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THE WEIRD O' IT

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The Weird o' It

BY

M. P. SHIEL

AUTHOR OF

'THE PURPLE CLOUD,' 'SHAPES IN THE FIRE,' 'PRINCE ZALESKI,'
ETC.

'Tibi ipsi frequenter violentiam fac' (Do frequent *violence*
to thyself)

Thomas à Kempis.

If a man commit himself unto Her, he shall inherit Her :
for at first She will walk with him by crooked ways, and
torment him with Her discipline, until She may trust his
soul : then will she return the straight way unto him, and
comfort him, and shew him Her secret

Wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach

London
Grant Richards

1902

This Edition is issued for circulation in India and the Colonies only



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THE WEIRD O' IT

I

THE WILL

A DARKSOME night in late Autumn was falling upon Lonbydale, with clouds low on the fell-tops, and vapours choking the corries. It was after the evening service, and at Beech How, toward the top of the dale, Dr. Stanley, the vicar, was pacing his study, with an occasional glance out at Rindscarth Head and Wurren Pike, now gloomy with impending tempest. From a room below sounded the laughter of four children—his daughter, Gracie, and three boys: but the doctor heard them with absent ears that Sabbath night.

He was a tall and portly man, whose mere aspect inspired reverence, with an ample, pointed brow, from which the rough hair grew back, a pointed chin, and an austere face all shaven, save for two strips of whisker, down one of which his forefinger-tip kept passing, smoothing it, with a delicate slowness: that finger, with its rosy nail, being a thing as dainty in its way as a fresh daisy, and the lines of his spacious face severely aristocratic.

He was the third son of the Marquess of D——, and his biography, briefly, was this: at thirty he had held a Derbyshire living, with the glebe his own freehold, and funds equal to £900 a year made over to him by his brother, the marquess; at forty he married; but his wife loved the London season: and debt soon drove him to

'speculate.' Now, his standard of right and wrong was not low, and not without secret pangs did he embark upon this career of what he considered mere godless gambling. Moreover, it was not long before his losses overtopped his gains; and when Lady Herbert Stanley died in giving birth to little Gracie, it is not improbable that the all-seeing Eye may have detected a certain relief mixed in the doctor's sigh of sorrow.

But now it was too late to withdraw from the whirlpool: and within six years from Gracie's birth he had mortgaged all his 'realty,' and had had to accept in a hurry the paltry 'living' of Lonbydale; here during two years he had been making a last try at fortune—only for his daughter's sake, not at all for his own—this time in connection with a traffic, which (it *must* be said) his heart knew to be not quite righteous and wholesome. But the day before that Sunday evening of lowering storm on Rindscarth he had received the tidings that nothing more was left him.

He would therefore have to bring up his daughter, the scion of a 'noble' house, on £210 a year, besides 'goose-grass,' or the right of commoning his geese—of which he had none: and he smoothed his strip of whisker down and down with a rather shaky forefinger.

He now repented:—his strong mind actually feeling something of the pleasure of a judge at justice done, though himself bore the sentence. 'I deserve, I deserve—oh certainly,' he muttered, with lips rather viciously compressed; and again: 'I have hardly been—a Christian.'

Each time he passed the stone-shafted window he glanced out, and saw the fells like angry seas of heather, and once, pausing there with lifted right hand, as if calling Rindscarth to witness, he muttered: 'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things . . .' But a division of the window slammed with startling fierceness in his face, and the white squall, all rolled in blackness, suddenly possessed the dale.

A minute later, still with bowed head and lifted hand, he was saying: 'The past is past: but the future is a

man's. I say that *never* again in my remainder of days will I, ah, tamper with my subtler instincts, or muddle by any compromise the absolute distinctions between right and wrong, under the influence of any such motive as, ah, pecuniary gain.'

As he uttered this vow, a shout of laughter from the four children below was instantly followed by a crackling outbreak of thunder over Corrie Craggs to the north-west: and the storm, which all day had brooded, was come.

His voluntary promise before Heaven was to be put to the test—that night.

* * * * *

For, as the storm broke, galloping hoofs spattered on the lonnin before Beech How, and a gangsmen of one of Mr. Amos Mackay's pits knocked at a broad, low window of the porch.

A lady who was 'girdling' oat-cakes at a steel basket of wood-fire in the hearthplace of the hall, ran to open. She was a niece of the late Lady Herbert Stanley, one Miss Annie Ames, called 'Missie' in the doctor's household—her face now bound in a handkerchief for neuralgic pains.

'Why, Lang, you are drenched,' she said.

'Ey, mum,' said Lang, 'it's a neet to mak' the varra dead yammer. But—a word wi' you—I'se coom't round from Brenchwaite Edge special to call Dr. Stanley——'

'On such a night!'

'Ey, hear me oot—'tis so. Laird Mackay's strook with another stroke——'

'You don't say that!'

'Ey, and Tam he's lang sen gone for Mr. Crowther, the lawyer, and says Pol to me, "Reddy, ma man," says she——'

'Stop, I'll run up and tell Dr. Stanley,' said 'Missie,' and went.

The doctor at once decided, and in some minutes came down, well protected—for he had a tender care of himself—in head-cape, macintosh, ulster, wrapper and overalls, with the elements of the Communion in a bag. Burnie, his lad, had now ready his small Cumbrian mare at the

porch ; and, selecting a riding-crop from a stand containing salmon and trout rods, sticks, umbrellas and a rifle, the doctor went out with Lang, who bore a lantern, and the two set off. No sky was seen, and anon space opened a quivering eye, revealing the dale one electric moment, then shutting for wind and rain to tumble in darkness again. The road leads south along the beck through a 'pass' between Daleshead and Thorneyfell Crags, and beyond the pass traverses a park, in which stood Dale House, a long Cumbrian homestead of grey stone and green slate, the house of Amos Mackay : a man who, thirty years since, had been a 40-acre 'statesman,' but now was lord of half the countryside, with its two pits, of a pencil-mill at Keswick, and a tannery at Carlisle. He lay dying in yonder room overlooking the porch, still brown and hale on one side, but on the other already dead, awaiting nothing further in this world but the coming of Dr. Stanley ; and by the bedside sat Mr. Crowther, of Spender and Crowther, Bedwick, drawing up Mr. Mackay's will—his seventh within two years.

From Dr. Stanley's first coming to the dale, Mr. Mackay had conceived a profound reverence for his character. They had associated intimately ; and Mackay had constantly consulted the doctor's judgment. Having a weakness for children, he had also made little Gracie Stanley his pet, and would insist upon having her for days at Dale House. On one occasion, when about to invest a large sum in a London syndicate, Mackay had been forbidden by the doctor, by that time his close friend ; almost a quarrel had ensued ; but Mackay had yielded, and the syndicate's failure had ruined hundreds. From that day the doctor had acquired the glamour of a prophet in the rich man's eyes.

Now, Mr. Mackay was without a relative in the world, and one of those recent six wills of his had made little Gracie Stanley devisee to all his 'realty,' amounting to some £900 a year ; of the other five wills, which were both realty devises and personalty bequests, three had been in favour of a boy called Nibbs Raby, and two in favour of a boy called Harold Pole, both then

temporarily boarding at the vicarage under the tuition of 'Missie.' But all the six wills had, one by one, been destroyed; and now a seventh was being made.

The difficulty was at once formally explained to Dr. Stanley on his entrance, though, of course, the doctor was familiar with the facts. Mr. Mackay, the lawyer said, was a man who cherished in his heart two memories—one of the father of little Harold Pole, and one of the father of little Nibbs Raby. Some extraordinary bond of friendship seemed to have existed between Mackay, Pole, and Raby, when Bedwick lads together; and some compact of lifelong co-operation had taken place between them. 'And this relation,' said the lawyer, 'was so intimate, that, on the decease of Pole and Raby some four years since, Pole being the county coroner of this district, and Raby a Government forester in India, our friend, Mr. Mackay here, went, as the folks say, "a laal bit daztlike" in the head. The six rapidly-succeeding bequests and devises have been made, as I say, now in favour of young Pole, now of young Raby, in one case your own daughter also benefiting as to the glebe and two pits. To-night I draw up a seventh, which only awaits—your consent, Dr. Stanley.'

'I cannot conceive——' began the doctor.

'It is very simple, my lord: Mr. Mackay, frankly unable to choose between the two boys, and determined not to split his fortune, has decided that your little Gracie Stanley shall some day choose for him. To *her* he bequeaths and devises his all in the custody of three trustees and administrators, with the condition precedent that she marry one or other of the two said boys before she attains the age of twenty.'

Dr. Stanley was agitated. It seemed an awfully ominous thing that not one hour since he had made a vow before Heaven . . .

There was silence there. Only, the wreck on the bed began to breathe stertorously, proving need for haste in the administering of that sacrament; and outside the winds went with their lamentation whither no man knew.

'But I fail to see,' said Dr. Stanley, 'in what sense my consent is, ah, pertinent. Mr. Mackay makes whatever bequest he pleases.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Crowther, 'but, before adding his mark, he desires your definite verbal approval and undertaking that Gracie shall marry one of the two said boys. Of course, as I understand it, he contemplates nothing more than moral suasion, parental pressure—that sort of thing—on your part.'

'And if the condition precedent be not fulfilled, what becomes of the legacy?' asked the doctor.

'A codicil provides that on the legatee's twentieth birthday, if she be not then married to one of the two said boys, both the legacy and the realised devise reverts to the National Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the——'

'But twenty!' said the doctor: 'the age is—early.'

The head on the bed shook a stubborn 'no, no,' meaning that he was the best judge of his own will.

There was silence again. A woman on the other side wiped the damp, bluish brow.

'Well, my lord,' said Mr. Crowther, 'I *think* we have your consent.'

'One moment, one moment—I have not said that——' murmured the doctor. 'If you will permit me, I will retire a minute to the next room.'

There it was quite dark, but he was familiar with the furniture, found the table, and there sat, piercingly frowning—in the grip of destiny.

'Think deep; choose well': so something might have whispered him: 'for solemn a thing is life, and delicate the art of living.'

'I will never again tamper with my subtler instincts,' he had said. . . .

Was it not, however, certain that an undertaking at a death-bed to bring about his daughter's union with one of two men in the far future would be tampering with 'subtler instincts'? If she should love neither? If both should be unworthy? If, though unworthy, she should insist upon marrying one, against her father's counsel, for the

money? Certainly, it was not a wise will. There were possibilities— How bitter, even to frenzy, might be the disappointment of one of the suitors! How prone to mutual suspicions of mercenary motives the husband and wife! Would the two suitors be likely to love each other as brothers? Here were dangers enough. Dared he ‘muddle by any compromise the absolute distinctions . . .?’

On the other hand, to a man just ruined the fortune seemed not less than boundless. It was about £7,000 a year. And undoubtedly there was such a thing as flying in the face of Providence. . . .

It would have been curious, if one could have removed the two house-roofs, to look in upon the four children at the vicarage, and, at the same time, upon the battle of the man bent over the table deciding their destiny—and his own.

The children were Gracie Stanley, the two boys, Raby and Pole, and a third boy, Jack Hay, who that wild night was playing truant from his home in Bedwick (a man in a trap was even then wending up the dale on the chance of finding Jack at Beech How).

They were tired of playing, and now sat on the seat of a deep neuk window, resting till ‘Missie’ should call them to supper, which was late on Sunday nights. But there was no rest to their tongues.

‘What are you going to be, Nibbs?’ Gracie asked.

‘A merchant with lots of money,’ said Raby, who was much the prettiest child of the four, a beauty in fact, though one of his eyelashes was quite wool-white, giving him an expression rather odd and weird.

‘What will you be, Harold?’ asked Gracie.

‘A p’lice,’ answered Pole.

‘Oh *no!*’—she said it with disdain.

‘Shaf! I wouldn’t be a p’lice,’ said Nibbs Raby: ‘where’s the good?’

‘Lots of good,’ said Harold Pole, who was a very sage boy, though rather plain: ‘a p’lice finds out people who do wrong, and tracks ’em down.’

‘What are *you* going to be, Jack?’ asked Gracie.

Jack Hay, a stout little man, with a big head of red-

black hair, pocketed two thumbs in his waistcoat, squared himself, and said :

‘A sailor.’

‘I see no good in being a sailor,’ remarked Raby.

‘More good nor being a merchant,’ retorted Jack : ‘isn’t it, Gracie?’

‘I—hardly know,’ she answered, affecting already a certain distinction of manner, with her father’s occasional pause before a word.

‘Which do you like best, Gracie?’ asked Pole : ‘a merchant, a p’lice, or a sailor? Be frank, now.’

‘One must not be—personal, Missie says,’ she answered portentously : ‘it would be “personal” if I said which’—and she shook backwards a mass of dark-brown hair from her lifted face, which was broad, large, and full of character, with humour in the deep-blue eyes.

‘Shaf!’ went Raby : ‘I know which she likes best : she likes a merchant, ’cos I’se to be a merchant, and she’s to marry with me, for she’s promised me : haven’t you, Gracie?’

‘There’s a lie, Nibbs Raby!’ cried Pole : ‘why, she’s promised *me*—haven’t you, Gracie?’

She had also promised Jack Hay, but Jack said not a word : he would not ‘tell.’

Gracie seemed embarrassed. But after a minute, suddenly rising to the importance of the occasion, she looked up, crying with great vivacity :

‘Bring chairs everybody, and sit in a circle before me, and I will tell!’

They ran for the chairs at about the very moment when Dr. Stanley returned from the dark room into the light of the death-bed chamber, his battle over. Gracie, for her part, took two sofa-cushions, placed them in the middle of the window-seat, and sat thereon, while the boys sat in a row before her. She was now like a throned queen, choosing her leader of armies, and her eyes were quite bright at this new kind of game. Pole and Raby watched her keenly ; but Jack Hay’s eyes were very modestly cast down. She rose, and, with a knowing coquetry and meaning in her smile, said :

'I will marry with *you*—I will marry with *you*—I will marry with *you*,' throwing her hand with each 'you' upon a head in turn, Pole's first, then Raby's in the middle, then Jack Hay's.

'With you—with you—with you——'

Faster and faster went the touching hand and hurrying lips.

'With you—with you—I will marry with—YOU.'

Her voice sank to definiteness on that last 'you,' and her palm rested on the head of Jack Hay—crowning him.

But her father had just given her to Pole or Raby. He had compromised, consented, undertaken. The will was signed and witnessed : and all the winds in Lonbydale made a mourning.

He stayed an hour to see the last of Amos Mackay, then galloped home in the subsiding storm with a sensation now of calm satisfaction, his heart lifted in gratitude, having no doubt that on the whole he had decided soberly, righteously, and godly. For it says : 'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man : but the end thereof is death.'

II

A GIRL'S HEART

PASSING over twelve years, let us look in upon the Hays at breakfast one morning, the last Sunday of July, in the High Street, Bedwick, a street of mediæval houses, but 'Parklands,' the Hays' house, all modern and foursquare, with stringcourses of limestone, marble span-drels, and pillared porch ; and that breakfast-room heavy with plate, old oak and china, Japanese bronzes, a wide-tiled fireplace, a table all silver, fruit, bouquets, and elegance, and having an outlook upon a balcony filled with flowers.

Eight years before it had not been so. But when, by the will of Amos Mackay, his administrators were disposing of his properties in order to fund them, Mr. Hay, then head of a very small biscuit-factory in Bedwick, had acquired one of Mackay's fell-sides beyond Brenthwaite Edge, which suddenly proved to be a 'wad-mine,' rich in graphite. This gave him a lever by which to take advantage of the sensational discovery just then of the hematite iron-ore in the Cleator district, which has proved so well adapted to the manufacture of Bessemer steel. Whereupon the Hays had 'risen'; a house in London, social fevers and ambitions had followed ; and they were desperately struggling still to 'rise.'

But that morning at breakfast, Mr. Hay, a big man in a white waistcoat, who made his high, carved arm-chair creak to his weight, remarked :

'I am afeart, my dears, that the little Riviera trip will have to be knocked on the head this autumn.'

There followed a painful silence.

'Why, pray?' asked Miss Augusta Hay, who was considered the beauty of the country side, having a chastely aquiline nose, black hair, and a complexion like morning-roses; though she was twenty-seven, and still unmarried.

'Well, my dears,' said Mr. Hay, pale with nervousness, 'it is only for this year: I don't see why you should kick up a fratch——'

'Kick up a——?' asked Augusta, holding her ear to catch the word.

'A noise—a to-do—a noise,' he protested.

'But why this year, and not last, and not next?' asked Miss Harriet Hay, who was a fairer type, less tall than her elder sister, though still tall, and more peach than rose; yet, perhaps, the more dreaded of the two. Both were superb, awe-inspiring women, with a sharp, strong manner of speech, especially Harriet, and on Augusta's bottom-lip hung scorn.

'Varra weel—if you must have it—it's a question of money!' blurted out Mr. Hay.

'*Very—well,*' corrected Mrs. Hay in an emphatic undertone, gazing straight before her.

'"Varra weel" or "very well," it's all one—means the same thing!' retorted Mr. Hay: 'and I've heard you say them very words, my lass——'

'But how do you mean—"a question of money"?' said Harriet: 'I thought we had got quite beyond considerations of that sort?'

'Perhaps we are getting poor,' said Augusta: 'pray break the news gently, papa.'

'Oh no—come—it isn't that, now,' stammered Mr. Hay: 'it only happens that the business has eaten up such and such an account, or such and such a group of drafts is outstanding—you don't understand: but it's a fact that, just for the moment, I don't quite see my way—— Another thing: which would you rather, go pleasuring, or see me become—a Member?'

His bald-growing head suddenly beamed, and his shaven upper lip lay bland in a smile: he had had this card up his sleeve.

'Of Parliament?' said Augusta quickly.

'That's it!'

'Papa!' cried Harrie, while a smile lit Mrs. Hay's worried face.

'Liberal or Conservative?' asked Augusta.

'Liberal.'

'But—why not Conservative?'

'Oh, one is as good as the other!' cried Harrie, quite flushed: 'doesn't matter which. But how—when——?'

'Got an invitation this morning from the Cocker-mouth Committee to stand, my dear. And I will—come now—if you stay at home for the autumn.'

'Have you a feeling of being bought, Harrie?' asked Augusta.

'What is the right word for it? "Corruption,"' said Harriet.

'If you would only do without the yacht,' said Mr. Hay—'that's what takes up the money. Or stop—I tell you another way: you get Miss Gracie Stanley married to young Pole, or to young Raby, within the next few weeks, and I shall have the cash both for the election, and——'

'But—how tiresomely puzzling you are, papa!' cried Augusta. 'Do be easy to read. What has Gracie Stanley's marriage to do with your finances?'

'Well, if I mention it, it is in confidence, in strict confidence, mind. In fact, I dunnot like—— Another cup, my dear. But for the last few years Dr. Stanley has been borrowing from me on the strength of the £7,000 income left to his daughter on her marriage.'

'Dr. Stanley! Borrowing! Doesn't it seem incredible, 'Gussie?' went Harriet: 'that, then, explains Gracie's London season, and the rest. Well, money is the thing after all, 'Gussie! I wonder if Gracie knows! But you lent it, papa?'

'Oh come, my dear, I could hardly refuse an old friend, and a gentleman like Dr. Stanley——'

'One *never* says "gentleman," papa,' said Augusta: 'one says "man." Do remember the simpler facts.'

At this point Jack Hay, a lad of twenty, came dashing through the big velvet portières, his dark-flushed, heavy-featured face giving an impression of revels and late hours, his hair wet from his hurried toilet, and

sweeping low across the spacious breadth of his low brow. He put a kiss on the indifferent cheek of his mother, muttering: 'Father—hullo, 'Gus, Harrie,' and sat. But no one answered, or seemed to observe his coming.

Providence, be it said, sometimes sends into a family one too many—one quite a stranger to the family's aim and scheme of life: and such was Jack among the Hays. He was not only no help in inducing Lord D—— to pop the question to Harriet, but threatened to become a disaster: for he was 'wild'—'on the downward road' (though he had a secret innocence of which no one knew): and for the life of them the sisters could not see why he had been born. 'Isn't it tiresome about this Jack?' Augusta would say. He had come to be hardly considered the social equal of his sisters. Mrs. Hay herself would acknowledge his existence with a sort of apology.

'Well,' said Mr. Hay, dipping into his finger-bowl, 'so it stands, my dears: get your friend Miss Gracie married, and I——'

'Papa is too funny!' interjected Augusta: 'imagine our setting up as matrimonial agents in that fashion. And in respect of Gracie Stanley, too: the most self-sufficient person, I suppose, in existence.'

Now, Gracie was the ideal, the bright star—and the envy—of the Misses Hay. She, with her poor £210 a year, had danced with the Duke of Cl——, had tasted Olympian food at the Queen's table, and sat with easy grace, by ancient right, high up among the Immortals, where 'Gussie and Harrie could never enter. Her manners, moreover, had some ancient spell and music, some *trouvère*-song about old forests, tournaments, all woven in with her glance, her smile, her walk, which could be clearly felt—but not copied in a day.

'But why, after all, doesn't she marry?' said Harriet: 'Raby is certainly a very handsome boy, and Pole is supposed to be so wonderfully clever. He threatens, I understand, to become a professional detective, even if he gets the fortune. Nice sort of a husband—a professional detective. It is like being tender to a microscope. But still she might have Raby, who is handsome. She

must be nineteen now, and at twenty she loses the legacy——'

'It strikes me that Gracie aims at far higher game than those two absurd boys,' said Augusta. 'Poverty in her case is only an added distinction, isn't it? Gracie has blood, blood. Ah! that, after all, is the thing, Harrie!'

Each time that word 'Gracie' was uttered, a little pang wounded the secret heart of Jack Hay, eating there in silence.

'Tea or coffee, Jack?' asked Mrs. Hay with her listlessly-averted, drawn, yet pretty, face.

'Coffee, please, Titty' (this, from childhood, was his name for her), 'and more haricots, 'Gussie, please: pile 'em up——'

'Or say "peas and plenty,"' murmured 'Gussie: 'his extraordinary appetite! He eats by rote, like a mincing-machine.'

(The sisters seldom spoke directly *to* him, but indirectly, speaking to each other *of* him.)

'The Napoleon of a *menu*,' said Harriet, 'as I once heard Lady Aumbrey say——'

'But isn't it serious about this Autumn, Harrie? Papa can't mean it!' (Mr. Hay had creaked away.) 'Have you realised it, Harrie? Lord D—— was to meet us at Biarritz; Sir Markham Perowne is to be with his sister at Borghiera . . . everything upset. Oh, it isn't fair to penalise us in this fashion for no fault of our own!'

'Well, you must only grin and bear it,' said Mrs. Hay in her resigned and weary way; 'your father does his best, I'm sure.'

'Or gnash, mamma, as grinning betrays the dentist. But what shall we do, Harriet?'

"'Things beyond hope are done by venturing,'" quoted Harriet: 'suppose we pay Gracie a visit, in truth?'

'To-day? We couldn't mention about the borrowed money, I think—*could we?*'

'Not mention, perhaps: but—we—might hint.'

'It would be bitter as gall——'

'Or say quinine—which is a medicine. Miss Gracie rather needs it, I think.'

'Oh, come,' said Jack Hay suddenly: 'you are not doctors, my dears. You needn't go about giving other girls quinine.'

'Isn't he a Machiavel?' Augusta questioned space. 'By the way, have you seen Miss Stanley lately?'

'Gracie? yes—I saw her yesterday,' said Jack.

'He must go to Beech How fairly often! I should not have thought he would find that amusing! What takes him?' Augusta asked Harriet.

'What takes you?' Harriet asked Jack.

'Nibbs and Harold go,' said Jack. 'We fish and tennis, mostly. Gracie is a tremendous one for char and trout-fishing, you know. Sometimes we bathe at Cribble's Fall in the beck——'

'Not all the four of you!' cried Mrs. Hay, suddenly waking up in a state of merriment, while Jack blushed radish-colour.

'No, *only* the three boys, let us guess, *please*, mama,' said Augusta: 'but, I wonder—can he be in love with Gracie?'

'Are you in love with Gracie?' asked Harrie.

There was a silence: then, with a break in a low voice, looking at his plate, Jack Hay said:

'All right, you two, keep on making fun o' me. Some day, when I am gone to the devil, you'll be saying: "Well, poor Jack! he wanted cruelly to be fond of us, and we would not give him one little morsel of our pity."''

In unfeigned astonishment the sisters looked at each other.

'Can he mean to be sentimental?' asked 'Gussie.

'He *is* in love, then,' decided Harriet.

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Augusta, with a pretty elaborateness of surprise, 'but not with Gracie Stanley! It is desirable to cultivate some sense of the proportions, you know, Master Jack. He might as well pluck at the full moon—!'

Jack sprang up without answering, caught up his sailor's-cap in the hall, and went out to spend with Raby one of his aimless days. (He had never been given an occupation.)

His sisters drove out for 'five-o'clock' that afternoon up the Nabside road, where the shining fat bays had to crawl, and down Three Yews Neck, and along the lowland mere, up the dale, to Beech How.

Gracie Stanley, looking very jaunty and bonny in Scotch plaid, was pouring tea under the slate-stone porch for Lord D——, her cousin, and Sir Markham Perowne, of the old Lonbydale Perownes. Her huge, fluffy tam-o'-shanter shaded a complexion so singularly white and rosy, almost like blushing froth, that she seemed always freshly powdered and delicately painted, in spite of a few freckles. Turning, she suddenly saw the two Hays coming up the lonnin, and, inwardly wondering, she watched them with that fixed, rather mocking, underlook which was her way, while Miss Ames, or 'Missie,' went out to welcome; and the party of six—the doctor was down in the village, it being 'rush-bearing' Sunday—sat there chattering a longish time, while in the clear sunset the very seams of distant scars were visible, with the outline of cattle carved in relief on their summits—sign of bright weather on the morrow. Not till near six did the sisters rise, and when the rest followed beyond the porch, Harriet found a minute's chance at Gracie's ear.

'You will be coming to our evening on the 3rd, I hope?' she said.

'Oh yes, I should think,' answered Gracie.

'It threatens to be a succession of monthly "evenings" for us all the Autumn. 'Gussie and I are in despair. Papa says that we must not go away! It seems absurd, doesn't it, dear? If I had my way, parents of the sterner sex should be sternly repressed; but these are the days of the emancipation of fathers—— I do hope you find the doctor easy to lead——'

'Not quite so easy as Mr. Hay, I fear!' answered Gracie, whose tongue could be a terrible feminine thing, direct as a pounce.

'Then you have my sympathies, certainly,' said Harriet: 'you should write a pamphlet, or strike, or emigrate——'

'To Bedwick? where daughters reign?'

Harriet, hard pressed, let slip the brutality :

'Or to one of the gold-fields, dear, while you are about an emigration——'

'Ah, yes, that is charmingly characteristic of you and Augusta, Harrie, dear: you are always so newly rich in invention: I must mention it to Lord D—— presently as quite your very own. But there is Augusta waving——'

She felt that Harriet had something to say: so she hurried her.

'Yes,' said Harrie, 'good-bye. That, then, is our case, dear: please be sorry for us: thwarted plans, and a giddy parent who refers us to the bank-rate. And not only giddy, but mysterious, my poor papa. Imagine, for instance, the unsearchableness of such a statement as this: that, if *you* would but choose one of your Two, then he would have the money——! No: I really must go, dear——good-bye.'

She went tripping, leaving the drop of quinine in Gracie's bosom: for at once Gracie understood: and her lip trembled.

After service that evening, she waited till Missie and Jean, the lass, had retired, when she put a stool on the wolf-rug at Dr. Stanley's feet within the great hearth-place of the hall, and there sat in an attitude of quiet English grace, fairly developed for her nineteen years, straight-necked, with a waist that could bend, though substantial. Her physiognomy had hardly one weak line, the vaulted skull having a certain predominance (in profile) over the face, well prominent behind, and slightly so at the forehead, which had three definite surfaces, like a coffin-end; the profile curves of cheek and chin were lovely in their long-drawn distinction, like the lines of a yacht; the broad face handsome rather than pretty, and all alive with that bright smile, and those bright underlooking eyes, that told of penetration, mockery, and humour, of will and sense, and worth.

The doctor, reading his last pages for the Sunday from the 'Imitation,' and smoking, glanced down at her, and read again, smoothing his strip of white whisker.

'Papa.'

'Well?' he asked, daintily touching her head.

'Is it true, papa, that you have borrowed money from Mr. Hay?'

Emotions, usually, were not permitted to depict themselves on that face of Dr. Stanley; but now he looked rather pained. His palm lifted on the book, and he murmured: 'Is it credible?' meaning: 'Is it credible that the man, Hay, can have been mean enough to mention it?'

After a time, not asking how she had heard, he said:

'Yes: it is—true.'

'Much, papa?'

'Close on, ah, £2,000 within the last five years, Gracie.'

'On the strength, papa——?'

'Yes: of your—marriage.'

Her forehead dropped upon his knee.

'Papa, it is hard, believe me!'

Here was an extraordinary exhibition in that household. The doctor's hand rested on her head: but his eyebrows lifted.

'You—surprise me, Gracie. This is—a new manifestation. In what sense hard?'

'Have you, then, by your own act, made it a thing fixed and irrevocable that I must needs marry one of those two persons, papa, papa?'

'Gracie, you are almost—I was going to say—sensational. Come, come. We must not be ponderous——'

She looked up sharply:

'I cannot help if I am ponderous, papa! It is my life: and life is more or less a serious matter, I suppose.'

'I endorse your dogma, Gracie. Nay, I impress it upon you, my child. Serious it is, and more rather than less. But you, ah, surprise me. The irrevocableness of your marriage with one of two persons is, I take it, no new thing to you. I promised it, on your behalf, at a death-bed. You have acquiesced in it; you have been a familiar friend with both the—parties. What, then, is the matter? I must say, however, that I am glad that you have broached the subject, for I have long been purposing, and long postponing, to speak to you: I say,

then, that the time is now fully come, Gracie, when you should choose.'

'Between Nibbs and Harold?'

'Yes. Both seem to be very—attached to you, Gracie. It is not fair to either that you be longer silent; there are, indeed, many reasons for a prompt announcement of your decision, apart from the terms of the will in relation to your age. I therefore now formally admonish you in that sense. See to it, Gracie, and that immediately. (This man, Hay—it is incredible.) One word only I would add——'

'Well, papa?'

'To your predilection as between the youths I have no clue; and what I have now to say should not too greatly influence your choice: but I say that certain rumours have reached my ears at one time and another as to Nibbs Raby, which are not precisely, ah, creditable: nothing dishonouring, perhaps, but still—damaging. I cannot specify: you must be content with my hint.'

'So that your "selection," papa, is—the detective?'

'Pole, yes, I—think so. But *my* choice, after all, is irrelevant. What I want you to promise me now, Gracie, is not to allow one other week to pass——'

Gracie suddenly rose, touched his brow reverently with her lips, and said:

'Well, since I must, I promise, papa. I shall set furiously to thinking. Good-night, dear papa,' and she went out and up, put out the staircase-lamp, and he saw her pass like a ghost with a candle behind a row of lattice-windows at the top of the inner side of the hall.

Her bedroom was a nest of white cosiness set in a frame of clumsy old carpentry with great ebon rafters shewing, the shining floor rather slant. It was situated in a back corner of the house, looking down upon the beck, upon the south end of Lonbydale Water, and upon the island there. She put the candlestick on the dressing-table, puffed it out, and sat down at a big stone window with cinquefoil top, gazing out. The waning moon gave little light, and the island's jungle of willows and alders shewed densely black.

The almost-uninhabited dale lay in deep Sabbath slumber, the house was silent, and the distant bay of a dog beyond the mere, or the lowing of a cow in some shippin, sounded unearthly strange and remote, like voices from some world beyond the night. She sat thinking, her palm pressed passionately against her upward-turned brow, like a creature in despair.

Presently a sharp outcry of startled jays and sedge-warblers on the island made her start, and peer that way; and she caught a glimpse of two legs among the bush, white ones, in flannel trousers.

She had seen them stand there patiently two or three times before, come to watch her light, and the exact moment of her going to bed. It was Jack Hay. His boat was hidden in the other side of the island.

She sat in the dark a long time, watching the island with that underlook of hers.

The murmur came from her in a deep voice like a groan:

‘Jack Hay, Jack Hay, what have I to do with you, Jack, Jack?’

After half an hour, with a sudden movement, she rose, lit the candle, and stood boldly at the window, holding it up, smiling. Not a breath blew, and the light steadily revealed her, while Jack cowered among the bush, white as a ghost, struck by the crazy thought that perhaps she knew. . . !

She retired inwards after a minute, muttering as she drew the red moreen curtains:

‘On the evening of the 3rd, then—since they drive me to it. Ah! but I have a fear that it may end—ill.’

III

FATHER AND SON

JACK HAY trudged homeward that night from Lonbydale Water with that wild, new question in his head: 'Had she known that he was there? Had she held the candle purposely . . . ?' Of all impossible dreams that seemed the maddest: yet he could not rid himself of it, and hardly slept that night.

It could not be true! But the mere supposition of such a thing set him groaning through the night at his sorry life, at the poor creature that he was, and the sad kind of man that he was growing into.

He came down to breakfast looking pale, and spoke hardly a word; then went up again to shave off a blue-black indication of hair from lip, cheeks, and chin—an operation necessary twice a day if he wished to be well-groomed, so hairy was he. Some purpose was working in his mind that morning, for, as he shaved, his lips muttered; brushing his shaggy jacket, he paused with the brush suspended; and finally, as he went down, said to himself: 'Yes, I'll go to father. P'raps the dear old dad doesn't see it. I'll go and tell him.'

Mrs. Hay was still in the breakfast-room, alone, reading the *Times*; and, passing through, he went and stooped, his arm around her, saying:

'Now, Titty, give us a kiss—one of the good old sort, now.'

She glanced up, smiled faintly, and gave her cheek; but he possessed himself of her, and kissed her all on the neck and face; then for a silent minute sat still, his forehead on her shoulder. He had that affectionate-

ness of growing Newfoundland pups, and for his mother in especial a deep, hidden tenderness. But his tenderness had lost all preciousness in her eyes now: and when he rose, she muttered 'Be good,' smiled her faint smile, and instantly resumed her reading.

He went striding down the High Street, a powerful, long-legged fellow, half a head taller than his father (himself a tall man); his appearance was very sailor-like in a sort of pilot pea-jacket with cable-and-anchor brass buttons, which he wore summer and winter, also flannel trousers, and a high blue-cloth cap, so low-peaked that one wondered how he could possibly see; and down past the Town Hall and market he went, flinging out his hand to two or three, and beyond the Fountain in the Circus between High Street and Commercial Street, into Brook Street. Hot sun had burned every cloud out of the sky, except a few muslin rags, and Bedwick had already the sleepy look of afternoon, few people being about on the narrow pavements or cobblestone alleys without pavements; but for soap-advertisements in the chemist's, and a rare bicycle, it might have been a town dozing under a fourteenth-century sun, and dreamed, perhaps, of Cœur-de-lion or Bruce.

Jack walked down a by-street, its gutter in the middle, and stopped before an old house with black wire-blinds inscribed in yellow:

'JOHN HAY, METAL BROKER.'

Within, the arrangements were primitive enough, except for the typewriter and tape-machine: three clerks sat on daddy-long-legged stools at a desk carved into a chaos, in a corner being the shorthand-writer, the den to the right the cashier's, that at the back Mr. Hay's.

Jack—a strange sight here—flung his hand to everybody, digging the stenographer in the ribs, for with all 'Biddick' he was hail-fellow-well-met; and he passed in to where Mr. Hay sat pencilling some figures at his revolving-top desk.

'Hello,' said Mr. Hay: 'what's up?'

Jack shut the door, and sat in an old wooden arm-chair.

'Father,' said he, 'I want to have a crack with you.'

'Well?' muttered Mr. Hay, still ciphering.

'No, look at me, dad, look at me, dad! Look here—it's serious.'

'What is?' asked Mr. Hay, twisting round his swing-chair, the pencil between his dark-brown teeth.

'My—bit of a life, dad.'

These were unusual words, and Jack said them with infinite dejection. Mr. Hay hurriedly scratched the back of his head, saying:

'Dare say it *is* serious! Good thing you are beginning to find that out, my lad. But come—what do you mean?'

'Now, here's a gay canny morning,' said Jack, 'the twenty-eighth or thirtieth of July—something like that. Before dark the nin' there'll be eleven long hours. How shall I occupy myself during that time, father?'

'What's he mean?' said old Hay, getting fidgety, 'how'll he "occupy" himself? In going to a cross-buttock, or a badger-baiting, or to the Pringley meet, or to the Long Meg, drinking among the scaff-raff o' Biddick! That's how—more shame to you!'

'Don't get angry, dad, for God's sake: that *is* how, no doubt. But ought I to?'

'Coorse, ye oughtn't! But ye do—ye do.'

High shrugged Mr. Hay, and out he spread his blood-guiltless palms.

'But, dear dad, don't you see? I have nothing else to *do*,' said Jack, his dejected brow resting in his palm.

Mr. Hay winked fast: he had no answer ready.

'I have nothing else to *do*,' repeated Jack in a tone suggestive of anguish; and there was silence.

'Well, I can quite understand, dad,' said Jack, 'that I surprise you a bit, threeping in this way. You look upon me as a good-for-nothing luby, with never a sober thought in my cocoanut, and quite right, too. But I tell you now, father, what'll be news to you, that sometimes I'm nearly mad, sir, at the thought of

everything. Why couldn't you let me go into the Navy, dad? You said I might, and I prepared, and old Sweeney said I'd pass the prelim.: and then you suddenly got a bit richer, and as soon as ever you got richer, the girls said you couldn't afford it just then, and I had to wait and wait, till I passed the age. Oh, that's hard, dad, you know, that's hard, sir! I should so have liked to be a sailor!

'But you are not all my family, my friend!' exclaimed Mr. Hay: 'you forget your sisters, don't you?'

Jack Hay leapt to his feet, and stamped.

'Yes! it is always they! *They* must go in yachts. . . . And every hope of mine must perish, because they——! And with *my* stripes, father . . . !'

He could not go on: passion with him was very rare, but always tremendous in its fury.

'Shaf, shaf,' went Mr. Hay bustlingly, 'what's all this? Fuss and flaitchment! And in my presence? What, sir! Dost begrudge tha sisters a few hundreds to help them lift tha father's and mother's name among the big-wigs o' the land——?'

'No, dad, no,' said Jack, his flare-up already cooling: 'it isn't like me to begrudge them anything, the dear old girls, whom I love with all my heart. But think of the hardship. This foreday I thought my brain would break through my forehead, going over things: though, as you know, I never say a word. I couldn't be a sailor—well, that's done with: but the mischief is, they won't let me be aught else! I would gladly have learned a trade: but no, that was a disgrace to them. Why couldn't you make me one of your clerks, or somebody else's clerk? But no, that wasn't good enough for their brother: the lords and ladies would hear. Well, then, what is a poor devil to do? Don't you *see*, dad? I am naturally an idle, good-for-nothing loon, and here are you others doing all you can to make me worse. The other day I wanted to go up to London to look for something: they made you stop me with all sorts of threats. And here am I out of my teens, my youth going, and no trade, no prospect, nothing. Nobody cares. All I know is what I learned at old Sweeney's,

and most o' that forgotten. Suppose you die—no doubt you'll leave everything to Titty and the girls, and quite right, too: but what shall *I* do then? And my days passing in golfing, wrestling, drinking, betting and the rest. Doesn't anybody care a curse for me? Too swell to be allowed to learn a business, too poor to hope to be independent, hedged in—hedged in—in this way. Doesn't it seem to you that there's a wrong somewhere, dad?

Mr. Hay winked fast; his chin stuck up, and he scratched under his rough, square beard.

'There may be some'at in what you say, my lad,' he mumbled at last: 'I dunnot say there is, but there may be, there may be. Look here—dunnot be discouraged—leave it over—and I'll have a talk with your mother and sisters.'

Jack, knowing what that meant, threw back his head and laughed, quite gaily now, his effort of seriousness swinging back to his usual mood of devil-may-care. He rose, saying, 'All right, dad, I knew you would take it in good part: think over it, will you?'—and out he swaggered.

IV

THE RIVALS

WITH quite a jocund air he passed down Commercial Street, where he chatted a little with old Spender, the solicitor, of Spender and Crowther, one of the 'characters' of Bedwick, having the 'laughing disease'—an affection 'of the spleen' resulting in morbid laughter. Thence down another by-street he went, and called up the stair of a cottage:

'Are you in, Nibbs?'

'Yes!' sang out a voice; then in Hindustani: '*ap kaisa hai?*' (How are you?)

'Drop that gabble!' roared Jack, pitching up the crotchety stairs into a room hardly two inches higher than his head. He found the air here vaguely grey with a mist—which, in fact, was incense: for, from two cones of sandalwood-powder and a black joss-stick on the mantelpiece, were trickling into the room three streamlets of fragrant smoke.

'Foh, you smell of church,' said Jack, sitting on the bed: 'whatever is the beast doing?'

'One minute—don't talk to me now,' said Raby: '*hamara kukm hai*—one minute.'

Raby was intently looking at something, his elbows on the mantelpiece. There, besides the incense, and an ebony Buddha seated with twined legs, was a little figure rudely modelled in black wax, over which Raby now began to mutter some gibberish in Hindustani. Jack came forward to look.

'Now,' said Raby, taking a pin from behind his jacket's lapel, 'I'll show you something, Jack. This little fellow

in wax is Pilkington, the bookmaker—that dirty welsher—who cleared off the Pringley course last Monday with fifteen solid quid of mine. He's in London now, and I'm in Bedwick: and he thinks he's got the laugh of me. That's good! He don't know I've lived in India; he don't know that it's against the rules for anybody to have the laugh of little Nibbs Raby in this little world; and he don't know that there's more things in heaven and earth than 've been dreamt of in *his* little philosophy. Well, here's Pilkington—this little man in wax: and those two pins in his head I drove in slo-o-w, yesterday and the day before, as the clock struck eleven; and as I drove them in, that man, wherever he is, felt darting pains in his head, as sure as the sun shines; and every day—stop: it still wants thirty seconds to the hour.'

Jack Hay looked at him with eyes of surprise, criticism, and judgment.

'But hold on, Nibbs,' said he—'are you serious?'

'Don't I look it?' said Raby. 'I tell you, my dear boy, no man in this little world is going to hurt me, and get off scot free: he—*isn't*—going—to do it! and that's flat.'

There was something distinctly coarse and colonial in his manner of speaking, as though his very voice had got sun-burnt in India.

'But——' faltered Jack.

Eleven began to strike: and instantly Raby had the pin-point in the waxen head.

But it never got far: and Pilkington was saved that day.

'Bah!' went Jack, 'drop that!' and away flew Pilkington, Buddha, joss-stick, and all, under one sweep of his hand.

Raby twisted and faced him with that white eyelash of his venomously lowered; he was nearly as tall as Jack, but a mere slim stick in comparison.

'Why have you dared do that, Jack Hay?' he said.

'Get your dander up, if you like,' Jack answered carelessly, turning back to sit on the bed: 'you know you have no right to be tampering with all that devil's play, Nibbs. It's both silly and wicked.'

'A precious lot you know about its silliness!' cried Raby, 'you, Jack, of all people—the greatest ignoramus, I suppose, in this country of simpletons. But, apart from that, don't you know I don't allow those sorts of liberties with me, my son?'

'Well, don't allow them,' said Jack, with his phlegm: 'I take 'em, you see.'

'But *don't*—not with *me*! You take a fool's advice! We are good friends, aren't we? and we don't want to fall out, after all. But don't do those kind of things with *me*! I wouldn't stand it from my father, or the Pope, or the Archangels, or I don't care who. Just you take my little tip.'

He sat on a chair, and sullen silence fell between them. Raby was now a fellow of near twenty-two, whom few of the other sex could look on without some sort of emotion, so extraordinary was his beauty: the nose, mouth and chin of perfect Byronic chiselling, with languishing, large blue eyes: but his forehead was too small, and the commonness of his voice spoiled his effect. His hair stood like a wig of bristles around his head, with a central peak and two bays over the forehead, and was worn almost convict-short—perhaps because some of it was quite silver-white.

He had lived in Delhi between the ages of nine and seventeen with a sister of his mother, and had taken fervently to Oriental lore, and ways of life. There on the table lay the Khama Soutra, or Code of Love; yonder on the toilet a nude of Parvati, Goddess of Love, with a six-armed Siva; while that locked drawer of the wardrobe contained things gathered in Hindustani, which, as Raby said, his dearest friend might not see.

He had now been articled to Spender and Crowther of Bedwick more than four out of the five necessary years, had been up to London to scrape through his 'intermediate,' and his father's executors held £2,500 to buy him a solicitor's partnership in London. For present uses he had an allowance of 15s. 6d. a week, which he increased by judicious betting. He was not, however, killing himself over Stephen's Commentaries and Conveyancing, and often deserted the office for

days, being conscious of his merits, and of £7,000 a year from the day of his marriage with Miss Stanley. His rival, Pole, was hardly a beauty.

'Well, what shall we do?' asked Jack, when the silence became oppressive.

'I'm game for anything,' answered Raby.

'Suppose we call for Harold, and go out to Beech How?' suggested Jack.

'All right. Beech How is never far from *your* little mind, my son.'

'Why the deuce should it be?'

'No reason at all,' said Raby, picking up his Buddha and incense: 'if the foolish little moth likes to have its foolish little wings singed for nothing, why, let the foolish little moth, that's all.'

'Oh, I am over the fifteen stone,' said Jack. 'No danger of wings and singeing with me.'

'Tut, you talk as if I were a baby, or you a bashful girl! Was that meant as a denial that you are in love with Gracie, I wonder——?'

'Oh, for God's sake, let Gracie's name alone, Nibbs! Come, get that hat on.'

'Yes, but I don't understand your point-of-view! Are we strangers, yes or no, or were we picaninnies in the same gutter? Why let her name alone? And if you did mean to imply that you are not in love with her, why imply it, my son? I can't bear people to insult my intelligence! Isn't it a fact that it is as natural a thing for you and me and Harold to love the girl as for trees to grow? That's how I always understood it! We can't help ourselves. *I* love her—or rather it is something more: it is passion *plus* habit; we got it with our teeth; it was part of our nature before we could spell l, o, v, e. Then where's the use——? Silly bosh!'

'Oh, well, I see you are in a disputing mood to-day,' said Jack: 'come on, let's go for Harold: *he'll* dispute with you better than I can.'

They then went out, stopped at a modern house in Commercial Street, and set to whistling, till Pole appeared at a window over a draper's shop, and soon came down to join them.

'*Ap kaisa hai?*' said Raby.

'Come, Jack,' said Pole, whose voice was a deep bass—'a strapping fellow like you, is it beyond your powers to make Nibbs stop that blasphemy?'

Pole himself was inclined to be hollow-chested, his very fine, white, dry skin, with carmine cheek-bones, indicating a consumptive tendency; his profile was rather concave; about his long chin-point grew a little tuft of corn-coloured beard, which he was always fingering, the whiskers so straggling as to be easily countable; his neck was gawky, with a prominent 'bone' in it, rather camel-like; and his lips, which the little white moustache did not at all cover, smiled eternally: a smile calm as death, chilly also, merciless perhaps, sphinx-like certainly.

He lived, with a sister, on a small independent income, and was an intense student, then going through a far-reaching course of self-imposed toil; so that the Bedwick police on duty would regularly see in his window the lamp-light of his nightlong vigils mingle with the dawn. And in his brow was thought; and in those active, azure eyes was sight.

The three went striding up Nabside, Jack Hay in the middle, each pair of trouser-bottoms turned up, the six pocketed hands lifting up the bottoms of three jackets behind, showing stern-views. Raby walked with a laggard and lazy nonchalance; Jack had rather a sailor's roll; and soon they were chattering like girls, with laugh, banter, and mutual interruptions.

But passing down Three Yews Neck, there was a little trouble. Pole happened to say:

'What made you two fellows quarrel this morning?'

'Well,' began Jack, 'Nibbs wanted—but stop a bit, how the deuce do *you* know, Harold——?'

'Oh, for God's sake,' broke in Raby rather nastily, 'don't set Harold on to one of his long rats-and-cats rigmaroles. What's he call 'em?—ratiocinations,—concatenations——'

'Ey, it is very simple,' said Pole, 'I——'

'Oh come—I simply decline to hear,' said Raby: 'free country, gentlemen.'

'Go on, Harold,' said Jack.

'Ey,' said Pole, 'I could see——'

'Oh, very well,' said Raby, 'I beg leave to retire from the company, that's all,' and he deliberately walked backward, to follow beyond earshot. It was a little exhibition of the settled rancour at the bottom of the two rivals' hearts, in spite of their intimacy.

'Ey,' said Pole with his smile, 'Satan has now got behind us, which is his fit and proper place, his fit and proper place: though wishing all the time, I assure you, that he could hear what I say. But there is no difficulty, Jackie. I can't bear my private friends to think me a monster with ten eyes: it's only a case of two trained peepers, and one trained boko—self-trained, which is the only real sort. "When thou hast entered into thy closet, and shut thy door," then begin, then begin. You have no idea what a thing a man is, Jackie: he is really an omniscient being, only the gods, fearing his powers, made him both sleepy-headed and short-lived. As to how I knew about the quarrel, I only guessed by seeing two livid spots in your right cheek, which vanished as I shook hands with you. I concluded that you had been sitting with your right elbow on your knee, and two knuckles pressed into your cheek. But marks like that vanish, you know, the moment you remove the pressure, unless it has acted a considerable time, and so confirmed the congestion of the vessels; and since yours had lasted forty good yards, I judged that you had been sitting so at least twenty minutes. But you would certainly not have sat so motionless, if you and Nibbs had been talking: for talking people do make a movement, do make a movement; therefore I concluded that you two had been sitting sullenly silent twenty long minutes in each other's presence: so I said to myself: "The silly devils must have had a row."

'Deuced tricky all the same,' said Jack: 'good old Harold—good luck to you! Come along, you, Nibbs! It's all over!'

At Beech How they found Gracie and 'Missie' all in white, with pink sashes, for 'rush-bearing' Monday, the

Lammastide of Cumberland; and Gracie, in Cumbrian mood, with little curtseys, said to Pole, 'A canny morning to ye,' and to Raby, 'How fend ye?' and to Jack, 'Are ye gaily, sir?' maintaining that impartiality of manner which made it impossible, even to Pole's keen eyes, to form the least guess of her secret mind with regard to the two rivals. For there were only two: Jack Hay, of course, being out of the running.

It was a Cumbrian day, marvellously clear, yet with a purple tone in the air, like the translucency of diamonds, and the tinted sides of the ever-varying hills lay mirrored distinctly in the lake. The young men went with the two ladies to the church—

'The snow-white church upon the hill,
Set like a thronèd lady . . . ;'

and they heard the doctor's 'rush-bearing' sermon, sitting among the garlands which strewed the church; and they followed the white procession of village-girls. Then, after returning to Fox How for lunch, which that day formally included haggis and hot bacon-pie, Gracie and the three went hatless up the western fells on a long stroll, picking black bilberries in heather high aloof, where the mountain-tarns lie like mirrors, and the boom of bees among their furzes mingles with the twittering of ringouzels by the torrent's edge. On Rindscarth they came upon a certain Jock o' Brent, a wandering harper-singer, who gave them a border-ballad in that pensive minor key so apt to characterise a people whose memories are local traditions that survive only in their songs; Gracie sat on a lichened rock, a study in delicate curves, clean-lined, English, daintily turned-out to the shining tip of her yellow shoes; and into her underlooking eyes there came, as she listened, a shadow of gloom, almost of fear; and she stood up—and laughed.

Not a gesture or word of hers, not a smile or glance, through the long day, but the lads could have described it a month afterwards. Never were three pairs of busier eyes. They watched her like cats, Pole and Raby not only watching her, but watching each other. For years

she had hardly had a private word with one of them : the eyes of the others were there.

When they returned again to Beech How, the sun being still high, the three took their bathing-drawers, with towels, from a compartment of the stable, and went half-a-mile down the beck to Cribble's Fall, where they bathed. They then returned for tea, and set off for Bedwick at sunset.

Gracie, who was standing under the porch, waited till they reached the lonnin, then ran a little out, calling :

'Jack!—one word!'

'Me?' cried Jack.

'Yes!'

He came running, rather scared, wondering again if she had seen him among the trees of the island last night . . . ?

'Ah, Jack,' she said, 'I only wanted to ask: you—are never at your sisters' monthly evenings, are you?'

'No.'

'But why? They are quite nice.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Jack: 'fact is, 'Gus and Harrie prefer my room to my company. Moreover, I haven't any evening-dress; and besides—I can't dance those sorts of dances.'

'How many deficiencies, Jack! you seem all one grand deficiency. Isn't it so, now?'

'Well, I suppose it *is* so—worse luck.'

'Or say "all one magnificent deficiency." Do you like that better?'

'Anything you like I like, Gracie.'

'Really? . . . Is that so? . . . But to have no evening-dress, and not know how to dance! That seems—inadequate, surely? The only thing will be to go without evening-dress, and let me teach you to dance——'

'*You*, Gracie? . . . When? . . . What do you mean?'

'On the 3rd—Thursday night coming. I want you

to be there. *I shall be. Don't fail me. Good luck!—good-bye!*

Back to the porch she ran, and he back to envious Pole and Raby, the earth somehow all a-reel to him. He understood nothing; a strange giddiness and singing in the head obscured his sight; in his heart a vast, vague note of interrogation.

V

'THE THIRD'

AT breakfast on the Thursday, the 3rd August, Jack Hay, looking at his plate, remarked :

'I am coming, you two, to the party to-night.'

Harriet looked at Augusta, and Augusta looked at Harriet.

'He seems very capricious!' observed Augusta. 'Why should he wish to?'

'Why should you wish to?' Harriet asked Jack.

'Oh, well, I do wish. I haven't committed any crime—not yet. I suppose I can come to my own sisters' party.'

'Oh, it is a proprietary right that he maintains—"his own sisters"!'

Augusta. 'He owns us lightly, Harrie, as one wears a scarf-pin, or a keeper——'

'Am I my brother's keeper?' asked Harriet, with raised eyebrows.

'All right, you two, keep on, keep on,' said Jack.

'Well, but, don't you think?—he had better not come,' said Augusta.

'We think you had better not come,' said Harriet.

'I am coming,' said Jack: and when he spoke in that tone, so rare to him, all Bedwick and a rain of sisters would not have changed him.

'Well, let him come, if he wants to,' said weary Mrs. Hay: 'he's your brother, after all.'

'But—has he the right clothes?' Gus asked Harrie: 'I don't remember seeing him dressed.'

'Have you the right clothes?' Harrie asked Jack.

'Nibbs is going to lend me his dress-suit,' said Jack: 'that is, if I can get 'em on.'

'Alas, Lord, it was borrowed!' said Harriet, who had a trick of quotation: 'but still—Raby must be a much smaller person than he: we can hardly have him come looking like a guy, Gussie.'

'You must see to it that you do not come looking like a guy, you know, Master Jack,' said Augusta.

'All right, you two, keep on!' said Jack.

'Better not come!' said Augusta.

'I am coming.'

'He must have some tremendous motive! Can it be because Gracie Stanley is coming?'

'Is it because Gracie is coming?' Harriet asked Jack, while all up Jack's throat, and powerful dark face, and massive low brow, a black blush spread its wings like a storm-cloud.

'But didn't we tell you,' said Augusta, 'to give up being in love with Gracie? We do not like you to be flagrantly absurd, you know. We told you that Gracie is quite a moon-maiden, as far as you are concerned, high above even your dreams——'

Jack stood up silently, and went away.

That was a busy day at 'Parklands,' and in all the life and business of Bedwick was a sub-consciousness of the Hays' monthly 'day.' In an obscure alley of Brook Street was a tuning and music—the practising band; the brow of Grant, the confectioner, was beaded in an embarrassment of pralines, babas, ices, sandwiches, timbales; Greatorex, the fruiterer, felt himself important in the scheme of things; there were heads in curling-pins; and in the bank, the rectory, the mews, the gas-office, that thing was remembered. By three o'clock the two halls, the three reception-rooms, the stairs, the dining-room of 'Parklands' were decorated; the pattern of burners laid in the porch and in the terrace behind the conservatory; the lanterns hung in the park. By five the two tables were arrayed in splendour; and by nine High Street was lined with empty and arriving carriages, and 'Parklands' seemed the hub of the world.

Lord D—— from Castle M—— beyond Keswick

was there, Sir Markham Perowne, lord-of-the-manor, and his sister, several county personages, three *élite* London trout-fishers, and whoever was anybody in little Bedwick: making a considerable congregation of shirt-fronts, low-necks, diamonds, and slippers.

But there occurred a great scandal at ‘Parklands’ that night: and Harriet and Augusta Hay were greatly embittered.

For, about ten o’clock, Jack Hay walked up the High Street, and entered by the front with his callous swagger into the brilliant gala of the rooms. Many a modish eyeglass turned upon him, there were discreet titters, and also blushes: he seemed to outrage some nerve of the assembly. The hearts of ‘Gus and Harrie leapt to their mouths; Mr. Hay, looking at him under lowering brows, muttered: ‘Disgrace!’ Mrs. Hay’s worried face turned from side to side. But there was one there who laughed gleefully right out loud, the instant her eye rested upon him: Miss Stanley. She had bid him come so: and he had come so! And she saw the massive phlegm of his face, his superior self-unconsciousness; and she thought within herself: ‘There, after all, is a man!—and so naturally well-bred. . . .’

Jack was in his pea-jacket and flannel trousers; and his thick boots, white with dust, trod insecurely the slippery floors. He had come direct from Raby’s, who had consented, like a good fellow, to lend his dress-things, to the very gloves; and Jack, all tight under the arms, had been about to put on the light overcoat to set out, when Raby noticed that his dress-coat lay open behind, split down the seam by Jack’s back; whereupon Jack had tossed off the borrowed plumes, hurried on his own things, and so come.

Gracie Stanley tripped out from the group of men around her to meet him in the middle of the floor.

‘So, Jack, you have dared?’ she said, with her mocking smile of compressed lips, and that bright, fixing, mocking underlook under her brows.

‘Dared what?’ asked Jack.

'To—be a Daniel; to—face your sisters' music! And all for—*me*? Tell me.'

'Well, naturally for you, you know, whatever I have dared, Gracie. But where does the daring come in? There's no daring about it.'

'There are some little things that be greater than the taking of a city, sir,' she said. 'And do you know how I mean to mark my strong approval? By not dancing with *anyone* but you to-night, Jack. Do you like that?'

'Well—rather!' he said awkwardly, grinning, his face all reddened like radishes, being very quick and prone to blush: 'if I could only dance a step——'

'Oh, you will learn of me like lightning, I know! Isn't it so? Tell me!'

'Well, no doubt it is so, Gracie.'

'Then, we will go up——'

Many eyes were directed upon them, some with surprise, 'Gussie's and Harrie's with thankfulness to Gracie for patronising the pea-jacket so publicly, though their shame rankled, and they asked themselves for what sin Heaven had punished them with a brother. 'Gussie's eyes wandered nervously to Sir Markham Perowne, and Harrie besieged Lord D—— with wit to prove her unconsciousness of Jack. But the sting was soon lulled by the waltzing couples and strains of music which pervaded the rooms, attuning the mind, like opium, to a happy serenity. Moreover, the pea-jacket, Miss Stanley having once set the fashion, became rather popular, and the demand for Jack's hand-shake greater than the supply. Gracie, to the sisters' surprise, monopolised him, so that the afterthought grew in Harrie's mind: 'Can she be doing that only to draw attention to him? What poor spite, if so!' 'After the Ball' and 'La Boudeuse' proved beyond the weaving of Jack's paces, but polka or gallop he negotiated gallantly with Gracie, who was a riotous dancer. She was very girlishly dressed in silk muslin, sleeved to the elbow, and no 'lower' than the shoulder-blades, with a la France rose, a bunch of scarlet rowan-berries, and a ruby sword piercing the dark loaf of hair set low

behind her neck, like a burden of womanhood. Once only he was summoned from her by Mr. Hay, and once by Harrie, who dropped some venomous words into his ears—or at them: for he did not hear, he did not care. The world seemed all new to him that night.

They two were standing in a crowd at a table about midnight, devouring like children a speckled *mousse pralinée*, when Gracie said :

‘I have not danced for quite a long time, and I think I have had enough, Jack. I am going to rebel, and go home—walking. I want you to find Missie, and tell her: she will come home in the trap when she pleases. Then you will get my hood from the cloak-room—I can’t leave this—and meet me with it in the conservatory. Then we can steal away together from the back. . . . Do you like that?’

Jack liked that, though what Gracie meant he could not dream. He ran to do her bidding, and in five minutes they were walking up Nabside.

They took four hours to walk the two miles to Beech How that night.

But they had not long left ‘Parklands’ when Nibbs Raby entered it. Raby had given up coming for Jack’s sake, but, looking at the split coat after Jack had left, he had had the thought that it might be repaired, and ran down to his landlady; she had regarded the rent as hopeless, but he would not be baulked in the new hope of seeing Gracie, and ran over to Pole’s to borrow. Pole was over his books, needing a stronger inducement to lose a night than the party: for though Gracie was there, he knew that Raby would not be, and his irritation was intense when Raby appeared; but he could hardly refuse; and so Raby turned up in Pole’s over-tight coat—soon after midnight.

He at once went searching through the hot rooms. Gracie was not there; Jack was not there. And Raby frowned, muttering: ‘Where the deuce——?’

Still he went prospecting with lifted chin, while here and there a fair lip murmured: ‘Isn’t he singularly handsome?’

Presently he saw Harriet Hay making towards him, with heated face.

'Are you looking for Jack?' she asked as they met. 'I *think* he is gone with Miss Stanley——'

'Gone?—where to?'

'Home, Miss Ames tells me.'

'Jack and Gracie together?'

'Jealous? In my very presence?' said Harrie, who was rather weak on Raby's face: 'that is shockingly rude, do you know, Master Nibbs?'

'Me?' said Raby: 'jealous of Gracie and——? O Lord!'

'Well, you had better look out, I can tell you! Gracie refused all dances but his the whole time——' she called it over her shoulder, hurrying away.

Raby stood with a new feeling in him—a slight pang, a disquiet. He was profoundly self-conceited, and had grown up with the consciousness that Gracie was his. He hated Pole for having money-claims upon her hand equal to his own: but he harboured no very deep fear that Gracie could prefer Pole to him. As for Jack Hay, he was not 'in it'; no one was 'in it' but himself and Pole: and Raby had never dreamed of being jealous of Jack.

Now, however, a possibility disquieted him. He walked straight out of the house, and eagerly went up Nabside—to spy. He passed Three Yews, and beyond to the dale. And at Three Yews were Gracie and Jack: but Raby did not see them.

VI

THREE YEWS

THE descending road just there is deeply-shadowed between sheer crags which almost meet high above; on the left (north) side a footpath, after going steeply up a grass bank, leads through a cleft into a larch-wood, and thence out into a glade, where stand the yews. Three grand old trees they are, old as Hengist and Horsa, seeming to lean together for support in extreme age, their hollows holding three or four persons: yet ever green, the haunt of innumerable rooks. Near them are two of those Druidical rocks which they call 'standing' stones; two rivulets wind through the underwood of long-grass, dog-rose, ferneries, hemlock, burdock, nettles, and furze; and to the north is a small cascade. Jack Hay, half-reclining on the knoll of one of the yews among its mossy ramifications, could see the waning moon to the south-west hang just over the tree-tops on the height, bathing them in its lotion; and a little within the tree-trunk sat Gracie. The murmur of their voices blended with, rather than broke, the fore-day quietude of the place; and when they were silent for minutes together, the murmur of the waters, which was but another form of silence, seemed to utter what they left unsaid. There was a lunar influence in the hour, and in the spot, which overpowered the mind like a hypnotism; the night grew very old and gray, and the setting moon looked pale with vigil; fern or rose hardly shook a leaf; and life seemed just then an awfully great and solemn thing to Jack and Gracie.

Her heart, at least, was heavy with foreboding that night; yet light, too, with joy. She had said to him from under her scarlet hood:

'Well, Jack, I want now to ask you something: you know that my father, and everyone, expects me to marry either Nibbs or Harold: if I marry either before my twentieth birthday, I get £7,000 a year, which is a very great lot of course, and already I am one month over nineteen. I had thought to have still eleven months to choose in, but something has happened—I will tell you frankly: papa has borrowed some money—from—your father, and is, I can see, dreadfully distressed and urgent to repay it. And it is only fair that I should repay it for him: for he borrowed it to spend upon me. Now, then, I have decided upon this course: to make *you*, Jack, my arbiter between Nibbs and Harold. Does that surprise you?'

'It does rather, Gracie.'

'It shouldn't though. You are my best and dearest friend.'

'Ah, well, now, that's good to hear,' said he.

'Is it? . . . Well, then, tell me: you know them, and you know me: which is it to be—Nibbs or Harold?'

'That's a hard question, Gracie. Which do you love the best?'

'Oh, as to love! that is not the point. I love neither—not in that way. Do they love me? I assume that it is merely the money-interest that attaches them to me——'

'Ah, there's where you are wrong,' said Jack: 'it is you they want, Gracie, not the money.'

'Oh, generous!' she thought, with half-closed eyes of pleasure—to defend his rivals. Always so loyal and strong, so frank and Jack-like——'

Jack very gravely said:

'Well, of course, Harold is the better man of the two—especially for a husband. Personally, I am more fond of Nibbs, of course: Harold goes in for thinking and books, and in his heart considers himself a peg above

such as me no doubt: and quite right, too. Nibbs and I are great chums. But—Harold is the better man of the two, Gracie.'

She smiled fondly upon him, his brow being knit in the unusual effort of deliberation and fatherly counsel, with an effect almost comic.

'So you definitely choose Harold, Jack?'

'Yes, Gracie, yes.'

'But if I am not fond of him, Jack—in that way? Don't be hard!'

'I am not hard! Don't say that. I—am very sorry. You might get fond of him—after. Or you can have Nibbs.'

'You must not give me away so, Jack. I don't want Nibbs!'

'Well, then, what can one say? You may be fond of—someone else, Gracie.'

'I may—I may.'

Jack glanced keenly, and a razor-edge of jealousy, new to him, cut his breast. But he only said:

'Then have him.'

'Ah, but *he* has no £7,000, Jack,' sighed Gracie; 'and *he* is a wild ne'er-do-well, who won't do any work, and will bring poor me to beggary.'

'But is he a decent sort of body?'

'Ah, most wonderfully decent!'

Jack loathed that man, but loyally he said:

'Then, have *him*.'

'That is your deliberate counsel, then?'

'It is.'

'But my father, Jack.'

'I should care nothing about fathers,' said Jack.

'Ah! . . . But have you ever seen papa in a passion? No, I suppose not. *I* have—once. His ears and nose turn the colour of ashes—'

'Still, I should care nothing about anybody's ears and nose, Gracie,' said Jack: 'I should have *him*.'

'Why, my brave, then, I will,' she said.

Their eyes met, hers gazing downward, swimming in love, his looking upward, with an expression of alarm. His heart began to surmise.

'That is,' said she, 'if *he* loves *me*.'

'A man must be a silly sort of fool, Gracie, who didn't,' murmured Jack.

'You love me, then?' she whispered faintly.

'Well, my good God . . . !' breathed Jack Hay, stricken with pain.

There was a silence of the murmuring waters, that were a form of silence—like silence melted toward speech to moan a peace that 'passeth understanding.'

Jack Hay drew nigh to her, panting for expression, loaded with a burden which he knew very well that his poor tongue could never utter: and, almost crying for the pang, he touched her hand, saying:

'But, Gracie—hear me, Gracie—you must not think that I ever had any such thought, or hope, of having you for—my—sweetheart, Gracie. Oh no, oh no, my God. Don't think that. I never could fancy you—the—wife of any man, even if he were the King of the whole world, dear, much less mine. Believe me, it is too much for me, Gracie. I—don't know what to say—how to tell my dear. I have it here in my throat—but I can't tell you, dear. It is such a pity that you can never understand. I always looked upon you as a white angel, who was condescending, and spoke to other people out of pity—or as a star—or something like that: and I was glad enough to worship my dear lady in secret, without having her angry with me. But you must not think, you know— Oh, it is pitiful—really! My heart is like breaking, Gracie, for the love of you—'

She drew him, her arms about him, consoling him, whispering:

'Sweet, give me my kiss . . . ah, like that. Add more to more. I have been athirst, Jackie, for that—a long time—years, Jack. It was killingly long to wait, too: and I feel now how foolish I was, and spendthrift of life and time, to wait—criminally foolish. But now you are in my arms: so glad, and strange! This one night, anyway. What night is it? the 3rd of August:

the night for which God made me. Ah, it is well so. Kiss me, kiss me.'

'Sweet soul,' said Jack, 'now I can see why those Catholic people, like Nibbs, worship a Virgin like God. They are somehow quite right. I feel—I can't say it. I do not want—to—kiss you, or to touch you with my hands. How sacred you are, Gracie, dear!—so white and fair, after all, dear! And so *good*, too—to love me. Why, you must be a perfect angel—What have I ever done—? Oh, I only wish I could make you understand a little. I feel so humble here at your feet, Gracie. There are no words for it, I suppose. I am rent by you. I give up my soul to you. O do take me, Gracie, and forgive me!'

His underlids were moist with tears, and she saw them, for the hollow of the yew faced the sinking moon, and she kissed them dry, saying:

'Don't I understand? For so I feel, too. And I want you to know that so it always was with me, Jack: never at any moment of lassitude, or worldly blindness, has the temptation of the Mackay legacy been at all a temptation to *me*; but every instant of my life has been my dear lord's, to whom, when quite a little girl, I gladly abandoned my heart and soul, my will and life. And all is yours for ever, sweet,—blood and pulse, brain and breath; and to-morrow, if you order me, I will follow you barefooted through the world, you see? and just try, Jack, to find in some direction some limit to my bounty, and you will fail, I tell you: for I am the ocean, sweetheart: and I do love my old Jack.'

So in a kind of fugue their young souls called one to the other, feebly struggling to express the Divine; and as they lay embraced, almost suddenly the light that so long had lingered on the tree-tops passed away from the glade; and the moon went down upon their love.

They rose, and walked loiteringly down the Neck to the dale. It had been Gracie's intention to be at home before 'Missie' should arrive; but now she did not care, carrying no burden but the burden of her peace, riotously forgetting to-morrow and all things. Instead

of going on to Beech How, they stopped at the mere's shore, and paddled in a char-boat to the small floating-island of Lonbydale that they call Ealee, and there chose their nook in the thick of the alders and willows, which the morning zephyrs wafted like a fairy barge on leisurely, crazy voyages about the lake. The moon was now gone, and it was that dark birth-hour of day, when sun and earth work together in silent travail, and there is a pause in Nature, as at the solemnity of an eclipse. Hosts of bright Cumbrian stars seemed to watch the coming birth, and sang together, reflecting themselves as comet-tails in the ebony floor of the lake; here or there perhaps on remote fell-sides a shepherd numbered the herdicks for their morning washing, and saw those stars; but now, far or near, not a dog bayed, nor a rabbit stirred: but all things seemed conscious of that hour when night is up in the holy of holies in lonely interview with God; and some whisper ran round the world of 'Hush, hush, lest thou break the spell, and mar the miracle.'

At this time Nibbs Raby had retraced his steps from Beech How toward Bedwick, searching, and back again to Beech How he had come. He knew that Gracie was not at home: for he had stolen through the roomy old house into her very bedroom to see—an outrage that offered no difficulty, since several of the house-doors always stood open through the night. He determined still to watch—till morning, if necessary. He saw Miss Ames arrive, and saw the horse follow Burnie, the lad, over the cobble-stone yard to the stables: and still he lay in wait.

An hour later, near four, Jack and Gracie landed from the island, and turned toward Beech How. The house stands at the south end of the mere on a piece of elevated ground, which rises gently on the front (or west) side, but at the back descends almost like a cliff upon the southward-flowing beck; and haltingly up the rising path they walked, leaning together, revelling in the sweetness of silences. But now into Gracie's mind a shadow had crept; into her heaven an apprehension of earth. And she murmured, as if sleepily musing:

'Ah, that is a strange saying: "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me: for I, the Lord thy God, am a *jealous* God"!'

'What are you thinking, dear?'

'You bring upon poor me the sin of idolatry, Jackie,' she murmured, with heavy eyelids: 'I wonder if it is really a sin? No, I think not: it is a piety, a holiness, this lump in me—I quite feel that—born in heaven, and begotten from the pure heart of God into mine. Yet—I don't know. You are my god, after all. And it says, "Thou shalt have none other gods . . . For I the Lord thy God. . . ." How really ominous! Ah, yes, I have a fear.'

'Fear of what, dear?'

'I don't know, sweetheart: but I fear, I forefeel. Will they take you from me? Will it end well? God guard us!'

'Well, all right, I don't care,' said Jack: 'I can snap my fingers at everything now, Gracie. I have kissed you, haven't I? I have felt the echo of your secret heart pulsing against mine like a wild angel in a cage. Nothing can ever take that from me, thank God. You have made me a king to this extent, that now I can face fate, death, and all comers, and say to them: "Do as you like now: I've lived a night; I've had my little fling."'

'Jackie . . .' She sighed his name, very white now, lying draggingly upon him like lead, with laggard foot, seeming wearied to death.

'Besides,' said Jack, 'I don't see what we have to fear.'

'But, Jackie, what shall we do, Jackie?'

Jack Hay pondered that.

'We will run away at once, and be married,' he said with decision: 'that once done, everything will come straight.'

She was silent; then wearily, with closed eyes:

'Thy will be done, Jackie. And really, it seems the only way. Perhaps I might win over Missie to our side. . . .'

They were then going up the lonnin of Beech How.

And Nibbs Raby saw them, and dimly saw how she

lay wearily upon Jack. He was at the north side, where there is a short external stair, and a gallery, within a recess of the house-wall, ponderous with stone balustrades; facing the stair is a Gothic door with stone shafts, before which hangs an ancient barred lanthorn; in the gallery is a big window with trefoil top, and on each side of it a defaced statue in a niche. The whole place, especially at such an hour, suggests Moore's words:

'I said, If there's peace to be found in the world,
The heart that is humble may hope for it here';

it is the shadiest nest, buried in roses, ivy, and white briony, in alders, hazels, and purple flowers of the fox-glove. But in this Eden lurked, if not precisely a serpent, at least Raby. He was in the external gallery, where the shadow is deep; and by craning through the creepers, he could see—till Jack and Gracie came quite near the porch.

There they parted, he saying:

'When again, dear?'

'You must not come, Jackie,' she murmured like one asleep: 'we should certainly betray ourselves. We should look morbidly at each other, and—smile. It couldn't be hidden, you know. Wait till I write, then come, and we will discuss all like sages. Sweet love, good-night. I am drowsy and sick of you, and weary of my wounded heart. Kiss me, consecrate me—good-night, good-night.'

Jack Hay made his way home as morning broke, and a sparrow twittered. He found himself at his father's door with a sort of surprise, having had no consciousness of the way he had come. He saw the opaque azure of the sky, and started, feeling that he had dreamed some deep dream about stars and spells and fairies, that had borne him on high, and made him monarch of the world. That it was more than a dream he could not realise. He put in his key, and stumbled, drunken and muttering, up to bed.

Behind him came Raby.

Jealousy was at Raby—a viper that turned his flesh green; but nothing resembling despair: he trusted in little Nibbs Raby.

‘All right, my little boy, and my little girl. . . .’ he said; and his eyes went menacingly narrow; no one should make light of little Nibbs Raby in this little world, and get off scot free: not his (dead) father, nor the Pope, nor the Archangels. Raby would see to it.

Passing down Commercial Street, he saw Pole’s vigilant lamp-light, and grumbled a curse against Pole, against Jack, and against the world: but chiefly, strange to say, against Pole, who had done nothing.

Raby had taken a world of trouble to spy, and spent a night of misery; and Pole had sat over his test-tubes and microscope and books; yet Pole knew as much of what had happened as Raby; knew, too, how Raby had passed his night; knew what thoughts had probably occurred in Raby’s head; knew the moments of Jack’s and of Raby’s return to Bedwick. He was pale with anger against Raby, and against Jack, and against the world: but chiefly, strange to say, against Raby, who had done him nothing. And *he*, too, would see to it.

VII

THE SUMMONS

IT was on Thursday, August the 3rd, that the Hays' dance was, and that Gracie and Jack Hay revealed their passion. The same night, be it said, Sir Markham Perowne asked Augusta Hay to be his wife in an epigram, and Augusta turned a smart phrase that implied 'yes.' Harrie's sky-high hopes as to Lord D—— were thereby warmed: and among the Hays was such joy as 'the world' giveth.

From that 3rd to the 9th, Jack awaited the promised summons from Gracie, but it did not come; though, on the 5th, she sent by post some rose-leaves 'From Gracie to Jackie'; and on this he lived.

During that time he was like another person—a fact, of course, unnoticed in his own home, where he was forgotten; but when Raby came to 'Parklands' to look him up one noon (since Jack did not go to Raby), he found Jack in the library, studying, of all books, a big Bible. Gracie had turned Jack 'steady': and he was devotionally reading the Song of Solomon, with her rose-leaves near.

Raby's visit was of course no visit of friendship, as of old. Raby was done with Jack—for ever. His nature was always more prone to enmity than to the kindly sentiments: and when he once took an umbrage, he wiped that man eternally from the book of his regard. He was a real, definite thing, Nibbs Raby—though not a good thing. His mind was incapable of compromise, and either liked or disliked, wished well, or wished ill—no middle course; and in whatever he did, or felt, he had

that narrow, hard-headed conviction of his own rightness which is the most dangerous sort of self-love.

Jack sprang up, but Raby pretended not to see the offered hand.

'Well,' he said, 'not coming to the cross-buttock to-day?'

'I know nothing about it,' answered Jack, looking down with compassion upon the friend whom he had supplanted.

'Well, it's Luke Bandy, whom you threw last week, who's challenged Big Willie o' Thwaite, and they're going to cross-buttock behind the Long Meg at 1.30. Luke Bandy's been in close training ever since you floored him, and I've put five bob on him. Coming?'

'No, old chap, no,' said Jack.

'That's queer. Well, coming to the club's durdum at the Hand and Heart?'

'Well, no, I'd rather not, Nibbs, thanks.'

'Ah, turning good,' reflected Raby. 'By the way—seen Pole?'

'Harold? No.'

'Sure, now?'

'Well, naturally, if I say so, old chap.'

'By the way, I hear you went home with Gracie on the night of the 3rd?'

'I—did, yes.'

'Did Gracie——?'

'Oh, never mind about Gracie's name, for God's sake, Nibbs!'

'Oh so? Is that it? Ha! ha! ha! Nobody must even call her name now? We'll see about that, my little son!'

'All right,' said Jack, 'I can see you like quarrelling. Quarrel away, if you like.'

'No, I've got something better to occupy me, thanks. Good-bye. Been out to Beech How since Thursday night?'

'No.'

'Not seen Gracie at all?'

'Oh, for goodness' sake—! no, Nibbs, no.'

'When you going?'

'I don't know at all. Soon, I—hope.'

'All right. So long. Look after yourself, my boy.'

Raby walked away, and just outside the house, innocently strolling, was Pole.

Pole, we have said, knew quite well the incidents of the night of the Hays' party. His sister, Gladys, a girl of seventeen, had told him on her return from the dance of Jack's and Gracie's disappearance, then of Raby's coming, and speedy going out. Pole knew that Raby had gone to spy, and he had heard Raby's home-returning footstep under his window at five in the morning. He therefore knew that Jack had passed four nocturnal hours with Gracie.

Now, this knowledge would have been enough to convince another man of something very deep between Jack and Gracie: but it did not convince Pole, shrewd as he was, nor even Raby, who had seen them together. Let us understand what happened to their two minds in this matter. Rivals are usually made, but they, as it were, were born. Pole had always been taught to think Gracie his very own, barring Raby; and Raby to think the same thing, barring Pole. Each had understood as boys that success in life—social elevation, wealth, and all—depended upon one thing only: upon defeating the other with respect to Gracie: here was to be the achievement of his career; and this deeply-implanted lesson had, as they grew up, acquired all the morbid narrowness of the manias of mad people. When, therefore, a third person, like Jack Hay, was brought in, it was impossible for them all of a sudden to change their lifelong point-of-view: their minds could not admit him as a serious rival. Both were angry with Jack: but, in the case of Pole especially, it was a kind of fatherly censure; and it was against Raby that his vigilance was excited. He detested Raby for daring to spy upon the future Mrs. Pole; he said to himself: 'How will Raby proceed to use this knowledge? at any rate, he may be depended upon to watch this child's-play of Gracie's; and I'll—watch *him*.' Thus, Gracie's love for Jack had the effect of exciting a new Raby-Pole alertness, and during those days every step of Raby's Pole knew.

The 6th, 7th, 8th, passed, and Jack received no summons : but had he seen how Gracie was employed, he would have been content. She was so busy, as to draw from Miss Ames, on the 5th, after breakfast, the remark : 'Gracie, what is the matter with you lately? You are at it from morning to night.'

'Come and sit here, Missie,' said Gracie.

It was in the external gallery, where the screen of creepers, ivy, rose, and velvety woodbine with bugle-blossoms, hid a morning mist and drizzle that haunted the dale, and the stone floor was strewn with petals. Gracie was braiding the hem of an obsolete skirt, with bent head, clicking needle, and a snip of thread on her lip; and Missie, who had her face tied up, went and sat beside her on the old stone bench under the window and the two featureless old statues.

'Well?' said Missie, smiling vaguely: 'what is the matter?'

'Missie, I am afraid I have—what shall I say?—a fever.'

'Fever, child!'

'Say hay-fever.'

'Jack Hay!'

Missie was never slow to understand an 'affair of the heart'; she herself had many; and she exclaimed:

'Well, I said you were in love! But Jack Hay! Why, Gracie——!'

'Missie, we are going to run away.'

'Who?'

'Jack and I.'

'*You*, child?'

'I.'

Missie suddenly sprang up, her hand over her mouth: for the least shock affected her with toothache; and she went ranging about, mourning:

'Oh, my teeth, my teeth, O Lord, my poor teeth, my teeth, my teeth. . . .'

Those teeth were not all there, and Missie tended to ugliness, but was redeemed by her trusting, gentle eyes. She was now thirty-five, faded, small, with some silver among her light, short, frizzy hair, and some varicose

veins in the cheeks; but she preserved a passion for intrigue and matches, and stubbornly believed that marriage would yet be hers. Her last toothache had been caused by the news that Sir Markham Perowne, whom she fancied, had proposed to Augusta Hay.

But this revolution contemplated by Gracie was no fun. Missie saw its tremendousness. It was the overthrow of life, the wreck of prospects, home, tradition, and all things solid and habitual: and she half knelt before Gracie, pleading with tears:

'Oh, but Gracie, listen to reason. Who would have thought it, my goodness! All these years—and I never even suspected! Well! you are a girl for hiding things. But you must listen to reason, you know, child; I know nothing can ever turn you, when you once—— Oh my teeth, my teeth. You are not a nobody to go marrying the son of a broker, but the granddaughter of a peer, under obligations to your race and to society. Why, this young Hay, they say his sisters treat him quite as an inferior. He has no occupation—— Well, what an event! That was why you left the dance——! Oh, my poor teeth. Where did it all happen, Gracie? How often——? You must give me *every* detail! I, of course, assumed that you were sound asleep when I came home. But your father's heart, Gracie—oh, think of *him!* think of *him!* And the fortune lost, after all! And the cruel blow to those two poor boys, Pole and Raby—and that Raby such a *very* handsome boy——'

'I can hardly be expected to concern myself about the feelings of those "two poor boys,"' said Gracie, with the callousness of women where they do not love: 'it is the third poor boy who claims my sympathy, you know. As to the fortune, there never was a moment when I intended to enjoy it, Missie. And do not tell me, Missie, to think of my father's heart. Ah! I think of it, you know, I think of it, poor papa. But I am bound to think of poor someone else's too. It was a racking perplexity, Missie. But, thank Heaven—I have decided.'

All that day and the next Missie implored against hope, but by the third morning her flighty heart could no longer struggle against the romantic to-do of a love-

event, and with fussy secrecy and zest she gave herself to the preparations, mending, purchasing, ransacking, suggesting, packing; she even consented to fly with the runaways. On the 9th, accordingly, Jack Hay received this note :

‘DEAR JACKIE :

‘To-night (Wednesday) Missie is going to service, I not. Will you come to me?’

‘GRACIE.’

VIII

RABY'S SCHEME

THIS note was infected with some feminine aroma of Gracie, some morbid effluvium of complicity, like oil wintergreen, potent as whiffs of chloroform to poor Jack Hay each time he kissed it, clinging about his fingers, inflicting all the day sweet wounds, sudden heart-sinkings: and he sat miserably watching the clock's-hands. But when at last it was dusk, and the time near, he was caught in a new wretchedness: for Harriet Hay, passing by the library, looked in, saw him, and said:

'Your friends, Pole and Raby, are in the dining-room, asking for you.'

Jack leapt toward her.

'Oh, Harrie,—do, now, for me, old girl—run and tell them I'm—out!'

His manner was too earnest not to spur the vague enmity which was the mental attitude of the sisters toward him: and she said:

'Out? Oh, nonsense! why so, since they give themselves the pains to come?'

'I have a reason, Harrie!' he pleaded: 'do, now, quick! Will you, for me, dear old Harrie?'

'Oh, but that would be too absurd, Master Jack,' she answered. 'We do not like you to be erratic, you know. There can be no possible reason. And you must not seek to seduce your sisters into telling stories, sir, because that is naughty.'

She went straight to Pole and Raby, not knowing

that her steps 'ran to evil': and in a minute Pole and Raby came in to Jack.

It had been the custom, fine weather or foul, for the three to go out together to the Wednesday-night service: for Gracie was always there, and usually played the harmonium. This being so, Jack felt that he dared not now refuse, lest Pole should guess his reason. His secret was so flagrant in his own heart, that he feared it must be written across his brow; and, in fact, a first glance shewed Pole that Jack wanted terribly not to go (for, certainly, it was never difficult to read Jack Hay), and instantly he drew the correct conclusions, and made his plans for the night. He first scared Jack into going by simply saying: 'You've got to come, Jackie, or there'll be nothing for us to think, you know, but that you are in love with somebody or other,' then, as soon as they were outside, he exclaimed: 'Oh, I've forgotten my ——! please walk slowly, you two!' and he ran back home, hurriedly said to his sister: 'I want you to come out to the dale-church to-night without fail,' and then ran back to Raby and Jack.

Their walk out this time was in a new tone, with silences, and a lack of the old laughter. Pole, for the first time, called Raby 'Raby,' not 'Nibbs'; and Raby called Pole 'Pole.' The sun set, and left behind a benign twilight, odorous with new peats, sweetbriar, southernwood, and the mown hay. In the dale-village the trio came upon a circle of lasses with linked hands, for whom long-nosed Phil Armstrong, the mountain pedlar, fiddled the cushion-dance, in spite of five boys who made running tugs at his coat-tails, yelling: 'From witches an' warlocks and all long-nebbed creatures, guid Lord, deliver us!' Only seven of the villagers gave heed to the plaintive calling of the rude old church, and climbed to its grove of swallow-haunted larches. These, with Jack, Pole and Raby, Missie and Jean, the Beech How servant, and presently Miss Gladys Pole, made a congregation of thirteen under the open rafters, and small lead-lights, and quaint little oaken pulpit of St. John's.

Jack Hay had come in with the rest, but clandestinely slipped into a seat near the door; and as Dr. Stanley,

large in surplice and hood, was saying: 'We have done those things which we ought *not* to have done,' Jack stole out and was away—wild, liberated, with bounding heart, and flying heels.

He hoped that his absence would not be noticed: and meant to return before the service ended.

The instant he was gone Pole knew: Pole had expected it. And at once he leaned to Raby, and innocently remarked: 'Jack's gone, I see.'

Harold Pole could hardly permit so special a young gentleman as himself to go spying upon a lady: and he deliberately used Raby to do it, trusting absolutely in himself to get afterwards from Raby all that Raby might learn, think, or purpose.

And, in fact, Jack had not been ten minutes gone, when Raby seemed to have a toothache, whispered to Pole the word 'toothache,' took himself up, crept out, and made for Beech How: and Pole sat smiling his smile.

Jack, meantime, stood hot and breathless in the yard of Beech How, looking to the four winds for her, his heart thumping like a drum in his throat. The house was in darkness: the night drawing in moonless and dark. Where, then, was she? Suddenly he heard her call: '*Come!*' She was in the external gallery, her head peering through the bindweeds, and he could not stir to go to her, riveted by her whiteness, her haloed air, and the thought that struck him like a surprise: 'It is the good Queen! and it is *me* she calls!' Then, on a sudden, he flew up the external stair, and breathless was their embrace, full of panted words, sighs, and fainting efforts of speech.

'But you are late——!'

'I had to go to the church with the other two——'

'How long did it seem, Jackie—tell me! since Thursday?'

'How long? Five—fifty years.'

'That all? Oh, I am not satisfied! You must talk to me in eternities and infinitudes, lest I press myself to death upon your heart! one day in *my* sight is as a thousand years——!'

'Ah well, in that case, I have reigned each day a

thousand years, dear, like those kings in the millennium : that's beatitude three hundred and sixty-five times a thousandfold, and I'm lifted right up above the angels—— !'

'Why, yes. You like that? And at your footstool —I? your most cringing slave? We are the King and his beggar-maid——'

'The King and his blinding star, you mean.'

'Oh no, not star: something nearer, more poignant and throbbing: the King and his heart-strings, the King and his—wife——'

'Did you say——? Gracie, say that word again! I didn't really hear, you said it so low—Just once, now, if you love me!'

'Is it a command?'

'Yes!'

'Why, then,—wife. What, you like that, then?'

He pressed her with a groan, she grown to him in a tasselled déshabille, her knob of hair drooping lax, like a half filled sack. They were old familiar lovers now.

Already it was quite dark where they sat on the stone bench, behind the ivy and roses; and Jack said:

'I've got to be back at the church before service is over, or Pole and everybody will know. We must talk very seriously, and quick, too, by Jove. Yes, lay your head my way like that. Ah, yes! You love me?'

'Yes, I think—a leetle.'

'How much?'

'Five feet, five: nine stone, seven.'

'Oh, then, may you never grow thinner, dear: for I am a Shylock for every pound, for every pound. I wonder if you guess how pitifully I adore you? It is with a little more than all my poor capacity, all my height and depth, like an overflowing cask; and that's why it is such a hard pain to bear, Gracie, because I've not gauge enough to hold it.'

She bit his lip, twisted about him, pushing back his cap, grating her palms upward against his rough-shaven cheeks, saying:

'Yes, tell me, Jack, find similes, and my ear shall be like that ravished monk who heard an angel singing forty

years, and thought it one second; and then *I* will tell a still deeper story, you see? how your name is on my forehead, and on my two palms, and incised with a lancet in my heart, that you may grow mad and kiss me furiously, or be rough, and beat me, for excelling you. Oh, I have stores, hidden hoards—corn, hives, and roses, and good Devon cider! Come, buy without money! milk and rivers, and all the wines. And you can't rival me in this, you know, Jackie: for to love you is my propensity, and my talent, and my birthmark: and my mother specially made me, Jackie, for that trade.'

He pippled little kisses into her mouth; then freed himself, jumped up, and peered near the outer half-light at his nickel watch. In doing this, he thought that he heard the creepers below stir sharply, and put out his head; but saw nothing: and Nibbs Raby, who was under the gallery, just come, escaped being battered that night into a tray of butcher's meat.

'Oh, I say, Gracie, dear,' said Jack, 'we *must* talk. I've only fifteen minutes. Now, tell me—when do we go?'

'I'm ready to-night, Jackie.'

'Oh, good! Then, I say the day after to-morrow.'

'That will be—Friday,' she said, frowning at her nails: 'I am sorry you even mentioned it. Friday is—— bad luck. You can't conceive how idiotically superstitious I have become within this one week! Oh, Jackie, if it fall out ill, Jackie! Why not to-morrow?'

'I am not sure that I shall have any money so soon——'

'That can't matter. Do you know? Missie is going with us: just think of her dear simple-hearted bravery and devotion! and she has £100 a year in her own right, besides £800 in the bank. So there is a great lot of money, you see.'

Jack did not like this. He meant to paddle his own canoe: but for the present only said:

'So you got over Miss Ames? That seems wonderfully clever! I wonder, after all, if you couldn't do the same to Dr. Stanley?'

'Oh, that is a most wild thought, Jackie! a gem of a Jackism—you dear big boy! Don't you realise, then, the enormous weight of the worldly considerations against us? And don't you know papa at all? He is too good and dear for me to say anything—— But he has a calm, deep, white rage, if thwarted, that is harsh as gall, and hard as steel. We must go at night, Jackie, and have a night's start. Anyway, he may follow, or find means to stop—everything. We are minors—— Oh, I do feel most daringly naughty, do you know? Where is it we are going to, Jackie?'

'To London.'

'Why London?'

'Well, that seems the natural place to run away to: and it is there where I shall find work, no doubt. You know, Gracie, my father never gave himself much of a headache about me: I've got no money, no trade—nothing. You remember that Sunday night when I was on the Island, looking at your light, and you shewed yourself to me at the window—you did mean to, didn't you?'

'Why, yes. Did you like that?'

'Well, I don't know: God had never seemed to trouble Himself much about me before, and I couldn't believe—— But anyway, the morning after that I went to dad, and asked him if he wouldn't do something for me. He took it all right: for he is a good sort, really, you know; and he said he'd speak to my sisters. Well, whether he has spoken, and they think I am claiming my rights, I don't know, but they all seem pretty down on me just now. And I believe that Gussie's engagement to Sir Thingumbob Perowne makes 'em worse—they don't think I'm good enough——'

'Yes, I know, I know, Jackie,' she said with a pout: your sisters are dreadful, vulgar people, if I may say so. I have no patience with them for presuming to be your relatives, and mine, and only hope I shan't have to associate much with them—after: offensive people of that sort somehow make me feel quite—creepy. Of course, one cannot help being vulgar, if one is made in that way; but when vulgarity takes the form of cruel

injustice, then it is apt to get itself noticed in Heaven ; and I don't doubt, Jackie, that the account between you and the Misses Hay may yet, some day, be regulated.'

'Oh, well,' said Jack, 'they are all right—poor old girls. I think I understand them, and I dare say they are as fond of me at bottom as I of them. But anyway, I want to shew you that I've got to stand on my own legs, and not expect much from them.'

At this point Nibbs Raby stole from his hiding-place below, crept to the back, and descended the steep foot-path in the cliff over the beck ; and along the heugh of the beck, and by way of Brenthwaite Edge, he made for Bedwick. Never did he pelt faster toward a goal. He had heard : the elopement was to take place at night : what night he did not know : but a complete scheme had very rapidly hatched itself in his head ; and he flew toward Bedwick to execute its first act before Jack should come.

Jack and Gracie, meantime, discussed details. Friday, after all, was fixed upon as the day : Thursday was too soon, Jack said, and, going on Saturday, they would lose all Sunday ; nor was it safe to wait for the next week, lest Missie should lose courage, and the moon come back. Jack had already consulted the time-table : the last up-train left Bedwick at 10.35 : and by that they would go. Unfortunately the doctor, who suffered from chronic sleeplessness, never went to bed before 11.30 : it would therefore be necessary to send the trunks to the station during the day, while he was out. What an eloping couple have to do with cumbersome trunks, and third persons, neither of them asked : for modern young people have no genius for such things. Jack would be waiting early for the ladies at the bottom of the lonnin precisely at 9.30 p.m., and when they joined him, the three would then hurry on foot into Bedwick. Jack thought that it would be a good thing if the doctor could somehow be got to sleep before 10, since, missing Gracie's 'good-night,' he might find out, and give chase by a foreday train ; and since he often took a little morphia to procure sleep, Jack suggested giving him some about 9 :

but Gracie considered that that would be unbecoming, and said that she and Missie would pretend to retire with headache and toothache. On reaching London they would at once give the three days' notice for marriage by special licence.

Such were their deliberations.

Jack was just thinking that it must be high time to run back to the church, when there was a sudden voice in the yard, calling :

'Gracie, are you anywhere?'

It was Gladys Pole with her bicycle, and Pole with her. The service had been some time over, and with the last word of the Benediction, Pole had hurried out his sister. Jack was trapped: for he could leave the house neither before nor behind without being seen, so far back did the Poles stand; on the other hand, the doctor and the servant were coming—and to wait might be still worse: coming, too, to a strangely dark house, Gracie having put out every light, to increase the sense of secrecy with her beloved; nor could she descend in her *négligé* to lead the Poles away from sight of Jack's exit, nor invite them in.

Harold Pole took his stand meaningly, smiling his smile, lightly fingering his tuft of beard, divining all the keen embarrassment.

'Why, yes, I am here,' called Gracie in a voice perfectly reposeful; 'have you been to the service, then? Going home by Brentwaite Edge? How do you do, Harold? Are you adopting your sister, then? Teaching her to be a—detective?'

'Good evening! yes—something of that sort,' called Pole, adding to himself: 'Jack's there: but where is Raby?'

'We thought we would say good-night, as we were passing this way,' called Gladys Pole.

'Kiss me,' whispered Gracie to Jack behind her elbow: 'insolence of them——!'

The kiss was imprudent, for Pole, with a jealous pang, saw her face turn, and linger a moment too long turned; but it was her defiance of the hot bricks on which they stood: for neither knew what in the world to do.

'That is quite charming of you to come to hear papa preach,' called Gracie: 'I hope he was—convincing. This is the first time, I think?'

'Oh no—I've come before.'

'What do you say? Come a little nearer——'

'Don't stir!' whispered Harold Pole; 'keep her talking!'

The moments became excruciating: for the doctor was coming. He had seen Jack Hay and Raby leave the church—and had wondered.

'Aren't you quite well?' called Gladys Pole.

'What, can you observe it so far off?' answered Gracie.

'No: but I thought that, as you did not go to service——'

'Oh, well, nothing to speak of: a touch of a sort of—fever. Can you hear, Harold? What is good, Harold, for the summer-fevers of young ladies?'

'Cold douches!' called Pole in his deep bass.

'Look here, Gracie,' whispered Jack, 'better let me go down, and throw Harold and that girl into the beck.'

She held his sleeve, while the painful talk went on. But after a time she whispered:

'Better go, sweet—by the back—it is very dark; one more kiss—Friday night.'

She kissed and pushed Jack, and he knelt at her hand, and went; and Pole discerned the dim form emerge, and pass bending down the cliff-path over the beck. There was no moon, the sky was clouded, and densely black lay the shadows in every gullock, pass, whaap and mass of foliage. The day's round of toil was universally stilled to soundlessness, and man was at the ingleside in the remote cot, or the remote lake-village, whose reflected lights twinkled unreal as midsummer-night's dream. Hardly a breath stirred, or a wing in the ebony trees: and the dale seemed an uninhabited world, given over to rather grim shades, and the spirit of silence and melancholy. It was not, however, so dark as to leave Pole doubtful as to who had passed from the house: his eyes, without

seeing, were aware of Jack's yachting cap and pea-jacket.

And now, Jack once detected, it was Raby's turn. Jack was bad enough, but Raby, after all, was the enemy. Pole intended to alienate Gracie from Raby, once and for ever that night, by shewing her that Raby had spied upon her. This had been part of his design in sending Raby to spy. He had divined that Gracie would probably meet Jack in the external gallery, in which case Raby would certainly conceal himself under it: for thence alone could he hear. And, believing Raby to be still there, Pole came near the gallery, saying:

'Why, you don't seem to be quite so alone as you thought yourself, Gracie: I could almost swear I saw those bushes stir——'

'Stir! There is no one——!'

'Let me look. . . .'

He plunged under the gallery—and received a shock: there *was* no one: his trap had failed; Raby was gone—gone before Jack—gone, therefore, in the very midst of the talk which he had come to hear: a strange thing. Pole's swift conclusion was that Raby had gone to make some use of something heard, and to do so while Jack was still with Gracie, away from Bedwick, from—home. Nothing else, he judged, could possibly have conquered Raby's itch to linger to the end, and hear all. Raby therefore had hurried away straight to Jack's home: that seemed the inference. But why?

Quick flitted Pole's eyes from side to side in searching thought: and in half a tick he had decided upon action.

Out he ran, crying: 'No, there is no one, Gracie—good-night,' and to his sister: 'Quick, your bike—you must walk——' and he legged over the bicycle and was away.

Never pedals spun faster, in spite of the short stride and his aching thighs. He passed the doctor and Missie; ran on foot a little up Three Yews Neck; mounted again toward the top, a stern look in his eyes which came there in his strenuous moments, though his smile never ceased; and he had begun the spin

down Nabside, when a front fork snapped, and sent him pitching into hillside heather. He picked himself up, threw the bicycle upon a fence, not even extinguishing the lamp, and went running. He knew that it was wrong to run: within three years three doctors had said to him: 'Whatever you do, don't exert yourself.' But he did not care: far and fast he ran. And he had not been standing a minute, pale as a ghost, before 'Parklands,' wondering if he was too late, when Nibbs Raby came out.

Raby carried a parcel, wrapped in newspaper, and tied. And Pole wanted to know what was in that parcel.

Fiercely Raby scowled upon him, to find him unexpectedly there: and 'Hello, Pole,' he said, 'want *me*?'

Pole could not help panting, and a morbid glare was in his eyes. He took a cigar-case and matchbox from his pocket, and hurriedly lit a cigar, while he said:

'No, I was getting home, I was getting home. Gladys is gone on on her bike. Been to look up that Jack at "Parklands"?'

'Yes'—sullenly.

'By the way, I want to ask your opinion about Semiramis for the Mattingly Cup: I'm thinking of putting a modest quid on her for a place.'

They walked together down High Street, talking of a race-meeting, Raby very short and gruff, holding his parcel by the string, Pole very friendly.

'Have a cigar?' said Pole: 'you are bound to have the ill-nature to say yes, because it's my last Indian.'

'I don't mind,' said Raby.

Pole always kept the best cigars; and producing the case, he struck a vesta, and held the light, while Raby puffed. At the same time he held the lighted end of his own cigar to the string of Raby's parcel.

'Cursed vile thing!' hissed Raby, as the parcel lurched askew, and dropped. They were near a street-lamp; and though Raby scrambled quick, and huddled the scanty wrapping together, Pole saw what it

contained ; it contained one of Jack Hay's rough, dark-blue jackets, and one of Jack's peaked caps.

These Raby had obtained by simply asking Augusta Hay for them, explaining that he was about 'to play a little trick' upon Jack, and did not want Jack to know that he had them for some days. Any excuse was good enough for the uninterested sisters, and he had been sent up to Jack's room to get whatever he wanted.

Pole smiled his smile : but he should not have run so far and fast. His pulse was now rapid and 'small'; he felt weak, and noticed a strange taste like blood in his mouth.

Still, he could think ; and not much thought was necessary to see the truth here : Raby meant to impersonate Jack Hay on some occasion or other—certainly at night—and probably soon, while the nights were dark, and before Jack should discover the taking of his jacket and cap, of which he certainly had not many. It was clear, too, that this thought of dressing up as Jack had occurred to Raby owing to something overheard between Jack and Gracie. Could Jack and Gracie, then, be about to run away ? The question did not fail to occur to Pole. But, he could not, would not, entertain it : it might be so, but could be of no importance : his mind threw it off, conceiving Raby alone as a practical danger in respect to Gracie, and thinking again : 'All right, Mr. Nibbs, you look after those two silly children, and I'll look after *you*—and trip you, too.'

But that feat of tripping Raby was not so easy as he thought : for he had another enemy—a worm in his own lung. His parting from Raby that night was very hurried, and he ran home with his hand over his mouth : he had too much excited himself—had run too far and fast.

When his sister arrived weary, she found him in bed all pale and semi-unconscious, by his side the two Drs Buck, father and son, leading physicians of Bedwick, and in the room an odour of creosote, and a basin half full of bright blood.

This was Harold Pole's first hæmorrhage. And all through his lifelong war with Raby, here was to be his weak spot—the burden which hampered him, the rope which tripped him, the flaw which undid him. His head was very good, and his heart was passably good, but his lungs were bad. By such tricks does Destiny execute upon mortals her inexorable intentions.

IX

THE FRIDAY

JACK HAY had all the Thursday and Friday following his interview with Gracie on Wednesday the 9th, in which to get money for the elopement on Friday night at 9.30: for he was distressfully anxious not to be dependent upon Miss Ames.

He had no allowance from his father; ordinarily he would manage to extract five to ten shillings from Mrs. Hay during the week, sometimes more, if he needed a pair of boots, or a couple of shirts. These small sums usually went in 'treating,' in promiscuous charities, and in betting on horses, dog-races, cock-fights, games, or cross-buttocks at the Long Meg: for he mostly lost, differing from Pole, who seldom bet, but invariably won, and from Raby, who had a hard-headed knack of luck, which generally pulled him through. On that particular Wednesday night when Jack boasted to Gracie of being lifted 'right up above the angels,' he had only fivepence in his pocket: early, therefore, on the Thursday he sought his mother.

Mrs. Hay was sitting in bed, propped up in the shade of the red-damask curtains, where she often spent half a day with the *Times*, a sherry-glass of green chartreuse, and the *débris* of her breakfast; and she smiled her vague smile, but kept on reading, as he came and sat on the quilt, his heavy rough arm about her, his head on her shoulder, like a little child.

'Titty,' he said, 'I wonder, now, if you're going to be good to me? I want something.'

'Well?' she murmured, still reading with raised eye-

brows, and a lazy straining of the upper lids to keep open.

'I know you'd have done it quick once upon a time, Titty,' said Jack, 'when we were such grand old chums, and it was naught but Jack and Titty, Titty and Jack, all the time. By Jove, you mind how I used to bawl the old house in Brook Street down, if you only stepped outside the door? and that night when you stole out by the back, and went to chapel, and I found out, and nearly got fits; and Elspeth had to run for you, and didn't you come quick, and didn't I feel all right when you said you'd never leave me again, not for a hundred chapels, as long as ever you lived. Ah, well, that was before the money came, you see: and now there's no chapel any more—it's all church now—and no Brook Street, and no Jack either, it looks like . . . All the same, I know jolly well who is fond of me still, Titty, right down, down, at the bottom of her heart, if no one else is, and that's grand old Titty!'

She smiled, enduring his caresses with eyes still lazily travelling the printed lines, saying:

'What is it you want? There are a few shillings somewhere on the dressing-table.'

'Oh, I want lots more than that this time,' said Jack; 'and I know who is going to get it for me by hook or by crook, too, as soon as ever she knows I really need it. Titty, I want—£50.' He blushed darkly at the greatness of the sum.

'Whatever for?' she asked, glancing at him.

'I don't think I dare tell yet, Titty: it isn't my secret alone: but you'll soon know, and I pledge you my word it's for something right. And I can't possibly do without: I *must* have it—by to-morrow—or better say to-night. And whom can I come to but to you? The girls won't part, I know, and dad won't. So you are bound to, you see.'

'But you must be joking,' said Mrs. Hay: 'where am I to get £50 to throw away like that?'

'Oh come, Titty, do understand what I say, now! It isn't to throw away, you know. Look at me, now: don't I look serious? I am begging for my *life* this

time: and you can't pretend, you know, that you care naught about my life, because you do, whoever else doesn't: only perhaps you've forgotten that you do. If you can't give me £50, give me £25——'

Fifty or twenty-five was all one to Jack Hay, both being so vaguely vast. Mrs. Hay sighed.

'But whatever for? You are a great worry, Jack. You shouldn't worry, if you see I am in bed. Your sisters say it will be your ruin, if I give you money.'

'But not this time! Haven't I told you? It's for something grand—something that will make me just like a sort of king almost! If you only knew! and, after all, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you now—in great confidence, mind you, Titty——'

'All right, some other time; leave me alone, Jack. I'm not well. I'll see. I'll ask 'Gus and Harrie——'

'No, Titty! Don't, now! That wouldn't be kind—really! They'll only say no, and crack their bitter smart jokes. Please don't, now. I can't trust *anybody* but you to know that I want all that——'

'All right, then, I'll see. How much is it you want?'
'£30.'

'But whatever for? You'll only spend it in giving away, and betting. You know, your sisters were very angert with you for coming to the party in that jacket. I think you might learn to dress yourself like fashionable people. But never mind—I'll see: you always were a one for getting over your poor mother, weren't you?'

She rumbled his hair in a movement of transient tenderness—and turned again to her Society-wedding.

'To-night, then, Titty?' he said.

'All right. Leave me alone, Jack.'

He hugged her, and went, thinking that it would be all right.

He was not the only one in Bedwick that day in want of funds: there was also Raby. Raby did not know the day of the intended flight: but he was sure that it would be soon; and—he had only a few shillings. All Thursday he lived in a torture of hope as to the Mattingly Cup and Lafford Stakes, on which he might scoop a 'double' of £10: but at four p.m. he received a

disastrous London telegram that one of his two horses had lost.

He went straight to his principals, Spender and Crowther, and into Mr. Spender's room, piled with black estate-boxes and red-taped bundles.

'Look here, sir,' said he awkwardly, 'I've got into a bit of—trouble, and want £15 very bad: can you advance it?'

Mr. Spender at once began to laugh. This gentleman's father had literally 'died of laughing,' and during the past ten years the son had developed the affection. The firm's whole interview-business, accordingly, was now conducted by Mr. Crowther, since no earthly consideration could restrain that incontinent spleen of Mr. Spender, at the least touch of comicality. He had been warned to watch himself very strictly, to eat little, to shun wine, lest he should hasten the destined hour of his foundering in all that ocean of merriment: but it was like warning a cascade not to fall. He was now fifty, and growing too fat. His fine bald brow and bushy eyebrows were like a contradiction to his weakness: but those two dimples in the chubby cheeks, those lip-corners ever drawn back ready for anything that might happen, and that rollicking helpless underlook of the eyes, told of a jollity on the very point of breaking loose in his gravest moment. Heaven and earth had become to him one killing comedy.

'Aha,' said he to Raby, 'betting is easier than Law, isn't it? only, the right horse always comes in last, it looks like. Been betting on the Lafford?'

'Yes,' said Raby.

'Lost?'

'Yes'—sullenly.

Mr. Spender had a stitch of laughter.

'That feckless cursed sniggering again!' groaned Raby.

'Right horse come in—last?' asked Mr. Spender, shaking.

'No, it didn't. The ground was wet. It's quite sure to win next time, too.'

'But don't you see?—it's a topsy-turvy, disjointed

affair altogether! the whole round world, you silly—the right ones come in—you can't trust—'

He wanted to say 'trust anything,' but the word was lost in a sweeter, weaker spasm.

'Look here, sir,' said Raby, who had a stiff, profound lack of humour: 'I allow no man to make game of me—I don't care who he is, or what his excuse. I think you should know as much by now. Can I have the £15, yes or no?'

'I don't think you can,' said Mr. Spender, becoming convalescent: 'unless it's a matter of life and death. What do you want it for?'

'It is to pay a debt of honour.'

'Ah, I dare say. But we have instructions from your father's executors, you know, not to advance you one penny—— *He don't like that!*' Mr. Spender screamed the last sentence, convulsed again, pointing a helpless, limp finger at Raby's face.

'Curse the vile sniggering!' groaned Raby.

'Oh, well,' said Mr. Spender, recovering again, 'I tell you what I'll do, if it's so important: I'll talk to Mr. Crowther——'

With this promise Raby had to go away. He returned twice the same day to the office: but Mr. Spender was out both times. He had thus to wait till Friday. The Thursday evening he spent in keeping an eye on the hall-door of 'Parklands,' knowing that Jack was at home.

Jack indoors was lurking about to get a private word with Mrs. Hay, and near nine p.m. met her descending from the drawing-room; he then whispered:

'Titty, have you got the money?'

'Which money, Jack?'

'Oh, Titty! the £30.'

'Why, I never gave it a thought,' she said. 'Come to me to-morrow, and I'll see if I can give you a cheque.'

'But, Titty, it is most serious, you know. Oh, it is, you know! Can I really depend upon you, now? After to-morrow it will be no manner of good. At what hour shall I come?'

'Come when I get up: though it is very wicked of me

to be giving you money, Jack. You make me feel like a conspirator against your sisters. . . .'

But the next noon Jack and Raby both received rude shocks. Mr. Spender told Raby that the firm would not give the £15; and never did Spender and Crowther's doors bang louder than after Raby's exits that day. About the same time, when Jack went into Mrs. Hay's boudoir for the money, she said at once:

'Jack, I can't give you.'

'My God, Titty! why?' he breathed.

'Your sisters were angert with me for even thinking of such a thing——'

'But, Titty, didn't you promise not to say one word about it to them? Is that kind to me, now?'

'Oh, well, I let the cat out of the bag somehow. They had to know. You must only grin and bear it. I do my best for everybody, I'm sure.'

She sipped her glass of liqueur, while a maid combed her thick, gray-black hair: that worried, pretty face, if you looked close, had in it something of the epicure: Mrs. Hay had learnt to enjoy, and tended to luxury.

'Oh well, Titty,' said Jack, with a lump in his throat, 'I suppose you had to act in this way, as you say so. But still, but still, I feel—— You did promise, didn't you? This may just wreck me——'

She closed her eyes. She did not answer. He turned away with a wound in his love: but immediately a still harder pang at his practical predicament took its place. He had only nine hours left. To be dependent upon the girl with whom one runs away for one's railway-fare is an excruciating misery. He ran through the house, seeking the butler, who, compared to him, was rich, in the kitchen, butler's-pantry, and servants'-hall, found him in the housekeeper's room, and tried to borrow ten pounds, saying that his father would pay. The butler, with shrugs, declared that he had nothing. In despair, Jack ran out and down High Street to his father's office. He told Mr. Hay that he wanted ten pounds very badly for a good purpose; he said: 'Now, dad, I do beg you; you can't very well refuse, now.'

'I dunnot much like you coming to the office this gait, ma man,' said Mr. Hay, who was in a bad humour: 'this is the second time o' late. And a queer sort o' son ye are, too! Here am I hard up for a couple o' thousands to send tha sisters travelling for their Autumn, yet ye come begging this gait! Have ye no shame left? Am I bound to find the money to support the Long Meg, hey?'

'All right, dad, don't get your dander up,' said Jack quietly, and got up, and turned away.

'If it's so very important,' Mr. Hay called after him, 'I'll talk to tha mother and sisters to-neet——'

But Jack did not answer: he went out with a barrenness in his bosom, the desolation of friendlessness. There came a moisture to his eyes, and into his mind somehow that reproach: 'I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink——'

But as he passed into Commercial Street, he saw—a sight! Dr. Stanley's trap and mare, driven by Burnie, the lad, toward the station. The trap contained two large, strapped trunks, three hat-boxes, and Gracie's violin-case. Jack blushed a dark crimson. Those things were going there because of him. His being thrilled as if pervaded with sudden hot honey. No king on any throne, after all, was so much a king as he. There was Love in heaven and in earth—and for him: there was nothing else but love.

What, however, was this moneyless king to do? If he had had a diadem, he would have pawned it. It was now near two o'clock. There remained only Raby, Pole, and a chum of his, Skerrett, the chemist, from whom to borrow. He went first, though with some qualms of conscience, to Raby, who had lately returned empty-handed from happy Mr. Spender. Raby was not in a serene mood.

'Nibbs,' said Jack, 'any money at all?'

Raby reflected before answering: here was his chance to get the unknown date of the elopement: and he got it easily, really from Mr. and Mrs. Hay, who had driven Jack to him.

'How much you want?' he asked.

'At least £10, Nibbs.'

'When for?'

Jack fell readily into the trap.

'I must have it by to-night.'

'Won't to-morrow do, my son?'

'To-morrow's no good.'

'Well, I can lend you half-a-crown, if that's any use'

Jack did not notice the excitement in Raby's eyes, nor his restless pacings. He went dejectedly away; and immediately Raby rushed down into the cottage-yard, leapt upon his old bicycle, and set off through back streets for—Beech How.

Jack started for Pole's—but very reluctantly. He had already stood at Pole's sick-bed that morning; moreover, he had a blue fear of Pole's penetration, should he go borrowing. He turned, therefore, the other way down Commercial Street to Skerrett, the chemist.

Skerrett, unfortunately, was out: he might be absent ten minutes or two hours, said Chambers, the assistant; Jack decided to wait, and went into the little pharmacy at the back, a room of shelves, ointment-pots, jars, glass-tubing, graduated instruments, and druggists' knick-knacks. He waited ten minutes at a table littered with mortars, labels, pill-mass, syphons, crystals, stains and dust; then he rose and paced a little; then sat again.

He poured some rose-cachous out of a bottle, and ate them; then his eye fell upon the words 'sulphate of morphia' eaten out by hydrofluoric acid from an opaque band on a glass jar; the jar contained a number of fragile vials; and these some quarter-grain tabloids, covered by wads of aseptic cotton-wool. Jack noticed it once, twice, thrice, without interest, as he noticed all the objects about. The minutes passed wearily, soundlessly, save for the tedious buzzle and fume of a dragon-fly in the window-pane; Bedwick lay in its sultry afternoon doze, and the dragon-fly was like the town's vague snore. No soul entered the shop, and Chambers leant upon the counter, contemplating Dr. Buck's mastiff-bitch, which lay flat and large on the opposite pavement, suckling three pups. Skerrett did not come. After ten more minutes, Jack

put out his hand, drew the morphia jar, opened it, took out a vial, removed the cotton-wool, took one of the tabloids, and dropped it into his jacket-pocket. For this fatal act he was absolutely without conscious motive. It was the merest outcome of a vacant moment. The word 'morphia' may possibly have suggested to him that here was the very thing which Dr. Stanley sometimes took to procure sleep; that it might somehow be a good thing to have about him that night; he may have thought of swallowing it himself some time, to see how it felt.

But the precious hours were going: he heard three strike from the town-hall; and no money. Skerrett did not come. After three-quarters of an hour, Jack went.

X

THE TWO WARNINGS

ONLY Pole was now left him. He made up the street, knocked at the side-door by the draper's shop, and was admitted up the stairs. Gladys Pole took him through her brother's study into his chamber behind—an artistic, but rather queer, room in green, shaded by a plane-tree at the back windows. Behind the door hung a complete skeleton; that head in chalk above the bed was Peace, the murderer's; that object containing tooth-powder on the wash-stand was the nippy tooth of a mastodon; a huge enamelled watch of the sixteenth century, a thumb-screw, a Japanese cocotana-dagger, and a row of Leyden jars, were among the mantelpiece-ornaments; one whole wall was crowded with chemicals, and specimens of mineralogy, botany, etc., on shelves. On the low green bedstead lay Pole, very bright-eyed and white, with dry-looking carmine cheek-bones. He was getting better, but still had hemoptysis.

'Hello, Jackie,' he said, 'back again? Bring that chair to the bedside—not too close, mind—and push the basin away. I am feeling appreciably better this afternoon, boy, appreciably better, though not up to anything yet. But you haven't come to see me this time, you scoundrel, you've come—I believe it's to borrow filthy lucre! from the blush of you. Yes, that's it, that's it: you've been to your father's, and took the old office tabby in your lap, for there are the hairs pretty thick on your sleeve; dad wouldn't part, and so you journeyed—to whom first? to Harry Skerrett, or to Nibbs? To Nibbs first! for that smear of pill-mass on your forefinger would have got smudged, if anyone had

shaken your hand since you got it. The order, then, is dad first, dad first, then Nibbs, for you'd certainly try Nibbs before me, and he, I know, hasn't a sou, for he's lost on the Lafford, I'm pleased to say: so you went to Skerrett, and got the smear, in which some cotton-wool filaments are sticking—have you been opening one of Skerrett's bottles, then? and Skerrett wouldn't, or couldn't lend, which proves that what you want is not shillings, but pounds——'

'Skerrett was out,' said Jack indifferently, accustomed to hear Pole describe the unseen.

'Ey, that was it, then; so you said to yourself: "There's only old Harold left, I'll go and bleed him"—though he's lost basins of blood already, poor devil. Ah, Jackie! aren't you sorry for one? Yes, I can quite see that much in the good old eyes, the good old eyes. Here I lie, boy, impotent, worthless, and my enemy, no doubt, up and doing: hardly fair, is it? Mustn't even talk—no smoking, no reading—nothing. But that's how it goes, you see: there's a crack right through the world—a cooling-flaw, Jack—and God Himself can't mend it. Ey, now, I want to ask you something: when you asked Nibbs to lend you, what did he say?'

'Said he hadn't it,' answered Jack.

'Ey, I know: but besides that. Didn't he ask any questions? Try to remember.'

'He asked if to-morrow wouldn't do.'

'And you said?'

'I said no.'

'Good! I thought so. Quick, then—how much you want?'

'£10.'

'All right, run quick and look in the top right little drawer of my bureau, and bring my cheque-book, with the desk, and pen and ink.'

Pole's carmine spots had deepened; his eyes had their stern look of action: in a minute the cheque was signed.

'Here's the £10, Jack,' he said. 'And now let me tell you some'at: to-night you are going to attempt something, in which you will fail. Don't think that I know what it is, for I don't, and don't want to. But I

feel pretty sure that you will fail: for you have an enemy, you have an enemy. Well, after you have failed, and are down in the mouth, just come to me again, and I will give you some tips about your life, which you will see to be good. It is my whim to love you: certainly, you are the best simplest, lovablest unfeathered biped I have yet dropped across, and if certain frisky young females take a passing fancy to you, I can hardly blame 'em, though you've not acted quite on the square to me of late—there, you see, you go blushing that black blush again. However, I'll be kind and good, though Those Above are so unkind to *me*, Jackie: but by the sadness of the countenance, you see, the heart is made better——' he sighed.

'My dear Harold, what bosh you are talking!' said Jack: 'what on earth you are driving at, I——'

'Never mind—go! No, seriously, Jack, you must go now—I've spoken too much——'

Jack was no sooner out of the room, than Pole snatched paper from the desk, and set to writing with feverish haste:

'MY DEAR DR. STANLEY,

'People give me credit for two good eyes, and I am writing this to warn you that Nibbs Raby is meditating some action this (Friday) night—I know not what—but probably at or near Beech How—which may have for you and Miss Gracie consequences the most inconvenient. I should never have shocked you with this letter had I been well to act instead of you, but, as you know, the Upper Powers have seen fit to lay me, for the moment, on my back. If you should happen, too, to come across my good friend, Jack Hay, at any time to-night, it may be well if you take some interest in his movements: but I cannot too strongly insist that the danger to be apprehended is from Nibbs Raby, who, by the way, will have on a hat and jacket of Jack's. I am sorry that I cannot, for the present, be more precise.

'My kind regards to Miss Gracie and Miss Ames.

'I am, dear Dr. Stanley,

'Yours with great respect,

'HAROLD POLE.'

This letter was hurriedly sent off by Garry, the assistant of Cox, the draper, who took it on Pole's bicycle.

Half an hour before this, Raby, on *his* bicycle, had reached Beech How. He went to the hallan, met Jean, the girl, and sent a request for an interview with Dr. Stanley.

At that moment Raby had abandoned (for lack of funds) the scheme for which he had stolen Jack's cap and jacket. The idea of that scheme had been this: firstly, to forewarn the doctor that Jack was up to some mischief on the elopement night; and, secondly, while Jack was under the doctor's eye, to meet the two ladies in the dark in Jack's characteristic cap, walk somewhat in advance, and near the Bedwick lights leave them on some pretext; the ladies would then go on to the station alone, and a porter named Borie, who was in the scheme, would then hurry them, not into the up, but into the down train, which leaves four minutes before the London one, on pretence, if necessary, of instructions from Jack; and as the train began to move, Raby would appear and jump in. Once in Scotland, he hoped to fulfil the Scotch requirements as to residence, etc., and inveigle Gracie into a facile marriage *per verba de presenti* by taking advantage of her dismay, confusion, shame, and probable ignorance of Scotch law. The tricks by which he meant to effect this would be as easy as the slipping on of a hand-cuff; he knew his way; he had made himself familiar with the Scotch technicalities; the ladies would be in his hand; he trusted in himself,—and, barring unlucky chances, he could detect not a flaw in the scheme. His lucky stars had even blotted out the moon for him, put Pole to bed for him, sent Jack Hay to tell him the very night of the flight.

Only—there was the money-question. Raby had not enough to pay a night's lodging. He knew, indeed, that Miss Ames would have money; and he was a favourite with Miss Ames, on account of his Byron-face. But he dared not: the ladies would be much too bitter against him, in the first days at least: the money question was insuperable; and Raby had rolled in his

bed, beseeching Heaven to curse Spender and Crowther, the horse that lost the Lafford, and all lawyers, horses, and things; he had flung his little Buddha, in which he trusted for luck, to utmost Jericho and Jordan out of window. He was too deeply in debt to Skerrett to dream of borrowing: and he had abandoned his scheme.

It was still necessary, however, to warn Dr. Stanley of Jack: and with this object he had ridden out. He was shown up into the study; the doctor was in a little alcove, to which three steps from the study led up; in that alcove was a small safe; the doctor was bending before the safe; and he said with back turned:

'Well, Raby, what is it? Be good enough to wait a moment.'

Raby, in the study, could see the doctor's fumbings in one of the four compartments of the safe; saw him take out a roll of notes, look at them, put them back; the doctor found the paper which he was seeking, shut the safe-door, locked it; and Raby saw him hang the key on a nail.

At that moment Raby's mind, by a sharp inspiration of the devil, reverted to his whole scheme. The money-difficulty no longer existed. He would secretly borrow—would steal—those notes that night. In three weeks' time, when Gracie was Mrs. Raby, he could repay it a thousandfold.

'Now, Raby,' said the doctor, stepping down.

Something was strange in Dr. Stanley's voice that day: it was harsh; his spacious, inward-slanting upper lip had an expression white and wrathful in its pressure: and not without serious cause: for, an hour since, when Missie and Gracie supposed him in the village, he was in reality with one of Mr. Hay's wad-mine gangsmen, who was ill, near Three Yews Neck; and, in going from that cottage-door, he had seen a strange thing: two trunks, three hat-boxes, and a violin-case going up the Neck in the vicarage-trap. The inference seemed to be that the inmates of his household were about to take a journey, without mentioning one word of it to him: and here was a mystery out of Bedlam.

He had said not a syllable to the groom, or to anyone since: he simply waited—patiently, but indignantly—to hear the explanation.

Before him sat Nibbs Raby with the explanation, but awkwardly turning his hat-rim, with downcast eyes, not knowing how to begin. Raby had an ingrained awe of Dr. Stanley alone of all living flesh.

‘Well, sir?’ said the doctor.

‘Sir,’ said Raby, ‘I have to make a little complaint—against Jack Hay. Fact is—it’s a bit delicate, sir. But Jack has been bragging about Miss Gracie, in a way, sir, that I don’t quite like. He’s told Skerrett, the chemist, that—that in a month’s time Miss Gracie is going to run away with him. Of course, there’s not a word of it true, sir: but I know for a fact that he comes bothering round Beech How at night, trying to talk to Miss Gracie; and I happen to know, sir, that on this particular night, between nine and ten, he will be here somewhere—probably, I should say, in the lonnin—waiting for some purpose which I can’t guess at—though I know for a fact it’s something serious——’

He stopped, careful not to say that Gracie was actually about to fly (for that might ruin his own scheme), only wanting to give the doctor a sufficient motive for keeping Jack under his eye that night. The doctor, however, divined much more than Raby intended: for he had seen those two trunks: and at once the blood all about his eyes seemed to leave the skin to crowd into his eyeballs; he rose, unscrewing a little reservoir at the lower end of his pipe-stem, to toss some nicotine-drops into the grate; he murmured the words: ‘My God, my God.’

‘Have you done, sir?’ he asked, stooping still, with a side-glance at Raby.

‘That’s all I had to say, sir.’

‘How do you know that young, ah, Hay will be about Beech How to-night?’

‘I—I got it from Skerrett, sir.’

‘Very good. I thank you for your pains; and I shall not fail to take your statement into my consideration. Good-bye.’

He put out a rather shaky hand, and Raby took it with a certain awkwardness, and went.

Spinning down Nabside he met Garry, the draper's assistant, toiling up; and wondered what Garry was going into the dale for.

Ten minutes afterwards Garry was handing to the doctor Pole's letter of warning against Raby.

XI

THE FRIDAY NIGHT

THE night drew in very dark. At eight the doctor, for the first time since he had seen the two trunks in the trap near two p.m., met Gracie and Missie—at supper.

The party of three seemed lost in the sombre and substantial grandeur of the old hall, whose fire-place was a cavern of shining Dutch tiles, with blue-and-white background; the wainscot of oak, ebonised by the centuries, almost reached to a richly-moulded ceiling; some antlers, with foxes' masks and brushes, ornamented the walls; at the inner side two projections, like boxes or dados, stood in the corners immediately under the ceiling, between them being a row of square latticed windows, by which one could peep down into the room.

That was a silent meal. If the doctor had not known that something was impending, Missie's manner might have told him. The poor lady was suffering acute toothache, and her hand, cutting the melon, or passing the salt, visibly shook. That delicately-painted rose, too, was gone from Gracie's cheek; her nose looked pinched; anon she stole an underlook of compunction at her father. She was about to stab, to leave him bleeding. . . . The hour was come, and seemed far more awful and presumptuous now than before. But never an instant did she falter, though she knew that it would end ill: something told her.

'Why, we are quite silent to-night,' smirked Missie, with an effort that ended in a clearing of her throat.

But that silence could not be lifted; a presentiment

like the shadow of death brooded in each bosom. The six candles in their worn ecclesiastical-brass holders shone upon three mere masks of agitation. It seemed certain that Missie must betray herself; while Gracie was too occupied with her own sensations to observe a very singular something in the doctor's face. Jean, the servant, a fresh-looking Cumbrian, moved about the table, thinking this a night like other nights.

'Papa,' said Gracie—and her green-plaid tailor-made swelled and sank in an agitation almost at climax, 'we have been dusting all the books, and washed your pipes to-day: they are all in the rannel-tree rack; there is a new pound of Cavendish on the buffet when you want it; also I have a letter from Freen's saying that your Sophocles will be rebound by Monday; and the new list slippers have come home soled: they are at the foot of your bed—papa. . . .'

'Ah, then,' said the doctor, 'you have been both considerate and busy, Gracie.'

Missie, who made no pretence of eating, could not restrain the murmur of: 'Oh, my teeth, my teeth, my teeth. . . .'

'I see,' said the doctor, 'that you are in pain, Missie. I am—sorry. Perhaps it would be well if you retire.'

'Well, if you will permit me——'

She went away, not to rest, but to pack a hand-bag with sandwiches, biscuits, the last trinkets, her cheque-book, etc. The painful meal came to an end. It was half-past eight. The doctor sat on a cane lounge in the hearthplace, three candles near him, pipe in mouth, with a volume of Heine, which, by an exertion of the will, he read, on a wolf-rug beside him lying Rude, his old deer-hound. Jean silently cleared the table; and most silent lay the dark dale without. Gracie went to one of the two low, elongated, deep-seated casements, one on each side of the porch-door, looking out between the chintz curtains; then without candles sat at the old grand-piano, though her hour for singing to her father was much later. These yellowed keys were crack-toned, but her voice, a golden contralto, was so far beyond ordinary,

that her London teacher considered public singing well within her choice. She played half a prelude of Bach, while still the doctor read, with never a glance at her. Presently, in a low voice of sorrow, she began to sing: and soon two tears were streaming down her cheeks:

‘Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on. . . .’

Her voice died away on a low note in the midst of the hymn; then, her thoughts wandering, she gazed upward, while her fingers played of themselves, rendering an air of which she only became conscious on hearing the clock strike nine, and then with a start and a terrified sob: for the air was the theme of that most grim funeral-march in Schumann’s E-Minor quintet: and she never forgot the sudden horror with which she realised it. As if she had touched a snake, she hurriedly abandoned the piano.

Still, she did not falter: across the breadth of the polished floor, strewn with rugs and deerskins, she walked to the hearthplace, to say farewell:—an eternal farewell, though she never, never dreamed that. There, like a smoking statue, reclined the doctor, frowning, reading Heine; and ‘Good-night, papa,’ she said.

He rose briskly, and bowed.

‘Good—night, Gracie.’

‘I have a headache, papa.’

That he did not believe, though it was true.

‘Well, certainly, you look pale, Gracie.’

She wished to kiss him; but he was so big and formidable; and he showed no inclination.

‘Good-night, papa,’ she said again.

He bowed. She turned away, and turned again, whispering with a sort of sob:

‘Kiss me, papa.’

But he was now engaged in reseating himself, and did not, or pretended not to, hear. So she went slowly away.

The doctor read still ten minutes; then, rising, glanced at the face of the oak clock over the salmon in its glass-case on the chimney-breast, and went eastward through a door under the lattices, across a vestibule containing the staircase, into the drawing-room, and

beyond ; he had on a striped silk jacket, an old black-velvet smoking-cap with yellow broidery, and felt slippers, quite noiseless ; in a passage near the kitchen he heard Jean's footsteps coming, and slipped behind a door ; then, with quick and silent feet, went on into the kitchen. He was wonderfully active for his weight and sixty years, and till lately had played against Bedwick in the dale's C.C.

He locked the kitchen-door—a thing not done for years. The key was reluctant, but with a strong grip he turned, and put it into his pocket. He then stole up the back stair, passed northward along a corridor, and came to the passage into which opened the trefoil-top window of the external gallery : a door in this passage he locked, and pocketed the key. He then descended the external stair into the open, and re-entered the house by a gable-door behind the external gallery : and this he locked, and pocketed the key. The gothic door with its lantern at the top of the external stair was always locked, and no key was in it : so that all exit was now barred, except the porch-door, and a little cellar-door on the north, which he either forgot, or neglected. He then returned to the hall, relit his pipe, locked the porch-door, and walked towards the lonnin. There was neither moon, nor star, nor sky : stagnant lay the dale ; and every piece of foliage seemed solid black mass, as if waxed into solidity. It was 9.15.

Jack Hay had arranged to be at the lonnin by 9.30, in case any circumstance should decide the ladies to start early, though that was not necessary before 10.10 or 10.15. But instead of at 9.30, Jack had been there before 9, anxious, counting the dark minutes. Harold Pole that day had said a strange thing : ' You will fail.' But, if he failed, he would fight for it. He stood there, suspicious as a bird, alert, his hand against every man's.

On a sudden, pretty near him, he saw—of all people—Dr. Stanley. He slipped behind an oak, his shocked heart throbbing slow and fiercely sudden, like slow puffs of a starting engine. But the doctor had seen him ; the swift slippers came, came ; and a voice said :

‘Hay, is that you? Be good enough to accompany me to the house. I wish to speak with you.’

Jack had a moment of defiance; but, with a groan, he followed—up the path—across the yard—a momentous silence reigning between the old man and the lad. Jack, seeing the doctor unlock the porch-door, again hesitated: but, if there were locked doors at Beech How, what good could disobedience do? They went in.

‘Be seated,’ said the doctor, pulling the hearthplace bell-rope; when Jean appeared, he said: ‘Be good enough, Jean, to bring me a bottle of the green Beaune, with glasses, the cigars, and my night-flask.’ Jack sat half within the hearthplace on an antique wooden settle with high, carved back and carved canopy; on the lounge sat the doctor, who abruptly began, to Jack’s relief, to talk about the work of a Cumbrian ward-priest, as compared with parish-work in Derbyshire. The girl brought all, including a nickel flask, half-bound in leather, which the sleep-wooing doctor invariably took up, full of wine, to drink the last thing after his devotions. He poured some wine—worth drinking, by the way, for the cellar of Beech How was as choice as it was small. Both sipped and smoked, placing the glasses on the tea-table between, with the three candlesticks. The doctor went on to talk of the temptations which beset young men at the Universities, then of the system of lighthouses on the East-Scottish coast, and of revolving-drums, syrens, Polar exploration, and the history of the compass. His talk was always well-informed and charming, and now had a certain jaunty vivacity, the yellow tassel swinging across his face. Jack eyed the clock. The doctor told an anecdote of a Bishop of Manilla, where the Inquisition is practically still in operation; and this led him on to say:

‘By the way, are you at all acquainted with the sermons of Hugh Latimer?’

‘No, sir,’ said Jack.

‘Then, I shall be pleased to read you one or two, if that will entertain you.’

He at once jumped up to a bookcase of calf-bound volumes. He was something of a martinet, severe on

young people, and all this had no practical object other than Jack's punishment, since Gracie could not possibly escape through locked doors: a punishment cruel enough. Jack sat on ten thousand prickles. His frank mind, always slow to suspect, hardly suspected any subtlety here, though he could not but wonder at that unlocked door, and this sudden condescension of Dr. Stanley; but when he miserably saw that it was nearly 9.30, and no escape, he suddenly remembered that in his jacket-pocket was a little quarter-grain tabloid of Skerrett's morphia, and that morphia makes people sleep. He assumed that each tabloid was a dose, not knowing that one quarter-grain, taken through the mouth, could produce no effect; and when the doctor rose, the thought occurred to him of dropping the tabloid into his glass. Unfortunately, he hesitated, remembering that Gracie had disapproved of this: and before he could decide, the doctor, returning with the volume, seated himself again, and began to read the 'Sermon on the Ploughers.'

Jack Hay lifted up his heart, and tried to pray.

Gracie, meantime, was looking down with pity upon him from behind the lattice up yonder between the dados. She understood now that all was over: she had discovered the locked doors.

On droned 'The Ploughers.' Anon the doctor sipped. Jack's face was a mask of excruciation. Many times his mouth opened, but said nothing. The doctor had thrown his chair round for the light to strike upon the book, and now was more turned from than toward Jack. At 9.40, Jack, with a movement almost sudden, almost involuntary, dropped the tabloid into the doctor's glass.

A movement too sudden. With the corner of his eye the doctor saw; and the calm of that strong mind was shaken.

Up he leapt, raised the glass, saw with rage and horror the little white object.

'Why, the fellow wants to poison me!' he shouted, in an outcry that rang through the house: 'he wants to poison me!'

Jean and Burnie, running in, stood aghast; the doctor, with agitated movements, appealed to them, taking out

the dissolving tabloid, and showing it as a white powder on his forefinger, shouting again : ' He wants to poison me !'

It was good, meantime, to watch Jack Hay's phlegm, that stout calm. He stood up, too, with a little sniff-up of the nostrils, but only said :

' All right, sir, think as you like. I thought you knew me better——'

' But here is the certain proof—— !' roared the doctor.

One of the lattice-windows now opened above, and the painful face of Gracie peeped out, crying :

' Jack, do go ! I am now going to bed——'

The doctor stretched his forefinger upon her, shouting in that same ringing outcry :

' I require that young lady to repair instantly to her room !'

She nodded twice to Jack with a movement of the eyebrows, closed the shutter, and disappeared ; whereupon Jack turned and strode at her bidding out of the house, without a word, the cigar between his fingers. He walked home gloomy, but not despairing, and sat brooding for hours on his little packed and corded trunk that night : a trunk from which an old cap and jacket were unaccountably missing !

As for the doctor, left alone, he examined under a magnifying glass the powder on his finger. And soon his brow cleared, with a ' Poh ! it seems only a little morphia. The fellow thought to put me to sleep. I was perhaps unnecessarily——roused.'

He brushed the powder away, sat again, and at once took Harold Pole's letter of warning from a pocket of his expansive waistcoat. He read it carefully over : ' People give me credit for two good eyes. . . . I cannot too strongly insist that the danger to be apprehended is from Nibbs Raby. . . .' Precisely what it meant he did not know. But Raby's warning about Jack had certainly proved well-founded ; far more likely to be well-founded was Pole's about Raby. Dr. Stanley respected Pole, and secretly disliked Raby.

At least, he would not fail to be watchful. He first tore up the letter ; then filled his usual night-flask with

wine, and placed it corked in his breast-pocket ; then corked the bottle, and put it away in the buffet ; then refilled his briar-pipe, lit it. Rude, surprised at all this movement, wagged his tail, but would not lift his old frame. The doctor walked out into the cobblestone yard. The night was close, and pleasanter out of doors. It now wanted sixteen minutes to ten.

At that moment Raby was within the house, bent upon stealing. He had arrived five minutes before, peeped between the chintz curtains of one of the porch casements, seen what he had expected—Jack with the doctor—and said to himself : ‘ All right—Jack’s a prisoner.’ Gracie, as he had anticipated, had evidently retired early on some pretence to her quarters at the back, would probably remain ignorant of Jack’s capture, and would go to the trysting-place. All, then, was well. Raby had then run round to the external gallery, and legged over the low window-sill, this being his directest way to the doctor’s study : but in the corridor beyond he found the door locked. It seemed strange, but he was in a state of mind far too wildly agitated to reflect that Gracie might be a prisoner as well as Jack. He descended from the gallery again, making for the north gable-door ; but between gallery and gable he saw the five cellar-steps, and decided that it might be safer to go through the cellar, lest Burnie or Jean might see him. He unhasped the door, entered the cellar, and went groping toward the seven wooden steps that lead up into a disused room still called by the old-time name of ‘buttery.’ But he soon regretted his choice of the cellar : the uneven ground was thick with dust which made him cough ; he could not see his hand ; and after searching his pockets, he hissed : ‘ Silly idiot, not to bring matches !’ He stumbled over a box, fell flat, and rose with dust in his very hair and mouth ; Jack’s cap, much too big for him, was gone, and he lost two minutes of rage and misery in finding it. Then, for the life of him, he could not discover the steps ; when he did butt upon them, his nose got a blow which drew some blood. He then ran up, raised the trap-door, and was in the ‘buttery.’

By that time, the doctor had made his outcry against Jack's morphia, Jack had gone away, the doctor had re-read Pole's letter, and gone out, smoking, into the yard, while Raby stole darkly through the house, which he knew minutely, into the doctor's study over the porch. There he went up the three steps into the alcove, and groped for the hanging safe-key. But it was absolutely dark: he could not find it. A hiss came from his teeth. He stepped down again into the study, groped on the doctor's desk, and his hand met three match-boxes. He took one, ran back, struck a match, and saw the key. But that strange momentary light in his study-window the doctor had beheld from the yard.

Quick, therefore, and soft ran Dr. Stanley into the house, and up. From behind the study-door he could see obliquely into the alcove, and—he saw: for thrice again Raby struck matches, once to find the key-hole, once to find the notes, once to hang up the key. But Dr. Stanley thought that it was Jack Hay.

Close by the doctor Raby passed out: and swift, and soft, and sure, the doctor tracked the dark form down to the 'buttery'-door. He understood then that the thief would go out through the cellar: and he ran to the front, round to the external stair, and from among the foliage there, spied the form come up the cellar-steps. Dr. Stanley was like Rhadamanthus and an outraged man in one, profoundly impassioned, but with the patient calm of a judge on the surface. He had the inexorable intention that the thief should sleep that night in the lock-up, even if he had to track him in slippers all the way to Bedwick. But, still believing Raby to be Jack, he would not tackle single-handed so powerful a fellow, lest he should resist, escape, hide or destroy the notes, and deny the theft. The sagacious policy was clearly to hang upon the thief, till his chance came: and when Raby moved toward the back, he warily followed, and when Raby paused, he paused.

Raby wore not only Jack's jacket and cap, but flannel trousers, like Jack; and, being a tall fellow, hardly an inch shorter than Jack, he had quite Jack's appearance

in the dark night. But near the stable he lit a match, peering at his watch. He saw that it was 12 minutes to 10. And the doctor, with still deeper enmity, now saw that he was Raby.

Raby reflected that Gracie would not be likely to go to meet Jack until 10 or 10.15. There was plenty of time till then. His clothes were impregnated with dust; dust was in his ears and pores; blood from his nose was on his hands and lips; perspiration and dust wrapped his skin: he would go to Cribble's Fall for a dip: then return, and await the ladies in the lonnin.

Habit made him take one of four bathing-drawers and towels that generally hung on the rack over the trap in the stable; while there, his always cautious mind prompted him to leave the notes, till his return, and he laid them under the cushion of the trap; also, he took a stable-brush for his clothes: quiet and quick were all his movements. In the next compartment the mare smote a hoof, and he heard the deep, nocturnal sound of her grinding jaws. Dr. Stanley, behind a yew, saw him enter, and in half a minute come out from, the stable, but did not guess his motive, not seeing the bathing-drawers and towel.

Raby then went down the cliff-side, and, going, looked back a moment at a light in Gracie's window; and he muttered: 'All right, my little girl. . . .'

XII

THE BROCH

THE footpath along the beck is hereabouts some three feet above the water, the bank steep and rocky. On the cliff-side above is gorse and long grass, but hardly a tree, so that Dr. Stanley could not follow down the cliff: for by a turn of Raby's head he might have been seen. He therefore went along the cliff-brow, where there is no path and the hill-side is dense with wood, underwood, and their populace of rabbits, squirrels, rooks, jays, and wheatears, compelling him to advance slowly; he soon lost Raby, discovered him again, and after five minutes, with a sense of defeat, lost him again: for he had to make a westward *détour* round impassable holly-thicket. At that point he trotted with the forward-leaning activity of a young man, intent upon his aim, yet—so unconscious is even a good man—hastening to his own undoing. There are, indeed, men who seem born, as it were, under certain texts or mottoes, which do not fail to apply, with a sort of astrologic ominousness, to every main action of their life; and the text of Dr. Stanley's life—whether we consider his marriage, his consent to the Mackay legacy, his borrowing from Mr. Hay, or his pursuit of Raby that night—was surely this: 'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof is death.'

He came down from the higher ground upon the road, Raby still lost to him; but after running thirty yards, peering, meanwhile, through bush at the footpath ten yards to the left of the road, he saw—not Raby—but the heap of Raby's clothes; and at once he thought: 'Oh, he is bathing. Well then, I have the knave.'

Raby was under Cribble's Fall, where the beck tumbles in two smooth streams over three rocks into Cribble's Hole—the regular shower-bath of the dalesmen. Fifty yards from the stream, on its west side, where Dr. Stanley stood, is a wall of overhanging mountain-rock called Thorneyfell Crag, which approaches to within three yards of the stream some distance below Cribble's Fall, and there forms, with Daleshead on the other side of the stream, the 'pass' out of the dale into Brenthwaite Edge beyond. A little above the fall, an edge of forest runs from the crags to the road; and the triangle of ground between forest, crags, and road is a piece of that black, peaty land common in Cumbrian mountain-districts, hardly an acre in extent, but containing two very interesting objects: one, a bee-hive stone-hut built there by prehistoric man, and, further back, a very ancient tower, like the 'round-towers' of Ireland, Scotland, Corsica, etc., called 'Lyullph's Broch,' this latter standing so well back in the shadow of the overhanging crags, that Dr. Stanley, though he was near, and cast his eyes toward it, could not see it.

He went forward, peered, and discovered Raby just emerging from under the three-foot fall of water; and, like the trump of doom, Raby heard that voice:

'Ah, Raby, come here.'

'*God!*' breathed Raby: '*Pole knew.*'

He came splashing to his knees among the rocks, making instinctively for his clothes, though nearly fainting, caught in the sudden panic of 'the sinner' in the hour of his calamity.

'You might leave your clothes for the moment,' said Dr. Stanley: 'just, ah, follow me, will you?'

The doctor turned, quietly expecting to be obeyed: and obeyed he was. His object was to lock up Raby in Lyullph's Broch, then return home and send Burnie to bring the police, believing the incriminating notes still in Raby's pocket—though, in fact, they were in the stable at Beech How. In this stern design to wreck the young man's life, his heart knew no relenting; the sinner should drink his sin: and with steady step he went, never glancing backward. Raby followed—a

lank, tender-footed, blue-white form in bathing-drawers, wracked with terrors, dripping, guilty, above all uncertain: for so calm was the doctor's tone, that Raby could not decide how much he knew, or whether he really knew anything: he might only want to talk about Jack, or something. . . . They went along a path worn by feet between tower and beck: for the tower is used as a depository for bathers' clothes in wet weather, and in its lower story may sometimes lie a heap of potatoes, turnips, or oats, and odd agricultural or mining implements. They stepped over a rivulet winding through the triangle of ground to join the beck, the shrubbery increasing as they advanced; they passed the bee-hive hut to the right; a few old-fashioned black-faced heath-sheep scampered from their path; they brushed through bush: and were at the broch.

Its first six feet are solid stone, and outside this part some steps run up to a doorway of flat lintel and slanting jambs, narrow atop, like old-Egyptian doorways, with a comparatively modern door, and heavy lock. The walls of uncut rubble have an inward batter, tapering toward the top, which is fifty feet on high; there are two triangular-top windows, and a wooden floor between the roof and ground-floor, the roof being of stone, slightly arched, and reached by two heavy ladder-steps. All these old brochs like Lyullph's were originally places-of-refuge, belfries, keeps, or watch-towers, one hardly knows which.

Dr. Stanley ran up the outer steps, saying behind his shoulder: 'Up here, Raby.'

Raby hesitated now, smelling danger; but he went up, he entered, panting, alert; and they stood half a minute in the blackness there, the doctor drawing ever nearer the door to rush out and slam it, the silence burdened by Raby's breath. Then the doctor made the rush—but a blind rush: for neither could see the other a foot within the doorway, and Raby had warily kept quite near it. He at once threw himself upon, and jammed, the doctor, seeking to slip out himself, and gasping the words:

'No, you don't!'

Those three words, without the 'sir,' were really most horrible. Raby was now sure that the doctor knew all: and 'No, you don't' meant definite rebellion against the doctor's almost sacredness—the casting to the winds of a lifelong habit of filial awe, of fear; this again meant the throwing overboard of the grand hope of Raby's life: for, those words once spoken, how could he ever become the husband of Gracie—if the doctor lived? They meant, therefore, a murderous mood, a crossing of the Rubicon, and a burning of his bridges behind him.

But in his attempt to slip out the doctor gripped his nude limbs, and they struggled together with silent fierceness against the thickness of the wall, the old man breathing rough and fast through the nostrils, till he managed by a thrust-back to send Raby staggering to a fall against the ladder; now would have been his chance, but Raby held fast to his left sleeve, though he tugged hard to free himself; and feeling Raby winning himself to his feet again, he managed, by reaching out with his free hand, to catch the door, snatch out the key outside, hurry it in inside, and, by an urgent writhe of the body, turn it. By this time, Raby, too, was at the key, struggling to secure it; but the doctor, who had the prior hold, dragged vigorously, and slipped it into his trouser-pocket, both now locked in.

'*That key—quick!*' shrieked Raby: and there was a beast in that cry.

Perhaps something in it startled the doctor; at any rate, feeling the ladder at his hand, to avoid an attack in the absolute dark, he ran up it, Raby after him, with pattering feet and palms, to the first floor; then, in hot scurry, Raby reaching up to catch his leg and drag him down to death—to the stone roof.

There, near the parapet, which reaches to one's hips, the doctor stood at bay; and Raby stood before him.

'Now, quick—that key!' gasped Raby.

'You—insist?' gasped Dr. Stanley, livid as milk.

'Quick, I tell you!'

Dr. Stanley put hand to pocket, drew out the key, and, by a quick lateral toss-out, sent it over the tower-top. They heard its rush through the bush below.

He had thus made himself a prisoner with Raby—till morning: for it was ten thousand to one that no one would pass to or from Brentwaite Edge at that hour. But nothing equalled the inflexibility of Dr. Stanley's decisions: and he had decided that Raby should not escape.

'Oh, you have done that, have you?' went Raby, his flaming eyes an inch from the doctor's: '*all right!*'

The doctor said nothing. Raby began to walk the fourteen-foot diameter of the leaf-strewn tower-top, to and fro, bursting from head to toe with the sentiment that no man should take liberties with him, and get off scot free, not if the man were—an archangel, or One still higher. True, he had stolen: but a theft committed by Raby became quite different to other thefts in Raby's eyes: such was his self-love. As for Dr. Stanley, he sat on the three-foot-thick parapet of untooled ashlar covered here and there with sheets of protective tin, glad of the darkness that hid his open mouth and toiling chest.

On that top of Lyullph's Broch was a silence big with meaning.

Raby stopped before the doctor, arms akimbo.

'Do not attempt to approach me,' said Dr. Stanley, now recovered in wind, 'unless you be further inclined to test an old man's vigour!'

'Bah! you old coward! I'm not going to touch you—not now. I want to know what you've brought me into this d——d hole for? What you done it for?'

'Raby, you are a scoundrel.'

'True enough! All men are scoundrels. But what have I done?'

'Raby, you are a thief.'

'True enough! True enough! But how do you know?'

'I saw you, sir.'

'Oh, you spied, did you? old—! And just because I stole a few notes to save your silly, mad daughter from running away with a pauper, you want to ruin me for life—for *life?*'

The doctor answered nothing, but put hand to pocket, took out his night-flask, drank some wine to cool his

throat, and put the flask on the parapet. Raby, his two large palms pressed against his flanks, then began to abuse—deliberately, unweariedly,—involving Gracie, too, whom he loved, searching for the wantonest words of a fishwife, his lips specked with froth, revelling in the sort of blasphemous sin which this revolt against Dr. Stanley was to him, all the old sweet respect turned now into turgid foul rancour and contumely, like Peter 'denying' with oaths and curses. The doctor answered never a word, but, in the midst of the mud-shower, felt for his smoking materials, found no tobacco, but pipe and matches, the pipe only half-smoked, and he lit a match. By it Raby suddenly saw anew that smile and impregnable dignity of Dr. Stanley—saw it with a sort of shock and hesitation: for the murky night obscured his sense of who it was he dared revile, and it was as if he reviled some abstraction of Dr. Stanley rather than Dr. Stanley; but the moment the match went out, he resumed his catalogue of old pauper, old humbug, old—dog; till his parched throat ached.

It was then past eleven, and now no chance of anyone passing. Raby again furiously paced the small space. Into the darkness went the doctor's tranquil puffs, while distinctly from below could be heard anon the rush of a rabbit, or bleat of a sheep.

Again Raby suddenly stopped before the doctor: this time with clenched fists, and eyes inflamed as it were with coals, saying:

'Look here, what you locked me in this place for? Curse you—what you done it for? It's *me* you've locked in, you understand? Me, Nibbs Raby, son of John Howard Raby! It isn't a silly fool! If I murder you, don't suppose I'm going to get nabbed! I wouldn't be such a *silly ass*—'

That '*ass*' was a prolonged snake-hiss, and Dr. Stanley felt and knew that if ever murderer walked it was Raby that night. But he puffed, feeling no fear: he was physically as strong as Raby; and Raby in his bathing-drawers had not a pin with which to scratch.

And again, for perhaps twenty minutes, Raby paced

the narrow space, just avoiding each time the ladder-opening. Once he threw back his head with a laugh—a ha! ha! ha! whose echoes clapped among the near crag-tops, caused by a thought of Pole—of how Pole would be glad—of Pole's dance and triumph-song over the grave of his, Raby's, life-hope; and, certainly, at that moment Raby was a maniac.

Dr. Stanley finished his pipe, and laid it on the parapet; then threw off his silk jacket, made it into a pillow, laid it on the leaves. He hardly hoped for sleep just yet, but he thought to lie down, make himself comfortable, and carry out the never-varied routine of bed-time, as at home. The pillow laid, he then knelt by the parapet, and prayed, gazing upward into the skyless air. And Raby, seeing him, muttered: 'Yes, pray hard—you'll want it all. . . .'

Raby now seated himself on the parapet, at the point farthest from Dr. Stanley, in his bosom a sullen heat which was no longer flame, but as fierce as flame—and more deadly.

Fifteen soundless minutes passed. The doctor then rose from his knees, and, as usual before getting into bed, drank all the wine in the flask. He then unbuttoned his collar behind, laid it on the parapet, and, while lowering himself to the leaves, said:

'Raby. . . .'

'Well?' answered Raby, who was now, somehow, wondrously close to the doctor.

'It is not singular, Raby, if I have been severe on your outrage. You have been—infamous. I say, however, that in the morning, if your demeanour be then very different, I may—perhaps—for your father's sake—consent to, ah, discuss details with you.'

For answer, Raby brought a wild face down, down to the doctor's, whispering in a kind of confidential frenzy the words:

'*Too late, doctor! Too late!*

'How do you——?' began the doctor, appalled in spite of himself.

Raby whispered the singular answer:

'I have lived in India!'

'You are certainly deranged, sir——' began the doctor again.

'But don't be a fool!' protested Raby in that secret whisper: 'prepare to meet your God, if there is One! I tell you, *you are now dying*. . . .'

No other word was spoken there. Ten seconds after that dread announcement, Dr. Stanley knew that it was true: he felt no pain—yet he knew that it was true. He sat on the leaves, and a profound despondency at once possessed his soul, an anxiety, a feeling of suspense, a sinking of the heart, a gloomy foreknowledge of coming dissolution. To him the night seemed drearer, the earth an abode of doom, and eternity a dismal abysm. He muttered: 'My poor child,' remembering with horror that he had lately allowed his insurance policy to lapse. Thus during four minutes, which seemed very much longer, his spirit groaned within him, his brow beaded itself with sweat, and his head hung sideward, mournfully meditating how in the pottage of life is ever death, death, and man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; everywhere within him was, as it were, a whisper of one who travelled, saying: 'I am coming, I am coming, and will not fail to meet thee, and hold converse with thee'; ever nearer, stronger, in all his vitals wrought that dark and potent premonition: and from his lips there burst the groan: 'O time! O eternity!'

Raby, sitting now again at quite the opposite side with averted face, was listening for that groan: and at once, hearing it, *his* brow, too, broke into sweat, the universe grew icy to him, and he muttered: 'Well, it's done: and Hell can't undo it.'

By the end of those four minutes of deadly expectation, Dr. Stanley's eyes were staring, with pupils monstrosously dilated to the size of a threepenny; he brushed his hands over them, trying to say, 'Am I getting blind?'—for he could no longer see—but his tongue made only a babbling; and Raby, looking away toward the beck, muttered: 'Your own fault—your own fault.'

Dr. Stanley, in sudden terror, now tried to pick himself up: but in vain: his limbs had lost their power,

the tower seemed to reel under him, and he fell heavily back with a succession of laboured sighs ; at the same time the surface of his body grew clammy, strong intermittent tremors began to shake his frame, and his mind became as blind as his eyes, groping painfully in a nightmare of ideas. He tried to say : ' Gracie, my child, pray pass me my Homer,' but again his tongue made a babbling ; and again the jaws of Raby shivered the murmur : ' Your own fault—your own fault.'

For perhaps ten minutes after his prayer, the dying man sat with his head leant against the rock, all relaxed and powerless, retching cawingly, yet unable to vomit, and harassed at the same time with a burning sensation in a throat which every moment became more bloated and more livid, and with an irregular heart, which sometimes seemed to stop. Suddenly, at the end of that time, vehement quick pangs tore his inwards, and tossing himself upon his back, in the passion of death he sent forth a cry which froze the current of Raby's blood. This died away in a succession of groans, while his palms ruefully pressed together his abdomen, in which now grimly travailed the throes of dissolution. After about three minutes of these pains, he became delirious, snapping aside at the dead leaves, his arms and legs meanwhile jerking themselves in clonic spasms, with ever-increasing vigour of action ; till, on a sudden, the body stiffened railingly, and lay stretched like an arch on the soles of the feet and the back of the head alone in a ' tonic ' spasm. By this time he was unconscious : but again and again there went forth that lamentable cry—re-echoed among the rocks of Thorneyfell Crag—which made Raby squeeze his hands upon his ears, lest he, too, should shriek to drown it, adding cry to cry, and frenzy to murder.

Then there was a minute's croaking horror, the last death-ruckle in the throat—then silence—then a sigh—then silence. It came in about eighteen minutes after Dr. Stanley had risen from his prayer.

He was always the last to retire at Beech How, which now lay dark in slumber : for about this time the candles in the hall burned out by themselves, the members

of the household being in bed, supposing him to be there also. But he lay dead in Lyullph's Broch.

Raby, poor fellow, sat all collapsed among the leaves, huddled sideways with bent knees against the parapet. He had not thought that it would have been so bad. And the dark hours passed over him.

At one time—near three—he got up stealthily to rush to the bottom from the body. But the body had him fast enough : for half-way down something explained to him that he could not face the interior darkness, and why he could not : and he was up again quicker than he went down.

Soon after three a light wetting rain began to fall ; and the moon arose, but remained invisible.

He sat sideways, pressed away from the body ; and occasionally it was brought sharply to his memory that he—Nibbs Raby—had killed a man.

And so precious a man to the world's eye : so cultured, elaborate, yet harmonious. The kind of man, however, was not the point with the voice that every half-hour sharply reminded Raby : the point was this : that it was a man, born of woman : and he—Nibbs Raby—had killed him.

Of murderers Raby had vaguely read in newspapers : and singular, foreign people they had seemed, as unrelated to him as a pen to an orange. Yet they were his brothers, after all—at bottom he was just like them—was now one of them ! This struck him with an ever-new astonishment, drawing from him groans deep as those dire groans which he had heard that night. He, too, like them, a sublime jackanapes, had monstrously mutinied—had confronted and outraged the universe—with all the infinite greatness, and the infinite baseness, of man.

Yet he felt with what perfect truth he could answer : 'Not guilty' if he were ever charged : for it was not Raby, but a deep unknown Raby inside the Raby which he knew, that had done it. The ordinary upper Raby was innocent enough.

It several times struck him that that particular night would never end—that the sun was done with the earth

on which *he* lived. Every spark of the flames which had transported him to his act was extinct now, and he cowered an undone wreck, craven, shivering, his nude body goose-fleshed. But at last, opening his eyes, he saw the darkness lifted, and felt the airs that forerun the day; and when beyond Ghyll Scar to the north-east he saw the rosy smokes of the dawn, he rose to the parapet to look out with weary eyes: for the dalesfolk stir betimes. He had still, however, hours to wait, and sat hugging himself, observing with a strange minuteness all the objects about him, save one—that smile behind him. He noticed his heap of clothes by the beck, and the grey eddies, and the two Cribble's Falls, eternal as the lids of dead men, and the fantastic outlines of the trees that ridged Thorneyfell Crag, almost overhead. The birds awoke as usual, and sang, and it was most strange that all things went as usual, not knowing what was on the tower-top; the heath-rams, with their black Jewish profiles, mixed with a few spotted herdwick, cropped close among the bush below; and there was a small long-horn heifer, rough and wild-eyed, like the Highland moor-ox, that cropped close between the bee-hive hut and the rivulet: they ate and ate: their only business was to eat; and well, well, well was it with them. But to be born a man, how complicated and vexed a thing was that!

Raby covered his small face in his large hands, and was rent with sobs. Let us duly blame him—but pity him more.

XIII

THE NEWS

THERE was an old weather-beaten fellow of seventy years named Pete ma Hinney, who by 4.45 had had his poddish and coffee, and with bent knees came trudging in clogs along the beck-road with his 'bait' (lunch) of Dutch cheese and coal-black 'rye-leaf' hanging from his pitchfork-end, intended for consumption late in the day, at 9.30 a.m. He stopped short at Cribble's Fall, seeing there a heap of clothes and no bather: recognised the uncommon cap of young Mr. Hay; and was looking wonderingly round, when a voice from the air arrested him, and his peering old eyes saw a naked form on Lyullph's Broch waving.

'Od bliss us, that caps all,' muttered Pete.

With peers and perks, and backward jerks of neck and back, he went along the path between black moss, gorse and copsewood, then mounted the seven external steps, found the door locked, and stood painfully blinking up the scabrous, lichened wall, stout with its sixty-eight feet of circumference (at the bottom), while Raby bent down, shouting. But an echo mixed with the words, making them a hoot.

'I canna hear what tha's at!' shouted Pete ma Hinney: 'coom down tul't!'

Raby, however, did not wish to come down, and finally the old man was got to understand: on the broch with Raby was—a dead man; and what Pete had to do was to get back to the village, knock up Attewell, called Bobm, the petty constable, and bid him hurry on

his galloway into Bedwick to knock up Calthorpe, the police-inspector.

Pete ma Hinney thereupon left his 'bait' on the steps, murmuring: 'Ey, yon's a maizelin wark, or I'se domd: stark nekkid on t' broch, and a deid man—!' He went away with quickened hobble, while Raby, pulling himself together, began to think, to plan, his legs hanging over the exterior wall. Pete ma Hinney was to him like a sail to a castaway, infusing a new sense of the everyday world: for the night had been a darksome infinitude peopled by two things only—a tower and a dead man.

Morning, as it were, threw wide casement after casement; flushed mists writhed away from corrie, fellside and glen, like waving gauzes of green and gold, rose and azure; the roof of Beech How grew definite to the eye, and, one by one, the ruined walls of Castle Bieder on the eastern heights, then the white Quaker meeting-house in its grove of larches, and the rare, perched cot—for the dale is almost uninhabited—then, far on the north-eastern shore of Lonbydale Water, the terraced lawns and grey mansion of Sir Markham Perowne, lord-of-the-manor. Back rolled every curtain, except to the north, where in a dip of the oval of hills the eye lost itself in a remoteness of haze; there came a moment when the strip of lake visible to Raby was a blotch of glare; the jays screamed, the woodcocks cockroaded, the little birds were all crazy with amazement and gratitude, and now the sun peeped up, to see on the top of Lyullph's Broch a noble cold brow in a smoking-cap, and a smile entranced by a far other dawning.

Not till near eight did three men come galloping: the inspector and sergeant of the five borough-police, with Attewell, or Bobm. By then quite a little crowd of yokels, mostly women, had collected: for it was market-day in Bedwick, and they were going with their produce by Brenthwaite Edge. Anon they sent up shouted questions, but Raby would answer nothing till the officers arrived, alighted, and came briskly to the broch. He then shouted down that the key was in the bush, though he would not move round to point out the spot,

lest he should stand over the dead. However, it was soon found, and the officers entered, locked the crowd out, and ran up. They saw Raby looking like a man of thirty, a man of sorrows, experienced in misery; and they saw the portly body long-stretched-out, the collar on the parapet, the nickel night-flask. The morning breezes stirred the white locks escaped from the smoking-cap, also the shirt-sleeves, and the watch-holder of black braid; one disordered trouser-leg revealed a pallid hairy shin above a red sock; but otherwise he lay in perfectly decent repose, his head on the silk jacket, the face very yellow, but the brow marble. It was as if in the death-agony the hair on lip and cheeks had sprouted: for he was like a man unshaven for two days.

'Dr. Stanley!' breathed Bobm, a gaunt old Scotch character, with hand on mouth.

Calthorpe fell on his knees by the body, breathing 'Dead!'

'My God, Mr. Nibbs, what's this?' breathed Delvin, the sergeant.

'I've been all the night with him, since ten,' sighed Raby, leaning upon the sergeant's shoulder, but hiding his left fingers under the elastic band of the bathing-drawers: 'I can hardly talk. Do get me home quick. He went mad, and locked me up here, and then died: I've been all the livelong night with him.'

'Went mad?'

'I suppose so. I was bathing in the Fall, when he came and saw me. He called me up here, and locked the door, and when I saw he was queer, and asked for the key, he threw it overboard. Then he began to rave a lot of nonsense about the Bishop of Carlisle, and said I was an enemy of the Church, and then he took off his collar and jacket—he thought he was at home—and fell down, and died soon after. I haven't slept a wink. I thought the night would never end. Couldn't you get a cart or something to take me home quick?'

None answered during a ten minutes' silence. At last Calthorpe rose, saying, 'Well, of a' the awesome

things!' and began to make notes. Then, during a weary half-hour, he examined the interior, story by story; then went out to go to the beck.

'Who's the dead man?' eagerly asked the crowd.

'That's none o' your traffic,' answered Calthorpe; then, striking pale consternation among them: 'It's Dr. Stanley, if ye want to know!'

At the beck he examined the heap of clothes, which were still dusty, though Raby had shaken them before bathing. He then took them in his arms, returned, and dropped them at Raby's feet.

'I see you had on a cap and jacket of young Hay's?' he said.

'Yes,' said Raby, 'I borrowed them for something—a trick I wanted to play on Jack; and I put them on last night, as it was looking like rain——'

'You was having a late bathe, too!' said Calthorpe.

'I fell coming down the Neck, and got all dirty; I was going to Beech How to tell the doctor something, but was in such a mess, that I got my bathing-drawers from the stable, and said I'd have a bathe first; and I had hardly got under the Fall, when he came——'

'Did he look funny at all?'

'I could hardly see. He looked all right. But I noticed that he talked funny.'

'What was in that flask?' asked Calthorpe, smelling it.

'Wine, I should say. I know he used to take up a flask of wine to bed. He took it out of his breast-pocket, and drank it a minute or two before he died.'

'What's all them big keys in his trouser-pocket?'

'Don't know: didn't know he had any keys.'

'Well, Delvin,' said Calthorpe, 'you'd better hurry back, and get a telegram off to Mr. Lamburn, and then go round to Mr. Crowther, and ask if there are any other steps to be ta'en.'

(Mr. Crowther was the Bedwick 'justice of the quorum,' a retired solicitor, brother to Mr. Crowther of 'Spender and Crowther'; and Mr. Lamburn was the county coroner who had district-jurisdiction here: for Bedwick had neither justices of quarter-sessions nor a recorder.)

'Well,' continued Calthorpe, 'I can see you are in a bad way, Mr. Nibbs, and no wonder, but I must ask you to come with me to the station before you go home, that I may take down your deposition. You, Bobm, had better wait till I send the ambulance, and Mr. Nibbs can ride your galloway in: think you're able, sir?'

'I'll try,' said Raby, and feebly descended (his left hand hidden all the time), with a feeling of liberation from years of prison. The crowd, now grown large, parted with astonished looks at his face. He was helped upon the nag, and rode away with Calthorpe, who carried the towel, bathing-drawers, and stable-brush, with the flask, collar, and jacket: but the pipe which Dr. Stanley had smoked during the night was no longer there.

It was now near ten, and long before this all the inmates of Beech How had learned of the doctor's absence: but at that hour only Burnie, the lad, and Jean, knew that he was dead. Burnie had gone out, heard, and come back white to whisper it to Jean, and together in the kitchen they discussed the manner of the breaking of the news to those above.

'Can it be young Mr. Hay that's really poisoned him?' whispered Jean.

'*Sh-h-h*, lass!' went Burnie.

Above, in Gracie's room, Missie and Gracie were palely discussing that absence. His bed had not been slept in, and during the night the cord of the old oil-painting which portrayed him in academical robes had broken, and the picture fallen. At half-past ten Missie went down to the kitchen with bandaged jaws to send out Burnie for enquiries, and Burnie, going, met old Bobm coming up the lonnin officially with the news, but persuaded him back, putting off the evil hour, which could not long be put off: for soon after eleven, he himself ran back to whisper to Jean: 'They be fetching him;' whereupon Jean, like a flurried ghost, ran up to Gracie's room, where Gracie still was, looking stonily out at the island; and Jean quickly transferred the key to the outside, and locked her in. But by that very locking

Gracie knew the truth, and knew also the moment of his coming: for through and through the house rang Missie's shriek; and presently in the doctor's chamber—divided from hers by only one room—were panting bosoms, and feet struggling with a burden. But she sat still at the cinquefoil-top window with its long-flowing curtains of red moreen, looking at the old island, so old, familiar, yet different for evermore from the island she had known but yesterday: for she felt that he was dead. 3.3807

Before this, Jack Hay, too, had heard from a servant at 'Parklands': for with Calthorpe's coming into Bedwick the news went like uncaged blackbirds: and Jack went dry-eyed to his room—for little water was in him—and knelt by his bedside, where he seldom knelt, pleading: 'Oh Lord Almighty, do comfort her—— Oh, if there is any pity—how is she to bear it?—don't let her suffer so cruelly, my poor dear! I know that things were made to run a bit rough on folks in the world, but do, Lord God—not her, not her——' and so on, wildly, till he broke down with dry sobs. And before him, Pole, too, on his sick-bed, had heard: and at once Pole gave himself to tears, mourning: 'Well, the doctor gone—I can't believe it—the good doctor! And it was I who killed him—as sure as there's a God—with my vile warning!' And by noon all Bedwick, and all the dale, knew—the dale which his presence had so filled; and the road seemed emptier, slower wended the one-horse cart, and all the landscape looked bereft; old Spender, who often received the gravest news with laughter, received this with the gravest face; the village-church pervaded the dale with the lugubrious mood of its passing-bell, as the toll of St. Peter's in the High Street pervaded Bedwick; the town-hall flag stood at half-mast; and in most hearts of men was a tolling bell and sense of loss for him that was gone: for in the uniformity of rural life awful is the sudden passing-away of such as he; and everywhere men, meeting, spoke of him, wondering at the place and manner of his going, or telling pensive anecdotes of his works and ways, with what wit he met the emergency of the moment, and with what

valour fought the campaign of the year ; he was the last and best of his type, they said : an example of the upright man.

Gracie, meantime, sat at her window, petrified, without a tear, almost unconscious of Missie's tearful solitudes ; and Nibbs Raby lay on his bed in a sleep broken by starts.

XIV

THE WAKE

MR. LAMBURN, the county-coroner of the district, with twelve good and lawful men, constituting a duly legal court of record, sat on the Tuesday forenoon about the bed of Dr. Stanley, '*super visum corporis.*' The coroner was a fat giant, with a petrified nose, like coral, and a gross jolly voice: not a good lawyer, as he should have been, but a bad doctor, unsuspecting that such things as technical rules of evidence exist. At the door stood Bobm, the constable, solemn and long-faced, acting as coroner's-officer, and overlooking both the death-chamber and the adjoining room, in which latter sat in conclave eight or ten daleswomen, mostly elderly, all with knitting-baskets, knitting vast socks with huge bone pins, and chatting quietly about birth and dying, and about passions and crops, fates and follies, and what colour of woof the Loom weaved just then and there in Lonbydale, with many an 'ey, ey,' and 'ah, weel,' sighs and smiles; they had come as ministers of consolation to do the 'streeking' (laying-out), and to make Beech How their temporary abode: and there sat knitting, in round-eared caps, proud of the 'bonny corpse,' like the very genii of funerals. In the death-chamber seven candles burned round the body, which lay in state for the late-wake of the night in cassock, alb, amice, stole, and chasuble; but the room, being very large and lofty, was still dim. The old-time four-poster, with 'tester,' fringe, and hangings, which faced the two drawn blinds over the beck, was covered with flowers of sombre hue, brought by the village school-children in white procession on the Sunday afternoon—garden-violet and foxglove, with some lilies and

white rose, holly-sprigs and bitter rosemary, yew and rue, which also strewed the shroud in the open coffin on its bier by the left bedside :

‘White his shroud as mountain-snow,
Larded all with sweet flowers. . . .’

Here death reigned established and old, and all objects seemed soaked with the heavy consciousness of a dead body — the timber-roof, the high-backed settle, the saucers of carbolic-water, the wood-fire, the draped mirrors, the tapers. Outside it was the same: the sky was a-move with low rain-clouds, and seemed to go slow and steady the livelong day in the funeral of a god; all mixed up, like a steam, in the misty drizzle was some taint of the clamm and humour of the grave; and every surge of the autumnal winds went away desolate with cadences of dead-marches. If a distant cock crowed, if the mare in the stable hinnied, in that, too, as in every sight and sound, was the same heart-rending infection of the dead presence, and, with it, the same tones and meanings, drear yet musical, telling of wild regret and the groan of the widowed, but also of the greatness of the passing away of the son of man, and of all the strange divinity of this our little race, living paltrily here on a paltry planet amid billions of greater, yet somehow tall as heaven, and sharers in the passions and harvests of the gods. The men about the bed conversed in low voices. The cambric face-cloth had been drawn, and the face lay exposed, looking now rather brownish and dusky, as if impregnated with spice-dust. The jurors, who had received the coroner's warrants on the Monday morning, were the better kind of ‘statesmen,’ Bedwick tradesmen, all mutually known and familiar with the coroner: it was like a meeting of cronies. At the pillow sat Dr. Buck, Senr., Dr. Stanley's doctor, who had examined the body; the coroner sat at a table with pen, ink, paper, and inquisition-forms; and the four witnesses sat in a corridor near. The good and lawful men were perfunctorily sworn, whereupon Dr. Buck, a broad man with a short, white beard, gave evidence :

He had been Dr. Stanley's medical man for fourteen years. The deceased had had not only tobacco-heart, but a valvular lesion of the heart, resulting in dilatation and a compensating hypertrophy, quite capable of terminating suddenly, though, on the other hand, he might possibly have lived ten, perhaps fifteen, perhaps twenty years longer. Death had been caused by ruptured compensation, asystole, arrest of the heart's action (in other words, the doctor had died, because he had died). As to the mental derangement which had been alleged to precede death, that was not due to any disease of the brain, but to defective heart-power, which often simulates certain symptoms of brain-disease, as was first pointed out by the celebrated Dr. William Stokes.

At this definite evidence, though everybody foreknew it, all breathed freer: for what all dreaded was the outrage of a post-mortem. Doctor and coroner had, in fact, settled the matter between them beforehand.

The rest was little more than formality. Calthorpe told of the finding of the body; Raby, still with hidden left hand, and still looking very haggard, retold with shifting feet and obvious shortness of breath, in the presence of those dead ears, the story of how the doctor took him up to the broch, and abused the Bishop of Carlisle, and called him (Raby) an enemy of the Church, and died: and the patient dead lips answered nothing, but smiled, reserving their defence. Then Burnie and Jean, looking very scared, were called by Bobm to be questioned as to the doctor's condition when last seen: they had observed nothing strange, they said: and as to the doctor accusing Jack Hay of 'wanting to poison him' they uttered not a word: they had been warned to be silent by Missie.

The coroner had not considered it necessary to trouble the afflicted ladies; but when the jurors were on the point of signing, Bobm stalked on tip-toe to the table to whisper that Miss Stanley had sent a tender of evidence. 'Oh, very well—all right,' said Mr. Lamburn; and in presently walked Gracie, a lily face over black weeds of grief; she bowed, and stood with her head leant on a bed-post at the foot, looking under the

brows at her father. She touched the Book, and spoke, stopping anon to swallow the spasms of her throat :

'I had it in my mind, gentlemen, to accuse before you the unwitting author of this—tragedy : and so am here. Alas, it is I myself. I am told that the cause of his mental disturbance and death was heart-disease, though, I must confess, this is the first I have heard of such a thing about him : but since that is so, then I must hold myself—and let everyone hold me—responsible for the crisis which killed him. Why, gentlemen, you look incredulous : you can't believe that calamity so crude could befall a poor girl—to have crushed the dear, good heart that ever beat for her, and never beat that it did not beat for her. Oh my, he is dead—he is gone away—papa—so strangely dead, and wildly gone, sirs ! and I fear—I *fear*—I was the cause : though, if it were to do again, with my bosom bared to the all-judging Eye, I think that—perhaps—I do not know. But now I—talk—Excuse me, will you ? I'm not quite—well. That, then, is really so : I was about to run away that very Friday night, to leave the house, myself and Miss Ames, with—my lover ; and, somehow—he found out. I assume that he found out, for he locked all the doors but the porch door, and those were the keys found with him. He said nothing, nothing : only, he refused to give me one last—O that is beyond——' She hurriedly covered her face, and tears filled the eyes of the silent men. They asked two or three gentle questions, as little personal as possible, and she went. Jack Hay's name was not mentioned.

Her evidence rather confirmed Dr. Buck's cause-of-death, and the verdict was in accordance ; someone suggested a rider of 'a family trouble,' but this was pooh-pooed among the cronies, and the coroner handed in to the registrar a bare finding of 'heart-failure'—certainly a not uncommon cause of death.

But that night some rather angry words passed between father and son at the house of Dr. Buck, Senr., in Commercial Street, when Dr. Buck, Junr., looked in to have a social chat. The young man, with an air of indifference, asked if it was not rare for 'ruptured com-

pensation' to end fatally in a night; the old man at once grew frankly red in the face, and said: 'Ah, yes, *you* start now with your wisdom!' The young man said: 'No amount of sentiment should have prevented a post-mortem.' The old man then began to prove how the young school of doctors think themselves mightily omniscient with their 'scientific' cant, whereas, if carefully weighed, their knowledge would be found just half that of the old fellows; and the young man then walked out of the house, saying: 'All right, I only hope you won't hear more of this matter, sir.'

More was quite likely to be heard of it: for that night at one o'clock a trap deposited at Beech How a young gentleman, come against all doctor's-orders, wrapped up to the nose, who had a certain knack of sight and insight; he entered the hall on the arm of his sister, Gladys Pole, smiling his eternal little smile, like those huge statues of old Egyptian Kings in the British Museum; and at the table they drank some ale from the keg, and ate a morsel of shortbread and barley-meal bannock, as they were bound to do: for the late-wake was in full progress, and, both above and below, the rooms held decent starched crowds in Sunday best, men, women, and children, each of whom had brought his 'cannel' to make that pile on the piano, and knelt by the corpse to say the Lord's Prayer: this by the last will of Dr. Stanley, a short testament of two clauses, one bequeathing his insurance-money, the second directing that his obsequies be according to ancient custom, and his body buried under the churchyard-yew. A letter of protest from Lord D——, the doctor's nephew, had suggested the family mausoleum at Castle Moran as the proper burial-place: but Gracie had ignored it. She was now prostrate, and did not see the kneeling of Gladys and Harold Pole; but Missie, holding her jaws between thumb and fore-finger, seated them near the bed before the rows of borrowed chairs and skemmels. The face-cloth was drawn for the wake, and the room blazed with lights in many sorts of borrowed candlesticks, as did most of the rooms, even the old lantern in the external gallery being lit that night.

Pole nodded to Jack and Mr. Hay, sitting like statues among the wakers; then put his black-gloved hands on his knees, and sat stooping forward for a long time, with his camel-neck, considering that ample visage on the bed. His light-blue eyes occasionally seemed to be watching something within, rather than without, himself. Anon a cough rent his frame, and once he rose, leant over, and made a minute's searching survey of the whole body.

He did not stop to see

‘How that there the liche-wake was yhold
All that night long’;

but he followed, near 2 a.m., in the slow procession of the wakers round the table in the next room, where Missie was ‘giving away’ from a heap of the doctor's belongings an object to each ‘for good luck’—to one a collar, to another a sock, a stud, a brush; and Pole, coming in his turn, said at her ear:

‘Would you mind giving me, Miss Ames, the flask that he had with him on the broch?’

‘I don't think it is here, Harold,’ she answered: ‘the police must have it still.’

‘Then can I get it and keep it?’

‘Why, yes.’

Pole then went away, but not to bed. Arrived in Bedwick, he left his sister at home, and drove to the ‘Long Meg,’ where the coroner slept that night. It was three in the morning; the door would not open; and Pole roused Bedwick with his bangings.

‘Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Lamburn,’ he said on finally reaching the coroner's bedside, ‘but it is for your own good. Look here, Dr. Stanley was poisoned, you know.’

‘*What!*’ breathed old Lamburn, his face like the clouded moon, a white scare emerging from slumber and sheets.

‘Ah, yes, get excited now, when it is almost too late,’ said Pole cuttingly: ‘what's the good of the lot of you?’

‘Poh, poh, what's all this, Pole? Wha—wha—what's the matter now?’

'The man was poisoned.'

'But—who are you to make such a statement, Pole? Shame on you! What possible grounds——? You have no standing in this matter! What makes you come here at three o'clock in the morning with such a—disgraceful statement?'

'I have just been looking at the man's body. He is poisoned. He *looks* poisoned.'

'Disgraceful statement! I—I—thought better of you, Pole,' said Mr. Lamburn with concentrated, short-winded indignation: 'to say that a man *looks* poisoned in that general way.'

'Ah, well, now, there perhaps you are right,' said Pole: 'I can't give chapter and verse for my opinion about his look, though there is a certain fulness of the neck—of the neck—— But surely you have observed that his right middle finger-nail is broken? That, I should say, means—convulsions, Mr. Lamburn: clutching out at the parapet of the broch, you know. Ruptured compensation of the heart is not attended with convulsions, I suppose, sir? His general appearance, including colour, expression, and a slight fulness of the neck, and then—the nail: those two together, those two together: that's why I am here. He ought not to be buried to-day, sir.'

'Poh, you are trifling, Pole. Go home to your bed, my boy, go home to your bed. These things don't happen—— Oh, I appreciate your well-meant zeal, you know, your youthful exuberance—that sort of thing: but you have absolutely no standing——'

'Give me understanding, O Lord, and you can keep all the standing, Mr. Lamburn: and now I warn you'—his delicate forefinger covering the coroner as he rose—'I shall act, since you won't: and if the man is buried without post-mortem, you may catch it rather hot.'

He went away, but not to bed: again his knockings resounded, this time at the section-house door, where he persuaded Calthorpe to give him, then and there, Dr. Stanley's nickel flask; then down Commercial Street he drove, and, startling the foreday with more

poundings, roused Skerrett, the chemist, whom he took with him to his own place ; and they two, till morning broke, were bent over a chemical analysis in Pole's laboratory, Skerrett as witness, Pole, with bared forearm, as agent.

But the result was almost nil. Every particle of moisture had, of course, evaporated from the flask, and the solution could only contain the minutest traces of anything : but they got some obscure alkaloid reactions, and an indication of pectic acid.

Some substance, then, had been mixed with Dr. Stanley's last draught ; what that substance was remained beyond conjecture : a post-mortem would reveal it.

Quick, then, Pole wrote—three letters, signed by Skerrett also, to the High Sheriff, the Clerk of the Peace, the London Chief Superintendent. He then left instructions with Skerrett to supplement the letters with telegrams, while himself set off in the waiting trap for Benthwaite Edge, with a magnifying glass. He spent an hour of search in Lyullph's Broch, found a fragment of finger-nail, and was still all one groveling, prying eye, not yet half-finished, when a taste of blood was in his mouth ; and, with a groan, down he hurried, and arrived home faint and white, to tumble into bed.

He waited anxiously all day, but did not hear that any result followed from the telegrams ; and at 4 p.m. the bells of Bedwick and the dale, which all day had tolled at half-hourly intervals, resumed their eerie outcries of tribulation and heartbreak over the last scene of the Rev. Lord Herbert Oscar Fairchild Stanley's earthly pilgrimage. By that time the front parts of Beech How house, and the yard, were full of people, and Waud, the undertaker, had made his dispositions, selected bearers and hymn-leaders, and distributed little cards assigning to each his appointed place. Gracie was now tossing in bed, whither she had been forced by Dr. Buck and the elderly genii of the funeral, after the fatigue of answering many letters ; and by her sat Jean, holding her hand. Some minutes before

the 'lifting' she asked if Jack Hay was in the house, and being answered 'yes,' said, 'Bring him here.' Jack, accordingly, was brought, and stood by her bedside; they looked at each other with a long gaze, till both faces began to work pitifully toward tears; and then she stretched her arms to him, as the drowning do, whispering 'Jackie'; and he bent upon her, kissing her brow, her cheek, whispering into her heart '*Never mind*,' in the presence of Jean standing there. Then their arms lingeringly drew apart, and he went quickly at a sound of movement and louder talk without: for, as the strongest man in the countryside, he had to be one of the two shoulder-bearers.

At last, by ten minutes to five, all was ready, and there was a general murmur of 'going to lift.' The procession of dalesfolk, including, too, dean, bishop and gentry, stood arrayed in the yard; above, the bearers wrapped the stiff linen towels in the coffin-rings about their fists; Gracie heard a *mêlée* of shuffling feet in the passage; and down the stairs, and out, and down the little cobblestone slope leading from the porch to the yard, went Dr. Stanley—the last time for ever—borne whither he would not: and the weighted arms of the bearers shivered, and their unweighted arms stuck out. Burnie, the lad, with a village girl of his height, alone preceded the coffin of polished oak, carrying two baskets of flowers slung about the neck, from which they strewed the route, while immediately behind the coffin came the choir, who, as the procession moved, began to sing:

'O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come . . .'

Here were no cloaks, plumes, and black bows, nor scarfs, hatbands and palls; but all was decent and well. The shades of a still evening slowly deepened as the funeral-train wended across the brown and purplish landscape, singing its airs of pain and hope: for hope was there: in those fading flowers, that seemed to smile in decay; in the sunset yonder, that would soon be extravagant sunrise; in that face in the coffin, whose last act was a smile; nor were those eerie outcries of

the tolling bell outcries of despair, but a soprano of wild hope sang with their groans ; and with wild hope the Rev. Hadley Martin of St. Peter's met the coffin at the lych-gate, saying : ' I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. . . . '

The body was committed to the ground in an ordinary grave, under yew-shade ; they sang a hymn over it ; and when the earth was heaped, stuck it all with sprigs and flowers. By this time the night was come, and, leaving him there, they went about the dale to their homes, and remote lights appeared like stars in the windows of the valley.

XV

THE WARRANT

THE next day again Harold Pole awaited in vain a reply from the authorities, chafing at the stiff reluctance of institutions to move at outside suggestion. On the third morning, however, came an announcement that his communication was being considered by the legal adviser of the Commissioners. And there the matter rested.

Dr. Stanley, however, had been murdered : Pole had hardly a doubt, though the flask had not exactly proved it : but why, and *how*? These questions he revolved, with an excitement and a continual strain, that retarded his convalescence.

The instant he heard of the death, his instincts had leapt to the conclusion : 'Raby has murdered him'—a suspicion which did not occur to another living soul, Raby, as far as anyone knew, being so absolutely without motive, and (still more important) without the means to murder on that tower-top. To Pole, too, that *why* and *how* remained utterly dark : even his moral certainty that there had been a murder was largely due to his wicked eagerness to crush Raby, the wish being father to the thought. But he knew Raby from head to heels, and believed him to be capable of it.

Five days passed, while Pole, restrained like a convict from stirring out, railing at the authorities and his own weakness, awaited events. He noted that Raby had not been to see him in his renewed illness ; that Raby, on a pretence of gout, which he sometimes had, had not been to the funeral. Pole had not once seen Raby since the death.

But a week after the funeral he was allowed out a short way, and went over to Raby's. Raby was at his office-work at Spender and Crowther's, and Pole discovered that Raby had been sticking steadily to work since the funeral, as if turning over a new leaf, though two nights he had intoxicated himself in solitary orgies.

Meantime, those same 'Authorities,' whom Pole blamed for their heavy movement, were, in reality, feverishly busy about Dr. Stanley—but busy in the dark. That eager plump stranger, with the rolled moustache, who stayed at the 'Long Meg,' and called himself Mr. Bailey, was really one of the most trusted detectives of Criminal Investigation; moreover, the body of Dr. Stanley no longer lay under the churchyard yew in the dale—but had been darkly snatched away at three one rainy morning, and was now in the hands of the Public Analyst; moreover, in far-away London, Her Majesty's Attorney-General had made a semi-secret application to the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court, requesting that the coroner's verdict be quashed, and a new inquest held: nor did the Queen's Bench say him nay. Whereupon that same Mr. Lamburn who had lately exclaimed: 'Disgraceful statement!' to Pole hurriedly held a new inquest in the Town Hall, in his pocket being a letter of reprimand from the Lord Chancellor, and in his head a fresh realisation that Bedwick is in England, part and parcel of an Empire, hitched-on to a civilisation. Of that inquest not thirty people knew: that self-reliant Detective Sub-Inspector Bailey was there present; the Public Analyst's evidence that Dr. Stanley had been poisoned was given in: and the verdict this time was homicide by some person unknown.

The first that Bedwick knew of all this underground to-do was the startling news, on the fifteenth morning after the funeral, that overnight Nibbs Raby had been arrested in his bed by that Mr. Bailey who strolled, and seemed interested in old country-town architecture: and Bedwick realised itself in England—a distant suburb of London.

It is impossible to describe the sensation of the little

place—the pity, the incredulity, the lifting up of both hands, though few believed. Only Harold Pole had a merry smile that did him good like creosote; and after fighting all day against the temptation of going to see Raby in the lock-up, toward evening he succumbed. He was in close, informal relation with the law-officers of the borough, who highly respected, and occasionally consulted, him; and, with Calthorpe, he entered Raby's cell.

'Why, Nibbs, Nibbs, this can't be you, boy!' he said maliciously.

'Good old Pole! *Ap kaisa hai?*' exclaimed Raby with that white left eyelash lowered, and a hard glint in the right eye: 'I knew you could not resist coming to see a cove! But let me relieve your little mind at once, my son: I am, of course, quite innocent: and the little inconvenience will blow over in a day or two.'

In the almost darkness Pole could hardly see Raby: but Raby had a tone of assurance which depressed him; he did not know the grounds of the prosecution, but he went away doubtful as to the result, remembering the habitual caution of Raby's mind. It might not be easy to crush so hard a nut.

That same evening, someone in a different temper came to see Raby—Jack Hay—but was refused admittance. He, however, got in a pencil-scrrawl, which said:

'DEAR OLD NIBBS:

'How are you getting on? Sorry to see you in such a silly mess with these silly London blather-skites. I was out on the mere to-day, and just by chance Gracie saw me, and called me, so we spoke about you, and I need not tell you with what scorn she smiled at the idea of your hurting our dear old father and friend. Since then I've been to see old Spender about it, he laughed like H—l at you, but says the silly London fools won't have a leg to stand on. So cheer up! it won't be for long. I've brought some cigars, but can't get them in to you. Cheer up, now.

'Yours,
'JACK.'

Here was proof of friendship: for Jack had his own grief just then, the death of Dr. Stanley having fallen hard upon his hopes, removing, indeed, all obstacle to the marriage, but deferring it by months of decent waiting.

Three mornings afterwards, the prosecution being ready, Raby was brought to trial. By this time the London papers were pretty big with the mystery of Dr. Stanley; the arrest of Raby was on the placards in the Old Kent Road; Scotland Yard was eager for a conviction; and quite a little bevy of 'strangers' had come down. Outside the countryside few doubted his guilt; inside, hardly a soul believed it; and the borough regarded the prosecution with a certain sense of injury as an intrusion by busybodies. They looked down upon Londoners as foreigners and 'girt boobies.'

By ten o'clock, in the quaint courthouse in the cobblestone market-place, the constables could only just keep the crowd back from the table, there being no rail. The three justices (Sir Markham Perowne, the rector, and, between them, Mr. Crowther, with some yellow volumes of Chitty before him) sat on a platform a foot high; and at the table sat the Treasury counsel, the detective Bailey, Raby's counsel (retained by Spender and Crowther), the clerk, two reporters, representatives of coroner and analyst, and three or four worthies of the town, as Mr. Hay, Mr. Spender, and the bank manager.

The case began with the 'finding' of the second jury and the report of the analyst—a report which had upon Bedwick an effect of consternation: for it left no doubt that Dr. Stanley had really been poisoned. The membrane of the stomach, it said, which contained a chocolate fluid, had been found 'injected,' and of a crimson colour from intense congestion; there was an effusion of dark liquid blood in the neck; the skull and brain-membranes were filled with a dark blood; the lungs engorged, and of a dark purple; the cavities of the heart empty; the liver congested and black; the blood throughout the body black. This meant poison: but the name of the poison was not there.

'But the name of the poison!' exclaimed Raby's counsel: 'we have not even heard it hinted.'

'It is impossible to name the poison,' answered the witness amid a murmur of sensation; 'an autopsy should have been held some days before burial; we were two weeks late, for putrefaction was everywhere advanced, especially in the course of the veins.'

Raby, sitting apart to the right of the justices, glanced at Pole; and Pole, for the first time, but not the last, asked himself this question: 'I wonder why he is hiding his left hand?'

'Then how can you positively swear that the deceased was poisoned?' cried counsel.

'Because of the violent abnormality of the body. It is perfectly simple. There is no sort of difficulty as to a positive oath. He was poisoned.'

'But by what extraordinary drug, new to the pharmacopœia?'

'Probably not new to the pharmacopœia: only very unusual as an instrument of crime, and, in the present instance, undeterminable by the analyst.'

The court presently rose for lunch: Raby was taken to a room upstairs; and, till the justices returned, a noise of tongues filled the room. The afternoon was devoted partly to evidence against Raby's general character: his room had been ransacked, and in one locked drawer a number of objects found not creditable to a young man: but no poison. Had the search been extended to the garden by a man with a certain X-ray quality of vision, a hole would have been found containing the stolen bank-notes left by Raby in the vicarage trap on the fatal night, and removed by him the night after: but even capable-looking Mr. Bailey lacked X-rays in his frontispiece, and the notes lay undiscovered. The prosecution had, therefore, to patch up a motive for the crime, based on Miss Stanley's evidence before the coroner as to her intended flight: the prisoner, as one of the two suitors under the will of Mr. Amos Mackay, had thought to outwit his rival, Mr. Pole, by taking the place of the chosen admirer of the young lady on the night of the flight;

of this intention Dr. Stanley had been warned by Mr. Pole, and was, therefore, on the *qui vive*; he had caught the prisoner bathing, had taken him to the broch, intending to lock him in from all possibility of executing his plan, had been resisted by the prisoner, and had then thrown away the key: whereupon the prisoner had poisoned him—out of disappointed spite.

‘But the paltry motive!’ exclaimed Raby’s advocate. ‘Do human beings act in that astonishing way? And whence came that mysterious, unnameable poison—from the waters of the Fall? From the prisoner’s bathing-drawers? From the empty air?’

‘In going from the brook to the broch,’ said Bailey, ‘the prisoner might very well have stopped and taken some poison from his clothes.’

‘He might! but where is the evidence, the presumption? And in what did he take it—a bottle? a paper? Then where is that bottle, or paper? The tower and its environs have been subjected to the minutest search! Does not the whole thing begin to assume an aspect merely absurd?’

The prosecution continued the case with dejection, and late in the afternoon, before all the intended witnesses, including Burnie and Jean, had been called, the case seemed to collapse of its own weight; there was a pause and laying-together of heads between Government-men and justices; whereupon Mr. Crowther made some remarks not very complimentary to the Government, and felicitated the prisoner on the speedy termination of the episode.

Raby, who, all through, had been quite collected and scornful, now dashed hot tears from his eyes; at the same time, a voice from the middle of the dark crowd sang out:

‘Now, boys, put your lungs into it—three cheers for old Nibbs!’

This was Jack. And three hearty cheers there were, led by him, while Raby looked on with a face which was a grotesque mask, tugged opposite ways between laughter and the worm that dieth not.

After a hundred handshakes, he left the courthouse the hero of the baser sort of Bedwick youth, who all repaired to the Long Meg, and made a night of it, Jack mainly providing the sinews of war (for some fisticuffs resulted), being still flush with the £10 lent him by Pole; and some hard things were spoken against London that night.

Dr. Stanley, however, had been poisoned: this was proved; and the justices' verdict merely meant that, in their opinion, he had been poisoned before mounting the tower, or else that the wine drunk by him on the tower had been poisoned beforehand.

Now, Jack Hay's name had not been mentioned at the trial: for Scotland Yard did not wish it mentioned: but Jack all the time was in the mind of Bailey, and Bailey, nibbling his inward-curving moustache-ends, had been eyeing and weighing Jack.

Scotland Yard had been baulked once; but baulked twice it would not be.

That night Bailey paid Pole a visit, and they spoke about Jack. But from Pole he met only discouragement.

'Look here,' said Pole, 'I know what happens to a man when shaken in a well-based suspicion by finding himself alone in it: the gravitation of the opposite opinion drags his mind from its pinnacle, and, broken up at the bottom, it goes off into the hunt of petty and random shadows. I know a man who was once a Quaker, but he read Herbert Spencer, and is now an infidel and—a spiritualist. The mind gets broken up at the bottom, gets broken up at the bottom. In the same way, because Mr. Crowther and Bedwick think Raby innocent, you, Bailey, fall from your belief in his guilt, and then run off into hunting Jack Hay. Curious reasoning, you know. I admit that it must be Jack or Raby: but I say that it is not Jack. You come to sound me, and I tell you honestly what I know, though you certainly appreciate too keenly the difference between Bailey the Great and a mere Cumberland amateur—a mere Cumberland amateur—to be influenced by my view. Very good, set to work, and trace all Jack's movements that day: you will find, for instance, that he was quite alone a

long time in Skerrett's laboratory, surrounded by poisons——'

'You know that for a fact?' said Bailey, sitting stooped forward, the embodiment of plump activity, strong-eyed and square-browed.

'I do: and I shouldn't mind betting that as soon as ever you begin to search, you will not fail to find other incriminating points. But when you've got your case complete to the hilt, then come to me again, Bailey, just to give me a laugh at you. I don't say, mind, that you won't convict, since you are all so frantically urgent to convict somebody: but I say that, at my bar, and at the bar of God, he will remain ridiculously innocent.'

'Well,' said Bailey, rising, 'I certainly consider your judgment of value, Mr. Pole, from what I see of it so far: but in criminal investigation, as you know, pre-conceived opinions as to character go for little. Well,—good-night. We'll see.'

The next morning Bailey took a stroll out to Beech How. Waiting in the lonnin, he sent an urchin to call Burnie, and on Burnie's coming, tempted him to a little wayside tavern beyond the Neck. Now, in that bosom of Burnie's was a secret known only to four people, which he had been warned by the other three to guard preciousy there: the secret of how the doctor had cried out against Jack Hay's 'wanting to poison him' on the fatal night. But it happened that Bailey had, from the first, observed a certain casting-down of the eyes in Burnie: and during that hour's friendly chat at the tavern, London so far outwitted Lonbydale as to acquire the perfect certainty that Lonbydale was hiding something; and London, at parting, said to Lonbydale: 'Silly lad, to try to hide anything from me: why, I shall know it all before to-morrow night.'

It was an empty threat, which knew itself to be empty, except in so far as it might mesmerise and undermine Burnie's resolution; but Burnie went back to Beech How scared, guilty, and very fuddled, and confessed his frailty to Jean, saying:

'He thrept me down, and bodert and bodert me so sair, I'se domd if I could help it!'

'Oh, but how couldsta!' quoth Jean with pale reproach, 'a buirdly girt fellow like thee to be ollas sec a girt bledderin' booby! Ey, that puir laal leddy!—'twill be her death——'

'Dunnot thoo say nout to her!'

'Ey, I'se sair maizelt now how to manish. Hod thy tongue, lad, and let yan gi' ma mind tul't.'

After some thought she decided to tell Miss Ames and ran up: and Missie, scared out of her wits, warned her to breathe not a word to Gracie, but to hurry on her things, and go warn Mr. and Mrs. Hay of the brewing storm.

Jean accordingly hurried into Bedwick. Mr. Hay was at his office; Mrs. Hay in bed; Harriet Hay in a reception-room, bent over a piece of pear-wood, carving a scroll from a Japanese copy: and to her Jean was introduced.

Jean panted her flurried tale: Dr. Stanley had accused Master Hay of poisoning him, and Burnie, the lad, had that day let out something—she did not know how much, Burnie being fuddled—to the London body, who had said he'd soon know all.

Wood-carving lost interest for Harrie Hay that day, and the earth dropped from her like an apple which she was about to taste: for Lord D——, who was shooting at Sir Markham Perowne's, had been 'coming' very often of late, and seemed in love.

Not a word said Harrie, but went to a window, looking into the park, showing her clutched hands behind, but hiding that rueful countenance.

The Hays, with many cares and fears, had 'risen': but if one member of the family, at one careless bound, should rise to the gallows? That would be excessive. A brother hanged by the neck becomes a millstone hung about the neck: and that is drowning.

Her face lifted, and, like Job, she called upon the universe for an explanation. What crime had she ever done? How could that be her fault, if her mother had borne her a brother? It was not fair!

She walked quick, and rang, and said to the appearing footman: 'Ask Miss Hay to come here at once.'

In two minutes Augusta looked in.

'Now, Jean,' said Harrie, 'tell Miss Hay.'

Those roses in Augusta's cheeks fled away from that tidings, and the sisters faced each other's pallor, their two bosoms labouring up and subsiding, as if competitively, like two competitive buoys on a choppy sea.

In each other's eyes they read their brother's conviction: he was undoubtedly guilty: he would be found out: he would not fail to be hanged.

And then, good-bye to—everything!

Augusta remembered that the murderer would be tried by her own *fiancé*, Sir Markham; and Harrie remembered that the murdered was the uncle of Lord D—. Each pitied herself, and then the other.

'Well, Gussie,' said Harriet.

'Ah, Harrie,' said Gussie, 'it is come.'

Not a smart phrase was left in their two conjoined frames. Confronted with reality, they tumbled like tin mannikins, the one distinct emotion in their collapse being rancour—hatred of their brother: so that not he was a murderer, but they.

All at once Harriet hurriedly whispered into Augusta's ear, and Augusta nodded, ran out, and quickly returned—bringing two five-pound notes.

'Now, Jean,' she said, sitting, and fondling Jean's hand, 'these are for you and Burnie: and Burnie has to make a vow not to drink anything for at least—four days, and not to speak one word on any subject to the detective. Will you promise for him?'

'Ey, mum,' said Jean, 'I'se not sec a quean, nor Burnie nowther, that's sib to me on the mother's side, to need a bribe for sec a wark——!'

'Come, come, you must,' said 'Gussie.

But when Jean began to grow indignant at this grossness, Augusta desisted; and after promising to keep Burnie indoors, the shawl with a hat over it, which was Jean, went away.

Harriet and Augusta stood at a window, one at each side, looking out, care sitting on their faded cheeks. Only the night before, an incredible rumour, emanating from the trial of Raby, that Gracie had been about to

run away with Jack, had reached their ears: and, for the first time for years, a thrill of pride in him had varied their habitual forgetfulness of his existence. At breakfast that morning they had filled Jack with content by a new interest in him, a sort of kind toleration; he had denied the rumour, but with a blush which had left them uncertain, and still proud; and now they knew that it was true: and it had led to a murder, and their ruin.

'But what a beast!' cried Harriet.

'He was always certain to do something, sooner or later,' said Augusta: 'it is our fate: we were never meant to succeed, that's all.'

'There are only two things to be done,' said Harriet, who had more decision and brains than the elder sister, 'one is to get him away instantly——'

'But do you suppose we could, Harrie? they already suspect—they must be watching him. We must only resign ourselves to become the laughing-stock of—of—England! How could he treat us so?—that beast! We might perhaps live obscurely in Paris, sending mamma to——'

'Ah, but I mean to inhabit my native country,' Gussie, in spite of my model brother! Isn't there another way? I mean, to disassociate ourselves from him and his crime to the farthest possible extreme——'

'How do you mean, dear?'

'What is the name of that Roman man who tried and condemned his own son to death? He is quite one of the heroes of history on that account. Well, let us turn papa into a Roman father. No one yet knows the facts but ourselves: therefore, let *papa* be the first to inform the police, let *him* undertake the expense and everything of the prosecution, and be prominent in punishing the crime: that is what I call disassociating ourselves: and my instincts tell me, 'Gussie, that almost the whole aspect of a "misfortune" would in this way be eliminated—and, after all, it is only of misfortunes that people are ashamed in Society—and our look of suffering relatives would be lost in our look of successful, disinterested prosecutors. Of course, it is bold,

it is taking the bull by the horns, but—it seems the thing.'

'But will papa do it?'

'Ah, he must, 'Gussie, he must, he must. No false sentiment here! Nothing else is left.'

They did not delay; a messenger was despatched to the office for Mr. Hay: and by the bedside of Mrs. Hay, behind locked doors, the family deliberated.

Mrs. Hay was very agitated, and spilled her char-treuse. It was she who had borne this Jack.

'Jack would never have done it!' she cried: 'nothing in the world will ever make me believe that of him!'

'Couldn't do such a thing, my dears,' cried Mr. Hay, who had begot him, 'couldn't, couldn't. Why, we ain't sure that he did it, after all. To condemn a man before he's tried—is that fair?'

Here, then, was rebellion: but only at the beginning, and the conference lasted two hours. The sisters first played the rôle of unfortunate souls, abandoned by father, mother and all to a cruel world; they then urgently proved that hell is stronger than heaven, and policy wiser than pity; they insisted that no amount of 'false sentiment' could alter the certain fact of Jack's guilt, and since he had to suffer anyway, therefore the Roman-father pose was the thing: and finally Mr. Hay, with care and perplexity all among the puckers of his brow, yielded; and Mrs. Hay yielded with a burst of tears, and the protest: 'He didn't do it! Jack never would have done it!'

Mr. Hay went straight to Calthorpe, possessed now by that same blind influence which causes swine to rush into the sea; Calthorpe went to Bailey; Bailey nibbled his moustache-end, and his eyes moved quick and keen; then he had a smile—at Pole's expense, who had promised to laugh at *him*; then he got upon his horse, sent a cypher-telegram to London, and galloped out to Beech How. On the way he met Jack trudging in: and he nodded to Jack, and Jack to him.

Jack had spent three hours that day with Gracie and Missie in a discussion of the future. The doctor had long been insured for £1,000, but Pole, who was

negotiating the matter, had just been informed by the Office that, the policy having lapsed, no exception could be made in his favour, only a small bonus being due through a non-payment of premium within the thirty days of grace. Gracie was thus left penniless. Sir Markham Perowne had offered Beech How as a residence for as long as the ladies liked: but this they could not accept. Lord D——, also, had offered an annuity out of the estate: but Dr. Stanley had been cold with his brother precisely for the scandalous meanness of his treatment as a third son: and nothing could be accepted here. Missie, however, had £100 a year: and it was decided that Gracie, Missie and Jean should at once migrate to London, so that Gracie, who had already passed 3rd and 2nd grades, could keep terms with a view to public singing by the gate of the A.R.C.M., and possibly a scholarship. Jack was to remain behind a week, to see if his father would launch him somehow; then, in any event, follow to London; and, six months after the doctor's death, if things went at all reasonably—marriage.

This much had been arranged that day: and all, full of the new hope and adjustment to destiny, thanked God, and took courage.

Jack returned to dinner at 'Parklands': and at that table he felt, rather than noticed, something strange. Mr. Hay's shaven upper lip was blanched, and severe were his glances: for now, having done evil to Jack, he believed him guilty; the sisters' faces were rigid; silence reigned; and in the midst Mrs. Hay rose, with 'Oh, I am not going to stand this!' and went away.

'Hello, anything up?' cried Jack: but no one answered.

Afterwards he lit a pipe, and, as usual, strolled out; and he had hardly gone when, to the sisters' dismay, in walked Sir Markham Perowne and his guest, Lord D——, both apparently fresh from fishing, gaitered, in loose suits of heather tweed and lowland-bonnets.

Jack, meantime, in going down to the Long Meg, had met two friends, and these together went to a wild-beasts', which that week was shewing under canvas on the common beyond the end of Commercial Street.

There he sat in a dusky light, tilted back on a creaking chair, watching the tamer's exploits, when, near 10 p.m., a hand grasped his sleeve, and drew him swiftly outside. It was Pole.

'Why have you been such a fool, Jack?' Pole broke out: 'why didn't you tell me long ago that you threw something into Dr. Stanley's glass?'

'Why should I?' said Jack: 'it was nothing.'

'What was it?'

'A bit of morphia.'

'I thought so! But why, in God's name, couldn't you tell me that before? I might have saved you!'

'From what, Harold?'

'From *hanging*!—Oh, I didn't think you were quite so crass an ass, Jack Hay!'

'What's up, then?' asked Jack with his little sniff-up.

'Look here, you have one chance—here are three pounds—run round quickly by Elm Close way to the station—you'll catch the down-train; stop at Kendal, send me a telegram without signature in the morning, and I'll write you what to do. Bailey's got a warrant, and a man is at "Parklands," watching for your return. Off, now!'

'Old Harold!' said Jack, looking down at Pole's flushed cheek-bones in the off-shine from the flap-door: 'I don't believe a soul knows how good you are but me: they think you a "smiling tiger," as old Nibbs says. But I thought, Harold, you were not to excite yourself in this way?'

'Ey, ey, you bummeler, but can't you open your mind a little, if you've got one? Why don't you *run*? Don't suppose this will be like Nibbs' trial! they mean to move heaven and earth——!'

'They don't move me, though.'

'Well, of all the ponderous——! Aren't you going?'

'Going, no.'

'Poor old Jackie! Then, what will you do?'

'I'll just go home, and make it right with Titty, and the old man. Then they can have me.'

At once he strode away with his gigantic phlegm and sailor's-roll, hands pocketed, and Pole stood looking

after him, thinking: 'Why should I care? He might have been really dangerous to Gracie now that the doctor is dead: and yet I'd give my right thumb——'

Jack passed through back-streets to 'Parklands,' and as he entered, a man watching through shrubbery inside the gates ran off to tell the police. At that minute, instead of the usual five, eleven constables were in Bedwick, drawn off from adjacent divisions by telegram from the chief constable of the county, for the special purpose of the apprehension: for Jack's reputation as a fighter was known to the Solway Firth.

He ran up and stood at a door of the drawing-room; and his appearing produced the effect of an apparition. There sat in primrose light Sir Markham and Lord D——, and standing in the middle, mopping his brow, Mr. Spender, just come. Harriet Hay had been fiddling Fauré's 'Berceuse' to her sister's accompaniment: but destiny seemed to snap her bow, so short she stopped. Augusta sat petrified by that ghost she saw. The light was mysterious, the seats low and soft, the carpet soft, the cut and Bohemian glass incalculable: and never had Mrs. Hay lost the freshness of her admiration for this lordly hall.

Mr. Spender had just whispered the news of the warrant to Mr. Hay: for though its issue had been kept pretty dark, he had heard a whisper, and run hot-footed, as an old friend, to give warning; but, as he saw Jack swagger coolly in, like lightning the old gentleman's gravity changed, and he had a stitch of laughter.

Jack looked round with 'Good-evening, sir,' to Sir Markham—a tall, handsome, dark-bearded man of forty—and 'Good-evening, sir,' to Lord D——,—a strongly-built man of twenty-eight, broad-faced, with blonde curls. Then he said: 'Excuse me, I didn't know anyone was here: but I mustn't stand on ceremony now. Fact is, a rather stupid thing has happened——'

He was stopped by a wild whisper at his ear: Harriet Hay had rushed to him with the hiss: 'We know, we know—*get away*——'

Jack looked at her with complete astonishment. 'She knew, she knew,' that he was in a deadly fix—and she told him to 'get away——'

'But you *don't* know!' he said, with rather raised voice—'or you would never talk in that light way. My dear girl, the fact is, I'm in a sad mess, and how I'm going to get out, if I ever do, God knows. These good gentlemen will soon hear, so there's no harm talking before them. Hello, Mr. Spender, what's all the good news, sir? Well, Titty, it almost looks as if you would have done better not to have a son—though, I tell you, I have not done so badly, I've had my private hour o' joy, and found my bit o' secret treasure, thank God—though that's neither here nor there. But now things are looking bad, Titty, bad. Fact is, dad, I did a foolish thing a little while ago, and Harold Pole has just been telling me that it is known, and I may have to pay jolly dear. From the day I did it till now I haven't given it one thought; but while Pole was speaking, I saw in a flash how impossible it may be to clear myself; and I was in such a blue funk lest you four might go thinking that it is true, that I came straight home to tell you how it was——'

He stopped, feeling something hostile in the atmosphere, noticing the stoniness of the faces round him. The two aristocrats, foreseeing with horror a 'scene,' as birds foreknow a storm, looked straight before them, with vague eyes.

When Jack next spoke it was with a higher ring in his voice.

'Why, what's the matter?' said he: 'you look——'

He was interrupted by a knocking at the front door. And at once he strode to a bell-rope, all eyes following him mutely. A footman appeared.

'Just see, Clark,' said Jack, a new masterfulness in his manner, 'that all the house-doors are closed, and let no one in till I order you.'

The family now formed almost a group; Mrs. Hay sat at a sofa-head almost under the central gasalier; at its foot sat Mr. Hay, leaning forward, with dismal underlook; Harrie, in an overskirt of Chantilly lace

over palest yellow silk and chiffon, a rose in her hair, stood rigid, tall, ecstatic, as if on tiptoe, her left fist pressed deep into the sofa-head, facing Jack; Augusta's face leant on her nude forearm at the piano; between her and Jack sat in armchairs the two visitors, facing each other; and near them stood Mr. Spender panting, tragedy in his wide eyes struggling with chronic comedy at his lip-corners.

Jack tossed back his deep-peaked cap from his eyes, and the lamplight lit his massive, swart face, regular-featured as Napoleon's, in which a look of horror was every instant growing.

'Well, why don't you say a word, any of you?' he cried, looking about: 'I only came to tell you——'

Again he stopped: every face was so stonily cold.

Then a bleating voice pealed through the house: for a certain bleating tremble, as of the lamb, was in his lifted voice:

'Why, good God, don't you believe me, then?'

There was no answer.

'Titty!' he shouted, 'I am accused of murdering Dr. Stanley: and there are ten proofs, a thousand proofs: just tell these people here that it is a daft lie, will you, Titty?'

Harriet's quick whisper was at Mrs. Hay's ear: 'Mamma! be careful,' and Mrs. Hay's face was a study in weak misery. She had it on her tongue to say: 'Well, it *is* a lie'; but said nothing.

Lord D—— jumped up to go.

'Sit, sir!' cried Jack with a movement of the forefinger, which meant to be obeyed, and was obeyed.

'Dad——!' he began: but Harriet Hay broke in, her face rushing from gaunt marble into reddest flame:

'It is useless! Go and bear the punishment of your crime like a man! It is papa himself who has found you out, and given the information to the police!'

This struck Jack Hay silent; his lips hung parted; while the house resounded with the knockings below, and by now all round it waited eleven men at appointed posts.

'*Not dad?*' he whispered.

'Yes—*dad!*'

'But that must be a lie!' he shouted: 'dad never, never would!'

'Ask him!' said Harrie Hay venomously.

'Dad, did you?'

'A did; 'A did,' said Mr. Hay, with two jerks of the head.

'So you believe me guilty?'

'A do.'

There was a thirty-seconds' silence.

'Why, that old man there!' suddenly shrieked Jack Hay, 'if he only knew how I had him in my heart, and loved him——!'

His face at that moment was a pain to see, the eyes reddening small to tears, where no tears were, like eyes that peer into burning fiery furnaces; while Mr. Hay kept jerking his head menacingly at the floor, his molar jaws having a piteous movement, like grinding a morsel of corn.

'And you too, Titty?' cried Jack. '*You* say I am guilty, too? Not you, too?'

Again Harriet Hay's hand pressed her mother's shoulder. Mrs. Hay looked one wild moment up, but said nothing.

'Not a word, Titty?'

Not a word.

'But, my good God, what a forgetfulness is this!' he cried, filling the place with his shrill astonishment and protest against Nature; 'can a woman fall sick o' this ungodly aversion to her own womb, then, like the small-headed, silly ostrich o' the desert, and bitches that eat their own pups? Of all the uncanny things——! All those sighs at midnight, whispers and blubbings, with babblings of nicknames, and moans of tenderness, piled up for years!—all lies, lies! Pawings and cuddlings in excess! and secret understandings of lifelong friendship between us two alone against the earth! I suppose I must be mad, or dreaming, or blind drunk! or else *you* are! Why, the rocks of "Parklands" must have softer hearts for me! I declare to God I was never so astonished!'

He stamped.

Sir Markham Perowne rose briskly: but Jack stepped backward and locked the staircase-door. 'Wait till I am done wi' you! wait, wait,' he said, with a gruff authority, that could not be disobeyed; while Mr. Spender, at sight of Sir Markham's face, had one clandestine spasm.

Jack took four strides toward the piano, crying:

'And you, too, 'Gussie? Let me have it straight!'

Her reply was drowned in a renewed storm from below, knocker and truncheon mixed now with shouts of 'Hi, there! open! open!'

'What did you say?' cried Jack.

'I said,' answered Augusta, in a quavering weak voice, 'that we always considered you an objectionable brute, and are not surprised.'

"An objectionable brute," and "not surprised": all right, 'Gussie, I'll take those words to my grave, 'Gussie. "An objectionable brute," and "not surprised"—by God! And what have *I* always considered *you*?—the handsomest, best lady in the land, 'Gussie—except one. Why didn't you tell me before what you considered me, then I should have gone and drowned myself, and saved you this shame? But you lie, 'Gussie: you didn't always consider me that, you know: it is since the money came, 'Gussie! Oh, God, it is past believing that merely keeping company with a few silly little men in dress-coats could have the power so to dry up the fountains of Nature, and turn human souls into heartless, nut-cracking apes! Why, gentlemen, I'm afraid this is partly your fault—— But stop, I appeal to you: you are men. I am accused of poisoning Dr. Stanley—a man whose daughter was to have been—my—wife, whom I loved like my own—I was going to say "father"—though I seem to have been got without a father, sirs, and no human mother ever bare me. Well, I am innocent: I never could have thought of hurting my dear old friend. Will you, then, who are outsiders, speak up, and tell my family here that it is not fair, not English, to condemn a man before he's tried?'

Sir Markham and Lord D—— looked up at him with distinguished movements of the eyebrows. Jack awaited an answer. Neither said a word. Out, however, went the right hand of Mr. Spender, who, with grave face, said :

'I, personally, haven't the faintest doubt of your innocence, lad—if that's worth anything to you.'

Jack Hay grasped that hand, and squeezed it, and would not let it go, but clung still to it, while with fierce brow he cried out against the two aristocrats :

'What! you refuse? though I tell you that it is through you, and such as you, that this ruin is? My father and mother loved me, as parents love—my sisters loved me—till you came and taught them to giggle in the throat, and shew their breasts, and mince, and smirk, and make light o' all things in earth and heaven, except o' money! I declare, I never quite saw it before! but that's so. If it wasn't for associating with low little men like you, wealthy paupers, living on the earnings o' the poor and the widow, false and barren to the core, these two poor girls would never have suffered this lapse from humanity into irritating pillars o' salt and paste. And, O Lord, if ever I have the chance to shew you two men—something: the run o' things: and how many times nine marquesses it takes to match a man! But now I talk, no doubt, of what can never be. . . . Well, good-bye, father! Mother, good-bye. Don't think I curse you—for I don't: worse luck—I can't. I'm off: and this, I think, is the last you see of me. I intended giving myself up, and only came—— But now they'll have to fight for it, if they want me, and it'll take half Cumberland, by the Lord, to hold Jack Hay! Good-bye, all!'

He ran to the door, his cap thrown back, teeth set. A hoarse cry from old Hay went after him; but the insistent thunder, now continuous at several doors, drowned it.

By now all Bedwick stood crowding outside the gates, sending anon choruses of hisses at the police: for Jack was by far the most popular character in the town.

He hurried through the house to the back, softly

undid a kitchen-door, and rushed out. The instant he appeared, a whistle shrilled, and a man dashed from the cover of a near shrubbery upon him. It was Bailey: and, as they closed, Jack recognised him with the cry: 'Ah, yes, you London body, but you can't tackle *me!*' and slipped Bailey face-upward over his left thigh back into the shrubbery again.

A bright moon pervaded the night, but here in the park it was nearly everywhere dark. As he ran, he heard pelting feet, whistles, and voices: but they had lost him. He scaled an old brick wall, and dropped on the other side into a dry gut, full of rocks, the course of which he followed with stumbling haste between cliffs, till it brought him out to Nabside: and up Nabside he ran, unfriended, homeless, motiveless, into the world.

However, he did not go forth a weakling: that night had changed him from Jack Hay, the boy, into something of a man; as the smart of bitter sea-brine makes the beard to grow.

From Nabside, he ran into a footpath leading through bush over Thorneyfell Crags to Daleshead and Brentthwaite Edge. Running along it, he heard footsteps, probably some peasant's, and, not wishing to be seen, stepped aside into the bush on his left—that is to say, the bush which fringes the overhanging edge of the crags. Hiding there, his heel trod by chance upon something smooth and round, which did not seem to be a stone; and was, in fact, the bowl of a briar pipe. He picked it up, and found it to be one of Dr. Stanley's pipes: for he knew of no one thereabouts, but the doctor, who smoked pipes of that particular patent make. Wondering by what possibility it got there, he dropped it into his pocket.

Then he ran farther.

XVI

IN EXILE

JACK HAY walked seven miles that night, and when it began to rain, went into a fellside shealing, where a cow-herd in shaggy dreadnaught lay asleep, and there lay down. In the foreday the man woke to find an arm round his neck, and he freed himself, rubbed his eyes, took his 'rye leaf,' and went out with his mountaineer's-staff, whistling a bar of 'Weel may the keel row,' thinking in his head, 'Ey, another day o' weary wark, the same old roundabout and roundabout.'

Jack woke late in a drizzly morning. So far he had come with some knowledge of his way, but now went further he knew not whither, save that it was away from the haunts of his youth. He followed the footpath over the fell, picking a few cranberries from the moss, and beyond saw illimitable purple, a valley in soft lithograph; down the brant mountain-side to his right leapt a cascade; and far away down the dale peeped from wreaths of tinted humidity a single cottar's house, resembling the white school-house of Lonbydale. Certainly, the world seemed wide enough for himself and the police too. That sadness of Cumbrian scenery—strange as the eye of the moor-ox—to which he was born, those vapours and chomes, like veils of pensive angels, touched that morning his native heart, drawing tears from thence, if not from his eyes. He had the thought to overrun all that world of mountain and dale far and wide, learn familiarly every pass and neb, and make of them his fastness against the world, like wild men, and old Scottish chiefs. If he levied the occasional tribute of a heath-sheep, or a keg of ale, for his needs, that would hurt nobody. Free,

anyway, he would be—shy and at large—as those suffused panoramas of heather and mist, whose mood was in his blood. In his vision of the fate from which he was flying, it was not the hanging which disgusted him, but the cell, the ignominious lack of space; and that morning he definitely disassociated himself from that ‘Civilisation’ which, to his mind, was only another name for ‘London’; with his four limbs broken off they might have him: but hardly otherwise.

He descended a rocky footpath to a cottage, with Queen Anne windows framed all in climbing roses and morning-glories, where he entered without knocking, and found a brown old dame thiveling her porridge-pot over a peat fire; and he said:

‘A canny morning to thee, grandma; can I stay and have bait with thee, then?’

‘Ey, tha’s varra welcome, ma man,’ she answered, raising herself: ‘and yan o’ tha slashy, overkessen marns it is: ma John wi’ ha’ been wetted through afore he gained the thread-warks i’ the dale.’

The coarse nap was already laid with delf, coffee and black bread; and like mother and son they ate love-feast, each learning the biography of the other within two hours to the whirring of a two-handed spinning-wheel. Near as she was to Lonbydale, she had never even heard of Dr. Stanley, and listened to the tale of Jack’s accusation with lifted palms at the wrong-headedness of the world: and together they considered the case of London, and deplored its errors.

He stayed till late afternoon, seated at the slanting door-step; she then gave him a Kilmarnock cap and gingham jacket of her son to change for his own cap and jacket; and produced for him some pieces of foolscap-paper, black sealing-wax, and a pencil, with which he wrote a letter:

‘MY DEAR GRACIE,

‘You will have heard, my poor dear, the nonsense that they have accused me of. At first I had the silly intention of giving myself up, and went home to say

good-bye, when, what do you think they said, Titty and all, except old Spender, whom I shall never forget for it?— that I was guilty. If you should meet any of them, don't lose your temper, now, but treat them with that little mixed frown and smile. I wish I could : but there is a black devil in me against them, that will never leave me till I am dead, dear. Anyway, when they acted so, I did not see why I should suffer being locked up in a little prison by perfect strangers from London for nothing at all, and you may rest assured that I'm not going to be either, except they lock me up dead : anyway, it will take not less than fifteen of them to put me on my back. But, my poor dear, how you are going to bear all this is what I don't see. Trouble after trouble coming upon you like this : how are you to bear it, Gracie? And I who ought to be like the arm of God around you to comfort and help you, cut off from you in this way, doubling your grief, my poor dear. What can I say, or do? There is such a gash of pity in me for my poor tender darling, that I could bleed to death, only I say : " I won't care about her : God is good behind and underneath, and will look after her." And though I am not much of a one for such things myself, it is a sort comfort to me, Gracie, that you have a deep faith in God, as I suspect, though you never say anything ; and I, too, have this much, that I should not be surprised if everything comes out right for each one, if only at the end of the world, though that's a tidy while to wait, dear. Well, now, I depend upon you to carry out the programme without alteration, and start for London on Tuesday. When I learn your address from Nibbs or someone, I shall come, too, if a hundred Scotland Yards were up there, instead of one. Meantime, please give this message to Harold : that I rely upon that head of his to clear up the surprising statements that they make about the doctor's having been " poisoned," either to disprove it, or to discover how, and by whom. I have known him to find out things just as wonderful before : so let him set to work, if only for my sake. Nibbs, as you know, is going up to London for good in six weeks' time, with a view to his final for a solicitor ; so, at any

rate, you will have some one near you, if you want anything done; and Harold, too, throws out hints of going up to enter a detective business early next year, which, I think, is all to the good for you. I do hope our love will not be making you any colder to the two dear friends of our young days, though I think you should let them both know soon that their hopes about you and the legacy can't ever come off. I don't consider that that was a right will of old Mackay's. Sometimes I feel rather queer to think what a horrid blow to my two best friends my marriage must necessarily be—though God knows whether, or when, that marriage will be now. Never while I am a fugitive—upon that I insist. But don't you worry much about marriage, dear, for *I* don't: even the Apostle John could not possibly marry me into any sweeter mixture with you than I am married already; and if I were to die to-night, Gracie, I think that when asked at the gates of Eternity "Who are you?" and "What is your passport?" I should reply without fear, "I am the husband of Gracie Stanley, and nothing else: that was my exploit and well-doing in the world." Well, now, I've written you a long rigmarole, and the paper's done. I should give the world to get a line from you, but I can't and won't give any address: can't, because I feel pretty sure that Mr. Scotland Yard at Bedwick will be breaking open this letter before you; and won't, because I'm afraid you might come after me. No more room. God look after you! Good-bye.

'Your friend, JACK.'

He gave the sealed letter, with a penny, to the old dame, who promised to post it two days later. Then they shook hands, he not offering any payment, though he had money; and with Christian equality and courtesy they parted, he with 'Good neet and thank, grandma,' and she with 'Good neet and thank, ma man, and a canny whiggin' to thee.'

The chance direction which he had chosen was south-western, toward the great fells and pikes—Scafell, Red-pike—and the narrow green valleys, overtopped by crags and desolate grandeurs. That second night he

slept with two men and two girls in a peat-loft, all lying awake in the dark till one o'clock, rain pouring without, while the girls told tales, tales, in hoarse secret voices, ghaists alternating with tales of warlocks, and tales of elves with giant's-graves and wishing-gates: and Jack, cuddled among the peats, believed with charitable heart. In the morning he helped about the byres, bore armfuls of second clover and vetches, and ate with the farm-hands a dish of potato-oats. They prayed him to stay, but he went farther. The farther he went, and the higher, the more it rained. The third night he slept on the floor of a malster, and stayed two days, lending a hand to the steeping-men; the sixth night he slept in a village tavern; the seventh in an elm tree on a sward overlooking a broad, rocky, shallow river. The whole of the eighth he spent in dancing, and looking at dancing, at a merry-neet in a barn a thousand feet above the sea: within being bride and bridegroom, fiddling, ale, light, a broad dialect, and red-hot cheeks, and without—rain, and the benighted gulf of nothingness. He came to the wettest region in Europe, where it pours sullenly for days, and the rain-gauge is 240 or so in the year. Here London is merely nominal, and her sceptre falls short. In the second week, talking with a group of yokels at a smithy-door, the village constable said to him: 'Tha's the young fellow pursued for that murder i' Biddick, I'se thinking, though tha's growed a beard, too.' 'I am,' said Jack—'worse luck. But if you think that I did it, come for a round on the common.' 'Shaf! dunnot get tha dander up,' replied the yokel, adding with pride, 'I'se not the man to think sec things o' *any* man'; and he reported the incident to the chief constable three days after Jack was gone.

From a mountain-pedlar, Jack bought a scarf; and a hobbling old spectacled schoolmaster—a man obscure to the world, but enormously wealthy and famous in Heaven—presented him with a maud or shepherd's plaid, an old pair of high-lows, a shirt, and had him to bed and board three days. The chillness of coming winter drew in, the jet-black earths were strewn with leaves, and the rains descended almost without pause. On Michael-

mas-day, time of settlements and rent-payings, the clogs went slapping through a deluge of water, and Jack ate his goose, fatted from the stubbled field, in a 'statesman's' farm-kitchen, where candles were burning at noon. Up in those fastnesses and small umbrageous dales he lingered till snow began to gather on the highest peaks. Before this, he had never been twenty miles out of Bedwick: now he saw that beyond Bedwick were the great mountains, and beyond them the world, the stars. With a certain exhilaration, he spent like a prince the £4 which he had, often, however, earning his dinner by every sort of work. He took train to Whitehaven, and frankly enjoyed the swift motion, new to him, saying to a world-weary Cockney voyager: 'Doesn't it go quick?' And at Whitehaven, with new wonder, he saw the sea, on which he had so longed to go to sail, and also his name in print, posted in a description of his appearance.

He wished to write to Raby before Raby went to London, and when he thought that the time must be near, started northward and eastward again, trudging on foot, without haste, but with little pause. He still feared to give an address to anyone in Bedwick, lest the post-office might hand over his letter to the police, but he had such a longing to hear of Gracie, that he thought of venturing into Bedwick by night, and his journeyings now were more or less in that direction. Within twenty miles of Lonbydale, however, he fell in one dark foreday with some gipsies encamped on a holm about a Druidical circle, and after halting there a night and a day, set off with the band eastward toward the great heaths and moors—the so-called Waste of Cumberland—deciding to avoid the row that might attend his entry into Bedwick. He left behind him two crying brats when he parted with the band on the fourth sunset, and tramped into the lovely valley of the Caldew, a stream which, in its course toward the Eden, turns a number of cotton and corn mills; and, his boots being rather down at heel, and his money spent, he stopped the next day, and found some work at a Mr. Phillips', a miller.

After two weeks here, he decided to write, and sent to Raby the following :

‘DEAR OLD NIBBS :

‘They haven’t got me yet, you see, and you may bet that they never will. I am writing you to get at once Gracie’s address in London, with all the news about her : so don’t delay. You must be soon going up yourself, and then you will be her protector for the time being, and we all rely confidently upon you. Send me £5, if you have any money, or else borrow it from Harold, as one of the dressers at the mill where I am is dead, and has left his wife nearly destitute with three children. I don’t give you the place where I am for good reasons ; but direct your letter to “John Bennett, the P.O., Duddon Village, near Wreay, Cumberland,” and I will go for it there. Only don’t delay. Remember : Gracie’s address, and all the news you can possibly think of about her ; also, whether Harold has found out anything about the mysterious “poisoning.” Don’t forget the £5, and ask Harold to write me—I hate writing myself—and my best respects to Mr. Spender and everybody you can trust.

‘Your friend, JACK.’

This letter he got one of his fellow-workers to address, and, for additional safety, sent it to the care of Mr. Crowther, the justice.

His work was in the screening-room, where he fed the cylinder with the new corn, to clean it ; and at the fan-blast, where it issued in a cloud, was a young man named Congdon. Late that same afternoon of the letter Jack was lying all whitened in the fernery round the old water-wheel, when this Congdon, with an eager and secret air, came to him.

‘I’se round from the mill-house, lad,’ whispered Congdon, ‘and there’s a Lunnon body threeping wi’ Mr. Phillips i’ the yard : he’s after thee !’

‘Sure he’s London, now?’ said Jack.

‘Ey, sure as the runner on the bed-stone, lad : who

cuddent tell them by the stand o' them and their bra'ard southland manner o' speech? A' went slow, and A' hear t'old man say "Hay? Hay? I dunnot know."

'All right,' said Jack, getting up, 'I don't want any fratch with those people: I'll run. This is the third time in three weeks—in my own country, too. Good-bye, lad. The old man owes me about nine shillings; get them and give to the widow——'

They wrung hands, and he plunged into bush, forded a beck, and tramped across country eight miles that night before stopping at one of those solitary granges, surrounded with wind-huddled trees on an otherwise treeless heath; and there found hospitable shelter.

About that same hour his letter was handed to Nibbs Raby.

Raby was leaning on his little mantelpiece, with pocketed left hand, and on the bed sat Pole, smiling, touching with a milking motion of thumb and fore-finger his tuft of goatee-beard.

Pole had taken to the vicious habit of leaving his studies to come to see Raby. They would then talk of the death of Dr. Stanley, while Pole would smilingly dwell and dwell upon Raby's face, and Raby would inwardly know that Pole was dwelling upon his face, as no man has a right to dwell upon another's face.

The situation had, indeed, become terrible. Pole was daring too much: and though never an angry word had been uttered, the mood here was electric, stored with the lightnings that, when they dart out, strike dead. So abhorred and execrable had that smile of Pole become to Raby, that he frequently dreamed of it. He was to have left for London in the second week of October, but had now forced matters so that he might go a week earlier: and that earlier departure was, in reality, a flight. Pole had become a visible conscience and still small voice: his existence was to Raby a threat, his smile an accusation.

Being now well again—as well as he could ever be—Pole had not been idle, but had discovered several facts about that fatal night, unknown to any soul but

himself and Raby. And with every new fact which he discovered, and with every certain deduction which he made, he hastened to Raby to confide it triumphantly, saying: 'I'm in the burning, Nibbs, boy—slow but sure—the murder will out! the murder will out!'—his eyes dwelling upon Raby's face.

This was partly Raby's own fault: for his persistent concealment of his left hand could not but be a provocation to Pole. He had never been a wearer of gloves, yet now would not step round to the office without them; and, of course, such a fact was to Pole like red to a bull. Moreover, when Dr. Stanley's insurance proved invalid, and Gracie was left poor, Raby had sent her back every one of those stolen and buried notes (they amounted to £45), directing the envelope in print letters, and taking a secret railway journey to Caldbeck in order to post it: and the return of that money had stirred Pole.

It was about this that he was talking to Raby that very evening of Jack's flight from Phillips' Mill.

'Well, you know,' Pole said, 'when Gracie got the notes, making sure that they came from Lord D——, she was intending to give them as a donation to St. John's; but when I went out that day to look through the last of the doctor's papers, and Miss Ames told me the news of the anonymous present, I at once said: "Why, that's just about the amount missing": for I had come across a stipend-memo of £57, and couldn't find what the deuce the doctor had done with all that. I asked to see the notes, and pretty soon discovered the extraordinary fact that—they had been buried!'

'Buried, be God: that seems odd,' said Raby, turning slightly further from the lamp, while Pole edged slightly along, to maintain the same angle of view: 'but how did you know, man? earth-stains on 'em, or what?'

'Oh no, no earth-stains,' said Pole: 'they had been wrapped in a piece of bluish brief-paper, and then buried to a depth of one-and-a-half to two feet in dry loam—such as that in your garden there. The brief-paper rather points to somebody connected with law—don't you think so, now?'

'I do, I do,' said Raby: 'seems clear enough, when you once go into these things. By G—d, you're a clever dog, Pole—old man! You'll get put into a glass-case as a mummy or something some day. But buried, be God! that seems odd. How did you know? How the h—l could you possibly find out?'

'Ey, ey,' said Pole, 'two of the six notes had been endorsed in red ink, you see, and buried back to back; and each endorsement now stands reproduced in inverted writing on the other, faint, but absolutely clean and perfect. Now, that means two things: first, moisture, acting in a very indirect and gradual fashion—for there is no running of the ink; and secondly, steady pressure, acting perhaps three or four weeks. That moisture came from the late rains soaking through the ground; that pressure from the overlying weight of earth. Those elements together—diffused moisture and pressure—result from no condition in the world but burying: therefore they were buried, therefore they were buried. The microscope also revealed among them three antennæ of male foraging-ants, the wing of a female, and a stain of plant-louse saccharine. They were buried, sir. And on one was a bluish indication, just such as would be left by moistened brief-paper in contact.'

'Oh, well, that settles it,' said Raby, pinned to one spot, to one posture, awkward, inconsequent, suffering, yet rancorous, 'I should say they *were* buried—unless they got wet with steam, or something. Wrapped up in brief-paper, and all. Oh, cursed clever!'

'Ey, and you observe the really ominous inference,' said Pole, 'the really ominous inference. One hears of buried treasure: but who ever buried bank-notes—except a thief? We may almost swear, then, that they were stolen. Now, the amount sent in that mysterious way to the doctor's daughter was just the amount missing from the doctor's account: we may almost swear, then, that that amount had somehow been got from the doctor. I say "almost": for there never lived a thinker, Raby, more suspicious of his own mental operations than I. But Fletcher, to whom I gave a list

of the six numbers, has to-day informed me that they tally with the numbers of six of the notes last paid out by the Bank to Dr. Stanley. So that one of our two "*almonds*" vanishes: we can now *swear* that the notes were got from the doctor, and almost swear that they were stolen: and the vanishing of the first "*almost*" makes the second really pedantic.'

'Oh, there isn't a doubt,' said Raby: 'you're getting near it, Pole, I can see that. God only grant that those precious lungs of yours hold out——'

'You see, of course,' interrupted Pole, 'how all this may be related to the dark question of *motive* in the murder of Dr. Stanley——'

But now there was a knock at the door, and Raby, like a released prisoner, went to open. It was a servant of Mr. Crowther, who had brought Jack's letter.

Raby just saw that it was from Jack, and hurried it into his pocket; and some minutes later Pole went away.

Raby then read the letter. He was to write to Jack at the 'P.O., Duddon Village, near Wreay,' and Jack would go for that letter.

Those few words caused Raby to turn as white as paper, his blood rushing to his heart as if in haste to drown a horrid thing there born. His soul had conceived the thought that, Jack once condemned and hanged for the murder, he, Raby, was safe. Then let Pole amuse himself with clues and arguments: no one would listen. What Law wanted, and would have, was a victim—the right, if possible, but a victim: and one victim having been offered up, it would fight desperately shy of a second; the incident would be closed, and silence would cover it.

But to betray Jack Hay, the innocent, the careless, the kindly!—though he *had* offended once, and *was* dangerous to Gracie. Jack had gone about Bedwick borrowing money to prevent little Jenny Lockhart from being buried by the parish. Jack had visited him, Raby, in prison, with cigars. Jack's resounding voice had sung out: 'Three cheers, lads, for old Nibbs . . . !'

Now, Raby was a fellow, who, if he never pardoned an

injury, never forgot a favour : and his mind was divided within him.

However, a man had to look after himself. Sentiment was no good in this dirty world. He drove his hands into his pockets and perambulated with rounded back, his ill-fated feet slipping, not without a struggle, on the declivity of crime.

'Bah! what's the use of cursing?' he muttered, after a succession of curses: 'there isn't any God, so it's no good hating and railing at Him. I'll just do what's good for myself, calmly, and without any rot. That Pole—that Pole!—coming with his threats; and then this other ass writing to tell me just where to have him arrested—the two together look just like a plot of some Beast in the sky, to tempt me: but it's all empty space, and there's no cursed Dog there at all! If He was, He could never have been so hard on a poor, poor wretch, as to lead me into—what—I—have done. Whose fault was *that*, eh? Not mine. Nor is it now. I can feel that I am going to do it. I *will* do it—just for the sweet spite; and the Devil be my God, and Hell be my sweet hot mistress: the old soul can't be damned much worse than it is. Well, good-bye, Mr. Jackie—and good-bye honour, conscience, and the rest of the rot! It's no use trying when you're once in.'

The poor fellow *had* been trying, as when he returned the notes to Gracie, and in other ways; but his mind, after its dreadful fall, swung about at random, like a ball in a rocking boat, between good and evil impulse: as indeed is the case with every man (more or less), whose house is not well built on the rock.

Raby put on his hat, ran out to the section-house, and showed to the police-inspector that address of Duddon Village, near Wreay.

XVII

GANGRELS HA'

JACK HAY spent Halloween at a low-built farmhouse, like a long shed with a gable, in a lonely situation at a valley-head under the shadow of a pike. Loud roared the fairy-fire in the kitchen that night, where a number of rustics had assembled with the farm-hands, while elf and sprite held carnival and Walpurgis-dance through all the essence of Nature, and in the haunted chambers of men's minds. Jack, however, was beginning to learn the loneliness of the hunted creature, and took no part in the rites of apples and 'weel-hoordet nits,' but sat apart grinding corn in a little quern, till at midnight he threw himself upon a skemmel, and slept amid the revels of man and witch.

He had already been there three days, and after Halloween remained three days more, till the 4th, when, early in the morning, he set off for Duddon, nine miles over the hills.

It was one of those November days when Summer comes back, the trees not all naked yet to the winter's cold, though ragged, nor the birds all silent yet, though saddened; and he went buoyantly enough, full of fresh air and health, without the least doubt that a letter awaited him at Duddon. After twice asking the way, he emerged from a path which wound through an oak forest upon a common, where two small Cumbrian horses and some cattle were; beyond this he saw a pond with a board-bridge; and immediately beyond this the bower of trees in which lay the village.

He entered it, clapping on the back an old humble-cow

which chose to accompany him. The sun was now high, yet the street shaded. There seemed not a man, nor a child, in the place, and only two women were visible. He went on past a door whence there came forth a drone, like the buzz of a hive, and there that honey was a-making which is bitter in the mouth, but sweet in the belly. Five yards beyond on the right was a small shop, with low overhanging thatch, and tiny windows with tiny panes: it was both draper's and grocer's, selling, too, tobacco and sweets, ballads and ginger-bread; it was also the post-office.

As he entered, a gigantic woman, who was *enceinte*, left off grinding a quern in the inner room, and came quickly to him with rolled-up sleeves, and a strange look of alarm.

'Have you a letter for John Bennett?' he asked.

She glanced searchingly at his face, and seeing that it was all right (her own being all right), whispered with a quick furtiveness:

'Na letter. *Run ere thae billies hae thee!*'

But it was too late. Almost as she spoke, Jack glancing round, saw the door closing; and a moment later it was as if fifty whistles in all directions split the air. He spun once round on his heels, then leapt the counter into the inner room, tried the back-door, and found it locked without. At the same time he heard shouts, pelting feet of men—it seemed everywhere. There were two windows with flowers; he rushed to each, but neither would open. He then heard the woman whisper: 'Upstairs!' and up a few steps he dashed into a little back bed-room; here was another window, and up he flung the bottom sash, which, however, dropped back like lead as he let it go. All in the turnip and potato plots below were running men. He flung up the sash again, this time introducing his body; but the opening was so small, that he could not manage. Now he heard the onrush of feet on the stairs, and flew to the door to lock it: it had no key: but with a rage of energy he caught up the little bedstead, and drove it in the nick of time, with a shock that thrilled the building, against the door. In his eyes was now a gay and gallant flame. As the officers began to

force the barricade, he caught up a chair and sent it at a run into the window; and almost before the shower of glass was over, a second shower rained. Now the window was gone: but still the opening was so small, that, though the eaves just there were cut away to admit light, he could hardly be said to leap, but fell sprawling, spraining his left hip. At once he was surrounded by seven officers in plain clothes; but before ever they touched him he had rebounded to his feet. Now he was in his element: he could fight like an angel: he had learned it young—and alive they should not take him. All in a body, they brought the rough power of seven manhoods to bear upon him; but every member of his being seemed to fight, shoulder and knee, knuckle and brow, leg and soul, multiplying him by ten. When they lifted him, he fought in the air; when his weight and force brought his long-legged mass staggering again to the ground, they staggered, too, and scattered a moment. In one half-minute, five faces, including his own, were marred with blood; in another minute, he and a stout town-policeman thumped together to the ground, he face downward above; the man seemed stunned, for Jack freed himself easily, and, finding three others struggling on their heels to rise, he cuffed them back in lightning succession, twisted round, and cross-buttocked a fourth, pitching him heavily headforemost over his right shoulder; then, hustling the remaining two, he took to his heels.

He ran across a meadow along the house-backs, feeling sure in the first moment of leaving them easily behind—in the second he doubted—in the third he knew that they must catch him. His left hip was paining. The men with all their legs were after him, one shrilling a whistle all the time. For an instant, half-way to the pond, Jack almost stopped; but a new impulse urged him on, till, emerging at the end of the houses, he saw a crowd of school-children and villagers gathered near the bridge in high excitement. The pursuers were now hardly five yards behind. He broke through the crowd, which parted with a shout for him; and there on the bridge were three more men, awaiting him. He did

not stop, but bore on; and the shock of the impact carried himself and two of them into the water. The pursuers, meantime, had been perhaps wilfully impeded by the villagers; and, still three yards ahead of all but one, Jack ran dripping up the further shore. He dodged one man with a duck, and made straight for one of the two horses on the common: but it was a skittish gelding, and shied, evading capture; he twisted round, sent his fist into someone's face, darted toward the second horse—a long-tailed long-maned little mare—cautiously captured her mane, scrambled upon her, and as she galloped with bounds and kicks into the forest, he, lying on her neck, looked back along her flanks at the men vainly trying to catch the gelding.

He goaded her ribs with his heels, till he was quite certain that he was lost to them; then for an hour sat on an old fragment of wall by a rill in a wilderness of bush, pressing his palm to his hip; and toward evening returned to the farm-house under the pike, in his mouth a new taste of the bitterness of life.

He remained there two days more, having his hip massaged by some of the brawniest hands in England; then, thinking it better to be on the move, set out again on his travels—travels which were becoming to him acrid as the taste of Dead Sea waters. Sometimes an indignation, like subterranean fires, would rumble within him at the recollection that he had—done nothing! but he was not subject to outbreaks, and, on the whole, kept his face of phlegm. With coolest intrepidity, he one afternoon once more bent his steps toward Duddon, finding himself near, and passing through a village two miles from it, saw one of the constables who had fought with him; they exchanged a nod and a laugh, and Jack went on to Duddon—with more caution this time. He could not believe that there had been no letter for him: but the post-mistress, Mrs. Campbell, the human-hearted giantess, assured him that so it was. He concluded that the police had not only intercepted his letter to Raby, but not given it to Raby afterwards.

A few evenings later he was passing footsore and forlorn through a Border dale, whose name he did not

know, when he came to a small sequestered mansion in a wood, called 'Gangrel's Ha'.' It was a very pretty place, with small red roofs, and two low battlemented towers, the house being made of that warm-tinted Penrith sandstone, and the close-wall of green-slate, with masses of bush peeping over. Jack pulled the bell-handle at the wicket-gate, and when a red-cheeked lass in a cap appeared, asked for a meal. She replied: 'Coom in, coom in,' and as they crossed the yard, he asked: 'Who lives here?' The answer: 'Mr. Spender' astonished him, though he knew that Mr. Spender had a country-house somewhere; so he said: 'Mr. Spender of Bedwick?' and she replied: 'Ey, o' Biddick.' 'Then,' said he, 'run in and tell him that Jack Hay wants him.'

In a minute, then, there appeared that chubby Christmas face, with the drawn lip-corners ready for anything that might happen, that face of Mr. Spender—care-forgetting, care-dispelling—with its helpless eyes of comedy, as painfully stamped with the passion and travail of laughter as other elderly men's with the passion and travail of sorrow. He came to the Norman hall-door with both hands held out in welcome; and that night Jack ate venison, and drank old wine.

'But,' said Mr. Spender, watching him eat, 'what have you come here for? If I harbour a murderer, I become—an "accessory—after——"!'

That morbid insight into the comic saw something or other funny in the words 'accessory after the fact,' and he broke down.

'An accessory after who, sir?' asked Jack.

Old Spender pointed a helpless, hanging forefinger at him (for Jack had a reputation for callous ignorance), and could not answer.

'All right, I haven't asked you to harbour me, sir,' said Jack, smiling.

'But what am I doing now?' cried Mr. Spender: 'feeding you on the fat of the land! isn't that harbouring you? I ought to have taken you in charge the moment you came in! The mischief's done, and I shall be afraid to let you outside the gate now——'

'No, look here, sir,' said Jack, 'don't think you're going to get me to stay here: that would be a bit too much.'

'Tut, lad, tut,' said the old man in a low voice, patting Jack's head, while a moisture came into Jack's eyes.

Here, at any rate, was a friend.

After the meal, they went up to a small room of faded furniture, with old hangings, a cedar kist, an oak clock, a triangular old-English spinet on three legs, and a spinning-wheel; and before a fragrant fire of logs they sat smoking.

'Well now, sir,' said Jack, 'can you give me any news of—Miss Stanley?'

'What would you like to know about her, now?' answered Mr. Spender.

'For one thing, I think I should like to know her address in London. . . .'

'He *thinks* he would!—look at him! he *thinks* he would—oh lud, oh lud!'

'Do you know it, sir?'

'Well—no; at least—no.'

'Do tell us, sir, if you do.'

'My friend, this is a serious world—*look at him!* he don't believe that at all, at all, at all! he won't swallow that! he's too——'

He wanted to say 'young,' but that was all lost in a sweet infirmity of merriment.

'I ought to know whether it's serious or not, sir, by now,' said Jack: 'pray tell me.'

'Young gentlemen who are under suspicion of murder,' said Mr. Spender, 'should not know young ladies' addresses: that may be bad for both.'

'Oh, but, sir——'

'I'm not going to tell.'

And he could be firm: and did not.

Mr. Spender was a bachelor, his household consisting only of a housekeeper, a lass, and a man who was cow-herd, gardener, groom and several other things. Within the last weeks he had retired from business in Bedwick, though every morning's post still brought him a mass of affairs, which it was necessary to get through. His life here was passed in a happy and shaded seclusion; his

habits were regular and simple ; his means liberal ; his servants like his own family : for the housekeeper and the man had been in his employ twenty years, and the lass six. Every morning at a certain hour he would seat himself on the top step of the dining-room stair in an old dressing-gown, whereupon the others, knowing that his motive was to 'have a crack,' would look in, and soon there would be 'cracking' enough—gossip and memories—smiles below, and convulsions on the stair-head. Every afternoon but Saturday he took a walk in the wood, fully dressed in black, attended by three collies. Every Saturday he fished in a near trout-stream. Every Sunday morning he held family prayer, not without risks of fun. Such were his events. At two he dined, and supped at eight-thirty ; and by nine-thirty the household was in bed.

Jack remained with him at Gangrel's Ha' over two months, of which hardly a day passed without its attempt to get Gracie's address. Mr. Spender told of Gracie's going, of her last words, of the auction sale of the wine, the mare, and part of the furniture ; but he stubbornly refused the London addresses of both Gracie and Raby. Jack, sure that his letter to Raby had been intercepted by the police, dared not write again to Bedwick. He was thus altogether cut off from Gracie, and often would sit by his bed a sleepless night, with buried head, as it were an embodied groan uttered in a great darkness.

However, he had plenty to do during the day. He assisted in the evening milking the two cows, and of the little ass, which furnished Mr. Spender's special drink ; on the two churning-days he helped in the little stading at the house-back, chopped gorse, mixed turnips, prepared the pigs' whey-wash, cleaned the box-churn, skimmed, pitchforked, scythed, or groomed : and he could work with a will. But these were the occupations of his leisure, his main work being in Mr. Spender's study, a quaint and almost luxurious den with a Norman window shaded by a whitethorn : for Mr. Spender, with all his geniality and simple way of life, was the most fussy of household deities, living in small things, and rather pampering the body ; the warmth of his

slippers o' mornings, the creaminess of his ass's milk, the species of his fire-woods, were to old Meggie things as momentous as earthquakes are; only two hands in the world could accurately thivel Mr. Spender's porridge; and if aught went wrong, he had a glance of tender reproach, which did more than thunders. He soon began to fall lazily into the greater ease brought by Jack, who greatly helped in despatching the daily tale of affairs from Bedwick; indeed, Mr. Spender was astonished by a certain rude vigour of intelligence with which Jack Hay tackled and accomplished all, and before Christmas Jack was not only copying, writing from dictation, adding figures, and making bills-of-costs, briefs and affidavits, but conducting a certain portion of the correspondence on his own initiative.

On Christmas morning, on opening his soap-dish, he found a £10 note, placed there for him by Mr. Spender, to whom that was a day of days, rich with goose, white with snow, red with holly-berries, hot with hot food and punch; the nine-thirty bed-time routine was suspended that rubicund night; and near eleven Jack, seeing the old gentleman foundering with white, dry lips far down a whirlpool of concentrated laughter, had to clap him on the back, with a stern: 'Come, sir! come, sir!' On Old Year's there was again sitting up to midnight, and each, the next morning, made presents to the other four; while Twelfth-night, with its cake-and-bean, was quite a second Christmas. That night Jack, seeing that Mr. Spender had well drunk, made an ardent new effort to get Gracie's address: but again without success.

The quiet round of life at Gangrel's Ha' was then resumed, and in the midst of all that made for contentment, Jack sickened of existence. His sense of imprisonment within the four high walls of the close, beyond which he never went, his longing for a thousand wings, became a mania: and once on Twelfth-night, and once four days later, he actually fell to his knees with passionate pleadings before Mr. Spender. But the deep things of the heart were unrealities to the lawyer; he saw only the evident Expedient in this matter: and would not tell.

But on the 15th of the month, as it were a great dawn arose of itself upon Jack. It was after breakfast: Mr. Spender was sitting on the stair-head, looking down through the banisters at Meggie, Ailie and hard old Morlan, all frankly idle, having their morning's 'crack.' Jack, at the desk in the study, was opening the morning's post. Suddenly his face went white, his eyes falling upon a certain very *chic* handwriting, large and masculine, yet also feminine, which he knew. He tore the letter open, and read:

“MEADOWSWEET,”
 ‘DEAN STREET,
 ‘MAIDA VALE, W.

‘DEAR MR. SPENDER,

‘Have you any news yet of Jack Hay? I have seen in a newspaper an account of his half-capture and escape in a village called Duddon, and as you have written nothing of it, I assume that you have forgotten your promise to let me know everything. I am extremely anxious, dear Mr. Spender, as he and I have been brother and sister since we were small people of five. So this is to remind you.

‘The letter which I gave you for him you may still keep, in case you be ever able to get at him. I have advertised my address in three newspapers; but, unfortunately, he never reads newspapers. Can you suggest any way? Neither Harold Pole nor Nibbs Raby has had a line from him—which is singular.

‘I hope you are quite well, as we here are. So far everything seems to have gone favourably, and I, personally, am supposed to be hard at work, mainly (at present) on languages, which a singer should know; but, of course, I find this matter of poor Jack Hay very distracting. Your old pupil, Nibbs Raby, having passed his final at the Law Society in November, seems to be making way, and we see him frequently.

‘Miss Ames sends you her very kind regards, in which I join.

‘Will you write soon?

‘Yours sincerely,
 ‘GRACIE STANLEY.’

Jack ran out with that letter: and Mr. Spender's 'crack' was spoiled that morning.

'Look here, sir,' cried Jack, 'you have a letter for me, and I want it quick!'

Mr. Spender looked up, understood that the secret was out, and quietly rose, saying: 'It was for your own good, my friend.' He unlocked a drawer in his study, and handed to Jack a letter now four months old; and with it Jack hurried to his own room. She had said to him:

'I have your letter, dear, and as soon as I can, I sit up in bed to write you, though I have let two days pass, not being very well, dear; and I write without knowing when you may receive it, if ever, but I write, if perhaps I may comfort you. Ah, you see now, this love of mine has brought upon you strange evil, my friend: and it is my fault only, for I somehow foreknew it all, and my duty was to have borne the heat and burden of my passion in silence, even if I had fainted under it, following my destiny and my father's wishes, without involving poor you. But, Jackie, forgive me: the temptation was terrible; I *could* not help it. For whole years, do you know, my life has been spent in inventing excuses to make trips into Bedwick, in the hope of catching a glimpse of you? On that point I was not quite a normal girl, I think. I would make superfluous calls upon your dreadful sisters, hoping so poignantly, so greedily, Jackie, so morbidly, to see my heart's food and my nostrils' air, if only for one instant of everlasting life. Do you remember that photograph taken of you in the Eton jacket when you were eleven and four months? I have used and used it in secret, Jackie—for years—with eyes and lips and hands, sleeping with it, praying to it, living for it, till now it is only half the size. Oh, my greatly beloved! you do not know what a temptation was mine: the Power that pushes all things toward their goal and consummation, pushed me continually with the suggestion, "Tell him once that you love him—whisper it—howl it—sob it: and see how he will look then!" The thing was indeed too glaring: if I had wrenched out my tongue, and

hewn off my arms, I still must have blabbed it, and written it: and, knowing my dear, I know that he will forgive me for what I could not help. But oh, the mischief of it, the baleful pity, Jack Hay, my friend! My father gone, mysteriously dead—only God knowing how and why: yet some instinct warns me that, in *some* way, this tragic mania in my bosom was the poison that cut him off; and *you*—whom I ought to have existed to shield from harm—*you* a fugitive, houseless, poor head——

‘P.S.—Missie says that I cannot write, as I have twice—“fainted,” she says. Good-bye. I see you say that they shall not have you, and that I believe, trusting in your heroic strength of limb and soul—Jackie, Strength of my heart—good-bye——’

Jack read it hurriedly through, fumbled about the room, absently looking for his hat, a sob in his throat, then dashed hatless, like a wild creature, through the house, out by the close-gate, and went running nearly all the way to Kirkton, a townlet two miles beyond the dale-river.

There he sent the following telegram to Stanley, ‘Meadowsweet,’ Maida Vale:

‘I am coming. Expect me to-morrow (Friday) night at nine.

‘JACK.’

When he returned to Gangrel’s Ha’, and told Mr. Spender that he was going, the old man’s face was grave, as it could occasionally be; and he exclaimed:

‘What! Can you be so rash and foolish, my poor boy?’

But Jack threw up his head with a laugh.

XVIII

THE BLOOD-STAIN

ABOUT that hour when Jack's telegram to Gracie went off from Kirkton, Gracie and Missie were in the drawing-room at 'Meadowsweet,' and with them Lord D——, who was on the eve of marriage, also the young Duchess of T——e (a Harley Street schoolfellow of Gracie's), and Nibbs Raby, who ought to have been at work, but was at play—a quite new-looking, metropolitan Raby, with a frock-coat that was his tailor's pride, a hat like black pearl, boots like black glass, pumps, suède gloves, orchid. Gracie's pale wild-roses were almost gone from her cheeks, and those eyelids had wept; she wore a plain black robe, and seemed taller, her hair being no more like a slanting loaf behind the neck, but in the new (Greek) fashion, like a promontory, or a breast, high up, adding queenly length to the head. As for Miss Ames, she sat chatting with her bird-like manner, happy, fond of London, and seemed never to have had a toothache.

With £400 out of the £800 which she had had in the Bank, the cottage had been prettily furnished, leaving £400; her income was £100; the rent with taxes, etc., was £70; and with the remaining £30, plus occasional drawings out of the £400, she, Gracie and Jean, could live very well, paying Gracie's fees, and all: such was their little budget.

Why the cottage was called 'Meadowsweet' was never divulged. It was square, two-storied, and separated from the two neighbouring houses by two small walls, in which were green doors with a hole in each: from the

street one could see three faces of the house, two being windowless yellow brick, terminating each in six chimney-stacks, the front having five windows coped with freestone, and six steps leading to the door; between the house and the street-railing was some sick-looking bush, and in the fairly large grounds behind, bush and trees.

The two morning-callers drove away, Gracie went up to her study, and Missie and Raby, who were chums, were left. Raby had now dropped horses for a new interest in the Stock Exchange; had several 'good things' in his eye; and had suggested to Miss Ames the withdrawal of her little capital from the bank, that he might invest it to better account for her.

This had struck Missie, and they two were discussing it semi-secretly for the tenth time, when a quadruple telegraph-knock sounded. This was Jack's 'I am coming.'

Missie hurried with it, calling out animatedly: 'Gracie, a telegram for you!' and Gracie, too, hurried down, and they met on the stairs.

Gracie tore open, and dropped it, with a fainting cry; and Raby heard that cry.

After fifteen minutes with Gracie, Missie returned to the drawing-room, where Raby still was.

'Telegram from Cumberland?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'From Bedwick?'

'No—*not* from Bedwick,' said Missie, with a certain smirk of mystery.

'Then,' thought Raby, 'it is from Jack.'

He looked out awhile into the empty street, then, with a half-affected yawn, said:

'Well, I must go. By the way, no news of Jack?'

'H'm,' went Missie, averted and smiling.

'All right,' he said, 'there is some secret, which I do not ask to hear. I am off. Perhaps I'll look in to-night after dinner, to have a talk about the New Queensland Threes and the Modders.'

‘All right, if you think me capable of listening on the wedding-eve.’

‘Or no—I can’t very well to-night; perhaps to-morrow evening.’

‘No—not to-morrow evening,’ said Missie, with that same smile of secret significance; and Raby thought: ‘Then, Jack must be coming!’

It was some time before he could compose himself to say:

‘Well, soon, then: good-bye; say good-bye to Gracie——’

He took cab to his office in Bedford Row, where he was now a junior partner in a substantial firm of four partners; and the moment he entered his private room, he saw on his desk an envelope which shocked his heart. He tore it eagerly open. It was from Pole:

‘MY DEAR RABY;

‘How are things? I am writing you in high glee to-day, as I know your interest in the progress of my mind in respect to the murder. I have been examining afresh—with fresh mind, fresh methods—the whole of Beech How, of the broch, and of the environments of the broch. My friend, I have discovered many things. The murder of Dr. Herbert Oscar Fairchild Stanley was a dark crime, my dear Raby, accomplished by a man of as deformed and thievish a soul as ever shocked the eye of Heaven: but, will you believe me, dear Raby? my horses shall overtake him yet, and my hounds shall have him. To this, indeed, I am now vowed; it is my secret warmth when I am cold, and my medicine when I am sick: and if I fail, then I’m no good at all, at all, at all, and I shall admit it, I think, in a practical manner. But what I had to say was this, that I have made within the last two weeks some substantial progress. I cannot go into details, but I may mention one. I have been dividing the whole interior and top of the broch into square inches, and examining each inch as a separate entity under a delightful little compound microscope that I have lately added to my treasures. Now, do you re-

member those sheets of rusty tin nailed on here and there to the parapet for the protection of the ashlar from disintegration? Well, under one edge of tin, which is bent down a bit, so that its under-surface is rain-free, I have discovered—what do you think?—an almost microscopic stain of blood—*human* blood, for the corpuscles are still determinable. How does that strike you, my dear Raby? How came it there? No eye but my own has yet seen it: it is smaller than a pin's head: but there it stands, and *will* stand, till the day when I am ready to use it.

'Gracie writes me that she sees a very great deal of you. My best regards to them both. You will rejoice to hear that I am coming up soon. With regard to Jack Hay, have you considered the singularity of that ambush of the police at Duddon? He appears to have gone to *the post-office*, expecting a letter from someone. From whom? From whom? Can it be that he was *betrayed* to the police by some friend to whom he had written? But no—that would be a crime too depraved, Raby, to be human. I have been pumping Calthorpe about it, and he denies: but, of course, as you guess, the mind of Calthorpe is an open book to me.

'Well, no more at present. Do write me what you conclude from the blood-stain.

'Yours,

'HAROLD POLE.

'P.S. Did I understand you to say before you left Bedwick that something or other was wrong with your left hand? I either dreamt it, or heard you say so. I hope it is all right now.'

Raby, with that white eyelash piercingly lowered, read this twice, while anon from his lips there came the hiss of hate: 'All right, my son!' 'All right, my son!' But his head suddenly dropped upon his arms, with the groan: 'What an unlucky damned dog I must be!'

More unlucky than he knew: for just then in far-off Lonbydale, a cart was wending along the Brenchwaite road containing a truckle-bed and a mass of bed-clothes, which it was taking to Lyullph's Broch—for Pole: for

Pole, for his own purposes, had decided to sleep that night in the broch, and for as many nights afterwards as might be necessary.

But again Raby had his answer ready to Pole's threat : and again Raby's answer was—Jack Hay. He rose, hunted through a book of numbers, ran up five steps to an alcove in which was the telephone, shut himself in, and rang up 'Scotland Yard.' When in communication he said :

'Are you Scotland Yard? We are Griffiths, Smith, Astill and Raby. Can we talk with Detective Sub-Inspector Bailey?'

In ten minutes Bailey's voice, once dreadful to Raby as Doomsday thunders, was speaking familiarly across London in the everyday vernacular : and they arranged an interview in an hour's time to have a chat about Jack Hay.

Raby meantime walked about the room. He was the Conveyancing Partner, and many things waited to be done by him : but he did not do them. His own special shorthand-man, an old red-nosed servant, experienced in shallows, miseries and beers, looked in, surprised at not having been summoned ; but Raby sent him away with insolent harshness. Again he felt that horror of betraying the innocent blood of Jack Hay : but now it was less acute. The old existence in remote Cumberland, with its friendships and feelings, was rather like a dream : London life was so real, present, and different. This perhaps was why he had fallen in love with Gracie, as it were afresh—with a new impatience and sort of spring-time *furor* : in London she was somehow like a new person, as he himself was ; and he had too often now to stifle within him the feeling that if another had her, he should certainly kill her, and that other, and then perhaps himself also. Gracie, indeed, had warned him in a serious talk, and warned Pole by letter, that the Mackay bequest would certainly go to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel on her twentieth birthday, July the 9th of that year, as far as she was concerned. But this had thrown neither Raby nor Pole into despair : for now, though forced to see that there must be something real

in her attachment to Jack, yet, as she could hardly marry a fugitive, they could not imagine her throwing away, without pressing motives, the hoard of wealth which she had been brought up to consider her own when the momentous day approached—never to be recalled, if allowed to pass.

As for Jack, apart from his danger to Gracie, Raby now hated him, as men hate those whom they have wronged, and wronged without effect. He waited with impatience, and when Bailey appeared, told him that Jack would be coming to 'Meadowsweet' the next (Friday) evening, going out of his way to explain that his eagerness for the arrest was due to a money-motive, Jack being dangerous to his interest in the Mackay bequest.

Bailey thanked him, and went out hurriedly. Raby then mentioned to one of the firm that he was feeling 'chippy,' and might be absent some days; then took cab to C——'s, bought a beard-disguise, returned to his chambers in Gray's Inn, tried the disguise, consulted an A.B.C., and set off for King's Cross with a coat and rug. At two p.m. he was speeding northward, bound for Cumberland.

By that time a system of police-depôts three hundred miles long were on the look-out for Jack Hay, and at the North-London stations, too, if he should reach them, deputations of welcome would not be wanting.

He, however, was no fool, and, without knowing much of the mind of the police, guessed that his existence was by no means forgotten, and that railway-stations must be dangerous points. Instead, therefore, of coming direct to London, he went to Wales, thence arrived at Southampton, and, instead of at King's Cross or Euston, reached London at Waterloo, near eight p.m. on the Friday.

He spent half-an-hour in gazing at that Maelström of life about him, all myriadfold, heaven-high, wheels, lights, and an exceeding great cry, and men not like Man, and women not at all like Woman, most strange; in the air was an extraordinary murk and heaviness, as it were the smoke of a torment which goeth up for ever and ever: for the whole spectacle seemed to trail in

pain, and nothing but madness and folly was the humour of it, all going in haste, bent upon strange ends, the reflections of the lights across the moist pavements seeming bleared eyes of despair, suffused with tears. A thing in rags, that somehow could talk, said to him: 'Matches, sir?' and he bought them for pity; and another wee thing in rags said: '*Star*, sir?' and he bought it for pity. He passed a bobby, pacing stout and padded-looking in winter frock, and considered how he should throw him, if attacked: but the thing paced stolidly on, without even a glance; and, being canny, Jack thought: 'Why, this may be the very place to hide in.' Then he went down into a subterranean place, where he saw the proclamation: 'Wash and brush up, 2d.'; and there he washed, and thought to shave his thick young beard, but feared; and seeing that it was 8.30, went out hurriedly, leaving his matches and too-earthly *Star* behind.

He was now quite smart (except that long hair draped his temples to the cheek-bones), having bought a black suit at Shrewsbury, with a billycock, and other things, leaving in his pocket nearly £3, on which to begin his London life.

He got into the first cab, and gave the address of 'Meadowsweet.'

Gracie, meantime, was expecting him. Since dinner she had tried gallantly to seem normal, but by 8.30 was in such evident distress, that Miss Ames, still in the flutter caused by the D—— wedding that day, put-on the mantelpiece-clock five minutes, Gracie having gone upstairs for she hardly knew what, and there fallen to her knees by her bedside. She came down again near 8.45, looking better, and presently put her arm about Miss Ames, whispering: 'Oh Missie!' and kissed her; but at once turned away with abrupt indifference, a sigh and a toss of the hand, saying: 'Please go away!—you have put-on the clock——' She then went to the window, but could not stand still a moment, spun round, cast a flying glance at her own reflection, pushed the gasalier higher, lifted and replaced a vase of violets, sat in the rocking-chair with closed eyes, rocking, then rose

and rearranged the fire-irons. Her skin grew to a stern white, expressing the skeleton of the face, and in her eyes was a strained intensity. All at once, as if inspired by some mysterious message, she sat at the piano, and, with a voice in which there was an appalling scream, sang the real passion of those words :

‘ He is coming, my own, my sweet ;
Were it never so airy a tread,
My heart would hear him, and beat,
Were it earth in an earthy bed.’

It was now eight minutes to nine, and she had hardly finished the verse, when his knock was at the door. Jean let him in ; Missie had retired ; Gracie sat still at the piano ; and he came soft, and put his palm on her bowed head, while, one by one, in slow detail, drip, drip, fell her tears audibly upon the keys in the silence.

He was half-way to his knees, that he might put his arm about her and comfort her over-joy, when, with the startled movement of a roe, he was up again on his feet, and she, too : there were two shrill sounds, one a whistle, one a scream—the scream coming from Jean outside in the passage.

Before Jack and Gracie had spoken one word together, there was a rush from somewhere, a crackle of flower-pots, the thud of a skull on the floor, and Jack was on his back under four men, his wrists locked in a pair of handcuffs.

It was described in the next day's news as one of the smartest of captures.

They had entered the grounds behind by one of the two green tradesmen's-doors, and there lurked, leaving a scout without, and they had come into the house from the back. Jack made hardly any resistance, and, as he fell, seven others trooped in. Two had their knees on his chest, and the labour of his throat was loudly heard.

‘ O pity !’ shrieked Gracie once, on her knees ; then her eyes closed, she swayed, and dropped sideways.

He was dragged up, and half in the air, half stalking on his toes, was wrenched toward the front, while the men's nails wilfully bruised the flesh of his arms. He

called back to Miss Ames over his shoulder : ' Look after her . . . ' his bosom in agitation, his mind pretty cool.

Outside a four-wheeler waited. He could have resisted entrance into it, but would not, thinking that she might come-to, and see. He got in, three officers got in with him, and they drove off southward and eastward through a complexity of quiet streets.

He sat in the back, and there was silence but for the humdrum plod-clap, plod-clap, of the horse's hoofs on the asphalte mixed with the drone of the wheels, and the four labouring breaths. But if the officer nearest Jack had attended, he might have heard a slight gnashing, and seen a face purple with effort : for Jack Hay had a sullen stubbornness which made the word ' defeat ' always meaningless to him, and he was straining to break the handcuffs. This was the less difficult because they had been slipped on with his palms *vis-à-vis*, not, as handcuffs should be, with the palms in the same direction ; he had thus considerable prise, and as they were about to round the south corner of Lord's, there was a click, followed by the shout :

' Hold him ! '

Easier said than done, however : for Jack was on his feet. His first act was to toss the steel against the window, which fell in shivers ; a moment afterwards they had him ; but his right hand was outside ; he turned the handle ; the door flew wide at the pressure of the scrimmage within ; and with two of the officers he tumbled outward, biting the dust. The third officer saved himself by a backward effort, then at once leapt with impending truncheon. Jack, much the first on his feet, saw that truncheon, flew to it, dodged quick, seized it, and in three spinning twists had it. He then ran some steps to the horse's head, and, heaving the truncheon in both hands, brought it down upon the left temporal fossa of the large-headed, straight-shouldered hack, just above and behind the eye. As the cabman uttered a shout, the horse dropped ; and as the horse dropped, Jack was gone.

All had been quietly done in less than half a minute, and it was now a foot-race—but a foot-race not unlike

that between hare and tortoise. Jack pelted into St. John's Wood Road eastward, they after him with loud feet, mouths and whistles. The houses awoke, the street by magic awoke, and there was a running crowd, continuously distanced by the chase. Three civilians who came hurrying out of Lisbon Grove might have intercepted the fugitive, but he had the canniness to shout: 'Stop him!' his eagerly-pointed truncheon convincing them that he must be a plain-clothes officer hunting some criminal. A minute later he dashed northward into a number of smaller streets east of Lord's. By now he had well distanced them: and at a moment when no one had yet rounded the near corner, he ran crouching among bush behind a railing; a minute afterwards, a single policeman, new to the hunt, pelted past, shrilling; two women put out their heads above, but did not see Jack, till he ran out again on the way he had come, when they screamed: 'Here he is!'—but the policeman did not hear. Jack ran till he came to a great park, where there was plenty of hiding, and walked about, wiping his brow. The mist was thick and chill, the roads wet, the place deserted, save for rare pairs of lovers, and two or three forlorn women unlike Woman. Moon, star, sky, or air there was none: and this city seemed a world out of all relation with the universe, a dreary Laputa going its own lost way down mysteries of space and time. From ten o'clock till midnight he sat solitary on a bridge-parapet over some water in the midst of dead woodland: and to him sitting there there came a Roar, vague but vast, as it were the voice of an accusation before God of myriads that rest not day nor night, crying: 'Babylon, Babylon.'

XIX

COMRADES YET

AT the hour when he left the park a scene of considerable consequence to him was being enacted on Lyullph's Broch in far-off Lonbydale: and, leaving him, we glance at that.

Raby had spent that day at Ambleside, mostly sleeping, and entered Bedwick by the 10.31 up-train. He passed through the slumbering town, wearing a sable overcoat turned up to the eyes, a disguise, and blackened eyelashes. He then went up Nabside, and turned into the footpath over Thorneyfell Crag, where one night in the bush Jack Hay had found a pipe of Dr. Stanley's; and at just that spot, Raby, too, now entered the bush, and set to search for something—something for which, often and often before, he had searched with sweat and groans through lonesome midnights, in vain: and this night again, for an hour, with curses that were half prayers, and prayers that were curses, he searched in vain. This, however, was not the special object of his journey from London: and, tired of his abject gropings, he sat on a stone in darkness, chin cocked on hand, waiting till he could be certain that everything in Lonbydale slept deep. Here, as in that London park where Jack Hay sat, the night was black and still: only, the Lonbydale night was safe at home in Being, not banned and bricked out from the radiant Presence, and in the moonless vast, not all unmarked by the eye of men, the heavenly crowds stood dressed. When it was near midnight Raby went out, descended the path

to Benthwaite Edge, and turned into the dale by Daleshead pass, till he was opposite the broch.

The place was unutterably lonesome and haunted, and his heart-beats now fluttered as quick as a watch's ticking. He went to the beck, and dipped a handkerchief, casting, as he stooped, a flying glance behind. Then he walked to the broch, and, before entering, lit a candle.

It was a usual thing for odd stores to be deposited in the broch: but hardly ever so many as those sacks of oats now piled at one side. Raby, however, engaged in peering for the invisible, scarcely noticed the visible; and, with a heart shocked at his own daring, up he ran, as if pursued, to the first stage, then to the top, his silk hat cocked back, his left palm held under the candle, and the half-illuminated face over the light looking a mere puffy apparition of care and scare. When he last ran up those steps, he had run up clutching to drag down a leg that fled. And this night his haste was as horrible.

On the top, ever cautious, he puffed out the light. He had no need of it to find that particular piece of tin with the alleged blood-speck: he knew it well. And with the wetted handkerchief he knelt on the untooled stones of the now swept and leafless roof.

He was about to pass the handkerchief under the edge of tin, when he heard a distinct sound behind him, like the stamp of a slipper on the rock, and, kneeling there, he slowly, slowly turned his face, and looked. He saw a thing standing with a smoking-cap: he saw the tassel; the cylinder of the cap—and the tassel: he saw nothing else: and, still kneeling, terror-struck, he suddenly sent out the scream of a cat, beastly to hear.

Then followed a minute's silence—or more. Then a bass voice said:

‘Ey, it isn't the doctor, it isn't the doctor.’

And as Raby sprang to his feet, Pole darted the eye of a dark lantern from under his flowing cloak; but, as if the light had burned him, Raby snatched his left hand away; and Pole saw nothing.

‘Which doctor?’ went Raby: ‘I never—why, Harold, old man, what's this?’

'Raby, Raby,' said Pole, muffled to the lips in silk wraps, 'that can't possibly be you! I never should have known you! What on earth's that?—a false beard?'

'Ha! ha! ha!—yes—a little disguise——'

'Ey, and what's that in your hand? not a wet handkerchief?'

'Yes. What about it, my son?'

'Kneeling with a wet handkerchief *there*, Raby? just where the blood-speck is?'

'Which blood-speck? Look here, what you doing here, Pole?'

'What are you?'

'Free country! Free country, I suppose! You said that there was a speck of blood here, and thinking that it might incriminate my best friend, who is under suspicion of murder, I came to wipe it off, that's all, before any one should see it beside yourself——'

'Ey, I assumed that that was so: you do it for Jack, you do it for Jack. Your disguise proves that. But what fills me with envy is the reasoning by which you fixed the exact spot: I assume that you only deduced it—for the speck is all but microscopic, the night dark——'

'Free country! I didn't reason or fix anything! I was wiping all the sheets of tin, and had just come to this one—— But, look here, how came you here, my son? What you doing here, Harold Pole?'

'I am sleeping here. I wonder you didn't notice my bed behind the bags downstairs——'

'But what you sleeping here for? What's it all got to do with you? You are not God Almighty sitting in the damp among wet clouds! You are not embodied Justice! You are not—— Look here, Pole, Pole, you make me mad, man!'

'Ey, I see that. But why so? Be reasonable, now. I was sleeping here because I was absolutely certain that the murderer of Dr. Stanley would come one midnight—fact is, I had set a little lure that I knew would bring him without fail, without fail: for I wished to be not only morally, but scientifically, sure that he really is

the man I suspect, in order to liberate my mind in its further investigations——'

'Ah, yes, your further little pokings, and prying, and muckings, Pole, Pole!'

Now every moment their natural antipathy of dog and cat, fostered by a thousand spite, deepened into the bitterness of gall. Pole's tones were suave, but, with eyes that darted rancour, he said :

'Ey, but be reasonable, now. I can quite understand your anxiety about Jack, for he's my best friend, too : and I think you might have trusted me to keep dark anything which I may find prejudicial to him. So don't wipe off the blood-speck, don't wipe off the blood-speck—though it is of no importance if you do, for I have already shown it to Calthorpe and Skerrett. And as to my little pokings, and prying, and muckings in this matter, I don't see how you can fairly blame me : for the murdered man's daughter is to be my wife——'

'Oh Lord!' groaned Raby with coarse lips of disgust, 'save her from a detective in bed. No chance there, Pole—no chance—no chance. She wouldn't touch you, boy, with a pitchfork.'

Fury leapt to Pole's eyes, and from his throat the galloping low words :

'But if it must be either you or I—and can never be you? Only I am left!'

'Why can it never be me, my son? Spit it out!'

'Because—— Ey, you know, you know : and I, too—I, too.'

'Know what, my son? Spit it right out!'

'No, I'll swallow it, dainty Raby—for the moment. But you surprise me by pretending still to indulge in any absurd hopes about Dr. Stanley's daughter. Why, I suppose that the grave would give up its dead to prohibit such a thing. And, anyway, she never would have had you, you know, she never would have had you. I know her intimately, and she never would. Your nature is made of catgut and sandpaper ; and hers, I assure you, is pretty fine. Your father was a low man of the——'

'Yours was a Coroner, wasn't he?—Lord G—d!

That's where, I suppose, you got your mucky little love of prying and corpses from——'

'Pardon me, it is *you* who are fond of the corpses——'

'All right, I'll *have* a corpse! Say one word more against my father, and I shoot you dead with that same revolver you are trying to shew me there!'

'What!' shouted Pole, '*another* murder on the top of Lyullph's Broch, you carrion-crow?'

'Yes, *another*!' whispered Raby, with that same confidential secrecy, and stare of horror, with which, one night, he had whispered: 'Too late, doctor! too late!'

From that intensity Pole turned away, siffling a tune through his teeth-edges, having no inclination to murder, or be murdered. He went and sat on the opposite side, calling out:

'You did well not to touch me, Raby. As you say, there's the revolver—a good one, in good hands; and I have left a letter at home, to be opened in case of my death, saying, "Nibbs Raby has killed me——"'

'So *I* was the "murderer" you expected here, then?' called Raby fiercely.

'I thought you might perhaps be looking in—for Jack's sake.'

'No shuffling, be G—d! Let us have it straight——!'

'My dear fellow, there is nothing to let you have straight: though, talking of murders, you perceive, I suppose, that your mere coming here to-night would be quite enough to hang you, only that pretty clear evidence as to how and why is required to hang a man once acquitted. Of course, *I*, as an old friend——'

He interrupted himself to light a cigar, sitting just where Dr. Stanley had sat, in the deepest shadow of the overhanging crags; and to Raby, sitting toward the beck, the light revealed him, as a match that night had revealed the doctor. Pole's smoking-cap made the coincidence ghostly and ominous: by chance, or by design, it, too, was worked in yellow.

'Yes,' said Raby, 'you, as an old friend, acquit one. Thanks for your—discretion. We were created to be old friends, Harold. God did it, someone did it. I have you on the brain and in the blood somehow, and

I dare say you have me. It's pitiful, really; somehow, it's pitiful. You are such a gentle, smiling beast, Harold; and, by G—d, I'm another. I believe I'm the artfullest human being that ever breathed; and you are, too, in your little way. We are related like two thunder-clouds, I formed to destroy you, or you to destroy me, or both: I foresee that it's destiny—I don't believe we can escape each other. But we really should try, though—we should, for pity's sake. When are you coming up to London for good?'

'In three weeks.'

'Why not stay where you are, old man—do, now!—and let me marry Gracie in peace?'

'Come, come, sir, I prefer that you do not refer to Dr. Stanley's daughter!'

'Dr. Stanley may go to the lowest . . . ! All right, come up. But when you come, keep clear of me, Pole! Oh, it's a pitiful thing—for I know quite well that you won't: but I warn you, now—before God, before those stars—I warn you, Harold. Look at me, I am not in any passion, am I? I am doing my duty in a calm, logical frame of mind, honestly trying, like a good, honest man, to avoid what I foresee. Don't meddle with me! don't! don't! Free country! I'm not the right man! don't dare meddle with me! Already you've done to me what I shall never forgive, my son. If you were to spend the rest of your life in grovelling at my feet, and then died to save me from drowning, still I should hate and damn you for ever. So I warn you—and my conscience is clear——'

'Continue,' said Pole: 'don't stop. Your discourses are always so charmingly Christian, Raby: and every word reveals to me so much more than you intend——'

So, for a long time they sat, separated by the tower's breadth, yet unable to part, wrangling, lingering, fascinated, fastened together by hate, each feeling that he had something to say, he knew not what, and waiting to see if he could find it, heaping up, meanwhile, in each other's bosom wrath against the day of wrath. Up came the late moon like a dragon, striking pallor through the universe, eating up a third part of the stars of heaven:

and they saw the dale, and the mass of foliage round Beech How, which lay wistful, tenantless, haunted by the dead past, vanished hands, and the sound of voices that were still. But still they lingered; and not till 2 a.m. did Raby tear himself away, to trudge to a village three miles off, comforted in his tormented mind by the thought that Jack, at any rate, now lay safe in prison. And after him Pole, too, went—and for two weeks lay ill in bed.

His main object in sleeping in the broch had succeeded: namely, to satisfy himself absolutely—or, as he said, ‘scientifically’—that Raby was the murderer. But his second object—to see Raby’s left hand—had failed. The bags which hid his truckle-bed had, indeed, been arranged with peep-holes between: but Raby, on entering, had held his left palm under the candle, careful to leave no grease-marks: and on the tower-top Pole’s dark lantern had proved useless.

XX

LONDON

HAVING dropped the policeman's staff in the stream, and rid his left wrist of the remaining handcuff by help of a many-bladed penknife, Jack strolled southward from the park that night, not knowing whither, seeking food and bed. The town was then in its most animated mood, the theatres just closed, cabs busy as the weaver's shuttle, and everything acting as if this were the most important night in human history, yesterday forgot, to-morrow ignored. Passing through by-streets from the Marylebone to the Tottenham Court Road, he twice saw the words 'good beds,' with some wonder at that epithet 'good,' that adjective. But in all his thoughts now were the police; he surmised that here things must be more cunningly organised than in the far mountains; and the very goodness of the beds might be a thing to shun. 'I don't want any more collishangie with those people,' he thought, 'it will be better if I find some private bed': and he determined to broach his needs to someone in the streets. But to interview a crowd is embarrassing, and he wandered, till, about Gray's Inn Road, he saw 'apartments' in some private-looking windows. But now the houses were in darkness. It was late; the animation had died down; the cabs rolled rarer, slower; the putrid 'pubs,' like midnight graves, had given up their dead, making Night hideous, and were counting up the gains of it in a ghoulish twilight behind railed doors; as he looked about, three girls, hugged together, singing, all-gone, union their only strength, passed by him, their heads thrown right back, appealing to God their Maker; now was the nocturnal hour of the washers of garbage: yonder before

the mews men dashed cabs with water, the intermittent clatter of their dropped buckets rousing the Seven Sleepers, not rousing *these* sleepers; yonder again were the street sewermen with hose and hissing nozzle, washing away the dead day, not its works and record in Heaven; and now separate footsteps, separate coughs and chest-troubles of the belated, sounded distinct, yet echoed, down the dreary vistas; if a cab came, or some obstreperous van bound for the dépôts, it had its moment of rise upon the ear, its period of growth, climax, and long-drawn decline into silence, like the history of nations; and around the barrows of whelks, oysters and potatoes were hardly now three or four night-birds winged with rags, together with one or two products-of-civilisation in shirt-front and dress-coat. Jack, in the gasoline of a 'coffee-stall' at King's Cross, partook with a bobby of hard-boiled eggs and a strange 'coffee': then wandered further.

In the King's Cross Road he met a distinguished, though shabby, young man, walking solitary with unsteady step, to whom he said:

'Excuse me, sir—I have nowhere to sleep: could you put me up?'

The young man, whom we can only call B——, replied with an opening of the hands:

'Continuo auditæ voces, vagitus et ingens,
Infantumque animæ flentes in limine primo. . . .'

'All right,' said Jack, 'you are drunk, like all the rest.'

'By no means,' replied B——, who now had him by a button: 'drunkenness is an abnormal state: therefore a drunkard—and I, I regret to say, am one—is never drunk, save when he wakes sober; nor is it true that all the rest are drunk, for, if you but knew, there are five thousand, and more, who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Will you follow me? I cannot let you leave me: you are gigantic—you are from the country.'

This B—— was a poet in a small, but very select, way, well known in certain so-called 'literary' circles: a fellow who, with his like at that time, kept night-hours, awoke at 7 p.m., drank deep, died young, and

associated as comrades with the commonest people: a man was to them simply a human character, whether king or wastrel: and of the two they preferred the more interesting wastrel. This pose was, in B——'s case, almost no pose, and in every case was really an unconscious effort toward Christianity, the products of whose influence, sometimes grotesque, are yet *always* so pretty, distinguished, and beneficent.

The two walked to a green cabmen's-shelter before the Foundling, B—— breathing to himself the words: 'gigantic person,' at every remark made by Jack.

At that 'shelter' B—— was no stranger (few were the holes of London where he was), and there they drank more indefinite 'coffee,' which, as it had a certain taste of bovril, B—— called 'bovee.' He there discussed with two cabmen a certain Italian waitress, fifteen years old, who had jilted B—— for a foreign barber in Soho, whereupon B——, persuading himself that his heart was broken, had taken worse than ever to drink (really hereditary, like his consumption), and had written to the girl a poem more exquisite, in our opinion, than anything done by Horace. This little girl was to B—— 'Chloe,' just as, almost without affectation, London was 'Bagdad,' and the outcasts of the night 'fair damsels of Bagdad'; nor to any sort of princess did his hat lift so servilely as to 'one of these.'

As they set out eastward again, Jack said in his stolid way: 'What I want is not to have to sleep in any public-house: they are after me for a murder, you see——'

'Simply gigantic,' breathed B——, lost in admiration.

'Oh, well, you know, I am quite——'

'Ah, do not say that you are innocent!' exclaimed B——. 'That, now, is really *banal*. You deserve to be guilty. If you are innocent, you are simply a martyr, and all we modern people are that. Do let me continue to think you Titanic and red-handed. As for a house, I am now taking you to one.'

Jack thought him a queer enough fish, and labelled him 'London,' though Oxford and Paris were really to blame. They went, till before a mean house in Rosoman Street, Clerkenwell, B—— began to call 'Fred!'

‘Fred!’ And soon a head looked from the top floor, calling: ‘That you, Mr. B——? all right, sir, soon be down!’

Fog filled the silent alley of cat-frequented garbage. Three struck. Then appeared a tall man of twenty-three, low-shouldered, narrow-chested, with a big nose traversed by a scar. He wore a peaked cap, cord trousers, and a jacket with a brass number; in his hands a parcel of bread, and canister of tea. He was a Great Northern goods-porter at the *dépôt* in Farringdon Street, and now on his way to work, being on ‘early turn.’

With him B—— had some talk; Jack was introduced; and Fred’s footsteps echoed away to work, while the two friends stumbled upstairs. In the top front-room a low light burned on a shaky table, giving a smell; there was a fire, and an old easy-chair with decadent bottom; in the bed a cat, and a girl of nineteen—Mary, Fred’s wife, an Irish Cockney, black-haired, grey-eyed—who lifted her head, flippantly said ‘Hello,’ and went to sleep again. B—— found a can with beer, for Friday was Fred’s great pay-day, and high times; and the new friends drank, and chatted, Jack smoking Dr. Stanley’s pipe, B—— saying:

‘Now, mark this—a new acquaintance is the delight of Fred, for in such is the prospect of Beer. He who gives 2d. for beer may freely take Fred’s ox, ass, wife, and everything that is Fred’s. He would sell his birth-right for a pot of—say “message.” Not that he has no affection for Mary: but Mary he hath alway with him, beer he hath not alway. He is bound, you see, to deliver up dutifully to her every penny of his Friday’s 17s. 6d., if he would keep a whole face: the rest of the week he curryfavours—cleaning the fire-irons, sighing ostentatiously—that she may tip him 2d. Beer he hath not alway. Therefore, if you would be loved, give: for Fred loveth cheer, and a cheerful giver.’

B—— said that this Fred was really the son of one Lord B——k, to whom Fred’s formal father had been coachman: but that the noble lord had never given aught to his offspring, save his narrow face, paralysed soul, and abandonment to pleasure.

Soon B—— went, and Jack slept well on two chairs

before the fire, till roused in the morning by a row, new to him—the preamble of London's daylong thunder.

Toward eight the lady, who slept in a petticoat, arose, deriding Jack's modesty when he made to go out; with a murmur of shivering jaws, she came bending to the fire, asked who he was, and he told her, but called himself 'Bennett.' She put on the kettle, dressed, went out, came back, swept, and tidied; and he noticed her superb figure, which, though richer and lissomer, reminded him of Gracie's. She fried bacon, and they breakfasted; whereupon she said: 'Now you've got to help me with my beads, if you ain't got nothink to do'—and produced a paper of beads, by stringing a gross of which in a certain order she earned three-farthings—evidently needed, for her bodice was rather ragged; and Jack, like Hercules before Omphale, stringed, too, till at eleven Fred returned, grimy and weary, with 'Well, Mary—well, sir—what'll you have?'

'Which do you like: beer or spirits?' asked Jack.

'I wouldn't give the price of a 'alf-pint for all your spirits,' said Fred—'that's me, sir!' Jack then produced gold, and Fred took the jug, went out, and returned brimming; and with lifted glass he said: 'Well, sir, here's to another thousand a year,' and drank, sucking with a wry face the last bitter-sweet from his moustache.

Soon afterwards Jack went out, and Fred, brushing his uniform-buttons on his button-stick before getting into bed, said meekly:

'You must treat him well, you know, Mary. He's a good sort, Mary.'

'All right,' said Mary over her beads—'shut it!'

The first thing that Jack saw outside was his name on every newspaper-placard: 'Hay's Arrest and Escape,' 'Extraordinary Escape of Hay,' and variations on that tune. His first intention had been to send a telegram to Gracie, telling of his safety: but with this publicity, he thought, she would know: and silence would be safer. He bought a newspaper, and, sitting in the graveyard of a near church, read his own story. It increased upon his back that burden of desolation which the outcast knows; and now, for the first time,

a certain real feeling of guilt for the murder of Dr. Stanley, the guilt which the world attributed to him, began to complicate his misery.

He was about to fold up the paper, when again, in another column, the name 'Hay' caught his eye. But this time it was a glorified Hay figuring like an angel in quite another world. It was Miss Harriet Bertha Hay, who, the previous day, had given her hand to the Marquess of D—— in St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square. Society had been got to wink at the *mésalliance* of one of the first peers of Great Britain with a broker's daughter, and the wedding had been *chic* to the stars. Jack read it all carefully. There was a diamond-and-turquoise present from the Prince of Wales, whose godson the marquess was, and presents from a host of other royal persons. The other presents numbered seven hundred. The bride's dress and going-away costume were described in French enigmas—*point d'Alençon*, ivory *duchesse*, lace *appliqué*—leaving on his mind an impression dark with excess of bright. Mr. Hay had given her away, and must have felt nervous in that Valhalla. Then there was the reception afterwards, attended by royalty. And there was Titty's name; and there Lady Perowne's; and there Missie's.

Three columns from the wedding was 'The Extraordinary Escape of Hay.'

Jack had heard from old Spender at Gangrel's Ha' of Augusta's marriage with Sir Markham Perowne in November; and, dropping the paper, he thought wearily: 'Well, my ladies, you seem to be happier than I am. But that is the way it goes, you see. One must not disbelieve in a just God on that account.'

But what to do? Work in any such place as an office, with people all around, should mean capture: so in a warehouse, factory, dock. From Gracie he was again cut off: every moment he saw her in vision lying insensible: but he could not go to her, nor write her an address, nor make a rendezvous, feeling certain that every letter to her would now be overhauled *en route*; so, too, he could not write to Pole; of Raby's whereabouts he had no idea.

His relation, however, to Mr. Spender was unknown to the police : he could, therefore, write to and through him ; and, through him, receive replies from everyone.

First, he asked his way to the City, and there wandered about, twice entering great buildings crowded with firms, busy with feet ; and in five offices, as chance directed, he asked for work. But the uninterested answers convinced him that this was the wrong way.

Returning near five, he bought a paper, to see if anything new was said, and there saw a drawing purporting to be himself,—like in detail, but unlike in expression. It had a beard ; and at the first barber's he shaved. He then bought pen, ink and paper, and returned to the Thaxters.

'Hello,' said Mary flippantly over her beads, 'there you are, then. This is my sister, Mrs. Brown, and this is Mrs. Ellis.'

Fred was in bed, and Jack entered the room with a sense of suffocation. Near each was beer, for where Kit (Mrs. Brown) was, there was beer also. She was the elder sister, fatter and shorter than Mary, prettier, and always more imposingly dressed, her husband a carter at Maple's, so that whence she got the dress one knows not. She was a virago, and of her Fred stood in mortal fear, and especially of Brown, a big red man, who had had sun-stroke in Egypt, and in his cups would beat everybody, save Kit. Kit was Mary's vice : for Mary, generally sober and good, had a weakness for women's-company, and in a circle of women would forget all things, spend freely, and come home incapable : whereat Fred would throw up the head, with a 'G—d blind me,' and go supperless, breakfastless. Through this weakness for women, Kit would seduce Mary, making her spend, while she herself saved : and more than are marked in the almanac were their unpremeditated high-days and holidays. Into such a circle had Jack been introduced by B——, who saw, or pretended to see, more human significance here than in kings' houses.

Mary rose on Jack's entrance, whispering her friends, '*That's him*—ain't he big and strong?' and aloud : 'I've got a steak for you : you must be hungry, if you ain't had nothink.'

'Thanks,' said Jack, 'I must first write some letters, if you will excuse me.'

So he sat and wrote, first to Mr. Spender, asking him to send on the enclosed letters, then to Gracie, Raby, Pole, without his address, telling them to write through Mr. Spender, who would forward their letters in a false name.

For five days after this he wandered London, from the Tower to Piccadilly, looking about him, learning his way, aggressively scanning every man that seemed to eye him, asking for work in odd quarters, and each night disputing with Mary about the bed, till she at last said angrily: 'All right, take it or leave it altogether—nobody ast you to come 'ere': so that he had to occupy the bed with Fred, till three a.m., she sleeping all night in the chairs.

On the sixth evening extraordinary luck befell him. He had been despondently looking at the river's flood-tide, with its gulls, fat-necked as Mr. Bumble, yet such rowdy swing-about; and at the steamers' funnels, red-and-black and yellow; and the barges; and the lighting up of Babylon the Misty, so vulgar in the detail, so great and melancholy in the whole. He then walked up Northumberland Avenue, and outside the Hotel Victoria sharply met a little man—a mere whisp—in a mighty furred overcoat and cloth cap, just entering: so Jack said on the spur of the moment:

'Can you give me some work to do, sir?'

The whisp of a man, who seemed 'horsey,' looked up, and answered in a hoarse sort of voice:

'Who the devil are *you* ?'

'I call myself John Bennett, sir.'

'You *call* yourself! What can you do?'

'I have an education of a sort, sir: you just try me, and see.'

Whereupon the little man, whom we will call K——, said: 'Come inside'; and Jack followed him into the corridor, and into a narrow room overlooking the street, which was K——'s private office and sitting-room.

There Jack arranged to become K——'s 'secretary' for £2 a week, and the moment he got out, suddenly leapt into a cab, dragged by some resistless power, and started

for 'Meadowsweet,' Maida Vale, where Heaven was, almost without knowing what he did.

But midway his soaring heart had a pang: on the one hand, he must not, must not, see Gracie lie pale on the carpet again; on the other, he felt an absolute lack of power to turn back. Only, he said to himself: 'Oh, I *must* be careful!'

Ten yards, therefore, from 'Meadowsweet' he stopped, and asked the cabman to deliver for him a note scribbled *en route*, 'Meet me by the bridge of the canal'; and while the cabman went, he himself stood by the horse's head, meaning to mount the cab and gallop at the first sign of danger.

But, as he stood peering, something puzzled him: 'Meadowsweet' was in darkness; he could see no window-curtains; and soon the cabman came running with the news that the house was unoccupied.

This was really so: for, the morning after Jack's arrest and escape, a certain Mr. Lewis, the estate-agent to whom 'Meadowsweet' belonged, had called upon his tenant, newspaper in hand, to point out how so regrettable an incident as the harbouring of a suspected murderer must necessarily bring the tenement into disrepute: in fact, he would feel obliged to be released from the lease. Miss Ames, in a flutter, had called Gracie, and Gracie, coming down, had confronted the man, saying: 'We shall do as you desire, sir—at once if we could—but there is, you see, our furniture: perhaps in a week, or two. . . .' 'Oh, as to that,' he said, 'there are warehouses.' 'Then,' said she, 'we shall go to-day.' 'Of course,' he remarked, 'I have no claim for any rent——' 'Nevertheless,' said she, 'you shall be fully paid to date': whereupon that estate-agent had gone away with that sense of defeat which meek compliance inflicts upon the evil man.

Three days later 'Meadowsweet' had been left empty, and Gracie, Missie and Jean gone to a Bloomsbury boarding-house.

Jack Hay was appalled. She was gone so mysteriously—for he could conceive no explanation—and Something ghostly seemed to part her always from him, as

if determined to teach his heart the meaning of desolation, hunger, pity.

He drove back to Holborn in a sort of daze, and thence walked to Rosoman Street, where Mary opened the door to him with the excitement which only a letter produced in her, saying: 'A letter for you! and didn't I know it? I dreamt of horses last night—and it's a sure thing, if I dream of horses, so sure there's a letter.'

A big one, too—from Gangrel's Ha'. And Jack, with hanging underlip, sat and read.

'MY DEAR JACK HAY,' said old Spender, 'I have delayed to write, not, you may guess, from lack of interest, but that I was waiting for a letter for you from your friend, Nibbs Raby, which, however, has not come. With the enclosed from Harold Pole I also enclose the letter sent by you to my care for Miss Stanley. Please understand, my dear Jack, that I refuse to be the agent of any intercourse whatever between yourself and that young lady, whose father was my honoured friend for many years, so long as the present imputation rests on your character; nor do I consider that it is right and proper for you to attempt to approach her in any way at present. I think I see your face reading this reprimand: you don't like that at all, at all, do you? Well, never mind: it is a long lane that has no turning. I beseech Providence oftener than you may suppose for your safety and exculpation, and mentioned you in the family devotions on Sunday morning last. Meggie, Ailie and Morlan send their best wishes, and we all rejoiced together at a certain gallant escape. The sad spectacle of a respectable old lawyer rejoicing at the defeat of the Law may somewhat excite your risible faculties—and it *is* a killing thing—but such is the case.

'I take the liberty to enclose £5, wishing you every good thing, and hoping that, if the emergency arise, you will not fail to use in every way

Your true friend,

'J. H. SPENDER.

'P.S. . . . I presume that you know of the marriage of your sister, Miss Harriet Hay, now my lady Marchioness of D——. In the same papers that recorded her marriage was an account of your late escape. It is occurrences like that in this world that make men laugh themselves ill, and shorten useful lives.'

So Mr. Spender. Harold Pole wrote :

'MY DEAR JACKIE :—I am very vexed with you. I am sure you have brains, but you don't seem to use them at all. Mr. Spender writes me that you have sent through him a letter to Nibbs Raby, and I assume that you haven't mentioned your address therein: *if* you have, then fly instantly: for Raby will certainly have you arrested. Do you start? Silly kid! Is it possible that you have not yet some faint suspicion that the two last police-ambushes for you were directly due to information given by Raby? It *is* so! and if you open your fat eyes, and think for two seconds, you will see how and why it must be so. Don't you understand Raby's motive? Either you or he murdered Dr. Stanley, you see: a thousand million people, all potential murderers, inhabit the earth, but of all those it was either you or he: and if *you* are worsted, then Raby sees that all my efforts to get him hanged by the neck, till he is dead and black, may fail. Do you see now? Or are you still "loyal"? If you are, it is a "loyalty" that might make the angels, and even the very jackasses, weep.

'Gracie, by-the-way, has had to change her address through the escapades of a certain person—at least, I divine that reason; and, of course, if you don't know her new address, it is useless to ask *me*: we are no longer children: yesterday was my twenty-third birthday.

'Therefore, I am sending a little birthday-present of £10 for present uses. I am deucedly hard up for the moment, owing to the partnership-purchase, the flat, furniture, and other Londonward preparations. I should be up in ten days, and hope then to see that rolling old carcass, which, you know, I really—love.

'Meantime, take at once the enclosed letter to its addressee, and he will fix you properly up. He is the "M——" of whom you have often heard me speak, a good old friend of mine since our Merchant-Taylor school-days together, and the most talented disguiser, I believe, in Europe.

'Yours for ever and a day,
'HAROLD.'

Jack Hay was deeply wounded by this letter, in so far as it related to Raby. And with eyes of dismay and astonishment, he muttered :

'Well, of all the dishonourable letters . . . !'

He crumpled up and threw it on the fire ; then, amid cries of horror from Fred and Mary, threw the £10-note after it ; and after that the letter addressed to 'M——.'

XXI

JACK'S DECLINE

THE £5 from Mr. Spender, having been handed by Jack to Mary, went in buying furniture for a sitting and a bed-room (cheap furniture characterising the haunts of Mary), and with these they 'flitted' to a three-room suite at the top of a vast workman's-dwelling near Cold-bath Square. In fact, the Browns and Thaxters, confirmed nomads, hardly ever for six months occupied the same house, the flitting-days being days of free cheer and beer.

Hence it was that when Pole came to London, in spite of an infinity of pains, he could by no means discover Jack.

Every morning at 10 Jack went to the Hotel Victoria to be 'secretary' to K—, returning to the 'buildings' between five and ten p.m.: and odd enough was his life at both ends, though both ends he took with his accustomed phlegm and negativeness. Weekly he gave his £2 into the hand of Mary, just as Fred did, and if he wanted anything afterwards, begged her for it: and now was Mary rich to the skies, and become the envy and secret rage of restless-minded Kit.

As for K—, he owned and 'ran' a paper called *The Gadfly*, mainly financial, but containing also chats and ribaldries about business-people and men-about-town, with race-meeting articles dictated by K— himself, slatings and eulogies of enterprises, and so on. All the week K— would absolutely ignore the paper, till Thursday, the press-day, when there would be a great rush: for though some mysterious hanger-on in the City

(who sent K—— hiding whenever he came to be paid), did some of the writing, the rest Jack did. The very first day that Jack went, K—— put a lot of prospectuses before him, saying: 'Just do those.' 'Do what to them?' asked Jack. 'Analyse them, and advise investors,' said K——. So Jack set to work to read, but, making neither head nor tail of them, in the afternoon when K—— looked in, said so. 'All right, don't make a fuss,' said K——: 'advise investment in the first you pick up, slate the second, and so on. Look into some back numbers, and you'll see how.' But Jack would not adopt this method, and soon, by breaking his brain, got into the way of forming some sort of judgment; and twenty little articles he wrote a week, all beginning with the same old phrase: 'This company is formed in order to . . .'

K—— was the coolest little person perhaps that ever lived. Nothing seemed of importance to him, and he attained Nirvana. He was a clean-shaven man of forty, with black hair, grey eyes, a sharp elfish face, and inward-slanting upper-lip, looking like a jockey. Late on Thursday night a note might come from the printers saying that there was hardly half enough 'copy' in hand, or that the paper could not be printed this time until half the last account had been paid: but K—— was never ruffled; neither was Jack: so that they went very well together. K——, if without copy, would calmly put in whole pages of some other paper; if without a sovereign, he yet never failed to find money, or anything else, that the Sphinx wanted: and to that extent was really great. He would somehow contrive, borrowing perhaps, or begging, from a certain Lady M——, or her sister, Mrs. P——, indefinite frequenters of the hotel, ghastly, faded, painted people, given up to horse-racing, yet rich, Lady M—— being probably the *bonne amie* of K——. Half of Jack's day was spent in opening to the hundred knocks at that dim room—most of them being betting and other duns. 'Not in,' was the usual answer. 'What did you say to him?' K—— asked once, in reference to a dunner from Prince's. 'I said "Not in,"' replied Jack. 'What did he say then?' asked

K——. 'He said,' replied Jack, 'that he could see by my face that you are': whereat K—— threw up a mild eyebrow of acquiescence. The other visitors consisted of every sort of City and West-End character, for K——, by some magnetism, drew all men unto him, especially company-promoters, who tipped him liberally for drawing up their prospectuses, K—— having some singular talent that way; and often the gay babel there drove Jack out to write in the smoking-room.

Sometimes he could not but smile a sad smile, pencilling his articles. One feature of *The Gadfly* was a series called 'Jolly Good Fellows'—biographies with a portrait—and these he 'did,' having first to hunt for an old biography in little back-street rooms of Fleet Street, dusty queer places piled with paper rags, and by hook or crook procure a portrait somewhere, evading copyrights. Then, in the tone of an old chum, he would write of names never before heard—lord mayors, lawyers, ship-owners: and once, when K—— and Lady M—— were spending the week at Monte Carlo, Jack in a memorable issue compared the owner of *Tit-Bits* with Napoleon. At other times, K——, from his stores of personal knowledge, would dictate the lives of these great in the weirdest English: and good then it was to see him, his pocketed hands throwing wide his frock-coat, while, smiling at memories, he paced to and fro with a sideward outpush of alternate hips, and a stalk that was half a dance.

This K—— was a most good-natured person. Messenger-boys and everyone delighted to come to him, he tipped so extravagantly. Though more a borrower than a lender, he was a lender also, and would evade an intending borrower by hiding in his bedroom above for hours, rather than say no. Never were perfect *sang-froid* and genuine cowardice so blended. If one came whispering: 'I say, old chap, lend me £3 till to-night,' K——, if poor, would reply: 'Tell me where to get a £10-note before lunch, and you shall have five.' It was only through a sort of kindness to *The Gadfly* that he kept it going, for he lost a good sum per week. And this kindness shewed itself one Monday

morning, when Jack, just about to start for the hotel, received this note by messenger-boy :

‘ A detective sort of man has been poking about after you here : so it’s rumoured. Better fight shy, if you’ve done anything. You will know.

‘ K——.’

This blow fell upon Jack with terrible force. In the mental toil of writing *The Gadfly*, so novel to him, he had found the possibility of forgetting for whole hours that Gracie was in the same city as he, and he could not see her. (In fact, she was quite near him at least twice a week in Tenterden Street, though of its existence, or even of the Academy’s, he had no suspicion.) Now he had time to reflect, and after staring at the threadbare carpet a whole day, that night, and for a week after, he outdrank Fred, Mary, Kit and all, and there was sudden holiday and high times, Fred refraining from work three days, and then getting the Company-doctor’s certificate of lumbago, to explain his absence. But on the sixth (Saturday) night of gala there was outbreak and bloodshed, Kit having unaccountably attacked Jack. She hated him for the prosperity which he had brought to Mary, and for a false suspicion that she had as to their relations, often threatening Fred to bring *her* Fred (Brown) upon him, if he did not turn the stranger out—a fearful menace : and now to hate adding contempt for Jack’s evident loss of work, she suddenly attacked him in a roomful of drinking people, including B——, the poet, Saturdays being her days of violence. He protected himself, though drunk, for some time, all the room a hullabaloo of tumbling furniture and shouting voices, Mary defending him like a tigress ; but Kit, with a hair-pin from her hair, lacerated all his face, and when, in addition, she put out her head, and began to shriek : ‘ Police ! Murder ! ’ Jack ran down the multiple flights of stairs, and out, his face washed in blood, gall in his heart, and adulterated whisky in his head.

Some days later he received a summons for assault :

for Kit was a frequenter of the police-court, knew her way both as plaintiff and defendant, and never by any chance failed to win the day. Mary, however, found means to induce her not to appear, and the matter dropped.

He had just been thinking of buying new clothes, when the weekly fund dried up, and now, broken in boots and everything, looked very seamy. Mary was eager to 'keep' him for ever, and let Fred go short of all, and it was evident to everyone, except to Jack himself, that she was bitten by some infatuation. But Jack, now without a penny, was on the very point of making the streets his home, when, wandering about Wapping one day, he met a small, bearded man in a guernsey lounging at the waterside (a shrimping-boat master), who, when Jack asked about the prospects of river-work, said:

'Looking for a job, then? Know anything o' frying?'

'Frying what?' asked Jack.

'O Crumps—never e'en heerd tell o' it! I was lookin' fer a 'and fer the season, as the spawnin's early this year, and seeing as Ned, that's our watchman, was in a bit o' trouble——'

'If it's fry-fishing you mean,' said Jack, 'I'm a dab at every sort of fishing, being from the northern lakes—at least—well, yes—from the lakes. Do have me, now.'

'Well, it ain't 'xactly fer me, it's fer Mr. Hales—that's the boatman: but p'raps if you are about 'ere to-morrow——'

The next day he was engaged, and in a week was a down-the-river waterman, catching in tiny-meshed stownets the first delicate whitebait-shoals of Spring.

Here he seemed to get his first breath of air for months: for to him London was a nightmare, a prison, where one only respired by an impatient effort of the chest; but the flat-shored reaches of the water far down below the Pool, where one might lie under the evident stars, was like being at home in Nature again. The boats lay anchored over the nets, and during all the five hours of floodtide, at noon,

at midnight, they caught and measured, caught and measured. Up from the deep came the proud, non-chalant ships, and incredible hosts of other things as well—all those little shrimps, sticklebacks, gobies, caught with the myriad whitebait in the nets—to visit London, like country-people. For there *was* the country, after all—China, the oceans, the world—lying great and lonely beyond, and London was not all. He wished to goodness that he was far from it—a wish soon enough to be fulfilled. However, each time he went on shore, he did not fail to return to it and the Thaxters, taking tram to Aldgate and train to Farringdon Street: for, ever a born brother, his affectionate nature struck root and attached itself wherever it could, even in environments the most sterile and ugly.

He had quite learned the new arts—closing, raising the nets, and how to fix them by ropes and balks, with watchman's-work, fish-measuring, etc.—when, walking riverward down a dark Billingsgate alley one midnight, he saw Shaw, his skipper, talking to a man. They were some distance down, but the other man happening to turn, the light of a corner-lantern fell upon his face. Jack saw only a head and shoulders: for five steps broke the alley into a higher and a lower street: but he recognised the head: it was Bailey, the detective: and turning about, he ran—soft at first, then pelting, a full mile, bidding then and there farewell to flood-tides, whitebait, and the river Thames for ever.

Again he fell upon evil days and evil ways, and Fred took holiday, saying ten times in a night: 'Well, 'ere's to another thousand a year,' anon looking alternately at his palm and his nails, yawning tentatively, drunk. But if work was hard as gold to find, and a man, having found it, was hunted like a beast, how, then, should he live? All the money being gone, Jack, in spite of the prayers, the tears, of Mary, would eat nothing; nor would he write to Mr. Spender, nor to Pole. He had brains, and he tortured them: but, like a dry udder, they yielded nothing. Thoughts of the docks, of becoming a porter like Fred, could not be entertained. Taken alive he

would not be: better starve to death. Only in the streets, where the callous crowd rolled like the River of Time, did there seem to be the least safety for him. The occupations of the street were paper-selling, toy-selling, match-selling: and to these he turned his mind. Other resource he had none.

He first took his stand in this public service one Thursday evening in St. Martin's, a newspaper placard pinned to his left sleeve. He remembered the queer little fellow in rags who had said, 'Star, sir?' that night of his coming to London: and now, he too, an old Londoner, said 'Star, sir?' So do things move forward, and imperceptibly evolve. He, too, was pretty ragged, having on an old cap and plaid scarf of Fred's—scanty covering against the winds that dashed the streets with gusts of sleet, his frozen fingers hardly able to change his customers' sixpences.

Those customers, as he soon found, often did a curious thing: they bought a ha'penny paper, but paid a penny for it, refusing to take their just change: really the conduct of people in some eccentric Laputa if one considers it, but a Laputa so charming, as sometimes to moisten his eyes. All that whirl about Charing Cross—gas and electricity—darting luggage and feet of a host tramping for barracks beyond land's-end—with pot-pourri of rags, shop-windows, vice hotels, and the sounding Loom—what could be more mechanical, centric and hidebound? yet through and through it worked the loveliest miracle—a wayward Spirit pushed—and for a ha'pennyworth they paid a penny. One day, in taking out change, Jack found a sovereign—put into his pocket by Mary, to whom his father (a waterworks stoker at Kew) had sent it, this being her birthday-period (date uncertain). Jack returned it that night, but she so irritably insisted, that he had to take half, and with it went to one of those wig-and-mask shops which he had noticed about Drury Lane, and came out 'made-up,' his perfectly straight nose transformed into a Roman one, his lips twisted yet without a hint of artificiality: and that night Mary did not recognise him.

One palpitating evening, he saw Gracie. He had gone out about 4.30, and after standing with a yelling mob of newspaper-boys in the distributing-room, had fled shouting with his pile down the Strand. But at the 'lighting-up' hour, when the West-End was just thinking to dine, a man whom he knew—a seller of National Gallery catalogues—asked him to drink, and they went to the 'Marquis of Lorne,' a sequestered 'pub,' with one face looking upon St. Martin's Lane, and one upon Hop Gardens under an arch—a dangerous place, the special haunt of the London detective, though Jack frequently went there without the least quickening of pulse. There they drank, and afterwards, instead of returning to Charing Cross, he went westward with his companion. As they turned into Waterloo Place, someone made the large request: 'Give me the Sun,' and Jack was about to hand it, when a coroneted carriage, drawn by spirited horses, swept northward on the other (left) side; it contained two ladies, and he, across the intervening vehicles, caught sight of the face of one: it was Gracie: and with the shout of 'Stop!' he flew. But he had to run diagonally, dodging the traffic; the street there is wide; and the two horses were at full trot. He had, however, good legs, and persisted, though the hour was the most unfavourable possible, for the pavement was busy with people, the street with carriages, and London, conscious of the feeding-time, growled like many lions. Up the hill of lower Regent Street he followed, jostling, dodging, boring, intolerant of obstacles, and now he lost the carriage, and now, spying it again, he waved the newspapers, with the shout: 'Hi! Stop!' The injured crowd turned to watch what seemed a maniac shouting at space; but the carriage rolled stolidly on; and when he saw her leaving him, and still leaving him, he groaned once with reproach: 'Oh, Gracie, stop!' She disappeared into Piccadilly, but still he fought and dodged his way, running, to the Circus; here a policeman made a catch at him, seeing him knock over two ladies and a basket of wine-bottles; but he evaded; and now, to his joy, again saw her, the carriage standing

still in a block. He darted, shouting: 'Gracie, it's me!' And now she did lean out sideways and look behind, some instinct in her perhaps waking to what her ears did not note in the general din. He could see her distinctly—she had on a round cap of white fur with black tufts, and an ermine fur round the throat—and she saw him, too, her eyes resting one moment upon a big newspaper-man under a lamp, who wildly made his way toward her, shouting. But that a newspaper-man should run and shout was not odd; though, if he had not been disguised, that momentary glance might have made her heart leap. He, for his part, quite forgot that he was disguised, and, seeing her look at him, had a glad throb of certainty. But her glance passed from him without interest; and a moment afterwards the coachman stirred the reins, and she was away, as if flying him. 'Why, of all the God-forsaken things!' he thought with agony: 'is there nothing anywhere to tell her?' and even in his ecstasy of haste, he prayed: 'God! tell her!' But now she more than ever distanced him, this street being thronged. However, no obstruction could turn aside his intent and ferreting gaze from the now remote carriage, and through masses of traffic he discerned it turn northward into Dover Street. To Dover Street, therefore, he ran, and, with a moment of joy, saw that it was comparatively empty. But in half-a-minute came despair: for carriage and occupants had vanished.

He leant on a wall, panting, and covered his face in the papers.

She was in that house with the porch and four double-pillars, six yards from him. It was a ladies'-club. There they had alighted, and sent the carriage home.

For two days he lay locked in his room, neither eating, nor going out.

To go out, however, was necessary: for despair snatches no fish-and-'taters, and the stomach (among mortals) is as real and loving as the heart: nay, there be stomachs without hearts, but never a heart without his respective stomach. Jack, therefore, resumed the paltry

round of his life, earning enough, by adding half-farthing to half-farthing, to buy himself stewed eels, 'faggots,' and pea-soup—hearty diet, if it were but served in Paris: for London, by happy Providence, is the poor savage's town, else many a savage would die.

Some nights after that night of Gracie, the news which he had to cry in the streets, and carry on his placard, was this:

'Cockermouth Election: Result'; and looking, he saw that Mr. Hay had been returned 'in the Liberal interest' by a small majority over his Conservative opponent.

Another night he saw a short par headed: 'Where is Jack Hay?' It consisted of a jibe at police-incapacity, with a rumour that a man answering to his description had been seen on a shrimping-boat in the Thames-estuary.

Then for some weeks nothing broke his wretched monotony. Only, there was a certain change in the manner of Fred, who loved no poor man; he did dearly love his eyes, however, and dared show no incivility to Jack, except by morose silences: for here Mary was queen, an Irishwoman's house being her castle. The thing that Fred feared above all was a fight, if it was with a child. 'Worse luck,' he always said, 'I never could use me bloomin' dooks'—really a pathetic thing, for those so harmless dooks were as huge as one can imagine, making one doubt if he could really be the son of Lord B——k. Occasionally Jack saw B——, the poet, who wanted to befriend him; but poverty had brought him a new sensitiveness with regard to money: and now he would accept nothing—a condition of mind which kept him from writing to his good friend, Mr. Spender. On Sundays he sold no papers, and would then, occasionally, in Fred's Sunday things, go down with Mary to Kew, no railway-fare being necessary, since Mary and Kit were winked-at personalities on 'the Metropolitan,' whence Fred, once a ticket-collector, had been dismissed for a Christmas orgy. The object of these voyages was to see the two 'old men,' Mary's father and Fred's, the latter being in the Teddington workhouse, whither in the strange, eventful whirligig he had come, after having been a coachman, and a small

publican. And once, going down, alone in their compartment, Mary rested her hand upon Jack's, and after a time, looking out of window, made the remark :

'Well, of all the cold men! . . . Don't you love me one little bit, then?'

'Who's cold?' said Jack. 'Me? Ah, then, you don't at all see into me, I see—I am too much the other way, if anything. But you know very well that I love you with all my heart, and Fred, too.'

'All right, you may keep—Oh, that's rich—Fred, too! Just like you!'—she laughed rather bitterly.

'Well, where does the fun come in?' said Jack.

'Oh, never mind! I wants no truck with the likes o' you. There's none so blind, I s'pose, as them that will not see. But—you're a dear little fellah all the same!'—and she loudly bussed his cheek.

Two nights after this Jack was in a crowd attracted by a quaintly-worded illumination hung at the façade of the Covent Garden Opera-house: 'Next Ball This Night'; the people stood at the north opening of the open porch, undeterred by drizzle from lingering to catch fantastic glimpses of chalked face, Spanish mantilla, or Turkish *feredjé*; once before Jack had made a good thing out of a dress-ball, not only by selling his wares, but by seizing his chance to open carriage-doors in busy moments of the theatre's three liverymen, and of the sponging bobby who hung about between the two entrance-doors; he had therefore come again this night in the high hope of gaining enough to visit a second-hand shop in Leather Lane, which he daily passed: for not without ingenuity were his clothes now coaxed to cohere, one of his braces being a string, while a string tied together his left sole and uppers. The ball had already brought him the necessary half-crown to buy a certain steel-tipped pair of boots which he had marked, when, near midnight, four carriages swept almost in single file southward toward the porch. Having lately missed two chances, this time he ran eagerly, jostling another like himself, succeeded in grasping one handle and ran with the horses, first spattering in the street, then, under six electric globes, along the narrow pavement

between the porch-front and the entrance-façade. The carriage was a coupé brougham, containing two ladies and a man, on its door a four-pearled marquess-coronet; and before ever the stiff, mackintoshed footman could stir at the stoppage, Jack had the door open, and stood deferential, cap in hand.

But now a pang took his heart: for a voice, related to every fibre of his body, soul and being, said: 'Whereabouts is our box, Charlie?' And another voice which he knew answered: 'I have no idea'; and a third, his own mother's, said: 'Pity Gussie wouldn't come: they're always so jolly'; and the first replied: 'Wait till you see a bal d'Opéra on mardi gras, mama!'

By this time the man was out, handing out the ladies, and they stepped down without observing the hairy wretch who still clung to the carriage-door. Jack was disguised; Mrs. Hay all smiles and anticipation; Harriet concerned with her train; but the man (who was Lord D——), halting half-turned to address the coachman, put a shilling into Jack's hand.

Everything seemed to reel about Jack Hay; he was hardly conscious, save of a wild heart: and when they were gone, it was like a vision that he had seen. They resembled big fairies in their hoods and slippers, so light they stepped, so light they looked, or nimble pierrots, or truant brides in some Japanese mood, out for nocturnal frolics. Yet they were no vision, but Cockney fact, solid as asphalt: they were his mother, and his sister, Harrie.

The cry 'Titty!' had almost leapt his lips, but was choked back by the terror that they might give him straightway into custody. . . . For the truant brides, though freakish, were cold and cruel, too, like moon-maidens and mermaids, and had claws, like harpies: for he had felt them. . . .

On the whole, his sensations were very stunned: but that was his main impression—an impression of truant brides, butterfly beings—something of that sort—flighty and cruel, yet themselves under a doom, all bewitched, deluded, like heady creatures dancing toward a precipice, fulfilling some ancient curse,—perhaps

this one: 'In the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be heady, high-minded, boasters, proud, without natural affection, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God——' so that, in a dim way, he was as much shocked at their fate as at his own.

Only the moving of the carriage roused and brought him to himself: and at once back to his face, his eyes, surged the blood; the marquess's shilling went spinning high down Bow Street, and with a face raspberry-red he sent forth his bleat trade-cry in irony and rage:

'All the winners!'

It is to be remarked, however, that all the winners are not all the seeming winners: wherein lies a difference 'twixt horse and man. And if the first be really, *all the time*, last, and the last first (by billions of trillions of miles), have we not here, gentle reader, a topsy-turvy state of things, which, to think on, might make a Mr. Spender laugh himself ill, or even give up weakly and die of fun? For therein lies the weird of the world.

Beware, however, of spiritual pride—that 'last infirmity'—O Christian reader, prince incognito, lamb of God: and finger not much in secret glee the tissue of your fragrant vesture, lest thumb or forefinger dim its blinding white.

XXII

THE MARCHIONESS

GRACIE having remained two weeks without a house, Raby was charged to assist their search, and also to receive from the district-office any letters sent to 'Meadowsweet' for them. But Pole, on coming, at once recommended a flat as more suitable, persuaded them, and in three days had procured a Maida Vale first-floor in a street made entirely of two warrens of flats. The ground-floor under theirs he secretly took himself, though he and his sister already had a flat in Westminster; and in it he at once caused the telephone to be installed, and furnished one room.

Raby had said: 'Don't meddle with me! Don't! Don't!' But Pole did not, apparently, mean to take that advice.

The papering and electric fittings finished, the ladies moved in in the beginning of February. Two evenings later Raby called; it was Friday; Gracie was out, singing at a 'Green Park' evening; and Raby, sitting with Missie, absently drew off his gloves.

Miss Ames, we must say in passing, was at this time in high spirits; her gentle heart, indeed, bled for Gracie; yet she could hardly hide her present conviction, that earth, after all, was the best of the planets.

First of all, she had made the plunge, and committed her whole fortune to the captainship of Raby: Raby had reinvested it: and the result was that Miss Aimes was now drawing dividends at the rate, not of £100, but of £135. This was delicious, and Raby stood high in her graces; she had indeed always thought that a boy with

such a face *must* be worth his weight in gold. But Miss Ames had a second cause of smiles and dimples—an incredible thing—she was now engaged! She had been engaged before, and been jilted: but this time not earth nor heaven was so valid. She wore the ring; she had introduced the rather dilapidated-looking man; and Gracie had fixed him musingly with her underlook, inwardly astounded at this levity of Miss Ames, puzzled at the man's motive, he having first met Missie with a mutual friend at a St. James's Hall Thursday-afternoon, and two weeks later 'proposed.' Anyway, this had been to Missie new-birth and elixir vitæ, and the qualities of 'Captain Dowson' were her constant chant—*arma virumque*. Sometimes she would just cross hands on her lap, look at one, and express everything by a silent, happy smile.

'Ah,' she said to Raby, 'I am well enough. But that poor child! I am afraid she must break down—with all the study and the worry. Why she should study I don't know: singers are not supposed to know anything about music—at least they never do. But here is she at the deepest intricacies of triple counterpoint, canon, fugue, and I don't know what—besides German, Italian, and——'

'You shouldn't let her!' cried Raby. 'She's only a kid, after all.'

'Yes, a kid in her absence, Master Nibbs, but a kid-eating sphinx when she is present to hear remarks. But she really *will* break down, if this continues. Have you noticed her eyes? And she never speaks to anyone now, unless addressed. She has some presentiment—Isn't it tiresome about this Jack Hay! Why can't he write her a line?'

'Probably doesn't know her address,' said Raby.

'But he could write to "Meadowsweet," and the letter would be sent on to you.'

'Ah! perhaps,' said Raby.

Jack *had* written to 'Meadowsweet,' twice lately—outpourings of his heart—and walked to Bermondsey to post them: but Raby had opened, read, and burned them both.

‘Captain Dowson, however,’ began Missie, ‘is giving his attention to discovering Jack——’

She was interrupted by a postman’s rap, and heard him say to Jean at the door: ‘Miss Ames—can I see her?’

‘Ey, coom in,’ said Jean.

He came to the near drawing-room door, saying: ‘2d. to pay, mum,’ and held out an unpaid letter, stamped with a ‘2,’ which, by the way, no Government-office had ever stamped. At the same time his eyes sought Raby’s left hand.

But Raby’s hand happened to be lying nearly palm-upward on his chair-handle, and the stout postman, who was of the same height as Pole exactly, could detect nothing. Moreover, Raby, who had a wary eye, saw the tail of Rude, the doctor’s old deerhound, strike friendly on the hearth-rug; and that lowered his left eyelash piercingly, and kept his hand just where it was.

When the postman was gone, Miss Ames exclaimed: ‘Why, the insolence! it is only a trade-circular’; Raby then asked for the envelope, and saw that there was no—postmark.

He went hastily away. The postman had vanished; but as he turned the corner into Maida Vale, a tall, fashionable, pretty girl deliberately smiled into his face. He did not notice that she was just of Pole’s height: but being in no mood for gallantry, with pocketed hand walked on.

Three mornings previously he had happened to leave his bath-room door unfastened, and while he lay naked, some man had dashed in, cast a glance towards his submerged hands, and then backed out, alleging a mistake.

Another day Gladys Pole had called while he was at tea; he had sent her a message to await him in the drawing-room: but she had suddenly and softly come in where he was eating: and he had only time to bury his hand under the table, and say: ‘Ah, Gladys—I had just finished.’

And that night of the postman-trick he lay on a couch before his fire, still wearing his forgotten top-hat

and boots, cigar-smoke trickling thick from his lips, thinking :

' Ain't I good and patient? To be hunted, and trapped, and watched, and invaded, and waylaid, in this way? My own, own hand! Ain't I a little gentle, sucking lamb? There was that man who came into my office on Tuesday—I'm sure he was some agent of Pole's, p'raps Pole himself; and there was that cabman the other night, who tried to look, when I paid him—the whole earth seems thronged with the beast! How am I to know who's who? What am I to do? How the devil did he find out to-night that I was at Gracie's? How could he, *could* he, find out? Is every step that I take watched by this universal spirit? My God, if I don't kill him, then do, do, my God, let me perish, Lord, and create a deeper, wilder hell to send me to! My own hand!—my own old left hand that my mother made for me, and gave me as a birthday present!—be G—d! But he shan't see it! The day he sees it, may white leprosy strike me—Lord hear me!—and may the children in the streets point at me, crying: "There goes the black-hearted murderer of a poor—unsuspecting—old—man!" I'll *sleep* in gloves, I'll live, I'll dine, I'll bathe in gloves——'

He stopped with a violent start: for there in the gloomy night outside the window, thirty feet from the ground, hanging in air, he caught sight of a face that steadily watched him: the face of a ghost—the very face of Dr. Stanley.

What had made him glance that way was a certain intentional rattling of the window; and had his thoughts not been at that moment intent upon the concealment of his hand, he would certainly have thrown it up, and perhaps betrayed himself. As it was, he did cry out at sight of that pallor-painted visage, but at the same time his hand concealed itself—an action which habit had now made second nature. The next moment he flew to the window, which opened upon Gray's Inn Square, to fling back ladder and climber to destruction: but that climber was nimble, knew his way, and had already slipped down a rope hanging from the highest

rung, before Raby, at the third attempt, could succeed in tossing the ladder-head away from the sill.

That night he slept with his left hand in a glove.

So far, all Pole's attempts had only resulted in making him more careful. But this was precisely Pole's object—to *make* him careful, morbidly anxious, to convince him that there was no safety, no peace, no truce, for him : and when Raby's fever of carefulness had been forced to the pitch of hyperpyrexia, then Pole knew precisely what Raby would do to escape his anxieties : and then would come Pole's chance.

Through March and April Raby bore this increasing persecution. It seemed to him that Pole must have a hundred agents to infest him : but he bore it, thinking ever : 'Ain't I a patient little lamb? ain't I a meek, early Christian?' The thought occurred to him that Pole was trying to push him toward some violence before that momentous day, the 9th of July, when Gracie would be twenty—perilously near now : and he contained himself, and suffered—acutely, too : for he had a feeling that, his hand once seen, that would not fail to furnish to Pole the missing clue to the means of Dr. Stanley's murder. And Pole, certain of the same thing, did not relax. With Raby's every visit to Gracie, for instance, Pole turned up like a law of nature, either disguised, or undisguised : and Raby would tear at his short hair in agonies of puzzlement as to how Pole could discover, each time, without fail : the simple means, of course, being the telephone in the rooms under Gracie's, where Pole kept an agent.

'Ey, but Raby,' said Pole once, in the presence of Gracie : 'do you always wear a glove on that vanished hand of yours? I have noticed——'

'Yes, always,' answered Raby : 'it's for gout—the doctor's orders.'

'How funny!' said Gladys Pole.

'*Very* funny, Gladys,' said Raby : 'but this happens to be a free country, you see ; and I thought you knew by now that I don't permit even my dearest friends to make reflections on my habits.'

Missie regarded him with admiration, saying :

'Your rudeness would make you a social pariah, if you were not nice to look at, Nibbs. I pity your wife, when she has grown tired of your eyes.'

'Pity her when I have grown tired of hers, Missie : but that will never be——' and he looked at Gracie, whose eyes, however, were wearily closed : and she heard nothing of what was said there.

But a minute afterwards she was up and excited : for there was a knock, and who should walk in, all chubby and smiling in evening-dress and button-hole, but—Mr. Spender.

'Oh ! I am glad ! how do you do—dear, kind father !' cried Gracie like a worshipper. 'But—why—are you here ?'

She regarded him with rather wild eyes of expectancy, hope and terror : and he thought it best to whisper at once : '*No news*,' adding aloud : 'I am just up for a couple of weeks—mere ingrained frivolity, the nomad instinct derived from monkey-ancestors—an old retired lawyer like me—respected by everybody—it's too bad——' and he was gripped with laughter. He sat, and they talked, Gracie sticking silently close, undergazing at him with still eyes of gratitude, as at Jack's only friend. Missie, meantime, after waiting till her chance came, said : 'if you go down so soon, Mr. Spender, you will have to come back to a little—hymeneal function !'

'Whose hymeneal function ?'

'It seems—mine.'

Mr. Spender was pierced with laughter.

'You are not engaged ?' he tried to say, with his reproachful, fun-drunken underlook.

'I am, I am : and, what is more, you are not to laugh !'

'I am not—I congratulate—forgive—Oh no, Oh no !'—and a shaking wheeze came from the back of his throat.

'Same old feckless sniggering,' muttered Raby.

Gracie skilfully changed the subject, and presently got the old gentleman alone with her at the dining-room table, where, by a hundred questions, she won from him every detail of Jack's life at Gangrel's Ha' ; he told her of Rosoman Street ; and of Jack's sudden, long silence ;

and of his definite discovery that day that Jack had gone from that address.

‘And left not a trace?’

‘Not a trace.’

‘That is strange! Yet he is not captured, sir—we search every paper—he never will be. Then, why should he cease to write to you? Unless—did you send him any money at the first?’

‘I sent him something.’

‘Then, that is it! he is in dire, dire want, and therefore become proud. Is not that a poor, afflicted boy, Mr. Spender? Ah, yes, you pity him bitterly—I see that—thank you! thank you! All the tempests on that one poor head—is it not too bad? And the single bosom that God has given him for his own so severed from him—? Really, it is a thing too strange and unnatural! I feel—— But have you not one hope left——?’

‘I think not, though I am bound to say frankly, as I said before, that, if I did find him, I could not tell—anyone.’

‘Ah, you would tell *me*, sir! I should grovel, you know, and wash your feet with my tears, and wipe them with the hairs——’ her brow fell upon the table, shaken with sobs, her health being by this time in a singular, and indeed grave, condition, and the quality of her lower-octave voice already in danger of impurity. The old man put his hand on her shoulder, saying: ‘Well, well—well, well.’

The next afternoon he paid a visit to the Marchioness of D—— in Brook Street, and, to his embarrassment, found her at home to a crowd of people, arrayed in a frothing tea-gown that came down like the waters of Lodore, her throat long and defiant, her hair built into a mosque of breaking billows caught in the act, glossy coil and foam. It was agreed that the once Harrie Hay adorned her station. Her manner was magnificent (a shade too much); she had brains; and her face was splendid, the nose straight and heavy like Jack’s, not arched and superfine like Augusta’s, the lips thick and firm, the profile long. She had become

a marchioness with some *furor*, too, making the money fly, having taught the marquess his proper place and function on the wedding-night itself. By this time her social events were quite talked-of, and Society had so far acclaimed her as even to permit her to slight the *convenances*: she was, for example, about to turn London into Paris by a Charles I. ball at the end of May: a function of whose impending 'the man in the street' was already subconscious by the end of April—the date of Mr. Spender's visit.

The moment her eyes rested upon the old lawyer, her brains were at work; and she said with a certain eagerness:

'I am quite glad to see so old a friend. When did you come up? I hope you will stay and dine.'

And at once, on placing him, she left her guests, and scribbled this note to Portland Place:

'DEAR GUSSIE: I want you to come here at once, if possible. Important. Mr. Spender (of B.) here. Do you know whereabouts mama is? bring her if possible. Go direct into the morning-room.—HARRIE.'

Lady Perowne on receiving this note at once set off, drove alone into cosy, Queen-Anneish Brook Street, and hurried incognito into the morning-room across a murmuring streamlet of costumes and *verni* boots, that trickled from the stair-top to the door, having its source in the little strokes of the marchioness' handshakes, like the waters from Moses' rod.

It is to be observed that, at this date, half England was familiar with the name of Jack Hay, and a certain proportion of it with the maiden name of the Marchioness of D——: but probably not twenty people outside a Cumbrian parish were aware that fugitive and lady were kin: for Rank has a hushing influence upon whispers, so that 'Jack Hay' remained to most people the unrelated name of an abstract vagabond. The truth, however, would certainly have come out, if he had been brought to trial: and though the sisters had been eager to be his prosecutors when no escape seemed possible for him, wildly had they rejoiced when he did escape;

and, ever since, each day was to them a new load of care, lest he should be recaptured: for a prosperous brother maketh a glad sister, but a hanged brother is the Homburg of his brother-in-law: and many, many were the family-talks, idle mean repetitions of hopes and fears as to the chances of his capture, his suicide, his emigrating. Augusta, impatient of it all, had groaned: 'Oh, why can't brothers be legally divorced, as well as husbands?' but Harriet had sighed a mournful proverb: 'Ah, Gussie, husbands are only skin-deep: blood is thicker than holy water and *fleur d'oranger*, my poor dear.' Meantime, they had learned from Missie and Raby that Mr. Spender was 'in the know' as to Jack: hence the agitation on his appearance.

Harriet, free of her guests, hurried down to 'Gussie. They conferred a minute, and then up they came to sit in a close triangle with Mr. Spender in a palm-shaded corner of the salon, a room lovely as an upholsterer's—or lovelier, with its silken walls, stucco ceiling, frieze, Japanese niceties, and crayon of the marchioness.

After pretending a patronising interest in Bedwick news, Harriet suddenly said:

'And now, Mr. Spender, as to—Jack Hay. Of course, we are interested.'

The two elegant heads of hair bent close: but Mr. Spender's face hardened against them.

'I know nothing about Jack Hay,' he said: 'I did know——'

'Then, will you tell us?'

He told them.

'But surely you might re-find him?'

'How?'

'Couldn't you advertise?'

'But why re-find him?'

'*Because,*' said Harriet with eager secrecy, 'we are advised that it is now possible for him to leave the country: in fact—to be frank—we *know*, Mr. Spender: Lord D—— has seen to that'—Mr. Spender had a secret spasm—'and it can be done. So can you help us? Will you try? You are *such* an old friend, and we have *so* much confidence in you. Just conceive our

relief to know that he is well away. And it is to his interest as much as to ours—he should really be very grateful to us. What is one country to him more than another? Australia and England are quite the same. It should be Australia, Lord D—— says. And the moment you find him, and advise us of his consent, we send you a cheque for, say, £150, which should be a spanking fortune to him. If someone could only be got to impress upon him that his guilt is perfectly established and known——'

'The poor lad's innocent as the day,' said Mr. Spender.

'Ah, he is guilty,' said Lady Perowne, 'but that is not the point: we wish to be sure, Mr. Spender, that we may rely absolutely——'

'Well, I will try—for the lad's sake. It might be a great thing for him. Though I doubt if I shall find him, or if he will go: he has a will of his own——'

'Confound his absurd will!' pouted the marchioness: 'we, unfortunately, are both witnesses and legatees to it, Mr. Spender. I only wish the testator well dead——'

'Ah, now, there you've got somewhat mixed,' said Mr. Spender, with a stitch: 'no legatee ever inherited during the testator's life, and ceased to inherit at his death: that's not—I, as an old lawyer—it seems a topsy—metaphors are dan——'

He could not say it. *Sunt risus rerum*. But the compact was made, and so earnest was Mr. Spender, that early the next morning—though it was late to *him*, who always rose at five—he took cab from his Temperance Hotel in Ludgate Hill to go to consult with Harold Pole. The streets were still wet with water from the hoses, and milk almost their only traffic; the girl who opened to him in a short by-street of Victoria Street had broom in hand, and answered his questions with ardent, wistful yawns. The blinds were down, and he stepped into the sombre dining-room, over a little dust-heap. He had waited three minutes, when someone who seemed a half-dressed old woman looked wildly in, panting: 'Oh, come this way, Mr. Spender—excuse me——' and disappeared. Mr.

Spender, half by guess-work, followed into a bed-room, where the old woman was dressing herself with intense flurry, rushing about with a dark, keen-eyed young gentleman, who was helping to dress her, their hands like scattering whirlwind among pots, brushes, grease-paint, fard indien, blue-powder, burnt umber, invisible-wire beards, eyebrows on gauze, powders, noses, black-enamel, all huddled on one dressing-table; and over the floor, the furniture, a confusion of clothes. Mr. Spender was about to retire modestly, when the old woman panted: 'No, don't go, sir—I am Harold, you know: this is my friend, Mr. M——; M——, Mr. Spender': and he flew across the room.

Mr. Spender, sitting down to look in wonder, thought to himself, 'He will kill himself, this Harold Pole. His eyes have become morbidly bright. Something or other is burning him out. . . .'

'I think,' said Murray, 'that the left nasal wrinkle might be a *leettle* more pendent——' and he glanced alternately at Pole and at a sketch, rough, but exact as science itself, with each Bertillon interval measured and marked in fractions of an inch. It was the sketch of a thin, pasty-faced old woman with scanty hair and stringy jowl, named Montgomery, or 'Monty,'—who was Nibbs Raby's housekeeper, or (as they call them in Gray's Inn) 'laundress.' Two days previously M—— had met her going home, and picked a conversation with her.

'Now, Mr. Spender!' cried Pole, when he, or she, had received the last touches, 'we must fly—I'm late—you have something to say, and will tell me in the cab—come——'

He ran out, but ran back, panting: 'Better take a revolver'—took one of a brace, then ran again, and Mr. Spender laboured after his unwomanly haste, following a rusty bonnet, plaid shawl, wrinkled boots, and agitated black skirt.

They descended the lift, soon met a cab, and Pole gave the address of Gray's Inn, with a 'Quick!' Within, he at once said:

'Now, sir: let us have it.'

'But—where are your teeth?' said Mr. Spender, a

chuckle mixed with his grave wonder. Pole only seemed to have four teeth in his head, broken yellow ones.

'The teeth are all right, sir—blackened out, you know—we have no time——'

'It was about Jack Hay,' said Mr. Spender: 'how can I possibly find him? I thought you might suggest something.'

'Ey, but I can't! I have been hunting London for Jack. I don't think he's in any business—Scotland Yard doesn't either—and how he lives, God knows. I should say that he's found some one to befriend and hide him, and certainly wears some disguise—if he's still in England. He *was* fishing on the river for two weeks: but that's long ago. My opinion is that he has now gone right to the dogs, and is hiding among the very dregs—I do wish to God he was in Canada or somewhere, both for his own sake and—my own.'

'Why your own?'

'Well, you know how the land lies. There is Gracie, and her wild, wild mania. Her twentieth birthday is less than three months off now—the 9th of July. And so long as Jack is in England—or she thinks he is—you know the rest. To me it is the most incredible thing: I can't at all realise it.'

'Well, but it is precisely about his emigration that I wish to find him. It can now be done——'

'Oh, I see—the sisters: good—you have seen them. Well, I don't know, I don't know. If you advertised in a certain way, there mightn't be much danger in his writing to Gangrel's Ha'—and he might see the advertisement. Look here—leave it to me, and I'll think it out.'

This was arranged, and at the bottom of Chancery Lane Mr. Spender was deposited. Pole drove on to Gray's Inn, went up some old stairs with massive black balustrades, followed by a limping cat which mistook his sex, and on a second floor unlocked a heavy black door, Raby's 'oak,' bearing his name in white letters, having long since taken an impression of the key, which Monty regularly left sticking in the door every morning. He patted the arched and sidling back, picked up the wait-

ing can of milk, opened the inner door, and unlawfully entered into Raby's castle.

It was then 7.30; Mrs. Montgomery's hour was 7.45: he had fifteen minutes. He went into the kitchen, taking no pains to be quiet, lit the gas-stove, filled and put on the kettle, searched in the cupboard: and whatever he did, though no eye saw him, he did it in the very manner of 'Monty': he was she. The details of Raby's morning-habits M—— had gathered from 'Monty'; he always had a chop, coffee, and a smoke in bed, and bathed afterwards. With this knowledge Pole prepared the breakfast: and presently, with napkined tray, rapped at Raby's door.

'Come in,' called a drowsy voice.

Pole went into the dim-curtained room, stood by the bedside, and waited three minutes with the trembling tray, before Raby would sit up. He then put the tray on the quilt, and now Raby exposed both his hands. But the left was in a doe-skin glove.

Pole was disappointed—but not acutely: for he hardly any longer hoped, in such ways, to discover the secret of Raby's hand; for, even if he caught a glimpse, a glimpse would probably be no good. His main object, meantime, was, by incessant wearing-down, to reduce Raby to an act of desperation.

'Well, what you waiting for?' asked Raby, pouring out his coffee.

'Nothing, sir,' protested Pole in Monty's thin voice, which he had elaborately studied, and stood where he was.

'But stop a bit,' said Raby, 'haven't I told you again and again—Where the deuce are the pickles?'

At that moment the fumbling of a key in the outer door was distinctly heard. Raby looked up, startled, profoundly mystified, whispering: 'Who's that? what's that?'

'Dunno, I'm sure,' said Pole resignedly.

Now steps were heard in the hall—making toward the kitchen.

'Go and *see*——!' whispered Raby.

'It can't be nobody, sir,' said Pole: 'nobody has any key——'

'Ah, but what a consummate old fool you must be, after all, to say that!' groaned Raby reproachfully: 'can't you *hear*——?'

Now the steps were heard again—*running* this time—toward the bedroom, the door of which flew unceremoniously open, and the real Monty, looking quite scared, rushed in, exclaiming: 'Why, sir, someone's been in the kitchen!—Why, good Lor', who's this——?'

'Why, good Lor,' who's this?' exclaimed Pole in Monty's special falsetto.

Raby, seeing before him the drunken spectacle of two Montys, twin sisters, each disowning the other, leapt fiercely, amid a crash of crockery and whirl of hot coffee, from the bed, shouting: 'Got him this time!' and in a moment one of the two old women was screaming on the floor beneath him. But he had, naturally enough, chosen the new-comer, and through her screams was heard the deep bass chuckle of the other, as she—or he—fled through the passage outside. Pole hurried down to his waiting cab in the Square, jumped in, and drove down Oxford Street.

He had breakfast in a restaurant, then drove to St. Martin's Lane, and opened a door marked: 'Balfour's Detective Agency: Established 1847.' In this firm he was a partner, but its old style of 'Balfour's' was retained unaltered for business reasons. He went into his own room, and for half-an-hour sat with his head buried in cogitation—thinking of Jack Hay.

Later in the day he handed to an agent this advertisement:

'Mr. Laughter urgently desires the runaway to write to the same place as before. Good news.'

It appeared for several days in nearly every London paper: and Jack Hay sold it twenty times a night, but did not see it.

It happened, however, that, some time before this, a just Nemesis had overtaken Fred Thaxter's continual affectation of 'lumbago,' and he had got it in reality; whereupon the weekly 17/6 had dried up, only a few

shillings from 'the club' taking its place; Mary pawned even her underclothes; Jack could earn nothing more than usual: and finally he did for them what he would not do for himself: he wrote to Gangrel's Ha', asking for a pound.

Mr. Spender received that letter two or three days after the advertising ceased, and at once set out from Ludgate Hill for 'the buildings,' which were not far, but difficult to find in a little Naples of steep alleys—the Italian 'Isle of Dogs'—a region of queer wine-bottles, children, poverty, piano-warehouses, and rather picturesque dirt. Towering in its midst stood 'the buildings,' and in a courtyard, over the door of one block, Mr. Spender read: '1 to 46': Jack was at 45: and he set to climb a strait and narrow way that led—to the top. At the second landing he began to laugh; at the third he was both panting and convulsed—a spectacle to a number of children whom no Compulsory Act could force to school; on the fourth he tried to say: 'Well, keep on, and on—soon be in Heaven now'; at the fifth the stairs had both conquered his laughter, and he their infinity: and the game was drawn. He knocked at No. 45 in a dim corner, and a woman with the figure of Venus, a dirty dark face, and visibly broken stays, opened to him.

'Is—Mr. John Bennett—here?' he asked with a spasm and a pant.

'Yes, sir,' said Mary, sensationalized by a gentleman's visit, while Jack, who was just carrying Fred in his arms, started in alarm.

The stranger was admitted, and waited till a ragamuffin appeared, whom for some seconds he did not recognise, though Jack was not disguised, nor ever was, when Fred was there to see.

The two friends clasped hands a long time.

'Well, sir, this is a surprise!' said Jack.

Mr. Spender's eyes moistened with pity. They sat on a rickety sofa: and Mary left them alone.

'I am up for a couple of weeks,' said Mr. Spender; 'just got your letter—my poor lad——'

'Well, I never was so glad,' said Jack: 'but don't

waste too much grief on me, sir : I was born under that star that they call Wormwood, I s'pose ; but I have a power in me to go through with it.'

'But—however are you living ?'

'I—Oh, that's all right, sir. I am living chiefly by the kindness of two poor people, just as I am dying by the unkindness of two rich ones. Old Meggie all right, sir ? and Ailie and Morlan ?'

'Right as beans—but grieving after me, I fear, grieving after me.'

'And how do you get on without the warm ass's milk in London, sir ?'

'I pull through, boy. But I am not looked after, you know, in this place : nobody seems to think of me. I am like a fish out of water all the time. They have nothing to eat—However it isn't for long : I'll pull through. Now tell me all that's happened to you since you left the Ha'.'

'Well—have you seen—Miss Stanley, sir ?'

'There he goes again. No—not seen her. Tell me your adventures—'

'Not seen her, sir ? That's odd ! When did you come up ?'

'No cross-examination, Jack : you know that Miss Stanley is taboo between us. Now, look here, I come to you to-day with a great offer and chance : what say you—to leaving the country ?'

'I, sir ! not me.'

'Ah, but you haven't thought of it, my friend. I'm afraid you've got hardened to despair, poor lad, and don't feel all your extreme wretchedness in this hole. Just think of freedom, a new start, a fair chance. And the moment you consent, I place in your hands £150—half for your first-class passage to Australia—'

'Oh ! it's those Two !' cried Jack, with a start : 'they want to be quit of me, do they ? And *you*, Mr. Spender, acting as their agent !—*you*, sir ?'

He glanced suspiciously at the good old lawyer, having now an extravagant terror of anything in which those rough 'Two' had a hand, whose iron had entered into

his soul. In the same way men fear ghosts in which they disbelieve, once frightened in infancy; and the burnt child *over-dreads* the fire.

'But now you are talking nonsense, Jack,' said Mr. Spender: 'what harm that I am their "agent," if what they propose is your salvation? I admit their purely selfish motive——'

'God curse them!' said Jack Hay through grinding teeth.

'Ah, that is the bad company, I suppose, which makes you talk in that way,' said Mr. Spender—'you never used to. They are not monsters to be cursed, but ordinary selfish people of the world, without much natural affection——'

'Then, those are monsters: they are not men and women——'

'Well, we won't discuss that: the point is this, that their offer is a grand thing for you, and if you reject it, I can only call you a fool.'

Jack jumped up and walked about, silent for a time. Then he said:

'It's only a trap. I know those Two. They want to get me lured on board a ship, and there have me arrested.'

Mr. Spender began to laugh, but conquered himself, saying:

'No, no, no: I pledge you my solemn word, now. Don't you see? It is their *interest* to get you away. I even believe that Lord D—— has tampered with the police——' and he went on to explain why.

Jack walked about still five minutes; then looked up with decision, saying:

'All right, I'll go: on one condition.'

'Well?'

'That you give me Miss Stanley's address.'

'Absolutely impossible.'

'Then I don't go.'

'Jack, Jack, you make me impatient of you. Why-ever should you want Miss Stanley's address under present conditions?'

'To get her to come with me.'

'*She!* With *you?* Well, you are deranged. A gently-nurtured—to leave her career——!'

'She cares not a button about her career, sir! It's me she's after. She is my wife.'

'Your—what?'

'I only mean that she loves me, sir. There's a bit o' something, Mr. Spender!—the bit o' deep sweet in my God-forsaken lot: and, good and bad together, I wouldn't change places with that angel who lives in the sun—I forget his name. She'll come with me like a shot, you know. Won't you give me her address, sir?'

'No.'

'Then I don't go.'

There was a deadlock silence.

Then Mr. Spender:

'However attached Miss Stanley may be to you, Jack, your notion of taking her to Australia is the wildest I ever heard. But I am loth to leave you to perish, poor lad; and to convince you of your madness, I will consent to this much: I will bear a note from you to her, and one from her to you——'

'That's good enough for me!' cried Jack; '*she'll* show you whether I'm mad——'

'On two conditions. First, yours must be short, must bear no address, and I must see it; second, you must pledge me your word of honour that, whatever the reply, you leave England by the first possible P. and O. boat. Do you agree?'

'Yes.'

'Pledge me your word.'

'I pledge you my word.'

'Then, write.'

'Mary!' called Jack, and Mary looked in.

'Just see if you have any writing paper,' said he, and Mary, with a sullen look at Mr. Spender (for she had heard '*Australia*'), brought a broken desk containing a chaos of objects; Jack fumbled, but found no morsel of paper, except the rent-book, part filled with receipts, part with printed dates for future payments. He could not, therefore, tear out a leaf; but,

since something must be done, he ripped off one of the crimson covers, whose inner surface was papered, and on this he wrote :

‘DEAR, I have enough money to pay my passage, and yours, too, to Australia. If you come with me, you may have, as far as I can guess, some terrible hardships to endure, my poor dear; but because I think you may suffer worse if I go without you, I am writing to see if you want to come, and Mr. Spender will bring me your answer. He won’t let me give you my address. I saw you in a carriage, but could not catch you. Don’t act on impulse now, but think well.

‘Your friend, JACK.’

‘There it is, sir,’ said he; and at sight of that book-cover letter, appealing grew Mr. Spender’s eyes, his arms hung limp, and he gave himself to mockery, while Mary at the key-hole wondered, laughing, too; nor could Jack Hay, for one, ever resist that merriment, but stood smiling, saying :

‘She won’t mind the paper, sir; it’s what is written on it.’

‘Which paper?’ gasped Mr. Spender; ‘this is not—this is—old Roman—*tablets*—’

He remained concentrated a half-minute, then recovering with weary sighs of ‘Oh lud, oh lud,’ put on his spectacles, and read the ‘tablet.’

‘All right, my lad,’ he said, rising, ‘this will do’—and he pressed the letter into his breast-pocket, which just held it. He had not noticed the crimson side, nor had Jack; but there, in gilt letters, were the words: ‘Cold-bath Buildings Co.: Rent-book.’

‘Here are a couple of sovereigns, meantime,’ said Mr. Spender, ‘and to-morrow at this hour I shall return with Miss Stanley’s answer; but I warn you to be prepared for a disappointment, my lad. Good-bye.’

‘I suppose, sir, that you have seen Nibbs and Harold?’

‘Yes.’

‘They all right, sir?’

'Oh, yes; both in business now.'

'Can't I see them, sir?'

'Not through me, my lad, not through me.'

'Did Nibbs never send you a letter for me, sir?'

'No, my lad, no.'

'Well, that is the oddest thing,' exclaimed Jack Hay.

The lawyer gone, he handed the two pounds to Mary, into whose eyes came at once a flighty excitement. She gave to Fred a glimpse of the gold, sure solace of his lumbago, then out she went gadding, to revel in shopping.

Jack, meantime, had locked himself in his room—deep joy in his bosom, high expectation. After pacing awhile, he fell half upon his mean bed, half to his knees, praying, 'Let her be with me, poor dear!' 'Give her altogether to me, Lord God!'—and though his praying-mill was rusty, there was a certain secret stair, in the centre of a maze, up which, by special right-of-way, he could get Audience—a stair marked 'Barred for Ever' to other lads of his age; for devil-may-care as his life had been, on one side, by lucky chance, he was all virgin snow; and in his prayer, with a certain intimacy, he said: 'I have been good! Give her to me!'

Later in the afternoon habit drove him out, as usual, not to the distributing-rooms any more, but to pass somehow the hours of waiting. He took 'bus to Hampstead Heath, and there roamed about; then, returning, called upon B——, the poet, in Guilford Street, to tell the news. B——, delighted, took him up to his rooms, went out, ordered a restaurant-dinner, sent telegrams of invitation to three other B——s, brought back sloe gin, and, after visiting several of his haunts during the night, sent home Jack Hay well drunken at 3.30 in the foreday.

But at the beginning of those revels, about 9 p.m., Mr. Spender was handing the rent-book cover to Gracie in the little flat at Maida Vale. Not anticipating its effect, he gave it in the presence of Missie, Gladys Pole, S—— the violinist, and a girl-student. Gracie looked at it in his hand with a little frown of puzzlement, saying,

'What is it?' suddenly saw the handwriting, took it quickly, walked into the dining-room, turned on the light, and read, shivering from head to foot; she then laid it on the table, and twice paced the room in haste, then re-read it, and with lifted face and closed eyes, kissed it slowly thrice, with plaints of 'dear'—'dear'—'dear'; then, as if it were all too short, looked at the crimson back for more, and now saw: 'Coldbath Buildings Co.: Rent-book.'

Half-a-minute of groping instinct, and now she was in flurried action, uttered a cry, hurried to her bedroom, put on her toque anyhow, her bolero. She then ran to the hall-door, and was half gone, when, remembering her invited guests, she rushed back to the drawing-room, uttered some words whose sense was lost, then back to the hall-door, and down the stairs like one flying from fire, trying to draw on a glove, and out into mist and night.

She ran till she met a hansom near Maida Vale.

'Do you know where Coldbath Buildings are?'

'Aren't those them near the Farringdon Road?' said the cabman.

'What is the fare?'

'The fare?—half-a-crown.'

'I want to go very quickly. I will give you four shillings, if I think you go quickly.'

They set off on a voyage through a misty Sahara, all ghosts and bleared eyes, and ships-of-the-desert that pass in the night, without a hail, like ghost-ships; down Marylebone into Smithfield: two isolated voyagers, related to the extent of four shillings, their next rendezvous at Kensal Green, or nowhere; then into an asphalt courtyard lit by three lanterns, and Gracie alighted.

She knew that Jack was 'John Bennett,' and seeing the word 'Office' in white celluloid on a near window, she entered the house, rapped there, and asked for him.

'It will be that big young man with the Thaxters, won't it?' said a little woman to her retired warrior.

He nodded.

'Then,' said she, 'it will be No. 45 in the corner at the top, miss.'

Gracie then picked her way up the dimly-lit steps through a Babel in Lilliput, a world of children, playing—hoops, tops, skipping-ropes—screaming—'You, Harry Jones!' and 'You, Mary Phillips!'—some with beer-cans, going, coming, some with grease-soaked packages of fish, lost spirits in a child-Tartarus, most clad in miseries, uncompelled by any Act, leading to the reflection that among the titles of England's next Statesman must surely be: 'The Child-compeller.' She, however, with a general subconsciousness of horror, and the instinct to fly, hardly noticed details, but sped on upward, panting, aspiring toward Heaven—in another sense than merry Mr. Spender that afternoon.

She rapped at 45, eager to enter, but, as the door opened, made a backward step from a scene within, a stench of alcohol.

'Mr. Bennett,' she panted—'does he live——?'

'Yes, miss,' said Mary.

'Is he in?'

'No.'

'Oh, not in. When——?'

'He may be in soon, or he may not. He don't come in till 'bout one as a rule. But to-night he'll be early, I should thin. There's no telling. He went out while I was out. What might you want him for, if it's not asking a question?'

'I—he is an old friend of mine. Are you his—friend?'

'I calls myself such.'

'Then, pray advise me. He will—thank you. I am quite without resource for the moment. Can one—wait?'

Mary divined all, with an interest in this white, superfine female-thing, who had won from Jack what she never could; and, wishing to study her well, and exhibit her to those within, she said:

'Yes, I should wait, if I was you. Come in, if you like.'

But the waiting-room was not nice. On the holey table-cover of faded pink were jugs and bottles, and round it a party of women, including Kit. This was the result of Mr. Spender's £2, Mary having hurried (as usual when 'flush') to Kit, and they two having gathered five or six women, such as Mary's nature loved, she sitting stooped forward to hear their observations, with exclamations of 'Fancy!' and a flippant 'Here's luck!' anon; and there, too, sat tall, steep-shouldered Fred, sycophant and happy, his lumbago forgot.

Gracie sat on the sofa, dismayed, looking into space, seeing nothing, and a silence fell, while the women shyly noted her—a woman, she, too, not from Mars; yet aloof as a Martian, by her very likeness to Woman. At last Kit, who was always as good as anybody, said daringly: 'Well, here's luck!' Then someone made an observation, then another, the frogs losing awe of the log, and soon the tongues were loose again. Gracie endured, aching for the poor boy who lived in that sty, praying, praying that he would come. But at that hour Jack was drinking with B—and B——'s facsimiles at a café in Leicester Square.

She waited an hour, like patience staring at shame—and wishing itself blind; but when she began to choke at the accumulated fumes of Fred's pipe, and the intoxication grew foul, she gave up and rose, saying to Mary:

'I must not stay, I think: may one—write?'

Silence fell again: her voice made such music there.

Still lying on the table was the rent-book with its torn-off cover, and Mary, spying it, said:

'You can write on that, so long as you don't tear it—if you've got a pencil.'

'I'm afraid I haven't one.'

'Hold on, hold on,' said Fred: 'I'll lend you one,' and he went into his room, and returned with his huge checker's blue-pencil.

Gracie then, leaning over the dancing table, tried to scribble across the last page, but the pencil, worn to the

wood, at first made only dents ; however, with coaxing, it was got to write the words :

' Came to see you. Come to me early in the morning.
' GRACIE.

' What a question you ask ! if I "*want*" to go. I am going !'

In her haste to be done, and gone, she forgot that Jack's letter to her was not an ordinary letter addressed through the post—that he might not, even yet, know her address ; and she gave none. She just said : ' Let him see that, will you ? Good-evening '—and fled.

When she reached home Mr. Spender was gone, and the two other guests also ; only Raby was there with Missie : he had come in late for a few minutes, *en route* for a dance at Hampstead at a Mr. Griffiths', the senior partner of his firm.

Gracie fell sighing into a chair in toque and gloves, with closed eyes, exhausted ; and Missie cried :

' Why, Gracie, what on earth has happened ?'

' I am not well, Missie,' she answered : ' do not talk to me. I have found Jack Hay.'

' Found him ! My goodness ! Oh, that accounts . . . Found him where ?'

' He is in a place called Coldbath Buildings. Good-night, dear. Good-night, Nibbs. I am not well '—and she went away with a visibly tottering gait.

Raby left soon afterwards, and as he entered his cab, was saying to himself : ' All right, Mr. Jack Hay, I've got you again—*Hell* gives you to me—and no escape this time !'

He drove to an illuminated house, decorated for a dance, overlooking Hampstead Heath ; and he had hardly paid his respects to his hostess, when, glancing about, his eyes fell upon two lips that smiled at him, and had the power to bring a pang to his heart. It was Pole, who was there with his friend M——.

' But does he know Griffiths ?' thought Raby : ' who could have dreamed that this man would be here, as he is everywhere, to wear out my life in this way ?'

This function was 'big and late,' with a heavy 'sit-down' supper: and Raby could hardly get through in gloves. Therefore, near midnight, he stole away: and in the hall itself Pole gave him a parting nod and smile.

And on the way home, Raby made that night a resolve which he had long been meditating, saying:

'All right, I don't want to shed any more blood: I'll stop the persecution once and for ever—for peace' sake, like a good Christian. I'll *cut* it off.'

Now, this of 'cutting it off' was the very resolve to which Pole had so long been trying to drive Raby: and for that reason had had nearly every movement of Raby's shadowed for weeks. The next morning, therefore, when Raby, instead of going to business, strolled up the Gray's Inn Road, he was followed by a young lady in whose wits Pole had the greatest confidence. Raby stopped in a mean square near King's Cross. At a corner-house, in one white-painted window-pane, was the inscription in black and brown: 'Dr. Pattison's Surgery. Consultations: mornings, 10 to 12; evenings 7 to 9.' He went in there: and as he went in, the young lady who had shadowed him ran to a little post-office three doors away, and telegraphed to Pole.

A number of women in shawls were sitting on the waiting-room bench; but Raby walked straight to the consulting-room, looked in, and said:

'Pattison, I want to see you.'

'That you?' answered the surgeon: 'one minute.'

Raby waited till a patient came out, then went in to the surgeon—an unkempt man, with rank hair, soiled linen, stiff beard, and a nose deplorably red; he had consulted Raby on some law-case, and they were now on easy terms.

'Well, you're a strange sight. What's the trouble?' asked Pattison in his rapid lip-murmur.

'I want an operation performed,' said Raby.

'Poh, poh.'

'Oh well, since *you* know that it's poh, poh, all right. Good-bye, my friend.'

'Stop a bit! what is it?'

Raby seated himself by the tilted green shade of the incandescent lamp—for the room was hardly lit through the painted and curtained window-glass—and drew off his left glove.

'It is the top joint of this third finger,' he said: 'it has been giving me agonies. It's gout: I am subject to gout. I have decided to have it off.'

'But not going to maim yourself for a little gout! Oh, I see: it's had an accident—nail's——'

'Look here, Pattison, don't make a fuss. I want that joint off, and, as this is a free country, it is going to be done. The only question is: are you going to do it?'

'Course I am, if you insist: only I say——'

'Never mind, don't say it. When can you do it?'

'Let me see: to-day Tuesday; to-morrow the police-court: Thursday do?'

'It will, if it must: but why not to-day?'

'Impossible, I'm afraid. Say Thursday at—1.30. That suit you?'

'All right—1.30 precisely. I say, will it hurt?'

'Not a bit.'

'No chloroform, or any of that bosh, I hope?'

'Oh, no. Still, won't hurt. I'll look after that.'

'Very good. Better put a bit of ointment on it, meanwhile, hadn't you?'

'If you like'—and Pattison strolled to the dispensary-window, dipped into the first pot, and rubbed Raby's joint unconcernedly: for he saw that Raby was in no pain.

'Keep it well covered up,' he suggested.

'All right,' said Raby. 'Have a drink?'

Pattison gave a glimpse of a flask in his breast-pocket, saying:

'Daren't leave patients——'

'Nice class of patients you keep, too, my son: you doctor the young ones gratis, don't you? Well, Thursday at 1.30: and I expect you absolutely, Pattison, to have a steady hand. I permit no man to work for me in a slipshod fashion. Good-bye'—and he sauntered out, thinking: 'Now, Mr. Jack Hay, you

next'; while Pattison, for his part, wondered: 'Why the blazes does he want that joint off?'

Raby walked back to Gray's Inn, and as he re-entered the Square by the head porter's lodge, there was a lady just before, and a cab just behind him, both equally concerning him. He saw the lady, who was Miss Ames, but not the cab, which dashed toward King's Cross, and contained Pole and M——, the disguiser, who were going in response to the telegram of Pole's lady-detective. Those two we will follow first. They alighted near the Pattison surgery, and went in; and Pole's eyes were bright that day.

It was now near noon. One woman with a child, and two girls, had still to be seen; the friends waited; then entered to Pattison together.

'Dr. Pattison?' said Pole with a bow.

'Yes, sir,' said Pattison: 'have a seat.'

They sat; Pattison took the stethoscope-tips from his ears; M——, as if by accident, deftly touched the lamp-shade, altering the tilt, so that the light fell directly upon Pattison, while, himself in shadow, tablet in hand, he stealthily sketched.

'We are here,' said Pole, 'on a special matter, Dr. Pattison, recommended to you by an old friend of mine, Mr. Raby—you know Mr. Raby?'

The surgeon bowed.

'My friend, Mr. Allen here,' said Pole, 'wants to consult a doctor about a little girl, a niece, who is suffering in a rather singular way. She has been under three medical men—in the country—but remains very ill. Mr. Allen, I may tell you, is a stranger in London, as I also am: and as he is anxious to secure a reliable doctor, we were delighted, on meeting Mr. Raby some minutes since, to have your name——'

'Delighted also,' said Pattison: 'how old is child?'

'Eleven years.'

'What are symptoms like?'

'Happily, as half a doctor myself, I am in a position to describe them in terms which you will understand: her gravest symptoms are the nervous phenomena of coma, epilepsy, and wrist-drop—' and at great length

he proceeded to give a history of the case, elaborately noting, meantime, every look, gesture and tone of the surgeon, while, instant by instant, the minutiae of Pattison's personality transferred themselves to M——'s recording tablet.

'Well, seems perfectly clear to me where the screw's loose,' said Dr. Pattison: 'shall be pleased—only hope you don't want me immediately.'

'Oh, she is not yet up from the country,' said Pole: 'if you will name the earliest day——'

'To-day and to-morrow I'm excessively busy. Thursday do?'

'It may—it may. Have you nothing special on Thursday——?'

'Practically nothing: my ordinary patients till noon, then a small operation at 1.30——'

'Is that the operation on Mr. Raby's hand, of which he told us?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, well, that's a mere nothing: Miss Allen arrives precisely at noon on Thursday: so that between then and 1.30 you will have plenty of time to see her at Westminster, and return to Mr. Raby's little matter. Shall we arrange it in that way?'

'Suit me admirably,' said Pattison, whereupon Pole handed him a card, and all, with much mutual deference, shook hands.

'Think you've caught him well?' asked Pole, as the friends re-entered their cab.

'Beautifully,' answered M——, 'he is a born subject, that man. Anyone could personate him. I can make you more like him than he is like himself. He is merely a nose——'

'Ey, ey,' muttered Pole: 'it is near now: it is not far off.'

The same day he had a workman into his flat, who removed the handle which drew back the latch of a bed-room door: so that that bed-room became a prison, destined for the reception of Dr. Pattison.

Raby, meantime, passing across Gray's Inn Square toward his offices in Bedford Row, intending instantly

to telephone Scotland Yard the hiding-place of Jack Hay, had seen emerging from his own house-door the long jacket, frieze skirt, muff, boa and reticule, which made little Miss Ames a wintrily large study in drabs.

She was in some evident distress: her eyelids looked red behind her veil; and she held her jaws between thumb and finger.

'Well, Missie,' said Raby, 'a drop in the dividends?'

'Ah, worse than that,' answered Miss Ames: 'I have been up to your chambers: come up quickly: I want to talk to you.'

They went up; Raby opened his 'oak'; and they entered the desert flat.

'Well, we are in a great trouble, Nibbs,' broke out Missie in the drawing-room: 'I don't know if you can do anything: I suppose not, but you are the only one—Captain Dowson is away—Oh, my teeth, my teeth—Gracie says she is going to Australia with Jack Hay——'

Raby jumped up, crying: 'To where? Is she, be G—d! we'll see about that!'

'It is all, all, Mr. Spender's fault. He has brought her a note from Jack. A man of his weight and standing to be so absurdly irresponsible—isn't it deplorable? But they say that old men who have never married get all kinds of strange affections—Oh Lord, my teeth. And she is really going: nothing will stop her: I know Gracie. I left her packing, poor thing: an orphan, Nibbs, poor, friendless in the world, but for me: and how is she to live without me, or I without her? If she goes, I shall have to go, too, and Captain Dowson——'

'Don't cry,' said Raby: 'she don't stir one step, you know: just give me a minute to think it out'—and with thrown-back frock-coat, thumbs stuck in his waistcoat arm-holes, he stood at the window overlooking the 'gardens,' in frowning thought.

'Where has Jack Hay got the money from?' he asked, glancing round.

'I suppose the family have given him a few pounds. Of course, it is to the sisters' interests——'

'Ah, I suppose,' and he set to thinking again. There

were two courses open to him: first, to have Jack arrested, as he had just been about to do; second, to let him go to Australia, without Gracie: for he saw at once that he possessed the absolute power to prevent Gracie from going, too. He inclined to the second course: for he had now come to the conclusion that Gracie would never take the Mackay legacy, so nearly falling due, into consideration, while Jack Hay was, as it were, present in the air: two months since, she had declined with amused regret the 'offer' of a certain lordling, whose rent-roll far overtopped the Mackay £7,000; everyone had his mania—and Gracie's, for the moment, was clearly Jack Hay. But the Antipodes are at the very bottom of all things, and Jack, standing feet-upward in Australia, would be, as it were, removed out of existence, and buried eight thousand miles deep: and then would be hope of converting Gracie. Also, since Raby was about to get rid of his finger-joint, his fear of Pole would now be lessened by one half, and with it his motive for having Jack arrested. Jack, therefore, might go—and should go.

This he decided, and, turning, said:

'When is Jack Hay going, then?'

'She is not sure,' answered Missie: 'but she has found out that the steamers start every other Thursday, and she thinks, and hopes, that it may be the day after to-morrow. She went to him last night, and he was out, so she left a note telling him to come to her this morning; she was expecting him every moment when I left, and was in such a way, too, poor child, wondering why he was late—I couldn't bear to see it any longer, and had to run out of the place. I feel that all this may kill her—she's not strong now——'

'Never mind—don't cry. She ain't going with him.'

'But what are you saying? She would—I suppose die, if he went without her——'

'Oh no, she ain't going to die. People don't die so easily. If she did, she deserves it.'

'Oh, you are too dreadfully gross, Nibbs! I have no patience with you. You cannot understand the pains

of any more finely-strung nature than your own. But how do you mean "she is not going"? How could you possibly prevent her?

'Oh, I'll prevent her fast enough, as you'll soon see. I love the girl, God knows: but let her not thwart my will! She is not her own mistress. She was married to me, or to Harold Pole, by—her—father. She dare not ruin either of us, except for the sake of the other. Grieving after another man in this way! what's she mean?'

'Now you are getting childishly angry, Nibbs. You are the most unsympathetic boy—you have no heart: you are only a face. What right had her father to marry her to you or Harold Pole, pray? The heart knoweth its own secret, my friend! Ah, the heart of a woman! you can never know. I must go—I must go. I don't know why I came here—I had to tell somebody. Nothing remains for me but to go and pack my trunk, and take my ticket for that unknown world; it is just like dying, for to turn up the soles is not so different from turning up the toes: but where she goes, I will go, that's certain, if it is even to the backwoods—is it in Australia or America that the backwoods are?—and Captain Dowson must follow me there, since he wants me. Good-bye—my poor teeth are hurting me very badly—I don't know what to do, what to do—life is not all beer and skittles—'

'All right, cry your eyes out, if you like,' said Raby: 'I tell you there isn't any need! Don't you believe me? She don't stir a step!'

'Yes, that's talk,' said Missie, going out, and Raby went with her to Holborn, and put her into a Maida Vale 'bus.

She went certain of finding Jack at the flat, and brought home an extra bunch of lilies and tin of pears for lunch: but walking up the street of flats, she saw Gracie looking out with haggard under-lids, and knew that she was still waiting.

'What, isn't he come?' she said on entering.

Gracie flung her hand wearily, and turned away, to walk languidly about the rooms, aloof in the greatness

of her distress: for a certain awe kept Missie or Jean from addressing her.

She would not go in to lunch. Once, soon after three, with sudden energy, she said: 'Oh, I am going back to him,' and walked sharply to her bedroom; but Miss Ames followed her with the remark: 'Yes—and the moment you go, he will come,' and she desisted.

At four Jean ran out to send a telegram which said: 'Why don't you come? I am dying to see you'—words which made Jack Hay groan a deep groan. He did not know where she was.

All day he had waited to see if Mr. Spender would come. He had read her note on the rent-book on coming home early in the morning from B——'s revels: and through the honey in his heart, and the intoxication in his head, had pierced the wretched consciousness that no address was there. During the day even Fred had pitied him in silence, and Mary was restless with compassion, murmuring continually: 'Poor little fellah: what've they done to him?' but afraid to address him.

But soon after the telegram, in came Mr. Spender, bustling, in his hand a square sheet with printing and writing, which was the ticket, and a bundle of coloured labels marked 'Cabin,' 'Wanted on Voyage,' 'Not Wanted on Voyage,' etc.

'Well, my lad,' said he: 'it is nearer than I thought. The boat leaves the day after to-morrow at 1.30 p.m., and here's your ticket. I got the cheque from the marchioness this morning, and she insisted that I should book your passage myself, so I took a first-saloon: I hope I did right. You will have enough to do to prepare yourself in the time, I imagine.'

'Miss Stanley gave you no letter for me, sir?'

'None, none. She apparently ran out of the house, as I handed her yours.'

'She came here, sir.'

'Here?' said Mr. Spender, with a laughing break in his voice: 'how could she know——?'

'I can't guess myself, sir: but she left a note—here it is—asking me to go to her (I was out), but didn't

leave her address. She must have thought that I know. Will you give it now, sir?’

‘My lad, my lad, don’t ask.’

‘Oh, but that’s obstinacy, sir, when you see that she wants me to have it! Here’s a telegram which she has just sent me. If she is going away with me, I may surely know her address?’

‘I can’t incur that responsibility, Jack: it is too much, too much—I won’t. As to the notion of her going with you, it is the most quixotic——’

‘Well, but she *is* going, you see—By the way, oughtn’t I to take her passage at once?’

‘You ought—if she is going: there are only five first-saloon cabins left, reserved by the Government, and now given up. Here is a sum of £80 in notes, the difference between £150 handed me by your sister, and £70 for your passage——’

‘Thank you, sir. But, Mr. Spender, she is suffering, sir: will you go at once for me, and tell her why I haven’t gone to her?’

‘Yes, I will do that: yes, yes.’

‘And will you tell her the hour of the steamer’s sailing? stop a bit—where does she start?—Oh, the Royal Alberts: I know them well. And the boat’s the *China*: I’ve seen her, too, waiting for her passengers at high morning tide down at Tilbury. Gracie will go by the Company’s special train from Liverpool Street to the docks at 1.5 p.m., but the trunks must go on beforehand—— No, we won’t arrange it like that: it is too complicated: will you tell her, sir, to go down from Fenchurch Street on Thursday morning with her luggage, and I’ll be at the dock-gates, waiting. In that way we shall have the whole day together till the start. She had better not come here to-morrow: I am sure to be out—and I don’t like her coming here. Will you tell her all this, sir?’

‘Yes—since you ask me, my lad. It seems a most rash step: her father—But I can do nothing—well, I’m off.’

‘Will you tell her from me that her servant sends his duty and humble thanks, sir?’

'I will, I will.'

'And will you tell her, sir, that her goodness is too heavy a mountain for one poor back, sir, and that her servant's heart lies—broken——'

'Without fail, without fail,' muttered Mr. Spender, and fled to hide both a dampness of the eye, and a spasm of laughter at his growing burden of messages.

Jack ran out after him to the stair-head, saying:

'Where are you staying, sir?'

'W——'s Hotel on Ludgate Hill.'

'Then, I shall call there on Thursday morning to bid you good-bye, sir. What about Nibbs and Harold, sir? Won't you give me their address, or write them mine, so that they may come to tell me good-bye? I have neither father nor mother, nor sister nor brother, but them, and you.'

'I will write them both your address: never fear, never fear——' and he hurried down.

Jack ran back, and had caught up his cap to go out, when Mary stood before him with scared face, saying:

'Is it true you're going away from me?'

'I'm afraid it is, dear Mary.'

'For good?'

'I'm afraid.'

'When?'

'On Thursday, I'm afraid.'

Instantly, with flung-out arms of despair, like divers, Mary threw herself face-downward on the sofa, wailing low, while Fred and Jack tried to comfort her, Fred with mild 'Never mind, don't take on, Mary,' Jack kissing and patting her head, and, with his carelessness of the morrow, slipping a £10-note into her hand. She kept it up some time, for there was nothing that Mary liked better than being a martyr: as soon, however, as she let herself begin to recover, Jack was gone.

He had just time to run into Holborn, buy himself decent clothes, boots, etc., return, hurry them on, and take cab to Leadenhall Street before the Company's offices closed. He then got his first-saloon ticket transferred to Gracie, and for himself took a second-saloon berth, there being no third, thus saving £35.

The next morning he received from Gracie this letter :

‘DEAR,—Your messages were duly delivered to-night by our good Mr. Spender, and I am snatching a moment from *Preparations* to drop you a line. We here are in a great hurly-burly, my friend—our two small heads all whirled—a hundred things to do and to foresee, as to flat, furniture, Jean, Rude, banking-account, Academy, etc. Missie, you see, *is coming*—is she dear and brave, or not?—and your retinue, my-dear sir, is larger than you bargained for. I note your directions as to Fenchurch Street, dock-gates, and other practical matters : and this shall be done. I confess to you, Jack Hay, that I am feeling rather happy to-night, a new thing in my recent record, sir—I hope you do not think me flippant as well as happy, for ah, a dire seriousness is in me, too : but if I am flippant, the revulsion and gust of bliss that has just suddenly overtaken me might excuse the turning of any poor maiden’s head. Am I excused, then? You see, I have a certain inveterate liking for this particular Mr. Hay : and since he now promises to let me be all about him in the place of peace where he lives continually, I can’t help feeling, oh, so warm and cosy, Jackie, and protected, my friend, and safe at home again, dear, in the bosom of my god ; and I do thank you, Jack, for this high and quickening joy that I have of you ! if my thanks are worth anything, take them, take them, from my full heart : I thank you that you live, and I thank you that you are just what you are, and that I have seen and handled you : and I thank God, too.

‘My eyes long to see you again, and I think of Thursday *early* : to-morrow (Wednesday) I do not go to you, according to instructions duly received—— Oh my ! not another word—Missie raves and tears the hair ! Three kisses by the postman—one for your sake, one for mine, and all on the Bank’s account !

‘GRACIE.’

This letter gave her address, but Jack, knowing that both had enough to do that day, went out resolved

not to go near her; and she, too, went out with like intention.

But near 3 p.m. both their resolutions broke down: she, finding herself not far, called with Missie at 'the buildings,' only to incur another disappointment: for about that same hour Jack was at the Maida Vale flat; and though he had said to himself: 'She's not in, I know: I'm only going to see where she lives,' the actual knowledge struck him like a blow. However, he and Jean met, and were mutually delighted.

Missie, meantime, had no ticket: she had telegraphed Raby in the morning to take one for her, and at the same time had posted him a cheque. But Raby took no P. and O. ticket that day.

He went to his office as usual about eleven, worked, lunched at his usual hotel in Warwick Court, returned, and worked. But all the day his face was rather pale.

At 3 he sent Barrington, his shorthand man, into the City, and ascertained that Gracie's ticket was taken for departure the next day.

Near 5.30 he called Barrington again, and impressed upon him some very unusual instructions. He then took cab to a costumier's in Garrick Street, where, with Meissonier's 'Cavalier' before him for model, he tried on his doublet for the D—— ball on the 20th: and endless was his criticism and harsh intolerance of defects. Then he fell in with two men, drank an *apéritif* with them at Gambrinus', and dined in Rupert Street; then he bought some sandwiches in a Deutsche Delicatessen shop, and put them into a pocket; then, with growing pallor, took cab for Maida Vale.

Although it was warm spring, he had on a heavily-furred overcoat—not without design.

'Oh, I am so glad you've come!' cried Missie, her face shiny with toil, 'I have a thousand things to say to you. Why couldn't you come before, Nibbs? Have you the ticket——?'

'Never mind about tickets,' grumbled Nibbs Raby inaudibly.

Two trunks lay in the passage; the drawing-room portière and curtains were gone; Rude, the deerhound,

was pacing his old bones about with hung head, conscious of change in the world, his master gone, his mistress going; Gracie, with rumpled hair and pinned-up skirt-front, was hunting everywhere for the piano-key in that state of mind which never finds anything, and on her right cheek-bone, where the pale wild-rose had come back that night, was also a smear of soot.

'Ah, Nibbs,' she said: 'we have been expecting you. Do you know whether Harold knows? We haven't had *time*——'

She stopped, startled by his evident agitation, and the top-hat still on his head. Whoever has seen a violinist step down, after performing, into the stage-room, shocked by a new rush of terror at the ordeal just past, a corpse but for his eyes and breath, like a man fresh from an interview with ghosts, will conceive Raby's face. He was about to take the reins of Gracie's destiny into his own hands, but lacked the depth and dominance to do it reposefully.

His will, however, was rock, as usual: and he said, heaving:

'Just leave the room, please, Missie: I want to talk to Gracie.'

Both looked at him with astonishment, till Gracie very quietly said: 'Go, Missie,' and Miss Ames went, Raby locking the door after her.

'So, Gracie, you're thinking of going away?' he said, standing at a tea-table, she on the other side.

'Well?'

'I thought you were to marry either me or Harold Pole, Gracie? It was your—father's—arrangement. We were brought up on that understanding. Don't you know that you are not your own mistress? What do you mean, Gracie, by these larks you are playing?'

'Doves,' she said, flushing angrily: 'not larks.'

'Oh yes, Gracie, jolly smart! but is that all the answer you give me?'

'If I were more explicit, I'm afraid I—should hurt your feelings,' she said.

'Oh, never mind about my feelings! I make a clear, plain, straightforward statement: answer it, if you can. This is no jesting—I am in earnest. You are pledged

to me or Harold Pole. Can you fairly go away with another man, and abandon us in this way?'

'But if you object to my "jesting," you should not use comic words: "abandon," now, is comic.'

'All right, jest, then—jest. You won't jest long, I know; and because I am fond of you, I am sorry for you, as well as justly offended, Gracie. You can't answer me, you see—not a word. Your conscience tells you that you are acting in a flighty and wrong manner, of which your—father—never would have approved—'

'But this is a new *rôle*! If you insult me, I will stay and hear, Nibbs, but if you preach at me, I *must*—abandon you. If I have not answered you, it was not, surely, because of my "conscience," but because you surprised me so utterly. Don't you always say "this is a free country"? then, why should it be so very free for you, and so strait for all us others? As to the "abandonment," my answer is, that *you* have no just cause to complain, for by my marriage with another man you can suffer no more than if I married—ah, how absurd!—Harold; nor can Harold complain, for he can suffer no more than if I married—you. I could never have contrived to marry you *both*, I think: for then I should soon have been in half-mourning. I do hope that you are answered now: I am—tired. We start quite early in the morning. Give me Missie's ticket.'

Raby drew a paper from an inner pocket.

'Here's her cheque,' he said: 'I haven't taken any ticket.'

Gracie turned away to the window-recess, white to the lips: for she knew that that morning only three or four berths had been left.

Raby followed her, saying:

'Now, Gracie, you must prepare yourself to suffer a bit, as we all have to suffer in this little world. I tell you, I am beastly sorry—but it's your own fault. It was nonsense to suppose that I was going to let you go away in this wild way with a creature like Jack Hay—or with anybody, I don't care who he is. I don't want to plead my own cause, but I tell you straight out now that you are not going to marry any man but me: it

simply shan't happen, that's all. This Hay business is only a mania: I give you two months—— But the point is this, Gracie: that it is now 8.30, and my shorthand-clerk, who is waiting at my chambers, has orders, unless he receives a wire from me before 9.30, to telegraph to Scotland Yard the Coldbath-buildings address of Jack Hay, *alias* John Bennett, and also the fact that Jack Hay thinks of leaving to-morrow by the *China*. But you can save him, if you like: I hope you will, for the poor devil's sake.'

She was silent, while the words—all their momentous, their vile meaning—worked their way into her brain. Her forehead rested on the window-glass.

Raby made a tour through the room, his hands pressed into his overcoat pockets, expressing his shape, his hat on. Someone knocked outside, but he did not open. Presently he said:

'Let me remind you, Gracie, that the telegram will take at least half-an-hour to get to my man. You have only about twenty minutes.'

'In which to do what?' she asked in a deep strangled voice, still looking out.

'In which to write to Jack Hay this letter,' he said, producing a half-sheet of note-paper. She turned, took it, and read:

'DEAR JACK: I have decided at the last moment not to go. The scheme was too wild, as I now see. But I expect and require you to go just the same, as that will really be a good thing for us both. I also think it will be better if you do not write me afterwards, as that can do no good.

'Yours, still fondly,

'GRACIE.'

She let it fall, and dropped with a sigh into a near rocking-chair, rocking with closed eyes, her cheeks quite sunken, her face ten years older; only once her mouth silently stretched into a momentary distortion, more open at the corners than in the middle, very pitiable, then flew back, like released rubber, into shape again.

'Gracie, I warn you,' said Raby, pacing. 'Fate is not surer, if you let the minutes pass.'

Now, with a rush, she was before him on her knees, gazing up, wildly kissing his hands—those hands, of which one, on the morrow, was to lose a joint—saying:

'Spare us! Dear, good Nibbs, hear me—— But no, I *won't* humble myself, and kiss your feet—like this—and this—and lay my cheek on your hand—like this: for you are only pretending. If you were really a black devil—from Hell, Nibbs Raby—do you suppose I should not have found out long ago? Why, I know you like my own face—you are all pity—Ah, you will spare us!—I see it in your face—Oh, thanks! Think of Jack, so afflicted, bruised—poor fellow; houseless, hunted; your dear old friend: how you used to come up the lonnin together, you remember? arm in arm, and he always said "Nibbs for ever," "There's nobody in the world like Nibbs"; and I, too: I always thought: "How handsome Nibbs is! and how much I should prefer him to Harold—"; ask Missie if I didn't say so, if you doubt my word; and if anybody came, I always said—I swear—"How handsome Nibbs is! O how handsome—how handsome—how handsome"—sobbing hard, dry sobs—'and you will spare us. It would kill him, you know—his poor heart—and then what should *I* be, O God? You see, Nibbs, God has sent him this little joy after all his unmerited lot—caused by *me*, only by me; and now if I make him suffer more, think how I shall feel, and have compassion upon me, dear Nibbs! let me go with him, will you? And when we go, we shall have a little cottage somewhere, called "Nibbs' Cottage," and if we have any—children, they shall all be "Nibbs," and our walls shall be papered with illuminations marked "Nibbs"—"Nibbs"—"Nibbs"—'

Raby, looking at his watch, interrupted her, saying:

'A nice place for you!—on your knees praying for Jack Hay. What can you possibly see in a lout like Jack Hay to make you—? why, God, I thought you had more pride, Gracie! And you think you are working on my feelings, don't you? You are only making me

more mad! You might as well kneel to that wall. Only seven minutes——'

Now she shot up straight, and went running at random, her face in her hands, from which came out a steady sound.

'Just write the letter and get it over,' he pleaded: 'you have to, so you may as well, before it is too late. I know I seem cruel, but you'll soon begin to thank me——'

Her writing-desk lay on the chiffonnier, covered with five or six stamped letters of farewell to special friends, and this Raby now put on the tea-table open, with all ready to write, and a chair; then took her arm, and tried to draw her; but now again she fell to her knees, her head prostrate on the carpet between her arms, and again her mouth stretched one instant wide in a silent spasm.

'Time nearly up,' said Raby, pacing, his hands pressed into his coat-pockets.

She threw up her body, her arms, staring upward, and now was like one shockingly excruciated on the rack, quite spent, shameless, her mouth twisted and open, her hair drooped, as it were the hunted hart *in articulo mortis*.

'Pity me,' she panted.

'Pity be damned,' said he, grim with passion, 'if you bother me, I catch hold of you there, and kiss and kiss you to death.'

'For Christ's—sake,' she panted.

'Two minutes more,' said he.

'I don't—care for—him,' she panted, only the feeble cunning of the fox now surviving in her, a gasp between each second word: 'I don't—want to—marry him: only to—go with—him: then I—will come—back and—marry you.'

'Modest talk!' he said.

'God will—curse you.'

'All right, let Him curse away, be G—d!'

'Jack would—kill you——'

'Time up!'

Now, scared into her wits, all scared, she flew: caught up the copy written by him, and, still stand-

ing, wrote with furious haste and the appalled face of one who has stepped in darkness over the edge of an abyss :

‘DEAR JACK : I have decided at the last moment not to go. . . .’

She finished it to the last word, but, attempting to put it into an envelope, suddenly gave up, and fainted. Raby caught her as she fell, kissed her on each cheek, then many times on the lips with savage greed, and laid her on the sofa. Then, in print-letters, he directed the envelope : ‘ John Bennett, Esq., The *China*, Albert Docks, West Ham,’ and pocketed it. And now he unlocked the door.

Miss Ames, who had been waiting there in terror—for she had heard the sobs—rushed in, saw Gracie, and uttered a scream, while Raby silently took up a chair in one hand, in the other a ‘Magazine of Art’ from the piano-top, and, going out with them both, said :

‘ Now, Missie, you are to understand clearly, please, that neither you, Gracie, nor Jean goes out of this house before 2 o’clock to-morrow. I hope you have everything you want in the house : otherwise you go without. You ain’t going to starve. I shall only have what little is in my pocket, and no sleep : so you’ll be better off than me. Tell Gracie when she wakes up. If anybody goes out, I simply get up from where I am sitting, and telegraph Jack Hay’s address to the police ; if the post-offices are closed, I go in person. No—no use screaming and crying : not a bit of good : good-night.’

He went down, placed the chair just inside the outer house-door, ran to the near post-office, and sent to his man, Barrington, at his chambers the telegram : ‘ Do nothing *re* Hay ; come to me here to-morrow at 12.45 sharp ;’ he then ran back, sat on the chair, and read the magazine.

A rare passer in or out saw the heavy-coated man sitting cross-legged there ; hour after hour found him there ; the lamp-man at midnight spoke with him, received a shilling, and left him in darkness : after which only a fitful moon saw his yawnings.

Occasionally he rose, and beat the pavement like a policeman. The hours of his task stretched before him like a desert : but his will was as mulishly stiff at 5 a.m. as at midnight, and at noon as at 5 a.m. He said to himself : ' It's got to be done, and it's going to be done.' He might well have used an agent to watch for him : but he had determined to trust no one. He sat, and strolled, and waited.

Every hour, or so, a man came to the hall-door of the ground-floor flat, near which Raby sat, peeped a few minutes at him, then crept to the telephone in the bath-room, and said to the drum :

' Raby still here.'

And from Pole's bed-room in Westminster would come the answer :

' All right, go to bed ; only give him an occasional look.'

Pole and his friend, M——, were not only wakeful, but busy men that night : for at 1.30 on the morrow an operation was to be performed on Raby's hand.

Pole had received a letter from Mr. Spender, giving Jack's address, and the news that Jack and Gracie were to leave England on the morrow : news which had thrown Pole into a fever. But when the telephone announced Raby's coming and night-long watch, this had absolutely calmed him. He understood that Raby would not fail to see to it, and thus save him a world of trouble, while *he* saw to Raby's left hand.

Gracie, meanwhile, was showing the first symptoms of the malady which was to undo her. Once, near 2 a.m., Missie whispered to Jean : ' It looks to me—I shouldn't be surprised—if she is getting *brain-fever*'—that disease so well-known to readers of novels, but unknown to doctors. What she noticed was, however, no fancy, but impending neurasthenia. Not without a cunning under-thought had Gracie consented to write Raby's letter to Jack, intending to fly to Jack the moment Raby was gone, and warn him to another hiding-place. But when, recovering consciousness, she heard of Raby's watch and threat, then she felt despair : and her face had taken on an expression, not

only of terror, but of terror mixed with a strange silliness.

All the night through Jean and Missie were giving peeps at Raby from the dark over the stair-corner; and, about 4 a.m., Missie in dressing-gown and shawl came down.

'Nibbs,' she whispered, palely agitated, 'I am done with you from this night! Your conduct is too disgraceful! Do you want to kill Gracie?'

'Oh, she ain't going to die,' said Raby.

'She *may* be: she is looking very strange—I shouldn't wonder if it is brain-fever. You simply have to let her go out, Nibbs.'

'Free country—she can go out, if she likes: but if she goes, I go, too, that's all. Look here, I don't want any discussion——' and he took himself up and went out, pacing.

Dawn found him cold, seedy, but hard-headed. Anon he munched a sandwich. The sun awoke like the early ploughman to plough his furrow, and in his train arose the early-yodling milkman (the human cock), with baker and butcher, and dreary coalman (the human raven). Now was the régime of brooms, and shaken fabrics, and hung-out things. From the flats men—and women—went forth to their labour in increasing number till nine or ten: and the sun, and all, saw Raby, time-worn, but fixed.

At that hour of 10 Jack Hay set out from 'the buildings' after a parting-scene with Fred and Mary Thaxter. He had been ready an hour before, but, though eager to be gone, had waited, hoping that Raby and Pole (according to Mr. Spender's promise) would come to say good-bye. But Pole, careful about many things that day, did not reach 'the buildings' till noon, and then in a prickly-heat of haste and pre-occupation. His heart smote him to find Jack gone: for he knew the stroke which was about to befall his friend, and had come with £50 and the comforting hint that any letter from Gracie was not written by her free will. But Jack had long gone: and for Pole to go to seek him at the docks was a thing not to

be thought of. Love was all crowded out from Pole's mind by hate that day: and instead of Jack there was Raby.

Jack, with no luggage but a gladstone-bag, first walked to Ludgate Hill, and, after an affectionate farewell from Mr. Spender, who gave him £20 more, took 'bus to Aldgate, with not the faintest suspicion that aught was amiss. All through the tram-drive from Aldgate to Blackwall and the portal of the East India Docks he was like a creature with many wings that beat themselves in a vacuum, moving him not an inch. The fear arose in him that the ladies would arrive first, and think him remiss, while like a laden ship in a calm the tram drifted past all that rather outlandish world of Commercial Street East, with which, since whitebaiting days, he was familiar, though all seemed strange and unrelated now, a scene in Mars, because *he* was about to leave it—he thought for ever. Sitting a-top, he noted, as it were with half his mind, that Odessa Kosher Restaurant, whose queer odour he knew, though what that 'נשר' might mean it would have taken all Cumberland to tell; then in strange neighbourhood, a Deutsche Wesleyanische Kirche—as it were a meeting between Aaron and Herder; then, everywhere, hints of the sea, fast and faster coming: ship-biscuit works, rope factories, the School of Navigation, the sailor's-rest, the old-established House for Sextants, all mixed up with Salvation citadels, carmen's pull-ups, the bath, the station; and now, at Limehouse, among the roofs on the right were masts, whence onward to Blackwall the urban animation gave place to a stodgy suburbanity.

Then into desolate regions beyond Shadwell, Stratford, he went by cab when the tram-lines stopped, shouting anon through the trap: 'Do make her go, will you?'—no easy task down the length of the Victoria Dock Road, where a thousand stalls before dismal little shops were grazed by a procession of vehicles travailing with world-merchandise toward 'delivery' and signed warehouse-receipt; and all among them signs now of the near ships, 'Jack' ashore, with puny

seedee-boys and klassies ('lascars'), and for sale in that chaos of objects on the stalls the so'wester, the binnacle, the compass, the block. Having to creep, and seeing by his nickel watch, just redeemed from pawn, that it was near eleven, Jack felt that here at last was a lane that had no turning. On the right no pavement, but a wall like the Chinese and Roman for length, behind which wooden arms dropped down and rose, and trains roared; in the middle the travailing caravan of waggons; on the left the stalls, the thronged pavement under awning, the shops, the Jew, the sailor, with dim bustle and hurly-burly. Finally, he lost patience, jumped out, paid his fare, and ran, as he knew how to; came soon to cottages with Norman doors, all alike, and offering 'apartments'—and thence, after a run with the heavy bag, reached a Gehenna of marshland covered with scrub and stubble, with gasometers, railway-lines, telegraph-poles, and chimney-shafts. Through this went the now houseless road, which was being repaired, its mud all strewn with macadam-stones, its 'pavements' only earth-banks with a fence. The dance of a light fantastic drizzle haunted the mist, and everything was wet. But no brighter smile ever lighted the face of Sicilian bridegroom than that grown chronic on the lips of Jack by the time he neared the dock-gates. He was sure now that the ladies had arrived before him; and this rather absurd smile was an anticipation of the meeting into which his mouth of itself relapsed, though he twice checked, on becoming conscious of it. But when, turning to the right through a railway-gate, he came to the dock-gates, he saw no Gracie or Missie anywhere there.

And the moment he realised that fact, this doubt, this instinct, arose in his chilled bosom: 'Can she *ever* come? is that at all *possible* to me? have I not been a dreamer to crave such a thing?'

She might want never so much to come: but could unmingled blessedness be here below? would not the nature of the world balk her?

This, however, was the deepest of whispers in him

at first. He walked to and fro some hundred feet on the dock-road, expecting them. If earthly events did not run on precisely happy lines, as he knew, still the earth was not a place made with Nasmyth hammers flying about in the air to knock people down. She could hardly fail—he would not listen to the fear that whispered louder, as minutes passed. There was a law of chance, of alternation and the pendulum-swing, making a man lucky in August who had been unlucky in July: and he had been unlucky all his life—a good thing, too, for now his lucky turn came in. She would come, therefore—there had been some delay—his gracious queen would not fail him. On the other hand, there was a law of repetition—a sad one, that—which caused the relapses of the reformed drunkard and the cured consumptive, and the third and fourth bankruptcies of the man once bankrupt. If a ship once sank and was raised, she could never long be kept afloat afterwards: so he had heard: doom led her by the nose. In the same way, fast and faster would disaster track like blood-hounds the man born under evil stars: it was the law of repetition: in the weakest spot, in the old healed sore, would the sword pierce, and come back to pierce again, till the man was all massacred and dead. As for himself, he had but lately admitted to Mr. Spender that he was born under the star Wormwood, harsh Apsinthos: and the fear that was in him grew like a poisonous gourd, whispering, ‘No escape: it will come again.’

He paced and paced, weighted on the right with the yellow new bag, on which the drizzle collected into streams. It was a dreary place, the road all sloppy, the air cut up by low bands of telegraph-wires; to his left, when he paced inward, lay a stretch of stubble-land crossed by rails; to his right a complicated band of rails running along the dockside shed—that galvanised shed, low but vast, that stretched away into invisibility, long as a Cumbrian Dale. Things near only seemed real by comparison with the ghosts of things remote, for all were seen through thinner or thicker veils of mist. The basin was not visible from where he paced, but he could see

over the shed-roof the near mastheads of a steamer, so far-spaced that it seemed incredible that any ship could be so long. Carts passed him in and out, grave in the entry, travailing to be delivered, light and rejoicing in the exit. All the air was a-sound with bustle, the rattle of steam-cranes, vague shouts of stevedores, the cries and puffs of a locomotive going to and fro in the space between the quayside and the shed, and running up and down on it. But the unseen sun climbed up from eleven to noon : and the heart knoweth its own bitterness.

Suddenly it became impossible for him to wait and do nothing, for his eyelids had taken on a heavy gloom like those that have looked upon the face of the dead, and it became essential that he should delude himself into further hope by some activity. As the ladies had probably no deck-chairs, he set off in a hurry to buy two, first entering the near station, and spying into every corner. He then went back to the Victoria Dock Road, and in a marine-store spent as much time as possible in selecting and bargaining, then pinned the ladies' names upon the chairs, and returned with active steps, as if very occupied, accompanied by a man who bore them. It was possible that the ladies had arrived during his absence, and he re-entered the gates with an excitement which, though suffocating, he did not at all admit to himself, and he glanced furtively about, hiding, as it were, from himself that he glanced : but no oasis was there for that drought of his eyes ; and still with busy steps he went along the railway and the numbered lengths of the shed, turned into one of its yards where drays were unloading, and came out upon the dockside. Down yonder, in the midst of a single file of ships by the embankment, lay the sea-mansion in which he was to sail, flying from her masthead the white, blue, yellow and red house-flag of the Company, not so monstrous-looking a hundred feet away, but a preponderous black *château* of steel, if one stood under her. He ran up the gangway amidships, followed by his chair-man, to the hurricane-deck—an expanse of planks whose lines met in perspective

distance, with garden-benches against the deck-house, and at the taffrail a colonnade of beams supporting the boat-deck above, which cosily covered it from inclemency; the whole seeming an esplanade of Ostende for promenaders, whence one might survey the Pacific as from the galleries of some travelling palace of Sans Souci or Bellavista: for he that seeketh findeth, and modern men having sought in this direction, in *this* direction have had their reward. At several points all was bustle for departure, and Jack, approaching a group, was referred by the 'Chief' to the deck-quartermaster, who in turn referred him to the cabin steward. He saw his second-saloon berth, and there left his bag; he saw Gracie's, an apartment on the port side, that would be free of the setting sun: but, with a dismal foreboding, he found that nothing could be told him of Miss Ames.

After that he could discover nothing to do. A thought arose in his mind of flying-machines, and how good it would be to fly in one second to Maida Vale—and see, and hear. Any explanation would be a comfort, any hint of the means used by Destiny to undo him: he could conceive none, only he felt the monstrous blow in the dark. And failing the flying-machine, he could not go, because of the certainty that she would come, if he only went away; nor was there now time. Miserably he wandered the ship, down to the main-deck into a white-and-gold saloon, and up to the hurricane-deck into the smoking-room, a glass-domed place with lounges and olive-green panels, and into the drawing-room, the music-room, whence by a well were visible two long-drawn-out tables of the saloon below; then, finding intolerable the dearth in all things of any balm or hope, he re-descended to the quay, and sat on a wet bollard, to which the ship's bow was moored, his brow in his palm. But soon he rose again, and paced, like one doomed to wander and find no rest, his eyes absurdly telling everything that they saw to his brain, like messengers running with news about the King of Siam's habits to a man under the gallows-rope: that Liverpool

monster was coaling, surrounded by five steam-barges with high coffin-decks, and such a large-minded activity was all about her, with spasmodic rushings of twenty winches, as when Babel and the pyramids were built; round all were barges; the tram-cranes slid to and fro, swung their arms, and anon delivered themselves of a sudden, short gabble, like turkey-cocks; the locomotive puffed to and fro in the earth, ran up and down in it; on the water round each stern lay planks, forming three sides of a square, and on that Bristol monster hung the warning: 'Keep off the propeller!' The poop of that Glasgow monster had been a-painting, for there all the water lay filmed and prismatic with the splashes; into a porthole of the *China* two men were poking rafters, one by one, feeding her, like a pet, with macaroni, and her inordinate stomach received them silently; from an eye-hole amidships came continually a soft fuss of steam, and he put his hand into its warmish fume; and the drizzle-dance wetted everything, and the mist reigned, and myriad-wise the world lived the day, and the sun burned itself slightly cooler toward its far-off failure and extinction in Eternity: but the heart of the lad knew its own bitterness.

It drew nigh to one o'clock, and by an impulse, but with hardly quickened walk, he went from the dockside, through the shed, out to the road, and approached a policeman, though he was now undisguised, and looking much as in old Bedwick days, with a deerstalker cap and flannel trousers; he asked for the post-office: that was it yonder near the dock-hotel: and thither he went, and sent the useless telegram: 'Why don't you come, dear?' knowing that she could only receive it as the ship started.

Then again he returned and sat on the bollard, his back bent quite low beneath his load: nothing in the future for him now, no reason to live, no prospect but nothingness, nor hope but the east-wind for ever, nor food but sand: and anon he pressed his thumb and forefinger over eyes rainless as the desert. Earlier in the day he had been smoking, and the empty

pipe—that same pipe of Dr. Stanley's, picked up on Thorneyfell Crags—still hung between his teeth. He heard when the Liverpool Street special drew up on the other side of the shed, and presently the passengers with their hand-bags were trooping up the ship's gangway. Now was bustle indeed; and presently the 'visitors ashore' bell rang, and there was another bustle of farewell: but Jack sat on the bollard, poring on the ground, like a colossus carved in stone, and fixed there.

Just about then the corner of his eye took in the fact that a man standing some yards away was watching him: but he did not start nor care, and would have gone like a lamb with whoever had chosen to come and say: 'I arrest you.' The passengers' friends were leaving the ship, when this man all at once advanced and addressed him.

'Are you Mr. John Bennett?'

Jack lifted himself.

'Why so?'

'If you are,' said the man, who was a harmless-looking elderly person with a red nose, 'as I suppose from the description given me, say so, for I have a letter for him.'

'Whom from?'

'From Miss Stanley.'

Jack's hand went out: he tried to speak, but said nothing.

The man, who was Barrington, Raby's clerk, gave the letter. Without looking at the address, Jack tore it open, saw her writing, turned some steps away, and read:

'DEAR JACK: I have decided at the last moment not to go. The scheme was too wild, as I now see. But I expect and require you to go just the same, as that will really be a good thing for us both. I also think that it will be better if you do not write me afterwards, as that can do no good.

'Yours, still fondly,

'GRACIE.'

There was a cracking sound and sputter at his mouth, the mouth-piece of the pipe having shivered to pieces between his teeth; at the same time his arms went out gropingly, and the letter dropped to the ground. Barrington then thought that he heard him say in a low voice: 'Who are you? Just lend us a hand, will you? I am feeling—queer——' and Barrington ran, held him up under both arms, and with all his rather feeble powers, supported him, step by step, to the bollard, where Jack sat as before, bowed down, loaded, and poring upon the ground.

But in two minutes he was roused by a: 'Please, gentlemen, please'—a man come to unship the cable. The last bell was ringing, and the moment come. Jack stood up, and precisely with the air of a purblind man, hurried but stumbling, started toward the gangway; but stopped, seeing the fallen letter and pipe, picked them up, and said to Barrington, who still stuck to his elbow:

'Tell her all right and good-bye for me, will you? And I will always—thank her——'

As he went up the gangway, a girl ran after him, addressed some words to him, the meaning of which he did not understand, and put a letter into his hand. It was a farewell from Harold Pole, scribbled in pencil, and contained £50 in notes. But it was not till some days later that Jack opened it. He went on up, grasping it tight, with the pipe, and Gracie's letter. And almost as he was on board, the ship was being hauled stern-foremost toward the opened gates. He sat on the hurricane-deck, quiet in the midst of a very animated scene, poring now upon the planks, instead of upon the quay, seeing no planks, but an abyss, while the ship was manœuvred through the straits into the river; then a brisk bell trilled, the water fled away from the screw, and she moved. And now, with quickening speed toward Gravesend, past the two multifarious river-sides she travelled, past wharf and warehouse and unloading coalship and anchored hulk amid-stream, *Ancient Briton*, and *Warspite*, these looming one by one ahead, then present abeam, then

washed astern with the stale discarded spumes of the propeller ; and with her, in short-winded haste and agitation, went puffing two little tugs, one on either side, down the widening reaches ; till one, running aboard, took off the river-pilot ; and the other gave in exhausted, and was left ; and the strong ship went on in a gloom of smoke to the ocean, and vanished. But she bore with her a broken life, and a sad fortune, that voyage.

XXIII

THE JOINT

BARRINGTON, the clerk, had arrived punctually at Maida Vale at 12.45, according to instructions, and there found his 'boss' seedy and rumped, pacing the pavement. Raby gave him Gracie's letter for Jack, with a description of Jack, and directions to take cab to Fenchurch Street for the docks; he then resumed his pacing till after one, when it was no longer possible for Gracie to reach the docks before the boat sailed, then walked away, entered the first cab, and sternly repressing the impulse to drive home to bed, gave the address of Pattison's surgery; and as the cab moved, fell asleep.

He was roused by the stoppage, entered a little hall or vestibule ending in a half-glass door marked 'Waiting-Room,' opened it to the click of a bell, and went in. On the right, as one entered, was first the consulting-room door, and further inward a window between the waiting-room and the dispensary, with opaque sashes, and a shelf at the sill, on which drugs were passed out to patients. Raby walked straight into the obscure consulting-room, whose one window was opaque, bearing the notice outside: 'Dr. Pattison's Surgery,' etc. Near the lamp lay on the table a folded towel, a bowl of water with a piece of soap in it, another bowl with carbolic lotion, some cyanide gauze, some wool, a small scalpel, a straight needle threaded with horse-hair, a little turpentine, with ether, eucaine, a hypodermic syringe, some bandaging, and a broad length of linen, evidently intended for a sling—all the preparations for a small operation: but, to Raby's

disgust, no Pattison was there, though it was now five minutes past 1.30.

‘Why, where’s the drunken fool now?’ he muttered : and he called aloud : ‘Pattison !’

The guillotine-trap of a tiny Norman window in the partition between consulting-room and dispensary shot up, and a face peered. It was Pattison’s dispenser, a mere lad, who had been waiting half asleep over a paper.

‘Are you Mr. Raby?’ he asked.

‘Yes, where the devil is this Pattison?’

‘He won’t be two minutes, sir, if you’ll wait. He told me to be here and have everything ready for your operation at 1.30; but he had to go to an important case in Westminster, and must have got delayed : I know he can’t be long——’

‘Why isn’t he here to do his work?’ grumbled Raby, but not very irascibly, being reconciled to the situation by his yawning condition; he drew the saddle-bag easy-chair to a fire in the wall opposite the dispensary, sat with his feet on an arm-chair, his hat-rim over his eyes, and his ungloved hands on his breast, and fell asleep. An old black cat jumped from the hearth-rug to his lap, nestled itself there, purred, winked, and fell cynically asleep, like Diogenes making a cushion of Alexander, and Raby did not know it; in the next room the dispenser, who had had his dinner and beer, nodded over his paper; and all was still save the vague sound of a mangle in the area-basement below.

Dr. Pattison, meanwhile, was at Pole’s flat in Westminster, where he had arrived at a quarter to one. He had been conducted to the bedroom with the broken door-handle, a minute afterwards the servant had entered with a tray containing a rather unusual quantity of cake and biscuits, also decanters of sherry and port, she had left it on the table and gone out; and a minute afterwards M——, the disguiser, had appeared.

‘How do you do, Dr. Pattison?’ he said : ‘I am most sorry to have to tell you that your little patient has not arrived by the noon train, as we expected : a telegram from her aunt informs me that there has been an un-

avoidable delay ; but she should certainly be here by the 1.5 p.m. ; and my friend, Mr. Pole, has just started for Victoria to receive her. I am very sorry—it could not have been foreseen—I only hope it is not asking too much——’

‘Close shave,’ said Pattison, looking at his watch, ‘if I am to diagnose the child, and be back at King’s Cross at 1.30. I might turn up again to-morrow at this hour——’

‘It would be distressing to me, I confess, Dr. Pattison, if she be not examined to-day. I may mention, by the way, that the question of your fee is not a first consideration with me, and the fact that you have been put to an inconvenience——’

‘Well, p’raps I can risk it : I’ll wait.’

‘That’s good. Will you—have something, meanwhile? I shall be with you again immediately——’ and M—— went out with active step, and closed that door behind him.

Pattison sat by the table and bedside, and had drunk several glasses of port, with the soliloquy of ‘Good stuff that,’ before M—— returned—or rather M——’s voice : for this time M—— called through the key-hole :

‘Dr. Pattison ! will you open to me from within ? I don’t seem to be able——’

‘One moment !’ called Pattison, and hurried to the door.

It had two locks, one enclosed in the substance of the wood, with an ordinary spring-latch opened by a wooden handle, and in this one stuck a key ; but a couple of feet above was a small iron case-lock, screwed on to the door-panel, one of those latch-locks that open with a pull-back handle on the inside, but only with a key on the outside. Its latch, when pulled back, could be fixed by depressing a little catch ; but this catch was now up, the latch was shot, and the small brass-handle had been broken short off from the bolt. Pattison fumbled at the lower lock, turned the handle this way and that, locked and unlocked the bolt with the key, but could not open the door, for it was fastened by the upper

latch ; and at last, stooping, he called through the key-hole :

'Doesn't look as if I can open it ! Something gone queer somewhere.'

'Isn't there an upper lock ?' called M——

'Yes.'

'Then, try that.'

Pattison rose, fumbled at the upper lock, then stooped again, calling :

'Doesn't seem to have any thingmagig to pull the thingumbob back !'

'Ah, how absurd ! That, then, must be the reason.'

'But what shall I do ?'

'What can you do ? Could anything be more trying ? It is my fault entirely : but Mr. Pole being out, I did not know——'

'Never mind : no use crying over spilt milk. Only way is to get a locksmith in——'

'That shall be done at once. Or the key may be found. I can only implore you to forgive me, and be patient, if there is any delay. Happily, you have the wherewithal to regale yourself somewhat meanwhile. I think there is a fire ?'

'Good fire. But I shall be dished of that operation at 1.30, if I don't look sharp.'

'So very inopportune ! How can you forgive me ? Have you any cigars ?'

'Not one, unfortunately.'

'Then, if you look in the right top drawer of the chest-of-drawers, you will find a box, and also some pipes and tobacco : or if you prefer cigarettes, I can pass you some through the key-hole.'

'I'll worry through with the cigars. Don't distress yourself—not so dusty as it looks from outside. But rout out that key quickly, will you ?'

'At once——' and M—— ran away with a laugh that ended in a frown of energy to Pole's bedroom, where Pole was flurriedly growing, growing into the image of Pattison ; while Pattison, with the mutter of 'Why can't they have things on their doors ?' drew an easy chair and the other pleasures to the

fire, and, like some first-class misdemeanant and Holloway-imprisoned lord, resolved to find solace in adversity.

At 1.15 by his watch he gave up hope of Raby's operation that day, and by that hour was in such a state of body and mind, that he burst into a fit of glad laughter at the thought of Raby's waiting and irritable misery.

But a start would have shaken his contentment had he caught one glimpse of his own double, which just then flew across that locked door to the hall. That spotted morning-coat over a body twice as stout as Pole's, that rank hair, that moustache of matted wet strings in the centre, the stiff beard, the coloured nose, were all exquisitely Pattison; no feature of Pole remained: the ears, the skin, were changed; his lips had grown gross; one top-tooth was missing from the front; the very irises seemed darker, and his very voice was gone: for when M——, who followed him to the last, said, as the lift moved to descend: 'Don't forget about the hongroise touches *en route*, and mind the coughing!' Pole answered in just the lazy lip-mutter of Pattison: 'All right, *Pu* look after that.'

No one seeing that loose personage hurrying across London over his cab-door could have dreamed that there went a product of contrivance comparable for pious care with the works of a watch, or the poise of druggists' scales. Even the watch-chain, the cravat-pin, were almost facsimiles of Pattison's; the third finger of each hand was bent inward toward the second, just like Pattison's, the right somewhat more bent than the left—cheiromancists know why; there was a certain smooth shininess of the underlip ravishingly like life. The whole make-up, in fact, was not only different in degree, but in kind, from those stage-personations of Richelieu, Napoleon, etc., which, tolerable enough across the foot-lights, are not real personations. For the actor is an actor, and no more a maker-up than a navigator, one thing being an art, and the other mainly an abstruse science; and though he may buy another's skill, he can hardly ever buy

that hearty passion for perfection, whose activity we call 'genius'; nor is the skill which he buys at all the result of a life-devotion to one branch of one subject by a cultured specialist like M——, whose other hobby, church-music and ritual, did not prevent that in personation he had, at that period, only two known compeers in the world—the Jew, Paulos, and Claude de Penet Artois. Personation at its highest is, in fact, one of those by-ways of study into which few really adroit and cultivated minds have penetrated: a rather lucky thing: for, in unprincipled hands, its dangers are obvious, since, in fact, anyone may be turned by the Master into anyone else not a dwarf or a giant.

Pole, at any rate, entered the Pattison surgery ten minutes late without shadow of fear that any suspicion would cross Raby's mind, though, for safety, he carried a small revolver. On his head was Pattison's own top-hat, in his right hand Pattison's own bamboo stick; in his left an instrument-case. He was certain that Raby was there waiting, for Raby's punctual departure from Maida Vale had been telephoned him: and he softly entered the waiting-room, nodded to the dispenser, who peeped out on hearing the bell-ping, and quietly entered the consulting-room, expecting to find Raby asleep, knowing his nightlong watch: and there, in truth, reclined Raby, the volatile ears of the cat on his lap spread to his breathings like two little lug-sails running free before the wind, and shifting as if to adjust themselves to shifting winds.

Pole looked at the sleeper, and divesting his mind of the character of Pattison, murmured with pointed forefinger:

'Ey, Nibbs, your last quiet sleep, I hope. . . .'

He then went to Raby's side, and taking at last that left hand into his own, stooped to examine it.

He knew that an amputation was to be performed, but, to that moment, had no idea what amputation. Now, however, he at once thought: 'It must be this nail': for except the nail of the third finger the hand was normal.

Upon that nail Pole bent his brow, twisting the lamp-shade, so that a ray illumined it. He expected to gather some knowledge from his first glance at it: but the deepening intensity of his frown showed that this was not the case. It looked like a new nail, flimsy, immature, and dented across the middle. A cottage-clock ticked on the mantelpiece: no other sound, but Raby's breath; even the mangle below was still. Pole's scrutiny grew intense into an expression of pain: his eyes turned away, and turned again to the finger, alternately; he asked himself: 'What can it mean?'

He was interrupted by a sharp sound—the lifting of the window-trap by the dispenser. It awoke Raby, who started, snatched his hand free, and broke into the half-dreaming bellow:

'Who the infernal devil——?'

'All right, don't kick up a shindy,' said Pole in Pattison's slangy lip-murmur.

'Oh, it's you, Pattison. Look here, what do you call yourself? Just look at the time——'

'Whose fault, if you chose to go to sleep? I was only three minutes late: beastly confinement up the Pentonville Road. Well, what's *your* trouble?'—— he turned to the dispenser, who, peering under the trap, said:

'Anything more for me to do?'

'Not as I know of, if everything's fixed up. Stop a bit, I'll just see'—— and he ran through the objects on the table, touching each, but stopping in the midst to say to Raby:

'Have a drink before the slaughter?'——giving, by a real imaginative feat of insight into Pattison, a glimpse of a flask in his breast-pocket.

'Never mind about drinks,' said Raby, stretching himself: 'work first and play after. You've got to get this little joint off.'

'Yes, you think a tidy something of getting that joint off, too, don't you? Like another man having off a leg. By the way, what's the trouble with it?'

'Gout, I repeat.'

‘No—really, I mean.’

‘Got the D. T.’s in it, Pattison, the damned trembles, of which you may have heard. But will you kindly let my private ailments alone, until I consult you? Diagnosis becomes a vice, if pushed too far, my friend. By the diagnosis of an apple, our mother Eve lost balance, and made you what you are, Pattison, and me—what—I am. Equitable piece of business to make us suffer for the larks of that old girl, isn’t it? Not even a peach, but a common Normandy pippin. But will you stop that gabble, Pattison, and cut this joint off, supposing you know how? Come along! I haven’t slept a wink all night——’

‘Been on the razzle, then?’

‘Yes, and she woke me afresh every time I was just dozing off. Razzle bounds *your* little imagination, my son. Come along! *Hamara kukm hai!* Get it off! My own left hand that I was born with——’

‘As if you could be born with anybody else’s left hand! I’m quite ready. Just toss your coat off, and wash the hand in that soap and water. I say, what’s-your-name, where’s the tourniquet?’

‘You didn’t say you wanted one,’ answered the dispenser, still peering under the trap.

‘Well, I do—a small one—then you can make yourself scarce.’

Raby washed and wiped his hand, the tourniquet was passed in, the dispenser was heard to go out, and the work began.

Pole, keeping always, as far as possible, in shadow, first carefully cleansed the terminal joint from all grease and dirt with a little turpentine and ether, then passed the rubber-band tourniquet up the arm, to constrict the arteries, while Raby, now a shade paler, said:

‘Mind you, Pattison, remember your promise—no pain! I hate pain! First of all, pain means kicking, and kicking means shins.’

‘Poh, no pain. Look at him—pale as a white rat: thinks he’s going to have a leg off. Mustn’t be nervous. If you kick, I shall only feel compelled to

retaliate. Just lay the finger firmly down on the towel.'

Raby laid it, and Pole proceeded to inject the joint with eucaine in several places, doing everything with a neat-fingered nicety of which the real Pattison was probably incapable, though his experience was only derived from four terms at St. Bart's before he was nineteen.

The injection over, he said: 'One minute—' and went out to the waiting-room while the anodyne took effect, not caring to be longer than necessary in Raby's presence; and there again, as he walked quickly, softly, to and fro, that painful puzzlement, that lost look, came to his face, and again he asked: '*What can it mean?*'

After some minutes he returned to the inner room, saying cheerily:

'Now, Raby, said your prayers?'

'Come along,' said Raby: 'it's got to come off, and it's going to come off, be G—d! But I'd rather it was anywhere else in my whole body than just where it is, Pattison. That must be a most tender little spot just there, you know——'

'Poh, coward, coward. Lay the finger firmly on the towel. I'll hold it by the tip, and don't you flinch when you see the cut, or you spoil the incision. Now—quite ready?'

Pole had selected a scalpel from his own case, which he had brought stocked with necessary things in case Pattison's should not be at hand; and as Raby, with grinding teeth, muttered: 'Off with it, be ——!' the chill steel drew nigh to cut. Raby prepared to howl. It entered his flesh to the bone. But he hardly felt it.

'That all right?' muttered Pole, all engaged.

'Good old Pattison—splendid!' cried Raby, 'hack into it! have it off! But—what you cutting it round for, instead of straight?'

'Well, you must have flaps, mustn't you?' said Pole, bending with as dainty a care over the work, as if doing it for a lady-love; and, as with cautious zeal he cut and turned, and cut and turned, he breathed

the steps to Raby: 'By that quarter-circle, dorsal incision, I made the upper small flap to cover over the wound, you see, and I also severed the tendon which extends the joint; now, turning over—like that—I make by this palmar incision a larger, semicircular, flap, and, in doing so, I—sever the tendon which flexes the joint. Very good: you see, there's very little bleeding: hold it firmly over this way on the towel . . . now, then, for the lateral ligaments—this one first—that's all right—now, then, this one—and now, Raby, it is—finished.'

The joint separated itself from the finger, at whose end thin blood oozed over blue-white cartilage, and spread upon the towel. And instantly, while Raby's interest was still concentrated upon his hand, Pole caught up the joint, plunged it into the soap and water, and appeared to leave it there; but it was still in his hand when, murmuring: 'One moment—' he hastily went out; in the waiting-room he dropped it into a vial from his pocket containing a solution of formalin; then, returning the vial to his pocket, hurried in again.

'Ah, now, you see,' he said, 'bleeding's shutting up already. We've only got to hold on a tick or two. You look pale: just have a pull at this'—and he offered the whisky-flask, of which Raby drank.

The bleeding over, Pole quickly united the edges with horse-hair sutures, dressed the stump with cyanide-gauze squeezed out of the carbolic lotion, covered it with some wool, set to bandaging it, and in a minute Raby's stump was turbaned like a Turk.

'That's all,' said Pole, 'only the sling now: and in a week or ten days the stitches can be removed.'

'Well, I call that splendidly done,' said Raby, 'thanks, old chap—only don't charge for my praise in the bill, you know. What's the damage? By the way, where's that joint?'

'Where do you think? not eaten, you know: didn't want to poison myself—'

'Bah, a bit of me would act like Corpus Christi, or the gold-cure, on you, Pattison. But what you going to put it in?'

'Put what in?'

'Why, the joint.'

'Funny question! Do you mean that you wanted it?'

'Of course I want it!'

'Then, why didn't you say so? Joint's long ago down the sink.'

'What! But what for? Why the deuce do you take these liberties, Pattison? I had a special fancy for keeping that joint——'

'Then all you had to do was to say so in time. You don't suppose we keep——'

'Couldn't you recover it?'

'Half way to the Thames by this, I'm afraid.'

There was nothing to be said, and Raby sauntered out grumbling: 'Well, send in your bill.' And he drove home with something somewhere within him not quite at ease.

Pole also drove home not quite at ease, with that puzzling vial of formalin before him. On his arrival, Pattison, then very tipsy, was released with a fee by M——, who at the same time said that the invalid niece of 'Mr. Allen' had been prohibited, after all, at the last moment, from taking the voyage.

That was all one to Pattison. He was at that point in unsoberness at which, if one once arrives, he must needs run on to the very bottom, as in running down steep places: and on the way home he made several stoppages for further beverage. When he reached the surgery for the seven-to-nine consultation, he seemed quite unfit for work, though, in reality, his head was strongest when his legs were weakest—or say, he could work with more *spirit*, but less *understanding*, when drunk than sober. He then said through the trap to his dispenser:

'Did Raby turn up?'

The lad, who had just removed the bloody towel, etc., answered:

'Yes, and you operated on him, and left the surgery wide open, too.'

'I didn't,' said Pattison: 'I was down somewhere in Westminster.'

‘Well, then, you were seen as you see, sir, and that’s double.’

‘Believe me, I was down——’

‘Aye, among the dead men, I dare say. Well, have it as you like——’ He turned away with contempt, and there the matter dropped.

After that, Pattison waited in his uninterested way for Raby to write or reappear for the operation, and Raby uninterestedly awaited Pattison’s bill: but for many days neither came into contact with the other.

Pole, meantime, was devoting himself to the study of a finger-joint in a solution of formalin. He would sit up whole nights, bending an earnest stare upon that plug of flesh hollowed out at one end, with a broad-headed bone sticking from the hollow. He had had no doubt that he had only to see it in order to probe that dark *How* of Dr. Stanley’s death: for since Raby had been so anxious to hide it, that surely indicated that it would furnish some clue to the truth. And now, at last, he saw it—under the refraction of his lenses: but, first with a shock of astonishment, then with a sense of shame, he found that it brought to his mind no light. Bitter indeed is that hour when to the young man conscious of talent comes the proof that that talent is not infinite, not so special as he thought it, nor even commensurate with the emergencies of life. To Pole this bitterness now came: his eyes grew to morbid brightness: and often, wearied toward daybreak, he would ask himself with opening arms and a face of distress ready to burst into tears:

‘Why, aren’t I any good at all, then. . . ?’

The clue to the truth which he sought, but found not—the real clue—was a pipe which lay in the jacket-pocket of Jack Hay, who by that time had seen Gibraltar, Marseilles, Brindisi, and was passing down that red Sea of Rushes where to them that had no helper God once opened a way.

XXIV

THE STRUGGLE

POLE, however, had somewhat to occupy him in those days beside that vial of formalin. For, Jack Hay gone, both he and Raby leapt vividly awake to the fact that now was the chance of life during those two months and two days before the 9th of July, Gracie's birthday. That she could now resist marriage with one or other neither could believe, for the reason that a man cannot suddenly change his mental outlook of twenty-three years. Now, therefore, was the tug-of-war: and let the stronger win.

It will not be supposed, by the way, that their insane intensity of this period was due to any greed to possess £7,000 a year. Harold Pole was a young gentleman who quite despised riches and rich people, as young gentlemen naturally do who get lovesick of their own forehead, and peep at it in mirrors—and smile. He would have given seventy times seven thousand anythings for one comrade-glance of that nimble Hermes whom he worshipped, one inch of deeper insight, or ampère move of mental stress. Raby, on the other hand, loved display and wealth: but this particular £7,000 a year figured little in his imagination of heaven, because it was not alone there, and was eclipsed by the person of Gracie. He loved Gracie with as hot a passion as Pole loved her with a chivalrous devotion, or Jack Hay with a lowly-hearted piety. But not even love of Gracie accounted for their fever: it was the tyranny of the early-implanted Idea that to win Gracie, and outdo the other, was somehow heaven. They had

good reasons to be eager, but their eagerness was vastly disproportionate to the reasons; nor could they have explained it to themselves any more than another man can explain his eagerness to be, say, rich. He knows, if he be not very green, that there is really nothing amusing in the world for him to buy with the riches (unless he be weak in the head, and likes to play with shiny stones), yet he strives, because when a boy he acquired the Idea that to be rich is somehow heaven; it is the fantasy of his dream, and eye-disease; nor can he ever escape that astonishing Idea any more than his own shadow (unless, indeed, he be born again, and again become as a healthy boy): and so with Pole and Raby in regard to Gracie: it was the fantasy of their dream and eye-disease—their Idea and delusion; they were the children of their childhood, and also its slaves: not the bright-eyed children and servants of Reason.

What rendered the situation most ticklish was Gracie's illness. She quite collapsed. On the Friday morning (Jack Hay having gone on the Thursday), she rose by herself, dressed, kissed Miss Ames, sat to breakfast, and, except for her silence, gave no sign of the approaching stroke. But an hour later Missie found her in the drawing-room in a very awkward, hanging kind of pose, and heard her mutter: 'I can't sing.' She tried to rouse her, but in vain; so she put her to bed, and summoned a doctor.

His diagnosis lasted a long time, and he gave some very minute instructions. At the door Miss Ames, with streaming face, said to him:

'Doctor, is she going to die?'

'No, no, no—pray do not think that, now,' he answered; 'complete rest—few visitors—not the slightest worry—and she will be well again in six months.'

'Six months!'—Miss Ames began to sob.

'Ah, now, you mustn't,' he said, 'or *you* will be next, and then who will look after the patient?'

'Doctor, could she be taken away in either two or four weeks' time?'

'Where to?'

'To Australia.'

'If it be necessary, she possibly might. Are you thinking of going there?'

'Yes,' said Missie with decision, having conceived the idea that this was the only way to save Gracie; though how she was to find Jack Hay when she got there she never asked herself, the Australia of her imagination being a pink place one foot square, as on the map.

Raby, not daring to present himself at the house he had so outraged, for some time knew nothing of the illness; but Pole came that Friday night. He felt her pulse, struck her patellar tendon several times, and peered under her lids, she looking at him with lifted brows, not seeming to recognise him, then suddenly saying:

'Ah, Harold, you see I am not very well. How is Gladys?'

'She is well, and you, I am sure, will soon be, too.'

But he saw that this could not be, till long after that 9th of July: so that, if she was to marry, she must marry sick—not, indeed, an impossible thing—nay, an easier thing: but his heart ached for her, and revolted from winning her through any feebleness of her mind. Only, there was Raby, who would not be sensitive. . . .

'Ey, she must have had a great shock, poor Gracie,' he whispered to weeping Missie.

'I will tell you outside,' whispered Missie: 'Nibbs Raby has been most barbarous——'

Pole's conscience now smote him, for he had been aware of what Raby did, but had not stirred a finger: and it had come to this. Already a growth of labelled bottles was beginning on the mantelpiece; something simmered over a spirit-lamp on the walnut washstand; a fire burned in the grate. Jean at the foot of the low brass bedstead held apron to eye, and in her other hand a slanted vinegar-bottle, as if for exhibition.

'Nibbs actually threatened——' began Missie.

'Sh-h,' whispered Pole: 'don't call his name: it may agitate her.'

Gracie lay on her back with a vague smile, not seeming specially ill.

'She went on her knees to him—I heard her sobs——' whispered Missie.

'So bad as that?' whispered Pole with malicious smile of triumph: 'she ought to love Raby after that. But don't talk.'

'I can't sing any more, Harold,' remarked Gracie: 'just as my voice was getting nicely *posée*——'

'Soon, soon,' said Pole.

'We are going to Australia Thursday after next,' whispered Missie.

'Who is?' whispered Pole.

'Gracie and I.'

'Ah?'

'Until we find this Jack Hay, I really despair——'

Whether or not that name penetrated to Gracie's consciousness, she had all at once an alarming seizure, taking on an expression of mixed terror and silliness, her body twisted into an *outré* shape, with the left shoulder stuck up to her ear, the neck twisted to the left, the right haunch highly protuberant, the legs cramped up. Pole held her wrists firmly down, while for a minute she maintained that shape of grotesque deformity, due to irregular muscle-contraction; then, stiffening itself, her body went on into a spasmic movement, stern, intensifying, a passion of activity, till the bed creaked to and fro, and Pole vibrated—arms, cheeks, hair—like one shaken in some vigorous grip. She had been rather an athlete and child of the open air, and her powerful muscular system tasked all his strength to hold her. He had just time to cry: '*Go, Missie!*' when, in the midst of the paroxysm, Gracie gave out a shriek that must have penetrated to every part of the block. Miss Ames, however, would not run, having been warned by the doctor how it would be, but leant over distressfully pleading: 'Oh, don't, Gracie! Gracie, don't!' till the second shriek, when her wits gave way, and she saved herself by the door.

When the seizure passed, Gracie, without recovering consciousness, fell into sleep. It was then late, and Pole, after telephoning to his sister from below, returned

with his own pillow and blankets, having now to explain, to Missie's astonishment, that the ground floor flat was his own; he watched till two by Gracie, then gave place to Jean, and slept on the dining-room sofa.

The next day he engaged one Miss Yates, from a Baker Street nurses'-home, who thenceforth took up residence at the flat, sleeping, chiefly by day, in Miss Ames' bed.

That night again, and regularly afterwards, Pole came and stayed, relieving the nurse some hours, then sleeping in the dining-room with the decrepit old deerhound on a rug beside him. He brought a dressing-gown, slippers, books, and was quite at home. Gracie was really his patient: for he habitually took upon himself to modify the doctor's treatment, secretly altering the prescribed proportions of arsenic, quinine, strychnia, and other nerve-tonics, always himself seeing the prescriptions made up. He had placed his couch immediately under one of the two dining-room electric lamps, and oftentimes when supposed wearied and asleep, was gazing at a vial of formalin with a finger-joint in it, or excogitating the riddles of his daily business.

At first Gracie grew steadily worse; but her malady was so deceptive, that there were times when she looked almost well, though always, except in paroxysms, her feebleness was extreme. She seemed, in general, to have forgotten Jack Hay and the incidents of his departure, and to be troubled only with the idea that her voice was ruined. On the fourth day she insisted upon being taken to the piano, would listen to no refusal, and tried to rise, but failed; she was wrapped up, carried out, and at the instrument began to sing a chromatic study, but soon left off, her chin on her bosom, and in the upward underlook of her eyes a quiet, very pathetic consciousness of her wreckage; she then tried to declaim 'Woe unto them,' but stopped in the second bar, saying with dolefully-shaken head and a smile: 'I can't sing.' A queer sort of falsetto mingled in her notes, as if one of the cords was more or less paralysed, and that range, power, and fluency in vocalisation which had bred in her visions of grand opera were now like clipped wings and withered

flowers. She would not return to bed, but was laid on a sofa, where the doctor found her, and approved of the change; and for hours she lay there, gloomily eyeing the piano, anon assuming shapes the most grotesque.

The same night she said to Missie: 'You must take me at once, Missie, to Mr. R——' (the voice-producer); and from that moment this notion so possessed her, that it became a plague to all about her. The doctor and Pole were greatly distressed by it, seeing that the worry was making her worse, but they would not consent to let her out. On the third day of her persistence, however, a bright warm day of Spring, Missie persuaded the nurse, and they two clandestinely took her in a four-wheeler to X—— Square, and the palace of the great R——.

Gracie, always strong in common-sense, had never before been a devotee to 'voice-production,' but it now looked as if her brain had turned exactly upside down, seeing many things in just the opposite light, believing what she had disdained, loving where she had hated, and so on. Hence the pilgrimage to R——.

The pilgrims were conducted by a liveried footman before R——, Missie and the nurse in a state of trepidation lest Gracie should break into one of her paroxysms. R——, who never refused a fee, first received his three guineas, then, leaving the others, supported Gracie's steps into his sanctum, laid her on a couch, and sat over her. This adroit man, a Jew, who had been, as it were, expelled from the Royal Academy in his youth for incapacity, had promulgated the tidings that, by certain physical exercises known only to him, the muscles of the larynx could be so modified as to make even a frog sing, and develop a moderately good voice into an Israfel's; and he had fixed upon London as his place of business (though a true cosmopolitan), well knowing that in England the charlatan (if only charlatan *enough*) lives in a palace, whereas on the Continent he begs *gros sous* in the streets. Nor was his trust in our British *naïveté*

disappointed: ladies soon flocked in hundreds to his bait, submitting meekly to the weights R—— put upon their chests, and to many a contortion and regimen. His high fees created faith, and faith bringing ever more fees and victims, he quickly became a millionaire, so that at this period of Missie's pilgrimage his annual trips to Italy were accompanied by the train and appurtenance of a prince. Thus did R——, by 'voice-production,' gain the whole world, and found it, let us hope, amusing: but as to his own still, small voice, above all voices needing 'production,' that, by some ostrich oversight, R—— never produced.

Gracie, however, he found a client not all beer and skittles, and, instead of the usual fifteen minutes, was cumbered with her two hours that day: for she, after repeatedly calling him 'Mr. Spender,' fell into a stupor, and could not be moved, the front being some distance away. R——'s manners lacked repose under this mishap; he gesticulated, deprecated, lisped, groaned, Missie's murmurs of 'Oh, my teeth,' seeming to act as an irritant upon him, till finally he broke out rudely: 'Sorry for your teeth, ma'am, I'm sure: but I'm not a dentist, I'm a—voice-producer.' There, meanwhile, lay Gracie, all inert and white. When at last she could be taken home, they found the doctor in the flat; and he, by threats, brought it about that R—— received no subsequent guineas from Missie, though for some days Gracie continued to harp like exiles in Babylon on the same forlorn string.

That night at nine Raby, for the first time since Jack's going, presented himself at the flat with a heart beating awfully against his side, his left arm slung in silk. To Jean, who opened to him, he said: 'Miss Gracie in?' and was answered: 'I'll e'en see, sir'; whereupon the door was shut in his face. Missie being out shopping, Jean hurried to Pole, agitatedly whispering:

'Mr. Nibbs, sir!'

'Tell him from Miss Ames,' whispered Pole, 'that Miss Stanley is dying, and that neither now nor afterwards can Miss Ames receive him.'

Jean delivered that message. And Raby said, 'All right,' and went away.

That night he hardly slept, though he did not believe about the 'dying': he concluded that she was ill: and often he murmured her name, confiding it to his pillow, tossed with sick longings, kissing at her vision, and swearing that if ever husband was devoted to wife, he would be to her.

He hardly looked in at his office an hour the next day, and at nine p.m. was again at the flat.

Miss Ames came to him at the door in high excitement, saying:

'I sent you my decision last night, Nibbs Raby!—it is not desirable that you should visit my house——'

'Oh, I'm not come to visit *you*,' he said, quite pale, urging his way in past her: and he walked straight to Gracie's room, Missie crying after him: 'Not there! Stop, Nibbs!'

Gracie, however, received no shock on seeing him, but, on the contrary, with a look of gladness, cried out: 'Jack!' That exactly upside-down condition of mind had characterized her all the evening; she had been slightly delirious, misnaming everyone, occasionally lapsing into stupor, and causing such pity and terror in the house, that at one time Missie developed something like hysteria, and had to be forced to bed.

Raby started to see Pole there quite at home in slippers: but in a moment he had no eyes but for that wrecked face on the pillow, and took her hand with a gaze of sorrow, while Pole muttered: 'Ey, crooked wretch!' spurred to a detestation by that gaze of sorrow. He said aloud:

'I have to tell you, Raby, that Gracie is in a dangerous condition—far more so than she looks. The doctor says that there is only one hope for her—perfect nervous rest, and as it is to you that she owes this, your sense of decency, one hopes, will save us from the necessity of summoning the police. You must go. . . .'

Raby, tenderly kissing her eyes and bandaged brow, did not answer: but Gracie, hearing the word 'go,' answered for him, saying:

'Go where to? Australia? But not without *me*, surely!' Then with childlike nods to Raby: 'We will go *together*, shan't we? and then, be—married.'

'All right, we will, we will,' he murmured consolingly, 'in spite of anything,' kissing her head again, while a smiling fiend looked out of Pole's eyes.

'Shall we really be married?' asked Gracie.

'Yes, we shall, we shall,' murmured Raby.

'Some girls should be mated at fourteen,' she sighed dreamily, 'and I was one of them. But you were always so wild, Jackie!'—with a pout and a shudder—'I was afraid of you. It is desirable that one should first have the wedding-ring, you know——'

'Nibbs Raby,' broke in Missie at the door, 'I again request you——'

'Come, come, sir!' said Pole, springing up.

Raby lifted himself, but, without taking any further notice of them, paced the room several times, his right hand in his breast, gazing at those poor eyes, which now closed toward stupor; and he thought with agony: 'Well, I killed the father, I didn't need to kill the daughter, too! Is that fair? Never mind, I'll make it up to you—darling!—if you will only let me.' After a time he said aloud: 'All right, Missie, don't worry your little self—don't excite your little self, Pole, my son—I'm going; but I'm coming back all right'—and he sauntered out.

Pole flew after him into the passage to whisper at his elbow:

'*What's the matter with your left hand?*'

'Got it crushed under a cart, my son,' said Raby, without turning or stopping.

'Did it hurt?'

'Hurt like ten hells.'

'But the third finger—I see you have it all bandaged: not been having the top joint off, Raby, Raby?'

Raby spun like a screw, hissing close and secret:

'*Yes! You're done!*'

And Pole stood and chuckled his delicious bass chuckle, while Raby sauntered away.

It was possible, by peering through the ornamented-

glass door, to see a visitor from within before opening, and Pole instructed Jean to open no more to Raby. The next night, therefore, Raby received no answer to his knock : but he waited there an hour, till Jean had to go out to buy something, when he easily slipped in, and came to the bedside. On the third night, receiving again no answer, he put his thumb to the electric button, and kept it steadily there, knocking rousingly as well, till Gracie began to fidget, and the door had to be opened. Pole strongly urged the police, but Miss Ames would not hear of such a scandal before the nurse, fearing, above all, its effect upon Gracie. Her first resentment was, in fact, subsiding : she was good and forgiving, and the power of Raby's will prevailed without fail each time.

Pole, meantime, never heard Raby's step or voice without a rather wild quickening of the pulse, being uncertain whether Raby had yet come into contact with Pattison. He knew that as soon as ever Raby saw Pattison, and Pattison denied having cut off the joint, Raby would guess the truth, and would not take it precisely in the manner of a Christian martyr. At no hour, therefore, of the day or night was Pole without a loaded revolver on his person.

XXV

MISSIE'S MONEY

GRACIE'S fellow-students, Gladys Pole and other friends, called often, but could rarely see her, except the young Duchess of T——e, her Harley-street schoolfellow, who came every second day at noon, and stayed an hour, bringing an accumulation of Greek and Malakhoff chocolates, such as Gracie had greedily loved, but now, in her inversion of tastes, would not touch.

The Marquess of D—— was on the Continent, but on the ninth evening, her Grace of T——e came accompanied by the marchioness—Harrie Stanley, *née* Hay, though the graciousness of this descent from Olympus was lost upon Gracie, who lay on the drawing-room sofa quite comatose; in the triangular space between sofa and grate sat her Grace, her Ladyship, Raby and Missie, her Ladyship seeming to occupy an amount of space proportionate to her rank, all soft-muffed and seal-enveloped, under the enormous curves of a Gainsborough hat sketched in profligate freehand, yet *chic* as the Rue de la Paix. Evening shades drew in, and the room was unlighted but by the dance of the fire. They bent upon those closed eyes and nipped cheeks on the sofa, and if one spoke, it was in murmurs.

'It seems sudden,' murmured Harrie Stanley: 'she was always such a healthy girl.'

'She was well one night, and like that the next morning,' said Missie: '*Jack Hay went away.*'

'Extrawdnery,' murmured the marchioness, adding to herself: 'It is *I* who should have broken down, if he had stayed.'

'Yes, she was healthy, but always most fffearfully high-strung when a little thing,' murmured her tall, pretty Grace of T——e.

'A change from this beastly hole to Switzerland, or somewhere,' said Raby: 'that's what'll pull her straight. And she's going to have it, too.'

'From a hole to the highest mountains might be sudden,' said Harriet Stanley, looking flirtily at him with soft lids, having always a distinct little weakness for his face: 'are you coming to my ball on the 20th?'

'Just got my dress home,' he said.

'That's right. I hope you are a Cavalier: you will be quite an ideal Cavalier, do you know?—yes, I think you know—and what's-his-name—Pole—should be a Roundhead, on account of his brains. Is Pole coming?'

'I neither know nor care.'

'But I thought you were always so inseparable? One always associated you in one's mind, considering "Pole-and-Raby" almost as the joint name of a sort of double personality. Oh, but I forget, you are rivals as well. I hope you don't fight! Is it Pole who has been injuring your arm?'

'No, I had gout in one of my nails, and got the joint cut off to give to a girl who was bothering me for a keepsake.'

'Oh, how fffearfully Roman!' went her Grace, always breathily gushing: 'that should quite *nail* her to you!'

'But I thought one only gave away joints in hampers at Christmas?' said Harriet Stanley: 'and is gout in a present *chic*? like "highness" in a pheasant? It might be catching to the lips, whether one eats one's joint or kisses it.'

'But it isn't *a bit* true!' gushed her Grace, with a kind of falsetto over-culture of voice, really grotesque, but still deucedly pretty: '*is* it now?'

'Perfectly true,' said Raby: 'I've already given it to her.'

'Oh, how fffearfully absurd! "What Will She Do With It?" must be the title of the romance.'

'She says she is going to press it into her thimble,' said Raby, 'and hang it for ever round her neck.'

'Ah, then,' said the marchioness, 'you may now truly say: "There is a divinity that shapes my end."'

'Oh, how fffearfully good!' breathily sang her languishing Grace: 'his hand will be ever on her heart, and his finger on her pulses. The thimble must be a symbol implying thread, and so attachment, just as the nail does——'

'The thimble *is* a symbol,' said Raby: 'don't know what it implies.'

'Fff course it is: "thimble" and "symbol" are even the same words etymologically, I should think. Do you know Prince P—— of Schaumburg-Lippe? He always calls a thimble a "simbol," so they must be what are called "kindred words."'

'No,' said Harriet Stanley, who knew things, "'thimble" is a corruption of "thumb-bell," because they were originally bell-shaped, and worn on the thumb. That is why she hangs it on her, because people do hang on little bells in Arcadie: but instead of "bells on her fingers," she has fingers in her bells.'

'Fingers *on* belles,' said Raby, 'tongues *in* them: that's the only correct order of things.'

'Be quiet, Nibbs!' said poor Missie, blowing a nose inveterately red-tipped now: 'you always jest like an elephant. I have no patience with you.'

'But we have not heard—is this passion for joints mutual?' pursued her Grace.

'Is it a joint passion?' queried her Ladyship, with soft, flirty gaze.

'Not a bit of it,' said Raby: 'I permit myself to be loved, but no woman need expect more of me. I haven't even any more jointures to bestow. So I give public notice.'

'No hope,' whispered her Grace, with hiding hand, 'he has exhausted his extremities——'

'He should pin a notice on his hat,' whispered back her Ladyship, "'No tips given here"——'

Gracie stirred under the quilt, moaned, turned, and

put a hand to the collar of her dressing-gown, as if feeling too hot.

'Better push her a little from the fire,' said Miss Ames.

They pushed the sofa, and afresh bent gravely upon her. Her Grace poured a few drops of eau-de-Cologne upon the bandaged brow, murmuring :

'Poor G.! But she was always so fffearfully high-strung, you know.'

The marchioness whispered :

'Was she very *amoureuse* when a little thing? But perhaps she would never have told. She seemed secretive.'

'She told *me*. She was sixteen or thereabouts then, I should think, and I eighteen, just going to be married. We used frequently to sleep together in London, and it was in the middle of the night. Oh, she did sob so *piteously* in telling, poor thing, quite as though her heart were being dragged out.'

'Who was it? Anyone?'

'No, a boy in the country.'

'Named Jack Hay?'

'Oh, you know, then? Yes, that was it.'

'Extrawdnery,' muttered Harriet Stanley.

Gracie now started and turned restlessly at a post-man's-rap, though without waking. Jean brought in an envelope which Missie, turning on the light, found to contain a type-written letter, with some coloured leaflets, and a P. and O. pamphlet. She had written to the Company for information as to the next Australian boat, and for the transfer to that boat of Grace's unused ticket taken for the *China*.

'Only the answer from the Company,' she said, holding up the coloured leaflets to show the Duchess of T——e.

'Oh, that is a dreadful idea of yours!' exclaimed her Grace: 'won't you be persuaded, Missie?'

'No, Charlotte, understand that I must be allowed to do my best for her in my own way. She is all I have, and I cannot listen to advice from any quarter——'

'But it seems so fffearfully—— Just think, Harriet, she wants to take Gracie to Australia——'

'To *where*?' said Raby, who, though she spoke in a whisper, had heard.

'To nowhere!' interposed Missie.

He frowned, but said nothing, for just then Gracie opened her eyes with the cry: 'Oh, my back!' so loud that Nurse Yates heard it from the bedroom, and hurried in; then, all at once sitting up, Gracie stared a minute round with her expression of wild terror and silliness, fell back, and immediately went on into that stern tremor which always preceded her outcries, and invariably threw the witnesses of it into a sort of affrighted ecstasy.

'The ladies must go quickly!' panted the nurse, grasping a wrist.

'Yes, go—do go!' implored Missie, running about.

The two visitors palely took themselves off on tip-toe, and as they drove away over the straw-strewn street, heard the first of the shrieks. At the same time they saw Pole just entering. He, at that cry, flew up, pushed Raby away, and took his place till the paroxysm was over, leaving the poor face wet with tears; Pole and Raby, in strange co-operation, then lifted her, head and feet, to bed, and there sat by her, till the nurse's hour for massaging.

Afterwards, in the drawing-room, Pole lay in slippers reading, while Raby at the bay-window looked out upon the street. A long time passed and neither spoke.

Then Miss Ames came, saying:

'Oh, you are both here. She seems quieter——'

'Missie,' said Raby, spinning round, 'is it true that you are thinking of taking Gracie to Australia?'

'It is,' she answered with birdlike perk of neck and chin.

'But what for?'

'You must not expect me to account to you for my actions, Nibbs.'

'Oh, mustn't I, though! I *do* expect you. And I also expect you not to expose yourself and Gracie to the ridicule of your friends. Who ever heard of such wild nonsense?—as if Australia were Greenwich! You don't stir a step!'

Pole smiled sweetly.

'But you must *want* me to go, I suppose,' said Missie,

'since you speak in this way. Nothing more than such insolence was needed to make my resolution absolutely inflexible. Why, Harold knew, and has not ventured to address to me any such protest.'

'I care nothing about any Harolds,' said Raby. 'Of course, being a woman, you prefer a cunning sneak to an open, honest talker—of course! Your Harolds said nothing, because they want to curry favour with you, and because they know very well that *I* should never permit any such wild nonsense as flying off to Australia. They put the dirty work on *me*, and think *they* 'll reap the benefit—when I'm blind and stiff! Look here, Missie, just let me tell you something now—and I'm glad that that gentleman is here to hear it: you call me insolent, but what I have said isn't any insolence: I have a perfect right to say it: and for this reason: that Gracie and I have privately arranged to get married, as soon as ever she can go out. So now you know.'

He turned to the window again, looking out with a spasmodic winking of the eyes, lightning twitches, both cunning and fierce.

'Gracie and you—*arranged!*' cried Miss Ames, astonished. 'Harold, do you know anything of this?'

'Yes, I think I heard the arrangement,' said Pole.

'But Gracie couldn't have been in her senses!'

'No: she honoured Raby with the name of "Jack."'

'Don't matter what name she honoured me with!' shouted Raby, spinning quick: "'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet——"!'

'Ey, he quotes, he quotes,' went Pole: 'not about offals, and poisons, and dead men's bones, but about roses.'

So far as this Pole had never ventured before, and Raby, watching him very queerly, was struck silent some seconds; he then said:

'I wish to have no quarrel with anyone. I wish to go my way quietly and peaceably, like a quiet, peaceable man, provided that no one interferes with me. All I say is that Gracie and I have come to a formal understanding, and upon that understanding I mean to insist.'

Whoever attempts to thwart me, must either kill me, or die himself—and that's plain talk. I can't say fairer. I recognise that that gentleman there will be damaged; I don't forget that he has certain claims upon Gracie—claims, in fact, quite equal to my own; and as I choose to be conciliatory, I now make him this offer here in your presence, Missie: don't think I am doing it on any impulse; it is the result of much thought; and I make it as a certain proof of my Christian desire for peace and goodwill: on the day of my marriage I inherit, or rather Gracie does, a capitalised fortune of £260,000: and I now make this gentleman the formal offer to hand him on that day a slightly post-dated cheque for that amount in full. In that way we both win: I freely yield the vile legacy: all I want is the girl. And I make no condition whatever, except that that man cease henceforth to thwart my purposes. Don't thwart me! Don't, Pole, don't! I can't stand it! Can't you see that I can't? My temper, my nature, won't let me—it isn't my fault. By God, don't thwart me!

He turned away trembling; Missie stood dumb-founded, alternately gazing at the two; and Pole, looking into his own consciousness, said inwardly: 'Raby will have to be mercilessly terrified, since I can't do worse, or his brute-energy will have its way.'

'Well, Missie, still going to Australia?' asked Raby, turning round again.

'You forget yourself!' said she perkily: 'I have already happened to mention my decision.'

'You won't take my little advice, then?'

'Your advice is irrelevant!'

'All right: good-night. Only, don't think you are going. And you, Pole: what about my little offer?'

'Ah, I will seek an early chance to discuss with you that little offer,' said Pole, with menacing nod and smile.

'Good! Good-night'—and he strolled out.

In the street his walk quickened, and he entered a cab, intent upon taking that very night the first step in an action which he had long meditated: namely, the throwing of poor Miss Ames' little fortune into the sea.

Her insistence upon 'going to Australia' merely hastened this action—for she could not go without money—but did not originate it. It originated in the thought that the marriage which he was vowed to accomplish would be made almost compulsory, if Miss Ames, and Gracie with her, were reduced to poverty—unless Gracie chose Pole. He would risk that, the game being desperate. If she chose Pole, then good-bye to Pole, and to her, too, and to himself, perhaps, also. As to ruining Miss Ames, nothing was easier to him. Three months before she had innocently committed her every penny into his hands. He even controlled her dividend-warrants. Her broker was his own, and accustomed to receive from him, as Miss Ames' agent and solicitor, instructions as to the manipulation of her investments. By his cautious and wise handling her income had successively risen from £100 to £135, to £150, to £179: he now determined to reduce it, in a perfectly natural manner, to zero.

He first drove to Gracie's doctor a few streets away, and in an interview in his surgery explained that he was the *fiancé* of Miss Stanley; told of the Mackay-bequest, falling due on the 9th of July, seven weeks off: and the question was, whether Miss Stanley would safely be able to go out to be married before then.

'I shall be very disappointed,' the doctor said, 'if in a month's time she be not able to go out once in a way, as it will then be hot. But it is unfortunate, all the same: the mere fact of marriage is an excitement—However, if it must be done, it must. But I thought I heard something about going to Australia? No? In any case, I suppose you understand that, if she marry, it must be a marriage only in name for at least three months. Absolute continence—'

'Oh, that'll be all right, that'll be all right,' said Raby, rising, and drove next to the villa of his firm's Chancery-manager in Addison Road, where, after discussing with him the stock-markets of the world, he said, at the second brandy-and-soda:

'Well, so much for the plums, Seward. Now, I happen to want a rotten one as well, never mind my

reasons: something that's bound to go under in another week or two——'

'What about the "Westralian Supply and Trading"?' said Seward.

'Ah, I thought of that lot. One of old Goodman's, isn't it? Sure it's a deader?'

'Sure as nuts. Prefs, by the way, still up to 15 $\frac{2}{3}$, which only shows what flubs your public are. But the last declaration was the merest piffle. They can't pay their trading expenses, and reconstruction's not possible. I know for a fact that the Court won't let 'em survive the statutory meeting on Wednesday next——'

'All right, that'll do for me,' said Raby, and that very night wrote to his broker instructions to sell out Miss Ames' various stocks, for prompt reinvestment in 'Supply and Trading' shares.

The next noon he left his office before lunch-time, bought in Oxford Street a £25 diamond-and-sapphire ring, and drove to Maida Vale. At the Canal he took off his hat to her Grace of T——e driving southward from the flat, and in the flat found Missie and Miss Yates about to sit to lunch. He invited himself, and sat with them, helping to serve, fetching things, Jean being by the sick-bed. Missie's eyes and nose-tip were in their usual purple mourning, but her lips smiled that day: for she had just received a letter from her *fiancé*, Captain D——, who was spending some weeks with friends in Somersetshire. His letter contained a consent to the Australian expedition—a consent rather too easy perhaps: but this was counterbalanced by his threat to follow Miss Ames thither, 'as soon as ever circumstances shall permit.' Missie was content, and in her good humour made no reference to the quarrel of the previous night. Neither did Raby, who had decided that his one care henceforth must be to rewin her lost favour: not a difficult matter—to him.

During the meal he mentioned that he was thinking of investing her capital in the 'Supply and Trading'—a meaningless name to her; and she answered with a smile:

'Is that a good one? I am always a sitter at the

receipt of dividends, you know. How on earth did people manage to live when there were no companies? Everybody must have had to go out to business—unless they were landowners. Give me the nineteenth century, after all. “Rather fifty years of Europe”—— A woman, do you know, would never have written that “fifty”: she would have felt that it would be taken to refer to her own age. But how much dividends does this one pay?’

‘Thirteen and a half last report.’

‘How good!’ she murmured.

‘But the share-value has slackened; I am bound to tell you that, so don’t rely on me altogether. The public have somehow lost confidence. That’s the very reason why I am buying, because I have private information——’

‘Well, you know best,’ she said, finishing the subject. ‘I rely upon your head, Nibbs, and am only sorry that I can’t always approve of your conduct. You are not to suppose, please, that any further gains you may bring me will at all influence my decision about going away. That is fixed. You all seem to think that I have some violent *penchant* for taking myself off to Australia—of all places! I am doing it for that poor child, and if you all truly love her, you ought to acquiesce gladly. I am going to the City to book mine and Miss Yates’ passage this afternoon——’

‘All right, book them: we won’t discuss that,’ he said.

After lunch they went into Gracie’s room; she lay with open eyes on her back, quiescent, and, as it were, dead, noticing nothing. Her hands and forearms lay over the quilt almost snow-white, and markedly wasted. Two tears meandered down her cheeks, but without expression of sorrow or pain, though at other times she had pains in the back, and aches in the legs. Raby sat wiping her face with his handkerchief, till Jean went out, and Miss Ames and he were alone in the room. He then said: ‘Missie, just look here, and witness what I am doing . . .’ and drawing a three-sapphire ring from Gracie’s third left finger, he pushed it upon his own little finger to the

second joint, where it stuck. He then produced an *écrin*, took from it the diamond-and-sapphire ring just purchased, and put it upon her finger.

'I told you,' he said, 'that Gracie and I had made an arrangement: and to that I mean to cling—at any rate, till she goes away. This exchange of rings is the pledge of it, Missie, and you will please consider this ring her engagement-ring.'

'Oh, this is the height of absurdity!' cried Miss Ames. 'I don't know how you can be so childish, Nibbs—childish, and also rude, and overweening. Doesn't it strike you that in all this you are merely taking advantage of Gracie's weakness and mine? Because we are women without a protector? I am sure you would not venture to be so arbitrary if Captain D—— were in town. I shall tell Harold about this——'

'Never mind about Captain D—— and your Harolds,' said Raby: 'you stick to *me*, and you will be happy yet. Good-bye—you won't see me again to-day, and there's that foolish ball to-morrow night. The whole world seems mad over the thing——'

'Don't pretend cynicism,' said Missie: 'little did you hope nine months ago ever to meet Royalty in this fashion. But I have noticed—you Bedwick people seem the luckiest in the whole world. I only wish *I* was going. This morning's *Telegraph* says that the Japanese Minister's wife will be in the gorgeous old Shogun costume, and the Russian——'

'But what have you done with the fancy-dress you began to make for it?'

'Nothing! The costumier has sent it to an exchange-and-second-hand shop in Victoria, but I have heard nothing: so, I suppose, that is another £25 gone. Really, I shall begin to need your—what is it?—"Supply and Trading" company soon, Nibbs. Out of that original £400 which I had in the London and Westminster there will be only about £12 left, when I have taken the tickets. And there is the doctor—— Isn't it tiresome about money? Well, good-bye. I hope you will be handsome, and like it. You must observe every detail, so as to tell me. Did you know that Gladys

Pole is driving to show herself to me in costume before going to the station?’

‘I know nothing of Miss Gladys. Pretended to be wild in love with me once upon a time; but now it is all the sweet brother, instead of me. *Spretæ injuria formæ*, you see. Take care of Gracie——’ and he sauntered away.

While he was with Missie, Pole had called at his office. Pole was anxious to see Raby.

At the flat that night, the first thing which Pole noticed was Gracie’s sapphire ring gone, and the new ‘engagement-ring.’ He looked questioningly at Missie, and she, with a tolerant carelessness, explained.

‘But isn’t it rather an outrage, Missie, to let this ring remain on Gracie’s finger without her consent? I must ask you to remove it at once.’

‘Well, if you insist——’ she drew it off. ‘I considered it of no importance. He is overbearing by nature, and one must not be too strict. Besides, he is useful. I hope Gladys is satisfied with everything for to-morrow night. The papers contain nothing else—— By the way, I have booked the two tickets, and feel as if I had said good-bye to civilisation. The ship leaves in seventeen days’ time. I should so have liked to go to the ball or something, before parting with everything. But there are always compensations. We are going to be quite rich, do you know, with 13½ per cent. Have you heard anything of a company called the “Supply and Trading”?’

Pole, who considered before answering, said :

‘I have heard of it. Is Raby putting your money into that, then?’

‘Yes.’

‘I knew he would!’ thought Pole with flashing eyes; and aloud: ‘all of it?’

‘I believe so: is it a thoroughly sound concern?’

‘For all I know, Missie. I am not supposed to be familiar with the markets.’

But if he did not ‘know,’ he had heard rumours. Raby’s purpose was clear to him. And his rapturous thought was this: ‘I knew he would—sooner or later!’

And Missie's ruin means Gracie's marriage—hardly to him, if I once strike him paralyzed with fright !'

His longing to meet Raby was now so acute, that he deserted for an hour his watch by Gracie that night, and drove to Gray's Inn. But Raby was out.

He put a note into Raby's letter-box, saying that he would call the next noon. But when he called, Raby was out. He went over to Raby's office : but there, too, Raby was out. However, he caught sight of Raby's back that night at the D—— ball, and the lady whom he took in to supper must have thought him *distrain*—and strangely wild-eyed.

XXVI

FATE

THE ground covered by the ball was so extensive, and was the arena of so multifarious a drama, that, in truth, it was not easy for one to find another : so that Pole for twenty minutes had sought in vain, not only Raby, but his sister, when, at 12.30, three trumpeters appeared in the central state drawing-room, solemnly took stand, and blew a fanfare on silver bugles—tall harbingers in white and scarlet, with powderings of gold. Through all the ball penetrated their clear calling, and at once everything flowed into a new channel, dancing ceased, there arose a widespread tendency toward the bugles' bruit, and gradually a procession formed, *en route* for supper. It was then that, by chance, ten yards ahead, Pole saw Raby's hat and mass of hair, though in that bazaar of costumes recognition was rather accomplished by a species of insight than by sight.

But at supper his several efforts to catch Raby's eye were unsuccessful, for between them intervened both the central table and several rows of others, these latter being rounds and ovals, but the central a large square, at which, surrounded by her Court, sat the hostess as Henrietta Maria—a patched and powdered presence so really regal, that most of the guests made an obeisance on entrance. The function, however, was markedly more dazzling than correct, for there were costumes coming down to Louis Quinze, even Seize, while a few went back to small farthingales, Mary Stuart caps, and trunk-hose—informalities encouraged in advance, for the sake of adding to the whole solar

pageant an effect of jollity and hurly-burly ; but the queen and court were, of course, severely Caroline and English, she sitting as it were washed in the coloured light of her jewels, tight-bodied, but with gown full and open, displaying a sapphire-broidered petticoat beneath, and brocade sleeves gathered at wrist and elbow ; she wore D—— family-jewels in a collar, in a *bandeau* under her cap, and in clusters at its clasps, while family-jewels fastened her court-mantle in tiers and pyramids of diamond from shoulder to shoulder. Here, in fact, was the enthronisation of Harriet Stanley. She burned, yet was not consumed, victorious in fires that might not touch her, like Beatrice in the Purgatorio. Her sister, Lady Perowne, looked up to her with something of timid in her admiration that night, and Mr. and Mrs. Hay, who had produced her, saw of their travail, and were satisfied.

But still more illustrious to the *coup d'œil* was the *ensemble* of eaters : for the room, though very spacious, looked thronged, such a mob had the three trains of the evening brought down, the whole having the flashing effect of stalactitic caves, while each table seemed one diamond and clot of light. This was due as much to the extravagance of the illumination as to the jewelry : for candles of bees-wax in silver candelabra, and church-candles in six-foot silver stands, flooded the house with white light to the number of four thousand, beside electric-lights, made to simulate candles in silver holders. All these were unshaded as in early French style, so that the ball became, as it were, a high lich-wake and candlemas over the utter death of night, and poverty, and care.

Probably no soul there but Pole was more concerned with personal cares than with that scene—a scene which, counting everything, only England could have exhibited. The park was still clad in the verdure of spring ; an exceptional frost had nipped both violet and dogrose : yet the tables were decorated with orchids, *midi* flowers, and piles of peaches, strawberries, grapes, profusely poured from the cornucopia of Summer ; bouquets adorned the Beauvais tapestries

at each arch, palms made many an oasis, and Louis Quinze garlands festooned every apartment. The clicking of plate and buzz of tongues, mixed with the waltz-air of a remote band, grew to a harmonious noise; and in the most ordinary details the banquet seemed to those particular guests heaved to Olympian level.

In the exit, Pole, keeping Raby ever in view, caught also a glimpse of Mr. Spender in Roundhead drabs, his face chubby that night as a meat-pudding; he had returned to Cumberland after Jack Hay's departure, but come back southward that afternoon for the ball, at which also were several other Bedwick worthies, invited for auld lang syne: nor was Harriet Stanley, though admired by princes, unconscious that the eyes of these in particular beheld her glory.

Throughout the dancing-halls the ball now transacted itself with a certain added easiness. Individual whims were more frankly at liberty, and in fifteen minutes Pole found himself disengaged in an end room, whence, with lifted chin, one might survey almost the whole tipsy carnival stretched to great length through a succession of arches, arch within arch, the denizens of the remoter regions moving and having their being in a certain charmed aloofness, as when through lattices a furlong off one spies a woman bathing by lamplight, and cannot turn away the eyes from beholding vanity. In the middle of this populous vista was Raby—in the Cedar-room, from whose panels looked down Vandyke portraits of D—— ancestors, copies of the maskers at their feet. There, in the window-cavern, the Caroline band played every sort of ancient and modern measure—brawl, gavotte, Tzigany dance—burdening the air with music through the livelong night and morning; there Summer had flung largesse of palms, flowers, tree-ferns, shrubberies; and there the *fête* of light was at its fairest noon, six chandeliers hanging from the white-and-gold roof—inverted trees of glass in flaming bloom—with a candelabrum in each corner, and on each side of the alabaster hearth-place another. Pole found a Sheraton couch in a nook behind a bosket of

palms, and peeping out thence at Raby's waltzing, saw him appear, and disappear, and reappear, with the annual-diurnal punctuality of a planet's periods, as without haste, without rest, he orbited the vast thronged hall.

Certainly, Raby looked gallant enough to stir the enmity of a rival that night. He was Meissonier's 'Cavalier' itself, only far handsomer in face, and (with his customary hard-headedness) wearing no cumbrous spurs; his doublet below the waist was a truncated cone sticking a little out in front; at the waist a sash, broad to the chest; a 'band,' or falling collar, of lace; loose sleeves, turned-back cuffs, loose gloves; wrinkled top-boots reaching high up the thighs, turned down with lace; and flung over the left arm a cloak, half-hiding the rapier-hilt. Pole, in Charles II. attire, was richer, but less gallant-looking: his doublet was open all down, and loose, like a modern sack-overcoat, and he had one of those dreadful periwigs, falling in buxom waves over the shoulders, like rolls of suet; his hat was plumed, but low-crowned and tame, not preposterous and dashing like Raby's; the shoes were tied with bows pulled stiff-stark, as also the breeches, where they met the stockings at the knee; and his rapier hung, not at the waist, but from a band, or baldrick, slung across the body.

Raby danced continuously, and even in that embarrassment of stars seemed a favourite with the fair: for, when flushed, he was not only beautiful, but bewitchingly pretty, and not only pretty, but aggressively amorous—aggressiveness being no misdemeanour at such a rout, when the night is old, the dance a drunkenness, and the air carnal with the exhalations of bodies. Pole watched him from his leafy shade over an hour: but saw no chance. However, he was quite resolved. Hate and policy both urged to haste: and he meant to check Raby's flush that night.

The ruin of Miss Ames, in fact, clenched the situation. She could do nothing to earn a living, nor could Gracie for months: so that the alternative before

the ladies was either the Mackay marriage, or want. In a crux so desperate, Miss Ames would hardly fail to counsel the marriage, and Gracie was not in a condition to resist even the feeblest will. Both men were therefore certain of a marriage, and each during those days ardently wished the other dead. Pole, indeed, knew that Gracie must consider him a superior sort of human being to Raby, so that, apart from her resentment at Raby's outrage, she would hardly choose wrongly between them—if she were like herself: but she was not like herself, nor would be for weeks: and meantime Pole had a dread of Miss Ames' weakness for Raby, and of Raby's high-handed truculence. Raby had already put a ring on Gracie's finger, claiming her deliriums as an engagement; he was certainly plotting unknown things in the dark, and with masterly cunning, too, as in the matter of Missie's money. It seemed to Pole imperative that Raby should be got out of the way, once and for all, without delay. To effect this, the only means at his disposal was terror: but this he *did* possess: and he watched Raby dancing with a pretty hope of having him well across the Straits of Dover by the next noon.

In a moment of impatience, therefore, near two a.m., he hurried from his nook, and said at Raby's ear, who passed close with a Duchesse de Polignac:

'I have been after you for two days, Raby. Meet me on that south balcony yonder. Rather important—for you.'

Raby looked over his shoulder, startled and staring. 'All right—— I'll see,' he said.

Pole then traversed half the ball to the end, where that wing of the Abbey terminates in a balcony opened upon by four French windows; it was thick with shrubbery, bamboos, tree-ferns, palms, and Japanese dwarf-cypresses on the coping, with hardly three or four loungers there in the chill morning: and Pole, leaning over the parapet in a lonely spot, considered how best to lay the enemy low.

It will be remembered, of course, that the atmosphere here was not good, but one apt to develop evil where

evil was. Here ramped every delusion, the vision of men all wall-eyed and bewildered, seeing only the seeming, and seeing that ill, while, as to the real, one could not see it for the candles: so that, by some persistent ill-luck, nothing that anyone said, or thought, was true. Such a success, for instance, seemed the ball! from lip to lip passed the murmur: 'What an achievement!' But there was little achievement. The marquess, indeed, had bought some candles and flowers (with money, certainly, not gallantly come at), but if one apply matches to candles, they burn; if one scatter roses, they look profuse: the art was stale and pretty, rude, Olympian. There *was*, on the other hand, a pathetic failure—the aim so high, the result so low, because the human element was low. Far more *chic*, surely, a dinner of herbs, and love therewith, and therewith tones of those 'muses in a ring that round about Jove's altar sing'—so much depending upon one's guests, and one's self. Piqued no doubt by her broker origin, and her consciousness of 'brains,' feverishly in those days was Harriet Stanley striving after 'distinction'—and very properly, for one should: but, let a reader interested in *manières de faire* compare her success with, say, the distinction of some 'Salvation lass' of Dalston, who, if one strike her on the right cheek, turns to him the other also, while (as we hear) the unseen seers clap about her, and 'clouds' of audience, 'numbers without number,' smile '*encore!*' While, therefore, Pole fretfully awaits Raby on the balcony, we say that the atmosphere here was propitious to that 'Nephesch' of the Cabalists—that *Lower* in men—stupidity, lust, unfounded pride; and 'hard by lust, hate' (Milton), and by stupid pride, ferocity; while up and down in it walked Mammon, the little pig-devil, not seeking whom he might devour, but as it were obese and slippered, in the bosom of his family. There was a little man there present, vast in power, in opportunity to influence, who, had he but taken the pains to make himself worth tuppence, had he cultivated within him one germ of knightly ambition, or noble quixotism, or Christian pluck and desperate-ness, might have quite changed the face of our rude,

unhappy land, and for himself won easy admittance to the royal family of good men: but no: of all the worldful of facts he had discovered nothing, save that ice-pudding is cool, women soft, and green-rolled vegueras nice to smoke; so that, following day after day, year in, year out, nothing but the little yahoo devices and desires of his own heart, he had grown now to a mere popular, well-meaning softness of old fat and varicose veins, a ghastly misgiving somewhere in him, yet ignoring still that near day when the very fat would drip from him, and nothing but a grin, and a smell, be there. It must be said, nevertheless, for Harold Pole in particular that he was not the young gentleman to be over-much affected by any 'Nephesch'-influence here. He could have told pretty accurately the number of candles in the halls, and, the number known, one is no more beglamoured. He considered the marchioness just what he had considered Harriet Hay—a half-cultivated young woman who cast a long shadow at sunset, a short at noon. That hatred in him was fifteen years old, and if it burned now, that was for other reasons than 'atmosphere.' With Raby it was rather different: in such as he self-love was stirred to see meanings in high ladies' eyes at a function which had fluttered Society for weeks. 'Nephesch' had Raby fast enough. He came peeping among the foliage very flushed, pretty as Apollo, and self-sure, muttering:

'Hello, what's up? You must be quick——!'

'Ey, you are a nice one,' answered Pole: 'didn't you make me a proposal three nights ago——? By the way, were you serious?'

'Quite serious. Do you accept?'

'One can hardly settle it in that off-hand way, Raby. I left a note at your chambers last night——'

'I saw it. Sorry I couldn't be at home.'

'I have found your proposal so tempting: you to have Gracie—I the money. Charming! A proposal worthy of you——'

'Look here, hurry up! What is it you want me for?'

'Ey, no need for hurry: you won't be dancing any

more to-night, Master Nibbs, believe me. You have danced altogether too much of late, you know—far more than you had any right to. A little sober thought, a little close reasoning, even a little gnashing of teeth, won't hurt you now—won't hurt you now.'

Raby peered with narrow eyes, all 'Nephesch' in them, saying:

'Well, my God! See how this man wants to quarrel with me!'

'Ah, no quarrel,' said Pole: 'men do not quarrel with vermin: they crush them. I only had to say that, after careful reflection, I had decided to accept your proposal, only I'm afraid now that—you won't have the time to marry in!'

'How so, my son?'

'Raby, you are about to be arrested.'

Raby glanced anxiously round at two people leaning over the parapet thirty feet away.

'Am I?' said he: 'that's grand news. What they going to arrest me for?'

'Why, for the crime on Lyullph's. You haven't quite forgotten it, Raby, Raby?'

'Oh no, I ain't forgotten it! But stop a bit: they are going to arrest me, and so *you* come with this anxious little warning in order to get me safe away: is that it?'

'That is just it. I have reasons, connected with Gracie's health, for not wishing to see you hanged just now. Doubt what I announce to you at your peril! Your arrest impends——'

'Of course it does! of course!' went Raby, bantering, bowing, arms akimbo: 'and yet people say you have brains. Where's it all gone to? Why, I beat you every time as easy—— I see through your little motives and *ruses* as if you were a child. No good, Pole—no good! Brains all gone dead, gone dead. No brains left. Oh Lord, I could pity the poor devil! Brains gone dead—the only thing he thought he had. Got to go to school again—impotent ass!'

'I said, however, that you were not to quarrel, Raby. In my daily business I come a good deal in contact with the criminal classes, so that your quarrelling manner no

longer entertains me. Command yourself, therefore, you carrion-crow. And tell me—won't you believe the news I bring you?'

'Oh, I don't want——' began Raby, turning away.

'Wait, wait,' said Pole. 'You should be out of England by to-morrow night, so there is no time to lose. You might have done me the honour to believe my mere statement, Raby: but I see that I must force you to believe. I warn you, however, that the proof will be harsh. Prepare yourself, therefore, and—look here——'

He made four steps through the shrubbery toward a Moorish lantern cut in ogives, at the same time picking from his 'vest' a vial which he held up to the light.

And a long time they stood like statuary, Pole holding up the vial, smiling, Raby, his great hat thrown back, peering forward to look, while steadily his colour changed from flushed to white, from white to yellow, from yellow to drab. He could not fail to recognise his own joint in that tough white object with the little cudgel of bone. By the action of the formalin it even yet retained some semblance of colour and vitality.

After three minutes of silence he made an instinctive snatch at it—but quite feebly, so that Pole had merely to withdraw it a little, then replace it in the lantern-light, holding it up, smiling, watching Raby's face. The musical noise of the ball, tongues, and a great business of feet trooping to some mysterious bourn come to them vaguely, mixed with two voices conversing near. Anon Raby's eyes moved basely a little, like a cornered cat's, which one is going to whip.

Through his brain passed thought after thought, wandringly, as if in sleep: the trivial memory, for example, of how he had jested about the joint with the duchess and marchioness at Missie's: and there now it was between Pole's thumb and forefinger; while he was jesting, Pole had had it. He ought to have got it from Pattison the moment the operation was over: that was clear. By what fatuity could he have

neglected such a thing? But he had asked Pattison for it: and Pattison had said that it was already down the sink. . . . Had not Pattison seemed embarrassed in saying that? One could hardly be sure: the light in that little room was not bright, the green shade focussing it in only one ray; but certainly Pattison had stooped awkwardly and stroked the cat—a black cat with white paw-markings, that had gone to sleep on Raby's knee. Pattison therefore must have kept the joint to sell to Pole, . . . how else could Pole have it? In any case, something was against one, perhaps everything—stones, stars, trees—all objects, motions and events—working together for evil to one: and no wonder, for he had killed a man, and the man, dying, had tried to say something, but could not; and his last cries had been taken up and mocked by the echoes of Thornyfell Crag. . . .

'Ey,' said Pole suddenly, 'I think you believe now.'

'Sh-h-h, for God's sake!' Raby glanced round like a portrait of terror—'we can't talk here——'

'Come then——'

Down three steps they passed to a walk that almost immediately plunged into heavy wood, Raby's deeper motive for leaving the balcony being unrecognised even by himself, though, half-way down the first avenue, he understood that something dark enough was born within him, and led his feet. At the turn into the first alley, he paused, peering, afraid to trust himself in a solitude so imbued with night, lest his hands of themselves should suddenly work mischief, and hell and frenzy overtake him there; but he went on, descending toward a valley under shades of evergreen holms, beeches and flowering holly-hedge, the footpath rough with stones, but buried in moss and mast of the last autumn; at some points they went stumbling in single file, heedless whither, Raby leading, Pole talking, talking, each possessed by the other; and at every three or four steps the end of Raby's scabbard struck, as he jolted downward, against a stone behind him.

'You admit the murder, then, Raby,' Pole said: 'I take it that you do. It would be so silly still to deny. . . .'

Raby peered into the darkness, to left, to right, before, behind ; then over his shoulder he half-whispered :

‘Do I? P’raps I do.’

At which admission, Pole, if wise, should certainly have turned sharply, and fled for his life : but he walked on, believing Raby cowed and conquered to an extent even beyond his hopes.

‘By the way, what quantity of the poison did you use, Raby?’ he asked, fishing for that knowledge still all dark to him, viz., the name of the poison : ‘I ask merely to satisfy my curiosity——’

Raby answered nothing.

‘Well, it is childish to hide a detail of that sort now,’ said Pole, ‘when I assure you that positively nothing that you did that night can any longer be called unknown. I could recount you, step by step, the whole march of the tragedy from the moment you left Bedwick : I *will*, if you like—just to convince you——’

Raby answered nothing : but he bent a keen ear, missing not a word, while Pole, with a display of ratiocination a thousandfold more brilliant than all those diamonds in the Abbey yonder, proceeded to detail what Raby did on that fatal Friday night in Lonbydale.

An April-shower sent them under the shelter of a marble pavilion with balustrated gallery and steps washed by a tarn : but nothing interrupted the stream of their deep converse. When the shower passed, through a silver net of drizzle the moon reappeared, full and white in the centre of a rainbow ; whereupon, somewhere far away, a cock awoke and crew with sleepy drawl, so that the ear was just conscious of a lifted voice in the night, but wondered whence it came. Most things else lay soundless, stagnant, save for the murmur of the two talkers, or a caw in the rookery about the pavilion, for hardly a bulrush of the tarn now stirred to the movement of hern, coot or wild duck. One battlemented turret of the Abbey alone was visible, and up among its ivy one lone light that watched all night like a star ; but of the carnival and brilliance in the dancing-halls not a sign was seen nor heard. Onward toward the

valley-bottom they strolled through wood and moonlit glade, rousing now a grunt from some half-wild pig at a covert's edge, now sending into trot-away a group of does: and the moon drew near her setting.

'You must not think, Raby,' continued Pole, 'that the *motive* of your crime is any new discovery to me: all that your nail has revealed being the *instrument* which you employed—an instrument, which, but for the nail, I might never have guessed——'

But familiarly as Pole might talk of this 'instrument,' fishing for one hint of the truth, Raby happened to make no remark which threw the least light upon it. He said hardly anything, but listened with the keenest interest, as to a story told of someone else, his eyes peering narrow and hard. At a second gush of Spring-rain, they entered a grotto in a rockery, over which poured a cascade, the centre of a tremulous wilderness of ferns, spray, moss and flowers. Its dreary sweet noise, together with that of several fountains, raised the tone of Pole's murmuring; the moon had gone behind cloud that stretched still, like a mass of sculpture, from north-east to south-west across the sky; and behind the curtain of briony at the grotto's mouth each to the other was little more than a voice.

'Of course,' continued Pole, 'the search after a motive was ended for me, as soon as ever I discovered that some notes had been stolen from the doctor on or about that night. For, given a theft, you have at once a possibility of detection, and detection, of course, furnishes a motive for murder. I had only, therefore, to know of the theft to say to myself: "The murderer (whoever he was) must have first stolen, been detected by the doctor, been threatened, and then, to save himself, poisoned the doctor:" or, supposing that you, Raby, were the murderer, I was easily able to say: "Raby stole, was detected, and tracked to the broch; there the doctor, meaning to give him into custody, tried to lock him in, but, on his resisting, the doctor had to lock himself in also; whereupon Raby demanded the key, the doctor threw it over the top, and Raby then poisoned him."'

'Was that how it was?' said Raby, watching the old secret dragged out, and fascinated thereby, as misers gloat upon their treasures: 'was that it, then? Let's have it all, since you were there to see——'

'Ey, I was not there,' said Pole: 'yet each statement that I have made stands, I assure you, Raby, indelibly recorded on the tablets of existing fact, and in the very nature of our reason, if we but investigate it. I need not tell you, for instance, Raby, that, since the murder began in a theft, the search for someone with a motive for theft that night was not prolonged. You presented yourself to the mind: for you were about to personate Jack in the projected elopement: this required money, and there are a hundred proofs that you had no money. I need not go into them—you had bet on the Lafford, and lost—tried to get £15 from Spender and Crowther, and failed—and so on. The proofs of your motive to steal are on the surface of things. But *did* you steal? One assumes that you are not a thief: you probably never stole before. It is to be observed, however, that, if you stole, your expectation of immediate power to repay a hundredfold would quite explain the moral new-departure: you would have become rich by the very elopement for which you stole. And just as you never stole before, so you never murdered before: but you did both for the first time in one night, when the pressure of motive proved sufficiently strong, your nature being like a crooked tree, which the first storm bends lower in the direction of its crookedness. But such general considerations, Raby, are beside the mark: for concrete proofs that you did steal are not far to seek. We know that £45 in notes was taken by *someone* from Dr. Stanley about that night, and I have already gone with you into the certain proofs that these taken notes were stolen: some day perhaps, if ever we meet again after to-night, I may shew you the marks of burial on them. Their numbers have been identified by old Fletcher as those of notes paid out by the Bank to Dr. Stanley: and the proofs that they were stolen by *someone* become accumulative when one goes into their restitution, after burial, to Gracie. As to that there is no difficulty, and

we need not discuss it. But were they stolen by *you*, Raby? There are, at any rate, twenty proofs. I remember speaking to you at Bedwick of the brief-paper in which they were wrapped to be buried, pointing, I said, to someone in a lawyer's office. But that, of course, is nothing more than an indication toward truth: the main proof that you were the thief is to be found in the consideration that certain distinct traces of his adventure *must* have been left on whoever entered the doctor's study that night, and that, as a matter of fact, *all* those traces were left on you. You know what traces I mean. The doors of Beech How had been locked by the doctor, hadn't they? All, except one: the cellar-door: and only through the cellar could the thief have reached the study. In passing through it, he assuredly got very dusty, even if he had a light; if he had no light, he not improbably broke some part of himself against the trap-door steps. Now, we know, Raby, that *you* did get so dusty, as to be compelled to bathe at a time when the minutes must have been of value to you; and as to whether the thief, whoever he was, had a light, we can definitely say that he had none——

'Was that how it was?' said Raby: 'he might have had—there's no telling.'

'Certainly not going in, Raby.'

'Well, p'raps not. *You* know all about it.'

'No, not going in: that is abundantly proved: for if he had had, in the cellar above all he would have used it, and he struck no match there. I was ill, as you know, at the time, but as soon as ever I could—two weeks later—I thoroughly examined the cellar with the lens, and in the whole place found only two burnt matches, both far out of the route between the door and the steps. You may object that, however minutely I might search in the thick dust of Beech How cellar, a burnt match might well escape my eyes: and that is so: but the air there is so dull and close, that a match quickly goes out, and I have found by experiment that, to light one's self from door to steps, it is necessary to strike not less than three, or better, four matches. If

the thief, therefore, had had matches, he would have struck three or four: and three or four cannot escape scientific search. But the mere fact that he stumbled and fell over a big brandy-box proves the absence of light——'

'Oh, he fell, did he?' said Raby.

'Yes, and his cap—a cap very like Jack Hay's—much too big for him—was jerked off his head: for the impression of the peak and rim was clearly left in the dust near the box. So that there is no doubt that he had no light. He did not, in fact, expect to find the other entrances closed, and so went to Beech How unprovided with matches: if, therefore, he butted in the dark against the steps, that is only what we might expect. Now, he did butt against them pretty violently: for the proofs of that butting he left on the steps themselves, on the jacket which he wore, on the box of matches which he picked up in the doctor's study, on the key of the doctor's safe, on one of the notes which he stole, and on the leather cushion of the trap in the stable, where he temporarily hid the notes. In nearly all these cases the trace is microscopical: but in all it exists. The thief, in fact, drew blood from his nose—probably very little, but he touched it and retouched it, with his hand; and afterwards when Bailey, the detective, came to me wondering about the origin of a little blood-stain on Jack's jacket worn by you, and on the box of matches found in its pocket, I was quite able to enlighten him, but wouldn't then. They were stains of blood from your nose, Raby. So that we can say, to sum up, that positively *all* the traces of the theft which the thief would necessarily, or would probably, have had about him, you, Raby, had: and you were the thief.'

'Was I? Keep on!' said Raby.

'But,' continued Pole, his lecturing forefinger beating steady time, 'by far the strongest proof that you were the thief, is to be found in the fact that the thief was the murderer: and I shall prove to you beyond cavil, Raby, that you were the murderer.'

'Was I? All right, prove away,' said Raby.

'We may, of course, swear, Raby, that the thief was the murderer as soon as ever we are quite sure that the doctor detected the thief. *Can* we be quite sure? Yes—and by the simplest considerations. I have shewn that the thief had no light on entering: but we know that he had light on coming out, for he used it in the yard to look at his watch——'

'Did he?' said Raby, struck by this minuteness.

'Yes, that is proved by the *position* in which he held the match: he held it perpendicular tip-downward, so that the flame was only momentary, since he was at once compelled to drop it. This is revealed by the fact that the whole length of the match was scorched, yet none of its interior surface charred: I may shew it you some day. It lay seventeen days among dead leaves before I found it, yet its lower end still shewed under the microscope several blood-corpuscles from the smeared fingers of the thief. The fact, of course, that he held the match in that awkward handicapped position proves that both his hands were occupied with other objects—the right with the match-box as well as the match, the left with his watch: for a watch it was, and nothing else conceivable, which that momentary glare was intended to reveal. Am I not right?'

'Are you? You might be, and you might not. There's no telling,' said Raby.

'Ey, I take it that I am, I take it that I am. So, then, the thief had light on coming out: for in the stable, too, he struck two matches—I think two—leaving on each traces more or less minute of his bruised nose. He did not, indeed, strike any matches in passing out through the *cellar*, for though on going inward his way had been all dark, in passing out he had the diffused light of the outer night, framed by the cellar-door, to guide his course: there, therefore, he troubled himself to strike no matches. Yet I have shewn that he had matches: and the question arises, where did he get them? There were none in the empty buttery; between the buttery and the study, whither he was feverishly bound, were only empty corridors: he got them in the study. But it is densely dark in that

room at late night, owing to the mass of ivy before the oriel: he must have had to grope painfully about for them—that is to say, he wanted them badly for something special and immediate—probably to find the safe-key. Now, as I have proved that he had matches at some time during his stay in that study, and as he seems to have needed them for something special and immediate, we might almost swear, without further evidence, that he struck a light in the study itself. But we have the clearest evidence that he struck no less than four there: and some day I may shew you the burnt ends of those very four. The study was, indeed, strewn with a great multitude of burnt matches, used by the doctor in lighting and relighting his continual pipes, and no servant could keep the place at all tidy: but I was able to select the very four burned by the thief, because they had been burnt almost to the end, and only dashed down when the heat caught the fingers, in absolute contrast to *all* the doctor's: the thief's, moreover, were in the little alcove, not in the study proper. It is established, therefore, that the thief lit at least four matches there.

‘But we know, Raby, where that study is: it overlooks the porch and the yard. And the doctor was all about in the yard that night. In the open he had captured Jack. I had written him a letter of warning to keep a sharp eye as to you, which I knew he would not fail to act upon. He was in the yard, therefore: and he saw that light in his study-window.’

‘Did he?’ said Raby.

‘He then tracked the thief—where to? we know. To Cribble's Fall. And this was the thief's motive for murder. The thief was the murderer.’

‘Was he?’ said Raby: ‘well, you seem to know.’

They had now, in their long, preoccupied stroll, reached a part of the domain called ‘the Lower Terrace’—a promenade strewn with gravel, bounded on the one hand by a procession of elm-boles, and on the other by a balustrade of stone balusters, supporting at intervals great urns containing plants, while, here and there, balustraded steps led down to a lawn dotted

with trees, flower-beds, and fountains. Hence to the Abbey was not very far, and one low, turreted face of the building was visible at intervals through the wood: yet the spot was as desert as the remotest coverts of the estate, and no hint of the revelry in the halls came here. It was the darkest hour before morning, the setting moon being now a mere local smear, drowning among cloud; ever and anon a shower of drizzle broke, like Nature's hysterical tears of joy at winter done, transitory as a largesse tossed by some hand from the sky; but probably neither Pole nor Raby was at all conscious when they came, nor when they went.

Raby leant, half-sitting, on the coping, near one of the flights of steps, his huge Cavalier's-hat thrown back; and still Pole, with indefatigable forefinger, murmured on.

'Ey,' said he, 'that, then, is where we have got to: that the doctor undoubtedly detected the thief: and the thief was the murderer. So now, casting out of our memory for the moment the hundred facts which prove that you, Raby, were the thief, let us ask—Who was the murderer?'

'Now, whoever the murderer was, *he* was not the kind of man (though there *are* such), who can strike dead by merely willing it. He must have had the physical means to murder. Therefore, so long as it continues to seem to the authorities impossible that you, Raby, could have had the means to murder, the incident of your coming disguised to the broch that midnight to wipe off the blood-speck can have not even the least incriminating weight against you: for, if it was impossible for you to murder, it was impossible, that's all—no matter how indicative of guilt your subsequent conduct might be. But as soon as ever I shew how the murder might have been accomplished by a naked man on a broch, then no one can need any further proof than your coming to wipe off the blood-speck that you were the murderer: that by itself becomes proof a thousand times valid: and, the means once shewn, the mind, disdaining further proof, will rush, with the wings of the lightning, and the directness of the hammer, to

the right conclusion that you were both thief and murderer——'

Here Pole paused—rather awkwardly, rather suddenly. Hitherto, with a certain enthusiasm of concentration, he had been speaking of what he knew, and that enthusiasm had led him incautiously, unwisely, on to the very brink of what he did *not* know—viz., the instrument of murder. And as running men stop on a precipice's brink, so he stopped, vexed with himself.

'Go on ; don't stop,' said Raby, never dreaming that Pole did not know all.

'There is no need for me to go into the history of my reasonings about your nail,' said Pole: 'I need hardly tell you that I was not long in getting at the truth with such a clue in my hands. But it is growing late—or rather early—and it is time you should be making for London. If you be not out of England by to-morrow evening——'

'How did you get it, Pole?'

'What?'

'My finger-nail.'

'I—bought it from Dr. Pattison.'

'Oh, you did! Then, woe to Pattison—and to you, too, Harold, to you, too, Harold!'

'Ah, no threats, no threats. You must go——'

'And as soon as you saw the nail, you knew about the——?'

'The what?' whispered Pole—too eagerly.

'Why, about what you're talking about. Did you know at once? Did you find out immediately? Spit it all out!'

'I repeat, Raby, that I now lack the time to enter into that long reasoning. But, apart from the murder, I suppose I have convinced you that a mere whisper to the police of my detailed knowledge of your theft would long since have sent you to penal servitude. I have not been silent, of course, through any love of you: but there is something professionally mean for a detective to convict a man of a lesser crime when he knows him guilty of a greater: I waited, therefore, for my chance; and it came with your nail——'

'Well, I'm waiting to hear about the nail,' said Raby, always profoundly cautious: 'what had the nail to do with the murder?'

'Everything,' said Pole.

'But what?'

Pole flushed, wounded in his mental pride.

'*You* tell me,' he said sharply, 'and where you lie, I will check you.'

Raby took himself up from the balustrade-coping, and with arms akimbo, said in a grave, contemplative voice:

'Don't you know, Pole?'

'Don't dare approach me!' cried Pole.

Now, certainty leaping up in Raby, almost a scream echoed through the wood:

'He don't know!'

'Don't know what, you ass!' went Pole in galloping throat-tones, overthrown from the acme of victory, and furious at his overthrow.

'He don't know!' again screamed Raby, ready to spring at his throat in a transport of triumphant hate, after all that hour of misery just suffered.

Ungovernable passion possessed Pole also: and fire leapt from his eyes with the rapid words:

'Why, what could a low slave like you hide from me? It was I myself who cut off your joint——'

'*You!*'

'Yes!'

And now, all at once, they were involved in such flames and distraction—such 'Nephesch,' and outbreak of the pit of evil—thronging the brain with blood, blinding the eyes, drowning the soul, that, for the life of them, neither could have described what after happened.

'*You* were Pattison?' screamed Raby.

'Yes!'

'Why, if I had only known, I should have washed myself——!' cried Raby, and, in the midst of that cruel cry, sprang upon Pole, caught his throat in a murderous left hand, and with the right belaboured him.

Pole, taken at a disadvantage, finding himself staggered and choking, first tore at Raby's lace 'band' (or collar), then, trying to squeal a word of remonstrance,

and failing, managed with the right hand to draw his small-sword, and with it stuck Raby through his left top-boot in the calf.

With the interrogative cry of 'Ah?' Raby abandoned his hold, Pole's action instantly reminding him of what he had forgotten—that he had a weapon: and in a moment he, too, had drawn, and was impending upon Pole.

At once Pole turned and fled wildly down the walk, not through any cowardice—for he knew that in an affair of swords he could instantly kill Raby—but through an awakening of sheer virtue within him. He foresaw murder, and was gone like a wind. But Raby, with lifted blade and streaming hair, was after him; and his mouth, as he ran, was open in a kind of beastly half-laugh.

Now, Pole, even before he started, had been winded, and he could never run far and fast without the gravest lung-dangers: after a hundred yards or so, therefore, of a pretty intense spurt, feeling himself failing, and Raby not far, he drew up, and turned sharp upon Raby, trying to lay that monster he had raised with the wild gasps:

'Stop, Raby! You can't fight—with swords—I *must* kill—Raby, I warn——!'

But as he spoke, the blades met. Raby, deaf and inexorable, could no more be stopped than a storm, and with infuriate onslaught on his side the encounter began. Now, Pole had during his London student-days been a pupil of B——'s *salle d'armes*, and was a master of the foils, an art which he had acquired in its minutiae, not only for its own sake, but as a supposed corrective of his consumptive tendency. He was not, indeed, at this time at the tip-top of his form, but still every movement of attack and parade was to him such a matter of mechanical routine, that his mind was left free to manipulate as he pleased such an antagonist as Raby, ignorant even of the simple principles of quarte-and-tierce; so that Pole, as he entered upon the fray, whispered to his own consciousness the stern warning: '*No murder!*'

His task in one way was easy, and in another excessively difficult. The rapiers were dull as old iron, speckled with rust, and never, of course, meant for hewing, but for thrusting; Raby, however, with his horrid half-laugh and stare, hewed and thrashed as if extinguishing a fire, merely dulling his dull blade upon Pole's, while Pole, with little one-two feints and easy 'time-thrusts,' stuck him here and there like a pig, but always with such reluctance to kill, that he did Raby little hurt. On the other hand, the mere stress and ecstasy of Raby's mind—the mere pressure and whirlwind of his effort—made him a power hard to withstand: for great is ecstasy, spinning concentration, and better a barking dog than a dozing lion: so that, though innocent of the elements of fencing, his legs untrained to plant themselves, his eye to measure, Raby yet made several excellent parades, by reason of that rapture which exalted his wit and senses as much beyond the ordinary Raby's as the ordinary Raby's were beyond an idiot's. After four or five minutes, his Cavalier-hat was gone, his wig askew, his 'band' in rags, his mouth wide open, while Pole, much mauled, felt his power of continuance failing. Once again he called: 'Stop, Raby!' but in a hardly audible pant. He had made two attempts to bind Raby's blade with a view to disarming, Raby's blade being unfastened to his wrist by the sword-knot; but the force required for this rather poor trick was more than he had had at his disposal, and he had failed; but toward the end of the struggle he made a third attempt, this time with all his remaining might; and in this act he was engaged, when another sort of tragedy befell him. A gush of hæmorrhage, almost like a ball of blood, fell solidly from his lips to the ground: and at once he gave in, and abandoned effort. Raby cut him over the skull, and he dropped.

After him, over him, Raby fell to his knees, and beat him devilishly with the sword-hilt. Then, kneeling there, panting, for a long time he kept staring at Pole with eyes intent, and steadily twisted lip.

Pole's face showed white between its blood and bruises: he had fallen near the balustrade; the moon,

now far down the south-west, gave a little brief light. He did not move. Neither did Raby move, though something again and again whispered him: 'This is the second'; but still with intent stare, and twisted upper-lip, like a statue that pants and hates, he knelt, gazing at Pole.

But the whisper, growing practical, said within him: 'It is the second—can you escape a *second* time?' And now at once he was up, and without even stopping to get the vial with the joint from the body, he snatched his rapier and hat from the ground, and ran as though the fiend were after him, along the walk under the darksome shadow of the elms—and down some steps, cringingly, to the lower level—and away.

XXVII

CONJUGAL RIGHTS

RABY'S several wounds about the breast were slight, and only in two places did a little blood ooze through his doublet. These, as he approached the village-station at late dawn, he covered with his satin cloak; and in an empty early-train went on to London and his flat. As he was not expected, his 'laundress,' Monty, was not at the flat that morning: so Raby made a hasty fire for himself, burned the clothes at all pierced or bloodstained, and washed the rapier. He then dressed, packed a few clothes, with all the valuables and money in the flat, into a bag, and took cab for Liverpool Street; he went on to Harwich, thence to Antwerp; and the second night slept at the Hôtel de Flandres in Paris.

The morning after this he ran out before early breakfast, and bought a *Daily Telegraph* at a kiosque, but would not open it till in his bedroom again. He locked himself in: then greedily read.

Pole was not dead!—Raby could read no more: but with hung head, he made the sign of the cross, and dropped to his knees by his bedside. He spoke there no articulate word to God: but there was this in his heart—immense gratitude, and the promise that, if God would give him both grace and Gracie, and also save Pole's life, then he, Raby, would repent, and serve his Maker ever after.

Meantime, the great fact was this: that Pole lived! Raby had had not a doubt that he was dead, and had said good-bye to all he knew in life, in the frail hope of

burying himself in some foreign hole. At this news therefore the world seemed lit by a new sun; and that day he wrote to his partners some explanation of his absence, with a promise of speedy return.

The paper, a day old, said that Pole had been found by a gamekeeper on the Lower Terrace about 7 in the morning after the ball. He was wounded in many places about the breast, arms, shoulders and face, and one bad wound on the crown had broken the skull. He had also apparently had a hemorrhage. He seemed dead when found, but, on being borne into the Abbey, shewed signs of life. The whole thing was—'a mystery,' though it was whispered that the police, inspired by a hint of the wounded man's sister, were not without a suspicion of the perpetrator of the outrage. Meantime, Mr. Pole was being nursed by the marchioness herself, and his recovery was not despaired of.

That day Raby was light of heart as a young boy, in spite of the 'suspicion' of Gladys Pole. He was sure that no one had seen him and Pole together; moreover, the fact that it was Pole who had first used the sword would be tremendously in his favour, if the matter came to trial. As to the finger-joint, the tragedy on Lyullph's, Pole was still all in the dark as to the means. That was a surprisingly glad thing, after all. Raby could have laughed aloud, and that day rowed himself in the Bois, climbed to the top of Notre Dame, witnessed a dance not danced with feet, and thought to himself: 'Give me the Catholic countries, after all.'

He had inscribed himself in the hotel-book in a false name; but late that night he asked for it, and wrote his true name, seeing now the ill-look of his flight from England, and how a false name might aggravate it.

During the next four days he searched the English papers, but saw only short paragraphs about Pole, inclining, on the whole, to hope. On the fifth evening, he was coming out of a book-shop in the rue de Rivoli, when two men in plain clothes appeared, and arrested him.

He had half-expected it, and went quietly enough with them through some obscure streets northward to

a *poste de police*. He was concentrated, agitated, and *en route* grumbled something in very bad French about 'arresting a man in this way in a civilised city.'

At the *poste*, a place with counters, and lazy-lounging officials behind them, he was taken before three men in succession—two below, one above-stairs—and by the time he reached the second, found, to his surprise, that the main charge against him was no longer that of having massacred Pole, but of having said *en route* that Paris was not a civilised city. 'We'll soon show him whether Paris is civilised,' said one plump man in a peaked cap. 'Not civilised!' murmured a close-cropped official above-stairs, 'all right, that can't hurt Paris. He is going to see!' But it was all very *bonhomme*, sweet, and well-meant. They put him to a petty examination, full of suspicious looks, dramatic accents, asking the name of his father, of his mother, the date and place of their birth, till Raby cut the second man short with an insolent 'no parly français.' And that night he slept in a cell there, '*au violon*,' as they say in the city of slang.

The next morning he paced and paced, rumpled, pale, waiting for extradition. It was ten, eleven, noon. And now he was suddenly taken out to the outer hall, and informed, to his amazement, that he was free.

When he demanded an explanation, the official, with a twinkle, reminded him that he, Raby, couldn't 'parly français,' so it was useless to try to explain: and with not the least clue to the mystery of his joy, Raby went out.

The French police had, in fact, that morning received instructions from the English to release him, and the explanation was this: that Pole, down at D—Abbey, had now recovered consciousness, had been asked to give some account of his wounds, and had declared himself unable to do so. Had not Raby been the author of those wounds? No—he could not honestly say that: he had not spoken to Raby on the ball-night, though he had intended to. He remembered coming to the ball, and he remembered seeing Raby some distance off in the halls, but—that was all.

Who, then, had attacked him on the Lower Terrace?

Why and when had he gone to the Lower Terrace? Pole could give no account.

This lapse of memory was, of course, due to the brain-shock involved in the big scalp-wound. It is a phenomenon which, as every doctor knows, accompanies every such shock, *nothing* which immediately precedes the shock being remembered during the rest of life. According to the gravity of the shock, the point at which forgetfulness begins may be days before, or only an hour or two. In Pole's case it was the moment of going in to supper. After that all was blank.

But the wounded man denies what, in reality, he only does not remember: he peers into memory, and seeing nothing *there*, says 'There is nothing,' as the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God,' no God being *there*: and the denial is so natural-seeming, and so decided, that even the doctor, who should realize its reason, usually lends it credence. To the police the denial is twice and thrice conclusive. Hence Raby's release.

But for two weeks he remained at a loss to understand what had happened. He read, indeed, of Pole's denial of all knowledge of the author of the outrage, but he assumed that under this denial lay some malignant design of Pole, and so remained in Paris. Some days after his release he received a packet of letters, sent on by his firm from his chambers, among them being two from Missie, the first asking him to call at once to see her, the second saying that she had called upon him. This latter was a long jeremiad: she had heard of the crash of the 'Supply and Trading' concern, had ascertained from the broker that Raby had invested her all in it, and now knew herself ruined.

'What is to become of us,' she wrote, 'is more than an angel could tell. The Deferred capital only gets 3d. in the £ from the winding-up, which will mean for us about £21 out of our £1,700—when we get it. I had only a few pounds left in the bank after taking the two tickets for Australia, and the house-rent for the Lady-day quarter has not been paid. . . .

'I never thought to see this day. . . . Jean says that I have got quite grey within the last forty-eight hours . . . like Marie Antoinette. . . .

'Captain Dowson is still in the country. I have had neither the courage, nor the energy, to write him this awful thing. In fact, I feel ashamed . . . somehow. . . .

'The Providence of God is very strange, and if one murmurs, that is only natural. . . . Two lonely women, accustomed to refinement, left without the ghost of a resource . . . unless we accept alms of our friends. . . .

'I make no reproach, but I certainly think you should have been more cautious, Nibbs. A certain young lady writes me that you did it *purposely*, in order to bring about a marriage with Gracie. You must excuse her for this, as she is in despair on account of her poor brother, who, they say, will be confined to bed for months, and it will be weeks before he can even be removed from the Abbey. . . . Isn't it a mysterious thing? . . . But Harold has very nobly exculpated you from all connection with the outrage. . . .

'Why on earth you have taken yourself off to Paris no one seems to know. I saw your Mr. Griffiths about you, but he was vague. . . . Do come. . . . The doctor seems pleased with Gracie, though she still has the paroxysms, less frequently, it is true, but the aches in the lower back, and the thighs, appear to me quite as bad as ever. Sometimes she lies like one dead to the world the livelong day. . . . Of course, she has heard not a whisper of the wreck. What we are to do about Miss Yates, only God knows, as He knows how we are to pay the doctor, or anybody, or anything. . . . Bills are already accumulating, and not only my poor teeth, but my head, never cease to ache now. . . . I wonder if I shall have to go into the Bankruptcy Court . . . or perhaps be imprisoned . . . I have no one to advise me, no help, no hope: and if God do not uphold me in His mercy, I must, of course, break down. . . . Combes, the broker, told me that I will get back not one penny of the ticket-money from the P. and O. people. . . .

No one knows the dreadful bitterness of poverty . . . it is like a disease and a panic. . . . To-day I sold a few trinkets, including the ring you lately gave Gracie, realising altogether £19, most to go to-morrow on the rent, as I feel so guilty now about it. . . .'

Raby's heart bled for her, and his long reply said among other things :

'I don't take it at all kind of you to be worrying yourself so about money, when you know that all I have is yours—especially as the trouble is through my well-meant, but disastrous, act. (You may tell Miss Gladys Pole for me that she *lies*, though that's nothing new for a Pole : their father was a miserable little county coroner, and they have his little tricks.) However, my dear Missie, you may cry your eyes out, if that pleases you : it is your little way, I suppose, of consoling yourself, and taking your revenge on me. Well, cry away, for the time being. I hope soon to comfort you richly, if God will help me : certainly, at present everything looks like working right in that direction. . . .

'My voyage to Paris, since you ask, was really a *running away* : for as soon as I heard of Harold's mysterious accident I knew that I should be suspected. I have been wrongfully accused before, and I wasn't going to be locked up in any more police-stations for nothing . . . so I ran. . . .

'Do cheer up, now, and look on the bright side of things. I shall soon be coming, I hope : and if I don't prove myself a worthy protector to you and Gracie, then I hope that nothing but evil may befall me henceforth in this world or the next. . . .'

But he sent her no aid to meet her present exigencies, wishing her to have a thorough taste of want ; and he remained two weeks longer abroad, still suspecting Pole of some design. During those weeks daily letters passed between him and Missie, the last few being discussions of his marriage with Gracie. He had cautiously broached the subject ; Missie in the first part of her reply had refused to discuss it, but ended with a long discussion of it ; Raby then proceeded to argue it with

considerable tact ; and Missie continued to reply negatively. Suddenly, Raby returned, and, without warning, presented himself one evening at the Maida Vale flat, after nearly a month's absence.

The campaign upon which he now entered he fought by a gallant succession of forced marches ; here was his brief, yet amazing, chance : Gracie's birthday was not three weeks off, but three weeks were something ; Pole was recovering, but still unable to lift his arm : and the field was clear.

Raby fell to one knee before Miss Ames, kissed her hand, and said :

'Missie, hear me : not for my sake, Missie—I am nothing in this—but for your own, and for Gracie's. It won't be a real marriage—that I have already explained again and again—only a formal one, to save that poor girl from the untold miseries of want——'

'Formal marriages become real ones,' said Missie : '*I* know these things.'

'But this one won't—believe me ! Think of the sacrifice I make for Gracie—debaring myself from ever marrying while she lives, in order that she and you may be rich, and live in a palace : for don't think I shall ever touch one penny of her money——'

'Well, but why plead to *me* ?' said Missie : 'she is quite capable of understanding you now, and of deciding for herself.'

'But, Missie, have I got you on my side ? You know that it depends upon you, really.'

'I doubt, Nibbs, if you will make a good husband—— You are given to flirting——'

'I will ! Flirting be hanged ! Look here, Missie, can't you be serious for once in your life ? This is grim earnest, not fun. Oh, how can I convince you ? Haven't I loved her all my life ?' Ah, you don't know—I do, I do love her ! My God, how I shall safeguard that girl ! how I shall cherish her ! And besides, I won't be like another husband—only formally, only formally. And from the day of the wedding, I start a totally new life : I have made a prayer that, if I let one

Sunday pass without hearing Mass, then may I be damned in hell for ever——'

'Dear me!' went Missie.

'The question is, Missie, have I got you definitely and strongly on my side? Yes or no? He who is not with me is against me, Missie, that's all!'

She contemplated his flushed Adonis-face, and smiled.

'Well, yes, then,' she said.

He kissed her on both cheeks.

'So far, so good. Then, Missie, you will do whatever I tell you?'

'If I think it right.'

'Good! Then the first thing is to let her know about the poverty.'

'I think she already suspects. But to tell her might hurt her health.'

'Oh, we mustn't mind about hurting her a little just now. It ain't going to kill her. She must hear it to-day. And tomorrow I want you to let me take her out for a drive. . . .'

It was now well past middle June, a period that year of blazing days. The doctor had ordered carriage-outings for Gracie, and she had had several. Her condition now was one of very gradual recovery. She no longer misnamed anyone, and the screaming paroxysms were over: but her lassitude persisted, an indifference to all things like that of the dead; memory, too, was dulled, and she never referred either to her singing, or to Jack Hay. As if nothing was amiss between her and Raby, she permitted herself to be taken in his arms down to his hired brougham; and they drove an hour in the park, till she fell asleep, her hand in his.

Each day they drove, twice with the Duchess of T——e, thrice with Missie, oftener alone, to the two parks, the heath, or even Kew. In the midst of the drive she invariably fell asleep.

Gladys Pole was with her half-dead brother at the Abbey; her young Grace, after some demur, had acquiesced in the marriage: Raby had nothing to oppose him.

He shewed Gracie her sapphire-ring, which he had taken from hers and enlarged to fit his own little finger, saying :

'You know this ring, don't you?'

They were driving round the outer circle of Regent's Park.

'Is it mine?' she asked, with eyes down-glancing from the height of her pillowed head.

'Yes.'

'How did you get it?'

'You gave it me.'

'When?'

'No, I can't tell you a story: you did not give it: I took it off your finger to put on mine, in exchange for another which I put on yours——'

'Where is it?'—glancing at her hand.

'Missie had to sell it. Missie is so poor now—through me, only through me. I put her funds into a rotten concern, meaning well, God knows. That's why I am in misery, Gracie, until I do something to lift her and you out of your wretchedness.'

Silence.

'Why did you exchange rings with me?'

'Because of a promise which you made to marry me.'

'I? When?'

'One night about six weeks ago.'

'I don't remember.'

'You did. I hope you are not going to forget that, Gracie.'

'I must have been—strange. I don't remember it. I do not wish you to marry me, Nibbs.'

'Oh, why not?'

'I do not seem to have any affection for you in that sense.'

'You *will* in time! And think how *I* worship *you*!'

'Is that so? I have somehow an impression that you do not'—and her eyes closed wearily.

'That is because you have been ill! Everything seems wrong to you. As soon as you are well again you will know the flaming truth. Why, Gracie, I die for you—dear, darling Gracie!'—he kissed her hand.

'Still, I prefer not to be married,' she murmured sleepily: 'does Missie wish it?'

'She does, very much!'

'It seems odd. Everything is so odd. But still, I'd rather not, Nibbs.'

'But, Gracie, I want you to consent *now*. Think what sort of marriage it will be—only a formal one, till some day perhaps you say: "Come, my husband," and make me drop to my knees with gratitude before my God and all Saints. Don't you understand, Gracie? Missie hasn't a penny—you have nothing to live on—and this marriage is only to raise you out of your misery——'

'How would that raise us?'

'Why, you remember the Mackay-legacy, surely?'

'Oh, I see.'

'Seven thousand a year; and your birthday is only twelve days off——'

'I see. But there is also Harold. Where is Harold?'

'Harold is dying like a dog! Oh but, Gracie—don't humiliate me, now! You would never have married Harold, you know.'

'I don't know. You and Harold are quite the same things. He is very nice and kind. Is poor Harold dying?'

'Yes—in the good Providence of God.'

'I am very sorry.'

'So, Gracie, all things considered, do you consent?'

'I don't know. It seems odd. I cannot tell.'

'Promise me!'

But now she was gone in sleep. The carriage drew up under shade nearly opposite the Zoo, and Raby watched her slumber.

These outings did her good; the brougham was like a travelling oasis through a desert where people were dropping sun-struck; by the beginning of July she was walking a little, and interested in this or that. She might alight and walk from the 'Inner Circle' some steps toward that bridge whence Jack Hay one night had dropped a policeman's staff, and a handcuff, into the water, and, sitting on the sward, would note all those rumours of the breeze in the profuse tree-top

above her, the innocent business of the birds, the ants, too, and other clans that lead their life in the grassy glebe, and all in the Summer hints of the Blessed Islands, and the hospitable largeness of the Creator. But this charm began to be more and more spoiled for her by the continual talk of marriage.

'Nibbs,' she said, 'you have said all this before. You should not pester one. Isn't this a splendid day?—so bright and so breezy.'

'But, Gracie—you don't understand the situation——'

'I do,' she answered: 'I understand more than you think.'

Her refusal had every day become more definite. He was now seized with the terror that he had let her get too well, seeing that the stronger her mind, the worse his chance. He had a long talk that day with Missie, who was now almost as eager as he for the consummation: for the flat was being run by his money; and before Missie lay only doubt, ruin and despair.

'Missie,' he said, 'it isn't enough to tell Gracie that you are poor: she must be made to feel that *she* is the cause. You have spent a lot on her, what with fees, and the rest. You must *tell* her so——'

'I! Oh, you are joking——'

'All right, I am joking, since I look so terribly like joking! Good heavens! What a fund of ingrained levity you must have in you, after all! Can't you see what a desperate pass we are all in, Missie, and talk seriously, like a rational being? It is a matter of days now, and then all is lost, or all gained. If the disease is desperate——'

'But to *upbraid* her——'

'Call it upbraiding, if you like! Call it what you like! But the point is, that this isn't the time to stand on niceties, if we are earnest people, and not play-actors. And as it has got to be done, after all, Missie, why make a talk?'

In the end, with red nose-tip, Missie yielded, where-upon quite a little mock-scene between her and Gracie was arranged by Raby. 'Only, don't do it, till you see me again,' said he.

He then drove to Gloucester Terrace, where he found Mr. and Mrs. Hay about to sit to a heavy lunch in lonely state; and he lunched with them. Mrs. Hay's weary face had acquired two rather brown semicircles under the eyes, from sorrow, perhaps, or dissipation. Mr. Hay was looking every inch an M.P., solid and stolid, in grey frock-coat and really imposing white waistcoat, his beard getting grey in the middle tuft, his upper lip still shaven—that Dissenter lip, of which the marchioness always said: 'It is papa's Achilles-heel, the bit of him that remained sternly Nonconformist when he was baptized into orthodoxy.' At one point in the meal, at a moment when Mr. Hay was drinking, Mrs. Hay cut a hurried mouth-and-finger sign to Raby, meaning: '*I want to talk to you*'; and at a moment when she was picking up her serviette, Mr. Hay whispered thievishly to Raby: '*A private word wi' you!*'—this meaning that each desired to hear, unknown to the other, if Raby had any news of Jack: for neither had seen Raby for some time.

'Puzzling thing that about your friend, Pole,' said Mr. Hay hastily, to cover his bit of by-play.

'No friend of mine, sir,' said Raby. 'Is he getting better?'

'Harrie was down at the Abbey last week,' answered Mrs. Hay, her eyes dwelling expectantly upon his face, 'and she seems to say he's improving. But he's mostly unconscious still, I hear, and it will be weeks yet——'

'His nice sister accused *me* of it, I'm told,' said Raby.

'Ey, I heered that,' said Mr. Hay: 'but shaf! ye mustn't mind the likes o' that sort o' talk.'

'It only shews Miss Gladys' own coarseness of mind,' observed Mrs. Hay: 'some folks never rise above their former selves, I'm sure. But how is Miss Gracie now? I was wanting to go to see her, but, believe me, I never seem to get a moment to myself. Isn't one of you two young men going to marry her, so as to get that money?'

Raby, tempted, then broke the news of his impending marriage, hope forerunning fact, and there was surprise and congratulation. Not a word, all the time, about

Jack. In the drawing-room Mr. and Mrs. Hay each waited for a moment's riddance of the other: but each stuck close to Raby; so he, meanwhile, told his own special business, saying:

'As I know, sir, that Dr. Stanley borrowed several sums of money from you on the strength of Miss Stanley's marriage, I came to ask if you would send her at once, through me, a detailed account of those sums, with a request for prompt settlement, so that her agents may make it a first charge on the fortune——'

'A' will—A' will,' said Mr. Hay.

'That's all right, then. Could you have it sent to-day, say?'

Mr. Hay promised to try. Raby then waited some time, knowing the two secret cravings to speak with him apart; but as neither would quit the field, he said good-bye.

However, as he passed out of the house, Mr. Hay came pelting down, and caught him on the pavement, with: 'Here!—a word wi' you. . . . Heard aught o' that Jack o' mine? Didn't care to ask before the wife, 'ee know—upsets her a wee bit—— Well, ye know what mothers are—fond, chicken-hearted——' and sheepishly his lids lay lowered, like a picture of abashment.

'Well, I suppose you know that he started for Australia in the *China*, sir,' said Raby.

'Ey, I know that.'

'That's all I know about him. He never came to see me when he was in London. Fact is, we had—a row. I know nothing about him.'

'Oh, well, no harm in askin', is there? Between us, mothers are such queer—— Ey, good-bye, good-bye——' and back he trotted in secret haste, while Raby, walking till he met a cab, muttered: 'Ah, Mr. Jack Hay, you are gone. And you were a good sort to me, too—many a time—a good, true friend. Don't think I've forgotten! But there's no justice in this world, you see, my little friend.'

That night, by the last post, he received Mr. Hay's account of the almost forgotten debt of Dr. Stanley

(nearly £2,000), and an hour later had placed it in Missie's hand, with instructions how to use it.

The next morning, accordingly, Missie rose pale, conscious of the approaching torture. This was the day. She could hardly look at Gracie. 'You don't seem very well this morning,' said Miss Yates at breakfast. Missie went from room to room in half-dress, unbelted blouse, and rough hair, her hand on her mouth; anon she sat a while, and stared, or cast up her eyes in a prayer too distracted to reach half to heaven. About 9.30, the drawing-room swept, Miss Yates led Gracie thither by the hand for change of air, and laid her in a starched *peignoir* on the sofa-cushions, a shawl over her feet; and there Gracie lay, all pale and quiescent, as usual in the mornings, a Shelley on her lap. Missie, alone now with her, looked lingeringly out of the oriel, then turned to enact the 'scene,' but failed, almost fainting; then walked vehemently to and fro a little; then began, Gracie all the time underlooking at her with her grave, still underlook.

And as on and on she talked, Missie grew quite red with worked-up heat, walking quick, a stamp in her gait, her jaws in her fingers, Gracie saying never a syllable, yet saying something or other with her pathetic, steady underlook.

'You should never have taken up music, Gracie—— Oh, my teeth, my teeth, my teeth—— You should have known that we were too poor for such dreams. I have been made to live in a fool's paradise. But for your extravagance, I should have had some little reserve left for the rainy day—oh, Lord, my poor teeth! Instead of being a help you have been a burden—— Ugh! how disgusting, my poor dear, my own darling!—a burden instead of a help—a burden instead of a help. And if anything lies in your power—whatever that may be—to undo the mischief, then it would be becoming of you—to—to do so. You have taken things too much as matters of course—— Life is a more real and serious thing than you have thought it. If one has no money, one suffers want. I shall have to find some work to support us both,

or be imprisoned, perhaps, for—debt. At present we are only living on Nibbs's money. And in the same way that you have brought me into difficulties, you also brought your—your poor father—oh good Lord, my teeth!—and here, if you care to see it, is an enormous account which Mr. Hay has just sent in, with a request for prompt payment——'

This made Gracie wince. Missie caught up the account from a table, and had just time to toss it upon Gracie's lap before falling into a chair with covered face, sobbing a bitter relief at the feeling: 'It is finished.'

No shadow of emotion passed over Gracie's face. She opened the foolscap, and looked at it; and she sighed the one word: 'Pappy'—and smiled.

Missie ran out, and locked herself into her room. After two hours Raby came with the brougham; but even then she would not shew herself, only sending him out a note, saying: 'I have done what you wished.' When Gracie was prepared, and the pillows arranged, he carried her down as usual, and they drove to Kensington Gardens.

She said hardly anything, but reclined with a musing air that had no variation, and that day did not fall asleep. He, for the first time, said not a word about the marriage. He was afraid, and sat palish.

On their return, he was about to lift her as usual, when she said: 'I can walk.' They went slowly up. His hand was stretched to touch the button outside the door, when she stopped him. With downcast eyes, she said:

'Nibbs, I have decided to do as you wish.'

'Gracie, have you? Good God——' and he was down on a knee, kissing her hand.

'You said that it was to be only—formal.'

He did not answer. His head was bowed. Tears filled his eyes. But she was as unmoved as if talking of the weather: only, her lids were cast down.

'You said,' she repeated, 'that it was to be, as you call it—"formal" merely. I suppose you were serious?'

'Yes,' said he.

Well, then, on that condition.'

She touched the button, the door was opened, and while Miss Yates led her to her bedroom, Raby peeped crazily into the drawing-room, looking for Missie, then, with exultant face, ran to her room. After one tap, he rushed in. Miss Ames, put *hors de combat* by the morning's ordeal, was in bed.

'Well, all's over!'

'Has she——?' she whispered awfully, starting upright.

'Don't I look it?'

With a face convulsed with sudden travail toward weeping, she drew him down, and kissed him solemnly.

'God bless you both!'

'That'll be all right!'

'When is it——?'

'Day after to-morrow—can't stop—write you all particulars to-night'—and he was gone.

He drove straight to the Holborn District Registry Office in the Clerkenwell Road, in which district he was a resident. It was a Tuesday, and he took out a license for marriage at noon on the Thursday.

He did not return to Maida Vale all that day, nor the next: but sent to Gracie a costly ring and necklace, and to Miss Ames and Miss Yates some other presents, with instructions how to act.

On the Thursday the hired brougham went to fetch them. He, waiting at the outer door of the Registry when they arrived, led them up a branching stair to a room on the left. Miss Yates, all white and immaculate, carried a bunch of lilies; Missie, too, was mostly in white, and asmile at the mere presence of Hymen; Gracie, now first out of mourning, wore pink *crêpe de Chine en accordéon*, with crimson neck-band, and crimson belt. They were married standing at a table in a severe room, adorned with a map of London, before them the case-hardened registrar, on one wall a list of 'Notices of Marriage Without License,' and yonder red masses of directories. The words of wedlock were few and hurried; Raby did not even give her a ring. She shewed no emotion—none—but

smiled faintly, with still underlook—a rather unintelligent smile. But it was clear that she knew what she did, realised its momentousness: once or twice she winced. There was no compulsion: it was her own plunge into bottomless abysses—a stubborn abandonment of herself to the teeth and claws of destiny: but done with a childish smile. Deep, however, under that smile was no child, but a naughty will—reckless, sullen, resentful—the resentment directed against Fate, or God, or Something, as who should say: 'You have destroyed me thus far, utterly be I destroyed, since that pleases You.' Just in this way, in this mood, prostitutes are made.

But it was very calmly done. Her intelligence was not awake. Had it been, she would have done the same thing, but suffered infinitely more. In the brougham, going home, she sighed and fell asleep.

Raby, for his part, walked from the Registry to Gray's Inn in a state of trance. He had no idea who he was, nor on what planet gyrated. For a long time he paced his rooms, looking for something vague: and suddenly he stopped, and told himself: 'Well, I am a married man: I have married Gracie!'

That same sense of novelty, of powerlessness to recognise himself, he had felt once before—on Lyullph's Broch one midnight, when he understood and knew that someone was dead. And just so amazingly he felt it now. What he had read, and heard of, as happening to others had come true of his very self, of that inner, solely well-beloved. He was a married man.

And married to Gracie! The dream was realised, Heaven won—though somehow Heaven was not *quite* so utterly nice as one had expected. He had thought to be happier, if only at Pole's overthrow, and at telegraphing the life-news to his aunt in India. However, victory was victory: he had his little wife: and wasn't he going to love her, and cherish her, and make her love him, too—in time? And by the side of his writing-desk he fell to his knees, and uttered words which, roughly speaking, we will call 'a prayer.'

For two days he kept ostentatiously clear of his wife,

letting her see that he had no intention to force his company upon her. Meantime, his firm presented his marriage certificate to the Mackay trustees and executors, and entered upon the preliminaries for the transfer of the fortune from their hands to the funds in Gracie's name. But by the third morning's post he heard from Missie that Gracie was taken worse, and had had another of the screaming paroxysms, so long discontinued. And at once he made a decision, and hurried to Maida Vale.

He announced his intention to take the whole household, including Jean, to the Continent without delay. Missie objected, the doctor objected, even Miss Yates, secretly glad, objected. But Raby was inexorable. He did not mince matters: he said, 'It is my will, that's all.'

Having arranged with his firm to become the solicitors of his wife, and to grant him a prolonged holiday, he started with his four the next day. And he quickly proved right as to Gracie's health: for they had not been three days in Paris when she seemed stronger. They were *en route* for Chamonix and Grindelwald, but Raby met in Paris a friend who assured him that the most charming place in nearer Europe is that William-the-Conqueror part of Normandy, all there round Caen, Bayeux, St. Lo, and the Vire valley: and thither Raby, after a consultation, set out with his four on the day following Gracie's twentieth birthday.

The weather was tropical; and making Caen, and its peaceful country, their headquarters, they took voyages to scenes where the sketcher finds his paradise, and the dreamer no lack of opium. It was like falling back from Maida Vale to the eleventh century, and the sensation of the fall was delightful. By the end of the fourth week, Gracie was taking short bicycle-rides. They had then entered a score of early-French cathedrals and churches, and within a small area had visited many varieties of scenery, from the richly romantic round Domfront, Mortain, to the pleasant country round high-set Coutances.

From Lisieux, and again from Bayeux, Gracie could

not be got away for many days. Coming to some old-timbered alley, one looks down it fully expecting the charming, and is yet anew surprised by the excess of the actual over expectation ; and there are sunny old market-corners, courtyards, that produce upon the mind precisely the same quality (though not quantity) of effect as hashish, morphia, and nepenthe.

After a month Raby had an interview with Miss Yates. They had just come back to the Conqueror's town, the 'place of chiming' bells, for some days. He wished, he said, to retain her valuable services still for some time, but did not find it convenient to have her longer in France: would she therefore return to Maida Vale—with Jean?

This was decided, and, Gracie, hearing the new arrangement at dinner, fixed her underlook a moment upon her husband, but said not a word. The next day they all accompanied, in the light-railway of those parts, the two banished to Ouistreham, the little port of Caen, and saw them off.

Raby, Gracie and Missie then went eastward again for a week on the heights of St. Lo by the dark-gleaming Vire. They lived in a half-hôtel, half-*pension*, old as the invasion of England, looking upon the square before the cathedral, into which climb and converge all those steep, deep streets. Here, as everywhere, Raby took care that his room should be as remote from the ladies' as possible, remaining, as always, ostentatiously good. At night, on parting, he kissed Gracie's hand, as he kissed Missie's. Not the least sign gave he that he was terribly in love, every day more: but he watched Gracie's growing health as a cat watches a mouse-hole in which he hears a stirring.

'Don't she ever talk about me?' he asked Miss Ames. They were alone under the trees at the west end of the *Place*, near the fountain with its bronze peasant-girl, behind them the façade of the steep-built church and its flight of steps; down there below, the climbing town, the river, the valley. It was a hot afternoon. Gracie had gone walking down the leafy river-side alone.

'I can't say that she ever talks of you,' answered

Missie. 'Of what does she talk? Of nothing. It is impossible to conceive what is in the child's mind.'

'Missie, don't you think the time has come for you to go home, and leave Gracie and me together?'

'H'm,' went Missie mysteriously, and smiled: for it was impossible to her to take aught connected with Cupid and Hymen without a certain levity.

'But seriously,' said Raby.

'Would that be according to the bond? I feel for you—you know that. But there is your promise——'

'Have I broken my promise so far?'

'No. One must give you credit for what you deserve, Nibbs. You have been very correct. I often wonder how long it will last.'

Raby laughed, touched on some nerve of self-consciousness, and, still self-consciously smiling, answered with opening arms:

'It will last as long as—there's any need! The point is this, Missie, that Gracie can't honestly touch a penny of Mr. Mackay's money as long as the present situation lasts. We have fulfilled the letter of his will, but not its spirit. You know as well as I do that this was not the sort of marriage which he contemplated. And it's hardly right, is it, to outwit a dead man in this way?'

'No,' said Missie, 'no. It is not. It is far from right. Ah, dear, dear me! it is all very perplexing!'

'That aspect of the matter should be put clearly before Gracie, Missie.'

'Ah, Nibbs, you did not suggest that aspect of it *before!*'

Again Raby smiled, touched in his self-consciousness, and, still smiling in spite of effort, answered with opening arms:

'It wasn't for me to suggest it!'

'No, you never *were* pre-eminently frank, Nibbs, I'm afraid. I can even conceive of some people calling you—cunning. But where is the use of talking? We are altogether in your hands. I will go back to London. But my heart bleeds—Gracie will feel herself terribly abandoned——' and tears welled in her eyes.

'Abandoned to her husband?' said Raby sternly.

Missie was silent.

Just about that hour Gracie, sitting three miles away in a wood of the river-cliffs, from whose face peeped one *château* yonder, was weeping into her hands; and her guardian-angel, if she had one, must have winced at that smothered shriek that suddenly rent her: '*My love!* where is he. . . ?'

This was her first transport of the kind: she lay writhed on the ground with hoarse bosom, her mouth open, the upper-lip and chin streaming with rheum. 'My God, what have I ever done to You?' she sobbed. All this implied the definite re-establishment of health—the sudden, vivid birth in her of memory, passion, power to despair, and power to curse. She went back late—long after dinner—a new woman, with a firmer lip-pressure, no atom of girlhood left in her.

'Isn't he very good and patient?' said Missie after a long silence, as they undressed.

'Who?'

'Nibbs.'

'Is he?' said Gracie.

Her taciturnity deepened from that night. She spoke to no one. Two days afterwards, Missie mentioned that she must soon be going home, adding a motive that was no motive. Gracie said nothing, but again fixed Raby with a momentary underlook: and now a ray of venom was in that glance.

And again, as in the case of Miss Yates and Jean, she and Raby accompanied Missie from Caen to Ouistreham in the languid light-railway that runs along a canal bordered by birch and poplar avenues—a far-stretched scene of rural peace, looking like a Dutch picture by, say, Hobbema, save for the *château* yonder through the trees, and yonder again the inevitable twelfth-century church. On the jetty Gracie gave her lips to Miss Ames, and Missie steamed out of the little port with the chilly impression of that caress still in her consciousness: it was as if she had kissed a statue.

The husband and wife dined at Ouistreham, and, having brought their bicycles with them, set out upon the eight or nine miles to Caen under the trees and the moon. In both was a species of sub-agitation, and few were the words they spoke.

Midway Gracie said: 'I have got tired. If you don't mind, I might rest a little.'

They leant the bicycles against trees, and sat on the roots of a poplar. Both wore cloth caps, so low-peaked, that their faces lifted a little during speech. The night was still, but for the cicada, or the movement of a rook. The moonshine was a luminous haze. No one was on the road, no one on the canal.

'Very tired?' said he.

'Not very.'

'I shall not let you bicycle for another two days. This is rather too much for you. You mustn't go thinking that you are quite strong yet. Here, just sit on my jacket——'

'It is of no importance.'

'What isn't? Everything relating to you is of infinite importance——'

'Don't take off your jacket. I shall be all right in a minute——'

'But isn't that so?'

'What?'

'What I said: that everything relating to you——'

'Why hold my hand? I do not understand why, if you mean to abide by your undertaking.'

'Which undertaking?' said he villainously, placing his lips on her hand.

This action had upon her an effect of the most sudden, the most extravagant passion. She leapt to her feet, all red, grinning her hate, shrieking the command:

'*Pity me!*'

'Why, what is it?' said he, rising, astonished.

'Will you?—yes or no?—*quick!*' she screamed.

'Pity you what for? Come, Gracie, come: I thought we were to be friends?'

'Ah, you are a bad friend! You have been an infamous friend!'

'Really, Gracie! Those are words that a man remembers. You must not go thinking that you are allowed to speak to me in that way.'

'Why, what do I care about you, Nibbs Raby? Have you not been an infamous friend?'

'Have I? To whom?'

'You know!'

'To——'

'Yes! Yes! to *him*.'

'Really, Gracie! Your reference to that person now is hardly in good taste.'

'But why not? I am his wife! I love him ten thousand millionfold more than my own immortal soul! Forever and forever his own!'

'Really, Gracie!'

'His wife!'

'No, mine.'

'Oh, fool—his! his!'

'Mine, by God!'

'You still want me, then?'

'Rather!—*to-night*, since you make me mad.'

'Another man's heart, you beast?'

'Rather!'

She was silent, and in that minute much evil was born within her. She suddenly said:

'Then, you shall! Come, let us hurry! I think I know, maiden as I am, what you want—not a wife! anything but that. And, as I am given into your power, I promise that you shall find me what you desire—a splendid mate—your female counterpart. The other alternative is to throw myself now into the water there—and I would, too, if such a wicked devil were not in me. No, don't be afraid—you shan't lose me. I will live on to hate you, Nibbs, that is, if I don't despise you too much to hate you; and as hatred and contempt are very near akin to the kind of infernal love you want, I swear that you shall be pleased with me, and more than pleased! You happen to be delightfully handsome, too—— Come, then!—be happy with me——' She ran to her bicycle, and all the four miles to Caen rode at such a pace, that it tasked him to follow.

That threat to throw herself with him down the broad road she fulfilled, and more and more fulfilled in the years that followed : so that, struggle as he might, she was ever a weight upon him.

For ten, eleven years we leave them, but we may perhaps spare a paragraph to trace something of their history during that time. In the first year a child was born—a girl—who, quite early, became an epileptic ; in the ninth year a healthy boy was born. Between those two births Gracie twice ran away from him—through little fault of Raby's, be it said. Raby was, of course, a clown, and the grossness of his nature had weight to drag her down, just as she, in her way, deliberately dragged him : so that both were well draggled. But he was 'a good husband' : and, on the whole, strove in the right direction. They often lived at Beech How, which Raby detested : but Gracie had succeeded in buying it from Sir Markham Perowne, and would insist upon spending there half the year, or the whole. As there was no Catholic church in the dale Raby had to ride four miles to mass ; but each Sunday morning, fair weather or foul, found him there. He maintained a constant correspondence with his 'spiritual director,' burned his *Khama Soutra*, daily read the simpler 'offices' like compline, and was strict as to confession and communion. His breviary grew brown from his thumb, and opened of itself. It is to be presumed, therefore, that he had confessed his crime to the priest. By the seventh year he had grown a Vandyke beard, and looked, if anything, handsomer than ever, yet rather careworn and sallow, due partly to his martyrdom to rheumatic gout. It was between the seventh and eighth years that his wife left him a second time, the cause of that rupture being a scandal which associated his name with that of the Marchioness of D——. Raby and the marchioness were certainly intimate : but as to an actual *liaison*, that we are inclined to deny. Gracie, however, a troubled guest in a gloomy earth, needed little excuse to stir her soured mind to action, though neither of the two ruptures was long-lasting : Raby found means to win her back ; nor, on

that second occasion, was this difficult, for, much about the same time as Raby's name, the name of another—a certain little personage—was being coupled with Harriet Stanley's. Here again we say that rumour may have been as excessive as it often is, that the marchioness may have been merely indiscreet; though, certainly, for some months a certain very graceful and gracious lady did strictly refuse to 'meet' her. That, however, proves nothing: and on this matter we fall short of definiteness.

From the second year Raby began to make every effort which his astuteness could suggest to discover the whereabouts of Jack Hay in Australia; and these efforts he kept up for eighteen months, till he learned that Jack had been killed in a fight. Having every reason to believe this true, he ceased to search. His idea was, having discovered Jack, to make him a rich Australian. But not in this easy fashion can the soul expiate its torts and forfeits: and God hid Jack from Raby.

Jack wrote to no one in England, save once to Mary Thaxter. And she never got the letter: Mary and Fred had had another flitting-day, with free beer and cheer.

As to Pole, he recovered of his wounds in five months. But he was never quite the same Pole afterwards. His value and virtue were rather dulled; and he settled down to the way of life and thought of the business-man detective. From the second year onward, he took to fits of drinking; the glare of his eyes became horrible; and apace his left lung grew from little to nothing. But still he lived, as it were sustained by hate, and the faith of the hater. Any day he could have landed Raby in prison for theft: but he would not: the revenge was too tiny for his large greed. He waited, he would not kill himself, hellishly hoping in Heaven. And oft-times, in his nightly cups and out of them, he gazed for hours upon a vial of formalin containing a finger-joint. It was his fetich. He used it as Raby used his breviary.

Missie was generally with Gracie: but that most tragic of wrecks, the wreck of tenderness, had taken

place between them. The old affection was dead, on the side of Gracie, certainly, who no longer loved aught on this earth save her own body, her lovely children, and one maniac memory. In the second year 'Captain' D—— made Missie ill by breaking off his engagement with her on the score of ill-health. In the ninth year, however, she again became engaged to a certain Mr. Emptage——

But we gladly leave them all for a time (it must be for a time only), in order to follow the goings of that young man, to tell of whose fortunes and exploits it was that we began this narrative.

XXVIII

THE COVE WHO PREACHED

JACK HAY had been making two round voyages as ordinary seaman from Melbourne viâ Auckland to Sydney, and back again to Melbourne, when, expecting to pull off £200 on the Melbourne Cup, he came an ugly facer, and was cleaned out to his last half-a-crown. He had suddenly left his ship—one of those round-voyage Union boats that start alternately from Sydney harbour and Port Phillip: for change was now the breath of his life; he was jack of all trades, and master of most, unstable as water, and a drunkard at the cup of freedom, finding the world no man's parish, but large beyond ken, primeval, with forests not 'preserved.' He had shot the wild turkey where no human ear could have heard the report, had his rifle been Etna, and there where he cooked it no eye could have marked his fire, had his fire been Vesuvius.

To have only half-a-crown in no way disconcerted him. By nightfall it might grow to hundreds, or it might disappear: either road was all in the day's work. He took things with his rolling gait and a barely-perceptible sniff-up through the nose, which was his way of expressing philosophic calm. Life was a toss-up: he took it easy.

He knew that a new boom was on at the Palmer diggings: for sailors were absconding from ships in Port Phillip, and it was the thundering wages going that had led him to take a turn on the sea: but he had had no thought of making for the Palmer, till, playing

euchre in a little Kew 'hotel' on Cup-day night, one Mason, a small squatter for whom he had shorn, proposed a dart to the goldfields, they two to try their luck as tent-mates.

'Suits me all to pieces,' said Jack: 'only you must give me a day or two to get my swag and my old weed, "Alex," from where I have him out to grass.'

'Where's that?'

'Goonadah station, about thirty mile up-country.'

'Right you are, says Moses,' replied the farmer: 'he ought to be in great buckle, too, with the bit of a drought and the half-dry grass, if he's been ridden any, and as my own screw's a flyer just about now, we should be across-country within the five days, if we make it up to start o' Wednesday three o'clock.'

'Suit me out and out,' said Jack, and the bargain was struck. Mason had been realising at the stockyards, and as all prices were running high, was in funds; Jack had been a quartz-reefer in Queensland, and knew his way about at any placer-diggings on this side Jordan. Thus mutually complementary, they set out on the appointed day, and covering sixty miles a night over country which both could track like blackfellows, reached in due course the goldfields. Mason got a digger's-license, and in the midst of the thronging claims pegged out a six-yard paddock. Soon they were up to the neck in it, and almost at once began to stand well in: in the case of Mason at least, though, as for Jack, as fast as he made he squandered. No millionaire could be more lavish. Even there where gold was dirt, his phlegmatic way of playing the high ropes roused admiration. 'Oh well,' he would say with his slight sniff-up, 'easy got——' and hand a little washleather sack of the yellow dust to the Methody minister for a tea-meeting. He would treat half a dance-house all round, with brown brandy at fifteen shillings. The new-chum Yankees grew to call him 'Swell Jack,' the natives 'the Swigger.'

He was drinking in one of the flash bar-parlours one midnight with a certain Honble. Frank Farnum, who in Pall Mall wore no moleskin trousers, while round

them roared a rout of German and Creole, Greek and Jew, with parsons, larrikins, mine-speculators, roughs, and every type—bearded, upstanding lads, rude but jolly, making haste to be rich—when the Honble. Frank said to him:

'You always remind me of someone: are you English?'

'Don't I look it all out?' said Jack, pretty well on in his cups.

'I hardly know. You must have left home early in that case. You no longer talk English, for one thing——'

'Rum start! What do I talk, then?'

'Well—say Greater British.'

'Bah! stash that. I know your sort down to the ground—I've had good reason to, you see—with your finickin' little jokes. But that says nothing: try another tot.'

'Delighted. But you do, really, remind me of someone—I can't say whom—every time I glance suddenly at you. What's your name?'

'Well, you're the newest of new chums, and no mistake, to ask a man's name that road. My name's Jack Hay, mate, Cumberland-man, Bedwick born and bred, and no much reason to be ashamed of it either, if justice was only done me.'

'Oh, quite so. But I must have seen your brother, or somebody, somewhere. Any relatives in the old country?'

'None, by G—d!'

'Quite so, quite so—don't get angry. I only thought—— Ah, Ali Baba, made your pile to-day? Come and join us.'

From out the crush emerged the face of a gigantic negro, a Cuban, very flashly dressed in fancy shirt, full-share hat, and scarlet sash, with bowie-knife and revolver stuck in it, his teeth gleaming white like keys of a new, black piano. With a Chinaman and a Mexican, he was working a claim next to the Honble. Frank's, with whom he was great chums: for here all were hail-fellow-well-met; and 'Ali' pressed his way to the little table.

It was a ball-night, and through the battle of tongues strains of band-music from the next room, with rushes of dancing feet, were just audible in snatches : for the ear was so beset and occupied by the noise, that at some moments one hardly heard one's own shout ; the rooms were brilliantly lit, though misty with smoke, and all down the bran-new street, too, though midnight was near, every store, 'hotel,' circus, and dance-house flared with light. Away yonder, too, over the creek-flat flared a purgatory-scene of camp-fires, looking luridly strange in the darkness to one up there on the hill-tops.

The Cuban, whose diggings-name was Ali Baba, had been nipping freely, and shewed it by his red eye-whites, and fixed pug-jaw : a jolly enough cove when sober, but at night, when off-shift hands turned out in flash rig for a spree, and the river of liquor ran at flood, Ali was apt to be quarrelsome. Every evening's racket, for that matter, was punctuated by at least two or three fights somewhere in Palmerstown, and in two of these Ali had been a combatant within a month, once with a Texas new-chum, once with his own tent-mate, the Chinaman, in both cases coming off first chop—not a bad thing for the others, by the way, for Ali was revengeful, and his motto ran : 'Vengeance is *mine*.'

The table at which Jack Hay sat with the Honble. Frank Farnum was full, but Ali Baba drank standing—or rather was about to drink standing, when, bringing his glass to clink lovingly against Jack's, both glasses, held in hands now wild of aim, broke to pieces. Brandy splashed Jack's face and beard, and ran down his chest through the open collar of his blue-serge shirt ; red appeared on Ali's hand. The Honble. Frank laughed, wettings and wounds not counting at the diggings.

But Ali was not sober, nor was Jack.

'Your dashed fault !'

'You be dashed !'

'You must be dashed drunk, Ali Baba !'

'You one dashed liar !'

'Better jack up, nigger, or you get my mauley in your eye!'

'Mauley? Ho! In *my* eye?'

'Yes! like one o'clock, too!'

Ali, sudden and quick in quarrel, caught fire in the head and breast. Jack's voice had its tremulous bleat. Meissonier should have seen: here was *La Rixe* in birth. The two throats strained toward each other with swollen veins. There is a Cupid of the Pit as well as of Olympus, who shoots his sudden random arrows of hate-at-first-sight.

'Come, come,' shouted the Honble. Frank above the busy din, 'it is nothing——'

'Rip you up like kangaroo kick out dingo's bowels,' bawled Ali.

'Going to stash it? Nigger like you!'

'Nigger knock smoke and saucepans out of mooching white sundowner like *you*!'

'By G——! say another word, and I go for you!'

'Go for me? He don't know *me*! *Me* go for *you*——' nor did Ali make longer tarrying, but brought his fist into relation with Jack's head.

Up darted Jack, 'shaping' with right fist at breast, left arm out, and gloomy underlook of eyes, as when the thunderstorm gathers. The table with all its glass upset, and the fight began — brief scuffle and interchange of blows, then pause and readjustment—then again quick scuffle and interchange, with pauses. The general noise grew lower, half-a-hundred necks craned to see, while the immediate crowd cleared back from that rough spot, and left the fighters field. Both were heavyweight pounders, yet nimble as wallabies, and knew the game all out and out; nor was either likely to cry crack, till he had had his bellyful. The mob took sides, with comments, with words of cheer: but quite coolly, smoking the costly cigar, with a callous brown spitting here, and a spitting there. Yonder peered the wrinkled eyes of Foo Chee, small-laughing, Ali's tent-mate, in his inveterate blue blouse, he having been a Sydney washerman before the dart to the diggings; and yonder Arizona Bill or Joe, calm as

an Indian, with fringed trouser, and left arm akimbo, nodded 'neat for the Britisher,' while the little Frenchman stood astonished at man's roughness to man.

'Me bettee plenty money Ali win,' remarked Foo Chee, his eyes all smiles: 'no catchee Ali Baba blind side of his face: Britisher more better look see another one.'

'By Gosh! Flash Jack's punished him there,' remarked another.

'Good, good—Ali Baba stands the flutter, and no mistake!'

'Bash! that's got 'im.'

'Can't hold a candle to the Swigger, though!'

'Don't know! Can't take much change out of Ali.'

'Good for a touch!'

'Phew! there's a perishing brickfielder!'

'Finish him, Swell Jack!'

By this time blood was moving down Jack's beard, Ali was cat's-meat, and they had closed to a throw, the result of which remained a minute uncertain, while the floor danced from side to side under the struggling toes. But here Jack had most of the savey, and was uppermost when they dropped with such a thud, that for a time Ali seemed quite knocked out. Jack disengaged himself, jumped up, and callously touched the trickling blood with his bandana. After paying the racket, he strolled out with the Honble. Frank and the mob of miners, down to the tents by the creek, for now the shops were closing, the lights going out; soon comparative silence grew upon the three thousand camps and log-fires; and soon a distant bay, or hinny, or gun-shot was heard by the armed watchmen as it were in the kingdom of dreams.

The Ali-affair, however, was not ended. The next noon he turned up at Jack's and Mason's 'Goldhunter Claim,' with a bandage over his left eye, and a dangerous light in the right, though grinning with all his teeth.

'Say, pard,' said he, 'you was A-One last night, and no mistake. But me no jacked up yet, you know.'

'You go and hang yourself, Ali Baba,' called Jack without looking up, standing shin-deep in water, a yellow kerchief tying up his head like a bundle, while far over the flat spread a spectacle *à la* Bret Harte, every man of thousands almost fiercely intent, working while it was day on water-wheel, pump, and windlass, with pick, shovel and wash-dirt dish, puddling, sluicing, weighing in the palm both dust and nugget; and with the crash of the quartz-stampers mixed the roar of the cradles; and over all the blazing sun.

Ali lingered and loitered, watching Mason and the wages-man heave the windlass; and at longish intervals he spoke a word or two, and from below Jack, without looking up, half-absently answered him.

'Me was half-seas over, boss: Ali Baba no chop when he like that. There's where you had the pull. Fust time I ever get floored, by gum. Don't noways know how you bring it off.'

'Well, you'd better clear off this claim, if you don't want to have the whole dashed jimbang slap over again,' called Jack: 'I'd put up to thrash you any day for sixpence.'

'So? Well, come up and shape now. Me shan't say no.'

'You go and hang yourself, Ali.'

'White man fancies hisself so! always so dashed cocksure, so thundering flash, and no mistake. Oh, b'lieve me, it ain't bad to give him the right-about nownagain!'

'You hook it, you hook it.'

'Say, you coming round to Keary's to-night?'

'How so?'

'It's thar ball-night. Take you all I'm worth at euchre against all you're worth, and slip the odds. How's that?'

'What's wrong with the nigger?' called Jack, straightening himself, as the tub went up: 'can't you take your hammering like a Christian, and stash the Barneying?'

'Best come, else all the bosses 'll only drop to

it that you're fighting shy of a black, and no chop anyway.'

'Makes no matter to me either road, Ali. P'raps I *will* come. You cut it now, that's all.'

Ali at last turned off: but he stood sentry at the entrance of Keary's that night, peering patiently among the promenaders, till he saw Jack and another come sauntering. Again he pressed the game of euchre: Jack did not care: and they passed into a saloon where, at a score of tables, euchre, nap, cribbage, and all-fours were going, with picquet, too, and hazard among the nobs and camp-officers. The jingle of gold on the tables mingled with popping corks and muffled music from another room. There were occasional shouts, but little speech, all eyes intent upon the cards. Ali and Jack played together for enormous stakes.

They played two hours, and Ali steadily lost. At last, near midnight, the roomful of gamblers was roused to watch an exact repetition of the last night's fight. Ali had again attacked Jack with that thought in his head: 'Vengeance is Ali's, not Allah's.' Most of the men crowded round with the same indolent interest as before, among them the Honble. Frank Farnum.

Ali had kept sober, and made a fight of it; but though Jack had been drinking, the end was the same: Ali dropped beneath him. This time, however, as they dropped, Jack sent out a short shout of pain; this time, too, not he, but Ali, first picked himself up: and Ali did it with a certain haste, and with a certain stealthy haste made his way out before he could be stopped. He ran all the way to the grazier's paddock where his horse was at feed, and galloped off full-split from Palmerstown. He had buried his sheath-knife in Jack's side.

Half-a-dozen men, including Farnum, followed the spring-cart, which was brought up by two of the Commissioner's orderly troopers to carry Jack to the courthouse; but by the time his partner, Mason, and a doctor, were summoned, Jack was lying alone there on a stretcher, left for dead. Such things happened

at Palmerstown : for where gold was cheap, how much more was life ? The next day the diggings forgot that Jack had existed, and been 'flash.'

He was not, however, quite dead, but lay at a bark-roof cottage in a gully beyond the flat in the care of a drover and his wife, to whom Mason had committed him. Mason drew all the money to Jack's account at the bank, handed it over to the drover, added a little of his own, found another tent-mate, and himself, too, proceeded to forget, while Jack passed through all the stages of ticklish peril, of deliriums full of the names of one 'Gracie,' and one 'Titty,' then of convalescence, during five months. When he was on his feet again, the diggings presented another scene. The 'second Palmerstown boom' had been shortlived ; the alluvial claims were now worked out, the golden potatoes digged ; no click of billiards, nor Babel racket, nor sensational nuggets, nor carnival nights now broke the quietude of the place ; the smart trooper who had pranced up the street like a show was thin as air ; instead of gallant, brown adventurers were languid wages-men ; there, as before man was, stood the cliffs with their scrub, frowning upon the flat ; but now along the creek was heard only the industrial sound of the quartz-batteries ; and, like a dream of time, all that pow-wow of the rush was dead and gone, to live any more for ever only as a spectre of the memory.

Jack went out from the cottage where he had so long lain with only two desires in him—to meet by chance a certain dark person called Ali Baba, and to touch once more the thing which he had to love, his horse, Alex. Ali had thinned like an apparition at cock-crow, but he found Alex in good hard fettle on the little run five miles from the diggings, where he had left him. He had bought him a four-year-old, pretty cheap, three years before, from the stud of a crack station, at a time when he was in funds, and when drought had covered the country with dead stock : and that purchase he always considered his biggest stroke of luck ; nor was Alex less satisfied

with the transaction, the infatuation here being mutual, the man born to the saddle, the horse a large-framed bay, near sixteen hands, lean-headed, broad-browed, with nine-tenths of pure blood in his veins. Jack had hardly any money left after paying his grass for the last six months: but that troubled neither horse nor man, as they fared forth together into the bush, knight-errant fashion: for the country was Australia, where, in the absence of my lord marquess, no such thing as fear of starving is among the cares of healthy freemen.

Up the Upper Murray and Darling Jack tracked during the next five months (working as he went), in 'outside' country—Perry, Morana, Livingstone. It was cloudless winter; instead of creeks, rows of water-holes; the plains mere expanses of dust, over which drearily paced the flocks. Still, an odd station-hand was welcome at anything of a run. He took small contracts of work: splitting, fencing, or dam-making—nothing came amiss to him—horse-breaking, shed-building, stockriding. His very air reeked of cattle and sheep, for after two years of that life every sign of the new-chum had passed from him; after three he was like a born bushman; after four he had that intimacy with Nature by which one divines the unexplored, the future, as surely as one recognises the known and present. Large spaces, jungles of eucalyptus, iron-bark forests, the herd of wild horses, the emu's eggs, the gully impenetrable to the moon—these had become his life, akin with the hue of his mind. How wretched a wretch had he come out—and still was! but the breadth of the world consoled him. Lying by his log-fire in some deep of Nature, he would watch where Alex stood hobbled, and feel a joy in those oblique shoulders, thick with muscle, that made his paces easy as if plied on springs, and in that broad knee, and opened eye, and nostril; or he might steer half the night by the stars, then wrap himself in his blanket in the ruins of some deserted tavern, and hear all the foreday in dreams the mopoke hoot through the forest, to breakfast at a station-house thirty miles

across-country—a breakfast of five men, an acre of beefsteak—his appetite stimulated to famine by the wild bush-air. His present thought was to find the means to go exploring far north, where new or half-settled country might be taken up by the thousand miles, magnificent downs covered with blue and mitchell grass, if also with mosquitoes and sandflies; he might, by work and luck, procure a few hundred sheep in a dry season, pioneer with some shepherds and black-fellows, fence a small territory, and make the water. There 'out back' was vastness enough; and anything to pass the time. As to getting rich, such a desire never entered his head: that might be easy enough, but so foolish while a man was young, able to ride, split, shoot, shear, from foreday to midnight, and possessing a horse that could swim a stiffish river at flood, jump any mortal thing up to his own height, and do ninety miles full bat right off the reel.

But his ambition after back-country was like all his ambitions—a whim, and soon passed. He did not care: he sniffed-up, and took it easy. Moreover, he had a stroke of bad luck that winter, which disheartened, and threw him upon evil ways.

He had chummed with every variety of shady character, men who habitually stole sheep, 'duffed' cattle and horses, and did not mind taking a hand in sticking up a station, a traveller, or a coach. He had gone out of his way to 'give the office' to a gang of bushrangers, on learning that some troopers were on their track. But he had never himself done anything 'on the cross.' He did not exactly know why: for he thought not much worse of a bushranger than of the Governor; no one does in half-settled country. Nor did he care much about the morality: he cared much for nothing; nor did he fear the consequences: he feared nothing. But because a tree mostly keeps on growing in the direction in which it was planted, therefore he had remained 'straight.' He mixed with the worst, drank greatly, and larked phlegmatically with the saucy bush-girls: but of bush-girls, and of all, he had chanced to remain unsoiled. Here was

where his good luck came in. The legs which he was in love with were Alex's.

However, that year, as we have said, a misfortune befell him: he got fever and ague, complicated by a half-blinding attack of sandy-blight. It was at a mammoth station, carrying 120,000 sheep, where he and a knock-about-man, named Jim Harvey, had taken a log-fencing contract for 'the back'; there they had been four or five weeks camped in a bark gunyah twenty miles from the frontage, seeing never a soul but the bringer of the weekly water-cask, when Jack gave in. He was so downright bad, that he could hardly sit on Alex, and had to be laboriously held on while carried to an inn outside Morahno, a bush-township seven miles away.

Here he lay ill several weeks, his recent wound so aggravating the trouble, that at one time he seemed dying. Old Murphy, the inn-keeper, and his wife, took some care of him, and so did a Catholic priest who was a dab at fevers, and sometimes rode that track between two remote townships: so in the course of time Jack got up from his big feather-bed, went out, and passed his palm down the blaze on Alex's face.

Old Murphy was a man who had spent half his life in the gentle art of horse-duffing, and would yarn for hours to most people who would listen about many a racket of his enterprising youth. Old age and a certain pressure of mounted police had caused his retirement, but he could not quite doff the mental habit of his life, and his inn was the resort of several gangs of flash people: for, as it was half-a-mile off the track, a surprise by the police was not easy.

Jack was mouching about the place one Sunday morning, still feeling shaky and down in the mouth, his money all gone, when one of these gangs, known as 'Tytler's lot,' rode in. They were three, two of them bushmen to the eyes, looking like drovers or overlanders of the roughest kind, long-haired, wild-bearded, black-burnt, the third a young man who had not even yet lost all trace of 'the Oxford accent.' They drank of old Murphy's illicit grog, and ate masses of beef-

steak incredible to any but an Australian. Jack knew one of them well. They asked him to the feast; he consented; and the talk ran high.

Presently the leading spirit, before going for a nap, stood apart with the others, and Jack could tell by their glances that their talk was of him. Afterwards he and the two roughs strolled in the back, which had been half-cleared of timber, visited the stables, and discussed the points of the horses, till one of the two suddenly said:

'Are you game for a flutter?'

'What's that about?' asked Jack.

It was explained. They were going to stick up Gurrowa station, twenty-five miles south, that night. They had reason to know that Mr. Ogilvie, the squatter, was in funds for shearing-supplies and extra wages, not to mention several regular flyers which he had in the river-paddock. But 'our lot' for the time being were scattered, some of 'us' three hundred miles away: 'we' wanted another hand, as the overseer was probably at the home-station, Ogilvie also, and might have ammunition with them. Was Jack, therefore, in the fakement?

Jack shrugged. He was rather in debt, down on his luck, a bad taste in his mouth. A few pounds might be handy. But he said:

'Alex isn't any great things at present owing to the lying-up so long; and myself I don't feel down to very much——'

'Only twenty-five mile across pretty good country,' said one.

'Not counting what comes after,' said Jack. 'What beats me is how you aren't shy of getting shopped, you coves, all day in a place like this——'

'Too fly by a long chalk for that,' answered one: 'we've got a bush-telegraph out. But—do you come it?'

'Don't much care either road. Not that I cotton much to it, all the same. I don't see why a cove shouldn't be on the straight. One's just as easy as the other.'

'No doubt—but that says nothin'. We pouch £100 a man to a dead cert., however it goes——'

'Well, take it your own way. It makes no matter to me.'

'Are you in it?'

'I don't care.'

'Yes or no?'

'All right.'

So the bargain was struck, and soon the details were arranged. Jack strolled away into the forest: the others went to sleep.

It was a cloudless September day, and getting hot, though sour-grass, wild orange and a hundred hues of flowers were wet with spring-showers of the night, and the country 'looked up,' like a nymph new-awakened and refreshed. Jack paced a mile or two along winding bush-road thick with stumps, and came out, without intending it, at the township. Mohrano consisted of a few huts, two shanties, a pound, a blacksmith's, a graveyard, broken bottles, a store, and an iron chapel seldom opened; some few men leaned, and loafed, and smoked out-of-doors. The showers had lain the inveterate red dust, but, as it now grew on toward afternoon, the smoke of the smokers began to seem an evaporation under the glaring heat. Jack, sauntering through, stopped to gossip with two or three at one of the shanty-doors about the prospects of the clip; and it was while he lingered there that one of them, with a jerk of the head down the street, made the remark: 'Hello, rum start that,' indicating a young man who had ambled in on a rough little horse, dismounted, tied the horse to a quince beside the chapel, then took his stand before the chapel, and—began to sing.

He sang wildly well—at once that was understood—in a sweet, cultivated tenor: and Mohrano was puzzled. No one had seen him before. A Salvationist who sang in that way had never been heard, though, going near to look, they saw that he did wear a red jersey under his blue, lapel-less jacket. Still, they were not convinced: he was not quite the thing: something somewhere was unsalvationist. Nine of them, including one black in a 'possum rug and two confirmed drunkards, grouped themselves before him on the opposite

side of the street in loafing attitudes—rude, callous fellows—‘rude,’ however, not meaning of the same stunted intelligence as the corresponding English class. They could not make him out: he had not that open-air, horseman look of the bush, and his hands were white. He did not glance at them at all, but with downcast eyes stood singing that admirably artful old hymn, all question and startling answer: ‘Art thou weary, art thou languid . . . ?’

He was of medium height, or a little over, handsome, lissom, ascetic-looking, about twenty-five, with a short-pointed beard and blonde curls, resembling an artist, or something of that sort, though rather a seraphic sort of artist: but quite poorly dressed, with old leggings, old felt hat, old swag, old saddle and bridle. There was nothing very particular about him, however, till one saw his eyes, and he lifted them when he came to the grandiose verse—*naïf* question, amazing answer:

‘Hath he diadem as monarch that his brow adorns?
Yea! a crown in very surety—but of thorns.’

It was characteristic, however, that he did not sing the absurd verse ending ‘Jordan passed.’ By the time he had finished, the men were more or less interested, Jack among them, and prepared to listen, if he said anything.

As he sang the last verse, two horsemen who had met yonder in the forest, rode up together, one the priest who had cured Jack, the other a Salvationist captain. And they, too, drew up, with puzzled brows, to hear.

The stranger then began to pray—the Lord’s Prayer—in a very sinking voice, his great eyes pleadingly upraised: but again it was characteristic that he uttered only the words of the Lord, omitting those added by some early church.

‘Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Give us our bread to-day. And forgive me my Debt, as I forgive everyone who is indebted to me. Amen.’

This said, he looked at the men, smiled, and began to speak, fluently enough, but sometimes hampered by an evident effort to talk in the manner of his audience. Out anon trotted some colonialism, his motive, obviously, being the 'all-things-to-all-men' one, which also perhaps accounted for his Salvationist jersey, so popular in Australia: but the men felt that he was not 'to the manner born'—he was too clearly an English 'gentleman'—and to this extent he failed to impress them: but he did not fail entirely:

' . . . I wonder if I shall persuade even one of you. I wonder! Or is it too much for a stranger to recommend, though I assure you that there's more rough gold in it than in all the Ballarat and Palmerstown alluvium? Only to read the Bible—twice a week—that's all I suggest. Ah, but the Bible's a biggish book, you say: you've not the time to read it all, and, if you had, there's such a lot of dirt and hard quartz mixed with the gold, that you require a special miner's-training to tackle it. Well, that's true enough. So that the two questions for us are: what parts of the Bible shall we read? and how learn to mine the gold out of those parts? It wants some savey, I can tell you! One can't sit down and read it right off the reel, like a newspaper, because everything in the newspaper's true and plain, you see, while most things in the Bible are untrue and obscure: and the great dart is, to be able to know what's true, since what's true is very life, not bothering our heads about what's untrue and obscure. How, therefore, to read the Bible—to get at the solid, and the important, facts? for it's the real downright facts that serious modern men like you and me are after, isn't it?—and to the dickens with anything but facts. The worst of our difficulty is, that we have already been taught to read it in church and chapel, and not well taught, I think. If we had never been taught, I sometimes think that we should *all* read it, lovingly, too, with fresher minds, and altogether much better than we can now: for, really, it was written in one tone or mood, but quite other tones or moods have been imported into it, which we here

have caught, and can't easily get out of. "Come unto me, all ye that labour . . ." isn't that all right? But the force, the tone, of it is all lost for us: as soon as I say it, you think of an excellent gentleman in a white tie, don't you, or—in a—red jersey? No, we can never read that well again: for the fact is, they were the secular words of a most secular Jesus, who really lived, and lives, but we have heard them as the clerical words of a grotesquely clerical Jesus, who never lived. Ah, I see you point at my own red jersey: and there, certainly, you have me. Well, no, I confess, I am not a Salvationist: I only wish I could be a good one: but the fact is, they say more things than you and I can believe, and somehow in a tone which does not win us. It is not our fault, I think: for men are not unbelieving, but, on the contrary, credulous, superstitious: so we should certainly believe, if we could, but we can't, because there is a limit to our natural credulity——'

'The Lord save your soul, my brother!' cried the loud 'captain,' seated on his horse.

'Thank you, sir,' replied the stranger with meek lids, like one receiving a reproof from an Emperor, while the priest's Irish sides shook with laughter.

' . . . I give offence. I saw the townsmen, as I rode in, and thought I might tell them what I think: I did not anticipate that anyone of higher authority than I would be present. I will cease, if I offend——'

'Continue, continue,' called the priest.

'Thank you, holy father: I will, then—and freely, since you permit me. We were asking, by what cunning shall we here now succeed in reading the Bible well? and as to that, the first thing is to determine what parts to read. Well, we already know the book in a general way, and we know that the Old Testament is a collection of antique writings such as can only amuse, instruct, and console certain more or less cultivated minds. It is not at all for us here: we have no time, especially in the shearing-season. So, then, that at once reduces our Bible by half: we can only afford to read the New—we want to get at Christ. But the New—what a jumble! Who understands it? No

one, really. Paul arguing against James, Peter having his say, and John also. First Epistle to the Thessalonians—Second to the Corinthians. No, we could not stand that. Peter and Paul were excellent Christians in their age and way, and what they say is most interesting, when we have once built ourselves a sure house, in which to sit and read them with quite tranquil, detached intelligence. But we want Jesus, who lived, Jesus, who spoke: he alone: we have no time—If Paul and Peter only spoke in the tone of Jesus, then perhaps: but they hardly do that. Jesus was simple as diamond, clean-cut, and so large, oh my, so deep: and always his words were in wondrous relation with the inner, permanent secret of man's nature. But Paul and the rest were mostly complex, "hard to be understood," profuse, partial, and temporary. Jesus said: "Whoever will lose his life shall save it"; Paul said: "It is a shame for a man to have long hair." He could never convince a Chinaman of that, could he? But Jesus convinces Chinamen, and all men, the instant they get to catch one tone of his incantation. No, then, we are driven to the Gospels: we want our friend. But the Gospels—what a jumble! what contradictions, funny incoherencies! The words are English, the sense is often Dutch: we cannot understand, no one can. For the New Testament, you see, is to Christ just what Nature is to God—a vesture, a veil, half-revealing, half-concealing, him; and as God is in Nature an "open secret," so Christ in the Testament is an "open secret"—more secret than open. Not everything that Nature says about God is true, you know. Last Summer, down east, I saw runs covered with 30 to 100,000 dead sheep—week after week, month after month, not a drop of rain—waggon-loads marked "Dead Wool" crawling along the roads, the whole country a desert, with ruin and despair confronting everyone. That was not the truth about God, you know: the veil even more conceals than reveals him. And just as Nature, God's book, says many things that are not true of God, so most things that Christ's book says of Christ are not true either. We do not know why this is so: it was

God's will : and sometimes I fancy that I can see why it is best so. We must *mine* for gold, if we want to be rich : the "violent" take Heaven "by force" : seek, therefore, and ye shall find. But *how* seek, you say—there's just the difficulty ! Yes, but observe this, that without going any further, we have already gained a tremendous advantage, as soon as ever we have quite settled within ourselves that the book is mostly untrue and obscure : for we can now sit to read with frankly-liberated minds, prepared to meet with what will offend and confuse us, yet also prepared not to chuck the precious thing away in disgust for ever, as we nearly all do now. Frankly-liberated minds : for that's the first need just now of all us English-speaking people, isn't it?—not of us here perhaps so much as of those at home ; yet we, too, still painfully wait, don't we ? for some one to come and set us free of ancient trammels, as the poet Goethe did for his Germans. With liberated minds alone, then, we shall surely go far : and, in addition, we have definite bits of knowledge about the book to help us. At once, for instance, we cut down our four Gospels to three, the moment we know that one of them makes no pretence of recording historical words and facts : for only facts will interest such as us— one authentic sweet from the lips we love, one little gesture which he certainly made—here's what we're down on. So, now, we have left us only Matthew, Mark and Luke. But Matthew and Luke, especially Luke, wrote long after the events they record : that we know, or can easily detect ; nor do they make any pretence of having seen : so we are driven to Mark, who certainly either saw a good many things, or got them from an eye-witness. Unfortunately, this very Mark was the rudest peasant, apparently wrote in a perfect fury of haste, and had, moreover, an extraordinary mania about "*devils.*" "The devil tore him sore," says he—"the devils entered into a herd of swine." We know nothing about all that : it leaves us yawning. But we shall never lay aside our good, downright Mark for all that, our minds once well liberated from *all* trammels. We shall laugh freely at him, in-

deed, but laugh through our panting interest. Listen! Here is—something. “And they bring unto him one that was deaf . . . and he took him aside . . . and put his fingers into his ears . . . and looking up to Heaven, he sighed, and said ‘Ephphatha,’ Be open.” That sigh—that troubled effort—that little authentic gleam of the sun: it is in Mark. And there are many others: Mark must be our man. Remember only his roughness, his great haste, his superstitiousness, and that the last twelve verses of his book are spurious: then read and mine away. But we can’t do without “Matthew,” too: for Matthew was a man who wrote with at least one document before him—a most precious document, containing some of the sayings, or “*logia*,” of the Lord—and these he has bundled altogether into one fictitious “sermon-on-the-mount” in his fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters, which, therefore, of course, are even more valuable than any part of Mark. Also, we cannot, after all, do without Paul—just one verse of him, in which he speaks of the order in which the different disciples saw the Lord after his resurrection. Mark gives no account of the resurrection, and you will find that Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts are quite worthless as history, while that of the so-called “John” does not seriously pretend to be true. So that we have to rely upon Paul—a single authority—yet one no less good than our authorities for Waterloo. How Paul, a friend of Peter and the rest, must have pried into that matter, curious for the least detail! how they certainly gossiped about it, with interruptions and hurried breath, again and again exhausting the subject! And the authenticity of Paul’s writings is certain. So that we want at least that one verse of Paul.

‘But suppose our minds, once liberated, get too liberated, and disbelieve everything, Paul and all! That would be a thing, wouldn’t it? Most modern people do, of course, disbelieve: but they are not, I think, really liberated minds, but minds which, nobly hating bondage, have rushed from one extreme of ancient bondage into another extreme of modern bondage. They can’t, for instance, swallow miracles.

Well, if you can't swallow them, don't strive to: that is very degrading: disbelieve frankly—you won't disbelieve long when you once feel a miracle stir within you. I, personally, know a young man in England at whose touch anguish of body and mind sometimes pass away like vapours: and in his presence (sometimes) a holy serenity possesses the soul. And you are not called upon to believe the particular miracles attributed to Jesus by Mark, much less the others: what you will soon believe, if you read quite well, is that he did work miracles; doubt freely the recorded details of his death and resurrection, which are mostly untrue: you will soon know that he did die, and rise; approach the whole thing with quite matter-of-fact, disengaged, slightly hostile mind: your hostility will soon perish in the river of your tears. The point is somehow to get one little general glimpse of the personality of Jesus—one is enough: and the day you do, I pity you, I envy you: for here, truly, friends, is the Rose of longing. To what shall I liken him? In what parable shall I compare him? Ever heard of that handsome youth who saw his own image in a lake? They had no mirrors then, and one day, seeing his image in a lake, he could not tear himself away, but pined, and died of hunger there, so dear was he to see. And so when we get one real glimpse of the personality of that sibyl: the ravished heart wastes with desire; nothing in heaven or earth is any more fair to us; and our life becomes as a pot of spikenard, very precious, which we break to anoint his well-beloved head.

'Yes, break! recklessly, impetuously. For our Christianity will surely kill us, you know, as Christ's killed him: indeed, once enamoured, we will not endure that our biography, so differently begun, shall not end like his: and we, too, become rent lambs of God. One must not be afraid of that in the anticipation: for, strange to say, one likes it in the suffering. Man, you see, is in a queer way. He pants to seize Happiness, and Happiness is seizable, but she is a most subtle sylph to us, and inevitably eludes us, if we grab directly

at her, like boors. To have and to hold her, we, too, must be subtle, indirect, and tricky. For in what does happiness consist? The true answer is certainly odd: Happiness consists in martyrdom: and that was all that Jesus lived to say, and died to show. I don't quite know if it is true of angels, or of the inhabitants of the planet Mars, but here verily is the inner truth about Man: that happiness consists in martyrdom, and in nothing else. Was he not tricky who found that out? So hidden-away was it! so abstruse and improbable. Well, but we cannot all have the high luck to die at the stake or on the cross: no, but there's more martyrdom, I believe, in smoking one pipe less than we want to every day for ten years than in any death at the stake: for it is not so hard to die, but it is hard to live, since to live is daily dying, and crucifixion by inches. But perhaps you will not accept, without proof, that abstruse and improbable answer of mine, that happiness consists in martyrdom? Well, I confess, it is hard to prove in simple words, though I was going to try, but I see that the holy father and the excellent captain are restless to go, yet are too kind and good to seem to slight me. I will, therefore, stop. But I say to you: do, and you will know. Begin, and a bird of the air shall sing it to you. But how begin? By casting ourselves down, perhaps, and asking the heavenly Father to forgive us the sins which have grieved Him? Hardly so, well-meaning as that is: for, really, we have not sinned against any heavenly Father, nor have our sins ever grieved Him. Look up among the worlds of the night: they are but gems and powdered pearl that dress the chariot of God. We must be *humble*; we must be sincere and clear; we must not be *superstitious*; and, I'm afraid, we must make a vow, for the present, against church and chapel. Our father was an ape, wasn't he? earthly enough, not too "heavenly," our mother an ape, and what we have called our "sins" were no sins, but the perfectly natural acts of the son of an ape. Natural hideousness is no sin, of course. Can an ape *sin*? Neither can his son. Oh, we *must* be humble—that's

the first thing—abject, absolute humility—the knowledge that we are just equal to nothing, unable even to “sin.” And, that well known—what luck for us! The ape’s son standing at the last edge of an evolutionary epoch! capable of conceiving and nurturing angelic protoplasm (or seed), which, too, shall grow in him, evolve, spread wing, and fly through heaven. But it is just that little “heat” (as stockbreeders say) for copulation with the heavenly that we lack, so inveterately apish are we, till we are “heated” by the “tickler” of previous good conduct or meditation. Do, therefore, and you will know. Begin, and a bird in your breast shall sing it you. How begin? By first reading Mark; then, having determined that Jesus really lived, sighed, spat, ate, and was worthy to be blindly obeyed, read those chapters of Matthew where Jesus shows us how to martyr ourselves; then try—quite awkwardly and self-consciously at first—to do what he there says: if *anyone* asks our last penny we must give it; if anyone strikes us, as people are constantly doing in various ways, we must not return it, but meekly invite him to strike us again: we must be lambs of God, martyrs of God; if we are rich, we must wash our hands of lucre, making haste to be poor; we must never be anxious or excited, but be quite fearless, placid and high-born, remembering our change of fathers, and of what reigning house we are; we must never be so green and natural as to care more for ourselves than for others; if we find that our right eye keeps us apish, we must tear it out, though that’s hard, the value of a right eye being just *nil* compared with our escape from the bestial—and so on: you will read it for yourselves; or nearly as good a way is to get a monkey, or, better, two of different sex, study carefully what they do, and then go and try to do just the opposite. In this way shall our manners, our very nature, be more and more heaved toward the plane of angel-manners and angel-nature from the plane of ape-manners and ape-nature, whereabouts they now are: it is a question of evolution. Evolution to what height we do not know: it may go on for millions of ages

till, like suns, we dazzle the stationary hosts on high: for God, it is clear, has greatly loved His plan of this small world. If we will only begin the process in the simple, yet not too-easy ways which Jesus tells us! Not too-easy, of a truth! For if we go on a hundred years, we shall still find those chapters of Matthew not exhausted by us: nor, I think, shall we need any "religious books," but just the Bible, to give us "duties," and keep us fully occupied. The "ascetical writers" of the Middle Ages were excellent saints, as the holy father will tell you: but we here cannot form ourselves by them: for the Providence of God calls us to be *fin-de-siècle* saints, crudely modern ones, serious men. To each age its own type of saint and knight, of course: we here, for instance, should not take very seriously a modern knight who went about the bush *cap-à-pie* in heavy armour, should we? for that is Don Quixote. *Far, far*, better Don Quixote, indeed, than no knight at all: for woe, of course, to that age, or country, which ceases to produce some sort of knight; and *far, far* better also a thirteenth-century saint in a billycock hat than no saint at all (though he, in his way, is quite as quixotic as Don Quixote). But we must forget those things which are behind, mustn't we? and each for himself, and all the age together, press forward, roadwise, pioneering, foreliving the future. With us here, however, the question is, to *begin!* I wonder if even one of us will? I should, really, be very glad. Will you? Certainly, it is a steepish hill to climb: but, as I said, the very steepness is somehow happy, the very fire cool, the very burden light. Moreover, that wounded Jesus, of whom you will infallibly become amorous when you once read of him with quite fresh and liberated mind, that Jesus still lives, still, I dare swear, haunts the earth, which is his proper principedom, going up and down in it with epoch-shaping ministries, his sighs borne ardently on many a breeze of midnight or summer noon: can see, therefore—with eyelids that have known the touch of tears—and anon visit, each of us poor degraded strugglers, still present to be our help, our instigator, and captain, not sitting at the right

hand of God, but (such is his pity!) standing at the right hand of Man.'

The instant he ceased, down again went his veiling lids, his hands lay clasped before him. The priest and the Salvationist looked at each other. For a minute no one moved. Then the priest raised his hat, touched his reins, and trotted off; the Salvationist followed. The stranger walked two steps, and untied his rough little horse. The men looked at one another. Someone whispered to Jack: 'Queer start'; but Jack did not answer. Then someone called: 'Thank you!' then another, then several others: but not Jack. The stranger, already mounted, lifted his veiled eyes, smiled, nodded, and was off at the fussy little ambling gait at which he had come. The men did not move. Their eyes followed him. He was just about to be engulfed by the forest, when Jack suddenly darted into running after him, sending out the shout: 'Hi! a word . . .!' But the rider was now fairly far, and did not turn. By the time Jack reached the wood, he had vanished; and Jack, halting, asked himself this question: 'Now, what the devil did I want to say to that cove?' He could not tell.

He then strolled on through the wood. By the time he reached the inn, the afternoon was late, and the three men of Tytler's gang were in the parlour over a comprehensive 'tea' (including more beefsteak). He went in, and sat near them, but refused to eat. The leading spirit then began to lay down the law about sticking-up station-houses in general, and Gurrowa in particular; the others discussed it; the hour for starting would be seven: after hobbling the horses, three would lurk outside the inner boundary, while the fourth—

'I'm not in that fakement,' said Jack suddenly.

They started, looked at one another, then at him.

'Why, what's the matter?' said the leader.

'I'm not in it, that's all.'

'But you agreed.'

'I believe I did.'

'Then, what's happened?'

'Don't know. Some nonsense has got into my head. And *you* aren't the men to get it out, neither, not by a long chalk.'

All exchanged glances.

'Oh, well, let him go to hell, and be dashed. We can fake it alone,' said one.

'No, you don't do that either,' said Jack.

'What's he mean?'

'You stash the whole dashed racket: you might just as well be on the straight.'

'Oh, the dashed fool's no chop!' said one with disgust.

'Get into a pelter, if you like: it makes no matter to me,' answered Jack stretching and yawning, though rather pale.

'But what's he mean?'

'Oh, he's turned preacher!'

'Or peacher!' cried Jack, flushing now.

'*What!*' all shouted, leaping to their feet.

'Stash the fakement, or I peach!'—he, too, springing up.

The silence which fell warned his instincts of a ticklish peril. He was conversant with man, and could read the signs like the signs of the bush. His Derringer was away upstairs; he had not even a knife. The others had. When he saw them exchange glances in a certain little way, he knew that his life was not worth sixpence. One moved a step toward him. But he was all eyes and alertness. Near his left hand was a doorway leading into the back grounds; and as a bullet splintered one of the posts, he had skedaddled through it, and on the outside was pushing the new ironbark door against a man inside who pushed against its closing: he had more downright muscle than any two of them together, and when the door closed, he fastened it with a hook-and-eye, and pelted toward the stable: for he knew that another door, only twenty feet away, opened upon the back; and, in truth, he was still five or six paces from Alex, when another bullet sang close in his left ear. But Alex, cropping loose in a log-fence

paddock behind the stable, had walked some yards to meet him, and in a moment Jack had thrown himself upon his back, and without even a halter, was away, Alex taking the fence on the further side, while bullets flew, the three having run out into the yard. However, he was not hit, the forest soon covering him, and through timber that in twenty seconds would have had some riders lying brained, he galloped, and soon managed to hit off the track southward toward Gurrowa.

As Alex had some fat through the long rest, Jack slackened down half-way, not thinking himself hotly pressed; but his bush-car soon made out the thronging bat of three horses a long way behind the brow of a range; and at once he leant to the small pricked ears, and went away again. Alex, still far from baked, understood the situation, put his feet to the ground, and soon had the pursuers beyond ear-shot again. Timber, creek, and range-side, scrub, track and fence, mile after mile he measured off behind him, guided by a mere indication, a touch of the hand, Jack's knees wedded to his shoulders. Then the far-carrying evening air brought him the tinkle of a piano, as he bowled along one of the roads that crossed Gurrowa run at the frontage. In the house he found Miss Ogilvie, a girl of twenty-two, playing, with the overseer, an elderly man called O'Brian, standing near her, and, smoking in a Cingalese lounge on the verandah, Mr. Ogilvie. Jack gave the news: the men were coming full pelt, their blood up.

'Who are they?' asked Mr. Ogilvie.

'Tytler's lot—three of them.'

'Only three. All right, we'll have a flutter for it. Three to three it is—that is, if you are with us.'

'I'm game.'

'My thanks.'

They struck hands. Jack got Alex under cover. None of the station-hands were about, and by a fever of activity they had just got the house tight, when, as night fell, the marauders came up, and began a vigorous siege.

The defenders moved from window to window in regular order backwards from the front, as the besiegers shifted ground. Miss Ogilvie with the cook-and-laundress, both near collapse, were locked in a room by themselves. O'Brian loaded and reloaded two old double-barrels, a Snider, a Navy Colt and a Derringer, while Jack and Mr. Ogilvie banged away, wasting as little as possible. The besiegers, however, kept well covered, especially in the back yard, where they could approach quite near: so that not till about nine p.m. came the first blood, when one of them got his billet from Mr. Ogilvie's Snider.

The other two now redoubled effort: the persistent crackle became like the dropping of water on a rainy day; and at 9.30 the old overseer fell dead by a shot which passed through Jack's lax shirt.

His fall, however, was unknown to the bushrangers, while their loss was known to the besieged, who did not relax. Near 10 there was silence. The siege was raised.

Jack slept at Gurrowa that night, and the next morning, after breakfast, had a long conference with Mr. Ogilvie in the verandah. Being questioned, he told something of his recent life; whereupon Mr. Ogilvie said:

'Well, from what you say, and what I see, I have no doubt that you are a slashing bushman and stockman, Hay, and as you've done me a service which I can't forget, I formally offer you the place of my poor friend, O'Brian. Have a look over the run first, and see what you can make of it: the stock's all off the frontage since the rain; you'll see them at the out-stations. We aren't very crack, and don't carry any great things: about 15,000 sheep, and 1,000 cattle, with a bit of maize and lucerne, and as the water's good out back, and the run pretty well paddocked, what little managing there is, I do myself. The rest will be for you——'

The squatter was a stoutish, bow-legged man of fifty-five, born in leggings, with a round face baked hard and brown, a goatee-beard, and shaven lip and cheek: a genial, homely, pretty rough back-country type.

'Only,' he added, 'don't come, if you're going to cut it in three months' time. You look a restless kind of chap, too. This house was O'Brian's home for fifteen years, as much as my own or Conce's—poor O'Brian! but he shall be revenged——'

'No, I shan't cut at once, if I take it on,' said Jack, 'though I don't know that there's much reliance to be placed on me, neither.'

Conce Ogilvie, who was sitting near in the shadow of a rose-twined verandah-post, glanced at him, and smiled encouragingly with her eyes—eyes bright and black, from which peeped the merriest little devil in the world.

XXIX

CONCE

JACK remained, not 'three months,' but nearly two years at Gurrowa; and he grew to love the place, its dusty desertness in summer, its sudden luxuriance of trefoil and prairie-grass at the least rainfall, its star-silences in some shepherd's-hut at the remote back; Gurrowa became a care to him, and as he eyed a dam, wash-pen, or fence from the back of Alex, lo, thoughts revolved in his breast, and he said: 'I'll see about you.'

But he had hardly returned from O'Brian's funeral, when he had to admit to himself that he was absurdly love-smit—not with Conce Ogilvie, or not yet, if ever, but with someone who had spoken one Sunday afternoon before the corrugated chapel at Mohrano township. First Jack 'pished' and 'poohed' at himself; but that young man, whoever he was, had won his fancy: he recurred—he could not be banished. Jack had come across Prince Charming. 'What's that about that young man?' he at last asked himself, sitting one evening in a reedy waterhole, washing the dust from his pores: 'can't get the cove out of my noddle any road.' He could not understand himself: for he had more than once deliberately set to work to remember what had been said, but in vain, for the most part: it wasn't the mere words, then: there was something about the Bible being false, yet true; something about the Gospel of Mark, he knew not what: he had not paid too much attention—all that wasn't in his line of business. Why, then, in the name of all the devils, should that cove so haunt him, and so sweetly haunt him, with so tender a

pang of desire, that every five minutes of the day, whatever he did, there was the cove again in his boko? There must have been some catch in the cove's face, combined perhaps with what he said, and the meek, austere way his lids covered his eyes—some illusive fragrance, some grace somewhere, some hint of chastity, some sweet severity, some charm of holiness. And here was a question: was it not some influence of the cove that had kept him, Jack, from wiring in with Tytler's lot in sticking up Gurrowa? He rather thought that that was so: he was not sure: it was hard to drop to what the racket was, or how the wind blew here: but by the third week this much was clear: that one could not brush that particular cove off as one liked—with his little tuppenny-ha'penny shillyshally ambler, and old swag and saddle. And as he had to be endured, better endure him down to the ground, find out where he was, see him, press his hand, and perhaps—kiss his feet.

Jack accordingly set to search. He made Mohrano the centre of a circle, and, both alone, and aided by a Gurrowa blackfellow named Tarda, who was often about him, scoured the country for two hundred miles. But it was all in vain. The impression derived from the search was that the stranger had come to Australia through the air, showed himself to eleven men in Mohrano one morning, and then returned whence he came through the air, saddle, swag, horse and all. No one could be found who had seen him either before he entered, or after he left, Mohrano. He was utterly gone, leaving nothing behind but a whiff of lilies, and a haunting sense of loss. Jack was never more astonished: for if Tarda could not track him after three weeks' search, then the cove must have been made of air.

He was returning from a personal expedition to a township thirty miles north-east of Gurrowa—the last which he intended to make in this forlorn quest—when he came upon Conce Ogilvie in the big gap five miles from the home-station. She was on her mare Pris—a big, high-bred black, clean-throated, long-hipped, with a good dash of Arab, tame as a cow, but almost as

full of go and fun as its mistress, who on the back of a horse suggested a bird breeze-rocked on some topmost twig. Conce was, in fact, the most finished of little bush animals, slim as a mosquito, yet full-figured, her face done rich and brown to a turn, with bursting cherry-lips, which it was a sin not to bite, and a brown spot on her upper lip. Hardly two years ever passed that she did not see Melbourne or Sydney: but cities were foreign places that slid from her like water from a duck's back, and she brought nothing back save a few novels, dresses, and plant-pots. Bush-born and bush-bred, she recognised one world only as actual and habitable: civilisation, 'home,' Paris were to her a large rumour only, like shell-murmurs, and Garrowa from of old the Centre, with 'the Gap,' a radius that led to 'out back,' and thence to gradual nothingness. But dull-looking as her life was, it was yet full: an excellent housewife, she cured her own hams, made her own bread, butter, wines, conceived and executed her own garden, fernery, bush-house, could milk, leg-rope, wash, swim, prune, drive, sew, and even at a pinch muster, stockride, or brand; but her natural place always seemed the saddle in her faded-green habit, with Mikey, her kangaroo-dog, at the heels of Pris; and then, timber or steep range-side, it made no difference to her, she flew as the bird flies, lightly as laughing, because the wing is its way of living.

'Ahem!' she went, as Jack rode up, and they travelled together at a hand-gallop, 'caught again!'

'What's that about, Miss Ogilvie?' said Jack, to whose lips the sight of her always brought a smile.

'Look at Alex's bit,' she said: 'you've come it like a mob of started brumbies at cock-crow. You've been out to—Mandaloo North.'

'How do you get at that, then?'

'There's Alex's pasterns all white with Gibson Range sandstone.'

'Well, you do drop to things, Miss Ogilvie, and no mistake.'

'Who's that you're after so hot out there? This is

the second time in three weeks—— Oh, / know! It's one of those Miss Sturts, sure as a gun.'

'No, there you're out of it, then. Never even saw them, that I know of.'

'Honour bright?'

'Yes, honour bright. I don't believe I'm that sort, Miss Ogilvie, running after this, that, and the other girl.'

'Well, I don't believe you are. I think you are good——' and her swift pert glance rested on the triangle of hairy chest between his open shirt and beard, all stained with blue and red tattooing. His indifference, his confirmed negativeness, continually piqued her; and he was always in her fancy.

They cantered neck to neck, over turf still living, though shearing was a thing of the past, and dry summer come. Jack was hardly thinking of her, but trying to remember whether the preaching cove had or had not once lifted his eyes during the singing of the hymn; in any case, wasn't that a lingering look which he had given the men on riding away! a look which somehow seemed to rest specially upon him, Jack, unless it was his conceit to think such a thing. And the horse!—that was where the laughable part of it came in! That little ambling screw! To think of a man like that riding a little ridiculous brumby with hairy fetlocks and big head. . . . He laughed right out.

'What's the laugh, then?' asked Conce Ogilvie.

'Oh, thoughts,' said he.

'Pleasant ones, too, it seems. "Day-dreams," as they say in the novels, dear me. When a man day-dreams and laughs to himself, what's that the sign of?'

'Well, what's that the sign of?'

'Darts and arrows, I should say: and sweet ones, too.'

'Oh, you: you're always down to your fun. Not in my line of business.'

'Oh, hark at him! never was in love with a girl—no, never.'

'Tut! you do talk.'

‘Not even before he came out from England—no, not for sixpence!’

‘Never was in love in my life,’ said Jack simply, and pretty truly.

‘I didn’t ask you for any fib!’ she cried, sharp as a hammer-stroke.

‘Makes no matter to me whether you believe me. It’s true all the same.’

‘Swear, and I’ll believe you.’

‘There’s no swearing: I never was—not what you might call in love. But that’s neither here nor there.’

‘What! with all the pretty, rosy girls in England, you never were shook on one? May as well tell me the real, downright truth.’

‘Deuced if I ever saw any girl in England so out and out pretty as you—especially on a horse. But prettiness says nothing. That’s only skin-deep.’

‘How much deeper do you want it? My word! but that’s you all to pieces: make me a compliment, and then spoil it. However, I’ll believe that about the English girls, and think all the more of you for it. But what was the laugh, then?’

‘Oh, I was thinking about a little horse. Some six weeks ago a cove rode into Mohrano township one Sunday afternoon on a little ramshackle woolly weed, and started preaching before the chapel—it was that same day that Tytler’s lot made up to stick up Gurrowa; but there was that difference between the horse and the man, you’d die of laughing—ha! ha! ha!’

‘My word, what was all that difference, then?’

‘Well, the man was the most wonderful little cove you ever laid eyes on, and the horse——’

‘What made him so wonderful, then?’

‘Don’t know. Can’t tell you. But he was some road prettier than any girl you ever saw: and *his* prettiness wasn’t skin-deep, you bet——’

‘Dearie me! It’s quite a love-affair. What did he preach about, then?’

‘Don’t know. Can’t remember much. I think he said that the Bible isn’t true——’

‘Oh, the naughty man,’ she said flippantly.

'Yes, but some of it, he said, *is* true, and what's true, said he, is worth having at, and no mistake——'

'If any's false, all's false, that's what I say. I shouldn't wonder if all *is* false, for what your parsons are worth these days.'

'Yes, but where's the use talking like that? This was a cove that knew what he was saying much better than such as you or me. You could see that much. There was no overstocking with him, and taking upon his run more than it could carry: every word was weighed out beforehand like bales of wool, or he never, never would have said it! I seem to be able to read him all out and out, his very heart: he was just like a little child, only grown up, but still a sweet child, or a spring-lamb——'

'My word, you *are* shook on him. I shouldn't care to be the young maiden who was the sweetheart of Mr. Jack Hay.'

'How's that, then?'

'I'd be that flaming jealous!'

'Well, that'd be rather a spree, too, to have you jealous of me, just to see how you'd look. You could show your hind-hoofs pretty spry, no doubt, if you once got into a pelter; and I shouldn't wonder if I'd be just the man to ride you tame and safe, like a filly that's never had the gunny-bag——'

'Yes, you'd like to try it on, wouldn't you, just?'

'I believe I should, for a toss-up.'

She put her thumb to her nose-tip and twinkled her spread fingers.

'Not just yet a while!' she said.

'Some day, p'raps.'

Her face flushed damask.

'We'll see how the cat jumps p'raps——' whereupon she brought down her quince-whip, was caught away with puffed skirt, and the eight hoofs drummed the sandy station-road with a steady rotatory beat, till they reached the house, where Jack slept 'in' that night.

All through that summer-end, and through the autumn, chance had a way of causing them to meet

at unlikely moments and places. Conce was a good tracker, so was he: each, if need was, could generally discover the other. When they met, they banded words that meant little, yet lasted long. He began to feel toward her something which was new to him—which he did not understand.

She, for her part, a child of nature, was prone to follow nature—only with some frisky poutings, reluctances, delays. When alone, she was continually shrugging her left shoulder now, with a push of the underlip, at the whispers that thronged the organs of her fancy; anon, as she mused, she smiled. Nature was all she knew: and she knew it well, and felt it. The rank bush-air bit in her veins; from midnight to noon, from noon to midnight, she drank it without truce, without escape. Sometimes in lonely places on Pris, she would utter a cry at the wine and yeast in her health. She knew no fast-days, nor lived on angel's-food. At Gurrowa incredible beefsteak and eggs were the order of things. Conce ate like three girls. Sometimes she took buggy-drives half over the run with her father, and they would discuss like two squatters every detail of 'putting-to,' lambing, breeding, manuring, raising. Her life reeked of stock. Cattle environed her, and the fat of rams was her horizon. Germination was as present in her consciousness as gravitation, and sex as respiration. When the home-cows bowed themselves and reproduced, she saw. She would gaze into a rose, then kiss and breathlessly inhale it; or one hot morning her teeth would bite into a peach with the pensive luxury of an Empire *cocodette*.

All this time her mood was subject to changes the most sudden. Now she was quite the town-lady, distant and correct, hinting to Jack that he was only an *employé* of her father, and must treat her with respect; the next day they were 'Jack' and 'Conce,' full of 'sauce' and *badinage*; the next she was subdued and poetic, and tears would film her eyes.

'My word, you look up-and-down knocked out, Jack, and no mistake,' she said one evening when he had been autumn-mustering the mobs in outer back country with

some stockmen, in the saddle from foreday to late night, and now was coming 'in' for a feed and some rest; 'there's no need to kill yourself, if it comes to that.'

'It'd make little odds to me, if I did, for what life's worth,' said he: 'but there's no fear of that just yet awhile. I'm just going to give a look to those old weaners in the gully-paddock, and then I'll ride in——'

'No, you shan't. Come and rest under this haystack, and watch the sunset behind the big gum-tree on Maddison Mount, like the poets. Look at it—it's for all the world like a bursting bag of blood nailed on behind the tree-trunk. My word, but hasn't that rain done good! Just look at this mass of ferns I've got; everything's just like spring again; I only hope none of the dams are carried away——'

'No, thank goodness. Well, here's off——'

'You just go! if you do, don't expect to talk to me again to-night.'

'Well, you're a caution! Mustn't I go and do my work?'

'Come and sit. And learn to take your chances, Mr. Hay, and to know when you're well off. Look slippy off that horse.'

'Not for Joe: I'm going to do my work. You can tie Pris to the fence, if you like, and wait. I shan't be long——' and he went, and she waited half-an-hour till he came and sat with her, while the austral stars appeared and thronged the sky, as mosquitoes thronged the sultry air.

'You're very down in the mouth to-night,' she said, 'and so am I, I don't know why. Sometimes everything seems so—sad, and I don't know what all. As for you, I always think you're gloomy about something you have in your mind: something about friends in England, I'd take my oath.'

'There's where you're wrong, then,' said he, his brow in his hand: 'got no friends in England, or jolly few.'

'Well, you're always so precious dark about yourself, Jack: no one knows—after all this time. Are you an orphan, then?'

‘Yes.’

‘No father? No mother?’

‘None. Or rather I’ve both. But I’m an orphan just the same, Conce.’

‘Poor lad! I see. And no brother? no sister? Not one?’

‘None, no. Oh, look here, don’t worry, Conce!’

He said it with such dejection, that her sensitive eyes filled with tears, and she drew her palm once down his tattooed forearm, where it was bare of the rolled shirt-sleeves, and a brace of hares hung in a bag.

‘Poor old Jack! So you’ve got nobody—only little me?’

‘If I’ve got you. How do you mean got you?’ said he, always desperately matter-of-fact.

‘Well, it rather looks as if we were good old pals, or were going to be, I s’pose, or we’d never be where we are now.’

A rush of blood, new to him, an impulse to seize and kiss her, occurred somewhere within him. But habit restrained him. He jumped up hastily, vexed and uncomfortable, saying:

‘We’d better go in.’

‘What’s that about?’ said she, surprised.

‘It’s getting late, and I’m about dead with the hunger.’

‘You are a good one, too, for a girl!’ she pouted, *énervée* and put out: ‘I don’t like you a bit!’

‘Can’t help that, Conce. There’s no need to take huff at me that road. Things may work out the way you say—a bit later on—God knows—look here, let’s gallop in! It’s no chop my staying here with you: I might only be trying on what we should both regret after——’

‘With me? You wouldn’t dare, Jack Hay!’

‘Well, then, let’s gallop in, and get out of it that way.’

And this they did amid the lady’s pettish silence. Miss Ogilvie had, in fact, two serious rivals in Jack’s interior: first a life-habit, from which one does not part so easily; and second, some subtle, yet strong, influence

of the cove who speecified at Mohrano township. He, indeed, as the months passed, became less and less prominent in Jack's consciousness: but he was there; and in the height of the winter, at a township a hundred miles east of Gurrowa, whither he had gone to meet a cattle-manager about a stud bull, Jack, seeing some leather Testaments in a store, bought one. It lay, indeed, a long time unread in his poncho, but one midnight when he was camping out with Tarda, the black, on an out-station at the far back, he read it. Tarda, sleepy from the hard day and his supper of mutton and damper, lay in his blanket by the log-fire; and Jack, lying on his face on the other side, he, too, in his blanket, read the book, smoking, with the billy and a mug of tea beside him, while the silence, hardly broken by a sound of water before the slab-hut, filled the consciousness like a great music which is not heard, but felt.

Remembering that the Gospel of Mark was the one, Jack found that, and read two chapters through; then, not seeing much in that, and tired, though not sleepy, he closed the book, and with his palms behind his head lay thinking—thinking of what his thoughts always wandered to: the people of his youth—one after the other, or all together: Gracie, Missie—Dad, Titty—Nibbs, Harold—Gussie, Harrie—Mary Thaxter, Mr. Spender, Jean, K——, all of them, in endless mixture and alternation. He was never long alone but these people rose like ghosts, and he saw them each and all: there in yonder corner was Titty's weary, pretty face, and yonder Harrie's proud throat, then Dad's shaven upper-lip, Gracie's bright smile and fixing underlook, Mr. Spender, weak-eyed, appealing, cramped with laughter, Nibbs' chiselled nose and chin, and prickly hair, Harold milking his goatee-beard, with his smile, Missie with covered mouth. Remote as the end of Eternity they seemed now; sometimes he could not believe that they had really existed—nay, still existed, no doubt—on the same earth as he, though like dead folk: for they had ghosts which he daily saw. In his bag was a little packet tied in a handkerchief,

which he often looked at for its virtue of bringing them nearer ; he reached and took it that night. There were three letters from Gracie, one from Mr. Spender, one from Harold ; also a pipe whose mouthpiece he had cracked between his teeth one dreadful day at the Albert Docks. He read her letters for the five hundredth time. But the difference between those first two and this third ! In the first she said : ‘ Do you remember that photograph of you in the Eton jacket, when you were eleven and four months ? I have used and used it in secret, Jackie, with eyes and lips and hands. . . . ’ That photograph he remembered perfectly : he was standing full-faced with a pout, and pocketed thumbs, in a temper, thinking himself treated like a child, to be photographed ; and his legs looked too long for his body. But she had ‘ slept with it, prayed to it, lived for it ’ ; and in the second letter, the London one, she said : ‘ I do thank you, Jack, for this high and quickening joy that I have of you ! I thank you that you live, and I thank you that you are just what you are, and that I have seen and handled you : and I thank God, too ’ ; and in the third—that third !—she said : ‘ I have decided at the last moment not to go. The scheme was too wild, as I now see. . . . ’ There was something odd here ! detestably ugly ! something wrong in *the style* : ‘ the scheme was too wild, as I now see ’—that wasn’t like her, somehow ; and where she said, ‘ I require you to go just the same, as that will really be a good thing for us both ’—that wasn’t *quite* her way of talking and writing ; and where she said : ‘ I also think it will be better if you do not write me afterwards, *as that can do no good* ’—no, that was unlike her : Conce, or a business-man might have written it, but Gracie must have been in some mortal agony . . . one might almost fancy them *dictated* words, when one came to look into it : for the hand-writing was hers, sure enough. But then, she was not the one to stand any dictation—unless the sky was falling about her, and she wrote to keep it up ; and the sky was all right. Her motive was inconceivable, but she had done it, he thought, of her own will.

Yet, slow as he was to suspicion, a doubt about Raby had grown within him. There was the envelope—for he still had it—directed in print-letters, not in ordinary writing. How was that, then? All was dark. Yet there in his breast, sullen and settled, was a hostile thought of Raby. Harold had once written him a letter saying that Nibbs had murdered the doctor, and therefore wanted him, Jack, to be arrested: certainly a very dishonourable, wild letter, not to be taken into consideration: for, of old, he knew that Harold did not really love Nibbs. But yet it was strange, too, those two traps of the police—the one in Duddon village, near Wreay, the other in Maida Vale. *Someone* must have known, and betrayed? And why had Nibbs never written him once from the time he, Jack, left Bedwick to the time he left England? Nibbs had kept pretty clear of him. That was out and out odd! That looked bad. He took Harold's last letter, handed to him by some girl as he entered the steamer; it had contained a farewell-gift of £50, and in one place Harold said: 'I pity you from my heart, but can't help you, Jackie: you must go, it is better so: but always remember that you owe your doom to Nibbs, and curse him with your last breath.' Odd, wasn't it? that Harold should persist in that rot to the last, without having any purpose to serve? Odd, odd. His teeth pressed together. He had seldom known Harold to be wrong.

But his dear! he did not know at all how she fared. She must have missed that Mackay-legacy: for she would never have married so soon after. . . Unless—unless that was her reason for sending him away. . . . His face paled with fright at that thought—fright lest any baseness might be in her. But it was momentary: she was all right: he knew in whom he had believed. But he did not know how she fared: many a time he had thought of writing to Nibbs, to Harold, to Mr. Spender—to her—in succession: but she had bid him not write; and as to the others, phlegmatic weariness and disgust of life and of himself had restrained him, a certain resentment, too, and malediction against the land he had left, and all it contained—except one being. He did, how-

ever, once write to Mary Thaxter, whom he loved, bidding her go secretly to the house in Maida Vale and ferret out the news: for he knew that Mary was as good as a detective, with her sharp eyes and ears; but he had never received an answer; and after tying up the letters and the pipe, and putting them back, he rose to a half-kneeling pose, his brow on the ground, saying ardently: 'Oh God, will you look after her? If she is in any trouble . . . if she wants any help . . . oh, do! My prayer can't reach that high to you, no doubt: but oh do stoop, God of Heaven, and hear my cry to Thee for my poor dear lady! Don't let her suffer anything! She could never, never bear it. If any trouble is fated for her in her life, put it somehow upon me, and let me carry it for her, who was so good to me, oh do, oh do, Lord God of Heaven, and help and bless her right through, Amen.'

He fell back with a sigh into his blanket, drank a pint of black tea, put out the smoky light, closed his eyes. But there was Tarda snoring, and the fire-dance penetrated his lids, and he lay without sleeping, almost hearing the astral silence, as it were the silence of the central sea. He thought again of that night when they were going to arrest him at Bedwick. . . . It was his father who had 'given the office' to the police—that old man: his teeth ground at that. And his Titty, whom he would have died for any day ten times, and thought nothing of it, she would not say a word for him—only old Spender, he alone. His heart softened to his mother now: she had been afraid of the girls, and of the two big bugs, the marquess and the baronet—those two men, whom he hated. He could see them again: the hyacinthine beard of Sir Markham, and the rosy face of the marquess. Those were the kind of little coves who could not stand up to a man with the naked mauleys, but by their power could still ruin him somehow, with open violence, or secret stab, like Ali Baba; could corrupt and subvert manners, homes, even nations. Whence had they this power? They had not much personal worth: no, but they had the land of England

—they had England: a crowded country, to which every English child had as much natural right as they: that was good! He could see again how they used their eyebrows, when he appealed to them that night, having more eyebrows to use than eyes, no doubt. And that Harrie! And that Gussie! Those Two! Harrie dressed up to the nines in low-neck, and flowers in her hair; and Gussie at the piano, with her weak-voiced 'objectionable brute,' and 'we are not surprised,' like a lesson said by rote. Perhaps it was Harrie who had told her to say it: Harrie was always the cleverer of the two, and the hardest-hearted, no doubt. But it wasn't kind. If they had only known how it broke his heart, and made him desolate, they never would have done it. However, it was past, and the sun still beshone him, and God was over all. They were big bugs now, all up among the upper ten, not troubling their heads about such as him, yet perhaps no happier than—— Why, the cove who speechified actually said that, surely! that happiness wasn't for such as them, but for trickier, finer folk, who went after it more fly and indirect like, like catching a doe-kangaroo. He, Jack, would see: each night he would read one of those chapters, as he had been told to do, and p'raps he might come out, in his way, as high as those Two, or even a little —— higher? there was no saying: certainly, he'd rather be a little like the cove who speechified than be any king anywhere. Meantime, he would bear them as little malice as possible: perhaps they were mothers now, with little things that he was uncle to—— And at this thought his heart softened: and he fell asleep.

His notion, however, that his sisters were not 'troubling their heads' about him happened just then to be quite untrue: about that hour they were excitedly discussing him. For whereas he fell asleep after midnight, camped under starlight, with scrub and sourgrass sprouting toward Spring, lo, in England was Autumn, and the sun hot at noon: so round, alternate, is the world: and the whirligig of Time brings about his revenges.

Harriet Stanley, about that hour, was sitting on a

lawn at a country-house in Bucks; and at her feet reclined a man: for we, with that faculty which we have, can see them, having flitted instantly round all a hemisphere through nether darkness, glim and shine, by India and the Arabian coast.

The man says to Harrie Stanley:

'Who is it you continually bring back to me?'

And she replies:

'I must be quite a system of mnemonics. You asked me that yesterday. It is not flattering. I never brought back anyone before, except my little nephew from the jam-pot.'

'That was a re-clamation—referring to the stickiness. But really: who is it?'

'How should I know? Don't! You said just now that I was unique, and had no second.'

'Certainly, no second, but a double perhaps——'

'Oh, that's horrid. If I thought that, I should be jealous of my husband.'

'And not of *me*?'

'He, at least, thinks me unique.'

'It was I whom he heard say so, the wretch. But no—"double" was quite the wrong word. It is just a fugitive something somewhere that recalls some-one——'

'Let me breathe with your list of indefinite pronouns. This shocking heat calls for perfectly definite language, I think. Oh, sing me the praise of fig-leaves——'

'I will, by Jove! and my title shall be "Paradise Regained." But I'm in a dilemma, for the shocking heat calls for definite language, but the shocking fig-leaves for indefinite. I was very delighted one day, when a boy, and groaning for a rhyme, to find that "shocking" rhymes with "stocking": I could not resist it, spoiled my poem, and got a box on the ear.'

'"I who erewhile" the homely stocking sang, of fig-leaves now——'

'Ah, but fig-leaves is a loftier subject. I am not Milton. Let me see—who discovered them? I think Adam discovered, and Eve covered. "Sweets to the sweet——"'

'Or greens to the green : our absurd general mother was distinctly that.'

'Foliage, then, to the *folâtre*, shade to the shady—'

'Figs to the figure, fans to the fantastic. But I'll hear, after all, about my "double," and even forgive, if she is not a woman——'

'By Jove, I have it! Just that reference to sex—I forgot that it might possibly have been a man. Really, it is quite a pleasure when a memory awakes. It was a man. Called Hay—Jack Hay——'

Harriet Stanley starts, turns her face aside.

'I met him at the Palmerstown diggings in Australia, and I remember asking him that very question: "Whom do you remind me of?" It was *you!* You have no such relative?'

'No.'

'Now I remember so well! He really was a little like you. The coolest rascal I ever saw, I think: a Cumberland man, absolutely spendthrift and swagger, and quite the best fighter on the goldfields. I saw him killed by a black man——'

'Killed!'

'Yes. You don't know him?'

'Why, no. But—you saw him die?'

'With my little eye.'

'Tell me——'

'That's all. He was stabbed to the heart in a fight. It happened sometimes. They were all such gigantic, nonchalant people——'

Harriet, we can see, has lost repose. Her nostrils open and shut. Her splendid bosom heaves. Appearances have lost weight with her: she says hastily: 'I will come back,' gets up, and walks away, a hurried white figure on the green, forgetting the heat. She goes in search of her sister, who, by chance, is spending the week-end at that very mansion. The house is crowded, and it is some time before she finds Lady Perowne in a palmery, talking to a man. She gets 'Gussie away, and whispers:

'Come with me. I have great news.'

'Why, you are quite pale——' says 'Gussie.

'Come.'

She hurries 'Gussie to a corner of the library; and tells her the news.

'Dead!' whispers 'Gussie: 'well, thank God! it is best so.'

'Poor devil! In that violent and sudden way, too,' says Harrie.

'Frank Farnum actually saw it?'

'Yes.'

'Poor Jack!' says 'Gussie.

'He was not very lucky in his little life, poor devil,' says Harriet.

'No, certainly, poor Jack: still it is best so, Harrie, it is best so, Harrie!'

'Well, I suppose it is best so,' says Harriet. 'We should not like it, if it was we, no doubt: and p'raps he was innocent, after all. Still, there is nothing to be said, I suppose.'

'What a retribution!—if we assume his guilt.'

'Oh, I don't believe in retributions,' says Harriet: 'they usually fall upon innocent people. I hope—I hope we have not been too hard, 'Gussie! I have a misgiving——'

'The past is past, dear, isn't it? And it was *your* doing, you know.'

'*Mine!* And not yours? What a singular thing to say!'

'Well, at any rate, the deed is done, and we have reaped the advantages of it,' says 'Gussie. 'We need not discuss upon whom the burden rests. It would be very—ominous—if we did wrong. But it is too late—— Poor mama! she will feel it, poor thing!'

'Dreadfully, I should say. I'll send her a telegram now'—and Harrie, going to a table, writes:

'Regret to say Jack dead in Australia. Seen dead by Frank Farnum of Rodeleigh. We both very sorry for you both. But think it best so.'

And the world, turning, turning, like a goose before a fire, till some day it be *done*, and stop, declined them ever more to afternoon, to even-twilight: but Jack in his ironbark hut it heaved ever nearer morning; and

like merry-go-round horses they raced, stretched to overtake, yet never either caught the other; and he, while the stars still strewed the foreday sky, being roused by Tarda, got up, and went out to the new lambing-yard which they were about.

For now came that serious lambing-time, soon to be followed by the anxious and weary period of shearing, when, if the lambing was grassy and lucky, and the clip clean and heavy, then all seemed well with the world, but, if the lambing miscarried, or the clip was poor, then nothing was well. Jack was soon to the neck in it, and forgot that promise to himself about reading the chapters—or nearly forgot; old Ogilvie, with whom he was in frequent head-to-head consultation, would say anon to Conce: '*He's* something like an overseer, if you like!' and Conce, pleased at his praise, would yet pout a discontent: for now she was playing second fiddle in the scheme of things, when stern work, and not play, was uppermost. Occasionally she would go out to the shed, and walk down the boarding between the double row of shearers: for at Gurrowa there were as yet no whirring wheels of machine-clippers, and only the loud-clapping shears sent the shorn ram—shorn like a convict—trotting to his shorn peers, all bleating, absurd and *béat*. But such a scene was the enemy to that subtly-sweet playing with fire which had become Conce's bad habit, and she ardently wished shearing over, and the last waggon-load of combings well on the road.

One day a shear-blade ran through a shearer's hand—a frequent accident, for which the tar-boy with his tar stood always near. Jack tarred and bound the wound; whereupon the man was for resuming his work.

'No, you don't,' said Jack: 'you go to your bunk. You're as pale as a sheep as it is.'

'Makes no matter,' said the man, who was a poor extra-hand from back-of-beyond country: 'can't lose the day.'

'You go, and you shan't lose,' said Jack, thinking, 'how should *I* like to be done by in such a case?' and he took the man to the hut, and made him rest.

And that day he sheared hard with his own hands at

odd times, so that by ten in the night he had the wounded man's tally equal to what it would have been without the accident.

And as he worked, a thought of the preaching cove was in his mind, and, with it, this other half-thought: 'How kind God must think me!' He had all his life been pretty kind to folks, and had never thought anything of it; but now—it was odd—that thought kept peeping in his interior: 'How unusually kind I am.'

And many little chances for being kind, his eyes once on the look-out, began to multiply about him: and he began to seize them all; but always there was that new feeling: 'How touchingly kind I am!'

To his manly mind this was disgusting. Soon, however, he understood that it was because he was doing it with a new motive, and under Eyes to which he was unaccustomed. Hence the self-consciousness. The speechifying cove had even said that it would be so—for, little by little, bits of that speech came back to him, as if something deliberately brought them to his memory. The cove had said that it would be a bit awkward at first: but if one persisted, then one would actually *be*—quite carelessly—the thing which one had only tried to act; with the apish conduct the apish nature would change; stage by stage one would mount, forgetting what was behind, as a Prime Minister forgets his Eton jacket, or a butterfly that it was lately a worm. The dart therefore was, not be disgusted, but persist.

There was, however, Conce to be reckoned with. Conce had got into his veins, as he into hers. At the touch of Conce's hand, God fled from him, as Asmodeus from the 'fishy fume.' He did not know what was coming over him as to Conce: he had never felt like that before. When she entered his mind now, she banished everything else, it mattered not what. With closed eyes he could see her quite as well as with open—her shape, her waist, that one might grasp and toss over a 300-foot gum-tree almost, her living, acting eyes. Did he love her? No. But he loved to see her; he loved to touch her.

Yet, if they shook hands, he drew his away with a sheepish brusqueness. Hardly any familiarity of contact occurred between them: he gave her no chance. In fact, he was appalled by the unexplored feminine. His heart beat and quailed like the first man's who put to sea in a boat, or dared to scale in a balloon. Conce to him was Isis. In her presence the breath of agitation came roughly through his nostrils. 'Funk' and habit held him back.

The last shed was cut out early, by the second week in November. Then they became great pals. He was often 'in,' and would dress up and spend an evening by the piano: for she could rattle-off tunes pretty smartly: always the same old ling-a-ling-a-ling ones, the ragged music before her, but never looked at. He was her gardener and orchard-help; they looked to the hive together; he gave a hand in her housekeeping, split her wood; without object, they took rides together, when he might occasionally give her Alex, himself riding Pris. One day, with a smile, she held out on her palm two halves of a sixpence; he took one; she kept the other. Mr. Ogilvie drove about in the old buggy, or smoked on the verandah, thinking that they two would some day make a match of it, perhaps.

He was wood-splitting behind an out-house one November afternoon, when she came to him. It was blazing hot, and beside the waterhole yonder lay one or two dead sheep in a nimbus of flies: but the heat hardly accounted for her eager palishness.

'The gov'nor's been talking,' she said with a momentous secrecy: 'he's off to Melbourne!'

'And wants to take you——?'

'That's about the size of it.'

His heart sank.

'Well, you want a change,' he said.

'Do I?'

'Don't you?'

'I may, or I may not. How does it strike *you*, Jack?'

'Well, I shall be pretty lonely, goodness knows: it'll seem as if there's nobody in the whole world only me,

and a station-hand or two now and again. But that says nothing——'

There was an awkward silence. He gave one look at the little figure with a rose in its hair, the print blouse washed colourless now, belted by a string—then cast down his eyes; and she watched him with a certain anxious appeal of the eyes, as he stood statuesque with one herculean forearm leant on the splitter, while one forefinger cleared sweat off his brow, and slung it to the ground.

'I don't want you to be so lonely as all that,' she said at last.

'Well there's nothing else, you see, Conce.'

'I *will* go, Jack, if you talk that way!'

'All right. I took it that you *were* going. Makes no matter to *me*—not a bit, so don't think it. You go and see all the flash boys and the fal-lals: you won't think much of poor Jack then. Come home, no doubt, an out and out Melbourne girl, with an engagement-ring on your finger.'

'P'raps that's just how it *will* be, then,' she said with a curtsey: 'I've heard it said that I take the eye of a young man. But don't be crying out before you're hurt, Mr. Hay.'

'There's no crying out. It makes no odds to me either road. I can live without you——'

'Certain sure, now?'

'There's conceit!'

'Why are you always after me so hot, then?'

'Who's always after you?'

'You.'

'Not me! Did I go to look for you now, or did you come to me?'

'I came to tell the news. I'd never be the girl to run after any man, not even—you. But where's the use barneying about it? You're a bit shook on me, no doubt, and I don't know as I don't give back all I get, Jack. It's queer that we are never frank and candid with each other. What's the row between us? I'm sure we're not like other people, after all this time. There's something wrong somewhere.'

'I know nothing about it, then.'

'You are queer, some way,' she sighed.

'I may be. P'raps I am.'

'All right, I'm not going to break my heart any more over it, like a steer in the killing-yard. Is it yes or no?'

'What's that about, Conce?'

'About going to Melbourne.'

'What's there to say, Conce, if the gov'nor wants you to?'

A drop of vexation glittered on her lash, her lips trembled, and a lump was in that beating throat, which whitened down with the gradation of lithograph-tints from rich sunburn to the snowy innuendo of her bosom.

'I leave it to you,' she said humbly, a break in her voice: 'say yes or no, and let one know.'

A keen struggle went on within him. He knew that, if she stayed, the world would be to them virtually a planet with but two inhabitants: and that was Eden, though appallingly novel. Had he glanced at her face, he must have said 'Stay,' but his eyes were cast down; so were hers now, and she looked very like crying, with pushed bottom-lip. A sort of half-prayer rose within him. Presently he said:

'It wouldn't do for you to stay, I don't think, Conce. We must be reasonable——'

'Oh, I am done with it!' she muttered in a pet of misery, and away she turned and went, with tosses of her head, her eyes raining tears, never once looking back, while Jack stood there, feeling as if he had wantonly torn out his right eye, or cut off his right hand.

Bitter was Conce's frustration, who had thought to float in an ether of dreams one whole month, letting the future care for itself; and bitter Jack's sense of self-mutilation: but neither discussed the matter again. Conce went with apparent calm about the preparations; and ten days later they tore themselves apart—she with less strain than he.

'Don't be forgetting me, now, for anybody,' said he

at the railway, whither he had driven the spring-cart fifteen miles.

Conce half-opened her purse, giving him a peep of her half of the broken sixpence, saying:

'Not that you deserve it, I'm sure. But it's you 'll be the sufferer, after all, and dreadful, dreadful lonely, I know, while I'll be seeing life and enjoying myself to the skies. P'raps when I come back you'll be a tiny bit glad to see me!'

'Well, good-bye, Hay,' said Mr. Ogilvie, bustling up: 'have 'em well into the frontage, and keep the horses up to the mark, till a bit of rain—— Come, Conce!'

'Don't be too down in the mouth,' she whispered: 'I'll cut off a week, if I can——'

'Don't be forgetting, then. I'll dream of you——'

'I, too,' she whispered.

'Good-bye. I'll count the days——'

'Poor old Jack! it won't be for ever—bye-bye——'

But to him it seemed for ever, so mighty an affair was a voyage from Gurrowa to the coast. She was gone, and took all the interest and zest in things with her. Driving back through the outer gate he found Gurrowa like the haunted home to which the bereaved return after the funeral. He sat till late in the verandah that night, smoking—a Crusoe on a continent—no companion but three dogs, the vast plain, the stars. But he saw no stars: he saw Conce, the tasty; Conce, that unknown world of fruit incarnate between the curves of one wee body, so much in so little; he gazed at her photograph, and all woven in with her saucy lips were somehow pleasures, and woven in with the arson of her working eyes were pleasures. He shut his own, and still saw Conce, the packed delight, the fire-flash. And he thought: 'Oh, by George, Conce, when you come back . . . !'

But she was away four weeks, during which time many babes are born. It was, in fact, his fate to see another sort of vision, and drink of another cup. For someone was at him beside Conce—a young man who rode a screaming little screw with hairy fetlocks; and it was

not long but he had decided which of them twain was the tastier, and the more packed delight, and the wilder fire-flash.

Not that he had over-much time to think of either, being sometimes in the saddle till eleven at night, though the thermometer was at 87°, and the run hardly half-stocked, a number of the best sheep having been sold after shearing. But even so, the burden of that big thing called Gurrowa lay on his shoulders; there was no rain; carrying feed in the buggy, he came anon upon dead and dying sheep; the creek had ceased to trickle; the eucalyptus-belt that marked its course, like every woodland, looked pale as with anæmia; many a flat had become mere black alluvium without a stalk. But in the midst of so much depression his heart joyed within him. When it first happened to him he could not have told; as it were in his sleep one had ravished his bosom, and left it pregnant. In the morning when he awoke he was full of bridal confusions, connubial surmises. For some time he had been in the way to learn to love, reading of the Perfect Lovely with that childlike, yet don't-care-a-damn-either-road mind, which, by good luck, was natural to him: and one day he was aware that he loved. Not that he was a stranger to love very like this, for just so purely, contritely had he always loved Gracie; but here there was some wondrous element of freshness and surprise, weaker whispers, coyer blisses, with we know not what of roses and lilies, fainting caresses, and half-reproachful doves'-eyes, nuptial rites. He had two splitters putting a new roof to an out-office, to whom he lent a hand toward evening; he had everywhere to superintend the stock-management; have a jaw with a boundary-rider anon; traverse each day many a mile of dusty bush-track, riding, driving; eye a shepherdless paddock, as the flock moved out to grass, or ruminated at its noontide rest; there was a washpen amaking to oversee; Concc's garden was not to be quite forgotten, nor the orchard and little vineyard; there was a bit of stack-making; above all, the feed, the eternal water-question. On his brow and

fixed lip sat Responsibility. And he went about it all with perfect efficiency, his black throat and tattooed breast bared to that furnace-mouth which was the sun; he joked, he toiled, he chaffed, he smoked; but he did all in a trance of surprise. He could not believe that it was the same old Gurrowa. Those heavens that would not open to the sheep and beeves were wide to him; the universe seemed one holiday, high sacraments, banquets of wine. Constantly his lips uttered the protest: 'What am *I* . . .?' and again he breathed a new word: 'Father,' which meant, too, 'ravisher.' Anon he was cloyed with honey, as again they underwent the travail of their espousals, and his shortness of breath was a disease, as who should say: 'Spare me.' Now he was sighing like furnace with desire; now his young maternity qualmed at the unrelenting pressure at his heart; and anon in his laden bosom, like a child in the womb, fluttered, as it were, a dove.

Into his solemn predicament we cannot chastely pry, nor will again refer to it. Only, it will be remembered that it was so with him: also, that that which is earthly dies, but that which is from heaven is immortal, and through all obstructions, plagues and tragedies still darkly lives and grows, with languished eye upturned, shaping to itself wings to fly. This remembered, we shall the better understand his adventures.

He, supposing that life henceforth was to be all honeymoon—no Gethsemanes, valleys of desolation—knew self-reproach when those raptures cooled apace, giving place to a fight grimmer than Ali Baba ever fought: for now his bulk of body, awaking as never before, asserted *its* right, too, to live and 'see some life.' It was as when, once upon a time, a baby-angel and a baboon met face to face, and there was mutual loathing, hissing detestation, challenge, and—war. The baboon boasted 'priority of claim,' ancient right to the domain, calling the baby-angel 'a mere brigand'; whereat she, with celestial visage all inflamed, smote him sore with her little sword, fresh picked from the armoury of God; the beast joined battle; and, but

for his carrion mortality and her immortal birth, dubious had been the outcome. Even so, it lasted long: and the man, the world, in which that meeting was become a mere field of battle.

One day, not long before Christmas, he was resting in a sequestered bit of country on a tree-trunk, which had fallen obliquely across a lane, his double-barrelled and a bush-turkey at his feet. There had come an inch of rain—a nine hours' pour—and the scrub on either hand looked sprightly, while lush grasses and trefoil had sprung up on the track, imbedding the tree-trunk. He sat under a messmate-shade, very boon in the blazing afternoon. So still was everything, save one sheep, that sounds were brought to the ear from incredible distances through the rare bush-air. Once he thought that he heard the bat of a gallop, miles away it seemed: he lifted his head: but it had ceased. He could not guess who it might be. Conce and her father would not be back for yet four days, as he had been informed by the last of three letters received from them. He resumed his work with a thought of Conce that touched his heart with ice. He had before him a two-year-old ewe from a breeding-paddock near. She had been pasturing too well since the weaning and the rain, and he had noticed her gorged udder, and caught her; so now, fixing her well with his knees and one bared arm, with the other he gently milked her, while the profuse spill grew to a puddle of cloudy bubbles in the grass, and ran streaming out like pale snakes through brush-wood. Ever and anon she bleated; and this bleating was in his ears, or he might well have heard some other sounds, stealing nearer, nearer. He did suddenly notice a steam of perfume invade the air, but before he could turn, even as, stooped sideways, he milked, two hands shut down his eyes. It was Conce. She had ridden out, come upon his tracks, dismounted, and with exquisite secrecy tracked him down. Her left knee rested on the tree-trunk, her fingers pressed his eyes. The ewe escaped.

She had wished to drown him in surprise, had arrived

that forenoon, and as soon as ever she had glanced round the house and garden, hugged the cook, and vented her first exclamatory praises of home, sweet home, had set out on Paris—to track.

‘Conce?’ said he, in a groping voice, motionless as blind Samson bound among the Philistines.

She pressed her face to his, whispering :

‘Know me now?’

That face was wildly white: she had been fancying this day for weeks, planning it a hundred ways, and now here it was. Without even stopping to saddle up, she had ridden out on a gunny-bag.

‘Leave go of my eyes, Conce!’ he panted, overwhelmed by the rush and power of her presence.

‘So crazy wild to see me?’ she whispered, and let him go, and he saw her, not in her habit, but all in white muslin and black ribbon—a new town-dress with a train—and festoons of a gold chain, with the watch in her waistband, and rings, and roses, and a little handkerchief tied over her head gipsy-fashion, and perfume loading the air.

‘My word, Conce——’ he said.

‘Well?’

‘You do look nice——’

She, too, was now on the tree-trunk, half-kneeling on the grass, leaning on him.

‘Well, what do I deserve for being nice?’

An uneasy groan escaped him.

‘But is this all the welcoming?’ she suddenly cried, aghast. ‘Oh, well, I suppose I’ve been a silly ninny again, as usual, expecting more than——! I’d not be a bit surprised if I cry the first day! I, who thought you’d about suicided for me by this time——’

He was weak enough to say :

‘Well, not so far off it, Conce.’

‘Truth? Then, you *do*—— Oh, tell me plain out! tell me! tell me! you *shall!*—— And now, flushed as flame, she kissed him.

‘Oh, Conce!’ he murmured, holding himself from her.

But her lips were on his, and *his* eyes, too, rapidly

acquired that tarnished look, like the surface of swamps, which was in hers.

Suddenly, close in their ears, sounded these gruff words :

'Oh, why don't you marry the girl!'

It was one of those loafers—called 'sundowners'—who tramp the country with humped swags, arrive at station-houses near sundown, and request food and bed—a request usually granted, lest a haystack or an out-office flame before morning. Seeing Jack start up at the insult, the man leapt the tree-trunk and took to his heels. Jack chased him a few steps, then stopped, panting, scared, gave one glance at Conce, then started fast again, apparently after the man, really away from Conce, and from God, and his own rumped and muddy consciousness.

All that afternoon he was the wretchedest being. In his widowed heart something whispered : 'There is no God.' He wanted to go 'in' to talk to old Ogilvie : but, to get at Alex, he would have to pass by where Conce might still be, unless he walked miles. He sought hiding in a gully-cave, and covered his tracks like a man dodging the police. There he lurked till about five o'clock, when quite the opposite impulse—to see her again—drove him pelting back. But she had long since gone.

He rode in as fast as Alex could race, till he got near the frontage, where he slackened down, and did not enter the house till supper-time, when he stole in from behind to wash, jacket, and smarten himself. Before Mr. Ogilvie, he and Conce shook hands, as if no meeting had taken place. Conce looked at him with questioning, wistful eyes : there was a secret between them now. At supper Mr. Ogilvie talked of the Bank, the Bank, Melbourne, the Autumn, eating beef-steak like Apollyon. Jack did not see Conce at all : his eyes were in his plate : but he felt the poisoned honey of her presence. She said nothing : but her eyelids rested with new meaning upon him, pensive, submissive, but assured. Why he had not come back to the lane she did not know. He was queer—— But

she had given herself, wholly and for ever. Everything had been admitted in a kiss. And the future—the near future—was foreknown.

Afterwards, the two men smoked in the verandah, and talked of affairs. Conce, too, after housekeeping, and trying at last some new music brought back with her, came out; and, all in among the roses, she leant silently over the rail, and reflected the stars in her eyes. Jack wished that he was that spangled sky, that with many eyes he might look down into her. She was all white and wee and dear, like a moonbeam in a bush—a very incarnate moonbeam, Conce. Old Ogilvie said to Jack: ‘Going to sleep in to-night, of course?’ and Jack, after a marked hesitation, said: ‘Well, I suppose that’ll be it’; soon after which, Conce said that she was tired out, and went to bed.

Presently Mr. Ogilvie, too, retired, and an hour later, after a talk with the stud-groom in the yard, Jack also. He re-entered the house from the back, went along a passage containing the door of Mr. Ogilvie’s room, and turned into another at right-angles, where his own door was. Twenty feet from his in the same passage, on the opposite side, was Conce’s. He could see by a wax vesta which he had struck that it was slightly open—which was strange.

He went into his room, softly locked his door. He had no need of light: rich starlight came through an Australian casement-window opening upon the verandah, and with it lovely breaths of rose, orange and eucalyptus. He peeled off his outer duds, and threw himself upon the big feather-bed. Lying thus, he began to pray—for he never now prayed kneeling—but mostly without reply, though twice or thrice for a minute he was successful. Then weary of himself, and of the day, he fell asleep.

Two hours later he awoke excited from a dream of Conce. It was then about one o’clock. He rolled two or three times, moaning her name, jumped up, stood uncertain, then casting his arms over the bed, groaned: ‘My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’ His heart beat as when one sees a ghost, and wonders

if it means to touch one. He was hot and cold together. His teeth chattered a little anon, like bird-peckings. He was just like two distinct men, one of them tearing to fly to Conce, the other supplicating piteously to be permitted to fly from Australia. The agitation resulting from this conflict was like the throwing of water into a furnace: one cannot hear one's ears for the outcry and protestation. But his dream had been sweet as those sensual heavens felt (they say) by drowning men; he was all drenched in it, nor well awake: and Conce was nearer than the coast. Like a bushcat he opened the door, paused, listened, stepped out; and earnest and privy as the prowling paw, he made for her door.

The passage was almost absolutely dark: he had to come quite to her door before seeing that it was now closed. This gave him pause. She had been in her bed when he went to his, and her door had then been open. She had therefore got up for some motive. She may have left her room, and closed the door on going, or she may have come back, and then closed it; or she may have simply risen to close it—to keep him out? He could not tell: but the thought that it might be to keep him out touched him with keenest self-contempt. He listened, and almost at once he heard her stir: she was up, but without any light: had just risen, therefore—for the second time. The slow, strong beating of his heart cut his bosom like slow strong cuts of a whip. Eagerly he listened, and now, quite near within the door, he heard a dog-skin rug stir over the floor: she had kicked it unawares; and he had just time to back and sidle before the opening door, when she came out, he standing cringed, his knees weak, his heart sick in his throat. She went toward his door: his eyesight could just conjecture the whitish something gliding—fast gliding—over the matting. Whether she was sleeping or awake he did not know. She stopped at his door a good two minutes, disconcerted, perhaps, to find it open; then she seemed to be peeping in. It was nothing extraordinary for him to rise at any hour of the night and go out on some affair of the run: her

feeling at not finding him would not be surprise, but vexed misery. Finally, she disappeared.

She had gone into his room: and in an interval protracted as an ordeal he waited, wondering what she could possibly be doing: in reality she was lying in his warm bed. In the wretchedest suspense he hung upon the outcome: for he thought that her state of mind would have to be abnormal, if she did not notice one or two of his few things, his belt, his gaiters, proving him still in the house, and now with all his heart he hoped that she might not discover that. After ten minutes back she came gliding again, a ghost but for her veins. He cringed behind the door, fully awake now, sager, safer, cold all over, and trembling at the reaction. The ten minutes' waiting had done him good, since he never dreamed in what a passion they had been spent within his room. There had arisen in his mind the word 'ape,' with the realisation that sweet Conce was in all essentials only that, and he another, she a sweet one, he not even sweet. Self-detestation, and, with it, a flood of compassion for *her* filled him, as with soberer step she returned. He could divine that slower step, and heartily pitied her poor tempest-tossed frustration—if she was awake: for he had heard that she sometimes sleep-walked, and tried to believe it now. In any case, as she came near, he had quite a new sentiment for her: fellow-feeling, compunction, true affection; and as she passed him close, not his lips said: 'Conce!' but pitiably his heart said 'God.'

But never again! any night this might happen—would, must—if he stayed. He stole back to his room. Once more, flung over the bed, he prayed, and this time with intercourse. He then hurriedly dressed, almost calm now; then took his two clean shirts from a soap-box under the bed, with a few other little things, and stuffed them into his poncho; got his pipe, small repeater, bag of cartridges, flask, cash, etc., and laid them together. He did not put on his boots: he had to pass Conce's door again: his saddle was in the harness-room; but he was accustomed to move sound-

lessly, and Conce was already fast asleep. In a few minutes all was ready: he went down the verandah-steps humping saddle, swag and all, and at the creek-paddock fence saddled Alex, who had walked to meet him.

Once only he paused and considered: it was such an odd 'touch' that he was about. Things are always so much cruder and duller in the doing than in the purposing. Here was he leaving old Gurrowa, which he had learned to love—for what? an invisible reason, at which all other men would laugh. And Conce, Conce, what would *she* think? How feel? Was it not too utterly cruel? But though the actual break with the ordinary invariably seems *outré* and excessive, if, for that reason, the surgeon drew back, no cancer would be cured. He continued the work with his sniff-up. There was nothing else left.

But to go without one word to Mr. Ogilvie! that seemed violent. Yet to wait till morning might be hours too late: for now, while he could, was his chance. After some hesitation he decided to re-enter the house without boots, wake the squatter, and tell him.

At the bedside he whispered:

'Don't say a word! just follow me out soft. . . .'

Mr. Ogilvie got up and followed in his shirt to the outer back stairs, and bent an ear that could not believe itself while Jack told.

'But, Lord's name, what for, man?' said the squatter, 'you said not a word of it last night——'

Jack said that he had to go: no matter why: he had his reasons.

'Well, I knew I should lose you some fine day!' exclaimed the old man with opening arms: 'but I never expected you'd throw up the whole jimbang so sudden, and give me away like this, Jack Hay! What's your reason? If I could only drop to that——'

'I want to see a bit of life,' said Jack: 'I mean to clear right off out of Australia——'

'Yes, yes, that's only a stall——'

'That's what it isn't, then.'

'Where are you going to?'

'Frisco, I think—p'raps the Islands—it makes no matter which to me.'

'I can't believe it! I won't believe it! You and Conce had a bust-up at all?'

'Nothing o' that.'

'Give me your word of honour if I let you take it your own way, that you'll come back.'

'That I'll never do, Mr. Ogilvie: leastways, I—hope not; and if you only knew what it costs me to go, you'd never ask it either. This is my home I'm leaving—not knowing what comes next, and you as much as a father to me, for I've no other——'

His voice broke. And for half an hour they conversed in low voices under the stars of the balmy night, the squatter imploring, protesting, questioning, upbraiding, opposing a hundred reasons for delay. It made no difference: Jack was fixed.

'Going Melbourne way?' said Mr. Ogilvie at last.

'Very likely I shall fetch Melbourne,' said Jack.

'Then wait till I come back. I owe you something more than common, Jack Hay.'

He went back into the house, returned with two envelopes, descended the steps, and put them into Jack's saddle-bags, saying: 'You'll see in the morning.' Then they grasped hands, tears standing in their eyes.

'You'll say good-bye to Conce for me, Mr. Ogilvie, and say that though I go like this, it wasn't because I wanted to, but because it isn't all down-hill in this world, but some climbing, too, or we'd never get to anywhere. Tell her that, and my kind love, too, and thanks for all her goodness. God bless you, sir!'

'Good-bye, Jack, good-bye. Look out for you in three weeks' time——'

'My ghost will haunt Gurrowa when I'm dead, Mr. Ogilvie, and shepherd the weaners all night till cockcrow: that's all I can promise. Good-bye, good-bye.'

But still their hands would not part. Again and again they renewed their aching farewells, while Alex, his molars ruminating on the bit, tossed his head, one

fore-hoof reaching out to fondle the ground as a kitten paws a ball.

'Good-bye, then, good-bye.'

'Give Conce a parting kiss for me, sir, and God bless her, and you, and old Gurrowa. Don't forget about the hoofs of those hoggets in the new gulley-paddock, and Tricky's diarrhoea——'

'All right. You'll let us hear how you go on, then?'

'You may bet. I have left a little parcel with some letters and other things in the room, and when I want them, I'll send for them——'

'Well, God bless you!'

'Good-bye.'

Finally they parted. Jack led Alex in his hand a good distance from the house. Two sheep-dogs followed, but he ordered them back. Then he mounted, and Alex, in hard condition, went away with his rocking-chair hand-gallop over the herby bush-track. The stars were all in the sky, with that suggestion of high-day solemnity which characterizes the foreday of southern lands, not merely a great congregation, but one convened to session, as it were the general-assembly of the universe, and parliament of being. Jack cantered on and on, steadily as by machinery, hour after hour, past miles of log and wire-fencing, and through the primeval trackless. The hunt of a kangaroo by a dingo-pack leapt past his nose, and was gone, he heard the 'possum cry, the flying-squirrel rush, the wallaroo stampede, on level down, in jungles of saltbush, by deserted station, over mountain country, through scrub, through timber. On his left hand the workings of dawn were in the sky. But not larger was the earth than his heart, nor purpler the dawn than that music which he heard. If his hoofs clattered down some gap or gully, the echoes were hoots to him of 'Well done, good knight'; that noise in the tree-tops was a rumour of him that ran, as it were vague triumph-songs of nations, and 'Heil dir im Siegeskranz'; from all ends of the world, from his own heart and brain, from the throne of God above, hasted messengers of peace and amity to greet him. At one time, bowed to his horse's mane, he was murmuring:

'Holy, holy, holy, God'; so that any king, knowing only the happiness of trips to Homburg, or were it to the Blessed Isles, or the Scilly ones, might well have envied him then: so famous is virtue, and large the meed of consuls.

At his first stopping-place, on looking into his saddle-bag, he found an envelope containing £80, and another directed to one Mr. Anthony Hawtry, of Melbourne, placed there by Mr. Ogilvie.

XXX

THE NAUTCH GIRL

UNLESS we had time to write another book as big as this, perhaps it would be better to make no attempt to follow Jack Hay during the next five years, so many and so various were his adventures. Moreover, they had for the most part no relation with this history and his subsequent fate, as the Australian events which we have recorded had. Still, we might glance at them for the sake of completeness.

First of all, three weeks after leaving Gurrwa he suffered a shipwreck which nearly ended him. Mr. Anthony Hawtry of Melbourne was the manager of one of those palatial banks which Australians delight to build, and Mr. Ogilvie had recommended Jack to him as an excellent bushman, explorer, book-keeper, stock-manager, and general worth-his-weight-in-gold man. Such men are precious, and though Mr. Hawtry could not employ him at the moment, he recommended him to a German slipper, who did. With a heart that beat quicker Jack heard the shipper's proposal to supercargo a barque called the *Jane Richardson* bound with copper ores for—England! He consented. But she had to call *en route* at Adelaide and Perth, and before she reached the latter, struck suddenly one midnight on a rock of the dangerous Recherche Archipelago, and quickly sank to her mastheads, drowning all hands save three.

The mizzen-mast was hardly fifteen feet above the surface, and those three, Jack among them, were rescued literally out of the water by a tramp bound

with Adelaide woollen-goods for Port Elizabeth: and thither the castaways were taken.

On contact with Africa Jack's spirits rose: for a certain '*Reise-geist*,' or Travel-spirit, led him now always by the nose—a certain colonizing forwardness of mood, so that his nerves must have been feeling the sweet influence of Conce Ogilvie longer than he knew, or Gurrowa would hardly have held him two years. Anyway, he was soon almost as much an African as he was an Australian: for his mind was fraternal, and quickly hail-fellow-well-met with the modes of being. What he thought to find novel, he found half-native, and, as it were, familiar from some former existence. As to Africa, that was splendid all to pieces. Here were all riches, vastnesses and fatness of the earth, ivory, apes and peacocks, with undiscovered kraals and pigmies, crocodiles and ostriches, and quarries of the Phœnicians. Australia was to Africa as a gum-tree wood to a Drakenberg forest of ebony. Australia was a great pastoral, Africa an obiah-dance and the saturnalia. In one were sheep and cattle, in the other were sheep and cattle and lions. In one was gold, in the other was Ophir and diamond. One was free and large, the other was free and large and voluptuous. The air of 'the bush' was like bitters, the air of 'the karoo' like wine. From drinking strong tea, he took quite naturally to drinking strong coffee. Tea is to coffee as China to Ceylon, as five-o'clock Nonconformity to Rome, as England to France: one is a broth, the other a soup; the tea-drinkers prosper, the coffee-drinkers live. His whip changed from a quince-stick to a whip of rhinoceros-hide. Instead of leg-roping, he tied the cows' heads to the milking-post. Instead of Conce's wines, here was Boer-brand. Instead of the dry creek here was the deep slood, and instead of the streamlet, the dim, dim forest-river, whose anthem was still of the geologic ages, though now the snorting nostril of the hippo rose voyaging far yonder adventurous in rough mid-stream. One might be standing forty feet from the grazing zebra-herd at twilight, and stare, yet see nothing, their black and white stripes blending

into an identical twilight grey: so artful a Handyman made them, and winked. To one passing along the karoo-track the baboon peered out with blinking brown eyes, cynical, as who should say: 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days be long'; if one had a rifle, he ran; if one had only a stick, he ran not, but blinked cynical, admonitory. At the Boer farm-wedding, one danced till morning, and at midnight personally conducted the bridegroom to the bride, with drolleries and instigations. At the diamondfields, every month a fortune was made; in the Zoutpansberg, gold-fortunes were being washed out, without a single crusher. There were white men—army-deserters, ship-absconders—who were chiefs of black tribes so isolated in the vast of the world, that of their existence no man was aware. A belt forty miles deep of the destructive tsetse-fly lay beyond the Limpopo, a living Wall-of-China, which no ladder could scale, nor cannon break down. There were races so big and races so little, that the heads of the little only reached to the ribs of the big; if they intermarried, the offspring could hand up one parent to the other. There was a plant whose sap was like milk, and a plant that resembled ink, a flower that seemed of ice, and a wood that stank like a drunkard. In some parts coal was so abundant and near, that they did not mine it, they quarried it; there was a mountain of iron that had been worked by multitudes before Noah was, and still was being worked, yet was a mountain of iron still; there were few sorts of wealth which did not teem in the ground. The earth was of the same colour as the people, and the minds of the people: where it was not black, it was red. There were tropic swamps so rank and foul, that the tribes who dwelt near them forgot the sky, and became devil-worshippers. Not only with respect to colour, but wondrously in other respects, the Hottentot was to the Kaffir, as the yellow-tree to the ebony. The language of some of them was a strange clicking and clucking like hens, the language of others was more Italian than Petrarch's. There were ethnological questions, as to origins, and so on, which the shrewdest

thinker could not even begin to solve. A Koranna, walking along the Vaal, picked up a diamond, and sold it for a bottle of rum; the buyer sold it for a thousand pounds; the second buyer sold it for twenty thousand. Some of the rocks took the shape of baboon heads: there they lay in groups, all looking one way, like a herd of baboons, a visible, tantalizing miracle; in retaliation, some living creatures took the form and colour of rocks. One ceased to be surprised at anything; one was only surprised when nothing surprising appeared. There was a cat-fish and a dog-fish; a lard-tree, a soap-tree, and a waggon-tree; a weaver-bird, a honey-bird, and a locust-bird; a hyena-dog, a laughing-hyena, and a laughing-dove. The weaver-bird's nest was like a half-filled sack hung from a branch: so artfully hung, that the faintest zephyr swung it, yet the fiercest tempest could not dislodge it. About the Malapo, Limpopo and Zambesi, the flocks of storks and herons slept with out-posts of sentinels: every half-hour the sentinels were changed, lest they should grow sleepy. The trees lived in herds as well as the animals and men: all there by Cradock, Colesberg, groups of six to twelve trees, clustering on the otherwise treeless veld, were a regular feature of the landscape. A Batlapin or a Marutse boy could bring down a tiny bird on the wing with a flung club, and was the master of more arts than all the Masters of Oxford and Cambridge combined. Jack himself, after a year, could bring down two springboks with one shot at two hundred yards, or, selecting one of a herd at seven hundred yards, could drop it without fail. The Boers taught him what shooting was, and then, to repay them, he taught them. He rode a veld-pony instead of Alex, though within three months of his coming to Africa, Alex had followed him to Cape Town; but Jack never saw him, for during four months of waiting for Jack to come Alex died. Jack did not cry: for how Alex would have negotiated the burrow-holes and anthills of the veld he was far from sure. Every three months or so his occupation changed. At first he was a transport-rider. For a month he over-

seered some Boer sheep-kraals and ostriches, that were to Gurrowa as a shell to a ship. He was just thinking of elephant-hunting north of the Vaal, when two English lads asked him to wire in with them for the diamond river-diggings, that had broken out all up the Vaal from Bloemhof to the Harts-mouth. He wanted no diamonds, but he wanted change, which was what he called 'seeing life.' They had money, he over £100 in his belt. At Grahamstown they got a light bullock-waggon, a span of six, and a Kaffir boy; passed over the Boschbergs; and trekked till they struck the Great Fish River. Here they were warned by some transport-riders that it had rained further north: for it was the fag-end of the dry winter spell, and a change was imminent in the mood of the now low rivers. They were in the middle of the river, crossing the drift at late night, when a noise of waters arose far away, and like the galloping roar of a thousand buffalo-herds, gathered upon them. Before they could fly, they looked up to see an impending cliff of water bringing with it animals, houses and up-rooted trees. The river had 'come down,' and in one moment was no river, but a tearing sea. The two English lads were swept away with the oxen; Jack and the boy, emerging far down the banks from deep-drowned depths of night and calamity, saved themselves by willow-branches at a bend; but everything, except the money in Jack's belt, was lost. However, the two survivors soon met on the further riverside, and continued the way three days through deluges of rain, the Kaffir boy contriving to knock down a bustard and trap a little buschbok gazelle, the raw flesh of which they ate, till they reached a farm. Here Jack got a cart and two ponies, a double Westley-Richards, some dried meat and peaches, and went on by Colesberg, Philippolis, Fauresberg, till he crossed the Riet and Modder. The diamond-craze at Coffeefontein and Jagersfontein had not yet broken out. He crossed the Vaal.

In all that Vaal-river region towns were springing up, as it were in a week, as the diamond-fever shifted from here to there: for what was a vast encampment in

August was a canvas and iron town in September. So sprang Hebron, Blue Jacket, Kierk's Rush, and the rest. But the crowd was not as yet cosmopolitan, and Jack missed the swagger of old Palmerstown. He bought a thirty-foot claim for £10 at Gong Gong, and began to dig, but without much interest, and would throw up work at any temptation, as to go springbok or baboon-hunting with gangs of Boers. There were baboon-fastnesses in all that range east of Kimberley, where the hunters, climbing up to those loaf-shaped crags called 'krantzies' in the dark foreday, could hear a row of squeals and growls, the squeals caused by pinches given to restless babies by the mothers, and the growls being sleepy growls of censure by the fathers at the domestic misrule and want of tact among the women and children. It was not pretty: and from it Jack understood that human beings should not growl at anything, nor pinch anyone.

At Gong Gong he and his Kaffir became acquainted with a certain Pattison, a drunkard, who had a claim not two minutes from Jack's. He was that Dr. Pattison of King's Cross, who ought to have cut off Nibbs Raby's finger-joint, but did not. Pattison had finally got to that point in unsoberness when one can no longer be a doctor in King's Cross, and had come to Africa fortune-hunting. As he and Jack were often together, it might well have come out that he was acquainted with both Pole and Raby, but it never happened to come out. Pattison made haste to be drunk after the day's work, and hardly referred to 'home.' His great infirmity, specially at present, was now specially due to the spectre of approaching want: for his claim was a by-word for bad luck. All those Vaal diggings from Bloemhof to the Harts, which were called 'river-diggings,' as opposed to the 'dry' diggings of Kimberley and Old de Beers, produced quite small stones, named 'glass-stones,' though of good water; the clay of the alluvial rubble was washed out in cradles, and the residue was examined with nothing more than a piece of stick, so that it often happened that the gems for which one had toiled were over-

looked, and these washed earths were sometimes profitably bought by outsiders on spec. At all events, whether Pattison's eye was dim, his hand shaky, or his claim no good, being already eighty feet deep, he had not made enough to pay the high expenses of living, and was every day sinking lower in misery, when one night in a canteen by the riverside Jack offered to swop claims with him.

'Who are you getting at?' asked Pattison.

'Take it or leave it as you like,' said Jack: 'I may believe in that claim of yours, for what you know. It's a spec which I thought you might care to drop to. Take it or leave it as you like.'

'But I thought you were standing so well in!' exclaimed Pattison. 'What's the dodge?'

'That says nothing. I know where my interests lie, and you should know where yours lie. It's only yes or no.'

'Done!' cried Pattison, and they struck hands, and exchanged claim-papers.

Pattison drank that night; but for weeks afterwards he was a sober man under the influence of toil and plenteous reward for it. He never met Jack thenceforth but he must needs turn away his head with one deep wink at space; and Jack, too, had his wink, each in his diverse way doing excellently by the deal. Jack remained only two weeks longer at Gong Gong, making nothing of Pattison's worked-out vaal-stone, though on the whole he was £500 to the good when he set off with the expedition of a Norwegian naturalist, whom he met at Klipdrift, upon a voyage of exploration and research far down into ultra-Zambesi interior. Jack duly hinted to his Chief beforehand that he was prepared to shoot elephants and flamingos, but never men: and on this understanding they set out, four whites and six blacks. Pretty soon it was all bush-veld and tsetse-fly, assegai-hunts and hippopotamus-bacon, names like Mabimbi, Makalaka, meal-pap and ground-nuts, with amulets and charms, manners-and-customs, and beliefs in a Deity. They trekked by the Upper Malopo for the Upper Limpopo, and struck off for the

Zambesi; and it lasted many months. From the Marotses Jack got those first lessons in medicine which were destined to kindle an ardour within him: for their old priest-men, by ages of poking into the crevices of Nature, had discovered remedies for dysentery, fever, wounds, snake-bite, and so on. But the expedition fell short of fame by reason of the death by sunstroke of the Chief in the ninth month; whereupon the others returned, and scattered on Boer frontier.

At this date Jack could speak both Dutch and some Suto dialects well; we have said that he was now some hundreds of pounds to the good; and for the next months we find him partner with a Boer in the very wild country round about the Drakenberg frontier-settlements. They two had conjointly acquired a few hundred head of stock, run up some daub-and-wattle huts, with some stone-and-bramble kraals, and prepared to settle down to quiet work and frugal prosperity. But it did not last long. Nearly all those frontier-farms were being harassed by two pests, baboons and Bushmen: two tribes of about the same bodily size and mental hue. The little Bushmen sallied out in raiding parties from the kloofs and caverns of the Drakenbergs, and were as much hated by the whites as feared by the other blacks, on account of their poisoned arrows, their wiliness, and nimble way of life. The baboons were even worse. They impartially destroyed lambs, crops, orchards, ostrich-eggs, for the pleasure of destroying: and the mountain-strongholds and secret places of the Bushmen were the fastnesses of the baboons also: so that here, in full swing, were liberties, equality and fraternity.

The farmers, however, had guns; they, too, could fraternize: and there was plenty of shooting. Riding out of blue distances, like vultures that flock from nowhere, they would meet at this or the other lonesome homesteading on fixed days, and raid forth, perhaps fifty, perhaps a hundred miles, with intent to shoot. Jack's own brother-Boer had a passion for shooting in general, and Jack a passion for shooting baboons: but, as we have said, he would not shoot

Bushmen; at this date, in fact, it was as impossible for him purposely to shoot a Bushman under any conceivable circumstances as to leap, at one bound, over the Drakenberg Mountains.

To this point of view was due his capture by them. A party of fifteen, beside three Kaffirs with the canteen, had gone out toward the end of June, he among them, on what was ostensibly a baboon expedition, though, if Bushmen turned up, that would not be extraordinary. On the second evening after penetrating the mountains, they were encamped in an elevated valley in the centre of a system of spurs, having already by two nights' work bagged ninety-seven baboon-tails, worth three-and-six apiece to the Cape Government. They lay about carelessly, with some wild turkey and buck on the fire, and with the horses, mostly knee-haltered, at grass, when from some quite small bushes, arrows began to fly. The hunters had chosen a saucer-shaped glade, almost open, only crowned by an ironwood belt, so how the Bushmen had wriggled unseen through the grasses was almost unimaginable. There, however, they were; the glen was now dark, though the sun still lighted the upper ranges; and a *sauve qui peut* of farmers and Kaffirs ensued. They simply snatched rifles, cleared horses, and, firing wild, were gone. One man's horse fell as he mounted, and himself also, as he ran afoot; another toppled galloping; and in two minutes they were a scattered flock, each pelting at random for himself about the darkening world of mountains.

Jack was descending full split a flat-bottomed kloof, when four of the little men started up three hundred yards in front.

'By George!' he thought, 'I'm a deader!' as they sent a volley at him: and instantly he felt his horse fail, and drew up, while two more arrows sang past his ears.

Just then he sighted a guinea-fowl winging high up, at perhaps four hundred yards, across the kloof, immediately above the Bushmen: his gun was ready: he took aim, brought it down, and it dropped at the Bushmen's feet. The spectacle of that aim into the

air, so cool, so true, taken by a man at bay, who could without fail have picked down at least two of them, may have stunned the little men: at all events, only one arrow left their bows after Jack's mysterious shot. But that one entered Jack's side; it was poisoned: and, with an instant feeling of death, he tumbled, at the same moment as his wounded horse, heavily to the ground.

The Bushmen's valley was not very far, and they took him thither, and doctored him: for though not tiptop herbalists, like some northern blacks, they know the antidotes of their own poisons. They reserved him to die, as their prisoners do, with rites and dances; and whole weeks he lay drunk with hemp-smoke, which was his only alleviation from the agonies of his swollen right arm and side. Their lair was a series of caverns round a mead under mountain-walls, safe even from approach, except by those who knew its labyrinthine secret. There was no hope of rescue from without, therefore; but when he was convalescent he set up as a witch-doctor, applying to the sick those remedies which he had learned from the Marotses, far yonder north of the Zambesi. This, in one way, only confirmed his captivity, for the Bushmen grew to regard him as heaven-sent, and preserved him zealously, apprehensive of the day when he would vanish by magic from their sight. He, for his part, was not very anxious to be gone, finding such pleasure in healing, or trying to heal, their ailments, that he then first made that resolve of his—to become, if ever God gave him half a chance, a doctor. In other ways, too, he served the little men: he was full of hints, though, as he knew but few words of the Hottentot dialects, expression was difficult; still, after three months, his own little clan of Bushmen were distinctly less like own brother to the baboons than before. The walls of their caverns were covered with ochre-paintings of zebras, gnus, elands, etc.: Jack painted them men and clothed women. The dances became slightly less obscene because of him, the women slightly chaster. If he was in any way hurt, he ostentatiously caressed the thing

which hurt him. The don't-care good-humour of his face was itself a lesson. He hunted with them, and taught them not to kill much more than was needed for sustenance. By the bank of the stream which traversed the mead, where he often fished all an afternoon and evening, he built an altar of yellow-wood blocks, on which, if anyone was ill, he would slaughter some precious thing—a silver heron, or a young calf, as the spring came on—forbidding the meat to be enjoyed, thus familiarizing their minds with notions of solemnity and sacrifice. He was a tremendous high-priest and witchman, some of their heads reaching not much beyond his hips, and they soon had him in awe, not unmixed with affection. By various tricks he contrived to give them notions of truth, justice, and mercy. His shooting of a bird instead of a Bushman was now understood, and not forgotten. He was all a new idea to them. They no longer looked upon the white man as an equal, to be shot down with poisoned arrows, but as a hero, a king, and a god, though he did tear boiled buckmeat, and snored in his sleep, as others. After several months, Jack, on a hunting expedition, made a bolt from them in an open place, where they could easily give chase. Finding that they did give chase, he drew up sharp, and ordered them back with his arm; they halted doubtful, and, as he again cantered off, expecting every moment an arrow in his back, he could hear their hullabaloo of confabulation. After a time they again started the pursuit, but he was far gone now, and escaped them.

When he reached his farm he saw astonishment depicted on the face of his brother-Boer, who had never heard of the escape of a white man from Bushmen. But Jack's astonishment was as great as the Boer's, for now hardly a head of stock was to be seen on the place. The Boer, believing Jack long dead, had sold out, and was on the point of clearing for the diamond-fields. In fact, when Jack reappeared, like Rip van Winkle, upon the world, he found everybody crazy with but one idea—the diamond-fields. Those new words, Kimberley, Dutoitspan, De Beers, Bulfontein, filled every

mind and mouth. The 'dry'-diggings boom had begun.

To no counsels to stay where he was would Jack's brother-Boer listen: he was a young man who had been an elephant-hunter on the Upper Malopo, and eager-minded to encounter and traffic with events. Jack did not much care, and, instead of persuading the other, was himself persuaded. They divided funds, and set out together for the diggings.

At Kimberley this time, and at all the fields, Jack once more found the old scene of Australian Palmers-town—the flashness, pipes lit with five-pound notes, the cosmopolitan tone. Here, again, was the Chinaman and Arizona Bill, the trapper and the fringed trouser, but even more fringed; for down at Dutoitspan, where the stones were of a lucid yellow, though small, they were picking them up like birds picking up birdseed, and at Kimberley someone had got a first-water thing of 83 carats, that was more like a pigmy sun, or blazing day-star at its noon, than a stone: from the ends of the earth, therefore, had they come. The majority were still drawing up the buckets of blue-earth by nothing more elaborate than a rope run through a block on a post at the pit-mouth, though already there were windlasses, horse-whims, with a horse washing-machine or two, and webs of wires that crossed and recrossed, stretching all over the place. The diggings were spread over a sort of crater, and from above, at the crater's rim, one saw a bewildering scene: the rectangular claims, dug to various depths, resembled a ruined Moorish city, which occupied the saucer-shape; but a ruined Moorish city a thousandfold repeopled and *affairée*, every wire humming, pumps going, buckets running, earth thumping to earth, water splashing, men shouting, singing, swearing; and beyond the crater, a sudden city on the red sand—a caravanserai of huts—iron huts, canvas huts, tree huts—round and oblong, flat and roofed. Some of that crowd acquired wealth in a day, many in three or four weeks; but few so suddenly as Jack. It fell out in this fashion: there was a blue-eyed girl of loose character at the diggings named Betty Laws, an

Irish Cape Colonist of nineteen, very *piquante* and pretty, whose admirers were legion. Her status at Kimberley was, we almost said, that of a fallen angel, but, anyway, that of a fallen princess. She was the gayest spirit, made money hand over fist, and chucked it about like the most successful of the diggers. One of her pals was Jack: and she pretty soon discovered the fact that she had the power to get more money out of Jack's pocket than out of any other man's in the place. Almost before she could ask, Jack had given her double what she had thought of asking. For he, for his part, had secured three claims conjointly with his brother-Boer, and, from the first, had been standing fairly well in.

But Jack proved the profoundest puzzle which Betty had contemplated on this side of the moon. Wantonly he gave like sun and rain, but got never a caress in return. If she, spurred by good comradeship and a sense of fair-is-fair, hinted her readiness to be tender, a hurried little cloud would darken his brow, and he would turn it off somehow. And whereas puzzlement in the first week was Betty's feeling, by the third it had changed into tolerant contempt.

Now, with all her sham-lovers, Betty had a genuine infatuation for one man. He was a Dutch Cape Colonist named Hoogbruin, and had known Betty before the rush. He had two claims, and was about the most successful digger on the fields, making money like dirt.

One night late, Hoogbruin, by favour, got early wind of a rumour. It was this: that if all the Kimberley diamonds belonged to only one man, then it would hardly be worth that man's while to stoop down and pick them out of the blue-earth. For why? Because some Transvaal Kaffirs had that day found a place where diamonds could be picked up as commonly as pebbles.

The whisper, so far, was secret as the grave; Hoogbruin had excellent reasons to believe it true: and now was Hoogbruin an agitated man, and the breath of haste was on his lips. If he could sell his claims before

the rumour got out, well and good. For he knew that the next day men would be selling for bottles of whisky.

That night he confided his case to Betty Laws; and she, having heard, sat up in the bed, and considered it.

'Know Jack Hay?' she said after a time.

'No.'

'That great big fellow with the black beard and eyebrows, in a blue-serge shirt——'

'Oh, aye—I think I know,' said Hoogbruin.

'Get at *him* in the morning. Sure to find him at the early market. He's the greatest softie on the diggings about money, and he'll buy sure, if you only get round him. I should ask it as a favour, and don't take any refusal, but press it, and he'll give in sure as sure.'

Then she told why she considered Jack a softie. For why? Because he had never been hard on her.

And Hoogbruin said: 'It might be worth trying-on.'

Early the next day, accordingly, at one of those morning-markets, where the diggers clamorously bought their provisions under the hammer of the Government auctioneer, as Jack was bidding £3 for a sack of potatoes, he heard a voice at his ear, glanced round, saw Hoogbruin, and at Hoogbruin's invitation, accompanied him behind one of the bullock-waggons which thronged the square each market-morning. Hoogbruin, with a great air of confidence, then offered to sell his two claims—cheap—at £2,000 each. Jack could not understand his motive, and refused. Hoogbruin insisted, wheedled, and lowered the price, pleading a necessity which called him away. He would not be shaken off: and in the end Jack bought the two claims for £3,000.

By noon he knew Hoogbruin's motive. The rumour was abroad. Such panics were common in early digging-days. The disaster was asserted in *The Diggers' News*, and proved by many proofs: all that day claims changed hands at ridiculous figures, and Jack felt that he had been cheated of £3,000. The scare had been worked by a ring of Jews, who wished to acquire claims; no Kaffirs, of course, had

discovered any diamonds; and two days later, when the ring had gathered in the spoils, the bubble burst, and things were as before. When Jack looked for Hoogbruin to sell him back his claim, Hoogbruin was long gone, probably dreading Jack's innocent clasp-knife.

But the best of Hoogbruin's claim was yet to come, and he must have spent the rest of his life in cursing his over-shrewdness. Among a number of good stones, Jack got three plums, one being $75\frac{1}{2}$ carats, and a fortune in itself. By that time he had had enough of the diggings. He found himself being more and more drawn out of the orbit of the labourer, the free man, into the financial ring. Strive as he might, by the mere possession of much money, his feet were in a net. The kind of men with whom he had now to associate became horrid to him: he far preferred the hand-worker: but he seemed to be on a road where there was no stopping, and no going back. Everything which he touched turned to 'securities,' and then, by mysterious processes, multiplied itself into more 'securities.' For eighteen months he was struggling, with daily hisses on his breath, to do so simple a thing as leave the town of Johannesburg, yet could not. For almost a song he had acquired from the Transvaal two gold territories, as it were against his will, one in the Zoutpansberg, one in the Lydenberg district. They seemed to cry out to him: Acquire me! and he was forced to acquire them. But as he acquired, so his life became all round new, all round cramped and fettered. He did not like champagne, yet, as though it were some debt of Nature which all must pay, he had to drink champagne, though he had a precious care of the quantity. Hook-nosed Jews, fat little *bonhomme* speculators, pushing clerks and journalists, not nice people, with the price of stock, transfers, ounces-per-ton, these became his atmosphere—and cablegrams, cablegrams. All the ends of the earth sent him cablegrams. If he opened his mouth, it said 'outcrop,' 'consulting engineer,' 'south shaft,' 'B block,' 'No. 1 cutting,' 'No. 3 level,' 'syndicate,'

‘panning-up,’ ‘dynamite.’ He was one of the first who introduced modern gold-mining plant into the Lydenberg : but he did it because he was forced to ; it cried out to him : Introduce me ! Some men have wealth thrust upon them : he was thrust upon wealth. What had he to do with Wall Street and Throgmorton Street ? But they had found him out. Diamond and gold had seemed to him to have no connection with the Pacific Railway, or nitrates, or Indian-Government bonds : but they had. He found that, unless he committed suicide, willy nilly he must consider the matter of the new Russian loan, for yea or for nay ; and he found this also : that whether he said yea or said nay, ever new piles were piled to his pile, the truth being that his operations were characterized by a simple perspicacity, a relation with truth, and what is called ‘a head screwed on right.’ His brain wearied of hundreds of thousands, counting of noughts, mammoth cheques, momentous signings of his name. He was a ‘high financier’ before he had well realised that he was rich, and one of the world’s great bankers before he had realised that he was a high financier. When he at last left South Africa, it was to found a banking and trading house in Leadenhall Street.

As soon as riches befel him he had remembered anew that he was under suspicion of a murder : and he became known by his old alias of John Bennett.

He took it all with certain private vexations, but still, on the whole, with good humour, sometimes even with little exultations when his sporting instincts scored a deal. He knew that he would have to rid himself of all those millions that budded and budded : but how to do that was no simple problem ; and he had been so rushed in the making, and still was being rushed, that he had given no thought to the spending. That would come. He did not care. He took it easy in the old way, with the old sniff-up.

What was secretly worrying him all this time was two hungers—two famines—which he had : the first of them—to serve, to do a little real good in some way, to some extent, to somebody, he cared not whom, before

he died : to serve, to be a servant. The giving away of his wealth, indeed, might do good : he was not so sure of that even ; but, anyway, that would never cost him one fraction of a headache when the time came ; and he would be giving it for his own sake, after all, to save his own skin, not for others' sake. That was no serving, as he conceived *serviug*. Serving was the spending, not of his easy-got money, but of himself. Therefore, his fellow-speculators would have been surprised to know the contents of that book which he carried about in his pocket : it was a Latin Grammar. He had determined to become a doctor.

Here, it seemed to him, was that loving, which is not in word, but in deed. To be a physician, healing as you go : not a common one, but another sort of one, a sighing one, to whom healing is a secret sacrament, and around his head are halos which no man sees : this was Jack Hay's ambition. To him the fairest of earthly beings was somehow that young man who had speechified before the chapel in Mohrano township one Sunday afternoon ; but he knew that he could not be a copy of *him*, nor must try to be : and after that young man, a doctor seemed to him the highest and luckiest man on earth. Therefore, having heard what was the first step from a Johannesburg doctor, he was haunting the Latin Grammar.

The other hunger of his to which we have referred was not so pretty : but because we would give him as he was, we mention it : for it had now become the constant thorn in his flesh. It was literal hunger—the passion for food, and still more food. Within two years it had grown and grown upon him. Like Galba, he would have taken emetics after eating, in order to eat again—if he had dared. Quality or sort was all one to him : what he was weak on was quantity. It was his fate to have to fight this crudest sort of fight, day after day, hour by hour, without respite, for years, and his life became a succession of piteous fasts, alternating with gluttonies when he fell, or with spare half-meals when he was victorious : so that all the baboons which he had

shot had their plentiful revenge of him. It first markedly began (though he had always been a feeder) in a vow which he made to himself, soon after becoming rich, never to smoke again. With much suffering he ceased to smoke. And at once he began to gormandize, the cessation of the narcotic acting in this way. He dreamt of springboks, and with musing eye he followed the flight of the paw. If one had asked him: 'What are you thinking of?' he would have answered: 'Grub.' Finally, he had to return to the pipe, and smoke all day. But now it seemed to make less difference: and the burden of his infirmity grew upon him.

He returned to the cities of Europe with a wretched sense of suffocation, which culminated in London. 'Oh, I can't breathe!' he would pant anon. The first night in London he rose from his bed at the Hotel V——, and slept on a bench on the Embankment; the second night he slept on Hampstead Heath, though it was winter, and stormy: no night did he sleep in a house. The walls oppressed his chest like nightmares. Not that his nights were long: he was in conferences till the small hours, and again at dawn, with hardly time to eat, though somehow time was always found for champagne. The whole of the second day he had an Atlantic cable reserved for his use, and the cablegrams came, and the cablegrams went, like the flight of the weaver's shuttle. 'Buddo' got circles under the eyes ('Buddo' was a brisk little Scotchman-financier, named Brady, but called 'Buddo' in the Johannesburg set, who was Jack's familiar spirit, and travelled the world with him). 'Buddo' had taken a first-floor suite at the Hotel V—— as Jack's permanent offices and *piéd à terre* in London: for Jack had determined, some time soon, to settle a while in England; and passing along the lower corridor one morning with Buddo and others, whom should Jack come upon but K——! He grasped K——'s little hand, knowing that no introduction was needed between K—— and a millionaire, only saying that he had met K—— somewhere. K—— looked as horsey and elfin as ever, quite gray now, but

not a day older. They all went into that same dim, oblong room of K——'s opening upon the corridor and upon the street, where Jack had written 'biographies' for *The Gadfly*: and there was champagne. No faintest suspicion that here might be his old forgotten 'secretary' crossed K——'s mind: for Jack was another Jack. We have forgotten, we think, to describe him as he now was. First of all, he looked bigger and heavier than before, though lean, being hardly thirty-two, and still quick as a bushcat on his pins; in his walk was that straddle of the legs acquired by inveterate horsemen; from the corners of his eyes looked out a still sagacity; his hair hung behind his neck like a fringe, a good thick one, now longer, now shorter, as he docked it, himself his own barber, but generally showing between it and the woollen shirt-collar a bit of neck of the colour of old dark bricks, mixed with freckle-splashes; his face was lean, blackish, and still handsome, terminated by a beard like black tufts of tow, of the same breadth all down the chest, and so grossly hairy as even to invade somewhat the cheeks; his eyebrows, too, stood out bushily, and protruding from each nostril was a darkling thicket of hair, mixed with the moustache, ever breeze-blown by his rough breaths. His ears looked time-worn, non-vital, all freckled, and stuffed with tufts of hair. His teeth were shiny and beautiful. Still in his gait, mixed with the straddle, was the old flash roll. The features of his dress were, firstly, his full-share hat, which he wore cocked, one large van stuck up swaggerly to right, the other drooped to left—and, secondly, his excessive cravat, whose red ends appeared beyond the beard. His clothing was of wool, even the cravat of wool. What he once put on, he was not readily induced to take off: and if one went too near him, his strong being gave a smell, as it were of sheep and cattle. He wore loose jackets, and had his old long-legged look. But there was something else not so easily expressed—that something which we miss in the Christs of Art, the painters giving us, indeed, the lamb, but somehow failing to

suggest the lion of God, the 'forty days' faster, and 'plucker-out' of (his own) eyes. It was some *compelling* expression of the face, of the pressed lips, of the personality, as of one who had confronted all Nature, Man, and Hell itself, fought them so often, and thrown them so often, that a certain habit of iron and scorch of battle was left behind, stamped for ever into the wrinkles of the countenance and the look of the eyes: so hard, so marred, Ulysses must have looked when he came up out of Hades. At any rate, K—— was miles away from recognising his old 'secretary' under disguise so deep, nor was he long sober enough that day to do much recognition, that being a high day for K——, all among the sultans of finance: for Jack took him with his lot to the City, so that the very air seemed amber-tinted with excess of cham, gold, and Olympian cordiality, and the jingle of the horses on the City-pavements resembled the chuckle-chuckle of coins shaken in bags.

They two, however, had a quiet lunch in a City restaurant, and seemed a queer pair, like Liliput and Brobdignag out on the spree together. Jack did not take off his hat to eat, wherefore K——'s hat, too, which always seemed too big for him, remained on, pressed down behind, so that he resembled a mouse peeping out of its hole. When the waiter brought the lunch, Jack first looked at the plateful and at the man alternately, then said:

'What's this?'

'Why, sir—what you ordered, sir, I think?' said the polished waiter, hanging deferential upon the outcome.

'Take it away, young un, take it away,' said Jack: 'you just bring me *three times* as much again on that plate, will you? I never heard such sauce—why, it couldn't fill a mallee-hen. People in this country don't seem to eat, damned if they do.'

K——, with his sore-throat guffaw, laughed happily. He had humour, and knew how to use and enjoy colonial millionaires as few men can.

'If we can't eat, we *can* drink,' he said.

But that verity clouded Jack's brow. In one day he had seen, with horror. He only answered :

'What about that *Gadfly* ?'

'*Gadfly* ?—which *Gadfly* ? Oh-h-h ! that old rag ? You know about that ? *Gadfly's* gone to the devil long and merry ago.'

'Start it again !' said Jack with decision. 'Must have the *Gadfly*. I'll finance you, when I come back——'

'When are you coming ?'

'Oh, about two or three months' time.'

'I'll be glad when you do,' said K——, and meant it : 'make things hum a bit. Going to borrow—how much ?—£50 before you go.'

'Make it the round hundred, and be done,' said Jack, eagerly eating, veins standing out on his throat and brow : 'you stick to me, young un, and you'll find your nest feathered all to pieces. I'm your man. Chuck horse-racing—that's no chop—and whatever you want, you shall always have double, and don't be afraid to ask, neither. You once did me a big touch o' kindness, K——, though you know nothing about it.'

'Me ?' said K—— : 'when ?'

'Ah, that's where the secret is, sonny, that's where the secret is. And there's something else you can do, too : look here, when I'm back from the States, I'm going all among the nobs and fal-lals—the lords and dukes and that lot ; so you must get some cove to give me the push-off——'

'Easier than kissing hands,' said K—— : 'I know half-a-dozen men will put you on the rails for a couple of monkeys.'

'All right : when I'm back.'

During the next seven days, K—— stuck close to him, and was often up in that busy first-floor room at the hotel, where 'Buddo' and two others wrote, wrote, for life, Jack's central table being one litter of cablegrams. K—— got his £100, and accompanied Jack and Buddo in a landau—for nothing could induce Jack to step into the prison-cell of a

cab—to St. Pancras, whence he saw them off for the States.

Jack on that journey to Liverpool sat alone in his carriage, having banished Buddo to a separate one; and his face was sad; and he read and re-read a document which he had.

It was the report of a detective agency, which, during his ten days in London, he had commissioned to discover the last eleven years' history of certain people. The report stated that:

1. Lady Perowne was well. She had had two children: a boy and a girl; and both were well.

2. Sir Markham Perowne was well. He had failed as a speculator and Director of Companies, had recently passed through the Bankruptcy Court, and, since then, had been taken into partnership by his father-in-law, Mr. John Hay.

3. Mr. and Mrs. John Hay were well. Mr. Hay was still the Member of Parliament for Cocker-mouth, and a Director of two Companies.

4. The Marquess and Marchioness of D—— were well. They had had no children.

5. Miss Stanley had married a Mr. Nibbs Howard Raby on the 2nd July, 18—, at the Holborn District Registry Office. She had had two children: a girl and a boy. The girl was an epileptic; the boy was well. Mr. and Mrs. Raby were well. They were at present staying at Beech How, in Lonbydale, near Bedwick, Cumberland.

She had married, then, within two months after his departure: that was odd: to Nibbs, not to Harold. And in his mind, for years now, had been, and were, doubts, doubts, about Nibbs—big, formless doubts—suspicions so foul, that he dared not acknowledge them to himself, lest he, who was called to love, should bitterly hate. And in Nibbs' hands was she, his wife.

'Father,' he breathed, and again: 'Father.' 'For me,' he said, 'oh do, oh do, if she is anyways unhappy. . . .'

In the report was no mention of the fact that she had

twice left Raby within the eleven years. He had no grounds to think her unhappy: yet he feared. Nibbs! She had cared nothing for Nibbs. He felt that. And he had certain memories of Nibbs, the lad, not nice ones. Why had she not married Harold? He would have felt easier in that case. As it was, a pang of fright was at his heart that hurt like a constant wound. 'Well, she's in *Thy* hand, my God,' he said agonized, with opened arms: 'and not my will, but Thine. . . .'

His departure from England was partly a flight, or at least a release: for he dreaded to find out that she was wretched, or anyway touched with the evil that is, and hugged his ignorance as long as he could, still hoping for the best. Urgent affairs, indeed, summoned him to New York, but he might have invented them, if they had not existed, in order to shirk for the present too much knowledge of Gracie; and he breathed freer when he found himself on the Atlantic.

For six weeks his life in the New World was such rush, that he was half able to forget, and for the first time found comfort in his immense business. Then there came a lull, and just then he was approached by a London discount-house on the subject of a loan of two millions to the State of P——. He was disposed to lend, but there was some hitch with regard to the character of the securities in their relation to the consent of the British Government to the transaction. Before he could lend, it would be necessary to send an agent to India to inspect, and report on, the bonds and other special guarantees. In these circumstances, still shunning England, he decided to go himself.

He had, however, to return to London for two busy days, during which even K—— could not capture him; and then, once more, he stood in those Albert Docks where, one harsh day nearly eleven years before, he had groaned so sore; and again now he could feel that pain. At Marseilles he sent and received cablegrams; at Brindisi also. At Aden he transhipped to the 'ferry-boat,' and soon landed at Bombay.

He got to P——, and there for some weeks was fêted by the Maharajah, fête succeeding fête, white umbrellas, 'elephants mad with pride,' tiger-hunts, and presents, including ten charming girl-wives. After all was over, and the loan negotiated, he went away, and made for Delhi, as the nearest centre for a week of cablegrams.

On his first day in Delhi he wandered out smoking, after breakfast, upon the verandah (it was at Maiden's), and for some time stood watching quite a crowd, who implored him to be guided by them round the town, or to buy of them arms, shawls, Benares ware, Jeypur trays. Inclined neither to buy nor be guided, he threw handfuls of coppers among them, and now was hoping for peace, when there came a certain famous Badri Das, whose smiles and wrung palms no traveller, we suppose, ever succeeded in resisting. Badri Das produced *chits* signed by Viceroys and Commanders-in-Chief, and Jack had to go, with a fine, too, of five rupees. Now, then, came legend and history, the Mutiny, the Mutiny, '57, '57, with mosque and church and temple, and that of Colonel Skinner, which was all the three in one place. Jack, who was a connoisseur in air, wondered at the wildness and purity of this, almost like bush or karoo air: he would not take a carriage, and on foot they passed through the Kashmir Gate, with its tablet of heroism. Now the expanse of the civil lines spread before them, with the Muttra high-road, a winding ribbon, and bungalows and public-offices among trees. Still they wandered, and on droned the good Badri Das of Nicholson the Brave, of Jones, in an English jargon half understood by Jack, who only seemed to like it, his heart being far from the Mutiny. But the scene was really pretty, if tame, with Ridge, Tomb, and Observatory, pleasure-gardens and gymkhana, Ludlow Castle turned into the splendid club, with plenty of colour, largeness, spirited air, and, above all, light and sky.

On a winding road that led toward the Ridge, Jack, taking refuge from the dead in the living, asked Badri Das what that crowd of natives was doing in

the compound of the one-storied building yonder, all roof and pillared verandahs. They seemed at picnic inside the gates, jabbering, smoking, eating in circles. He was Indian enough now to distinguish the races, and here were many sorts: frontier Pathans, thick-lipped north-western coolies, the yellow Brahmin all *finesse* and aristocracy, like sixteenth-century Venetians, with Delhi Mahomedans, Muttra Rajputs, Bengalis. Two or three in linen passed quickly through the crowd, 'persons of importance,' and anon an office-gharry, driving up, deposited a sahib amid gesticulations of the policemen, who sought to clear a way in the crowd that pressed in and out of the doorway.

'That,' grinned Badri Das, 'that where judge sit. All bad mans tried there. It not interest you.'

'As much as anything else,' said Jack. 'You take me there, if there's any sitting down.'

Badri Das, sighting a friend in the compound, contented without fuss: they went forward, whereupon three turbaned constables sprang upon Jack, seeing in a sahib of his size and air as it were two sahibs, perhaps a new Commissioner or Inspector-General, and frantically they cleared a way for him. He was ushered through a door reserved for distinguished persons into the very arena of the lawyers and court-officials, where he caused a stir, strangers being rare in an Indian court; but he was labelled 'globe-trotter,' and seeing that he was expected to sit by two who made room, he sat and looked about. At once he noticed a smell in the air, spicy and pungent—due to universal betelnut-chewing and hookah-smoking, infecting all breaths. An elderly gentleman, seated high on the left by the judge, eyed him close and earnestly through his glasses. All, he saw, was simplicity itself: no wigs, no robes. The native barristers, half-Oriental, half-English in dress, wore a black alpaca cap, and there were three or four English ones, too, assisted by native *vakils*. Immediately before him was the dock, with the prisoner in it, and they were examining witnesses; but, to his slight disappointment, all remained meaningless to him, for

the proceedings were in the Urdu vernacular. However, fearful of again disturbing the court, and feeling listless, he sat on.

Meanwhile, the figure in the dock was so attractive, that he could not take his pitying eyes from her—a young girl—a Nautch. She was not far from white, with eyes that flashed a blacker flame than ever Conce Ogilvie's flashed, and blue-black hair, and under-eyelids stained with kohl. The native police had not yet robbed her of her jewels, and diamonds hung from her ears, necklets from her neck, with bangles round her arms, round her ankles, rings on her fingers, rings on her toes, and a ring, by the way, in her fine little nose. At her slightest movement she rattled like a tambourine. Two bucklers of filigree gold covered her breasts; a scarlet *sari*, or scarf, flowed down behind; and a manifold blue dress, shot and laced with gold, covered, but in no way concealed, her feline slimness. She stood unconcerned; now and again she might smile, apparently with herself; and only once, when one of those hookahs that they call 'hubble-bubbles' was handed up in evidence to the judge, did a shadow of emotion cross her face.

Jack, as we said, could understand nothing of what was up, so that he was glad when the court rose for lunch. In the exit a brisk young Englishman in a *sola topi*, who had given evidence, and now was next him in the crowd, said:

'Your first experience of an Anglo-Indian court, I think?'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'I'm just from England *via* P——.'

'P——, really? Well, come round to the club for a peg.'

'What's that, then?'

'A w. and s.—ha! ha!'

'Oh, we call it a nip, or a swig, or a caulker, or a tot——'

'Ha! ha! we who?'

'I'm a South African, and an Australian, too, for that matter.'

'Ah, I thought—— Well, will you?'

'I'm much obliged,' said Jack, and they set out.

On the way they exchanged names, the court-witness saying:

'My name is Frank Coghlan, and I am the Civil Surgeon for this district.'

'That's how you came to be giving evidence, then,' said Jack: 'what was all the bobbery?'

'A nautch—poisoned her uncle. My evidence was merely medical.'

They drank together in a white-washed bar-room, and for half-an-hour discussed the countries of the world, while Mahomedan waiters moved here and there. In the midst of it, Jack, recurring to the nautch-girl, happened to say:

'Poor little girlie! I wonder if that cove who is judging her is an all-round better being than she? P'raps not.'

'Don't suppose he is,' said Coghlan: 'only he has been brought up, you know, to fight shy of nicotine-poisoning.'

'What's that, then?'

'Well—— Do you know what a hubble-bubble is? You saw that one in court, didn't you? They stick a tube into the side of a cocoanut, put a pipe-bowl at the top, and draw the smoke through water in the cocoanut, with a bubbling noise. Well, she appears to have given her uncle a spoonful of the smoky water from his hubble-bubble.'

'And was that poisonous, then?'

'By Jove, yes. Not only was it poisonous, but there is no other poison in the whole range of nature that can compare with it for deadliness—except one.'

'But I don't quite drop to it,' said Jack, 'and I thought I was down to most things going, too. Don't quite see where the poison comes in.'

'Why, it's simple. The smoke passes through the water, the water absorbs the nicotine, and therefore becomes poisonous.'

'So nicotine is a poison, then?'

'I tell you there is no other half so promptly mortal.'

Two drops kill you almost instantly. Prussic acid is the only poison ever compared to it, but the general opinion is that nicotine is the deadlier. A smuggler once covered his skin with tobacco-leaves to elude the revenue, and died on the way home. Only this morning I was reading up a case of three London workmen drinking together some years ago, one of whom dropped the juice of his pipe into another one's beer—only out of fun: as the other drank, he dropped——'

'Well, this beats me,' said Jack: 'here am I smoking all day long: doesn't some of the nicotine get down my throat?'

'By Jove, no. The throat is always on the look-out you see. Perhaps some does pass: but it is so microscopic, that little harm is done. If by chance some of the juice does get into one's mouth, you know with what horror the gorge rises to reject it.'

'Yes, that's so. But how did they drop to it that this girl's uncle had died that road?'

'By post-mortem, you know.'

'You can always tell, then, when the death is due to nicotine?'

'Yes—if the post-mortem is prompt. In that case the organs all smell of nicotine. The smell is the thing we go by——'

'And if the post-mortem isn't prompt?'

'Ah, then, it might be hard to say: when the smell is gone, there are no distinctive nicotine clues.'

'I see. But here's what beats me,' said Jack: 'in Europe, for instance, where everybody smokes, everybody has this poison ready to his hand, and can use it for murder without incurring the least suspicion through having it, yet they go to the chemist for a poison, and, by that very act, get the traps after them——'

'Yes, that's odd,' said Coghlan: 'mostly ignorance, I suppose. There was a man called Count Bocarmé of Brussels, who was executed some time ago for poisoning his brother-in-law with some drops from his pipe. But it's rare in Europe. Over here, it is more common, especially among the low-caste coolies——'

He was going to say more, but stopped: for Jack had abruptly turned away from the bar, where they were standing; and could Coghlan have seen it, he would have seen that bronzed face now sick as with sudden cholera. Jack sauntered with pocketed hands a little away, looking unconcerned, but in reality a great terror, a lifelong woe, had befallen him. He had remembered that Nibbs Raby once lived in India; he had also remembered Dr. Stanley's pipe, and where he had found it—in the bush at the edge of Thorneyfell Crag, near Lyullph's Broch. From the top of the broch one might easily throw up a pipe among the bush of the overhanging crags. It needed no seer to draw conclusions from these facts . . . and doubts which had infested him for many a day were hardly any longer doubts.

His intenser agitation lasted only a minute. He turned to that Altar where calm is; and when he had almost mastered himself, he sauntered back to Coghlan.

'Now, I'm going to ask you something that interests me,' he said. 'Ever seen that sort of briar-pipes with a little bone reservoir at their lower end, which you unscrew to toss out the nicotine?'

'Oh, yes: I know what you mean.'

'Would there be enough nicotine in one of those bone reservoirs, when it was, say, half-full of juice, to kill a man?'

'Oh, enough to kill three or four men: enough to kill fifteen or twenty men, if the juice was pure nicotine, but, of course, it isn't pure, many other products of the tobacco being mixed with it. Still, in such a reservoir half-full there is always nicotine enough for three or four deaths.'

'That's all right, then. Have another nip—or "peg," that's it'—and not another word said he about the Nautch girl.

Hours that afternoon he sat at a window of his bedroom, that pipe of Dr. Stanley's in his hand. It had remained for years at Gurrowa in the little parcel which he had left there, but had come to him before he left

South Africa for Europe. That pattern of pipe Dr. Stanley had always smoked, he alone in Bedwick, and used to get them down by the half-dozen from London. The curved bone mouthpiece had been cracked by Jack's teeth that day at the docks, but half of it still remained screwed to the wooden bowl-piece; and there still, still, was the bone reservoir, large as a small thimble, projecting outward under the bowl. If Raby really killed the doctor, to unscrew the reservoir and tip the collected nicotine into the doctor's wine must have been one instant's work, the doctor having perhaps left the wine and pipe on the parapet. The pipe seemed specially made to tempt, to tempt . . . supposing that one knew the poisonousness of the juice. And Nibbs knew! He was always such a one for cottoning to India, used to eat no end of curry and chutney, knew the people all out, and would spout little phrases, so that he, Jack, still knew some Hindustani words, though not their meaning, so often had he heard them from Nibbs. Nibbs knew, if India knew. And whether it was Nibbs who killed him or not, Jack was now certain that by nicotine the doctor had died: for that explained how the analysts and people never could drop to what the poison was; the body had first been buried, the post-mortem had been too late for them to smell the nicotine: and nicotine being unknown to them as a criminal poison, or quite unfamiliar, it had never entered their heads to dream of such a thing. From first to last there had been no mention of the words 'pipe,' 'tobacco': everything of the doctor's, even the flask, had been allowed by Nibbs to remain on the broch till the morning: but *the pipe* had been thrown into the bush. Cunning, dark cunning. But Harold surely should have remembered how the doctor smoked, especially at night: *he* at least should have thought of that word *pipe*. But no: it had never entered his head. Perhaps he had never even heard of nicotine-poisoning. It was God's will—though hard, though hard.

He was the husband of Gracie, this Nibbs. All night he lay in her bosom. And he had killed her father. . . .

But *had* he—really? When one said it aloud, the air seemed to mock it. It sounded false. It was like nightmares which, even as one dreams, one knows to be unreal. He, Jack, moreover, was under orders not to judge anyone, not to think anyone more deserving of the gallows than himself: and there he sat, hour after hour, by the window, with peepings of hate in his heart, with prayers for pardon, with mother's yearnings upon the poor ill-fated girl who had loved him, now with clearest conviction of Raby's guilt, and now again with doubts. The sun lit up the unhealthy-looking plain, the semi-ruinous battlements of the city-wall, the osiers and willows which bordered the spacious bed of the Jumna during the rains, though at present the river was a shrunken stream, quite three-quarters of a mile away, crawling through white sands, which, here and there, were covered with clothes of native washermen. Far away yonder the prolonged lines of the railway vanished into bush. A few bullock-carts, a few ponies, climbing the opposite river-bank, marked the road to Meerut. And upon that pensive, very Oriental scene the sun went down.

Still he sat looking out, unconscious of the sunset, with pain and fear, love and hate, doubt and distraction in his heart.

Was Raby verily guilty? It seemed so. But his motive? Think, think as Jack might, he could not begin to conceive a motive. Why had Dr. Stanley even gone into the broch with Nibbs that night? All was dark.

In London was Harold Pole, who, with certainty, knew Raby's motive, but could not conceive his instrument; in Delhi was Jack Hay, who, given a motive, knew with certainty Raby's instrument, but could not conceive a motive: it only remained for these two halves of knowledge to meet, in order to rush together, like exploding mixtures of oxygen and hydrogen, into perfect union and roundness of knowledge: and if the explosion did not destroy one or many, that would be a wonder.

As for Jack, he lifted himself despondently at last,

with the groan : ' My bruised Gracie, dear heart. What have I ever done, that you should meet with this? You must humble yourself, Jack, and pray—pray—pray—no ravings, no madness!—then with sudden hiss : ' that foul aas-vogel! . . . No, I must wait—no, no—patience, patience! He isn't guilty. He wouldn't have dared marry her. . . . If he's guilty, I'll soon know. I'll find out. And if he's guilty, he shall be scragged, he shall be scragged, the polecat, without mercy . . . God have mercy upon me a sinner. . . . '

Two days later he started back westward for England, intending to reside there some months.

XXXI

LITTLE LORD ARCHIE

WE who write his adventures somehow feel the temptation, common to people with a *penchant*, to represent our friend Jack Hay as now grown into a sort of 'lamb without blemish'—a representation easily made by a series of *suppressiones veri*. That, however, would be too untrue, a lamb *with* blemish being his stamp: forgetful, brutish, but struggling to remember, and be heavenly. He forgot, for instance (among other things), when he threatened Raby's 'scragging,' that Gracie had two children, so that, scragging Raby, he must needs hurt these, too, who had killed nobody. As a matter of fact, those two children were myths to him: he had heard of them with quite absent consciousness, as we hear of floods in Kamtschatka. Gracie had groaned to bear them, they daily ate, screamed, and had the stomach-ache; but they had not, as yet, gripped *his* consciousness, and forced him to realise them.

On the third morning after his return he stood in a first-floor corridor of a building in St. Martin's Lane. Eager to get to England, he had left the boat at Brindisi, and come by train: yet three days, full of doubts, had been allowed to pass without action: and still he was doubtful.

His indecision was complicated by so trivial a thing as this: that in the rather dim corridor where he paced were *two* detective agencies, one down yonder facing the length of the corridor, the other facing its breadth. He could see them both at once. Each tempted, both repelled him. For now there were two questions with him: Should he enter either? and, if one, then which?

On one door, that at the end, was marked: 'Balfour's Detective Agency: Established 1847'; on the other: 'The Secret Service Agency, Rg^d'—no date.

In Balfour's one of the partners was Harold Pole: but of that Jack had not the faintest suspicion.

He had already employed an agency to get the eleven-years'-history of his family and of Gracie, and would now have employed that same one again, but, as it was away in the City, to save himself the trouble of going there that morning, he had searched a directory at the hotel, seen that Balfour's was near, and come to it. But now he had a choice of two: for here, too, was 'The Secret Service, Rg^d'.

He fingered Dr. Stanley's pipe in his pocket, pacing slow: and the point with him was this: Would that be a Christian act to pry into Dr. Stanley's murder? Had he not to do to Raby as he would have liked Raby to do to him, supposing *he* had murdered anyone? *Had* he never murdered anyone? No: though he came horribly near it that night when he defended Gurrowa from those three of Tytler's lot—horribly near. He had murdered then in intention. And he had hated: had he not hated Ali Baba and Lord D——? After his seven years' struggle to live a decent life, did he not, even now at low moments, hate Nibbs Raby? And did not hatred send up to heaven the self-same monkey-stench as murder, no better, no worse? Someone in the Bible had said so. In what way, then, was he better than Raby, assuming Raby's guilt, which he was commanded not to assume? Was not he, Jack Hay, the worst of men and 'chief of sinners'? By what right could the worst of men pry into another's fault? Such questions troubled him to the soul. On the other hand, his nature cried out to him: 'Do something for her! somehow save her from him!—and—take her to yourself?' No, not that: or it was a whisper as inaudible as the fall of a leaf in a storm which, if audible, he would have disdainfully crushed. Finally, he compromised, though conscious down in his boots that to Christianity compromise is abominable. He did not realise that a compromise

of Dr. Stanley's at the deathbed of old Mackay had brought upon him, Jack, all the deeper woes of his life, had caused the doctor's death, had stained Raby's hands, had produced the tragedy of Gracie's life, had brought an epileptic child into the world, had made Pole a semi-drunkard, and still was darkly working to produce yet other ruins and despairs, till its capacity for slaughter should be exhausted. At any rate, Jack compromised: he decided that he would simply find out the truth, and that known, would then decide what action, if any, he should take.

To one of the two offices, therefore. Which one? That question occupied him a minute more: then he walked toward 'The Secret Service, Rgd.'

Balfour's, in which Pole was a partner, had a date, 'The Secret Service' none; this meant that the latter was new: and the trivial question which had divided him was, which was likely to be the better, the old-established and experienced, or the modern and smart? On the principle of 'new brooms' he chose the modern; and was hardly three steps from the door, when it was dashed open, a lad flew out screaming with laughter, and after him flew an orange, which divided Jack's beard, and struck his chest.

'Well,' he thought, 'they look like taking it pretty easy in there,' and this little thing decided him for old-established Balfour's: he wanted a serious concern; and his life now hanging upon the chance of a flung orange, he entered Balfour's at the corridor-end.

For two hours in a room crowded round with directories and red-leather tomes marked 'Balfour's Secret Service' in gold letters, he was telling the story to a man named Farlow, now elderly, but active, and weighty-browed.

To begin with, Jack said:

'I come to see you about a matter eleven years old: and I want, first of all, to know whether, in case you prove what I suspect, it will then be left absolutely to me to take any further steps or not, as I see fit.'

'Oh, certainly,' answered the detective: 'we are not

law officers: *I* once was, but except as your agents, we shall have no knowledge of anything that we may discover.'

'That's what I wanted to hear'—and he proceeded to relate the story, from the projected elopement to the Nautch girl. The first thing, he said, that should engage the detectives was the question whether the analyst's report of the post-mortem confirmed or refuted the suggestion of nicotine-poisoning: if it did not refute, then that would mean Raby's guilt; then the next step would be the discovery of Raby's motive.

The detective filled a couple of pages with notes that looked desultory enough, yet concentrated every grain of known fact. He then began to question—a host of questions—with more paltry notes. As the interview was unfinished at lunch-time, Jack asked him to Gatti's: and there among a noise of eaters they continued the talk.

'Now, that case of yours, Mr. Bennett,' said Farlow, 'would be just the kind of thing to tickle my partner——'

'Oh, you have a partner: well, hand it over to him, if you think best. Makes no odds to me.'

'Impossible, unfortunately. He has been at death's door over five weeks now—lung disease. Shall be pleasantly surprised if I ever see him back at the office. By the way, is it known at all what became of Jack Hay?'

'He got away to Australia.'

'But after?'

'I happen to know, but I don't see the good of telling. Better let him lie, he's a man of a strange destiny—But that says nothing: tell me now how your prospects of unravelling this whole bobbery strike you.'

'Well, when I heard the case eleven years ago, I concluded Raby's guilt, but, of course, when it seemed impossible, I acquitted him, like everybody else. I think I was in New York, and didn't go into it, except as one of the public. But with this extraordinary clue

of the pipe, I have no doubt that we shall strike oil somewhere. It may need time——'

'How much?'

'Weeks perhaps—or months. There is such a crowd of little hole-and-corner points. What, for instance, took the Rev. Lord into that tower, or broch, you call it—broch? I only wish my partner was about! It would just delight him, this case——'

'Well, you carry it off somehow,' said Jack. 'As to money, I give you *carte blanche* to chuck that about, provided we get to somewhere.'

'Well, of course, money makes the mare to go, Mr. Bennett; and you may rely upon our straining every nerve to give you satisfaction.'

Jack then returned to the hotel, where, seated in his nominal 'bedroom,' was a certain Lord Archie D——t (called 'Little Lord Archie' by K—— and his set), who was now busy with preparations for Jack's *début*. He was a little man of thirty-six, delicate-handed, thin-shanked, effeminate, and stale as the inveterate *viveur*, his straight hair forming a perfect arch round his forehead, his pasty face a perfect oval.

'Just from Savile Row,' he remarked, as Jack began to roll about, 'saw your tailors——'

'Damn my tailors,' growled Jack, not pleased with himself that day.

'They were already damned by me,' lisped Lord Archie (his upper teeth were all little dark stumps): 'they promised me some of the things for to-night, and now they say—can't.'

'What did *you* say?'

'I said that there was no such word in the dictionary.'

'What did *they* say then?'

'That it was tailor's-slang for "cannot."'

'Damned barneying,' growled Jack, pacing like a bear: 'I wish you'd be slippy about it, and let's hook this London hole as soon as I can. There's no room—no air——Hoh!—how is a man to breathe without air?'

'I am very sorry. P'raps I'd better take you to Richmond or somewhere. I'm afraid you'll find it

deucedly close, especially at crushes. I know the feeling. I only wish I could do something——'

'Don't say a word,' said Jack, patting the small head: 'you try your best. Forgive me—I'm not in a very good mood to-day, old man. Ah, we must do what's right, Master Lord Archie—we must, we must—what we're told to, you see? not what we think we will, but what we're told to, you see? and then it will be well with us; if we *don't*—ah! it will still be well, but not so well.'

Lord Archie considered that, sitting there more a type than a man, mean but thoroughbred, bluest-blooded but poor, and stiffest in his cuffs, but not looking a fool, in spite of his flabby little flat-lipped smile: for his (blue) eyes had worldly sense and vigour, and he had shot koodoo and hartebeest in South Africa, an occupation which redeems. He had even printed the dreadful diary of his treks, and would give one a copy. But Jack had not met him out there; their acquaintance was three days old: yet it had the intimacy of years.

'As to the studs and gloves——' began Lord Archie.

'Damn the gloves, damn the gloves, old man,' said Jack mournfully, with flung arms of despondency: 'and, after all, what's that about gloves? can't I go as I am? I thought they all cottoned so to millionaires——'

'Well, yes, but one might give some hint of linen to their cottoning: that's only fair. They are people, don't you know, very apt to ignore whatever isn't writ large before their eyes, so one must not only be a millionaire, but look one, otherwise there's a dreadful imaginative strain. No, Bennett, no: we must do this thing with *éclat*. I could pull you through in a blanket, you know: but that's not it: my ambition is to see you the undisputed lion of the Season. There's my own credit to be considered, too, you know. I mean to make you go everywhere, entertain like a sultan, and everywhere you must be *the* star. You have just that touch of nature which has the effect of a Doric brogue, and, in conjunction with much money, is often most popular. I don't see why you should not carry every-

thing before you, Bennett: I don't, really. I shall feel beastly cut up, if you don't. I shall feel that I have taken your money, without really bringing you off. But you must let one form you——'

'What's that, then?'

'Form you—that means hints about things, and so on, doesn't it? How to talk to the men, to the women—Bennett, you are too *opiniâtre* to talk possibly at present. You have opinions which you know to be right, and you patronize everybody who does not hold them like Lilliputians. That's—you must let one be frank, you know—that's—provincial. It is perfectly proper to despise everyone, but you must not reveal why, or at once you reveal a limitation. One looks down upon people in the abstract, doesn't one? There must be no special reason. And in Society one has no opinions, you know, only notions. Speech is to conceal that we are liking our dinner, isn't it? And the point is, to talk and talk without saying anything——'

'That's what baboons do,' observed Jack, still rolling about, with his horseman-straddle.

'There, now,' said Lord Archie: 'is that daintily said? It's—it's—provincial, though so true. We even know that God sees that we are baboons. But look a little closer than God, and you'll find that we are baboons with a difference: the ass once put on the lion's skin——'

'That can't do much biting, my friend.'

'No, I know. But, Bennett, I must somehow get you to admit that a lion's skin *has* a value, if I am to bring you off with *éclat*. An egg, now, isn't all meat, is it? There are even some eggs, like the tinamou's, which one values only for the shell. And if the meat is rotten, all the more need for a shell, to hide the smell. We are monkeys that have got hold of fallen-angels' skins, and all I say is that an angel's skin, though fallen, is of *some* value—a form of culture. Culture is deucedly many-sided, isn't it? not of the torso only, but of the toes. I know a Boer man who could pick you down a running gazelle any day at eight hundred

yards. There's culture, now—equal to any saint's or poet's in degree. You, now, are a man, I can see, who has attained an awfully high culture in at least one direction—moral culture: and you believe that, when you die, you will go straight into a society of angels, while I shall be thirty thousand ages in hell and purgatory, before I see one holy cow or bee, if ever. Now, I anticipate my hot millenniums, Bennett; but frankly, I can't think that the cherubim would associate with anyone straight from Johannesburg. When you die, take my word for it, you'll be sent to some mild school of harping for two hundred years, then to somewhere where one learns to eat bread-and-honey prettily, and with all my ages of fire, there'll be arts for you to learn which I, to some small extent, already know——'

'There's something in that, too,' said Jack with a nod: 'p'raps I'm a bit too cocky with myself—if it's true that I seem to despise any man, lord or no lord. Ask me for an extra £100 presently for saying that, and if ever you see me despise anybody again, just whisper "Johannesburg," and I forfeit you a £100-cheque each time.'

'Good business!' went Lord Archie, pleased as Punch: 'have I enlarged your mind, then?'

'You have—a bit. Look here, I *will* wire in with you all out in this affair, as you suggest, since I have to. When do we launch out?'

'As soon as ever we get the vile things! To-morrow night, if we get them, entertainment at Lady de R——'s, M—— to sing, supper in garden'—he read from a velum pocket-book—'day after, first Newmarket spring-meeting, Duke of C—— going down: you and he bound to chum; Thursday, polo-season opens, Ranelagh; Friday, private view at the R.A.; evening, diner d'asant at Mrs. L——'s; Saturday——'

'Yes, but don't forget the point,' said Jack: 'these places won't be too agreeable to me: I am going with the sole object of meeting certain people——'

'Quite so. But, in general, I can only make guesses: one can't be perfectly sure that so-and-so will be

anywhere: but there will always be a ten to one chance——'

'Newmarket, for instance: what would they be doing there?'

'Why, that's the place! It is perfectly well known in Society that, since her husband went under, few turf-women have plunged like Lady Perowne; and as to the Marchioness of D——, she dropped at least £15,000 last racing-season——'

'Fifteen ——!'—Jack started—'that must have made a hole in her husband's pocket. . . .'

'Not counting what D—— himself dropped; there were even whispers about of "whom the gods wish to destroy . . ." don't you know? Fact is, Perowne's collapse upset the whole crew. Old Hay came to the rescue, so did D——, and that pulled everybody down all round; then, to make up the lee-way, both men and women began to plunge in stocks, horses, and cards, and dropped another pot of money in that way. I happen to know that D—— has been mortgaging pretty deep.'

Jack was looking down into the rush and roar of Northumberland Avenue, with turned back, but keen ear.

'How do you know all that?'

'One knows, you know. You will soon see how. Society is a village in Arcadie built over a whispering-gallery. If a woman gambles, that can't be hidden, because she always loses, and as her losses form part of the world's gaiety, no one would tolerate not knowing. I don't know why they gamble: they have to, I suppose, or everybody would be in the Divorce Court. Epsom acts as a counter-irritant—salts to the salacious—you see: but their virtue costs them dearer than their jewels, and to that extent they are real martyrs, for to save their reputations they lose their heads. They always lose their heads, for I never yet knew a woman on the right side, Bennett, at the end of her second racing-season. Cræsus must have been a bookmaker in Lesbos——'

'Old Hay gamble at all?' asked Jack suddenly.

‘Not that I know of—oh, on the Exchange, of course: but *Mrs.* Hay plunges. There are a certain number of racing-women, you know, whose names get to be associated with the big fixtures: and lately hers has been rather one of them. She is one of those women that feel with their faces, and I have seen her quite pale during the June and July weeks, haunting the paddock, gloating upon the finish——’

A sigh came from the window, then:

‘Come along, let’s have some lunch——’

‘Great heavens!’ exclaimed Lord Archie, ‘pray forgive me, my dear Bennett, I never, of course, dreamt that you hadn’t had lunch——’

‘I have had—what *you* call lunch: but we can have another, I suppose? And after it you just take me somewhere out of this London. Better get two good horses, and let’s ride down to Scotland or somewhere. Where’s Buddo?’

‘At the bank, probably. He told me——’

‘Well, let him go to blazes. It’s you and I for the present, Lord Archie, you and I. We’ve got a charitable work to do, though stern. Come.’

XXXII

THREE COUCHÉES

IT was the dance of the week—at a house in Grosvenor Place — whither half-a-dozen hostesses had carted dinner-guests in lots, most people had brought a daughter, there were two *débutantes*, and plenty of men under the age of Enoch. There first Jack Hay saw nearly all his people—only Sir Markham Perowne being absent. He had met them separately, often enough ; but now, by chance, together.

They struck him still with surprise, all looking older by eleven years' ticklish flying-machine voyaging, whereas he had expected to find them in the old spot. The Scythe of Time had been at old Hay's head, and mown it like a meadow down and round toward the ears and nape, leaving not a blade amid-field ; his square beard was grey, that broad back stooped a bit, but still his upper-lip was stern. Harriet had grown larger, more regal, world-versed ; 'Gussie, too, was a heavier womanhood, and looked a mother, but somewhat careworn : there had been 'troubles,' and that scornful lower-lip had trembled (her upper-lip was thin, the lower thick and scornful in expression, her nose delicately aquiline), but still she seemed to Jack the most beautiful woman in London. Some days previously he had been gazing at her portrait at someone's private-view at the Grafton, where she hung full-length, holding a sheaf of purple irises against white draperies, and turning from his gaze, not knowing that she was in the crowd, had suddenly met her eyes : whereat 'Gussie had blushed all up her face, a

blush that disquieted Jack: for it was not the first time that she had so blushed at him, and there was the question whether some gleam of recognition— But no; the moment she spoke he was reassured: no hint of light was there.

Harriet, however, that first day at the bazaar, had twice glanced at him. His voice had in it a certain vibrancy or thrill, which, ordinarily, was like a struck harp-string, at a shareholder's-meeting suggested a clarion or bleat, and when he shouted was really clarionlike; and, hearing it, she had certainly glanced in a quick way. It was at a floral *fête*: there selling marqueterie and woodcarving she had stood, robed in peach-mauve, within an art-stall of briony trellis-work and smilax, and Jack, seeing her, had felt for one instant his purposes hesitate in his heart, she seeming so truly queenlike, not beautiful alone, but good, helping some charity. Little Lord Archie had presented him, and hearing his voice, twice she had glanced: but, after all, with no ray of recognition. Something had called to her: 'Here is the well-known'; but it called to a consciousness profoundly asleep, and preoccupied with the old certainty that he was dead.

He had astonished her by buying up all her stall and half the bazaar, article by article, driving bargains for each; then he had presented to the charity all that he had bought.

He had been to a recital and to a dance at the D—— town-house in Brook Street; then he had met Harriet with singular frequency everywhere, and had begun to wonder at it, when Lord Archie explained: they met because the marchioness wished to meet him, the fact being that she was chaperoning a *débutante* named Lily Barnes, whom she was going to marry to him. 'And don't smile in that self-sure fashion, Bennett,' Lord Archie had said: 'my Lady Marchioness of D—— is a woman who has married herself, and can marry other people. You must bear in mind a woman's point-of-view with regard to men: there are no men to them, really, only Man, the

trouser-creature. Whenever they like one man, it is because they have the notion that there is more Man in him than in anybody, and the reason they don't like their husbands long is because he soon shows them that he is not so much Man as a man: then they call him a brute; and he, with clinching intuition, replies, "You are a lady." Was Eve true to Adam, Bennett? Yes—till Cain was sixteen. And the point is this: that the marchioness, having induced D—— to marry, feels that she could induce the Pope: for both wear trousers. The news that you are a bachelor created a flutter, you know, and the crowd of dowagers after you are no triflers and amateurs. The danger is perfectly real. But the Marchioness of D—— is probably the brainiest woman in Society, and her competitive instinct is piqued about you, I can see. I should stamp out Miss Lily Barnes, Bennett, if I were you.' After which warning, Jack cut Harriet short, when she next began to describe Lily Barnes' ancestry, saying:

'I shan't be marrying her, you know.'

'Ah, Heaven!' she murmured, with upraised eyes: 'how frank!'

They were leaning over a parapet in Grosvenor Place, looking upon the garden, where two marquees were, and people moving among the trees in the warm foreday.

'I *am* pretty frank, you know,' he said: 'is that a good or a bad thing?'

'It is a labour-saving appliance,' she said: 'but such things are hardly pretty; and if one gets one's finger in, they grind.'

'Keep your finger out, then,' said he. 'Why, after all, trouble, giving yourself headaches and heartaches for phantoms, and that which profits not? Eh? Tell me that, now—tell me!'

'I shall run. You always speak in that fashion to me. I shall really go. You are the only extraordinary man I have ever, ever met—let us talk of Lily—of Miss Barnes——'

Somehow she was agitated.

‘Of anything but Miss Barnes,’ said Jack. ‘How shall I convince you that that is useless?—well, then, I love someone else.’

This caused her—not for the first time at words of his—to blush throughout her being, just as Augusta had blushed at seeing his gaze at her portrait. She tittered, saying:

‘But this is frankness with a venom! One can’t bear everything at once. All your news come like cablegrams. “Time, gentlemen, time!” as they say at the cafés. I can’t hear any more about love to-night: there is no moon—for the moment. Tell me something else frank about yourself. About *money!* and how it feels to be awfully, awfully rich.’

‘It feels all right,’ said he.

‘Is it true that you don’t know how much money you have?’

‘Sometimes I do. But if I know one hour, I don’t know the next. It’s always rising and falling by big jumps.’

‘How sublime! Is it wrong to ask——? How much have you got—about?’

‘Well, within the last three months I think it has always been somewhere between eight and nine millions sterling.’

She hummed an air to express her unutterable musings.

‘That’s not fair!’ she pouted. ‘It ought to be more equally divided. Why, you could buy a Throne—you can do anything that you only dream of. How does it *feel?*’

‘It feels all right. There are things that feel between eight and nine millionfold nicer.’

‘What, for instance?’

‘Love,’ said he.

Again she blushed, rich and red: but he could not see in the shadow where they leant.

‘Cupidity is the subject for to-night,’ she said: ‘Cupid is a boy, and grows like a rose by keeping. I want to know your whole secret—just how you do it. Will you tell me? You will have to. If a man can do it,

a woman can do it. But I have heard that some of your *coups* on the Exchanges are just like magic or divination; they say that you seem to have known beforehand what no one could possibly have known. Is that true?

'I don't know beforehand, I guess. Shall I tell you the secret of my guessing?'

'Do!'

'It's something which you haven't at present, but which everyone can get. It's callousness.'

'Tell me——'

'I mean that usually I don't care whether I lose eight millions or gain them: therefore I gain them. You know how, if you gamble for someone else, you always win. Well, when I deal, I do it for other people really; I don't care much either road, and looking at the facts with a perfectly cool head, I generally drop to the truth of them. There isn't much in it. But before you can get to that callousness, you must learn that there is something so infinitely better than eight millions, that they're not worth picking up in the street.'

'And that something is——?' said she.

'Love,' said he, and laid his hand upon hers.

'My poor head,' she murmured, slowly withdrawing her hand: 'you are terrible with your love and your millions and your callousness. You have a giant's pocket, a giant's consciousness, and a giant's jacket. You hear those men dancing that extra in there? Any two of them could dance on your two palms and find room. Don't you heartily despise everybody?'

'There's no despising,' said he: 'just the opposite. No doubt I should despise them, if I had time; but my time is so taken up in despising what's in myself, that everybody seems a peg above me. Or, rather, that's how it ought to be, if it isn't.'

'Now, there's a speech,' she said, half to herself: 'so simple, yet so impregnable. You are not only a giant, but a child. And you were not born either, but became both. You are the creature of some Idea, of which no one else has ever even heard. You should not puzzle! The woman whom you say you love will probably

follow you over any precipice in this world, because of your mystery, without feeling at all alarmed, because of your strength, and, if you both get fractured, she will be sorrier for you than for herself, because of your childhood. I believe you are mainly a child. One could make you do whatever one chose——'

'What about Miss Lily Barnes, then?' said he.

'Ah, poor Lily!—I forgot her. Well, then, you are a stubborn child; and it is the Idea that makes you stubborn. You have been among the Central African blacks and learned some dark world-secret from one of the obiah-men at his death-bed. And that one whisper makes you not only unique, but distinguished, and not only distinguished, but eminent. So there's frankness. When are you going to tell one that obiah-secret?'

'Soon,' said he; and again he muttered, 'soon.'

'Was it in Africa that you learned it, really?'

'No, in Australia.'

'From a black, I hope? Were you in Africa or Australia most?'

'Rather more in Australia.'

'I am very curious, you see. Will you tell me sometime about your life? It must be absorbing: "Anthrophagi and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders——"'

'I don't see that there's so much to tell,' he said in a low voice, looking down upon the gravel-walk: 'sad stories are pretty simple mostly. I was born in England, you know. But as a lad something came between my life and me, somehow. I can't very well explain it to you, but I was utterly cut off, somehow, from whatever is sweet and happy. There's a little green place in the desert for most poor devils, some home or heart, but when I came to my bit of oasis the well was crowded round with strangers in holiday dress, and they stoned me away like a cur. There's no bitterness left, you know: that's all long since forgiven, ten times forgiven, a hundred times. But so it was. The very spirit of drought and withering got hold of my roots. I looked for something, I

gave something, but I could get not one morsel of it——'

'And that was——?' said she very gently.

'Love,' said he.

'I am sorry for you,' she said, with downcast eyes.

'No, don't be, not now. That's all past. For every hurt there is, there's a herb somewhere to heal it, and I don't believe that ever a tear was shed but shall find its consolation. That's all past. And even then—even then—there was a Finger in my pie, I tell you. Some most unmerited mercy kept me from downright ignominy and stains that there's no washing out. That was all right, wasn't it? And I found love where I least looked for it. That wasn't bad, that wasn't bad. And since I've left the old country, I've gone by a road that I couldn't—tell you of: crooked enough, rough enough, but blooming with flowers that I couldn't see, and leading to goldfields where it's *all* gold—houses of gold—streets of gold——'

He tossed down his cigar, his eyes looking, not now upon the gravel-walk, but upon the stars.

Without much comprehension, she yet experienced the spell of his earnest mood. Whispers the most *bizarre* and inscrutable were awaked in her by the mere trill of his voice. She hardly recognised herself.

'You will tell me,' she murmured.

Now came a man, bowing to her, from the suite of drawing-rooms where they danced. She had half forgotten where she was, and was somehow glad to get away and dance. But she spoke little to anyone that morning.

The next day, in the early afternoon, one of the greatest puzzles that ever knit her brows occurred in her life. She had returned home to lunch from the Row, a charm to the eye in a large picture-hat and white chiffon gown, with Lily Barnes and a man in the carriage; and, happening to enter the book-room for something, still fresh from the drive, hatted still and gloved, she saw something strange on a table—something black and gleaming. She gave one glance

at it, then sat to scribble a hurried note, but midway was again attracted by the thing, peered nearer, could not understand, and rang.

‘What’s that, Joseph?’ she asked.

‘I hardly know, my lady. Looks to me like one of those typewriters.’

‘When did it come?’

‘Half an hour ago, my lady. I thought I would bring it in here——’

‘A typewriter for *me*!’

Again she looked at the fillet of parchment tied to the cover-handle. Certainly it bore her name: ‘Marchioness of D——, Brook Street.’

‘This cover-thing comes off,’ she said. ‘Just remove it.’

The footman, after some fumbings, got off the cube of japanned tin. A shining Remington typewriter was revealed.

The marchioness’s puzzled brows were mixed with a sort of half-laugh, and both with a certain disturbance of the breathing. At the same time she saw a piece of paper on the keys with some typewritten words on it. She took it up. The words were:

‘*Learn to write on this machine quickly while you may.*’

She laughed a little, holding the paper before her; but she did not like it *au fond*. There was a little pallor in her face, and a little horror in her laugh.

‘It seems to be some very absurd hoax,’ she said, ‘if it is not a mistake. Better take it away.’

‘Where to, my lady?’

‘Anywhere,’ said she, and sat again to her note.

But at lunch she had moments of absentness, so that Lily Barnes said:

‘Auntie, you are either tired of the season or undergoing the result of a race. You seem *distracte*.’

‘I am rather undergoing the result of the season, dear, and tired of races. No, I was thinking——’

But she stopped. She was on the point of relating the typewriter pleasantry, but something or other checked her—some hint of the ominous. She now felt a touch of malice against the *outré* sender of the

thing. It might mean more than she knew. Her husband was not prospering. . . .

Ever and anon during the course of the afternoon the typewriter recurred to her mind. As to those words, 'Learn to write on this machine quickly while you may,' she knew them by heart.

About 3.30 she happened to be alone in her *cabinet de toilette* when a voice outside called, 'Are you about?' And at her answering call of 'Yes,' a handsome crinoline hat peeped in, then Augusta herself, robed in palest mauve voile with pearls, saying:

'Only a minute, in passing. . . . Markham has just been appointed a Page of Honour (Markham was her ten-year-old), and we shall have—— What's *that* thing?'

She had started.

'Where?' asked Harriet.

'There!'

Augusta pointed to the foot of a silver-strewn dressing-table, the fall of whose drapery was slightly interrupted by some object. A thin black gleam only could be seen: Harriet had not noticed it. It was the typewriter, which, like Noah's dove, or a cat in a strange house, found scant footing in the D—— *ménage*. The footman, at a loss where to rid himself of it, had at last smuggled it there, but not hidden it perfectly.

'Oh, absurd!' exclaimed Harriet; 'it is that typewriter thing again——'

Instantly Augusta's bosom heaved, and with *her* half-laugh, too, was mixed a breath of agitation. She said:

'What, have *you* got one, too?'

'*Too?*'

'*I* have,' said Augusta.

Then they looked at each other, and about each nose and underlid was palish affright. They were silent: the forced laugh died on their lips.

'When?' asked Harriet.

'This morning,' said Augusta. 'When did you get yours?'

‘This morning,’ said Harriet.

‘Did a piece of paper with some words come with yours?’ asked Augusta.

‘Yes,’ said Harriet.

‘What words?’

‘I—— It is absurd. *You* tell me your words.’

‘Mine said: “Learn to write on this machine quickly while you may.” Was that what yours said?’

‘Something of that sort.’

‘Not those very words?’

‘Well, yes, then,’ said Harriet.

‘Good Lord, Harrie! what does it mean?’ whispered Augusta, overtaken by a sudden, deeper pang.

‘How should I know, ‘Gussie?’

They looked at each other. Both were big women, solid-waisted, wealthy-bosomed, in the most sumptuous charms of their maturity, especially Augusta, now thirty-eight years, whom it would have needed a strong man to carry up a stair. The more they gazed the whiter became each nose and underlid, and the more their bosoms worked.

‘It is some hoax,’ said Harriet.

‘It may be,’ said Augusta; ‘but what is your feeling? The *two* of us! It must be someone who knows—— I don’t feel that it is a hoax.’

‘It is,’ said Harriet, too proud to admit that she saw a ghost.

‘But it is rather a dear hoax to be quite meaningless. These things must cost £20 or £25 a-piece. I can’t dream who would have been at the pains——’

‘It may be Charlie, or Markham, or papa,’ said Harriet, but she knew very well that it was not.

‘Certainly not Markham, and not papa: they haven’t £50 to throw away on absurdities. Say someone who has it in his power to ruin us——’

Their mutual stare of awe would soon have drawn all colour from their faces, but at those words Harriet turned away with the reply:

‘No one has it in his power to ruin the Marchioness of D——, dear,’ and the spell of panic was broken.

They continued to discuss the possibilities of the

typewriters, Augusta pacing about, playing her parasol, Harriet seated at the mirror, proud and strengthening, saying that some one would have to be horsewhipped. Then, the subject exhausting itself, Augusta said :

'Well, time will show, if there's anything to show. You are happy, dear, but I have two children with futures before them. I told you, didn't I, that Markham has just been made a Page? He *will* be pleased! By the way, the two Rabys and Miss Ames had lunch with me.'

Harriet was silent one second too long ; then said :

'You are full of news. When did they come up?'

'On Monday. They are staying in town a week with the St.-John-Heygates, and then going abroad. Gracie has become awfully gay and amusing, but really, really, Harrie——'

'Well?'

'*Foie gras*,' said Gussie: 'old cheese. One might almost say depraved—at any rate, *détraquée*, over-modern. She chatters, chatters, chatters, and it's all scandal, never a good word for anyone. From her point of view, Society is a mere sty—it's horrid, really!'

'And absurd, too,' said Harriet: 'every aristocracy is rotten, or soon becomes so ; but compare ours with the Imperial, the Borgian, the Dogian, even the Louis Quinze, or the present Russian, and we are all models of propriety——'

'Gracie says it is the men who keep the women straight, or Society would fester. Really, I was quite vexed after she went. The Chamber of Horrors may be amusing while it lasts, but afterwards it depresses. Anyone much with her would inevitably acquire a morbid outlook. Where she hears the stories I don't know—she has only been three days in town—but she teems. She says that the E——s' separation is the result of quarrels due to the lady's insistence upon painting him black all over, as she is no longer pleased with white men. Also that Lady C——'s three children are the sons of a private in the Irish Fusiliers hired by Lord C—— at £100 a year ; also that it isn't really the old duke's tyranny which has made Lord Frank P——

carry off his two sisters from home, since it is a runaway match *à trois*; also——’ and now she bent to Harriet’s ear with a yet deeper mystery, which Harriet heard with knitted brows and smiling lips.

‘I don’t see anything so extraordinary in all that,’ said Harriet: ‘three at least of her stories are true, to my knowledge; but people’s conduct can’t be expected to conform to Bayswater and Clapham notions. Such things are regrettable, but they make talk. And about Nibbs—is he better than Gracie?’

‘Oh, don’t mention Mr. Raby, Harrie! Ugh!—he oppresses with his sanctimony. That man will *never* acquire the tone of Society. Mama has beaten him by thousands of miles. The last thing I heard him say was something about “a home beyond the skies,” complicated by “our Mother and all saints”—dreadful person!’

‘Poor Nibbs!’ said Harriet: ‘the only hope left for him now is some fresh flame. But I’m afraid it’s too late: his wife has prematurely reduced him to his breviary. Instead of husbanding him, as he deserved, she has expected him to husband her. He has hinted as much to me. If I had a man with such a face, I should stick up in his bedroom a week-to-week curriculum of his pleasures and diet. I have often wondered that the other women in Society don’t consider him too good to belong to only one. Is he shaven now, or has he a beard?’

‘A small beard. But really, Harrie, I can’t help thinking all that an aberration of your taste. Mr. Raby could never give me one quickened pulse. So, then, you were really *éprise* that time? I have often wished to know the actual truth——’

‘No-o-o!’ protested Harrie: ‘not too specially, I think. One is touched by his face . . . and there are the weaker moments. That season he used to give little restaurant parties—with a view to me, of course. And I would go. You were *accouchée* with little Aimée then, I think. Then there were presents and hankering. But it was all very timorous and nibbly. The goose was afraid of the big Fire, and I, I suppose, of

Heaven. Then Earth, too, intervened: his wife got to know, and made her absurd to-do. She pretends to despise him, but only let anyone touch him——'

'Did he use to—kiss you, Harrie?' 'Gussie asked, and stood in suspense.

'Some parts of me,' said Harriet.

'Which parts?'

'Prurient curiosity, my dear.'

'But seriously. You know that *I* should tell *you*, Harrie, if that ever happened to me,' said 'Gussie almost pleadingly.

'He didn't use to kiss my lips. *One* night, perhaps: it was far up on the river—near Iffley Mill—and I was dreamy. Yes, he did a great lot, then. Poor human Nibbs, he forgot all the "offices" that night—except the "Salutation." But I was soon disgusted with the man. I found out that he was at least as much in love with his wife as with me, and more with his confessor than with either. At present, of course, I am quite, quite fever-free—of *him*, certainly. Poor Nibbs was the veriest twig: but there are such things as dark-rooted, rough-trunked, mighty oaks in the world, are there not, my 'Gussie?'

'Another, then? Let me see, who is a dark-rooted, rough-trunked, mighty oak in Society? He has plenty of compound adjectives. I know no one—except perhaps one. But it can't be he. He is apparently *épris* with—someone else——' And she blushed just a little.

'Whom do you mean?' asked Harriet.

'The Colonial creature.'

'With whom is he *épris*?'

'I mustn't gossip.'

'Say.'

'Not yet. One is not sure yet——' And Gussie's little smile was secretive.

'You seem absurd, with your secrecies, dear,' said Harriet: 'but in this case you miscarry. *He* isn't for everyone.'

And she, too, smiled confidently, knowing in whom she believed, while Augusta looked at her watch, saying:

‘Oh, I must go! He is coming to meet papa, the Mac,—and Mrs. Mac—at dinner to-night, and afterwards the Opera——’

‘Who is?’

‘Mr. Bennett.’

‘Really? You might have invited me——’

‘Come, if you like.’

‘One can’t in that sudden way: I am taking Lily to Lady C——m’s dinner and musical party. I didn’t think you would like his way.’

‘Whose way?’

‘Mr. Bennett’s.’

‘But I do. I like him exceedingly. How awfully popular he seems just now! Gracie has been plying me with questions about him for half-an-hour. I have heard people say that they like his terse little heavy remarks on things. He said at Lady W——’s Tuesday dinner for Claire’s *début* that it is apish for a lot of people at dinner to feed each one himself, but each ought to feed his neighbour, and be fed by his neighbour, for that is how the angels “feed.” It might really be pretty, don’t you think? People like his simplicity and humble way——’

‘People!’ went Harriët scornfully, jealous that she was not his only discoverer, ‘canaille, you mean! They don’t understand his humility, or anything about him. It isn’t the humility of a boor, it is the humility of one who stoops——’

‘Well, who said that it wasn’t? If you understand it, other people can, I imagine. I didn’t know you knew him so well as all that. You are strange! The man is in everybody’s mouth—I don’t see why they shouldn’t understand him as well as you. What’s there to understand? He is humble and kind—— They say that this month he has come to the rescue of three City houses that were going to fail, and his gifts to the Mansion House and Charities are record-breaking. He is very much mixed up, too, with papa and Markham in business. Markham has high auguries of it, and there’s some talk of Bennett becoming a partner in Hay and Perowne. Wouldn’t that be jolly? They’re

not faring too well as it is, apparently. By the way, Markham says that Bennett resembles you about the eyes, Harrie, and I do think there is something— Oh, I *must* go! The man invited himself to my dinner, by the way—said he wanted to see the children. I didn't know that he knew that I had any children— Oh, just look at that dreadful typewriter thing! every time I move, I can see it leer in the glass— Must go— Good-bye—'

She put a negligent kiss on Harrie's cheek, and ran.

'Come again!' called Harriet: 'we used to be much greater chums—'

But 'Gussie was gone: there was no time for love with them.

Jack duly dined with the elder sister that night, and bent with a long kiss over the black head of Aimée asleep in her cot; after which they all drove to the Opera, where Madame B——, the new American prima donna, sang *à merveille*, no longer with the 'throbbing throat' of Keats, but with that throbbing, white money-chest, where she kept her venal voice. It was so hot, that everybody walked about the foyer and passages, as if it were Paris; and by the middle of the second act, Jack's suffocation had become painful to see. Augusta went out with him, and they strolled for a time in the passage behind the boxes; and once, passing her fan, he took her hand, saying:

'Going to give me those two children?'

'Oh, not *both!*' she said, sailing her hand slowly out of his, 'I should be like a cat seeking her drowned kittens. You must choose one—'

'I have a down on both,' said he. '*Aut Cæsar aut nihil.* Do you know Latin? That means: "Either Cæsar or nothing." And you shan't ever see them again, except by special permit: nobody is going to nurse them, touch them, see them, except me; they shall be all buried away in a convent in my heart—'

She glanced at him, conscious of some odd influence and perfume from somewhere, but very vaguely conscious; and soon she had to give him up to Mr. Hay and Sir Markham Perowne, the three men strolling

together, up and down, a long time, talking what they often talked—business. Jack put his arm within his father's; and Mr. Hay, who had been three years living a life of secret panic, felt that night a strange calm, like one who leans on an arm of adamant after much floundering, and is comforted.

They parted before the opera-house itself, the others driving northward, Jack walking just a little eastward to his sleeping-place.

At much about the same hour his two sisters and he went to their several beds: but with how different thoughts! If we give one glance at the *couchée* of each in turn, we see Augusta seated before her mirror, languid after the day, undergoing a slow disrobement; and the thought in her head is this:

'Is he genuinely *épris*? . . . It seems so. How he gazes at one! . . . Yet it isn't quite like other men's—somehow. . . . He is *bête*!'

Twenty minutes afterwards, Harriet arrives at *her* house in Brook Street, asks the question: 'Is the marquess at home?' and receives the answer: 'He is in the book-room, my lady.' The hour is late for solitary study, and with some softness she goes thither, and looks in. The marquess is seated at a table littered with papers, auditors' reports, deeds, letters, prospectuses, telegrams, tabulated statements, files, estate-maps, ledgers, and so on, making quite a little sea of paper; but all that Harriet can see of him is the top of his large, yellow head, in which some silver hairs now show, the head lying abandoned on his forearms on the table. The carpet is soft, and he is not aware of her, till she touches him, saying: 'What is the matter?' whereat he raises his broad, shaven face, which for the moment looks swollen, and says: 'That you? Well, I am tired and worn out . . . I wish I was dead.'

'What is the matter?' says she again.

'Nothing that you can follow.'

'Try me and see.'

'Oh, not now, my dear! Better go to bed. I have had a bad day. . . .'

'Another?'

'Yes, yes, I am worried. If words were sovereigns, I should talk all night, and all to-morrow and the next day, without stopping to eat or to breathe; I should—— But that can do no good. Forgive me—I know you mean well. But I have sunk a great lot of money again——'

'What on?'

'Cape Copper.'

'But why persist in gambling, if you find that you are not lucky?'

He flushes with sudden heat.

'I *am* lucky! I *am*! Of all the millions of men in the world, only one was born Charles Stanley, by Heaven! Luck is innate in the texture of my being, in the process of my breathing and digestion. I have always been lucky, and I shall and will be lucky still!—if things only cease to oppose me. And you talk about ceasing to gamble—as if that were at all possible now! It is possible for your ladyship—it is possible for your ladyship's sister and mother: but your ignorance of the situation must be complete, if you imagine it possible for me. You may have heard of such things as conveyances, liens, mortgages, and bills of foreclosure——'

The marquess is a stiff-minded man, narrow, and shall we say proud? Yes, but of all the things under the sun nothing is droller than that pride. He is not proud of his mind and breeding, nor of 'his' lands and Abbey, his birth and place. He is proud because he is he. He dreamt one night in his cradle that he is the Archone, and for him Venus runs the sky. He has his being in the ghost of a fancy; and his house is not built upon the sands, it is built upon the winds.

'My ignorance is not quite complete,' replies the marchioness, 'and from to-morrow morning it begins to cease. I offer myself as your helpmeet henceforth, Charlie. I have no taste for titled ruin. I must know, and—advise.'

'You are perfectly welcome,' says he. 'I know that you have brains—that you are mainly brains. That is why we have no heir to our miseries, I suppose——'

'I wonder if that is a reproach?' says she, with some touch of softness somewhere.

'On the contrary, it is a compliment. Your children are all high-born—up in the head—like Jove's: quite Olympian, you see. It is *chic* to have no chicks, though sometimes—disheartening. But I hope we are not quarrelling. There is no need. Look into the position, if you like, and see if your brains can help. It is all here in black and white. I don't know, by the way, if I ought to tell you now—but—the Villa Medici is gone——'

'Gone!'—she starts. (The Villa Medici was their Cannes home.)

'Gone, or just going, and not for a quarter of its value. Monday was the forfeiture-date—Hughes and Berridge, you know—and I can't possibly meet the mortgage just now, unless we cut the season, and go hiding quietly somewhere. But that, of course, I should never expect of you. I could apply to the Court for a sale-order, you know, but that would mean instant publicity——'

'Oh dear, no, never that,' she mutters, quite pale, yet haughty.

'No, of course. But I am going to tell you a fancy of mine now, Harrie: sometimes it feels to me just as if something, or somebody, is working in the dark against me all the time. Undoubtedly it sounds odd: but I can't help that. It is only within the last three months or so. Nothing, *nothing* that I do comes off. It is like some sort of current—a good strong one, too, strong and ruthless—that is steadily opposing me, and will carry me away yet—good God!'

Sweat-beads stand on his brow; and his wife stands ghastly silent. She is about to say: 'That is too fanciful,' but something stabs her heart with the memory of the two typewriters, and the words perish on her lip. She tells him nothing of the typewriters: some fear, some shame, restrains her.

'Last month,' continues the marquess, 'I was a bear for a great lot of Mulwarries, and was quite certain that they would slacken before I had to buy: in fact, I

had private information. But they didn't slacken; I waited—they didn't, they wouldn't, slacken; over £25,000 was at stake, and to the last day I hoped. But by then they had gone up, instead of slackening. Soon afterwards I got to know that Bennett's Bank had been artificially keeping them up—why, I don't know——'

'Bennett's?' says she: 'why, good gracious, if you had only approached Mr. Bennett himself, he would have done anything—I am certain—to bring you off a winner.'

'Anything?' says he coldly: 'that seems emphatic. May one assume, then, that Mr. Bennett is among your ladyship's admirers?'

'Better go to bed,' she says: 'you have sat up too long. Mr. Bennett is my friend, and will be yours, if you cultivate him. Good-night. I will come to your room in the morning, if I may, and discuss everything——'

So they part; he presently follows upstairs; and both are soon asleep.

As for Jack, he is a little longer awake. From the Opera he has come to such a sleeping-place as would astound and appal those sisters, could fancy picture them such a thing. It is in a street between Drury Lane and Stanhope Street in a centre of slums. It has no name, or rather it *has*, but if one is anxious to learn it, the only way is by detective work among the natives. *They* know: but it is their *cabala*, their sole: they tell with reluctance. It is a very short street of seven houses on one side, and four on the other: for on the short side they have been knocking down three of the houses, which had grown dangerous; and on that side one can see from Drury Lane three fireplaces of the last-demolished house—a perpendicular row—gaping against the side of the first of the still-standing houses. Those exposed ruins of fireplaces have been the focus of many a home, and warmed men's bones for centuries, for all is very old brick. Back of those four houses, which form the north side of the street, runs a row of nine or ten others,

forty or fifty feet away, darkling places, nearly every window of them broken, the tiles gone here and there, showing rafters and laths; and to them from Jack's street runs a boarding, not directly, but sweeping round the space once occupied by the three demolished houses. The boarding is rough; round it run, at top and at bottom, two bands of white-iron hooping; and over its top peep masses of timber. It is that open space which the boarding encloses—not very large, yet largish—which has induced Jack to buy a house here. His house is the second in the row of four, as one looks from Drury Lane. The first has a lantern outside marked: 'Good Beds: 6d.'; then comes Jack's; then a gate, marked: 'Johnson's Barrow Depository'; then the other two houses. Jack's house is No. 5, and the number is indicated on the door: but not painted: the 5 has been cut out of a newspaper, and pasted on. He has bought it so.

In another city he might have lived with the rich: but as soon as he saw London afresh, he knew that here he must not do that, and his burst of irritability, full of 'damns' and hisses, at the intolerable personal inconvenience involved to himself, had greatly tickled his satellite, 'Buddo.' For to Jack, fresh from the colonies, London had presented such a scene as paralyzed for a time even his pity; his being had stood dumb before it: for he had forgotten the place, or remembered it (latterly) only as containing Throgmorton Street. Then he came: and instantly he saw that, being unmarried, he would have to spend at least part of his life where the horror was foulest. So he had hired a house in a slum near the Whitechapel Road, and bought this Drury Lane one.

He enters the ever-open door, and stumbles up the stairs, breathing hard. His two rooms are on the top (third) floor: for, with a courtesy now absolutely natural to him, he has kept the worst floor for himself, in giving the others to four outcasts. He strikes wax-matches as he ascends. He is sensitive to the least malodour, and sometimes his breathing seems to pause: then with

windy rough breaths he goes. On the second floor there is a quarrel behind a door, an odour of beer: the back of his hand knocks twice in passing, with a gruff: 'Ah, you, Bill!' Still he mounts, and enters two rooms. He lights a little lamp. They are queer, those rooms: themselves so sordid, the things in them so richly rare. There are lion-skins and zebra-skins, rocks that are half gold, snake-bones and hippo-teeth that are charms; there are two assegais, a kiri, a saucer of precious stones, two flamingo - eggs, guns on a gun-rack, a stretcher, two camp-stools—but no bed. Very mean is the little wash-stand, but elaborate the carved calabash-basin. There is a coffee-mill on the top of a post, a coffee-pot and spirit-lamp also, and on the mantelpiece a row of calabashes containing the quaintest, diverse things—jumby-beads, mealies, dried twigs, specimens. There, too, are little odds and ends bought at half-a-dozen recent bazaars, poker-work, a purple-velvet Life of the Queen embroidered in rococo, an ivory fan, a plaster of Gladstone. Jack is peeling off his dress-things. On the deal table, which is covered with an antelope-skin, are four African roaster-cakes, made by himself. His hand goes out to them, but some thought checks it, and he continues to undress, hungering for those charmed cakes, laying the clothes neatly on the stretcher. Now he is naked, and the lamplight sees all his hairy arms, back, chest, and belly one chaos of tattooing, faded blues and pinks. In contrast with the fine bluish skin (where it is visible), his face and neck look like a grossly sun-burned mulatto's. Now he begins to dress again, this time in the rough woollens in which he is familiar 'up East' to the City, 'the House.' When he has finished, he puts out the light, and descends to his sleeping-place.

In the back-yard is a shed, which may have once been a make-shift fowl-house. It stands near those nine or ten houses behind Jack's street, and only contains now old boxes and rubbish. Its roof is Jack's sleeping-place: a ladder rests against it. But the roof slants somewhat, and, lest he should roll

off, he has had to strip the shingle at the lower edge, and build a wooden railing there—a well-built one, done with his own hands. When he wakes in the morning his view is the space enclosed by the boarding, the masses of timber within it, the house-backs—and the sky. At his Whitechapel residence he has a similar sleeping-place.

He mounts the ladder with a campaign-cap and a camel-hair sleeping-bag, which is in case of rain, though English rain gives him no headache: he has heard of rains before, and floods of the Great Fish River; Europe seems to him a place made for children to play in, and he feels that he could ride across it in a night. Even as he lies on his back, pressed against the railing, a drizzle falls. He covers two books with the sleeping-bag. What books? One is a Bible; the other a bigger book—Quain's Anatomy. And that other object beside him, 'so large and smooth and round' (Southey)? It is the skull of a man who once lived (ill or well), 'a bubble on the ocean of Eternity,' all burst now, but the wind which filled it still perhaps extant. Jack is going to be a doctor. His purposes are like glaciers, and move inflexibly forward, without haste, without rest. He knows that as day breaks he will awake, and then, lying on his face, he will read.

There, then, he now lies—and he prays. There are no stars to be seen to-night: but still he is awed. He knows that they are there, though so small a thing as London may hide them, millions, more suns than sons of men. How, then, can God, so busy, hear him? He knows how: and 'Holy, holy, holy be Thy Name,' he says, 'Thy Kingdom come. . . .'

At the end of his orison he says also: 'I thank Thee, my God, that Thou hast given me those two women to handle as I will, and guide as I will, and my old father and mother, and the other two men, and the two children; God only grant me success, that what I do may prosper for them. . . .' Soon after which he falls asleep, half-an-hour after Augusta in Portland Place, ten minutes after Harriet in Brook Street.

XXXIII

'UP EAST'

FROM time to time Jack would receive a report of progress from Balfours' Agency. But, having got so far as the police had once got, there Balfours' rather seemed to stick, in spite of the pipe. The mind almost refuses to believe in a murder quite motiveless, and Raby's motive remained inscrutable. Yet something was determined. A toxicological expert declared that the post-mortem organs of Dr. Stanley, as described by the Analyst, were not only consistent with nicotine poisoning, but indicated it, the word 'nicotine' having once been mentioned; secondly, Balfours' agent in Cumberland was now certain that Dr. Stanley did have *a* pipe on entering the broch that night, or at least on leaving Beech How for the broch—a pipe which had disappeared in the morning. By whose hand?—Raby and the doctor being alone in the broch?

The investigation was proceeding, and Balfours', now knowing the importance of their client, were, as they said, 'straining every nerve.' In one communication, their Mr. Farlow again referred to 'his partner,' whose assistance they had hoped to have: but he was still ill and dissevered for the present from business. Jack, meanwhile, waited for the full truth, dreadfully certain now of part of it: and it would have been better if he had not incurred that certainty and all those nightly groans with it, which did no good to himself or anyone.

Things were in this situation when, one night, he

unexpectedly saw Gracie. It was at a Saturday-afternoon dramatic recital at Steinway Hall, where a good many 'people' were, and a sweet-voiced girl, assisted by piano and violin, gave a varied repertoire. She wished to be thought simple-maidenly and sylphlike, as all her dress and action showed, and Jack, for one, thought her all that she wished. She so pleased him, that he repressed every whisper of little Lord Archie, and, at the applause, clapped like five, saying anon: 'By George, she does carry it off, and no mistake,' so that his enthusiasm attracted notice round him. Gracie was not in his mind. He believed her still at Beech How, from periodic enquiries made of Lord Archie, who knew the movements of everybody under the sun. He shrank from meeting her, as he shrank from hearing of her, even now knowing nothing of her happiness or unhappiness; he guessed and feared: but from actual certainty he flinched like a coward.

But this shrinking was, of course, not simple, but mixed with that longing for one sight of her which constituted his constant temptation, like the pull of a cable or sweep of a current. Each week that he resisted was an achievement comparable (if we only estimated things with some approach to truth) with the taking of ten Metzels, or two conquests of Gaul. There were moments when he could barely keep his hands from turning his horse into a northward road, or his feet from entering a northward train.

The reciter had just given 'Airy, fairy Lilian' with some fairy graces, and Jack's hands were clapping as if it were an occupation, when they paused, and his face faded into the dirty yellow of some autumn leaves. He had become aware of a certain underlook fixed upon him, which, he on the right hand of Judgment, she on the left, would still have reached and touched his heart. And *she* knew him: before ever she saw him yellow beneath her gaze, she had been looking at him with perfect clearness of recognition.

What struck him afterwards was that she did not seem surprised. As a matter of fact, she had known three days before that 'Bennett' was Jack—alive, and in England; and the wondering question with her had been: 'Why has he not come to me?' She had seen in a newspaper a bearded face in the centre of an oval group of City-men's faces, and even as she had pored upon it, her heart had leapt awake with the cry: 'It is he!'

In that mutual gaze their eyes flinched as if gazing at the sun, and it did not last long: but everything was said in it—a hark-back to all the past, a surmise of the future. Then Gracie turned toward the stage, nor looked behind again, while his eyes bent upon her with a gloomy forward gaze, like a gaze at a hole. She was finely turned-out in a powder-blue gown, white and heliotrope orchids, a white boa, a heliotrope hat tied under the chin, her dark hair worn low in a buxom knot at her neck. Her figure now was slimmer than the girl's, like a figure that has evacuated several children once latent in it, with some enigmatic grace in its lissomness. And her face astonished him! He had thought to find it in the same old spot, but ten times the flying whirligig had whirled her round the sun, the sun itself meantime flying, and she many a million leagues from the old spot, thirty-one now, never more to be twenty, with two children, though Jack had half forgotten that, or never well learned it. There was just an indication of brown in the space under her eyes, in spite of powder; her complexion was hardly now that mixture of milk and pale dog-rose; and in her expression was a something, let us say, new.

His heart groaned for deliverance and strength. What he was to do in the going-out he could not conceive. Raby was apparently not there. Beside her was a lady, to whom she occasionally spoke a word—her school-friend, the Duchess of T—e. Whether he should speak or not, whether, if he spoke, he could use Lord Archie to present him, what he should say, he did not know. But she solved half his

doubts for him. He was moving in the crowd toward the door, feeling her presence all in his back, when he was aware of her trembling voice.

'Will you take me to my carriage?'

She had pressed her way to him, leaving her friends, and put an arm upon his. It was now late, and the hall dim with deepening twilight. The audience thronged them with a low noise of talk and laughter. Both were tongue-tied. But half-way out she said :

'Are you quite incognito?'

'Yes.'

'To me also?'

'Why, no; not to you.'

'You have not written, or anything.'

'How *could* I, dear?' said he, with trembling.

'Why not?'

'I was—afraid—dear.'

'What of?'

He did not know what to say, and said :

'I did not know how you might take it.'

What he meant was: 'I knew how God would take it.'

'How *I* might take it?' said she: 'I could only take it in one way, dear—the old way. Nothing has happened.'

She said it confidentially, looking up with tender lids, assuring him of its truth, just as though ten years, of which each hour had been transforming her and him, were 'nothing.' They were remoter now than any poles.

She was married: that, at least, had happened. But he did not at all understand what 'nothing has happened' meant, and it did not grate upon him. Thinking what it might mean, he did not answer. They came to the door, where a mob of carriages stood. Her friends now came out in their turn, Jack shook hands with them, and they talked a minute, awaiting the carriage. When the ladies were handed in, at the last moment Gracie leaned out to him, saying close and low :

'I was to start for the Continent to-morrow. But I shall go back to Beech How instead. I shall be quite alone. . . .'

What *could* he say? He was quite pale. He tried to say, *did* say: 'All right,' but in so strangled a voice that she hardly heard. The carriage rolled away.

He went to his east-end house in New Street, and sat considering it in the dark, till midnight; then in other clothes went out roaming, as in this locality he often did, during the small hours. But this night the shapes of woe at corners and on doorsteps could not stop his eager walk. What he concluded from 'I shall be quite alone' was that she must be in some way unhappy, and wished to tell him the tale of it: for where, if not in him, was her help? If he could but dare to go to her, to write her even. But his mere presence, a mere note, he thought, might disturb the tone of her feelings toward her husband. Her husband was still her husband, and she must, to some extent, have grown to love him—so Jack felt. And what affrighted him was the thought that, if he approached her, some recrudescence of lover's-love for him should warp her wifely temper, and tarnish the tissue of her mind. The risk of such a thing was so awful to him, that at one point in his roamings he resolved to fly the next day from England, and hide his existence for ever from her; but even as he so resolved, he thought of his sisters, and what he was doing for them. *They* kept him: he could not go. He groaned. But we must say that that groan was not quite sincere: for he was not wholly sorry that something did keep him. He hankered to go to her, in spite of the spiritual dangers. 'I shall be quite alone,' she had said, and how pathetic, he thought, those five words! She wished to tell him her troubles. Yet how perplexing these other three: 'Nothing has happened!' The three seemed to contradict the five: for, if 'nothing had happened,' what would there be to tell when she should be 'quite alone'? This puzzled him.

As to one evil half-thought of her, that was far enough from him.

Yet some deeper pang than all, vague enough, unadmitted, was in him. For he had had eyes to feel rather than to see: and the woman's face was not the virgin face of the girl; and in her manner was something—an infection.

The next day he did not go 'west' at all. In the morning Walton, his 'coach,' awaited him in vain at the hotel (he was a man who went to 'cram' Jack for a College-of-Preceptors exam. with a view to his admission to St. Barts, though, meantime, Jack was attending clinical lectures at hospitals informally); by eleven Buddo had begun to fume, and thrice uttered the words: 'Raise hell this day!' He had finally opened and sorted the day's mail and cablegrams before a long wire, like a letter, came from Jack, saying that he did not feel 'down' to work, and giving directions for the day. About 4.30 a clerk drove eastward with a portfolio of papers needing signature, and unearthed Jack sitting at a window of his exotic garret. While the signing was going on, a coster-girl looked in, asking if he had forgotten Mrs. Treat, whom he had promised to call upon with certain sick-room necessaries. Jack looked at her as though he saw a ghost, then despondently: 'By George, yes, I forgot!' and, the moment the signing was over, caught up his hat, and dashed down the stairs. 'Thinking of *myself*,' he growled inwardly, 'instead of thinking of other people: that's what's the matter. I don't know how you lot Up There have any patience with me. . . .' But when he had made the few purchases, he went on to the sick-house, comforting himself with 'Never mind, Jack, you aren't come to the end yet. Hope thou in God, and He will give thee thy heart's desire. . . .'

He had been fasting all the day, and smoking—strong, black tobacco—to dull his pangs, intending to keep it up till night; but, emerging from the sick-house, he came upon a certain steak-and-onion shop,

lingered before it, went on his way, came back, and entered. In these shops, which are common in London, steaks, chops, sausages, and onions stew together in a pan of bubbling grease, with clucks and mayor's-chuckles, sending out upon the air an aromatic stench that may easily enmesh the unwary. Never in his fullest moments did Jack pass one of them without some glance, some sense of relationship: for that infirmity of his, of which we have spoken, grew always upon him, and long since he had admitted to himself the word 'glutton.' His stomach sometimes seemed a hole which nothing could fill, so that at many a banquet, when he seemed engaged with those beside him, his thought was of that before him. He had, however, so cultured himself, that no one suspected his secret. But the steak-and-onion shops of London were his special pitfalls, and before them he often said in effect: 'Lord, pardon Thy servant in this thing . . .' and slipped within.

That evening he did not readily come out, having gone in, and the street-lamps were alight when he started on his further rambles. Within a certain area of that region his rough, gentle personality was well known, and he was on familiar terms with a number of types, whom he studied with his knowing, worldly eye. About this time, in fact, his thoughts were full of them. His experience of their class in the old days had been mainly confined to Mary and Fred Thaxter, for whom within the last months he had been searching in vain. He had learned that their two 'old men' were long dead down in Kew; Mary's had had ruptured bowel (they all get that, those waterworks stokers), had been pensioned by the Company too late, and died; old Thaxter had died in the workhouse; and Mary and Fred, in spite of search and advertisement, were vanished. But now Jack came into contact with types of a far deeper die than Mary and Fred, and found himself called upon to consider the awful fact of their existence in relation to his own salvation. What in the world to do, or to think, he did not know. But he was considering it.

While he was out, Buddo called, as often, to look him up and discuss the day's world-history; but after waiting an hour in those top rooms, smoking an eighteen-penny cigar, he finally, near ten, gave up and went. However, driving west along the White-chapel Road, he saw the full-share hat and red tie rolling along the pavement with one arm round an old hag's neck. He hailed, alighted, and the two men then walked northward a long distance up Commercial Street, expatiating on the day's events. It was not the first time that those streets had heard their large plans and comments at midnight. Buddo knew Jack's ways, and took them for granted, like any other fact which he could not alter, while he looked up to and loved him as financial Jove. He was a natty, small-bearded little man of forty, pale, quick-stepping, with a decisive nod, two deep wrinkles over his moustache, and a face looking business, all costly cigars, fancy waistcoats, and an exhibited handkerchief corner. He talked that night for two hours, often threatening his left palm with his right fist, and they were returning south down Commercial Street near midnight, when Jack said, nodding to the right:

'Nice-looking street that. Don't seem to know it somehow. Let's have a look. . . .'

They entered it, and at once eyes of interest regarded Buddo's chain—such eyes! Groups stood here or there in a darkness visible, and after mutual glances watched the daring two. Two bobbies also were interested, and strolled toward the strangers with furtive looks; one whispered the other: 'They can't be smashers.' It was not a long street, but a pregnant one. Its name was Dorset Street. At the further end Jack pushed open a beer-house door, and was aware of a scene of women, such as could never, we believe, exist ten seconds in another country of the world (possibly in China, but not Russia). It was not like Hell, or a chronicler might attempt description; but here the pen hesitates: it was Hell complicated by lice and the peerage, a little hell by the same authors as Mayfair, unlike Mayfair to a dull eye, like as two peas

to a seeing. Jack said not a word; he was very pale; once only a few spasms toward wailing jerked his frame, like silent coughs. He knew streets resembling it, but by some chance had not known Dorset Street, his haunts lying mostly on the yon side of the Whitechapel Road. Dorset Street was a culmination—a street all dosshouses, with only one beer-house, and one fish-shop. Into one marked 'The Noted House for Beds,' Jack made to go, when Buddo caught his sleeve in dismay, but Jack, spinning round, wrenched it free, muttering in a stern, tremulous voice: 'Don't be a fool!'

Inside at a window he got a numbered 4d. ticket, and followed a man up to a bed. He had no idea of sleeping there: he only wished to see. The stairs were of stone, narrow, and covered with a low ceiling which followed their directions. Anon they passed numbered doors. Jack soon began to stifle. There was some sensation of a prison of iron within the bowels of the earth.

At last, near the top, the guide, opening a door, pointed to a bed. And to Jack standing on that threshold came the vilest experience of his life.

The room before him was large, windowless, and so low that one could almost touch the ceiling. It was crowded with little beds, and human creatures on them. And they sighed: the air was heavy with sighs; soughs of tribulation and weariness. And here was no bush-air, nor Drakenberg air: but an odour such as is inconceivable to anyone who has not retched at it.

'Oh, my God!' he breathed with reproach, 'save me from sleeping here!'

But he knew very well that there was no escape. Just there, in the house most noted for beds, he was bound to make his bed.

He first ran down to Buddo at the outer door, whispering:

'Got to sleep here—pity me, old man. Come in the morning, will you?—early, about six—I shall be so damned ill, Buddo——'

Buddo flushed and began an earnest protest, but at the third word Jack had left him, and was running up

the stairs. He got back to the room, stood hesitating one minute, then plunged into the noisome den with more distress than into a den roaring with tigers.

It was hottest summer: but the men slept (naked) under heavy bed-clothes, upon which their own clothes were piled for extra warmth. They liked it so, for to them warmth was always an asset. Their imaginations still shuddered at the colds of the last winter, gentle reader. And the fat air festered. Jack, sitting on his bed, fought hard to hold his breath: but he had to breathe, and every breath was the foulest disease, a gulp as it were of little lords and lice and stagnant old lies, and the pest they puff to Heaven. For the human body is like the human spirit: nothing so noble when noble, nothing half so sickening when sickening. In an hour Jack on his knees was stooped with passionate vomitings: so that out of the eater came forth meat, and sweetness out of the strong.

There is no exaggeration, by the way: these things were, and are to-night,* just so. What is inconceivable may, indeed, seem extravagant: but most truths *are* inconceivable. We state only facts, which, by a 2d. 'bus, anyone may see.

He endured all night, and when he descended some time before six a.m. it was quite feebly, with that pallor of autumn leaves, as when he had seen Gracie, his palm across a brow racked with pains. But there below paced the faithful Buddo.

'My Gawd, Jack,' said he, as Jack leant on his shoulder, 'what are you about with yourself? This carries it a bit too far——'

'Oh, you shut it, you shut it,' muttered Jack, all sighs, and abandoned head. 'Oh, Buddo, Buddo, nice country this——'

'You'll be ill for a month,' said Buddo, 'and a damned good job, too—— Oh, by George, I *am* sorry for you, old man!'

'Can't walk,' said Jack, 'see if you can get a cab——' and he tottered to a doorstep, and sat there, his brow in his palm.

* 1902.

Buddo went trotting at random into Commercial Street with prospecting chin, to north, to south. But cabs were few and far between, and it was twenty minutes before he came driving back. Then they drove for Jack's house on the other side of the White-chapel Road through streets bright with the sun, yet still asleep and desert.

'Sleep at all?' asked Buddo.

'I got into a kind of a sleep; but it wasn't like sleep, old man. . . .'

When they reached his rooms in New Street he dropped into the stretcher with closed eyes, while Buddo threw off his snuff coat, and prepared some Boer-coffee, in which he was an expert. There were some roaster-cakes and Lockhart buns; and they had breakfast. Buddo then loaded Jack's pipe, and he, smoking, began to look up.

'But, after all, what good could that do, old man?' said Buddo.

'Oh, I don't know that you'll drop to my meaning,' answered Jack. 'A citizen has got to sleep there, you know, if only once. Of course, it'll kill him, if he's anyways weak: but still he should, as some penny-farthing propitiation for his own crime in having it there, and as some little redemption for the governors of the country, who are sure to catch it pretty hot anyhow, poor devils.'

'England don't suit you, Jack,' remarked Buddo.

'No, I'm damned if it does. I shall be glad to see a bit of karoo again, and that'll be soon, too, it looks like. Here's a country that, by the vigour and virtue of its middle class, has been pelting ahead full bat, and no mistake, while the others have been fighting and sleeping, and not cried crack yet: but if sudden pains and panic don't take hold of it, then nothing's true; and a decent financier ought to be always on the look out for it, too.'

'I don't believe you're far out there.'

'Oh, I know what the matter is right enough: it isn't three or four little things, but one big one. England, a crowded little country, instead of being English, belongs

to a few lords and nobs, and there's the whole root of the bobbery. A business-man who doesn't see that can't be down to much finance, and I shouldn't let him tot up a column of figures for me. What beats me, is that the lords don't hold a meeting and pass a resolution to give up the land to the Government, when they see the corroboree they cause: they must be weak-minded little chappies, Buddo, good Lord! I and you'd buy up the whole jimbang, shouldn't we, if our few millions would only go round——'

Buddo laughed at this, shaking a doubtful head.

'But here's another thing that beats me,' said Jack: 'this private ownership of the national land must cause much the same poverty, I suppose, in both town and country; yet somehow the countryman's poverty does not make of him the thing which these Londoners are. Did you ever see such people, Buddo? did you? I know Cumberland men, and I know gins and black-fellows, Kaffirs and Bushmen: but they aren't like these Londoners. Your Cumberland man is a peg above your Kaffir somehow, though your Kaffir's richer and happier: but your Kaffir is ten pegs above your Londoner. He looks a human being any road, but these people, good Lord, what people! And here's what I'm galled to drop to: *what is it* which makes all that world of difference between your poor, human Cumberland man or Kaffir, and your poor, non-human Londoner? Do you know at all?'

'I give it up,' said Buddo, who didn't care.

'Is it the drink?'

'There you are!' said Buddo: 'that's just it.'

'No, it isn't the drink!' said Jack obstinately: 'it isn't. Nobody can booze more than your Cumberland man, and what about your Hottentot and Batlapin, by George! No, not the drink—I don't think. It's some little simple thing that I can't quite drop to yet, though I'm always feeling after it. Sometimes it's on the very tip of my tongue to say, and yet I can't say it. If ever I do, you may bet that we'll find it to be something easier to help than that landlord fakement, which is so far beyond our means.'

'Well, that's as it may be,' said Buddo, jumping up: 'but about things: shan't we see you at all to-day? You've got to be about for the Exchange settlement after to-morrow, however it goes——'

'Look at my hand,' said Jack, holding it up trembling like aspen: 'I may be all right to-morrow. You know the day's game: hold those Southerners for all you're worth, and tighten loans and discounts. I'm thinking very seriously of making the issue of Sterling Drafts and Cable Transfers about the main feature of the Bank. If anything crops up, especially about that Marquess of D——, or Hay and Perowne, wire me promptly. Many begging-letters yesterday?'

'Hundreds, hundreds. Takes two clerks——'

'Remember that everyone must have what he asks for each day.'

'Shan't forget. But pity you're so joined to your idols, Jack, old man. Lazy scoundrels, that don't deserve a farthing——'

'I know they don't——most of them. But you don't seem to drop to it, Buddo. It isn't for *them*! I care nothing for them——don't know them. It's for myself only, isn't it? because it's bad for my manners and my mind to refuse anyone anything. I'm bound to think of myself a bit, too, surely——'

'All right, take it your own way,' said Buddo: 'here's off. I'd have a tot of hot brandy, and a sleep, and you'll be right as nuts. So long, old man——' and he was gone.

XXXIV

THE BANSHEE

JACK then descended into his back-yard, which was spacious for that locality, and had three trees in a row at the bottom. Behind them he had built a board platform two feet high, seven square, in a plot of thin grass; and there he lay down. The day was bright and soft with zephyrs, the sky English-blue: and soon the noises from the house began to come to him like impotent affairs happening beyond the frontiers of the dreamland where he walked and mused; then he slept, and did not wake till two p.m.

He woke feeling better, and for a time lay still, with a thought, somehow, of Harold Pole in his head. He had not seen Pole at all—which was not friendly. He had asked Little Lord Archie, who knew everyone, if he knew Pole: but he had said no. Jack did not know Pole's address, and, for the most part, his days were so crowded, that he had made no effort to discover it. A fear, too, had influenced him: that Harold would penetrate his identity, as Gracie had done, in spite of a belief that he was dead. Jack did not wish that, having special reasons, and also the general one that he preferred to dwell aloof in his cloud, still related with the painful past and modifying its outcomes, but doing it *ex machinâ*. He had therefore taken no steps to find Pole. He did not know if he was still alive.

But, lying there that day, he had tender memories, and a pang of self-reproach. As to the address, it now struck him that Pole might quite possibly be still in the

house from which he had addressed that letter, containing £50, the day when Jack left England. Jack still had that letter, and he resolved to invent some excuse, call there at once, and see.

But it was strange: something stopped him—that day at least; and if he had been able to augur from that stoppage that it would be better not to go at all to Pole, it might have been well. But who can read such hints?

What stopped him was a coster's barrow. He was walking west in the Whitechapel Road toward a Westminster 'bus (he abhorred cabs), when he came upon a barrow of flowers—geraniums, stocks, wallflowers, marigold, verbena, musk. He stopped and looked at it, hardly knowing why, the real reason being that a low-looking workman was buying a box of verbena, and this unusualness rather struck him. When the coster again rolled forward, Jack said:

'Where are you off to with those?'

'Dunno,' said the coster, with the reticence of his class.

'Tell us—come on. Where are you for?'

'Funny question to ask, too! It's my living I want to earn, not *questions*.'

'I give you a bob, if you tell me. I don't mean any harm, you know.'

He took out his net-bag, and gave a bob.

'I'm going down the west central,' said the coster.

'What for?'

'Why, to sell, of course.'

'Why don't you sell about here?'

'Garn!'

'That's no answer.'

'Can't sell much 'bout yere.'

'Stop a bit——' Jack laid his hand upon the barrow, looking up into the air like a statue of Abstraction.

At that moment he saw some light. He had been asking Buddo why the country poor were human, cultured, and non-ugly, while the city poor were non-human, barren, and hideous: and here now was the

answer—so obvious. It was because the country poor were in the country, and the city poor not in the country! Only that—yet how long had he been trying to say it, and couldn't! He had sought some deep reason, and the reason was on the surface, where truth so often is, a secret, indeed, but an open secret, frequently showing her near-smiling face to babes, but hiding it from the wise, who seek her always in a well.

The coster struck an injured attitude, unable to move his barrow, while for a good time Jack stood, thinking how the matter was. Men, he now saw, were not town-animals, but country-animals, like all animals, needing the thousand influences of 'Nature'—flowers and birds, and bees that 'hum about globes of clover and sweet peas,' with brooks and flocks, and 'the sweet return of morn and eve'—to cultivate, naturalize and pacify them. Hence the shepherd on the fells was a man, though poor, but Bill Sykes a buffalo. It was the divorce from 'Nature' there in Whitechapel which made the difference: bricks, bricks, bricks, but no straw. Down in that West Central part, too, there was a separation from 'Nature'—but not a divorce. They did buy flowers there, and birds, and fruits, and palms, were never without them, and at those west-end dances all was roses and leaves, orchids, bouquets, and natural profusions. Moreover, those others took care to escape from all brick and bric-a-brac for half the year, or three, two months, and wash themselves afresh in 'Nature': but these poor easterns were born in brick (such brick!), had their being in brick, till themselves became a sort of brick, each a squarecut copy of all, conceiving the universe a pile of bricks, and God a foolish big brick a-top of all. They did not see when cloud-shadows swept the rural mead, nor fancy empyrean wings, whose *route* lay not far off earth; the lark, rising like a morning and an evening prayer, taught them no lauds nor benediction; when church-bells chimed for evensong, as it were swung censers censuring the air of the dale and all the countryside with puffs of fragrant sound, they did not hear and bow the heart, learning no sigh and hope from their canticle

of resignation ; from harvests they learned no bounty nor cheapness of gold, and from seed-times no husbandry ; the lily taught them no passion of chastity, and the rose no chastity of passion ; from the squirrel they learned no franchise, and from bees no regimen. They were slaves without fealty, and tyrants without mastery, and brutes without comeliness. The sun arose, but they did not see it, and the stars, but they did not hear them. They could neither hear, see, smell, taste, nor feel. They were cut off from the land, the land of the living, and the bricks that entombed them were not more dead than their induration.

This was due primarily to the existence of a small landed class (itself a nearly dead one) ; and, secondly, to the divorce of the cities from 'Nature.'

The first lay beyond the help of any one individual (except the prophet's, writer's, teacher's) ; but the second might be helped, and Jack now had a glimpse of how, though it did not enter his head that any vast results might grow out of the action which he took that day. His whole 'Floral Fête' now, indeed, stood extant, but in tiniest germ : he had begotten, but did not know it. It needed another mind—a woman's, a helpmeet's—to bear his invention, and show him its possibilities, it being understood that the invention was yet never *hers*, but *his* : and as he stood there by the barrow, all unconscious of her existence, he was on the point of meeting her.

He said to the coster :

'How much for that lot ?'

'Ten bob,' said the fellow, and hung expectant, with one winked eye.

Jack gave ten bob, took the barrow-handles, and wheeled forward, saying : 'Follow me for your barrow.'

He wheeled eastward a little way, then turned northward into Brick Lane (accent on the 'Brick'), a mean street with tiny shops, here or there a 'kosher' smell, posters in Hebrew, and all in the loud bewildered air the shout of Goethe : 'Why does the Folk rage so, and cry ? it would win itself food, children, too, get, and them feed, as well as it can.' The house-doors

were level with the pavement, and nearly all open. Jack stopped at one marked: 'The Purest Ice-cream in the East End: ½d and 1d,' took a pot of geraniums, and knocked; a woman appeared; he presented the flowers.

'No flowers,' said she.

'Nothing to pay,' said he, 'giving them away.'

She stared, and hesitated.

'Take it or leave it as you like,' said he; 'nothing to pay: giving them away.'

'Well, much obliged,' said she at last, and took it.

Now he threw off his jacket, and at door after door went knocking: and at every door a woman, or a girl, refused, stared, took. This was the history of nine doors: but at the tenth it was not the girl, but Jack, who stared and hesitated.

It was on the left side, going north; there was a biggish Talmud Torah building, then the shop of one 'Thomas Colston: Stick-straightener to the Trade'; and between the shop and the Talmud Torah was a door of entrance.

That door was opened to Jack by a lady dressed in gray—a nurse's-dress—with a little white something on her head. She was middle-sized, beautifully formed, with something quite light and aerial about her, and her face and hands were very beautiful. She seemed about twenty-four or five.

He gave her a pot of gillyflowers. She took it, put her hand to her apron pocket, and he was so bewildered by her, that she had actually taken out her purse before he uttered that rhyming poetry already pat on his tongue:

'Nothing to pay: giving them away.'

'Really?' said she: 'why?'

'Just for love's sake, you know.'

Their eyes met, and lingered together, and loved.

'You are good,' she said, and smiled upon him.

'I don't know that it will do any good,' said he.

'Fie,' said she: 'love works every miracle.'

He lingered a moment awkwardly, and said:

'Thank you. Good day, miss. . . .'

'Goodbye.'

She put out her hand, he shook it, and found himself alone with a sense of loss. Her countenance had bloomed to him and smiled like a little pink flower, and somewhere within it he had read: 'Holiness unto the Lord.'

He had a presentiment that when he next came, she would be lost to him. But to knock again would be absurd: he had nothing to say. Finally he went away, and continued to give the flowers, but with a new conception in him of what the angels must be like. 'Aristocracy,' that was the word which she embodied. Anything so aloof, yet affable, he had never hoped to see. But her secret, he thought, was not her aloofness, nor her lowliness, but her spotlessness: one felt it in the clean azure shining of her eyes, in her cuffs, her apron, her silver locket, in her voice that seemed to come wallowing through cloying honey, in her not very tidy hair that was dry like wheat, and was packed away and up from her nude ears and oblong swath of brow. A new conception: yet—here was where the funny thing came in!—he knew her: had met her somewhere years before! in what dream of what night of peace he could not tell.

He made a prayer that he might not be all without her: that at least he might see her sometimes. . . .

When the flowers were exhausted, he delivered the barrow to the still-staring coster, saying:

'Now, you be at that same spot to-morrow at four, and bring five or six of your mates, too, all with barrows of flowers, and I buy the lot all out.'

He went to no Harold that day, but returned to his New Street house, full of the two new events: the flowers, the angel. His thoughts called her 'angel': if she could fly, that would not too much surprise him; she looked light enough somehow, though no chicken: he felt that she was not far from flight. Hardly ever had he been so shy a creature in any presence, and what he had said he could not remember. He spent two hours in surmises of the spot where, in very early

youth, he must have seen her, forgetting that she was not then born. Then came the City portfolio to interrupt him, with signings and orders; then came Little Lord Archie, full of programmes and his vellum tablets: there was a cotillon party that night, whither the Marchioness of D—— was taking Lily Barnes; a meet of the coaching-club the day after, and an assault-at-arms at B——'s; on the third day Epsom; on the fifth Hurlingham and Jack's banquet at Claridge's; then the Agricultural Hall, to meet—but Jack cut him short, saying:

'Know anything of the two Rabys?'

'Let me see—yes; they were staying with the St. John-Heygates: that you know. The man left yesterday for Marienbad—gout, you know; and the woman—by the way, I heard her sing a little last night, Women Journalists at home, Essex Hall. Rather an extraordinary voice, powerful and tender, like the caress of an Amazon, but far more conceited than formed, and horridly sexual. What amateurs never——'

'She not gone to Marienbad, too?'

'She was to leave at once for—er—Bedwick, I heard. That is where they live, you know. I believe she went this morning. Depend upon it, my dear Bennett, when you hear of a woman leaving in the middle of Season for Bedwick, and her husband for Marienbad, it is really she who is going to the bad, and some other man to the bed——'

'Ah, little Lord Archie, little Lord Archie,' groaned Jack, rolling about the room. She had gone down, that they might talk in the old scenes: and she would wait: but he could not go to her.

To escape from himself, he dressed, and was taken to someone's party, having also the secondary aim of beginning that night a new *régime* with his sisters—a *régime* of open enmity. But he was disappointed, for neither Harriet nor Augusta was there.

The next morning by eleven he had done some business at the hotel, been 'crammed' by Walton his 'coach,' and was in Westminster to look for Pole. He questioned the lift-boy, went up, and knocked. The

servant said that she was afraid he could not see Mr. Pole himself.

'I must,' said he.

'Then I'll see. Please come in. What name?'

Simple Jack gave the name of 'John Bennett,' and Pole no sooner heard it, than he thought: 'That was Jack Hay's old name.'

Jack sat meanwhile in a dim drawing-room, where Gladys Pole was at the piano. This girl, now thirty years old, had had more than one offer of marriage, but had refused them through devotion to her brother. Jack addressed some words to her, but she was short, seeming rather to resent the stranger's forwardness.

Then entered a nurse to him, saying confidentially:

'Is it so necessary that you should see Mr. Pole? He says that you may: but he does no business——'

'Ten minutes,' said Jack: 'there'll be nothing to worry him.'

She then led the way down a corridor ending in a door, which permitted the escape of that old odour of creosote which was part of Pole. They went into an airy bedroom, with an electric fan on the mantelpiece, and a fire that hot day. The nurse then left the two alone.

Pole, on a low bed, turned his eyes, without moving his raised head, upon the stranger, and that sideward glare may have gleaned something interesting, for he suddenly moved, and the instant he moved burst into a fit of coughing—sonorous bays, like echoing vaults—long-lasting, too, till finally he deposited the cause of it in a dainty paper handkerchief: then lay back, sighing.

'Take a seat, sir,' he said, and his voice was the same old bass, but now with a certain resonance of the big drum in it. The 'bone in his throat' stood prominent: he was emaciated, and had now a longer beard and some whiskers; but in spite of hectic spots, lunar owl-eyes, and his etherealness of complexion, he did not seem at death's door, though he was; he breathed

calmly, suffered no great discomfort, and his expression was a mixture of cynicalness and hopefulness painful to see.

Jack sat agaze.

'What can I do for you, sir?' said Pole, 'I am not attending to business for the moment. Will you be good enough to hand me that glass?'

Jack handed some brandy and water from the bedside table.

'Now, sir,' said Pole.

'I don't know that I had better tell you now: I didn't know that you were seriously ill. It makes no matter. That will do for some other time.'

Pole eyed him with steady sideward glare.

'Let me hear.'

'Well, if you insist. My name is Mr. John Bennett——'

'Ey, I have heard of you. I have also seen your face somewhere in a paper, and thought I had seen it before, but could not tell where, could not tell where. I once had a friend called John Bennett——'

'Mr. John Bennett,'—said Jack quickly—'and I am Chairman of the Zoutpansberg Mining and Exploration Co., Ltd. We are about to issue prospectuses for two subsidiary concerns, and——'

'I see all: prospectuses for two subsidiary concerns—only two; and you got my name'—his astral forefinger rose lecturing—'as that of a man largely involved in Zoutpansberg operations. How did you get it, sir? I assume—— Ey, Jack, Jack, I'm right glad to see thee once more, alive and hearty—alive and hearty!'

He had started upright: but before Jack could take his hand, that cough of the tomb was echoing again, awing the ear with its gloomy banshee-omen. It caught him at almost his slightest movement.

'Don't you stir now, Harold,' said Jack: 'don't you! Ah, young un, I never looked out to meet you like this!'

'Like what? Do I look bad?'

'You do, Harold.'

'Here's another one of them,' muttered Pole. 'I am not ill! not very! I know that I am not well: but I would bet you £50, if I had it, that I shall be up in three weeks. Oh, yes, you think I am deluded, I see: there is an absurd thing which they call *spes phthisica*, "consumptive's hope," which they imagine I've got, just as though a man like me—— Perhaps I *have* got it, and don't know, but nothing is so improbable. But it is all very well for you to come pitying now, Mr. Bennett, when you have been in England for months——'

'I have never forgotten you, Harold, in all these years, never ceased to love you with a special love, young un; I never shall. Let that be said, and done with. I don't know if you ever looked upon me as your own mother's-brother—don't suppose you did—but that's how I always looked upon you——'

'Big, abundant Jack,' said Pole, with momentary eyes of tenderness: 'I mustn't move—kiss me on my forehead. That's it. A mother's-brother, a mother's-brother. Ey, yes, something of that sort you were to me, too—to me, too. But I have forgotten you, Jack, long since, long since. It isn't the same old Harold, so do not be under any delusion. Just pour me a *wee* drop of that brandy—my two dear nurses are not over-liberal in their views on brandy, so when Providence sends me a visitor, I seize occasion by the neck, and drink her contents—just a *wee* drop more perhaps, so as just to cover those markings—— That's a Jack: now, gently, gently——'

But no gentleness could do it. The resounding cough seized him, as he moved. Anon Jack daintily bore the little used handkerchiefs and dropped them into the fire.

'Ey, brandy's a good thing, Jack: and God saw that it was good, and branded it with Three Stars, wrongly ascribed to Hennessy, which sing together, and sometimes look like six—hence the term brandy, hence the term brandy. No, Jack, no—not the same old Harold. I have had consumption all down the left side—heart as well as lung—both gone, both gone. My only left lung is on the right side now, sir, and my heart

on the wrong. Ah, Mr. Bennett, the years wheel round the sun, and are those wheels of God that grind exceeding small, though slow, grinding geniuses into drunkards and noble minds into mud. Damn your sentiment, my good sir. I hope you are not coming here with any sentiment. If you were my own mother's-brother, how comes it that all these years you never found 2½d. to write me a letter?'

'I ought to have,' said Jack ruefully: 'I am sorry now, Harold. Forgive me my big debt, will you? I was miserable most of the time, and miserable people aren't down to writing letters. I was never a one for that game, neither. The deeper a man feels the less he says, mostly. I've thought of you, I've prayed for you. You've got to believe a cove.'

'Ha! ha!' laughed Pole lightly: 'why, you do not even talk the same. You have changed as much as I have. In order to be fond of each other we have to jump back eleven years against the pull of an elastic string, which, the moment we touch ground, snaps us back to the present. I can still do it, old Jack, but only for moments, and the jump makes me cough. Let us clear our minds of cant, dear Mr. Bennett. There is no lasting sentiment among men, except the impulses to cough, to drink, and to hate——'

'To do what, Harold?'

'Ey, to hate. Does that make you start as if you saw hell?'

'Harold, Harold.'

'Why, what is the matter? Have you turned good, and yet found your way into this room? If so, you have certainly missed your road, my dear sir! Round this bed the devils hold their councils——'

'You shut it, Harold, you shut it.'

'Tell me—have you taken Mrs. Raby from her husband yet?'

'Not yet.'

'Going to?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

Don't choose.'

'Seen her yet?'

'Yes.'

'Doesn't she want to come with you?'

'*She!*—no.'

'She does. You try her and see.'

'Don't want to try her.'

'Are you not in love with her still?'

'Never was what you might call "in love." I loved her, as we all did.'

'Don't you still?'

'You may bet, Harold.'

'*Take her from Raby, Jack!*'

He twisted with whispered eagerness, and at once the condor of death was flapping again in the room with awful vowels of omen, till he fell back with a weak 'Oh,' and Jack bore the handkerchief to the fire.

'Oh, Harold,' said Jack, laying his hand upon Pole's, 'you are ill.'

'Do not refer to that,' said Pole: 'I know that I have a cough without being told. No man who was very ill could feel the charming hell that blazes in my centre. I'll have a little brandy——'

'Is that such an all out good thing?'

'An all in good thing. Just give me a little. I am not a child.'

Jack gave him.

'That's good,' sighed Pole. 'Are you going to take the woman, then, from Raby?'

'I desire you to drop that now, Harold.'

'But why not? Haven't you discovered even yet that it was Raby who brought about those two ambushes of the police for you for a crime committed by himself? Was there ever profaner infamy? I am a detective, and I know crime and criminals: but never have I encountered depravity quite so ghoulish and obscene. And don't you know that it was Raby who made Gracie write you the letter which banished you from England?'

Jack started.

'*Made* her? how made her?'

'Ey, Raby knew your address, you know, and threatened to give you away to the police—for *his own* crime!—unless she wrote the letter. She did it to save you——'

This had an extraordinary effect upon Jack, and with upward eyes he sighed: 'Oh, thank God that she is so beautiful—better, better, than all my best thoughts of her!'—so that Pole, who was trying to excite hatred, saw with a shrug the very face of love.

'But after Nibbs threatened to give me away,' said Jack, 'so soon after—she——?'

'Married him? Yes. Woman, you see. But, to be just, it was not her fault. When you went she got neurasthenia, and while she was dying Raby dragged her out, on the understanding that the marriage should be only formal, and married her. He had had charge of Miss Ames' money, and deliberately sunk it in a rotten concern. They had nothing left, but the Mackay legacy. Miss Ames has told Gladys that Raby actually made her upbraid Gracie of the money spent on her music-lessons. Just about then an unaccountable accident half killed me: so Raby had it all his own way. He treated those two women as only a murderer can treat a woman——'

'Polecat!' breathed Jack, trembling all over, and pale as autumn-leaves.

'*Jack! take her from him!*' whispered Pole again, and again he had to undergo an interlude, as it were applause in Hades, and grotesque clappings of ghostly watchers in the room, seeing him come and come to join them.

'Are you going to take her, then?'

'I think I told you to drop that, Harold. I shouldn't take her to be king of the world, and she wouldn't come to be queen of ten thousand worlds. I happen to know her, you see, you don't. So don't waste your breath about that.'

Pole glared sideward at him.

'Still the same old simple Jack, or more so,' he said. 'What can put that notion into your head that

she would not come? If even she did not want to, the merest whisper that her husband is her father's murderer——'

'Well, why haven't *you* whispered it, Harold, as you are so anxious for her to know?'

'Ah! the reason is prosaic. An action for libel would just ruin my right trouser-lung, as a year of prison my right chest-pocket. The bacillus has been in the trouser, too, my friend. And I had my sister to consider, who is amiable enough to pretend some attachment to me——'

'Bosh! you were afraid of giving pain to Gracie, there's the bottom truth——'

'Really, you attribute sentiments to me, my good sir——! I have nothing against the woman, who was more sinned against than sinning, though she was not unconscious on her wedding-day, you know. But as to any morbid craving to save her from pain, that I must disclaim. In dreams, perhaps, sometimes——'

'Tell me—you love her again in your dreams?'— Jack leant forward to hear, like a diagnosing physician.

'Love, if you like to call it so. There are snatches of old songs on the fells, Jack, and the stars of old nights in the dale. Ey, yes, they come back——'

'That's when Heaven calls you, Harold, and the other noises are asleep, and let you hear. Ah, God, that's sad, after all, that we should be better when half of us lies dead, than when we are all awake. Oh, Harold, Harold, Harold, if we only knew the art of life——!'

He covered his face, and one sob filled him full, burst, and escaped.

Pole glared sideward at the stooped figure: then there was a chuckle on the bed.

'Jack, shall I tell you how you impress me now?'

'All right.'

'You won't be offended?'

'No fear of that, Harold.'

'As a converted burglar, who has turned local preacher.'

'I'm not so sure of the conversion and the local

preaching, but you're not far off it about the burglar-ing, Harold.'

'Ah, now I have been insolent and vile!' cried Pole, starting up, whereat the cough burst out, and the conclave of ghosts and echoes were all clapping and shouting again, 'Ho! ho! come! come!'

'Look here, that does you no good, my being here,' said Jack: 'I promised the nurse——'

'Stay a bit, stay a bit. Perhaps if you stay long enough I shall start loving you again, old Jackie. Ey, you were always the freshest, brawest carle I ever met in this world. You are like fell-top air, and may do my lungs good, though the heart's beyond you now, I think. You have told me nothing of your career——'

'I'll come again, often, for five minutes at a time.'

'Good. By the way, do you know now that Raby murdered the doctor?'

'Oh, do, do, drop Raby.'

'Do you know?'

'I know nothing about that—that *man*, and his murders. God is his judge. He is no worse than you and me, if we only had a grain of commonsense to see it.'

'Ha! ha! isn't he, though, by God—the hell-cat! Seen him at all?'

'No.'

'Let me show you a bit of him. Just feel under the bolster—just there—and you will find a vial——'

Jack felt, and passed the vial with wonder: it contained a finger-joint in formalin.

'That joint,' said Pole, smiling at it with old affection, 'is the top joint of Raby's third left finger, Jack. He had it cut off to hide from me, and I personated the surgeon. That nail was injured in some way on the murder-night, and is an absolute clue to the whole truth, if I only had the intellect, the intellect, to read it. But I can't, I can't'—his voice sank musingly—'I shall only know it in Hell.'

'Well, suppose we throw it on the fire, Harold?'

'You dare, sir?' shouted Pole, with wild eyes: 'my vial, please, Jack Hay!'—Jack gave him—'No, I

shall know it before the Hell-stage. I feel that sometimes. Something will happen—I shall have a dream—or I shall read something—or some Magian of Persia has already studied the mystery, and knows, and we shall meet, we shall meet in the day of Destiny. That is why my right half lives, and my Will can beat down death and trample on it. Can you tell me, Jack, the instrument by which Raby poisoned Dr. Stanley? Can you? Ah, if you only could! Then, you'd be ten mother's-brothers to me, Jackie, and my heart's darling, too, and all day I should sit at your feet, and fondle them——'

Jack rose, saying very gently :

'If you only knew what spirit you are of, Harold! But good-bye now. God bless you.'

'Good-bye. Glad to see you.'

But Jack lingered.

'About the doctor?' said he.

'What about him?'

'Who is he?'

'Oh, a little man called Newall.'

'Newall? I don't know him,' said Jack, now well-acquainted with the big guns in the profession: 'he's nobody, you know, Harold. Is he a lung-specialist?'

'I think not. His main qualification is his nearness to me.'

'Surely, you ought to see C——, Harold.'

'No, thank you. You don't understand the position, my good sir. I am a poor man now. Precious little coming in, and a worrying lot going out. Two nurses, an expensive flat, brandy, and already a debt to Newall, without thinking of any Dr. C——.'

'Well, but that bears on the very thing that I came to see you chiefly about, only I forgot it: You remember that £50 you sent me at the docks the day I left England——?'

'Ey, I think I do, and I should not be at all displeased if you are honest enough to repay it——'

'Yes, but I forgot the whole jimbang in barneying about other things. I didn't want the £50, as I had other moneys, so when I got to Australia, instead of

sending it back, I thought I'd invest it for you. So—what did I do? I—gave it to an overlander who was going to the Palmer diggings, on the condition that he'd buy a claim—for he had nothing himself—work it, and give you half the racket. Three months afterwards he handed me over—how much do you think?—£10,000.'

Pole's hectic spots paled intensely one half-minute.

'You jest, or you lie,' said he, in a very strained voice: 'which is it?'

'Neither one nor the other,' said Jack, who could lie profoundly for other people's good, 'it happened just as I say. I never dreamt that you needed it.'

'Let me think,' said Pole, visibly panting. He had been harassed for money over two years, and had tasted wormwood. Then presently:

'Give me your word of honour that your story's true.'

'I—give you my word of honour.'

'And the amount is——?'

'£10,000.'

'But what about the interest?'

'Interest at 3 per cent. equals £300; for five years equals £1,500; makes £11,500 all out.'

'Only five years? You said——'

'Ten, I meant: I was thinking of another matter: ten I meant. Interest at 3 per cent. equals £300; for ten years equals £3,000; makes £13,000 all out.'

'When shall I have the cheque?'

'To-night—on one condition: that you let me go to your man, Newall, now, and arrange with him about a consultation with C—— to-morrow.'

'I consent. You have become a great liar, I see, though you lie with quite obvious distress, my friend. But I consent. I will consent to anything you ever bid me from to-day, Jackie. Send the cheque—£1,000—no more. And when it comes, I shall kiss it like a love-letter, because it comes from you, and at the same time I shall utter my first prayer for eleven years, and it shall be for you, Jackie——'

His lips trembled now.

'Well, who's starting the sentiment now, you or

me?' said Jack, his tender palm on Pole's forehead. 'But you may as well have the whole jimbang. Not much meat in £1,000, any road. If you won't swallow the fakement about the overlander, that's nothing if I give you the rest. Just for the present, I'm one of the half-dozen really rich men in the world, and I haven't anything which isn't more yours than mine by a long chalk, young un, you bet. I'll send £10,000. That's far less sacrifice for me to give away than £50 was to you, Harold. By George, there's the nurse peeping, and huffy, too! Good-bye. What's Dr. Newall's address?'

It was just near. Pole, lying weary now, gave it, saying:

'Come again, will you? Come often. Or better not come at all. But, if you come, come often; then p'raps the heart may get better, if not the lung, though I don't think, I don't think.'

'I'll come. I didn't know your address before. But, Harold, mum's the word about who I am! mind that. Not Gladys, or anyone, must know. Is that a promise.'

'Yes. Go now.'

'By the way, I want very bad to see old Spender. I sent someone down to Gangrel's Ha' on the spy, and I hear he's still hearty and laughing. I've been trying to drop to some way of getting him up to town, without having him dropping to who I am. Could that be done?'

'Yes. I'll think of something.'

'Don't forget, then. Good-bye, young un. I'll be thinking of you.'

Pole's eyes glared after him with strong yearning till he disappeared through the door, then wearily closed; and as he slept, two tears dried on his cheeks.

Jack, for his part, walked to Dr. Newall's.

To his question: 'What is the truth about Mr. Pole?' the doctor replied:

'The *truth* is that he can't live more than seven days. Phthisis, as you may know, has a very uncertain prognosis. But in this case I think seven days.'

Jack thereupon suggested consultation with the great lung-specialist, C——; Dr. Newall promised to try to arrange one for the next day; and Jack then went away to the Hotel V——.

But it would have been better if he had let Pole die, rather than cut short his own pilgrimage: or it seems so to us, who know so pitifully little. For whether the luckiest man on to-day's Exchange was he who caught a fatal cold, no one yet seems to know.

We may say at once that Jack did not again see Pole for three months, though he got several letters: for before he found time to return to Pole, Dr. C—— had so wrought upon Pole, that he could be hurriedly removed to Davos, where he still more recovered: for Jack's money, beside making the voyage to Switzerland possible, produced a peace of mind favourable to health.

After the usual flight of cablegrams at the hotel, and the sending of Pole's cheque, Jack set off for White-chapel, and by 4 p.m. was the centre of a crowd of barrows. The coster of the previous day had over-whispered his luck, and some fifteen had come with plants and flowers, fuchsia and aster, lobelia, stock and jenny. This abundance startled Jack, and rather enlarged his first small conception. He bought them all out at four times their market-price, and sent them down separate streets, with instructions to give at doors. Two or three did give, but some hid the flowers to sell again later, while some attempted to *sell* at the doors. These possibilities did not, of course, escape Jack's mind: but for that day he was helpless. He himself threw off his jacket, and, as before, wheeled down Brick Lane with his continual 'Nothing to pay: giving them away'; till, finally, he came with faster-beating heart to that door between the Talmud Torah and the little Stick-straightener's shop, where he had seen—the vision. And he knocked.

But he forefelt a disappointment, and it came. A slatternly woman appeared. After giving her the flowers, he said:

'But about that young lady?'

'Oh, she's gone,' said she secretly. 'She came to nurse my little Fan that's been down with the diphtheria—God lo' me, and she's a kind un, talking o' kindness. But Fan's most better now, which she ain't comin' no more in a manner o' speaking—not reg'lar like, yesterday being the last.'

'Well, that's hard, then,' said Jack, all dejected: 'I wanted to see her very bad. What's her name and address?'

'We doesn't know no address. Miss Stephane, we calls her 'bout 'ere. But that ain't her true name in a manner o' speaking, seeing as she's a lady o' title, named Lady Summat-or-other, as I know for a fact, which I have it from Fagg, the sanitary-man, that moves among the haristocracy——'

So Jack had to go, blank and hopeless of seeing her again. She was of those that had one meal at sunset with men, then vanished, and left them aching. And, wheeling from door to door, he remembered how that thing had happened to him once before—in Australia—how he had seen once, and sought, but never found. And, thinking that he knew, he started: where he had met her before was revealed. It was in front of the little iron chapel in Mohrano township one hot Sunday afternoon—not her, but her brother. They were the image, really, of each other, when one once dropped to it, only she looked lighter somehow, gladder, fatter, more like flying than he, and he was paler and stranger-eyed than she. The discovery electrified him. But as the brother had disappeared, so now the sister, too, was gone.

During the next three days the business of barrows and flower-giving grew, the news of the man who bought up wholesale spreading in geometrical progression; but things by the third day were better organised, Jack having his own distributors.

They were three pitiable days for him, during which not a taste of food passed his lips. He was fasting for the recovery of Harold Pole. And his prayer of pain was heard.

XXXV

THE ABBEY

IT was rainy, late night, with flickers of lightning and occasional far thunder-moans, like dozing thoughts of Jove; but in the D—— book-room in Brook Street the lightning left the air unpurged of the long presence of five people and of candles. The marchioness's face was gaunt with study and care. She sat at the table over books and papers with Lord D——, Sir Markham Perowne, and Mr. Hay, like a man among men—by far the knowingest and bravest of them, too—fighting for life, the old high life, though at her last gasp now. Augusta sat a little away in an easy-chair, fascinated but excluded, and sometimes her eyes closed. To her the discussion was a mere tragic jumble of weary words—'conveyance,' 'lien,' 'encumbrancer,' 'title-deeds,' 'grantor'—while Harriet was the very spirit of suggestion, strategy, and enterprise, never admitting defeat, though all the time subconscious of still deeper chasms of despair than Augusta.

The Hay family had, in fact, steadily increased in force downward from the eldest to the youngest. Jack was born in the fulness of his father's and mother's vigour, and midway between him and Augusta, in order of time, in personal power, came Harriet. The eldest was the prettiest; the youngest was the best.

The firm of Hay and Perowne, nominally metal brokers, but now in reality London stockjobbers, had just consolidated interests with the Marquess of D—— under the pressure of events. The marquess, on the bankruptcy of Sir Markham, had put £5,000 into the

new concern of Hay and Perowne, and, having since seen hardly a penny of his money, had now made overtures to the firm to come, if possible, to his own rescue.

But for the past three months Hay and Perowne, never very successful, had been in the roughest waters, loss following loss with the regularity of mountain-waves; so that the consolidation, on examination, proved a mere consolidation of liabilities.

There was one rift in the cloud: the possibility of Mr. John Bennett, of Bennett's, becoming a partner in Hay and Perowne. That possibility had even been a probability. Bennett had gone into the books of the firm, estimated the whole position, and his last words to Sir Markham had been:

'You'll be all right in the end; trust to me to see to that.'

This had seemed to imply the partnership, or, at least, some tiding over. But at a banquet of Bennett's just given, he, in conversation with Mr. Hay and Sir Markham, had rather seemed to back out: so that to disaster was now added uncertainty.

'Mr. Bennett is too mysterious,' said Harriet wearily, cheek on hand.

'Oh, he's heard summat that's put him off,' said Mr. Hay: 'some busybody. He'd never be the man to back out else. I've more confidence in that young man than in my own—I was going to say son, God forgi' me. He's spoken wi' me kinder than any son, if it comes to that——'

'All right, *I* will undertake that much,' said Harriet, seated next her father, facing the two husbands: 'he shall become a partner. But meanwhile! If I had only known the situation three weeks before! I should have claimed our equity of redemption on Pigwell Chantry, stopped the sale, and I'm sure that Hughes and Burrows could have been induced to consolidate it with their first and third mortgages on the Abbey: then Grandison's could have been paid off, and we should have had four clear weeks for Hughes and Burrows——'

'It could not have been done,' remarked Sir Markham, his palm supporting his dark-bearded chin: 'you

forget that there was a second and a third mortgage claim on Pigwell as well, and as Grandison, the third mortgagee, had got an assignment of the first mortgage, the second mortgagee would have cut up pretty rough——'

'Ah, do not disturb her ladyship's idylls!' said the marquess with impatiently-shaken face and snapped lips.

'My idylls are deeper than your plans, apparently,' retorted her ladyship.

'Tut, tut,' said old Hay; 'dunnot get into a pelter. This all comes o' the betting, and the risks, and the high doings. I always said——'

'Papa, I *cannot* stand any more Bedwick to-night!' interrupted the marchioness very hotly.

'I'm done,' said Mr. Hay. 'Ey, but there's some sound sense in Biddick, too—some sound sense in Biddick. There was none o' your bankruptcy and shame while we stuck to Biddick.'

'Who is it has acquired Pigwell Chantry?' asked Harriet.

'Brady,' said Sir Markham.

'Buddo again, then?'

'The great Buddo,' murmured the marquess bitterly. 'If I have a dream about fairies, if I moan in my sleep, Buddo knows it the next morning, and takes action——'

'Oh, absurd!' said the marchioness: 'people who are in trouble always conceive impossible conspiracies against them. The man probably regards the Marquess of D—— and the Greek myths as about equally beyond his interest. But, ah Heaven, if Buddo had only died with his first tooth. . . ! It is a wonder he isn't afraid of the entail of Pigwell to an heir male——'

'Ah, Buddo's not afraid,' said the marquess: 'heirs male that are "futures" do not dismay Buddo. Buddo builds upon a sterile aristocracy, as *vignerons* upon extinct volcanoes.'

The marchioness fixed him one silent moment with her eyes, then dropped them.

There was silence.

Then the marchioness:

'This is what I think: that Mr. Bennett should be

immediately fixed about the partnership, and, if he consents, or whether he consents or not, be asked to discharge all the mortgages on the Abbey, the three town houses, "Parklands," and what's left of Lonbydale, as they fall due, holding all the title-deeds as mortgages in equity. It will be a transference of liability into hands that will at least not crush us out of existence; and if the Coal Strike only ceases in time, as it must, within three weeks Hay and Perowne will have paid off more than half, and Charlie's debt will then be mainly a debt to the firm, instead of to Bennett personally.'

'But if the Coal Strike doesn't cease?' said Sir Markham.

'Ah, it must, it must, Markham. If it doesn't we shall simply all be ruined three or four times over, and, in any case, it will be better to be in *his* hands than in any other's.'

'Why so?' asked the marquess, with lowered lids.

'Because—it *is* so. I happen to have instincts, and you, of course, none. Pray let me have a voice in my own affairs. That is a *small* right.'

'Ha, ha!' he laughed—not too prettily.

'Ey, merciful Lord, all hangs on how that Coal Strike turns now—all, all,' said old Hay. 'I've lived to see this day in the fulness o' my years, God forgi' me.' . .

The fact was, that Hay and Perowne were 'bears' for a large number of coal-syndicate shares, due ten days thence. A coal-strike in South Wales had enormously raised the price of coal, and also the share-value of the few still-working concerns: the moment the strike ceased, those shares would drop enormously, and Hay and Perowne would then be able to buy, at a price below the agreed selling-price, the shares which they had undertaken to sell: in this way they would scoop a fortune, for they had plunged most heavily on this final chance. But, if the strike continued, they would be bankrupts with large liabilities and hardly an asset. There was good hope, however: that very day an amicable meeting had taken place between the strike-leaders and the owners' federation. There, under

Harriet's elbow, lay the *Evening Standard*, from which she had been reading aloud the prospects of peace.

'If that, then, is agreed by everyone,' said Harriet, 'I will myself approach Mr. Bennett. Is it agreed?'

No one answered. The eyes of the three men were cast down. Only 'Gussie, weary of vague anguish, half dozing, sat up with awakened interest.

'Well, then,' said Harriet with the firm lips of her brother, 'I take it that that is settled. To-morrow morning I see Mr. Bennett, and Markham sees Hughes and Burrows. In the evening we meet again. There's quite a storm outside, it seems. Gussie, dear, you had better sleep here. . . .'

The meeting then broke up. Mr. Hay and Sir Markham went home. An hour afterwards Augusta and Harriet were lying side by side in darkness, sleep far from their eyes. After a very long silence Augusta said :

'Harrie, don't you think it would be better to explain to me what it is you want to ask Mr. Bennett, and let *me* go to him instead?'

'You jest,' said Harriet.

'But I don't. Better take my advice. I shall have more personal influence with Mr. Bennett than you——'

'*You* will?'

'Yes. How the man has dared to back out of the partnership and cause us all this misery, at the same time pretending to be violently *épris* with me——'

'With *you*!'

'What excessive surprise! Yes, with me. Surely I'm not so old and unattractive——'

'No, but strangely obtuse, dear. Mr. Bennett is pleased to be taken with me.'

'Well, of all the self-delusions——!' breathed Augusta, sitting up. 'You *can't* be serious!'

'Why sit up? you uncover me.'

'You make one sit up. Has Mr. Bennett ever told you that he loves you?'

'Ah, your directness, my dear! You investigate like a lancet. Has he ever told you?'

'Well, yes, then! Or as good as, many times.'

Now Harriet, too, 'sat up,' while Augusta said:

'Has he told *you*?'

'Yes. Practically.'

Then they were silent a long time, while a clock by Boule on the mantelpiece ticked delicately, like a pair of fairy clogs waddling up a golden stair in Eternity with soft plod and pilgrimage, and the sweat of the passed rain dripped profuse outside.

Harriet turned an electric button on the table. Then each saw that the other was a scared and rumpled head over frills and broideries.

'There is some mistake!' pouted Harriet: 'just think again.'

'You think again. I am absolutely certain.'

'Did you encourage?'

'Perhaps. More or less. I was fond of him, Harrie. Were you?'

'I am. But not quite in that way, perhaps.'

'So with me, too: a sort of fondness. Sometimes the man has made my heart quite burn, somehow. But I have not been *éprise*. So he, then, Harrie, was the deep-rooted something oak——?'

'Don't call him oak, dear, call him man-drake—or sigh-press—and not Bennett but Bendigo. What does he *mean*? He can't want us both! We two lumps would be quite too much for any one man, surely: he would never rise to the occasion. But think, Gussie, think of the new complexity! What shall we do now, in Heaven's name? Ah, Gussie, if ever two poor devils stood face to face with horrors without end it is you and I now! Do you realise, dear, how desperate everything is?'

'Stay, I think I know what has happened,' said Augusta: 'he was first in love with me, and now has changed to you. I see it now. I met him at tea on the terrace of the House last week, and, to my surprise, he seemed rather to avoid me, then spoke a few frosty words. I thought it was a fancy of mine, but it was the same at his banquet last night——'

'But how wildly puzzling the man is, then! I was imagining the opposite explanation—that he has left

me for you! For just lately his manner has seemed cooler. I met him and Lord Archie D——t in the Row this morning—he rides Freewill, which won the Oaks two years ago—and I was with Thomas only: they might well have chatted, but only bowed——’

‘He couldn’t have loved us both together, and given us up together, surely!’

‘Just when we want him, too! Oh, I don’t like inscrutable people!’

‘Or one or other of us may be mistaken somewhere.’

‘Perhaps. But what to do, Gussie? Can you only dream? All, all, depends now upon his whim. The first and third mortgages on the Abbey, which have been “tacked,” terminate in six days, and Hughes and Burrows are going to file a bill as sure as there’s a sun. Suppose we both go to Bennett to-morrow?’

‘If you like.’

So it was finally arranged. Harrie turned off the light, and again they lay without speech, without sleep, questioning the darkness. When at last Harriet’s eyes had closed toward dozing, Augusta, stirring her shoulder, whispered:

‘Harrie, what have you done with that typewriter?’

‘I don’t know! How tiresome! let me sleep.’

‘I still have mine.’

‘Well, keep it.’

Now they lay still again, and the hypnotism of the heavy foreday gradually lulled them into slumber.

The next morning by 11.30 they were at the Hotel V——, went up the central stair to the first floor, and turned to the left along the tunnel-gloom of the corridor, hardly lightened by a procession of electric jets at one cornice. Both were purposely charming that morning, white and soft as a pair of swans, with a certain actualness of elegance and beauty, which, though familiar, yet takes by storm. Their parasols were lily fripperies of lace and gold, flirts with the sun, more paradoxes than parasols; in their hats rolled weirs of ostrich-feathers, large arcs of plumage, flustered by every breath; Augusta had a bunch of Malmaison pinks, Harriet white orchids; and though care and

panic were in them, they so artfully contrived, that their faces looked fresh as morning, Augusta's more like rose, Harriet's like peach.

Jack's suite was at the north end, its hall-door facing the corridor's length, bearing in gold on a black ground the words: 'Private Suite.'

A clerk with a pen in his mouth opened to them. Then their hearts sank: Mr. Bennett was not in: and time was money with them.

'Have you an appointment?' asked the clerk.

'No.'

'It is practically useless to come without.'

'We *must* see him. Where is he?' said Harriet.

'I *believe* he is at the R—— Club. He had an appointment there, I know——'

'Is he coming back?'

'Some time, of course.'

'Let us go to the club,' said Harriet.

They descended by the side-stair, and drove to the club. But he was not there. Strict inquiry revealed that he had left ten minutes before they arrived. And now their faces worried, and they played their parasols, lingering there, teased and fascinated by his so recent presence.

'What shall we do, Harrie?'

'So killing! Everything seems against us. But we can't lose the day: we must only go back to the hotel and sit down, like marionettes.'

They drove back, not now looking quite so fresh and serene. But when they went up again and rapped, they heard glad news.

'Is he come back?'

'Yes: he asks you to step into the drawing-room.'

They entered the vestibule. It had a mirror at the end into which they glanced; but here one saw in a glass darkly: all was dim and cool, in spite of three electric jets that watched like eyes without eyeballs. The first door to the right was the drawing-room door, next to that was Jack's office, next to that a bedroom, all looking out upon the Avenue; on the other side

of the vestibule were the bath-room, a bedroom, and between them another office, from which came out the fitful patterings of type-writers. They entered the small drawing-room, a middleclass place in figured green silk, with an oval table, cheap piano, and electric chandelier. And there they paced silent, playing their parasols.

Soon, however, the door flew open, and Jack in his brown City woollens, his hair fallen across a brow wet with sweat, entered hurriedly, shook hands, and before anyone could say a word, exclaimed: 'One minute!' and disappeared again.

'Ugh!' went Augusta, and sat down in one of the two small easy chairs.

'By the way, you have not been asked to sit,' said Harriet. And nothing more was said.

Jack, meantime, was just outside the door, in the vestibule, alone, considering it. The thing which he feared had come upon him: they were come, he knew, to beg; and his rule—or not *his*—was to give: but this time he did not mean to give.

Was it not, however, presumptuous to break the rule? Were there any lawful exceptions to the rule? He was puzzled.

He knew what they had come to ask, and he knew that he could grant it without interfering with his deeper purposes, which were fixed as adamant; but he did not wish to grant it; and, on the other hand, he was forbidden to refuse. After five minutes he decided finally upon what for a whole week he had been meditating: namely, that the way to escape either granting or refusing was to prevent their asking.

Again he entered bustlingly, saying in a loud voice: 'Ah, glad to see you. How are your father and mother? All right, I hope? Do you want to see me about anything in particular? Or only looked in in a friendly way? I am very busy to-day'—both whitened with shame—'no time for dallying and chit-chat. If women like you, one of you with two children, only lived the least bit as you ought to live, you'd never find the chance to go wandering about in this indefinite

fashion, as you all do, like hopping sparrows, five of which are sold for a penny, instead of like daughters of men——' And as he spoke, he moved toward the door, and as he moved they followed, gaping at each other, and at him, thunderstruck, aghast.

He moved to the hall-door, still talking, opened it, and they were outside. There Harriet stopped, digging a hole into the carpet-fur with her parasol, and stooping as if to examine the hole; and she said, with breaks in her voice, like dry sobs:

'We did not come—"wandering"; we—came—on business——'

'On business! Ah, well, now, that's better'—he moved on, talking as he moved, and they had to follow—'I am a business-man, and I like business-people. Unfortunately, I can't hear it to-day: every moment occupied. You should have made an appointment. Let me see, what's to-day? Thursday. No, I'm afraid it is useless to think of, unless I throw over other people for you. You'd hardly expect that, would you?'

There was no answer. Lumps filled their two throats, like worlds of shame and aching. He had led them on to the smoking-lounge, a palmy space to the right of the corridor over the central stairs: they half-expected that he would stop a moment there; but on he went, talking the while, they a little behind, down the stairs, forcing them to follow, to the landing. Hence a couch looked down upon the hall and the street, and here Harriet again halted, saying over her parasol:

'It was awfully—important. We were led to think that you were—interested—in my father's affairs. Is that not so?'

'Yes, I am more or less interested in your father's penny-farthing affairs. I like your father, and you, too, if you only knew it. But I happen to be interested in one or two other little things as well.'

'Quite so. I—thank you for your regard, which, I hope, includes my sister also. But, since not to-day, when—can I see you?'

Jack pondered that.

' Say Tuesday at three p.m.'

' Not before? This is Thursday.'

' Not before—I—think.'

' It is so—momentous. If you only knew, I think——
But I understood from Lord Archie D——t that you
were coming to my week-end at D—— Abbey——'

' So I am. But you will hardly like to discuss your
father's business with your guests, will you?'

' No,' she tried to say across the lump, but failed.

' Good-bye,' said he, and with too quick hand-shakes
was gone up the stairs, three at a time, a lump in
his throat, too. Augusta had not said one word to him,
nor he to her.

They sat on the couch some minutes in silence.
Then Harriet said: ' Come,' and rose.

In the carriage, too, they were long silent, carefully
avoiding each other's eyes. Then Augusta:

' This is my lover.'

' There is some *reason*,' said Harriet. ' I know him :
I'll swear that I know him. That is not he which we
just saw. Something is against us. . . .'

' " Hopping sparrows, sold for a penny,"' murmured
Augusta.

' He meant shopping sparrows, dear, " sold " by the
shop-assistants. Ah! here end *our* little adventures in
the air, my Gussie! If we were only sparrows! but we
are Icaris. And don't you know of here and there a one
who will clap the hands to see us sprawling in the mire,
my Gussie? Ah!'

' And I have two children, as the man reminded me.
Was there ever such bullying insolence?'

' Ah, he was right though! He is always right! He
has some meaning which we do not see——'

' Well, God help us, Harrie: that's all I can say.'

' Leave poor God out of it, dear. Providence can't
pass the ushers of a Court of Equity, and the bankrupt
hath said in his heart " There is no God." Just *one* little
chance is left: Tuesday, at three, when I see him, will
be just too late for strict formalities: but it will do, if
he then consents——'

' But *will* he?'

'Ah, he will. I shall make him. I shall pray on my knees——'

The carriage drew up at the D—— door.

The next morning they went down to the Abbey, feeling as if it were their last week-end there, or anywhere. It is situated in nobly-wooded Bucks country, not far from the two Chalfonts and Amersham, and there throughout the season Harriet gave week-ends, small parties, but very chosen, and considered good.

Late in the Friday night Jack and Little Lord Archie arrived on horseback.

The next morning, Jack, who invariably woke at dawn, was walking in the park. He had passed through that vista of state rooms where the great D—— ball had been danced ten years before, and come out upon the balcony where Pole had shown the bottled finger-joint to Raby; thence, down three steps, he passed to the walk by which they two had gone from the balcony, soon to plunge into wood. It was a bright morning, though sunrise was not yet. That, in fact, was noted as a phenomenal summer, a prolonged fête of light, with hardly any rain. Everywhere the forest rang with singing, and was charming with flowers, night-dews, and perfumes. By chance Jack turned to the left down that very wood-alley where Pole and Raby had descended, their scabbard-tips anon striking upon stones buried in moss and mast. He entered a region of evergreens, holly, box, laurel and holm, with some beech, and elms of that great size which, somehow, is attained only in the neighbourhood of London; then, seeing a pile of felled silver-firs, backed by a wall of forest, he passed through a plantation of cherry-trees, eating as he went, sat on the trunks, and put hand to pocket to get his pipe. Away yonder across a valley was that rockery and cascade where Pole and Raby had taken shelter in a grotto from a shower; its noise was hardly audible, but through the trees Jack saw its foams. The long grasses of the plantation were all inlaid with forest-flowers, profusions that would not be hidden, but peeped, anemone, pansy, bluebell; and here, it was clear, the principal business was to

sing and give one's perfume with all one's heart and all one's soul, each for himself, never mind the others, while it was called to-day. Just overhead amid shrilling routs of little wagtails, sparrows, reedwrens, a cuckoo cooed his gawky plainsong, which soon ceased, but soon recommenced the same old scoundrel tale of 'No cares—no chicks—egg laid—titlark's nest—thank God.' There on a felled fir a hairy caterpillar propelled itself, and not fifteen yards yonder a lark rose high, a blinking song, shading as it were its eyes, to see how the sun was coming. Jack was about to light his pipe, when in the hazel-top above him a squirrel rushed, and a catkin, dropping upon his match, quenched it. He glanced up, and by that glance was held from any smoking that morning. He saw coming—a woman. She had apparently not yet noticed him, but was looking up into the cherry-trees, almost laughing. Her uncovered hair, somewhat rumped, and packed away and up from her nude ears and brow, resembled the dry interior of wheat-straw. She wore a mauve flimsy, baggy at the waist; and he almost looked to see her feet bare, so flighty she seemed, and capable of darting into the air. It was his 'angel' of Brick Lane.

As he rose, she saw him, paused one second, and they met with extended hands.

'Little did I expect to see you here,' said he.

'I am spending the week-end with my friend, the Marchioness of D—. And you?'

'I, too.'

'I thought you were a workman.'

'Yes, but a rich one for the moment. I am the marchioness' brother: but don't say anything, as I don't want anyone to know.'

'Yet you tell me!'

'I have been looking for you in Brick Lane.'

'Just to see me? And I have been thinking ever since of you.'

'I know your brother!'

'When? . . . Where?'

'A little outside bushtownship in Australia called

Mohrano. He preached—one Sunday afternoon. And I heard him.'

'How lucky! When?'

'Six, seven years ago. Two weeks later I started searching, like a woman searching for a piece of silver, but I never found him.'

'So like him!' she laughed: 'he vanishes! Was it he that made you give the flowers?'

'Yes. My soul is his son in a manner of speaking. I love him more than any other being in the whole world—except one.'

'Then, you and I are brother and sister, husband and wife, and knit old friends!'

'You mustn't suppose that I'm worthy to be anything to you——' with lowered lids.

'Your humility is very great'— with lowered lids— 'and proves that *I* may be unworthy of you.'

'How happy to be with you!'

'Just listen to these screamers with their vain repetitions, thinking that they shall be heard for their much speaking. One cannot hear one's ears for bliss! And that silly, fond lark trying to get clear above the discord and competition, and alone lay its song at Heaven's gate. On the highest slopes we, too, could fly beyond them bodily: but that will be in a moment, and the twinkling of an eye.'

She linked her fingers with his, and they strolled, not *really* through an English park, but through uplands of peace, fields of asphodel, toward gardens whose glassy portals swung back at their approach. For it is written: 'Two are better than one: for if two lie together, then have they heat, but how can one be warm alone?' And among the myths of churches, this is not a myth: the 'communion of saints,' and the suppers of the princes.

Like stars they sang together: for though to a listener their speech would have seemed mere speech, soon it was really a chaunting, a sacrament, and an 'unknown tongue.' Her mere music, without words, stirred an answering rhythm in Jack's bosom; his mere presence made her light. If she told her name,

his heart burned within him; if he told his, she laughed for joy. Anon simultaneous tears filled their eyes. Such Paradises are on earth.

‘What had he on?’

‘A dark-blue jacket, an old hat, old leggings, a Salvationist jersey——’

‘Oh-h-h, the duplicity! That was to entrap! Did he look—thin?’

‘Rather pale and thin. You haven’t seen him since?’

‘No. But soon! I have a recent letter’—she touched her bosom—‘he is in South Africa. He will be in England within two months.’

‘Then I shall see him.’

‘I hope so.’

‘Why do you say that you will, but only hope that I shall?’

‘I don’t quite know. Something made me.’

In the garden of their pleasance they were now descending an avenue brown with shade, where the birds were all nightingales, and the moss was carpeted with violets alone.

‘What is his name?’

‘Arnhem Valdemar d’Este, Lord Harling.’

‘And yours?’

‘Stephane Jane d’Este, Countess St. Delmo. And yours?’

‘Jack Hay: but I call myself John Bennett.’

‘The great rich Bennett?’

‘Yes.’

‘Rolling barrows of flowers about Whitechapel?’

‘There’s nothing in that.’

‘There is princely deigning, of which the world is not worthy, when you think it nothing. Beautiful you are to me, my friend, in your purple and fine linens, and I do love you, and shall be with you always.’

‘That’s by your pity and beauty, then, and by the greatness of His mercy. You are just like him. I suppose you grew up neck and neck?’

‘Yes. He is four years older than I. There were

no others. Our father and mother were Christian folk. They parted with half their belongings: call it "theirs." It was all the light they had then—they were not old, and would have learned with years. They retained half, they said, for Arnhem and me. They died on the same day, when I was about twelve and he sixteen. Then we two were alone in a gloomy home near the sea-shore. We hardly ever separated ourselves day or night, but spent our life, sleeping even, in an old library and wood of sycamores and tamarisks near it. In no motion of my mind, or lifting up of my eyes, was I without him then. Three years of that life passed for me without leaving one salient memory behind, save the songs he wrote for my harp. I forgot place and time in the interest of watching him grow into the very picture of the Lord.'

Now the garden-paths really led through a wood of sycamores and tamarisks to sea-sands, and behind the trees lay a manor-house, whose halls gave Orphic sounds at every breeze or movement, being dry-timbered, like old violins and choirs of humming-tops; and the sea lay like a lake when no breeze is, violet-dark, but it panted and trembled like a breast, and one understood that its calm was but the precursor of a passion, when it would tempest into singing; and from the sands sprang musk-roses, which trembled continually: for the air was unquiet with sighs and musics that whiffed the hair; and heaven darkened with purples; and a storm of music gathered.

'Only once, when I was eighteen,' she said, 'our minds diverged a little. I have prayed, of course, but it remains. It concerned the origins of man. He had taught me that man is the son of the ape, by father and mother: others say grandson, though the always-missing "link" is significant to Arnhem and to me, too, that there is no "link." But son or grandson to the millionth degree can make no spiritual difference to man: for the pure-blooded descendant of the earthly could never have aught of heaven, till heaven intervene as a begetter: that is clear: for the ape is no

more moral than the oyster, one might almost say less moral, and however long the oyster kept on evolving, the element of morality, of the Ineffable, could never have come in without the seed of intervening heaven: for like can beget only like, even after a billion ages. Hence Arnhem says that unregenerate man is no more moral and heavenly than the oyster or ape, and *is*, in fact, an ape-being.'

'Well, isn't that so?'

'But it breaks my heart——! Have not unregenerate people consciences?'

'I don't think that. The fact is, regenerate men have introduced moral ideas and rules, and when unregenerate ones break them, they feel frightened, and call it "conscience." I've heard that the ancient Greeks were proud of stealing, instead of being ashamed, as modern people are; parents and the Government used to murder children as a matter of course, without any remorse; and modern soldiers murder without the least twinge of "conscience," because it's the fashion, whereas in a rational society a man would be far more shocked at the idea of murdering one who never harmed him than one who had. It's only fashion. There's no more conscience than in apes——'

'But I never will yield! They have heavenly impulses: they build hospitals—they have a sort of worship——'

'Those must be imitative impulses: they can't be really heavenly——'

'They are.'

'Then, how can they possibly get them? Not from the oyster. That's impossible.'

'From their Father in heaven.'

'But their father was an ape.'

'I believe that their father was God.'

'I don't understand you. Who, then, was their mother?'

'An ape: a virgin ape. Man is a mulatto.'

'Oh, I see——'

'Hence the double-nature of the utterly unre-

generate—the ape mixed with persistent hints of the god; hence the absence of any trace of “links”—for hundreds are “missing,” not one, *I* think; hence the huge upward bound of the cathedral-building son from his mother; hence the Biblical myth that it was the *mother* of man that was base; hence the notion of all nations that the earth is man's mother, heaven his father. I think, in other words, that the upheaving of the world was by two stages: first, a virgin ape was impregnated with heavenly seed to produce man, then a virgin woman impregnated to produce Jesus. Jesus, being two removes from the ape, was able to feel that man's one chance lay, not only in crucifying the ape—that had been felt before Jesus—but in straining to do, feel, and be in just the contrary extreme to the ape's doing, feeling, and being. Man could never have discovered that for himself: he was still too heavily apish; and the use of Jesus was to do it for himself, and declare it. Man now, by uphill straining, can first reach the stage of newbegetting or regeneration where Jesus was born, and thence on into the mountains where Jesus clomb: but with how much more difficulty at first, with our double weight, than *he!* who was not born a man, but an overman.'

'You are beautiful with your pity,' said Jack: 'I don't know if your reading of the secret is right; but your spirit is so perfumed a lamp, lady, that one must needs love you with all the heart.'

'That, then, was the divergence in the progress of our minds. Arnhem told me one day that it was only "a surmise" of mine; I replied that it was a surmise which had come to me after a week of prayer, and he fell penitent before me. But I feel that we are still divided.'

'Does he always travel about?'

'Since he was twenty-one. He only waited to possess his belongings—say "his." We were what are called "wards in Chancery," and slaves of the Law, which, I'm afraid, did not find us as submissive as we should have been. Then, having given away, he started to travel and preach.'

‘Is he altogether poor, then?’

‘Why, of course. One hardly divines how he lives and travels. He never writes of that. He probably works sometimes.’

‘When I saw him he had a shaggy little pony, that set me laughing for weeks after. No one knows how sweet that was but me!’

‘You are just as knightly and charming in your way.’

‘That’s by the favour of your heavenly eyes, then. And you, are you so hard up, too?’

‘Sometimes I take money for nursing, and then am rich. Ordinarily my many rich friends, regarding me as more or less deranged, take me in. To the unregenerate, the mood of Heaven is not like Dutch, but like the talk of winds, and waves, and spheres: it is inarticulate to them, and they look down upon us with that same cynicism with which cats look down upon men. But it is a cynicism not ill meant, and even touching when mixed with their good pity and charities; some of them even see that, but for us, the world would be instantly destroyed. So I have told you of myself, and you will tell me.’

‘I’d rather hear about you all day. How happy and bright——!’

‘What?’

‘Everything.’

‘Such is His mercy, you see, and the milk of His Kingdom. I don’t think I was ever better than now.’

‘Nor I ever half so blessed, lady. You are the queen of all the muses and the graces, I think. Pity me if I can’t love you as I ought.’

‘You can. Some day before long you will be quite among the powers, I divine. You have something special: some simple odour of violet, or clover, from which the rarest honey is ravished. What flower is it? I am not sure. I have known only two other men—I think I guess, though: is it not virginity?’

‘It may be—by His strange pity.’

‘I thought so: there is so much of the lamb, dear, in all your voice and way. Virgins alone attain to

miracles, Arnhem thinks: that is why you can so suffuse one's bosom with blushes of perfumes, my friend; and well were you chosen, Jack Hay, to scatter flowers in Whitechapel, who are yourself a lily. My hail to you, prince of God.'

Her face, looking up incarnadine, resembled the freshest rosebud.

'Not that I had anything to do with it,' said he very humbly: 'only my usual luck.'

'Fie, it wasn't. I know about men. Haven't you been "in love"?''

'Once only, in Australia, soon after I saw him: *he* saved me then. Besides her, I loved another when I was a lad, still do above all flesh. But if ever there was anything earthly in that, it wasn't much: mainly a broken-hearted affection, like a regeneration. She's married now.'

'You will always be virgin, of course?'

He drew in his breath, with 'You may bet.'

'Then, I will marry you, if you ask me.'

'Now, may God grant it! On my honour, lady, never dared I hope for such a crown!'

'I won't be much of a wife, you know. Whitechapel is already my husband. But you will see me sometimes—in the evenings—whole evenings sometimes. Never before has such a thought entered my head; nor have I seen any man but you and one other, to whom I felt that I could trust with quietness the inviolability of my body. I should go at once to live with you, dear, but I fear the offence to others. We can be outwardly married within a week, if nothing hinders.'

He brought his lips toward her brow, her head between his hands.

'Your God fill you full for your beauty and pity,' said he. 'I tell you for a downright fact, which I know, that I don't half deserve to have you that close to me. But I don't care: this is not the first thing which has been wastefully handed me without the least deserving: and I take it like the others. . . . You will patiently hand and guide me, blessed lady,

up the hills where you contemplate the vision of your Father.'

Again he piously kissed her brow, and his face was as if transfigured, and hers also, and they sighed in a crisis of their coming together.

'But I know nothing of my husband's life; only his name and fragrant heart. How is it that you are brother to the Marchioness of D——? You do, I see, resemble her about the eyes, till one looks closer.'

'I will tell you soon. It is a long story. They don't know who I am, and mustn't. They are very dear to me, and I have a harsh work to do for them.'

'Is it true that you are so very rich?'

'Yes, very.'

'Since when?'

'About four years now.'

'So long?'

'I suppose it seems long. But I must say in self-defence that I'm not like other rich men: I care not a button for my riches. They haven't done me any harm——'

'Are you *sure*?'

'Well, I hope not. I don't see—— Of course, I've always intended to get quit of it all pretty soon. But I've never found the time to pan it out somehow. I haven't much troubled, to tell the truth. I knew that that would come. Besides, I wanted *some* riches, to do what I'm doing for these same sisters of mine——'

'Obedience first, dear,' she murmured very low, putting her arm about him: and a mist came between them.

'That's true,' said he.

'Infirmities—unprincipally indignities—even degradations—must harass us, until we obey to the letter.'

'That's true, too. I know it too well. I suppose I have been a fool again, just through don't-care. But I'll do it soon.'

'Be very quick!'

'All right.'

She smiled, saying:

'You are one of those overmen whom Jesus loves. I know the sort : people not perfect, but perfectly fond, innocent, and brave : and I see—I certainly see—that you will die a violent death, in the mood of his, while you are still a young man. There is about you a shroud spotted with blood, and in your hand a sceptre wreathed with amaranth.'

'How's that, then?'

'I understand that it must be so with you, I can't tell how. And it will be due, firstly, to your own faults; secondly, to your own heroic birth and being; and thirdly, above all, to your Father's ancient Will before the world was.'

She said this standing still, agape at a point in space; and she sighed with strong relief, having said it. And now as they went still on, they were re-ascending that avenue brown with shade, where the birds were all nightingales, and the moss was carpeted with violets alone.

'Then, p'raps I shan't see him, in truth,' said Jack.

'Oh, yes,' she murmured, her head on his shoulder, 'in the appointed day'—then, with a movement—'see him now at least'—and she took a silver locket from her neck, and shewed him a miniature. But it was not quite the Mohrano face, being younger and less bearded.

Half-round the miniature was a lock of hair; and she said:

'Under the hair and miniature is a piece of paper. It has been there nine years, and is very old, quite twenty years. It has some writing of his on it: my mother found and stole it, and gave it me on her death-bed. Do you think I dare . . .?'

'Better not,' said he.

'But I wish you to see. I shall risk. . . .'

They were now in that place called 'The Lower Terrace,' bounded on one hand by elm-boles, on the other by a balustrade, where Raby had left Pole for dead; and she, kneeling by the balustrade, put the locket on the coping, he kneeling beside her, so that they resembled devotees.

With care she got out the glass; daintily lifted

the miniature and hair, laid them in a fold of her handkerchief, and, peering, picked out a brownish paper, small as a ha'penny. To open this was indeed a work, each creasing being as frail as scorched thread. Jack's head touched hers in the close interest of their prying and suspense. Happily, there was little breeze; and presently four inches of paper, covered with writing and a drawing, lay on the coping. The characters now seemed written in diluted red ink, and being tiny, were illegible round the borders, but in the centre could be read the words: 'Dear Jesus, will you come and dine with me this evening? Everything to be spare and frugal, as you like it, but with plenty of liqueurs, nuts, and sweets, and a song-cycle by the Muses. Yours ever, dear, ARNHEM.'

When they had sufficiently gazed, it was refolded without grave injury, and replaced under the miniature, the hair, and the glass.

'How old was he?' asked Jack.

'Eleven perhaps: nearer ten probably. Do you know that figure in the corner?'

'I seem to, somehow.'

'The words we use can say nothing,' she sighed.

It was a six-pointed star, with an eye in each point, and an eye also in the centre: and to one's gaze it seemed to roll.

The sun was now well up, and from somewhere sounded an axe and a grass-mower. They turned their steps toward the Abbey through the elm-forest, discussing the date of their legal marriage. But Jack happened to mention that, for certain reasons connected with Gracie, he did not wish to live in England, and, as he was 'learning to be a doctor,' thought of going to America; and this Stephane heard with unease, saying:

'I did not know that you had to go from England. This is the first time during two years that I have left Whitechapel for more than twelve hours. Will you tear one up by the roots? Now, and always, and everywhere I am your wife. But perhaps we should wait and see, dear, how God wills. . . .'

Finally, it was arranged to wait till Arnheim came,

and consult him, Stephane promising, meanwhile, to make the flat in the Hotel V——, where Jack never slept, her home.

‘Where, then, do you sleep?’ she asked.

‘In a yard in Whitechapel, or one in Drury Lane.’

‘Hence the flower-giving up there. What, by the way, was your *motif*?’

‘I seemed to drop to it that the degradation of town-people as compared with country ones is caused only by the absence of all Nature——’

She looked fully at him, and after a minute’s thought said with strong emotion :

‘Believe me, Jack Hay, flesh-and-blood has not revealed this to you, but your Father in heaven.’

‘Yes, I felt that it was true,’ said he.

‘“A virgin shall conceive”—how true universally—how true of *you*! But since?’

‘I have continued to give every day. It has even grown a bit. I’ve got two clerks, and about fifteen men on it. The costers come, and my men buy——’

‘But—how wasteful!’

‘Costs precious little.’

‘But still—— Why not buy your own flowers wholesale? Why not grow your own? And why flowers, more than birds, fruit, honey——?’

She was gazing away, as if amazed at something in space.

‘It never struck me like that——’ said he, astonished.

‘Here is the chance you seek to spend and spend! How rich are you?’

‘Some seven to nine millions——’

‘Well, that would be enough for a beginning.’

‘A *beginning*?’

‘Yes—if we can get the Aristocracy and the City interested. I’m sure they’d like it, and help. What new brightness and refining! the steady influence and winning-back! We may get a flower into every London room——!’

Her face blushed with ardours of the fairest rose, and Jack stood agape as at a new thought.

‘Well,’ he said presently, ‘I haven’t the least doubt

that what you say is practical. Your whole body is full of light, dear, and I'd bet that there's not much in the way of business that you wouldn't handle better than any financier in this world, if you once tackled it. All right: the first thing is to get expert information, and then we'll think of these same birds and flowers, and give our intermarried hearts to them.'

And now, lifting up the eyes, he saw quite near the feudal pile, the hall, and there, like an anxious mother, Little Lord Archie, prospecting with shaded eyes, Jack having had no breakfast such as Lord Archie knew of. After passing through a paved hall of tapestry surrounded with seats and carved cabinets of pearwood, Stephane, leaving them, mounted the stairs with the airiness of an ascension, and, as she vanished from his sight, Jack awoke from a dream far realer and brighter than the dream of sense.

He had been given the best bedroom in the house, the marchioness's own, a very chapel of Flanders tapestry. But when a little later he met the sisters on a terrace, their hearts sank: his manner was curt to rudeness. At lunch, too, he replied to them only with 'yes' or 'no'; and toward evening made such a scene as D—— Abbey may never have witnessed.

All day, at moments when not with Stephane, he had kept Little Lord Archie by him; and with Lord Archie, as the sun declined, though still hot, he entered the west wing from the lawn toward what is called the King's Gallery, a place where the guests mostly assembled: for it contained a fine organ, to play which an organist came down weekly, as well as part of P——'s band. In such ways the marquess's money had been spent.

There reclined the marchioness, serene in angel-sleeves as though no Ætna growled beneath her, for she drowned Ætna with the organ, cringing in the shelter of to-day, as the *condamné* feasts on the night before the gallows; and there, too, was Augusta, elegantly hiding in to-day, but palish, starting at shadows, conscious of to-morrow's relentless sunrise; and with them were most of the guests, listening to the music,

a Royal Academician, Lily Barnes, another *débutante*, a Cabinet Minister, Mrs. Hay, talent and no-talent, male and female, in various poses and moods of elegance.

But, seeing Jack come, two hearts there without reason quailed and chilled a moment, like the sensitive-plant.

He, as he approached, stopped a moment, scrutinized the group, made quite sure that Stephane was not in it, then, stooping to Lord Archie, said:

'What was that you were telling me on Tuesday about my being in love with the marchioness and Lady Perowne?'

'Only that it is said, my good Bennett. It is your own fault, really. One must not be paternal to a pretty woman, or everybody assumes that it is her children whom you wish to be a father to——'

With strong outcry Jack ran forward.

'*Stop that playing!*'—and all faces paled.

The music broke off. The organist spun round. Sir Markham's hands gripped his chair-arms. Mrs. Hay dropped her tea-cup. Open stood the white lips of Harriet and Augusta. Every eye glanced astonishment and dismay at the severity of his countenance, at the call of his voice with its tremble of the bleating lamb, at the authority and mesmerism of his manhood.

'Extraordinary thing!' he cried, standing all among them, just over Lily Barnes' chair. 'Extraordinary thing! It seems that I am accused of unheard-of infamies! I am bound to make you good men and ladies my witnesses. The most incredible slanders! Our hostess here and her sister, Lady Perowne, have taken it into their heads, or pretend that they have, that I am for making love to them! To them both! Lawfully-married women! One of them with two children! Two sisters! Daughters of a respectable middle-class man and woman, whose hairs are now gray with heartbreaking venerableness! And these two women have gone about, spreading the report that I——'

'No,' interposed Little Lord Archie, his hands shivering on a chairback, but some echo of old *noblesse* in him: 'it was *I* unfortunately who bantered Mr. Bennett about this, but I *never* said——'

'Be quiet, be quiet, you, be quiet,' said Jack; then louder: 'These two women have gone about, spreading the report that *I*, a man whose good name has never yet been tarnished, am in love with them, and want to lead them from their husbands, their children, their duties, and their God! Was there ever such a thing? Women, both of whom I liked so well, and would have helped in their troubles, and still, by God's help, mean to rescue! At any rate, never was a statement so false; and I think it would be only fair to me, if you, ladies and gentlemen, henceforth contradict it in my name whenever and wherever you hear it. Who steals my purse steals trash, but she who robs me of my good name——' his voice almost broke with laughter —'I won't stay another moment in this place. Come along, Lord Archie, get me my horse——'

Though stern enough, he had failed to look passionate, for lack of a flush, and on two or three minds, as he turned and went, he left some impression of unreality: but upon all the effect was terribly painful. Lord Archie did not follow him at once, but stood making a little confused speech, which no one heard, his eyes carefully turned from the sisters; nobody, in fact, dared look at them, not even Sir Markham, feeling that their faces were not presentable. Everyone seemed frozen. Only Lily Barnes, with shivering shoulders, moved her eyes, glancing up to see if he was really gone from her. Sir Markham had sprung up, and an agitation waved down his beard, but he did not move. 'Titty,' who usually bore her sixty years well, looked quite old in her brown silk, and sat in punishment with crossed wrists and side-ward face. Suddenly the organist broke the agony of silence, only heightened by Lord Archie's lispings, and saved the situation by thundering into music. Jack, meantime, was half-way to the stables, a quadrangle of brick in semi-Mauresque; and there, in the

courtyard, Lord Archie soon joined him with one concentrated :

' *Bennett !*

Jack put an arm round his shoulders, saying :

' Sorry to make you feel so little, old man. But take everything cool, you know. That's the only way. You may bet that I had a meaning, and if ever you see me give pain to anyone again, be sure it's their fault and not mine, for I hate that. It isn't the surgeon that's wrong, you know, it's the sick man. Besides, this means another two hundred quid for you, for your trouble.'

Lord Archie's flat upper-lip hung silent : he had no inclination to be the talk of Mayfair, even for two hundred pounds, and inwardly he damned South Africa.

' Well, are you still in a huff ?' asked Jack.

Lord Archie threw up palms of despair, and ran to the back of the house to give instructions about the trunks ; in a few minutes the horses were ready, both ex-racers, Lord Archie's a present from Jack, and they set off for London.

XXXVI

WHIST

THE next day, both at Church Parade and at lunch in a club, Lord Archie remarked with a lifting of the hands :

‘All, all is known. . . .’

‘How can you tell?’ asked Jack.

‘As if one were blind and deaf, my dear Bennett! A scandal is like ozone, it freshens everybody up, doesn’t it? People take a new hold on life. Those two at the third table are now discussing us, you know——’

‘But—there’s no post on Sunday.’

‘There’s the telegraph on Saturday night, though. We have been wire-dancing like two vile acrobats. If a few people in Paris and New York now know it, that would not surprise me. Everyone in London does, except, perhaps, D——. Of course, Bennett, you know your own motives best——’

‘Yes, I do: so don’t say anything. Those two women, I assure you, no longer belong to Society, to their husbands, or to anyone, but exclusively to me: so I’ll do as I like with them——’

‘By all means—I give them freely to you—turn them into a harem, make them tract-distributors, enjoy them in the form of sausages—only don’t for God’s sake——’

‘Never mind, don’t talk. You don’t understand. Your sky is an acorn-shell, and you can’t conceive the firmament——’

‘“Johannesburg”!’ cried Lord Archie, starting alert.

'All right, you shall have your paltry £100. How much is that now?'

'Five hundred.'

'Well, come on. I'm going to Whitechapel——'

On the Monday afternoon he saw Stephane a few minutes when she brought her little wooden trunk and harp. She chose the bedroom on the right of the vestibule, looking upon the Avenue, got a key, and immediately went away. Then for a week she was lost to him again. She mostly came to her bed at foreday hours, and like a ghost might be gone at cock-crow.

Three p.m. on the Tuesday was the hour appointed for the meeting with Harriet. But Jack never dreamed that she would come after 'the scene,' the main motive of which had been to prevent her coming. She was, however, coming, and with her Augusta.

It was dull and raining; they were in a cab; and when, turning into Cockspur Street, the horse slipped on the wet street, Augusta broke the silence, saying:

'Really, I'd rather the horse fell, and broke my neck, than face that terrible man again! Why not leave the man under his delusion? It is too much to expect of me!'

'Don't be a coward, dear,' said Harriet, with pressed, white lips. 'Understand clearly that we are this man's slaves, his will our law, and his good opinion our heaven. It has to be done, so let us do it with *aplomb*. We are of richer blood than our husbands and their peers: pray, let us be women.'

Augusta sighed.

'But why be his slaves, Harrie, for no good? This man isn't going to help us, really.'

'Isn't he? He *is*! If he kills me, I'll still believe him grand and good. I know him in my inmost nerves. I happen to be blessed with instincts, you see.'

'The man isn't going to help us,' said Augusta ruefully.

'But why not? It is only this report that has set

him against us! I knew there was something. Didn't I say so? We have been two geese, that's all: he never loved us the least bit as we thought; but that he was fond of *me* in some way I will swear. And what did he mean by saying on Saturday, "Women whom I still mean, by God's help, to rescue"? Those were his words. I shan't be afraid——'

But as the cab drew up, sudden cold gripped her heart, and her face blanched.

They had got to the foot of the central stair, when Augusta stopped dead, and stood looking down, with repugnance hung on her scornful lower-lip.

'I'm not going,' said she.

'Well, as you like. Let us go back. I certainly shan't go alone,' said Harriet.

They turned their faces back toward the street, and for some time stood indecisive, shifting about, not looking at each other, playing their parasols.

Five minutes passed.

'We had better go on,' said Harriet.

'I leave it to you.'

'Come.'

And now with a sort of haste they went—up the stair—along the corridor—till, in the midst of it, Augusta again stopped, saying:

'The man isn't going to.'

'Come, dear,' said Harriet, panting, 'let us try our luck——'

And again they went forward, but this time with reluctant slowness, till they came to the door; and Harriet knocked soft, as if afraid of disturbing someone dying.

'Mr. Bennett is not in,' said a clerk who came.

'Will he be long?'

'There is no saying.'

'We will wait.'

They went into the drawing-room, where Augusta at once sank into a chair with a sigh of relief at the respite and postponement of the ordeal; but Harriet's overwrought nerves were affected in the opposite sense, and crying: 'Oh, how cruel and terrible! He

promised me so faithfully. . . . ' she gave way, and wept into her hands.

Jack, in fact, as we said, never imagined that they were coming, and at that time was down in K——'s room with a lot of men, in his hand a copy of the new-born *Gadfly*, which, by an absurd whim, he had made K—— re-start. It was half-an-hour before he came up, without a hat, and as he entered the hall-door, heard with wonder the voice of Harriet, and the word '*Jack*.' His heart thumped at that name on her lips. He heard it distinctly, the drawingroom-door, just near the hall-door, having been left slightly ajar by the clerk.

'This is the punishment for *Jack*,' Augusta had remarked.

'For *Jack*!' Harriet had exclaimed: and it was this exclamation which he had heard. He stepped softly nearer.

'I mean,' said Augusta, 'that things do come back upon people's heads. There must be a God somewhere, and it is useless saying that there's no retribution. It may wait a long time, and move slowly, but it comes at last, apparently. Really, it is we who killed *Jack*, you know, Harrie——'

'Dearest! no, no,' murmured Jack with full eyes. He always loved Augusta the best.

'God knows,' said Harriet: 'don't bother me. If we really did, I only hope we shall catch it nice and hot, as we are doing already——'

'No, you shan't,' murmured Jack, all red-eyed.

'He never was guilty of that crime,' said Augusta: 'some truths dawn upon people by the mere process of the suns, without any other reason: and that is one. Papa and mama always said that he wasn't guilty, and I have always felt that he wasn't since his death. We were too heartless to that poor boy, really!'

'No, no,' murmured Jack.

'Who killed Dr. Stanley?' asked Harriet. 'What a mystery! No one has ever come near solving it. I have heard Mr. Pole say that it was either Jack or

Nibbs, and that it wasn't Jack. And it wasn't Nibbs, of course. Then, who was it?'

'If I had to choose between Jack and Mr. Raby, I'd sooner say that it was Mr. Raby, Harrie——'

'No, no,—dear love,' murmured Jack, with streaming face.

'Perhaps Dr. Stanley poisoned himself,' said Harriet: 'he is said to have been deranged that night. There was no one who had the least motive for poisoning him——'

'Ah, pity you didn't think of that at the time, Harrie!' said Augusta: 'I certainly don't wish to upbraid you now, dear, but it was your fault, you know, and I should not care to be in your shoes. It was you who said something about some Roman father, who condemned his own son to death——'

'And who persuaded papa, when he refused to prosecute?' retorted Harriet with the promptness of a spring: 'who burst into tears, and said that life was become impossible, and you'd rather commit suicide than endure it? I prefer my shoes to yours!—though I envy your slippers. It is beautiful to remember by halves, my Gussie!'

'Well, all I say is that I don't know how you could have done it, Harrie, or I either, for that matter. Really, he was too hardly used, that boy: and cut off so young from his life, too. If humiliation and disasters come upon us now, I don't think that would be unnatural. Oh, it is all very sinister! Heaven only forgive and spare us——'

'Why, it does!' groaned Jack outside: 'can't you guess? if only for me——'

'Ah, people reap as they have sown, dear,' said Harriet: 'I don't believe in forgiveness and sparing——'

'Oh, do!' he went, with wrung hands, 'why not?'

'At any rate, Jack has found his avenger,' said Augusta, 'between Providence, Mr. Bennett, and our own recklessness. Our consolation for the moment is that Society puts us in the right about that Abbey scene. I really thought that people were not going to receive us——'

'It is wonderful that you can care a fig what Society thinks now,' said Harriet. 'Ah, when is the man coming? I can't bear it much longer——!'

Outside Jack's face was lifted, and his arms spread, for them; then, startled by someone passing across from the office to the typewriters' room, he hurried into Stephane's, and there washed his eyes. Still, however, he was hardly presentable, and had to wait some minutes; then, muttering 'No weakness, now,' he went out, and entered the drawing-room.

'What, you here,' said he, stopping short at the door, with a certain terrible sternness, gaunt and hard, which his face could assume: 'how came you here? No one told me. This is very surprising, that you two women keep coming here after me!'

They had both sprung up, white as sheets.

'We—we had an appointment with you at three. Had we not?' said Harriet.

'One of you had. But why the other? Mutual protection society, is that it? But I never dreamed that, after what passed at the Abbey on Saturday, you would come here again. This only helps to spread the rumour which you've been putting about——'

'I have come to disabuse your mind of an impression so far-fetched,' said Harriet proudly, her face like white iron: 'and I have brought my sister in order that she may explain the probable origin of the rumour. *We*, of course, never put it about.'

'Oh, you did, you did.'

'We—did—*not*.'

'You did, I say.'

She turned from him with that lump again in her throat, and eyes stung with tears.

'But, Mr. Bennett!' pleaded Augusta, 'don't be angry with us! I'm sure my sister never did, and I never did. We wouldn't! We couldn't!'

'Well, sit down. P'raps you didn't. But it looks wonderfully like it.'

Harriet sat in the lady's armchair, Gussie in the man's; Jack threw himself all over the couch, his

leonine head on his hand, contemplatively facing them.

‘Tell Mr. Bennett, dear,’ said Harriet.

‘Tell me what?’ said Jack: ‘more tales and rumours? You are cool, you two women! Do you really imagine that a man like me can sit listening all day to tales and rumours? Did you ever, I wonder, happen to hear anyone remark that “life is short”? I wonder! And have you ever believed it the least bit? I should just like you, each for herself, to write me out an account of your last—say ten years! How much have you grown? What have you tackled? Where have you got to? Or were they ten years of calls, receptions, bettings, and trips, in probably the lowest company in the world? for I’ve been round the world, and I know men, white and black, and I tell you so. You come of good stock, you have brains and eyes, but haven’t you wickedly shut them to all that is refined, in order to give yourself to all that is easy, in the very mood of the women on the streets, but without their excuse? I’d like to know what heart has blessed you all those years, what tear you have dried, or stomach filled, except your own: I’d just like to know! And only one penny-farthing little life for ever! one half a wink, and it’s gone; yet you spend it with your eyes fast shut, following your absurd little husbands and friends, whom women of your blood and wit were made, not to follow, but to enlighten and rescue. Anyway, you shan’t waste *my* life—what little may be left of it. What’s the bobbery about?’

‘My sister was—going to tell you,’ said Harriet, who had bitten her lip livid. ‘Your bad opinion of us may be quite correct—but will you hear us? We do not care to rest under the imputation of having traduced——’

‘Whatever put it into your heads that I was in love with you? With *both* of you? That’s where the scandalous part of it comes in——’

‘Oh, it *never* entered our heads——’ began Augusta.

‘It did. I have seen you blushing, instead of thinking of your husband and children.’

'Blushing!' she breathed, with a lovely blush, and downcast eyes.

'Yes, it did—enter our heads, Mr. Bennett!' said Harriet brokenly, but stoutly: 'your manner to *me*, at least, seemed—heartly. The men we are accustomed to do not treat women heartily, or even gallantly, except for basely interested motives: and we thought—— It was too foolish! We should have known—— We do ask you to forgive us!'

He cast down his eyes; then, with uncontrollable tenderness:

'Do I look as if I do?'

'Yes,' said she, dropping one tear.

'That's all right, then. But—but—whyever did you go spreading it all over the town——?'

'We *never* did. Don't be angry! Do, pray——'

'You must have.'

'Tell Mr. Bennett, Gussie.'

'Mr. Bennett, no,' said Augusta breathlessly, leaning forward, 'my sister never said so. About two weeks ago she was having lunch at the Hurlingham Club with old Lady de W——, and it was Lady de W—— who mentioned you. Mr. Bennett, it is perfectly well known by everybody that Lady de W—— is the greatest liar in the world. Surely, you must have heard that! She has ruined hundreds of reputations. It was she who mentioned you, *not* my sister. We do hope you won't doubt one's word. She mentioned you in connection with me, and my sister was pre-occupied, and so certain that there was no truth in it, that she hardly took the trouble to deny—— We hope that this may satisfy you——'

'But were you there?' asked Jack.

'Not in person.'

'In what, then?'

'In nothing.'

'Have you *any* person? Or are you all a *toilette*?'

'The point is——'

'How on earth can you know what passed, if you were not there in person?'

'Hasn't my sister told me? I know precisely what

passed. That is why she has brought me, to tell you. Pray do believe. I *know* that my sister must have treated it contemptuously because of her surprise when I myself told her—that you——’

‘That I what?’

‘Were pleased to regard me——’

‘Ah, ah, there you are, you see! You had that fancy in your head! I told you I’d caught you blushing. And you said a moment since that you *never* had the fancy. How is one to believe a word you say, if you contradict yourself in this way?’

‘Oh, I don’t know what to say to him!’ mourned Augusta in despair, with high eyebrows and shaken head.

‘But, Mr. Bennett,’ said Harriet imploringly, ‘we don’t tell lies——’

‘But why not?’ said Jack earnestly: ‘what guarantee have I that you don’t, when your whole existence is a tissue of lies? I should say that ten to one you do tell lies, *ad lib.*, whenever it suits you. Doesn’t Lady de W—— tell lies? And haven’t you miscreantly allowed yourselves to become as like her as two peas? Doesn’t that old hag seem to you less putrid, because she wears caterpillar’s silk, than harlot Sally down the alley? And isn’t that a lie?—such a vulgar one, unworthy of a Bushman! If you saw her talking patronisingly to Sally, would you scream with laughter at her for a crazy old merry-andrew, knowing that she and Sally are just like twins? I doubt it. And don’t you understand that if you lazily live festering all day in one lie, thinking it, scratching it, eating it, you will end by believing and telling all lies? You *do* tell lies.’

‘Ah, then, we do, we do!’ said Harriet: ‘only we pray you to believe that not everything which we say is a lie. I assure you most solemnly that I *never* told Lady de W—— one word——’

‘Look here, what is it you’ve come here for?’

‘To tell you that.’

‘Nothing else?’

'No, nothing else. We only wished—to lay before you—the facts of my father's position—as by appointment—since you have been pleased to be interested——'

'What, after spreading these horrible rumours——?'

'We *never* did——'

'No, Mr. Bennett, she never did,' said Augusta, 'and *I* never did.'

'You did.'

'No, we didn't! Believe us!'

'But what's that about your father's affairs? Have you come here to ask any favour?'

'Yes. We desire——' began Harriet.

'You are cool!'

'If you do not take over the mortgages on the Abbey-estate,' she said gallopingly, 'I shall be hopelessly ruined in one day——'

'Why should you come to *me*, of all people?'

'I don't—know,' she sobbed, breaking quite down.

'I'll do it,' said Jack: 'don't you cry——'

'Truly? Really?'—she looked up with arrested tears.

'Yes. Send your two husbands and father to me in the morning at my Bank—eleven a.m. sharp. Good-bye.'

He sprang up busily, in a hurry to hide his eyes, and just touched their hands.

'Thank you!' they both cried.

'Don't go thinking any more that I love you, that's all——'

'Oh, we *never*——!' began Augusta.

'*I* did! *I* do!' cried Harriet triumphantly.

'What! You still think——?'

'*Yes!*' she screamed after him, as he hurried out with blinded eyes.

And, after him, they passed into the corridor, and down the stairs, lively and chattering as two magpies, flurried with hope and relief.

'But the wonder that he should really do it!' said Augusta in the cab, 'and so easily at the end! What a profound mystery the man is, after all!'

'I have given up the attempt to read him,' answered Harriet: 'mystery is his name. I only know that he has done it for my sake.'

'For yours! Really, Harrie, I can't think that.'

'For yours, then, of course,' said Harriet coldly, each still believing herself Jack's sole motive.

'Oh, but Harrie,' said Augusta, shocked, 'how he talks to us! From whom else could one stand such talk? "Women on the street," "harlot Sally," "lies"——'

'Ah, but it is all true, true, Gussie! Don't let us permit him to say that he has cast his pearls before swine. *He* sees, Gussie! *He* knows!'

'And about our good "stock" and our "blood"! He has an awfully high opinion of us at bottom, you know——'

'Did I tell you so, or not? And did I tell you that he would, or not? Answer me. If he put a knife to my throat, I should still laugh in his face——'

But their exultation did not last very long. Jack did, indeed, take over all the mortgages on the Abbey, 'Parklands,' Lonbydale, and the three town-properties, which was all the landed property left the three men, both Pigwell Chantry and the Cannes Villa being now in Buddo's name; moreover, besides discharging the mortgages, he offered to buy 15,000 coal-mine shares from the marquess personally in ten days, at their temporary market-value of £5: a proposition at which the marquess jumped with the joy of a saved man. The coal-strike, in fact, was on the point of collapsing on the side of the 75,000 men affected: for, though public opinion was strongly with the men, an emergency-committee of the employers had stiffened the weaker members, while the men's picketing-system had partly broken down, the strike-benefit funds of the unions were all but exhausted, and the funds of the strike-committee for the support of non-unionists, in spite of lavish public subscriptions, were at an end. The strike-leaders were now holding a series of final meetings with the employers' repre-

sentatives at the Hotel M—, and everyone was awaiting the announcement of peace. Soon after that peace Lord D— would be able to buy the shares to be delivered to Bennett's for a mere fraction of £5, and the thousands derived from this deal, added to the thousands of Hay and Perowne's similar 'bearing' deal, would almost refloat the three: and that night the marchioness with renewed cordiality slept with the marquess.

'He is really *giving* us this money,' said Harriet to Augusta the next day. 'Is he a new kind of man, or not? If we killed one brother, we have got a better one, which is an odd sort of recompense. Oh, but the man makes me so disgusted with everything about me! I confess, Gussie, that my Charlie no longer amuses me. Joy may endure for a night, but heaviness cometh in the morning. There are prettier sorts of marquesses, certainly. I shall go to see the man again to thank him, even if he turns me out——'

But on the night of the day when the brokers of Bennett and the marquess settled their coal-contract, two men sat in a corner of the Hotel V— smoking-room, which was almost deserted, smoking cigars, and sipping brandy-and-soda. They were Buddo and the chief strike-leader. And their talk was long, close, and weighty.

At the end of it Buddo took a cheque-book from his breast-pocket, went to a near table on which was pen-and-ink, wrote one of his mammoth cheques, and handed it to the strike-leader. And the next day negotiations were broken off between the men and the employers.

The strike went on.

Five days later Hay and Perowne were bankrupts, heavily involved. Their resources could not purchase one quarter of the shares which they had contracted to deliver. They were without outside assets. The title-deeds to all their realty, with liens on nearly all their personalty, were in Buddo's safes. . . .

Four days, and then would come the turn of the Marquess of D—.

It was Ascot week, and hardly more than a month of the season left. Harriet and Augusta went down with a house-party two days before the public breakdown of Hay and Perowne. They still had sufficient jewels, though the husbands had been borrowing freely of them, to make, by pawning, a joint fund of £11,000; and in one desperate week at Ascot they lost it all.

They returned to town the day before Lord D——'s coal-contract fell due. The strike continued. That night at nine Harriet, close-veiled, dressed in black silk muslin, and trembling from head to foot, called alone upon Jack.

She was in such a state as hardly to feel surprise when the door was opened to her by Stephane. She only said:

'How do you do? Are you with Mr. Bennett?'

'He is out.'

Harriet made a gesture of despair.

'Don't be troubled,' said Stephane: 'come in, and I will run—perhaps I can find him: he left a note that he has gone to the Recital at St. Paul's with Lord Archie D——t.'

'I will go myself—thank you——'

She hurried away and took a cab. Some time before this, the mournful death of a young prince had occurred, Society tended to mourning, and from a number of carriages before the cathedral costumes almost colourless came out. Harriet had intended waiting outside, but in company with a party of three who recognised her she went in. The interior was dark, save for one ray in the chancel. Up yonder to the east a seated crowd could be discerned, a crowd of ghosts; some male ghosts stood in the aisle; and ghostly out of the glooms thronged the hushed footfalls. Anon the darkness was informed with a voice of power, and trembled; then, when the organ ceased, a lady clad in black emerged out of the remote obscurities of the chancel, grew real and realer toward the single ray, and there standing, music in hand, sang 'Still wie die Nacht.'

Harriet had separated from her friends, and standing in the loose crowd peered to find Jack. The men at the top of the aisle, was there: and just before the search was not long: he a long time, while the organ, him she stood trembling the single voice stood by the singing light, and again 'O Rest in the Lord.' Then at last, Harriet on tiptoe whispered: 'Can I speak with you?' and he, without turning, said: 'All right.'

She followed him out, and without speaking they got into a cab. After a long silence she began to speak, but he stopped her, saying: 'Not yet—let me think.'

At the hotel he opened his door with a latch-key. Stephane had gone out. The suite was in darkness. In the drawing-room he turned on the light.

'Now then, my lady!' said he, throwing himself on the couch. 'Sit down.'

She tried to speak, but failed, shaken by a steady tremor. He jumped up, went into Stephane's room, and returned with a glass of water, into which he poured some claret from a cabinet.

'Drink that,' he said.

She lifted her veil to the eyebrows, and drank a little. He lay on the sofa again and watched her, with a rather stern face.

'Everything is lost for us.'

He shrugged.

'How can I help?'

'Do not harden yourself! In three days he will be a bankrupt——'

'That has happened so.'

'Yes: but you bought the shares from him with a view to help me, didn't you? Now that things have gone against us, you will not——'

'He'd be a bankrupt anyhow, three or four times over. Nothing could save him. He's involved over a quarter of a million, and hasn't a farthing——'

'Only let him keep the —— Abbey!'

He jumped up with a stamp.

'You have no right to come here making requests!

Let him keep which Abbey? How can he keep a great house, or any house, without a penny piece? Besides, don't you understand that every one of the properties has second mortgagees, and that if I don't act, others will and must? Nothing can be done for a man who is without an asset! What grounds have I given you to come making these large requests of me?'

By this time he was pale through inward consciousness of fault, and she was sobbing into her hands, from which escaped the broken words:

'If you only knew what—panic is——'

'Panic!' he cried bitterly, striding the oval room; 'you make one ashamed. You have no idea what your panic means! It means want of spirit—fear of the contemptible contempt of contemptible people. Fifteen years ago, I bet, you'd have stood your beans like an Englishwoman, but you have chosen to associate with slaves and cowards, and that's where all the panic comes from! You've caught it from the husband whom you deliberately chose. But have you forgotten your father and mother all out, then? You make one ashamed. . . !'

He quivered with passion, and she quivered under his lash, bent down, sobbing quietly, steadily. He paced up and down, frowning and palish, conscious of fault.

'I know you are fond of me,' she sobbed: 'that's why—that's why—— Save me only this time. Afterwards I will—be—different——'

Just then he heard a sound at the vestibule-door, which made him think of Stephane, and at once her face was with him, and her voice saying in words characteristic of her: 'Give to him that asketh thee, Jack (especially to *her*) and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away: for truly, Jack, the earth is a star in heaven, and you have too much ape-blood in you to behave at all passably in heaven, except by blindly obeying One much less an ape than you'; and the voice might well have added: 'Far better leave your sisters to follow their broad and easy road, and for your own skin fly, fly, from England: for Harold

Pole is gaining strength at Davos, and will return; and as for you, some little thing may any day make you leap upon your horse, and yield to that rope which is straining you towards Lonbydale, where Gracie is waiting for you, each dawn to her a hope, each night a despair: and that might be tragic.'

His heart was divided within him. In disgust of everything, he had an impulse to say to Harriet: 'All right, I will—and you go your own road.' But his self-will held him.

'It is only for this once,' she said again, through her regular sounds of collapse—'a little longer. If you only don't foreclose——'

He walked about, frowning.

'Can you play cards?' he asked suddenly.

'Cards? Yes. . . .' She looked up.

He touched a button at the fireplace, went out, opened the vestibule-door, and returned. Presently a page appeared.

'Tell them in the Bureau to send me up a pack of cards.'

An ebony clock struck ten-thirty. He placed a chair on each side of the oval table covered with green plush. Her sobs subsided, as with startled interest she watched him.

'I'll play you a game,' said he.

'Why?' she asked, starting to her feet.

'Nothing at all. What can you play?'

'Anything—nap—bridge—but tell me why——'

'Play euchre?'

'No.'

'Whist?'

'Yes.'

'Then whist let it be.'

They sat *vis-à-vis*, her face bloodless, save for one flushed streak like a stain. Some instinct informed her that if she won or lost the game, she won or lost all. The swath of veil across her brow darkened the wildest eyes of hope and horror. He, too, had a shade of pallor. What fifty-two cards have to do with the *logia* of Christ was a question which his

impulse had given him no time to answer. Having to choose between his own will and the highest counsel, he had compromised: and the grotesque outcome was—whist.

‘That your last brooch?’ he asked, nodding at a diamond Borzoi.

‘How do you know——?’

‘I know very well. You and your sister have been pawning everything to squander at Ascot, coronet and all. And then you come making requests. Christian occupation, betting on horses, isn’t it? And after acting in that coarse way you are simple-minded enough still to imagine yourself a lady! Was it you who taught your mother to bet? Didn’t you love her poor old heart any more than to expose her to all that rough whirlwind of chances? Tell me.’

‘She taught herself: you should know that, since you know our affairs. Why you should care—God knows. I am perhaps not worth it. But I do thank you, even if you—crush me. If you will somehow save me this once, I shall solemnly promise——’

The page hurried in with the cards. Jack said: ‘We will have a game.’ She almost fainted as he dealt her two, then himself two, without first shuffling. Fro and to, with give and take, acted his active hand, dealing twos, till all were dealt. He was a great one for cards, from long before old Palmer-digging days; so was she. Here the point was mainly memory, coolness also and calculation, and, lastly—fate.

He lit a cigar, and they began. She put down the ace of diamonds, diamonds being thenceforth trumps, and he put on the three. She took the trick. And as they played, their faces became wonderfully alike, the same alert and forward eyes, grim lips, and determination to win. Harriet had always a notion somewhere in her that, strung to her highest, she could match and beat any man in trousers: and she now concentrated all her force of mind, eyeing the cards like a cat. The tears dried in her eyes; a little colour now flustered her cheeks. She won the second trick, and the third. They deposited each card

promptly, Jack leaning sideways to the left, his left elbow on his left knee, his eyes flinchingly surveying his cards through the cigar-smoke. Harriet won the fourth trick; but at the fifth lead, for the first time, she paused with suspended card: she had forgotten one of those played, and was racking her brains. She could not, she could not, remember; and sharply Jack said: 'Play quick.'

He won that trick, she the next: and ever greater grew the strain upon the memory, the play ever slower. Hardly a word was spoken. Sometimes Harriet, to extract a card, had to make two or three pulls from her fan of cards, her hands so trembled. Never once did Jack markedly hesitate: like a machine he produced his card, without haste, or pause; there was something very aggressive, domineering in his expression, and during those minutes he hardly loved. He had resolved to let the game decide for him, and was in earnest. He won the twentieth trick, and they were then equal. Six more tricks were left. Harriet's agitation at this stage was piteous, but he seemed not to notice it at all. He had now forgotten three of the played cards, but she quite five or six. When he took the twenty-first trick, she gave a shocking little scream, as if cut. He took not the least notice. 'Play,' said he. His face was grim.

She won the twenty-second, and then leant back, panting:

'I can't—go on.'

'You must,' said he.

They were equal again. She leaned forward, and desperately tossed down the ten of clubs; he put upon it the three of spades, implying that he had neither clubs, nor diamond-trumps. She took the trick.

But he won the twenty-fourth, and they were equal again. When he won the twenty-fifth, some little ribs appeared at the angle of her jaws, the bones of her face were defined, and the room seemed to her to reel.

He was one ahead: and there was one trick more—a chance, therefore, that the game might be 'drawn':

and of this chance she was evidently confident, for, crying 'Quits!' she put down the ace of spades.

He tossed some ash from his cigar behind his shoulder; then upon her ace, saying 'You are mine,' he dropped the two of diamonds—trumps.

'Oh, *beast!*' she screamed, leaping to her feet, her fists on the table, with quivering face of flame; then in one instant she blanched, sank back upon the chair, swayed a little, and tumbled sideways.

He rushed round, lifted, and laid her on the sofa, though a low head is really better; then took off her hat, touched her brow with a little of the claret and water, and kissed her lips; then went to the window, looking with heaving chest upon that river of life in the street.

Standing there, in a minute he was aware of faint music—a voice and a harp—Stephane singing two rooms away. The clock struck eleven.

It sounded sweet, her luting, very delicate and remote, like a milky-way of sound, or lonely angel-song in the empyrean; but the air and some of the familiar words reached him. Deeply touched, his head bowed, and a sob broke from him.

'Time like an ever-rolling stream
Bears all his sons away:
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.'

Presently, when he returned to her, Harriet lay with open eyes, looking shaken, but better.

'Feel better now?'

She moved her eyes in sign of yes.

He got another glass from his office, and she drank some claret; then rose, tottered a little, and pinned on her hat.

'I will go. . . .'

He accompanied her down to a cab, gave her address, and said low at the last:

'You will have to be brave, so as to comfort your sister and parents.'

He then returned to the drawing-room, and had just

sat, when Stephane looked in. He had not seen her for three days, and leapt up eagerly: but she had stopped short, gazing at him with wonder.

'Why, you look quite agitated,' she murmured.

'Well, yes, forgive me: I've been bothered——'

'Oh, Jack Hay, believe me, you can't know what dreadful harms you are inflicting upon yourself!' she said earnestly. 'What are you and the least agitation doing together, my friend? The risks you run!'

'Oh, I have no right to be talking to such as you,' he muttered gloomily: 'better let me go my own road——'

But she came, laid her hand upon his brow, kissed it, and soon won him back to some serenity. And for an hour they sat discussing flowers and birds, birds and flowers, with several architect's-plans of a very great building before them, till he went out to sleep in Drury Lane.

During the next weeks he did not see his sisters: for, the moment his work for them was done, he dropped Society like a hot iron; nor were Harriet and Augusta any longer in Society: they were in Camden Town.

Who cannot play at bank cannot play at rank, and without cheque-books the sisters found themselves without pass-tickets also: for peeresses, who associate with public 'unfortunates,' attending their daughters' weddings, etc., shun public misfortunates, unfortune being only immodest, but misfortune *immodiste*. A marquess without rents is indeed a plucked goose, or a shaved convict, not a pretty fellow: and Society made haste to forget.

Lord D—— passed through the Court two weeks after Hay and Perowne, both cases being as dull and intricate as usual, with only one amusing incident, when Jack refused to take the oath in the witness-box; whereupon Mr. Registrar B—— asked him:

'What is your reason, Mr. Bennett?'

'Only that I'm more or less a Christian, sir,' laughed Jack.

'Just like him!' said a gay financier, loud enough

to be heard, 'there's a Jack in the Box answer to spring upon the Court!' (Jack was known as 'Jack' 'up East').

'But that seems an uncommon reason, Mr. Bennett,' said Mr. Registrar B——, when his laughter had ceased: 'this is a Christian Court.'

'Well, that's odd, then, sir,' said Jack: 'I've certainly seen it somewhere in the very Bible on which I'm asked to swear that one must swear not at all. Simple English words. I don't see how they can admit of any difference of opinion.'

In the end they had to be content, and he gave his evidence without Kaffir crudeness, not telling 'the whole truth,' but that millionth part of it which he fancied that he knew.

There was one ugly moment when Sir Markham was being tackled as to his assets; they had been returned at £117 5s., and seemed more, though he swore that the other things were his wife's. But for this incident, he might have fallen moderately well upon his feet, as he was a good business-man: but when he was on the point of getting an upper clerkship in a concern of which six years previously he had been a director, Buddo, a 'friend' of the firm, privately intervened with hints of the 'regrettable incident' in the Court; and the baronet, left without a berth for weeks, began to watch with anxiety the decline of his boots.

As for the marquess, he could only fish and shoot, neither well. Always believing that his lucky stars would fight for him at the last, he requested the Court to order a sale instead of a foreclosure, although his new debts proved to be complicated by heavy old ones, his interest in the marquisate having been anticipated by post obit bonds to the extent of £125,000 before his father's death. The Court consented, and there was a sale, which was a farce: for everything was over-mortgaged, and Bennett's, who held the titledeeds, simply bought, without having to pay anything. The bankrupt was left almost literally penniless. He now began to call at the Government offices, and had talks with functionaries who gradually

became less and less high-placed, till the Government offices grew to sigh and weary at him; and he was finally referred to a £1,000-a-year man in the Colonial Office, who assured him that at the next Gold Coast vacancy he should not be forgotten. Meanwhile, he waited.

Mr. Hay, however, with Cumbrian canniness, had a secret 'couple o' hundreds' in some corner, and these, like the Chiltern Hundreds, which he took, proved his loophole. Two days he was travelling about London with house-agents' lists: on the third he decided to buy a little house in Camden Town, warned his son-in-law that they must shift for themselves, and got some second-hand Euston Road furniture. But now very little was left him, and he fell ill.

Harriet drove one evening from Brook Street to Camden Town in her own carriage, which she was never more to see; and now her face was as brave as it was white. The 'panic' was gone: the Cumbrian woman was left. The very next morning she bought a penny bottle of ink and a pen, and commenced a five-act drama in blank verse. If Shakespeare could, she thought, *she* could: and late into the foreday hours for two weeks she would sit writing. But this was different somehow from giving great balls: it would not work out well, requiring practice, and also real power and *noblesse*.

As for Augusta, she sighed, did some household work, watched her children dolorously, and occasionally answered an advertisement. Mr. Hay had taken to his bed, and though he soon rose, hardly went out, suffering from palpitation, and pottering about in slippers, with a lifting up of the hands and eyes. She who took the ruin best of all was Mrs. Hay, who now seemed to wake up from a long nightmare, and to recognise herself; sometimes, with a kind of secret relief, she sighed to find herself once more the same Cumbrian Harriet Burnett, poor but human, who had married John Hay in the Methodist chapel at Bedwick; and strangely often now in her heart was a pensive word: 'Jack, Jack. . . .'

One Tuesday morning, in the fourth week, she called upon Jack at the hotel, who had been impatiently expecting something of the sort. He rang, and ordered up biscuits and champagne. She was dressed in black, close-fitting the spare body, but plentiful in the skirt; her eyes were sedate, elderly and calm; her hair different now, brushed smooth from the parting to each ear, with a shining track in its iron-gray where the temple met the skull-top. As he put a cushion beneath her feet, he saw with a pang taht her boot-tips turned up, and her glove-tips were frayed and elongated.

‘Thank you, Mr. Bennett,’ she said, with hands crossed on her lap, ‘you are always very good and kind. I should have had a son about your age, or a couple of years younger, may be, if he had lived, and not unlike you in his stand and carriage, and about the eyes, and the way your hair falls, only you are stouter built. He was—— But God gives, and God takes away, sir. . . .’

‘Don’t cry. Tell me about him. Was he a good son? Did he love you with all his heart, as you deserved?’

‘You are very kind and good to say so. But you always are. I am sure you will help us, if you can. My husband says you’ve spoken to him like any son, I’m sure. Yes, he loved me, and he was everything to me at one time, but the world seems to tear people away from their hearts, somehow, sir, and I’ll tell you that I deserted him once, when he had no one but me to stand by him—my only son: it’s hard to believe—I can’t understand it. And I’ve had pains in the heart since; oh, yes, I’ve suffered, sir; and he died far from me, cut down by an assassin for my sins in a strange land, where I couldn’t shed a mother’s tear upon his body; and he never forgave me——’

‘Oh, don’t cry: you can’t know that. Don’t accuse him—he mightn’t have been so bad as all that’—he leant fondling her hands—‘if so dear a mother as you did anything to a son, he’d forgive you the next week, you know, only he’d not let on,

for pride. Other people, who were out of it, might think you'd gone against him, but *he'd* know the secret there was between you, wouldn't he? and he'd laugh at everybody, knowing that something which you couldn't possibly help had made you. There's no crying—don't cry. I'd bet a million any day that he forgave you, you know, and that his ghost is always with you, fondling your feet, dying to whisper your sweet name into your ears, and to kiss away all your fears and troubles——'

She did not see his eyes, wiping her own, saying :

'Well, I am sure, you speak most beautifully to a mother's feelings, and in a way that does the heart good. The woman that was your mother must often have blessed her breasts. I have thought that, if you had known my Jack, sir, you would have liked him, and perhaps taken him up. He was wild and don't-care, that's true, but I don't fancy anybody could have been an hour with him without liking him, he was that fond and loveable somehow, not much like his sisters. I never knew anyone so—I can't describe it—so dear. Sometimes, I'm sure, the lad used to come bothering me with his kisses and huggings, and I didn't take much notice, little thinking what was in the future, and how I was to hanker for a touch of his poor hand some day. Ey, dear me, we don't know the weird of the days that pass, God forgive us. But here am I talking, and wasting your precious time. I came to see whether you could do anything for us——'

Instantly Jack's face hardened. He lifted himself from her, and sat back.

'What about the two husbands?'

'They are in apartments near each other in a place called Barnsbury. They haven't got any work yet; I believe Sir Markham is keeping the marquess from want, and he hasn't much himself. Mr. Hay can do nothing for them, for he's half his time in bed with palpitation of the heart, and not much left——'

'What about those two children?'

'They are with us.'

'I thought the boy was at school?'

'Well, his mother has had to take him home——'

'I see. And what do you propose that I should do?'

'See if you can find something for the baronet or the marquess, or both, to do, or for one of my daughters, or both. You have always——'

'Your husband know you were coming to me?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Well, to tell the truth, he's a little bitter against you just now: that's but natural, sir——'

'Your daughters know you were coming?'

She smiled.

'One of them did.'

'Which one?'

'The marchioness——'

'Why not Augusta?'

'She's a little bitter——'

'And not Harriet?'

'She is, too, no doubt: but she says that you have a meaning, and are still her friend.'

'Did she? Isn't she kind and brave, and a brick all out?'

'Oh, she's brave. Never a tear drops from her eyes. But the other one has two children, you see.'

'But the children are mine—tell her I say so—she gave them to me one night. Look here, I'll see about the two men later. Can your daughters typewrite?'

'No, sir.'

'I ask because I see two Remington typewriters in the inventory of the Brook Street and Portland Place houses. I just happen to want two lady typists in my office, and if they can't typewrite, and care to learn, they can have back those two machines, practise on them for a week, and then come. I'll give them a special salary of 25s. a week, making £2 10s. all out. Also I take over the children. How would that pan out?'

She did not answer, but began again to weep.

'Don't cry—don't cry. That's all I can do at present, but you may bet that later on it will be better. On condition that they both accept my offer,

I enter Markham for Eton as soon as he can pass, and I guarantee his career till he is through the University. I'll have all arrangements completed both for him and Aimée within two weeks. So that's agreed. As for you, you see no more of Camden Town to-day. I am going up the river——'

'They are expecting me——'

'I'll wire them.'

He went out, despatched two wires, one to the Thames Navigation Company, and sent a clerk packing for a landau. They lunched at Claridge's, and arriving at the Westminster wharf, found a gay steamer, with flags and gold-fringed cloths, and a damasked purple cloth laid down on the landing-place for her to walk on. A crowd had gathered, expecting someone royal, and blatantly cheered as the mother and son entered the boat, he with a pleasure in him at being able to treat her like a queen. They dined at the Star and Garter, and, as they returned late, another wire was sent, and Mrs. Hay slept that night with Stephane.

Harriet positively refused the typewriter's place under him, and this was communicated by letter. Then came a week of reflection, of approaching want, of Augusta's prayers and reproaches for the children's sake; then another visit of Mrs. Hay to Jack, accepting with gratitude; and at 9.30 on the Monday morning of the second week in September the sisters presented themselves for work at the hotel, like children coming to school, their mouths full of ashes and sand of the desert.

XXXVII

THE FLORAL FÊTE

MEANWHILE, the great building arose 'up East,' and seldom has such a monument been piled in such haste by so many hands. Jack having offered three premiums for designs, the first premiated was that of the late Mr. J. R——, F.R.I.B.A., who was thereupon appointed Architect to an administrative and financial Committee of Seven, of which Stephane, Countess St. Delmo, was Secretary, and Jack a member. As for Stephane, the current of her life was deflected: for Jack's crowded days hardly admitted of this great matter of flowers and birds, and Stephane, realising that the government was upon her shoulders, practically gave up day-nursing to throw herself into the new direction. As Jack had foreseen, her high mind (like all high minds) was more practical than Throgmorton Street, more cute and organizing than Buddo's: for light is One, and the soul that sees sees all. Every difficulty and danger yielded before her. By this time, no very rich man in England had not been interviewed by her, and few had succeeded in refusing her his help. (She had seen at once that Jack's few millions would hardly suffice for her large hopes.) The flower-giving, meantime, went on apace, and now rolled the countess in wealth, a cheque-book in her pocket. Three houses in Commercial Street had been bought, their walls of separation pierced with arches, and the room thus formed was traversed by a counter where nothing was counted; and here, from eight to ten each morning, crowds assembled to watch a remark-

able scene, and smell another odour than fried fish : half a streetful of carts and barrows, arriving, departing, laden with cut, pot, and box flowers, with ferns, shrubs, palms, peas, fronds, grasses, sedges, bulbs, mosses, creepers. The distribution was still confined to east and north London, districts near the *dépôt* being served by barrows, other districts by white horse-carts and donkey-carts. The first part of the fast-rising Floral Fête which had been built was its stables, and the Committee already owned and ran its own carts and livestock. The servants of the institution wore no livery, but numbers on the arm. All was as yet makeshift, and rather wasteful. Hardly a week but some new activity was added to the primary aims: private gardening was being fostered, and seeds, hoes, etc., given; the Committee were in negotiation with the County Council for permission to plant certain districts with plane and chestnut, as in Paris; the countess had written to the *Times*, pleading for the abolition of lights in the parks, etc., at night, as in the Bois de Bologne, etc., and this was being debated; everywhere interest was awaked, funds promised; what for the present was lacking was economy and organization: the neat *dépôt*-girls, who all day gave to applicants, had often more than they could do; the wilderness of plants was not yet rigidly sorted into sub-groups, so that sometimes a given plant could not be discovered; many of the hundred kinds of objects which were afterwards to be sold were being needlessly given away. But in the chaos was a toiling brain and patient heart, and progress toward order.

Occasionally Stephane might telephone that they were shorthanded, and if Jack then said to his sisters: 'One of you two to the *dépôt*,' Harriet and Augusta would look at each other, each wanting to leave the office-drudgery for freedom and a breath of the flowers, yet unwilling to deprive the other. Finally they came to take it in turns, and from Jack's or the cashier's hand would receive their cab-fare shilling. For weeks he would speak not a word to them, except in the way

of orders. His manner was that of any merchant to his typewriter, brusque, completely indifferent. The machine and its user (who may be a genius) are both called 'typewriter,' and as he treated the metal typewriter so he treated the non-metallic. They grew to have a reverence of his step, and if his entering voice was irritable, that was a care to them. One evening, after looking through a batch of sheets which Augusta had brought him to sign, he deliberately tore each down the middle, saying: 'I warn you that this won't do it. I'm not going to send scratches and blotches out of the office. You do your work decently, or not at all.' She turned white to the heart, and that night was wearily clicking on the machine, weeping all alone in the flat, till eight. They had soon learned to shrink from his boss's-eye and temper, as when, one morning, Harriet coming fifteen minutes late, he caught her on her entrance, saw her start, and as he passed her in the vestibule, growled unconcernedly: 'Must come earlier, must come earlier.' That old idea of hers that 'he had a meaning,' and was 'still her friend,' had vanished from her mind by the third week, and she realised that life was an earnest matter, with no happy surprises of melodrama waiting to pop out. He was only 'the Boss': they heard the clerks call him so, and took it to heart. Harriet called him 'the Cross,' 'the Imbossible,' and 'His Terror, the Boss.' On their third day of service, happening to enter their room opposite his office, he stood a minute over Augusta, who, not yet proficient, was picking out the letters with bowed head; and watching her humble, awkward striving, on one of the keys he saw a tear-drop, which she had not had time to wipe, though she bent lower to hide it. They noticed how he dashed out, but could not see him on the drawing-room sofa bowed quite down with grief for them.

From day to day their cheeks lost colour, and the outlines of their jaws became more defined. The change of climate was immense, and they drooped; and his secret heart knew it.

From the first he had recommended Harriet to learn shorthand as well, promising a 'rise of screw' to £2 a week—a rise soon terribly needed, for Mr. Hay fell ill again, and sick-bed expenses accumulated. At first the drop from luxury to sparseness had not been complete in the Camden Town house: wines and fruit had found themselves on that small table; a servant came daily (there was no bedroom for her); and for a fortnight Harriet had regularly dressed for dinner, till, by the very climate of Camden Town, dinner began to happen at 2 p.m. There came a time when all the *épatant* costumes had to be passed under review, money becoming necessary—embossed skirts sole of their pattern from the loom, petticoats that cost four hundred francs, angel corsets shining with fruit and flowers, Cinderella shoes, chemises worthy to be chasubles, recondite dainties and fine linens, smelling well, instinctively worn in secret to supply the place of a spotless conscience, and of hidden deeds of beauty, and treasures in heaven. Two business-women had called, and to her who bid the higher tenth of the value the treasures were sold. But this money had not lasted, for the house was so poorly furnished, that the sisters were ashamed at the doctor's visits. Furniture-dainties were rashly bought: then again loomed want. They had had, moreover, to buy clothes of a soberer kind for the office, blouses, skirts, and moderate hats, which, however, they wore with a *chic* which still spoke of Courts and Embassies, and with that neat perfection which is akin to elegance. Harriet, therefore, had readily fallen in with the proposal to learn shorthand when Stephane undertook to pay her school-fees, and with earnest will she had set to it, in two weeks of night-work mastering the whole theory of the matter. Then, for the more protracted acquisition of 'speed,' she sat in a Chancery Lane class-room night after night among girls young enough, some of them, to be her daughters, while a man read out by a watch so many words a minute. By the fifth week, she was capable of 'taking down' commercial letters, and Jack, discarding his usual

shorthand man, adopted her instead. An hour or two every morning she spent in the drawing-room with him in prosy *tête-à-tête*, he walking up and down, she bent-headed, earnestly struggling to get his too-swift words recorded, with hardly a moment's upward glance. Then with her pregnant note-book she would return to the typists' room, occupied by herself, Augusta, and two other lady-clerks, on the other side of the vestibule.

Meantime, both Season and summer-holidays were long over, and little Markham gone back to his Bedford school to prepare for Eton, on Jack's undertaking to discharge his bills, while Aimée was with an old lady in Lonbydale, named by her mother, and well remembered by Jack. (Her name was Mrs. Sales.) Jack himself was at school, and at every spare moment a student; he had passed his College of Preceptors in July for entry to St. Bart's, and often after the morning's letters would rush to the theatre to hear an anatomy lecture, or to dissect his old arm, which he had already more used than the man who once thought it his.

Sir Markham, by Jack's interposition, had now a place in a Great St. Helen's shipper's, and Buddo had taken the marquess as a clearing-house clerk to the Bank; each had salaries sufficient for London lodgings, but leaving nothing to help the Camden Town *ménage*. The marquess's Gold Coast vacancy had not yet opened; but, meantime, he was full of schemes: was going to open a Club; had hit upon a racing system for backing each day's favourites, nothing but favourites, doubling the bet if he lost, ceasing for that day when he won—a sure thing impossible to fail, especially for a Stanley, since at least one favourite wins each day; he was going to start a new financial paper, to float a new sort of music-hall: but Sir Markham, to whom he stuck close, only smiled, seeing him meanwhile running the Bank's errands. Occasionally one or both spent an evening or Sunday hour in Camden Town; but they were hardly the kind of men who are pretty without money

to a clever woman : there was no rapture of reunion, and their wives entertained them chastely.

Mr. Hay remained in bed, and at the end of September developed rheumatic fever, not very severely, but still terrifyingly to the sisters. Now was the *régime* of cotton-wool, bathings, blisters, and salicylate of soda. Funds fell short, and stern management was called for. Harriet took it all upon her with pressed lip. The servant, who helped to nurse, could not be dismissed; and Harriet herself, with nervous reluctance, had to stay two days at home. On the third, about lunch-time, at a moment when the sisters were alone in the typists' room, Jack lurked in the vestibule a few minutes, hoping to catch detailed news of the sick-bed through the half-open door. The 'machines' were still, and the sisters talking, but in murmurs hardly audible to him; he, however, heard Harriet say :

'I shall get some typewriting to do at home at night. Other people do. One advertises, I think, and the work comes. You charge 1s. 3d. for 1,000 words, and that is not nothing. We shall have to do something. If this was not pay-day how on earth should we manage?'

'I shall advertise, too,' said Augusta : 'these two typewriters are ours, after all. I shall take mine home : I am not afraid of anybody. Ah, Harrie, did I tell you that those two typewriters had a sinister meaning, or not? Who really sent them, Harrie, after all?'

'God knows. I care no longer for any problem, dear, except the problem of bread. Even that I should abandon this hour, if I were alone : but there are those poor two at home. I often wonder by what miracle of cowardice those two men of ours still drag out their wretched lives. I have no patience with a man——!'

'Oh, I don't consider that one has the right to kill one's self, Harrie, really. There is always hope——'

'Hope for simpletons who believe in a God! This is a cursed little terrene, my Gussie, and we the most

cursed two on it. Just frankly resign yourself to that! I laugh at hope, and at fear, too, I am proud to say.'

'I always think we shouldn't have done that to Jack, Harrie. I do wish that we hadn't——'

'Let me alone with your Jack. We thought we were harming him, but we were very kindly killing him. Yes, I am sorry for him, too, poor boy, but we really did him the best possible turn. If what I did to him would only happen to me to-day! "It is far better to depart," my Gussie. To me nothing seems less appalling than the pall, or so gay as the grave, or so stupid a rehearsal for the hearse as life. We die daily, don't we? and to keep from being nightly dead the vast majority of people have to fight like tigers during the hours of light. 'Warum treibt sich das Volk so, und schreit? es will sich ernähren . . .!'" Only Mayfair is happy, dear: and that is a kind of flea or louse happiness. I think I'd rather be a louse than a duke, for both are equally well provided for, both have to fear the scratchings of the beings they feed on, but the louse has no trouble about stewards and rents. Jack is all right where he is, dear. I wish he could take me to-day to his consoling arms—and he would, too, if he could—he was a dear, kind boy, if we had known it. I only wish I could ask him to forgive me, and to thank me, with a kiss.'

'Harrie,' said Augusta after a minute, 'you know German and French well, and I so-so: why can't we get two books to translate? Such things are done——'

'Does either of us know them well enough to translate a book? It would take us a year! Reality, my Gussie! that is the name of the adamant country into which we have now voyaged. For God's sake, leave off dreaming.'

'I wonder where he is now?'

'He who?'

'His Terror the Boss.'

'Don't call him "he," call him "it." He is out. What do I care where he is? Let us go to our lunch,

our "A.B.C. shop." Ah, we start the alphabet late in life, Gussie—a cursed chance, by Heaven! but it has happened, it is *here*, it is *so*, like the world which we see, but can't explain, like the clouds, and the stars, and the frame of things, a dream that is real as rock, and if you strike it, it cracks your skull to fragments. Oh God, to die, to cease—how sweet and lazy! like lukewarm baths of attar. Let us go. I still have half-a-crown. A is for plate ov 'Am, B is for Bath-Bun, C is for Cocoa, "large" or "small," miss. Your birth was a tragic indiscretion, my Lady.'

'Well, we can only bear it: it is useless to rail. I remember when papa was pretty poor, and it might have been better if he had kept so; but then I should have had no Markham and Aimée—— What amazes me is the man's pretension of friendship when we were well off, and his treatment now. He hardly tells us good-morning——'

'Oh, you irritate! What can you expect of the man? We are his chattels: how can he treat us with respect? And he is paying us more than anyone else would dream of, not to mention about the children. I am very grateful; though, if I wore trousers, I could command £2 10s. a week for what I am doing here, but, being a woman, I am far overpaid at £2: a gallant society, isn't it? And there were once knight-errants in England! Come along. . . .'

Jack heard them arranging their papers, and, as they came out, disappeared into the drawing-room. While they washed their faces in the near bedroom, he looked into their office, and saw Augusta's crocodile-skin bag on the central table where she worked (Harriet worked at a roll-top desk in a corner). When Augusta returned she looked for her bag, but could not find it, and not needing it, put on her hat. Jack listened if she said anything, but she said nothing. He heard the crushing sounds of hat-pins in straw, and again silently disappeared as they went out, and did not see them again that day.

In the afternoon a clerk from the big office brought Augusta her bag, saying, very unaccountably, that it

had been found under a litter of papers there. She put it by her, till at six p.m. they were paid for the week by the cashier, whereupon they went out, and at St. Martin's Church entered the Hampstead 'bus for home. The days were now drawing in, and misty lights, murk, noise and feet were the world. Driving down St. Martin's Lane, Augusta opened her bag, and with the drawing out of her handkerchief to get some coppers for the fare, a banknote fell out. It was folded, and when her agitated fingers succeeded in opening it, she saw that it was £10. But what was even more mysterious, in the folds of the note was a slip of paper, which dropped to her feet: it had some typewritten words on it, and these, when she had read them, left in her heart a haunting pang. She handed both note and slip to Harriet on the other side, and saw her own flushing paleness and opening nostrils reproduced in her sister's face. The slip said to them:

'I was anhungered, and ye gave me no meat; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.'

As they left the 'bus, and walked from the Hampstead Road to Arlington Street, Augusta said:

'How could they get into my bag? Could it by any possibility be he?'

'He went out for the day after letters,' answered Harriet; 'the letters were sent to the Bank to be signed. It couldn't possibly——'

'It may be Stephane, then, purposely, or by mistake, though I didn't know she had been at the hotel to-day——'

'But that slip of paper! Has it any relation to the £10, or are they two distinct mysteries? What does "I was anhungered" mean? It could only have got there by some wild mistake! Oh, it is dreadful—perplexities added to miseries. We mustn't touch that money meantime——'

When they got home, round Mr. Hay's bed, too, there was discussion, and exhibition of the banknote and slip. Mrs. Hay put her hand upon her mouth, and saw no solution in vacancy, pondering it in

her heart; the fever-stage had now passed from Mr. Hay, but left his joints in cotton-wool, and he received the problem mainly with short groans; he counselled them, however, to have a care about touching the money: he recollected the case of a boy called Shirvie Armstrong, who found a fuppenny-bit with a cross on it in the Dale, and died in agony three weeks after; the sisters, lingering about the dim bed, reviewed every possibility the most far-fetched, and exhausted it; and all the while in each heart was an unconfessed word unaccountably there, one haunting syllable like a pang, accusingly risen up out of the past: 'Jack, Jack.'

No one in the office seemed to know anything the next day. When Jack looked in in the afternoon, the sisters mutually spurred each other to approach him, but neither would; at the last moment, however, when he was going, they sent a Miss West, a fellow-clerk, after him, who caught him outside in the corridor, and asked him.

'No,' he answered, 'I did not put it there' (he had made the cashier do it): 'but tell them to keep it, as they have it, and if an owner turns up, I'll put it straight.'

The next day was a holiday for the formal opening of the Floral Fête by the Duchess of S——, though large areas at the back of the building were still unfinished. It stood at the corner of Dean and Howard Street (both of which had been half pulled down for it), facing each of the two streets by a long low face containing a top row of thirty windows, with a broad thirty-first in the middle, and a broad thirty-second and thirty-third at the ends; the bottom row consisted of thirty, with three portals, this row being round-topped and slightly larger than the top ones, with spandrel ornaments; all were small-paned and mullioned. In each façade were forty-three pillars, fourteen being double pillars, clustered at the ends and at the two centres, where there were broad shallow porches, with pediments. The walk from one end round the corner to the other was no inconsiderable

journey. Above the cornice ran a low balustrade, arranged in groups of eight balusters; at the centre of each façade was a clock-tower with a cupola, and in the centre of the whole block a vast dome, with pillared cupola; the low roofs were covered with green slate. The faces were of white glazed brick with some granite, and stood back a considerable distance from the two streets, the interval being occupied with fountains, cascades, ponds, rockeries, walks, and pleasure-gardens that had yet to grow to beauty.

At the centre of each façade in glaring blue-stone mosaic were the words: 'The Floral Fête.'

On the opening evening one of the Worshipful City Companies banqueted the Committee, and for a week the Fête was turned into a bazaar, from which large funds were realised. Lady St. Delmo had not failed to interest both the Aristocracy and the City, and that week was her triumph. Harriet, in a letter to Jack, had pleaded, both for herself and Augusta, to be excused from taking a stall, and when Stephane added her prayer to theirs, he did not insist, though he said to Stephane: 'They *used* to sell, but, you see, they refuse to do good unless dressed up to the nines like birds of the air that toil not——'

'Still, one must not be strict,' she had said tenderly: 'those who toil not all the more need *toilettes*—— Your sisters have habits of mind not to be altered in a day. I pray you for them.'

Stephane, in fact, sometimes seemed not quite at ease about Jack's plan of teaching the alphabet; she had said once to him:

'Are you quite sure?'

'Yes,' he had answered without hesitation: 'what hope was there for them, divorced a million miles from realities, to learn anything? If a rich man ever entered the Kingdom of Heaven, no rich woman ever did. I am doing to them as I should have liked them to do to me.'

'In *that* case, of course——' she had said: 'but just that is the difficult thing to be sure of. Their sufferings are most intense. I can hardly bear it. . . .'

Sometimes she would hurry to the hotel before six p.m., and induce one or both of the sisters to sleep there, seeing that they took it as a *fête* to be with her. It was a breath to them of the old life: for this was odd—that Stephane, though poorer than they, remained in everybody's eyes aristocrat *in excelsis*, whereas they, by poverty, had dropped quite out of aristocracy.

'How sweet and happy she is!' Augusta would say, dressing for business after the three had slept together, and Stephane was gone, 'she had my head on her all night. There is something in her touch—I never felt so easy in anyone's company. She is like a light that drives away a child's fears in the night.'

'And she a product of the "bloated haristocracy,"' said Harriet; 'it seems odd. If we—or rather they—were mainly like her! Mayfair could then dance more economically, without need of roses.'

On its fifth day Jack had been watching the great bazaar, where l'Idéal and Dr. Rouges roses were selling by duchesses for guineas, and returning west about two p.m., looked in at his office, when one of the men said:

'There's a gentleman waiting, sir.'

'What name?'

'Mr. Spender.'

Jack uttered an exclamation, and rushed into the drawing-room. Old Spender, who had been looking out upon the Avenue, spun round with his droll underlook and ready lip-corners: and they faced each other. The mere sight of this overpowering, colonial man, looking so pleased for nothing, spurred underlooking mockery; but the old man would not let himself go, and they bowed with decent gravity. He now stooped a little under eleven more years of world-comedy, but his paunch was as round, his face as chubby, his eyebrows as bushy, as before, though grey.

'Take a seat. What can I do for you, sir?' said Jack.

Mr. Spender explained, saying:

'I have called, sir, on the recommendation of an old

friend, Mr. Harold Pole. I reside in a remote part of Cumberland, and usually come to London every three years; this is not, indeed, my year; but Mr. Pole, who lies ill at Davos in Switzerland, has requested me to come up, in order to look into the state of his papers in his absence, and put them straight for his sister, in view of his possible decease. Their father and myself were affectionately related, and I felt bound—— But truth to tell, his affairs don't amount to much'—a break of mockery—'and I don't quite see why I am here. He added, however, that you, sir, being a good friend of his, might be good enough to give me your views on certain concerns, in which my little money is invested——'

'Suit me all to pieces!' cried Jack, understanding that Pole had kept his promise to bring up the old man on some pretence: 'don't you say a word. Mr. Pole is my one special pal, and mentioned you to me. I mean to keep you three or four weeks any road——'

'Keep *me*, sir?' said Mr. Spender, pointing to his breast, with an underlook threatening outbreak: 'why keep me?'

'Just to have you about.'

Now the old man could no longer conceal his infirmity from the stranger, but laughed with inward strain.

'Why, sir,' he tried to say, 'this is—unexpected—pass—ion. I—I—excuse me——'

'There's no laughing,' said Jack, happy and laughing; 'I'll get you a little ass——'

'To—ride—about—on——'

'For the milk, I mean. There's no laughing.'

'There *is*! Don't you—see? I can't—*help*——'

His words escaped like a drowning man's, one by one at each half-a-chance; then he slowly recovered, with the old weary 'Oh lud, oh lud!'

'What I meant,' said Jack, 'was that, as you don't often come up, and I know everybody, I'll make you see some life, if you will stay. There are still some

nobs about, and you might like to know the big guns on the Exchange, and see the Floral Fête, and so on. I could even give you a bedroom here, and as to the grub you like, *I'll* see about that.'

'This is most hospitable,' said Mr. Spender, rising, and putting out his hand, 'I should be churlish to refuse altogether. By the way, I understand that two very old friends, whose good parents I have already seen, are here, Lady Perowne and Lady D——'

'You shall see them,' said Jack, and, going out, he sent the sisters in, himself remaining outside, not to witness their probable embarrassment. When they had spoken to Mr. Spender, Jack returned to him; and when Mr. Spender left after an hour, it was with sore jaws and the feeling of having met an old familiar friend who never had a name, nor a body, but only a pleasant odour. He was on the way to his old Temperance Hotel in Ludgate Hill, when he suddenly stopped at the thought: 'But how on earth does he know that I take ass's milk? Why, the man is a mystery . . . !' and he throed with mockery.

Jack, meantime, had telegraphed to Little Lord Archie, who was still in town, and, when he came, asked him to call upon Mr. Spender, and arrange to take him to whatever was going on.

Next morning at the appointed hour Mr. Spender returned to the hotel, *en route* for Harley Street, where he was going to see the doctor who had advised him for twenty years. Jack accompanied him on the top of a 'bus, and waited while the old man was examined; setting out to return, they were walking down Harley Street toward Cavendish Square, when something white, fluttering pretty high in the air, caught Jack's eye; he stopped, waiting for its fall, and it dropped near his feet. It was a book-mark with blue fringes, and, embroidered on it in blue old-English letters, the words: 'Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live.' He looked round and up, but seeing no one, and not knowing from which window it had fallen, put it into his pocket.

The next day, a Saturday, when Mr. Spender reappeared at the hotel it was with a lady and another man, the lady being Miss Ames, and the man her *fiancé*, one Emptage, a squat, heavy-faced bank-clerk of fifty years, Miss Ames being now perhaps forty-five. The engagement had taken place two years previously, and the marriage was constantly being promised to happen, and then postponed. However, it was now fixed for the 26th of November, though it was quite impossible to detect any passion in Emptage's stolid face.

Jack started at seeing Miss Ames for the first time, while Mr. Spender said :

'Let me present my old friend, Miss Ames—or rather, yes, my *old* friend—what can one say? though the term — may be — ambiguous — to Mr. Bennett. Mr. Bennett—Mr. Emptage, the future——'

Jack heard his voice dangerously shake, and came to the rescue by hearty hand-shakings all round. Mr. Spender continued :

'Miss Ames is just up from Cumberland, Mr. Bennett; I called upon her this morning, and as you were to take me to the Floral Fête to-day, I took the liberty of asking her——'

'Perfect,' said Jack: 'I am very pleased to meet Miss Ames and Mr. Emptage. Let us go.' But the thought of panic in his heart was this: 'Has she sent her up to see why I don't go down to her?'

A landau was waiting below, and the four, setting off for Whitechapel, drew up before the Howard Street porch of the Floral Fête.

Nothing was more agreeable than to enter that building, its white halls were so spacious, smelled so well, and so charmed the eye and ear. The visitors found the dalles of the first hall strewed with coloured paper, straw, sawdust, and packing-shavings, and round its walls multitudes of empty baskets piled half-way to the ceiling; but even into this confusion came a music and a perfume. In the next apartment was a telephone, by which Jack

asked Stephane in her office far away on the upper floor to come and conduct them; here were two curved stairs of easy gradient on either side; here round the walls were masses of garden-hose and greenhouse-boilers, with tins and bags of fertilizers; attending to five or six people were two neat girls behind a counter strewed with books and pamphlets—the visitors read such titles as ‘The Tomato, and how to grow it: its diseases and cures,’ ‘Diseases of Cage-birds,’ etc.: the pamphlets were given away, the books cheaply sold. Yonder on the wall, with a hand indicating a corridor, was a placard in a state of ecstasy, which said: ‘Bulbs! Bulbs!! Bulbs!!!’ Down the stair sped Stephane with happy face, accompanied by the late Miss O——, an elderly lady of high scientific standing, who was the official Adviser of the Committee, and happened at the moment to be in the building. There were introductions, and the party set off on tour, accompanied by a wandering white she-goat, which followed them some distance (the keeping of goats was being encouraged by the Institution, and they were sold very cheaply by a goat-department on a weekly-payment system). The next room was devoted to the sale of every sort of vase and flowerpot, which crowded its walls, and thirty or forty of the public were here. Nothing was sold at a loss to the promiscuous buyer, though everything could be bought by him at half its value by going through certain formalities, and under certain conditions everything was given away. Every kind of flower and bird, apart from the free morning distribution, was given away through the day to the promiscuous applicant, provided he possessed a suitable cage, small wooden cages not being considered suitable. The Institution had its own metal cage-factory, could sell at ridiculous prices, and the cage-room was a sight to see. Stephane, who had this intricate world of organization well in her head, led them from sight to sight, explaining. Anon a door might open and shut, and a sudden typhoon of music would storm the ear,

and leave it humming. One hall contained small rockeries ready arranged, with cascades, to tempt to cheap purchase, with aquariums and aviaries of selected song-birds: starlings, greenbirds, linnets, thrushes, the three finches, the three larks, the lesser redpole; in the next hall, which lay across one of the five fountained courtyards, were summer-houses, garden-frames, garden-seats, and so on; there were rooms all implements: hoes, syringes with spray-nozzle, with soots and superphosphate for manures, tobacco-powder for destroying green-fly, Bordeaux-mixture for spraying, etc.; in another was every kind of small object such as belong to birds, shell-gravel, bird-seed, insect-powder, and bird-baths, with lettuce-seed, which is a mild purgative, and pyrethrum-powder for dusting their wings, and cuttlefish-bone for them to peck at between the wires, and chemical-food, which, dropped into their drinking-water, causes growth of feathers; there was a bird-hospital and two bird-doctors, and ovens for baking the cages. From a top-floor library, devoted to rural subjects, they passed into Stephane's office, where hung a plan of the Institution's nursery and bird-home in Bucks, and thence went down through a room of fruit, honey, nuts, etc., where people accustomed to the absurd London price of fruit crowded to buy a lunch of strawberries, cherries, apricots, grapes, or apples at a fourth of the cost of the carnal mass which they call 'dinner'; thence onward the visitors passed through the largest of the conservatories to the stables, themselves a sight, and saw the wilderness of carts and barrows in the courtyard, the bright harness-room, and rows of stalled donkeys and horses. The servants of the Institution in this department alone amounted to 997. London had now been mapped into black, brown, and white streets, the white, or well-to-do, being visited with flowers not at all, the brown every second day, the black each morning: and even in the richest western districts were black streets. All in these back regions by the stables, building was still in dusty progress, and stone-dressing and moulding-machines at work. The party returned inward

through another region of the edifice, and were shown how, by telpherage, every size of package was rapidly conveyed from point to point along suspended cableways, with curves and terminal loops. Yonder was an office half-covered with placards, giving the conditions of a number of competitions, with the prizes, for various sorts of gardening, home-decoration, and rustic work; in another apartment were collected all sorts of seeds for Autumn and Winter-flowering plants; in another bird-nests; some rooms were mere conflagrations of roses, asters, auriculas, polyanthuses, irises, alone, or juxtaposed in barefaced contrast; others were groves of greenness, dim with palms, fronds, bindweeds; others jungles of grasses and sedges, the oatgrass, the horsetail. A denizen of Whitechapel could hardly enter the building and leave it without some access of culture, and to linger in it was to find everywhere some tone of Eden. One shrill hall was a carnival of parrots, free as in Brazilian forests, and the air streamed with crimsons, yellows, blues and greens—with 'pretty polly-chromes,' as the Marchioness of D—— remarked; in another, that 'Sultan of old' might have walked all day in gardens of spice, or mooned in dripping grottoes of reverie; yonder the bombastic gorge of the tumbler-pigeon moaned and trembled toward song; and yonder again whole tribes and nations of melodious doves brooded their soft rondos upon the happy air.

At first the Institution was subject to several frauds: a coster, for instance, might get flowers enough from the different departments to fill his barrow, and then sell them. But the Institution's method of crushing these miscreants was swift and infallible: they were soon 'spotted,' whereupon the flowers which they asked for were given them as before, but with the hint that their game was known: and in every case this mildness broke their evil will, and they stole no more.

Jack left the building that morning with this thought in his heart: 'Well, here's a bit o' something done, if nothing else: God forgive me my Debt, as I forgive everyone.'

In the carriage he was several times on the point

of saying to Missie: 'I have met Mrs. Raby: how is she?' but the words would not come. Missie, for her part, was all chat and affability, and *à propos* of nothing, suddenly said:

'Do you know Cumberland, Mr. Bennett?'

'I have been there.'

'Do you think of going down shortly?'

It was a strange question: he hesitated, and said:

'That depends.'

Someone, in fact, had enjoined upon Missie to know Mr. Bennett, to write minutely about him, to find occasion to ask him: 'Do you think of going down shortly,' to mark the answer, and to report it. The answer was: 'That depends.'

As for Mr. Spender, he was delighted with Bennett, whose nameless odour he had smelled in a former existence, and he was every day at the hotel. The next morning, when he called, Jack was out, but driving back eastward along the Strand, he saw Jack rolling toward Whitechapel from Drury Lane. The streets were empty, and the bells ringing for service, no longer with voluble argument, but with their last effete calls. The old man alighted, joined Jack, and proposed to take him to the Temple Church; Jack objected his unsuitable rig-out, but finally consented. For fourteen years he had not entered a church, except when old O'Brien was buried near Gurrowa, and one night lately in St. Paul's: and, sitting on those old red cushions, faded now to pink, he found himself in a charming strange land: the dim light, everybody so prim, and no mistake, the women by themselves in two corners, the men by themselves, columns of flutes, Crusader-tombs with figures in armour, the strict clergyman lecturing the Infinite, the organ and choristers—all was lazy and quaint, like a worship of Thammuz. Mr. Spender was grave as gravity in white waistcoat and frock-coat, save once, when the Master slipped going up the little pulpit. 'Now, what will he say,' wondered Jack, 'after so many centuries of preaching?' What he first said was unexpected, and caused Jack to sniff-up a little, and raise his eyebrows; he said: 'Man that

is born of a woman hath but a short time to live——' He said it twice; and thereafter Jack's thoughts wandered, and he heard little of the sermon.

That night, lying on his shed-roof in Drury Lane, he decided sharply that the time had come to wind-up everything, and start for America, which he intended to make his country for some five years. By 'winding-up' he meant cutting himself loose from affairs, and making over by deeds his remaining wealth to the Floral Fête, except so much as would take him through his medical course, and provide for his family as he intended. To leave Gracie in the hands of Raby, and Raby unscathed, seemed to him now not only the least horrible, but the only way: for even if he wished to bring Raby 'to justice,' he probably could not, seeing that Balfour's agency had not proved Raby's motive, though still working upon it, as a recent letter assured him. He would go, leaving Gracie to call him heartless, inscrutable—what she liked; already a thousand times she must have called him so; and this broke his heart, but he could not help: God knew. . . . To approach her while she was a wife, beyond doubt would cloud and hurt her: he would not, God being his help and strength. Miss Ames' manner was odd: she looked at him with little smiles; Gracie might be getting desperately impatient, and might have sent her up to see and report. . . . He would hurry away. In America he would have to pass no matriculation, being already a student of St. Bart's; in four, five years his medical course would be over; he would then return to Africa, and, with or without Stephane, live among the 'Sutos. He doubted whether Stephane wished to leave Whitechapel and the Fête to be with him: the decision, however, would rest with her brother, Lord Harling, who was coming, but coming slowly, not to arrive till the second week in December, three weeks off. Till then Jack must wait. Meanwhile, every day would be a fear lest Gracie should come, should do something. And with a sigh at the delay, he fell asleep.

XXXVIII

UP THE RIVER

THE next (Monday) morning at the hotel he got this letter from Pole :

‘DEAR MR. JACKIE BENNETT:

‘One line only this time—your piggish silences certainly deserve no more. Understand, then, my dear sir, that at the actual moment I dance, I carol, I chortle! Davos is a good place. Already I’ve been all over the valley, and mine eyes have seen Val Tellina, and the Upper Engadine. These facts speak for themselves: I travel. It has pleased that Universal Spirit which I call God when It is good to me, and the Devil when It annoys me, to bless my better half. The fact is, I suppose, It can’t well do without me, for It would become the laughing-stock of the Universe if Mr. Nibbs Howard Raby went scot-free, and I dare swear that I am necessary to the catastrophe. So to Mr. Raby’s crimes I owe a lung, and thank him for being a ghoul. ’Tis an iil wind, etc. I really had *spes phthisica*, you know, my friend. I see it now. I thought myself well, and I was *bad, bad*. But now no human being could be in better health than I—on the right side at any rate, and the empty left side is—immaterial. Only there is still the cough, as before, and the paper handkerchiefs: but the handkerchiefs suggest banknotes and prodigality, and coughing is only a form of self-assertion, which makes everyone in the hotel respect me. I am well, thank God, and shall yet see old age and

hoary hairs. I caper, I assure you, I laugh aloud. There's nothing in life but the lung, after all, the heart being a mere absurd *bâton* to beat time to the rhythm of respiration. And all these things, I say often to myself, I owe to a big, bearded, sudden stranger called Bennett: and my hard heart softens, Jack Hay.

'I thought to stay here all the Winter, but I am going at once to London, probably for three weeks or a month; then I shall come back here again. My firm has a case in hand, for whom do you think?—His Majesty the Satan of Turkey! a thing that may bring us no end of prestige, if decently done. I fear me that my honest partner is a dull soul, and I am returning to help him to believe that he has solved the complication. At present my brain looks out so strong and clear, that I feel capable of solving the secret of Judas's birthplace, or of Mrs. Raby's toleration of her husband during eleven years; and I am again addressing myself *de nouveau* to that finger-joint that you wot of. "Ich fühle Muth. . . .!" Good-bye.

'HAROLD POLE.'

'P.S.—What's all that about "learning to be a doctor" in your old age? It will take you *ten* years, rich and mighty as you are. I divine that the motive is some religious one: but what wild religion is yours? Shintoism? Obiahism? Christians don't act in that way. Enjoy your wealth, take Mrs. Raby, and win Heaven by subscribing to the lung-hospitals. Heaven being far, it is mercifully arranged that a very little goes a long way upward. I have followed Floral Fête happenings, but you have not, I fear, sounded the depths of your Maker's indifference. He doesn't care. I wish *I* didn't, but you have ravished me, you tremendous simpleton, and all day I miss and want you in some aching place of my brandyised heart. If my real motive for going back to London is only to see you, that would not surprise me, though I hope I haven't yet reached that stage of brain-softening. Anyway, *au revoir*. I start some day next week. My sister's regards.'

'Old Harold Pole,' murmured Jack, as he sat considering the letter with his sideward lean; and he was so ten minutes, till Harriet entered with her note-book, dark frieze skirt, white blouse, and elegant structure of hair.

'Good-morning. How's your father?' said he.

'Not very well.'

'I know that. Tell me some more.'

'He is in pain. The rheumatism will probably become chronic, the doctor says.'

'He wants plenty of nourishing food and rich wine.'

'Yes.'

'You must let him have it.'

No answer.

'Mother well?'

'Thank you, yes.'

'What's the matter with *you*? You don't look very well. You have been sitting up with your father.'

'I am well,' she said, glancing surprise at all this new favour.

'What about those circles under your eyes, then, and your thin cheeks? This work doesn't suit you. And your sister the same.'

She cast down her eyes, turning dreadfully pale at the thought that all this might be a preliminary to dismissal.

'I tell you what I'll do,' he went on: 'let Kiell take down the letters this morning, while you and your sister go for a walk, and come back in time to go up the river with me at noon.'

'You are very—— I will tell my sister,' said she, all flustered, and out she went in haste, beckoned Augusta from the typewriters' into the bath-room, and blurted out:

'We are going to be dismissed!'

'My God, Harrie!'

'There is a return to the earlier manner. He says "this work doesn't suit" either of us. We are to go "for a walk" now, and up the river with him at noon. He will tell us then: and the trip is to break the cruelty of the fall——'

Augusta saw a ghost, saying:

'If that happened to us both now, Harrie, with papa——!'

'And I have *slaved* for him, and done my very best at all times!' cried Harriet passionately, dashing wet from her eyes; 'I know I am not quick with the shorthand——' The words choked her, and she turned away her face.

'But could he be so ruthless to two helpless women, and a helpless old man and woman? He wouldn't! Oh, he couldn't!'

'Couldn't he? Didn't I believe in him, too, till he played me that game of cards, and even a little afterwards? But if you had seen his cruel face that night! It was like a Gorgon's. I have had a terror of the brute ever since——'

'But the mere fact that he played proves that he was undecided——'

'He wasn't! He had some reason for playing, but he knew beforehand that he would win. He divines things—other people say so as well as I. He must be the Devil—— At one time I said "I can't go on," I was nearly fainting; he said "You must"——'

'Well, God help us!' said Augusta, the last vestige of her roses vanished.

They did not 'go for a walk,' but remained in terror, doing nothing, feeling themselves all isolated now, unsupported in emptiness, possessors of nothing in heaven or earth; but when Mr. Spender was gone, and Jack looked into their room, they put on braver faces with their jackets and hats, and went with him. He had ordered a steamboat, the Company had again sent it decorated for him, and under the bridges they steamed, past Tudor House, Battersea, Bishop's Walk, seated together in velvet chairs on the empty spread of deck, the sisters subconscious of misery, but trying to 'talk,' as of old. It was one of those November days that they call 'second summer,' some of the trees already stripped, but some all in red and gold, like the specious pomp of Empires just before their fall. And gradually, when no honeyed dismissal came, and Jack's face was the frankest good-nature, the sisters' terrors leaked out of their hearts, and by Chiswick and the first 'ait' the bright holiday

had influenced them to half-forgetfulness of care. They began, as often still, to talk of where so-and-so was, and what so-and-so wore, till Jack said :

‘It beats me that you still care about that lot, who no longer care about you.’

‘We don’t really care,’ answered Harriet, ‘but as they are the only people to talk about——’

‘What about Mrs. Perry in New Street, whom you wrote that letter to for me, with her five children, and only 11s. 6d. a week? *She’s* interesting.’

The sisters exchanged glances.

‘You are not a disciple of Nietzsche,’ said Harriet mysteriously.

‘Never even heard of him. Who is he?’

‘He’s dead. He was a *savant*, a Professor in the University of Bâle.’

‘Well, and what did he say?’

‘Let me see: what did Nietzsche say, Augusta? He said—that—caring for other people is the curse of modern man; that by crushing out the weak and unfit, as the brutes and the old Romans did, man would gradually evolve into an Overman, a being as much superior to man as man to the ape; but that Christianity, which he calls “slave-morality,” because it encourages the multiplication of the weak, retards the evolution of man into Overman——’

Jack just sniffed up, muttering :

‘Shrewd kind of man that.’

‘Do you know *Zarathustra*, Augusta? It is quite delightful.’

‘But do you believe it?’ asked Jack.

‘Many clever people do.’

‘That’s because they read too many books, and none well. Of ten which they read five are wise, and five are foolish, or two wise and eight foolish, and at the end chalk and flour are one to the kind of people you mean. This Nietzsche, now, was no chop.’

‘Why no chop?’

‘Because he started writing about evolution without knowing anything about evolution. He may have had some learning, but he lacked wit and guessing. He

wants man to crush out the weak, as the brutes and Romans have done, and become overman; but since man comes between the brutes and overman, therefore overman must be less like the brutes than man is: how, then, can man evolve into overman by copying those very brutes and brutish Empires built on the sands, that couldn't last a day? Can Satan cast out Satan? can the brute eliminate the brute?

'But the brute *has* to a certain extent eliminated the brute,' said Harriet, 'for the brute has become man; by the same brutish means man may become overman.'

'You know nothing about evolution!' he cried: 'and it is most necessary to know, for to know is to know how to live. The brutes did not become man by brutish means, you see, but by Christlike: they became man by fastings and scourgings, by thorns of sorrow and crucifixions of the flesh, not doing it for themselves, of course, but the earth, their mother, whipped them. I like that talk about evolution in "favourable environments"—soft lairs and grasses! but evolution never took place except in unfavourable. The nature of the brutes was to lie and take it easy, and your three-toed horse would never have evolved into the overhorse which lost you all that money at Ascot, if he had not had to pelt for life, with staring eye, and no mistake: seven times the earth tried him in the furnace of affliction, hunted him bleeding, perfecting him by suffering, before ever he got quit of his first toe. From the sluggish jelly upward, every step was a groan, an asceticism, wasn't it? an effort to be different from one's sluggish origins, and from one's own inherited nature. So man's only chance, too, of becoming overman lies in straining to be different all out from his origins and from himself, and "Slave-morality," says, "protect the weak, die for them," only for one reason, because it is evolution, because it is so unlike the jelly, the baboon, and the child, and so unnatural to yourself. There is only one "weak" class—the "weakest" of all—which the brutes don't "crush out"—namely, children; and at once Christianity, always straining to be unlike, says: "Crush *them* out

for all you're worth, by not having any." But even that "crushing out" is a protection of them from the pains and humiliation of the flesh : in either case you get chastity—the thing most unlike the brutes. It looks, in fact, as if Christ spent thirty years of his life in studying baboons through a microscope, and then, for three years, went out preaching the way not to be one.'

'Nietzsche must have been a crank, Harrie,' said Augusta, as the steamer stopped near the Old Deer Park before Isleworth Lock, in a region of swans and osiers ; whereupon a man ran up saying : 'All's ready, sir,' and they rose to go down to a basket-lunch in the cabin.

'Yes,' said Harriet at table, 'but how will those overmen, the people who come after man, regard Christ and his teachings? They will despise everything that was man, as we despise apes.'

'But which queer people, do you think, are coming after man?' asked Jack : 'no people looking at all different to man. Extraordinary thing that a man like Nietzsche should not know that for certain! Don't you understand that there's a natural limit to evolution by any given planet? That limit is the same as the limit to the evolution of any human machine, like the steam-engine, and it is reached when the machine becomes automatic, doing for itself what had to be done for it before. If all the angels tried through eternity, they could never produce a steam-engine more evolved than our present self-feeding engine. And man is the earth's limit. She started starving and chastising a jelly, and kept on till she got a strange machine which can and will starve and chastise himself : and there she gave up. Her work was done. What evolution remains is spiritual, not by the pushing of the earth, but by the drawing of heaven. Under this new influence men continually do chastise themselves into overmen : and in Bâle, where Nietzsche lived, there were at least two or three overmen much more above Nietzsche than he above the ape : but when the whole race has become overmen like those, how long does Nietzsche suppose that they would last on the earth?'

'They would keep on lasting,' said Harriet, 'till everybody evolved into over-overmen, and over-over-overmen.'

'He never began to know anything about evolution!' cried Jack: 'he never saw the most important day in the history of evolution! it was the day when a being, evolved by the earth, stood upon it, and tied a fig-leaf round his loins. That day the earth sighed, "It is finished": divine Shame was born; and the evolution of Shame is Chastity. The race as a whole could not now advance one step, without becoming chaste all out: then you'd have one generation of overmen and never another. If you could have another, the organs which produce children would have dropped off, or become latent, as the other tail or appendix already is: for being in love's no chop, any road: that's only a form of appendicitis, and is very truly called a "disease."'

'How much franker will he get?' whispered Augusta hurriedly to Harriet: 'people will be made like angels and dolls. . . .'

'And what I say about that,' continued Jack, 'is no mere probability, but is certain. A thousand things prove it. Black men are chaster than monkeys, white than black, thinkers than costermongers. Great men, unlike great horses, have no children, or pretty poor ones, and hence "blue blood" generally means "white liver." L'Aigle produces l'aiglon. The great men's blood lives up in their head and heart, and their other parts tend to wither. There'd be only one generation of overmen. One of you two may have two children, and the other none, because one thinks more than the other, while Sally down the alley has a litter of ten, almost before she can get married. The law among men is: for each very slightly higher type, a very much less profuse type. You have heard of a man called Malthus—probably the greatest ass who ever lived: well, what he said is quite true of horses, but just the opposite is true of man. The more you raise man, the less prolific he becomes. In France the population won't go on at all, and what *you* think is the reason is

not the right reason. This Nietzsche was no chop. It isn't necessary to know much about man to know that the very first thing that happens to a man tending to become an overman is chastity—unnaturalness, climbing, unlikeness to the ape, not likeness! Try to imagine the Lord or Saint Teresa having a child: that would be a ridiculous tomfoolery: for they were overmen and over-overmen, and, like the angels of God, couldn't "marry."

'And do you think that there will ever be that one generation of overmen?' asked Augusta.

'You may bet. Evolution has not stopped, only evolution by the earth, which reached its natural limit when it produced a type of man who could and would chastise himself. The pushing process is over, but a drawing process is going on, and he who draws will draw all men unto him. I always pan it out that the sun and moon are symbols of these two great processes of evolution, the pushing and the drawing. The fierce sun, which drives the earth, represents the pushing up of the brute to man, but the moon, which draws the earth, represents the drawing up of man to the Overman. The moon is Christ all out, rejected by the earth, thrown off by it into the heavens, "lifted up," a ghost, a "risen body"; but still haunting, drawing and fascinating the earth, full of phases and recurrences; chaste, wistful, haloed, like him, and walking as in a garden among the stars; but strong, riding the tempest, walking upon the sea, influencing the billion waves and waters after it, "till there shall be no more sea"; and showing to the earth a countenance "like unto the son of man."

'He means the man-in-the-moon,' explained Augusta with grave *naïveté* and lifted champagne-glass, whereat they all suddenly laughed.

'But assuming Christ to be the pattern and leader,' said Harriet, 'the suicide of the race through chastity will hardly be a copy of his death, which was not a suicide.'

'But what was it, then?' asked Jack: 'you can't get over the feeling that he crucified himself, for he could

have escaped. The suicide of the race through chastity will, really, be an exact copy of his : it will be the final nailing up, scourging, and mocking of the ape, that wanted to be king over us ; and it will be triumphant unlikeness at last to the brute, by getting quit of a fleshly body altogether. The race will then do for itself what each overman now does for himself at death.'

'But what exactly do you mean by an overman?' asked Harriet.

'A saint.'

'Really? And what exactly is a saint?'

'A saint is a person who does by second-nature, or habit, what Christ says that one should, *i.e.*, the opposite to what apes do.'

'But such a person is a man?'

'By George, no. He looks like a man for the moment, because his body won't evolve. But if it were possible for a man to see his nature, or soul, that man would never see anything again.'

'Is a saint, then, to man as man to the ape?' asked Augusta.

'When he first starts to be a saint, yes. But when he climbs higher, doing always more exactly and naturally-unnaturally what Christ says, the interval between him and man becomes far vaster than between man and the ape. I don't quite see how I could prove that all out to you, but I know it. Evolution, you see, goes on at increasing bounds after a time, at what they call "acceleration" in Mechanics, till finally it ceases to be a pain and becomes a flight, at which point the saint has hardly any resemblance to man, and is more an angel than an overman. That is why we all feel so subdued and humble near Lady St. Delmo: we are just conscious a little of her soul, though, fortunately for our eyes, we can't see it.'

'But will that final generation of overmen, then, be no higher than present-day saints?' asked Harriet.

'How can it? The present-day saint is like his Lord, and no disciple can ever be above his Lord. You mustn't think that those will have any longer

hat-bands or shorter belts than we have: for the Christianity, if it could have time, might modify man's body, it never could have time, for as soon as ever the race becomes Christian, its Christianity will be death to its body, as Christ's was to his. Mind and body are at war, aren't they? Mind is the chastiser of body, and wants to modify it, as the earth modified the brutes by chastising them: but body wont, or only just a very little with infinite bobbery, having reached its limit; so mind, evolving all the time by 'acceleration,' at last breaks body, since body won't bend, making death the next evolutionary step. The earth can never see a body of higher type than Christ's: for body for ever stopped evolving at man, though mind, by its own laws, kept on, just as, in the individual, body for ever stops growing at twenty or so, but the mind keeps on, the growing mind killing the stationary body all the time, if it is a living mind, till finally you get a genuine suicide of the individual as you will of the race. The suicide of the race through chastity, or self-chastisement, will only mean the final victory of mind over body, which is the whole secret and purpose of evolution and Christianity.'

'So, then, the earth will be left again to lions and horses?'

'Yes, and perhaps to the three-toed horse once more and winged lizard, going back through a retrograde evolution to the jelly, as the old man's body back to the child. Man is only the transient, topmost blossom, late-coming, early-going, and won't last a million years all told, you may bet—that being just one hour compared to the age of the earth. There is a cactus-tree which grows barren a century, then puts out one little sky-blue flower for an hour, then takes another barren century to die in. That's the earth and man all to pieces: he has but a short time to live, both the individual and the race: for he's strange and moon-struck, this child of a middle-aged mother; he is not like other children; he hears voices, he has dark fits: he will immolate himself, like the phoenix—like Christ, the phoenix: and he will spring from his ashes.'

They rose from table, and the captain now looking down for instructions, Jack said: 'Yes, get us back now.' But they continued to sit in the cabin on red-velvet cushions that surrounded it, watching the river-water quite near sing past the row of open ports, with bits of moving scenery beyond.

'I wonder when that final generation will be,' said Augusta: 'the last man left will be lonely.'

'The when, of course, depends upon you and me,' said he mournfully, leaning sideward on his left knee: 'that's awful all out, isn't it, that a man may lengthen man's period of pain and humiliation on the earth? Listen to what I tell you, you two—listen well—this is the last time, may be, and what I tell you I know to be true. I shan't be having you back at the office'—their faces blanched in one quick instant—'and I am going away pretty soon from you, for a long time, perhaps for ever, leaving you to fight it all out alone. You guess that I'm a bit shook on you, don't you? Not in that old funny way, but in a better way. Why I should like you more than other people, is my concern: I choose to. So listen to what I say: for I tell you now, at the last, when I think your ears are prepared to hear. Don't be a curse to the world! We weren't sent into it to enjoy ourselves and be dukes, but to be servants and waiters—a most difficult and delicate trade. To serve man is always, at bottom, to help him toward chastity, and you must do it, firstly, by being chaste yourself, and secondly, by declaring war against the thousand things which keep him from chastity, especially war against your own class, which is the chief thing that keeps him. You mayn't see how this pans out at first, but the moment you consider it you will. For what does "chaste" mean? You know Latin—it means "chastised." Now, all creatures, in order to evolve and be better, have to be chastised, and I told you just now how the earth chastised the brutes to evolve them, till man came, who is automatic, and the law of his being is to chastise *himself*, to make *himself* chaste. A creature which does not fulfil the law of its being

can't smell happiness, of course; and unchastity is all misery, if only because no unchastity no men, no men no misery. An unchaste person is like a self-feeding steam-engine which fails to feed itself: for his law is self-chastisement, and, not fulfilling it, he is all out of gear, and can't smell happiness. But take a country like England, and tell me what chance it has of becoming chaste and happy, remembering that the law of a man's being is to chastise *himself*, not to be chastised by others. In England you have two sharp classes, one grasping all the land, the other without any land, the landed wealthy, the landless poor, for land means wealth, and there can't, of course, be any wealth, except from land. Or instead of calling them the landed and the landless classes, call them the chastising and the chastised classes. The chastised are so chastised, that they never dream of chastising themselves in addition, and have no chance of becoming chaste and happy, for chastity is *self*-chastisement; and the chastisers are so occupied in chastising—that is, in holding and miserably enjoying the country of the chastised—that they, too, never dream of chastising themselves, and have no chance of becoming chaste and happy. So, whoever wishes to help the Kingdom of God, and to shorten the period of man's pain and humiliation in the flesh, must declare war against these two classes, hating them with all one's heart, and all one's soul, and doing all one can to abolish them. England, Russia, Germany, can't begin to become even a little Christian while they last. Christ spoke of "the poor having the Gospel preached unto them": but his poor, you may bet, did not resemble ours, or he would have gone mad; they were like Kaffir poor, or even French poor, moderately at ease in their poverty, not chastised like the staring three-toed horse into a mere belly in a flurry. Our poor laugh, or hinny, at self-chastising: they are already chastised like brutes, and by a retrograde evolution *are* nothing but brutes. And what I want you both to promise me now is that you will never again belong in spirit to that chastising class,

which is really the more apish of the two, as long as you live.'

'Excuse me, Mr. Bennett,' said Harriet, flushing, 'I am sure that you are right, and mean us well, but there is something that touches us more keenly at the moment: you remarked that you would not want us any more at the office——'

'Ah, there's Battersea Bridge. Never mind about the office. Didn't I tell you that I love you? Will you promise me? You may never have another chance. I am hooking it for America.'

'Really? When?'

'In three weeks——'

'And shall we then lose our situations, Mr. Bennett? It is necessary——'

'Never mind about situations, I tell you. We have not much time. Will you promise me?'

'About the aristocracy? Personally I hate the simpletons——'

'You must love the simpletons, but hate their simplicity, using all your brains to teach them prudence and argument. And you, Augusta?'

This was the first time he had called her so: a blush flustered her pallor.

'I have not the slightest wish to return to Society, Mr. Bennett.'

'Poor Gussie!' he murmured, with a smile, holding her hand firmly in his big own; 'well, I will take that as a promise. And will you promise, Augusta, not to consider everybody who happens to be a little more manly than a lord as an "objectionable brute"?''

This was thin ice: but their faces showed old forgetfulness of 'objectionable brute.'

'I never considered——' began Augusta.

'Well, that's all right, then. But I'm in an exacting mood all out to-day: I want you to promise me three more things: first, that you, Augusta, by favour to me, will give up going to church or chapel—I know you never go, Harriet—as long as you live; and that you will both read, with all your brains, one chapter of

the Gospel of Mark, or of the first half of the Gospel of Matthew, each day for five years without fail.'

They were all in a maze of sensations, his voice had such a farewell and solemnity in it.

'But why?' asked Harriet, she sitting on his left, Augusta on his right, their eyes cast down, and strange motions at work in their breasts.

'Because I love you, and ask you in the name of my love.'

'Well, for that reason, yes.'

'And you, Augusta?'

'Yes, Mr. Bennett; I couldn't refuse you anything.'

'Don't forget, then. You are too utterly dear and good, both of you. And this third thing: will you promise to continue in your present home in Camden Town, whatever your husbands say, till such time as you acquire a new outlook upon life in consequence of that reading of Matthew and Mark? Or, putting it another road, till such time as you acquire a new picture in your minds of the over-overman, Jesus, on the understanding that, if the picture is at all absurd, grotesque, or dreary, then that's not the right Jesus?'

'But, Mr. Bennett,' said Harriet with wide eyes, 'you talk bewilderingly: in what other home could we "continue"? It is our all——'

'Never mind: promise.'

'Well, then, yes, since——'

'On your honour?'

'Yes.'

'In spite of your husband?'

'Yes, of course.'

'And you, Augusta?'

'Why, yes, Mr. Bennett.'

'Here comes Chelsea Bridge: we have missed all the fresh air. And a fourth thing from you, Augusta: will you promise that Markham shall learn carpentering, or some trade, for three years in an East-end workshop, as soon as he has matriculated, and Aimée some trade in a London workshop for two years as soon as she is seventeen?'

'Why, you are providing for them, Mr. Bennett: of course, I promise.'

'In spite of your husband?'

'Why, yes.'

'On those four conditions,' said he, 'which my lawyers will hand you to sign, I paid off in full all your husbands' and father's creditors last week, and executed deeds-of-gifts to you of all your former properties—the Abbey, Pigwell, Lonbydale, Parklands, the Cannes villa, and the rest. You, Harriet, are now nearly twice as rich as you ever were, your father slightly poorer than seven years ago, and you, Augusta, slightly richer than ever. I hope to God you will find out what you should do with it all. Understand that all is now yours personally, and nothing your husbands'. Take those back to live with you, if you like: only do take them for their sakes, not for your own, to teach them what I have told you, that chastity, or the protection of the weakest, is evolution, Christianity, love, chivalry, prolificness, liberty, happiness, Heaven, the law of being and the fairest among ten thousand: man's hardest task, but crowned with prizes transcending fancy; and that next to the protection of the weakest comes the protection of the weak. Perhaps it would be better if you, Harriet, now took the baronet, and Augusta the marquess, but then that might give offence. Anyway, I hope—I believe—that you will do well. God only grant it.'

'Is it true, Mr. Bennett?'—she had sprung straight a little to his left: Augusta's forehead rested on his right shoulder; and the cabin echoed one sob.

'Well, of course, it's true,' said he.

'Oh, but what have we done to be so loved by this man?' cried Harriet, appealing to Augusta, and in a moment she was crouched on the floor, her brow on his left knee; Augusta sobbed slowly on his right shoulder; and he wept to see them.

'There's no crying,' said he, 'don't cry.'

Harriet looked up.

'Is it *really* true?'

He nodded.

'Then hear my vow before you,' she said with a face that adored: 'that, since you have so loved me, I will try—if such as I can even try—I will try with all my heart and soul to be something like what you desire me to be. If that can be any reward to you——'

'You may bet,' said he softly, 'you may bet.'

'And I, too, Mr. Bennett—oh, I, too, believe me!' sobbed Augusta.

'If I may offer you—my whole heart,' went Harriet, 'if I may embrace—and kiss you——'

'Rather,' he whispered, with lowered lids of pleasure.

She rose hurriedly, and kissed his happy, upturned lips.

'Well, that's sweet,' he said: 'another one like that. . . . And you, too, Gussie: three from you, Gussie.'

Augusta, too, kissed him; and now they felt the heart-beat of the steamer cease, her speed died away, and a few moments later she touched at the Westminster Wharf. Jack jumped up, saying:

'There you go, you two, you see, crying over a few hundred thousand pounds, like two children——'

'You were—crying yourself,' said Harriet brokenly.

'If Lady de W—— had seen us—kissing Mr. Bennett,' sobbed Augusta; and a man who just then looked down the stairs saw them laughing like sunshine through rain.

The landau was waiting on the Embankment, and they drove to the hotel, where, in parting at the door, Jack said, 'Better not tell the husbands for two or three months,' and the sisters drove away homewards.

Mrs. Hay happened to be standing at the front-door in Arlington Street, when the unusual landau swept into it, and with a sinking of the heart she saw her daughters coming in that way at high afternoon, suspecting at once that they had been dismissed. At half-past twelve, two hours before this, there had arrived at the home two mysterious packages, one a box of port-wine, the other a turkey and a ham, and this had troubled the old lady with

some rather nervous surmises: for she could form no guess whence they came; and when she saw the sisters, instantly putting two and two together, she concluded that the presents were a *douceur* to the dismissal. But for her brave heart, she might have fainted. She did become cadaverous for a minute; but the moment she saw her daughters' faces well, she understood that the news was joy, and not pain.

Mr. Hay, in his cotton-wools on the bed, received the amazing news with a long silence, then, with a start, he uttered the words:

'Well, I always told ye! The young man is my born son, only I'm not his father. The merciful Almighty brings such things to pass. . . .'

But Mrs. Hay sat in a corner of the room, solitary and silent. In the left angle of her brow, under the hair, she had a scar, which in pensive hours she always rubbed and rubbed with a finger-tip. And there she sat, very slowly rubbing it a long while, wrapped in herself, awe and wonder in her heart, and a weird voice, whose language she could not quite interpret.

XXXIX

GRACIE'S LETTER

IN the early mornings, after his breakfast, which he cooked himself, Jack Hay had a habit of roaming about the streets in the neighbourhood of his two homes, smoking a massive pipe, wearing no jacket, but a dark-blue shirt open at the neck, with his full-share hat, and in this rig-out was a familiar morning sight to the two districts. Sometimes, if he saw a Floral Fête barrow, he might follow on its track, and see the people come and take their flowers with an air of ancient right, already picking and choosing without reserve, even grumbling, if aught displeased them.

On Tuesday, the day after restoring their possessions to his sisters, he was so strolling in White-chapel, where he had slept, when he saw a Floral Fête barrow going its way loaded with roses, some of high grade, niphetos, hybrid teas, W. A. Richardson, yellow, white, and red, with some azaleas, China asters, stocks, etc., in pots and in bouquets. It was about 8.15 a.m., a warm, dry morning, but overcast with clouds. He was near the bottom of New Street, saw the barrow turn out of Commercial Road into Cannon Street (not the great Cannon Street), and lazily followed, thinking not of the barrow, but of other things, yet conscious of the barrow. He had soon overtaken it, spoken a word to the two barrowmen, who touched their caps, knowing him well, and was about to stroll on, when, in the first-floor windows of the house which the barrow had now reached, he saw some-

thing—four curtains, tapestry ones, very faded, over eleven years old. He knew them! he had bought them himself. He waited till the woman of that room appeared for her flowers, and then his heart leapt: it was she, Mary Thaxter, visibly there, showing her stays as usual under an open white-cotton blouse, one sleeve rolled up; but a changed Mary, a podgy lump now, the Venus-figure gone, her face heavy, almost ugly, making the blue eyes small, the skin dark and coarse; but there still were the fine teeth revealed by her smile. He turned his face to her, well knowing that few sharper eyes and ears were in this world than Mary's: but she showed no recognition, though she had not heard that he was dead; he spoke to the barrowmen, that she might hear, but still she remained indifferent.

'What'll you have?' said the barrowman.

Her forefinger hovered over the barrow, and she said: 'Them yellow roses,' picking out in half a tick probably the best bunch in all the mass of fragrance.

She returned inward as the top-floor woman arrived; and softly after her hasted Jack up the stairs; entered her room without knocking; and the first thing which he saw was a man in the bed.

'Who's that man?' he cried at once.

'Well, the cheek,' went Mary softly, turning pale.

'Answer! who's that man?'

'Who are you? It's like your cheek to come into anybody's room——'

'What do you say?' (There was such a noise of singing-birds that low speech was hard to hear.)

'I said,' said she, clearing her throat, 'that it is like your cheek——'

'Don't you know me? Look well—peer into me—suppose I had no beard. Where's Fred?'

'Oh, it's *him!*' she screamed, and sprang to his bosom, kissing him, weeping, smelling of yesterday's beer.

'Where's Fred?'

'Whoy, ain't he dead and buried this four years very near?'

'Dead!'

'Where are you from now? Why haven't you wrote me all this time? I've thought of you more'n you have of me.'

'Don't be too sure of that. I did write, but never got an answer.'

She began suddenly to cry again into her dress, like a diving-bird suddenly deciding to dive.

'Don't cry. Who's that man?'

'Whoy, ain't I married to him?' (It was not true.)

'Get up, Jim, and go out, why don't you, instead of lolloping there in bed?'

She always had a man well in hand: for if he rebelled, she simply got drunk, and he lost his dinner; and if he beat her, she beat him back. The fellow meekly got out of the high bed in his shirt, coughing and yawning as he dressed.

'Well, this is a day,' she said: 'I can't believe it's my own boy come back to me again. Got any money to gi' me? You don't look that over flush neither. I never loved anyone like you, no, nor never shall again. Kiss me again. Oh, I could eat you!'

She went kissing him again, while her 'keeper' unconcernedly drew on his boots.

'Aren't you got big?' said she.

'And what about you?' said he.

'Me? I ain't big: it's the stays'—and she pulled the top of the broken stays a mile out, and let it fly back. 'Got any money to gi' me? Look here'—she took an empty vase, and poured out a cataract of pawn-tickets.

'Same old furniture, I see,' said he, pointing to a pile of chairs in a corner, all broken: 'why on earth don't you burn those old chairs if you can't sit on them? Is the couch all you have to sit on?'

'That's all, and that old armchair, that you've slept in many a time. I can't believe it's him! I like you in that hat— And what a beard! and his hands all tattooed and hairy. . . . You look quite different, like a foreigner, and your face looks hard and cruel, like anybody who's been in the wars——'

'Come, tell me about Fred. Dead and gone: and why he lived his uncomforted little life what angel knows? what tongue can tell? But God knows, Mary. Sit on the couch, and tell me. I see you've got plenty of flowers and birds: do you cotton to them, then?'

'Ain't I looking at them all day? That cock-canary sings beautiful in the early morning, and I am going to have an aquarium, when I've paid off the three cages, a shilling a week. Got any money to gi' me? But if you don't pay anythink, they don't make you, or dun you. They *are* good there! and everybody pays, who can. The woman upstairs has a rookery (rockery); she says her husband's been going regular to the library ever since; and the landlord's going to plant the back-yard. You wouldn't believe, but it makes anybody feel different to have them, not so God-forsaken as anybody was. I've heered people say they don't know what they should do without. Ever been into the Floral Feat? it's like dying and going to heaven. My Kit's got such a wopper of a cage with ten birds, and two such lovely pairs o' vases——'

'Kit still alive?'

'Whoy, wasn't she here last night, looking as broad as she's long?'—— she grinned her broad, beautiful grin.

'What did old Thaxter die of?'

'Whoy, didn't he have that big growth at the back of his head? But how come you to know——?'

'I've been looking for you, of course, and heard about the two old men that road. I've been away from England ten years and more, and only been back eight months.'

'So you've been looking for me? Well, I mighter knowed that, though. It's no use, I've got to kiss him again——'

He had also been sending her flowers and birds, every day without fail, like a faithful lover: but she had not known it. On the mantelpiece were four cheap, but large and pretty, flower-pots, bought at

the Fête, three of them containing the last three days' bouquets: two groups of roses, one group of lilies, drooped beneath their heaviness, like angel's-flesh touched with strange decay; in the window stood pots of flowers: all the windows of this street, in fact, were dabbled with that innocent blood, each woman trying to excel the rest; at Mary's windows hung two aviaries, that called one to the other, and to Mary, and to a third aviary hung in the centre, not without answer; so that, in spite of the pile of chairs, etc., the room no longer seemed a den, but a habitation, in which some day perhaps a thought might be born, or even a prayer arise.

Jack sat warily upon the couch, feeling himself come home; and they talked a long while at haphazard about everything, especially about Fred.

'Where did he die?'

'Whoy, at the Royal Free.'

'Consumption, of course?'

'Yes, and they did serve him cruel. He was six weeks, poor fellah. And I'm as good as a witch, for when they was taking him up, I said to him: "This is a funny stair, there's a funny bend in these stairs" —she frowned deeply—"you are coming up, but you will never go down any more." And I was as good as a witch: for didn't Kit say to me afterwards: "Well, Mary, your words was true." And every time I went, my Fred said to me, "Oh, Mary, they're serving me cruel. I haven't got any strength, and all they give me is a little drop of milk." You could see the bones in his poor hands. "If he only knew this," he said, meaning you, "I'd get some money. Why don't you find out, and write to him, Mary? I'd be out of this. *He'd find some money for me——*"'

'Poor dear,' said Jack: 'but what on earth did he want money for?'

'Whoy, wasn't it to buy some warm clothes and come out? *He* didn't think he was going to die, not he. On the Tuesday, he said——'

'When did he die?'

'Whoy, wasn't it on the Friday morning, as the

clock struck seven? On the Tuesday he said to me: "Next Sunday when you come you'll find me up," and on the Sunday he was in his coffin down at Brentford. On the Thursday night a hospital-porter ran to call me—I was staying with Kit—and it *was* lonely-like in that room all night, only Brown part of the time, and me and Kit, and a table in the middle, with the light turned down; there was a red screen round my Fred's bed, and somebody dying at the side of him. I said to the nurse: "You might give me something to wet his mouth," and she wouldn't; I had to keep dipping my finger in the ice-water and putting it in his mouth, and one time he near bit my finger off—you can see the mark. He died just as the clock struck seven in the morning, quiet as you might drop off to sleep, and one of the nurses said "At last! the long time he did last!" "Yes," said I, "I'd last *you*, if I had my way of you." Then comes one of the sisters, and she says: "What is your hobjection to having him opened, if he is dead?" "Never mind, you aren't going to open '*im*,'" said my Kit, and they started arguing the point between them—well, you know what Kit is, it'd take a good many sisters to get the better o' *her*. "Oh, you may as well consent," says the sister, "for it will be done anyhow." "Will it?" said I: "you aren't going to open '*im*.' If you've had him for six weeks, and haven't found out in six weeks, you won't find out now." Then a young doctor comes up, and he and the sister look at one another and smile, and he says: "He will have to be opened." "Will he?" says Kit: "you aren't going to open '*im*,'" and they argued the point between them. Then the sister says: "Will you please leave the ward?" "All right," I said, "we will: but you aren't going to open '*im*,' so don't think it." So what does I and Kit do? We goes down to the bottom of the stairs, and there we waits. Presently two men brought down my Fred on a stretcher—they had him all bound up like a mummy—and they took him into the hospital-mortuary with all coffins round it, laid him on a table, and threw a Union Jack over my

Fred, a blanket with all colours. I was stooping down, looking through a little grating, but Kit had smuggled herself into the mortuary with the porters, till one of them seed her, and he said: "What are you doing here? Are you his wife?" "I ham," says Kit, proud like. "Can't help that," says he: "you must go out." "You aren't going to open 'im, though," says Kit: "I must see Dr. Williams." "Garn! he's in bed," says he. "I don't move till I see him, though," she says: for Kit knew that if you aren't quick enough to get a certificate, they'll open you, but with a certificate they can't open you. What the devil did they want to open my Fred for? only to show him to them young doctors: for they knew he'd died of consumption. Well, Kit wouldn't move, and they argued the point between them. Then one of the porters blew up a tube, and at last Dr. Williams came down with a muffler on. "What do you want?" says he. "A certifikit," says Kit. "Well you shall have your certifikit," says he. And we got it, too.'

'Grand old Kit,' said Jack: 'she would have been a flasher general than any Napoleon. Where's she living?'

'Whoy, in the Pentonville Road.'

'You must have her here, so that I may see her.'

'And I had such a token before he died,' said Mary. 'It was the Wednesday night; the publichouses wasn't shut, for I could see, as I lay a-bed, when all of a sudden I heered every bell in the house ringing, and the knocker going. I thought to myself, "That can't be for us"; then I hear Brown say to Kit in the next room: "Kit, get up: there's all the bells a-ringing." Then I didn't hear any more; Kit didn't get up, nor Brown neither, so I thought to myself, "It must be for one of the other lodgers." So the next morning I said to my Kit: "What was all the bells a-ringing for last night, I wonder?" She says to me: "I never heered no bells." "But," said I, "didn't your Fred say to you, "Kit, get up"?" "No," says she, "I didn't hear him: we'll ask him

when he comes home." So in the evening when Brown comes home, we asked him, and he says, "No, I never heered no bells, nor I didn't wake up Kit." But I'm as good as a witch: for that very night, the Thursday, as I was lying a-bed, just the same hour as the night before, the publichouses wasn't shut, I heered every bell in the house ringing, and the knocker going again; and I hear Brown say to my Kit: "Kit, get up: there's all the bells a-ringing." It was a porter from the hospital who had run to tell me that my Fred was dying, and he was ringing all the bells. I'd heered it all the night before just as it was to happen, and my Kit said to me, as we was running to the hospital: "Well, Mary, your words was true."

'Well,' said Jack, 'such things happen. There's a third eye in the head somewhere.'

'Oh, but ain't I told you my dream about you? Poor little fellah! I was crying for days about that dream, till afterwards it passed away.'

'What was that about, then?'

'It must ha' been about three years ago. I dreamt you came to me, and you wasn't like how I knew you, if you can make it out, but more as you are now, and yet you was. I'm sure you had a beard: and yet it was just the same you. You was washed in blood from your head to your feet, and, oh good Lord, I think I can see you now!—I never see'd anybody so sad and wild like. You was more like a ghost than a man. You was in your shirt and a pair of drawers, with red socks over the bottom of the drawers, but no boots, and you had an old leather belt round your waist over the drawers, and your hair was all wild and bloody; and you came to me for comfort like, and to say good-bye, saying as how you had committed a great sin, or something wrong, I couldn't make out what, and must be killed at once to wash it away. Oh, but I can't tell you about that dream! you wouldn't understand, in a manner o' speaking: I never had such a fright. I wasn't crying when I woke up—it was too awful somehow for crying then—but I was crying for days after—poor little fellah!'

She laid her hand upon his, and they were silent.

Then he, jumping up :

'Well, we'll wait till the racket comes, before we grapple it. I'm away, but I'll be back in three or four days, and then we'll talk some business. Here's five pounds, meanwhile, to get the things out of pawn, and don't forget to burn the chairs. That man really your husband?—tell the truth.'

'Garn! I don't want to get married.'

'Let him know that he must be married to you within three weeks, or I take you from him altogether. I see you still drink beer.'

'Not much——'

'Too much, Mary. I smell it; and there's the eternal can. Ever go to mass now?'

'Garn!'

'You'll have to, every Sunday—for some time. But I'll see you soon. There are your birds calling to you. Come, kiss me. I love you all out, woman, and when I die, I'll not fail to come again to you, and keep you in all your ways.'

Tears welled in her eyes as she kissed him; then from a window she watched him walk down the street: and they parted with a lasting parting.

From New Street, where he dressed, he went on a 'bus to the hotel, hardly any longer to 'do business,' but to tear himself out of the coils of business, an even harder business. But that day little was done: for, in the first place, when he arrived late, old Spender was in the drawing-room; Jack first tore open a few letters in the office, including one from Harriet, which said that the sisters would call in the afternoon; then, leaving the rest, he hurried in to greet Mr. Spender, with whom was another elderly man, a certain Sir James H——, who was one of Her Majesty's Directors of Convict Prisons, a Cumberland baronet, and an old friend of Mr. Spender's, whom Mr. Spender must needs present to Jack. Jack professed himself delighted to meet Sir James, ordered champagne, and they conversed for an hour.

The talk turned upon prisons, whereupon Sir James

H—— asked Jack if he had ever visited a prison. Jack, with a mental shudder, said no, this shudder being due to the fact that his imagination pictured to him a prison as a place resembling the Dorset Street dosshouses, in which he had three times slept since that first night of which we have written, each time with the same vomiting illness. He thought, without thinking much, that a prison was like that, never dreaming that men, to be punished, are taken from styes and shut up in clean mansions. When, therefore, Sir James H—— said that he was to start the next day on his monthly visit to Dartmoor, and would be pleased with Jack's and Mr. Spender's company to show them the prison, Jack hesitated: he had a constitutional repugnance, and he was busy. . . . Then again he reflected that it would be well—that he should. 'I was in prison, and ye visited me not': those words got into his head; and he said:

'That will suit me all out. Will you come, Mr. Spender?'

'Will there be anything to eat?' asked Mr. Spender, who had been ten minutes on his good behaviour, and now weakened.

'No fear about that,' said Jack, 'I'll look after the canteen.'

'I can trust him—for that,' laughed Mr. Spender, who had got into speechless trembles of mockery at seeing Jack eat and keep on eating, more like the Giant than like Jack.

'There he goes,' said Sir James: 'we shall feed him well to-morrow, and have him as merry as a lad in his teens——'

'Which teen? my can—teen——'

'There he goes,' repeated Sir James: 'the word canteen has tickled some nerve in that body of his. What, sir, by the way, is the origin of that word?'

'Well, sir,' said Jack, frowning, 'I pan it out this road: I suppose that originally there were mostly tinned articles in a canteen: but instead of saying "tin-can," they somehow said "can-tin"——'

'Oh Got!' wheezed Mr. Spender concentrated, with

limp-pointed finger, 'that's not—true. Don't trust—Mr. Bennett's—etymol—ogies——'

Seeing him sunk into that state where any chance word might add to his trouble, they were silent, till he slowly recovered. It was then arranged that he and Jack should meet the Director of Prisons at 11.30 at Paddington the next morning; whereupon the visitors rose, Mr. Spender saying:

'I have to go, in order to call upon our good friend, Miss Ames. She happens to be in some difficulty at present——'

'How's that, then?' asked Jack.

'Her *fiancé*, Mr. Emptage, has for two days—*been—lost*——' He stooped, cramping afresh, with meek, appealing eyes.

'How's that, sir?' asked Jack of Sir James H——.

'He has not been to his business for two days,' answered Sir James, 'nor seen, nor written to, Miss Ames, nor been at his chambers. So that there is some natural anxiety—oh, but he is sure to turn up.'

'Well, I do hope so,' said Jack.

When they were gone he telephoned the Bank, and Buddo coming, they spent a couple of business hours together, Buddo in these days being in a state of gloom at the impending loss of Jack, and at the wicked waste of money-coining talent involved in Jack's retirement from finance, an event which would be an earthquake on the Exchanges, though Buddo himself was to stand rather well in by it. When he was gone Jack descended to lunch in the *salle à manger*, at which he entertained K—— and three of K——'s followers, then ordered a picnic-lunch to be sent on to Paddington for the next day's trip to Dartmoor, then went up again, now expecting his sisters. They did not come, and having to go to the City, he left them instructions to wait, went to the City for a while, then to his hospital for an hour, and returned about 4.30. But they had not come, and he found a telegram instead, saying: 'We pray to be excused till tomorrow. Mamma very unwell to-day. Our love.—
AUGUSTA AND HARRIET.'

This 'mamma' was an extraordinary mistake of the telegraph-office. The sender had really written 'papa'; and as Jack had no clue to the gravity of the alleged illness, he first became restless, then, looking out and seeing the landau still there, ran down, and started for Camden Town. He had not seen his father for months, and longed to be with them all.

Arlington Street was a paved street, drowsy and mean, the houses all alike on the west side where the Hays lived in No. 12, all contiguous, all small, made of stone painted dark-red to the first floor, and thence of old brick to the narrow coping. Each had a Norman door and broader Norman window in the ground-floor, each a glass door in the first-floor window. The house north of No. 12 was a boot-maker's, and three doors thence an old-furniture-shop, exhibiting some chairs and a carpet on the pavement, *à propos* of which carpet, the house opposite No. 12 announced: 'Robinson, chimney-sweep and carpet-beater,' and on a lamp: 'Mangling and washing done here,' while south of No. 12 was Richardson, an 'altering and repairing tailor.' Hardly a cart blundered down there; but there were cats, children and sparrows, especially in the courtyard under that Gothic archway, which was sculptured with 'St. Mark's Parochial Schools,' and 'St. Mark's Mission,' and 'Jesus Only.' When Jack's landau swept into, and, as it were, captured the street, hardly a sound or movement disturbed its quietude, save dreamy noises of the children in the St. Mark's courtyard, and some aviaries in first-floor windows that sang to the transient light of sunset, or to flowers on the window-sills.

The coming carriage was marked from No. 12, and, drawing up, created a sensation. Before the servant could, down ran the sisters with a certain pallor, half awe, half joy: for Jack, the Boss, was not yet dead in their consciousness, though Jack, the well-beloved, was taking his place.

'Why, Mr. Bennett, this is delightfully unexpected——' cried Augusta.

'How's your mother?'

'She is quite well.'

'Your telegram said that she's ill.'

'Papa, we said.'

'No, "mamma." Tell me the truth frankly——'

'She really is quite well, Mr. Bennett.'

'Ah, by George, that's all right, then. I got rather a shock——'

He said this unguardedly, in a matter-of-fact mutter, like the most natural thing; and at the same moment the words and the manner struck both sisters as quite odd.

'Come up, and see for yourself,' said Harriet.

He was led up some little stairs that creaked to his weight to a 'drawing-room,' quite small, but looking well, with a chiffonier, a cheap piano, some dainties in tables, and good valenciennes at the glass-door window; everything exquisitely tidy; and it was crowded with splendid Floral Fête flowers, for the sisters had the privilege of taking *ad lib.* from the morning carts, and did not stint, while over the piano was a cage of linnets; and on the sofa across the corner near the window-door sat Mrs. Hay sedate in her brown silk, with Miss Ames and Mr. Spender, the last two having come to five-o'clock together; and as soon as Jack was seated, all recommenced to discuss the subject which he had interrupted: viz., the strange disappearance, for two days, of Missie's *fiancé*, Mr. Emptage.

Jack sat in an easy-chair before the sofa, the sisters close on either side of him, Harriet on a stool, both looking elegant as queens, though without gauds, their hair a Moorish architecture, as it were the Mosque of Omar, and their waists cut out to flaunt. Also, on this first day of prosperity, the dinner-hour had slipped quite back from 2 p.m. to 7; also, that morning Harriet had made a secret run down to the Abbey, just to see it, and had lectured Jack's caretakers. Jack's hand rested on Augusta's, while Harriet's right shoulder pressed upon his chair, where she could look

up anon into his face and smile, flirting with him her first chaste-minded flirtation.

Miss Ames looked very harassed, her veil across her brow, and would not let the subject of Mr. Emptage drop, till Mr. Spender got fidgety, fearing that he would laugh if she kept on, which would have been an intolerable thing; and, with a perilous smile, he proposed departure. But, just then, the servant entered with rather late tea, and there was thus a delay. They drank tea, which Augusta poured, Jack all the time trying to contrive an excuse for getting to see his father, who lay in the room behind the drawing-room; but before he could say anything, before tea was well over, a cab drew up near the landau at the door, and attracted general attention.

'There's a cab,' said Miss Ames, who could see it, and immediately she added: 'Oh, it is for me! Harry'—meaning Mr. Emptage—'is found!' For she saw that the occupant of the cab was a footman of the St. John-Heygates, at whose place she was staying in Victoria Street (though they themselves were all on the Continent), and she saw that the man held a letter. On starting for the Hays', she had, in fact, left her destination with the housekeeper, who, knowing her anxiety, had in this way promptly sent her a letter marked 'Urgent and Important.'

The footman knocked, the servant took the letter, hurried up with it, and Miss Ames flew to meet her at the drawing-room door.

All anxiously watched the poor, agitated lady; she just panted: 'It's from Harry,' as she tore the envelope; and then, with eager-travelling eyes, she read, while silence reigned.

She was not half through when her left hand went up, and covered her mouth; she grew pallid; finally the letter dropped from her, and one just heard the murmur, 'Oh, my teeth, my teeth . . .'

'Bad news?' cried Jack, jumping up to go to her.

'My teeth!' cried Miss Ames shrilly, suddenly, now starting to range up and down the room; and in

her running little falsetto she added: 'He is in Liverpool! he is off to America—oh Lord, my teeth—he says that I may keep my money, and dispose of my affections as I choose, just as he means to dispose of his, my teeth, my teeth—oh Lord, my teeth, my teeth, my teeth—my teeth, oh Lord, my teeth—'

Jack had twice tried to intercept her career, that he might whisper some hurried comfort, and was again attempting, when a cry broke from Mrs. Hay, who had happened to glance at Mr. Spender: he was laughing—a laugh silent as death, deep-seated as life, and in struggle with life.

All eyes turned upon him, everyone now standing. There he sat, helplessly foundering, his face every moment more bloated, his eyes nearly shut, moist, expressionless, and engorged, while once or twice a creak came from him. Jack looked flurriedly about and threw up distracted hands: for no one is so utterly at a loss in the presence of the sudden as a medical student; then, with the shout of '*Water!*' he flew, and kneeling, clapped the old man on the back, just knowing that vessels degenerated by age could never stand that awful blood-tension, but knowing no more. A minute, and Augusta stood by him with water, but he did not take it: for by now, after three or four clonic spasms, the red-black laugh was over, Mr. Spender lay limp in Jack's arms, and the purplish which had succeeded the red was fading into white. No one knew what to do, except to loosen his collar, which Jack did; in fact, nothing would have helped: he had burst a vessel in the brain, and was now in a condition of coma and paralysis, marked with stertorous breathing. The room was full of whispers, cries, and pale faces; only Jack talked without pause to the dying man, beseeching him, coaxing him, to live, with dear names of 'old friend,' 'protector,' 'second father,' forgetting that others heard him; but it did not last long: he knew that look of death which came in about three minutes, and, as he lowered the burden to the couch, glanced round with sudden irritability, hissing:

'How could you be such an idiot, Missie, with your teeth——!'

'Great Heaven!' cried Miss Ames, looking about with wide eyes of protest, 'could I dream that my teeth were destined to be the death of him? But—this is strange——'

Jack, still on one knee, had turned again to the dead man, and was feeling his heart, when he was startled by a shocking scream: Harriet, standing rigid and staring in a far corner, her forefinger stretched upon Jack, had screamed:

'That's Jack Hay!'

Jack, on his knee, his back still turned to them, glared half-absently, half-alarmed, at her steady forefinger and white-iron face; and for a minute no one seemed to breathe. The familiarity of his 'Missie,' the 'idiot,' and his pleadings over Mr. Spender, had struck into definiteness instincts which many things had been nurturing—in the case of Harriet soonest, but instantly in the others also. The silence was broken by a sound from Mrs. Hay which regularly repeated itself, an all-gone 'Oh' in a dying accent, while her face moved up and down sideways toward him, uttering the unutterable, and her eyes were like sickness itself. She made a step forward, but tottered, and as he sprang up and caught her, she sighed the four words: 'My own pains—God——' and fainted with her lips on his. Augusta, meantime, had an arm about his neck, standing on his left, her face buried on his shoulder, ever repeating the same broken words, which he could not catch: 'I always loved you, I always did'; and Harriet was kneeling on an armchair apart, her head on its back, with solitary sobbings, while Miss Ames looked from one to the other, and at the dead man. Jack, too, turned his head to glance at Mr. Spender, and, doing so, saw a white something, like a ghost in the gathering darkness, at a door which had silently opened between the drawing-room and the sick-room; the form swayed as if to fall, and he, quickly depositing his mother in an easy-chair, ran to it, and caught it, saying:

'Now, dad, now: there's no exciting yourself for nothing: come to your bed——'

'Excited! unhand me, lad!' cried Mr. Hay. 'A'm safe as a lamb. Are ye my own son?'

'Yes, dad, all out.'

'Are ye Jack Hay in God's truth, that A' got, and lost?'

'Yes, dad, the very same.'

'Are ye Jack?' repeated old Hay, with a molar travail of the jaws, his tongue-tip showing anon—'the lad that A' did that thing to, come back like this? wi' tha two hands full o' naught but love an' bounty?'

'By the working o' God, dad! By the pity o' God, dad!'

'Let's hand thee, then, let's kiss thee'—he sank on one knee with up-reaching arms—'since the way o' it is so. Ey, A' had queer dreams at times, and A' saw one night a log i' the fire that ached the heart, but A' deemed thee dead and gone, Jack, never more to bless my old eyes wi' the sight o' ye, Jack Hay. Perhaps ye never had a son, lad, and dunnot understand the strain o' it—ey, it's hard, it probes deep. Nay, dunnot touch me! A'm a man, too, wi' my natural pride, and I'll thole my burden and reap my sowings. What kind of a father was I to him, good Lord on high!—he tried to rise, but failed with an 'Ugh!'—'go see to tha mother, who's fainted there for thee, and never dare think, mind ye, lad, that she had aught to do wi' that—thing—being agen it from first to last, and it was only me, that gat took o' some sickness o' the spleen, like sudden malaria, and stickings o' the mad-fly—God forgi' me. Ye must forgi' tha poor old father on his knees: A' can't do more than ask ye——'

He bowed himself down, and at the same moment Harriet came whispering:

'Get him into bed, Jack: he is in great pain——'

Jack stooped, got a cautious hold, strained, and bore the night-dressed weight, with its sick-bed odour, into the inner room. When he reappeared, Mrs. Hay was still comatose, and her, too, he carried, and laid on

the bed, the sisters following after him, in and out, as after a magnet. Miss Ames sat near the body, rocking from side to side, her hand over her mouth, and her, too, Jack led into the other room, and shut the door; then in the passage he found the girl, got a doctor's address, and ran out. When he returned with the doctor, the lamps were lighted. The body was then examined, and the doctor, after undertaking to see to its removal to the mortuary, went away, whereupon Jack re-entered the sick-room, and there they all were, Mrs. Hay up and wandering about, weeping; and he went straight to her, whispering:

'There's no crying, Titty—it's only laughing.'

'Are we friends, Jackie—like before?' she whispered: 'it's hard to believe in.'

'Worse than ever, you may bet,' he whispered, 'worse than ever'—and they whispered on an ottoman, till the sisters came by concert, and knelt before him, and Harriet said:

'We ask you to forgive us, Jack.'

'What's that about, then?'

'It is only formal. We know, don't we? that you have: but tell us.'

'I have no idea——'

'Yes, you have: tell us.'

'What, you two still on about that same old accusation bobbery?'

'About that very bobbery: forgi' us wilsta, dearest? It is heavy on our broken hearts.'

'But how do you drop to it now that I didn't do it, then?'

'We know that thou art a prophet sent from God, Jack.'

'Ah, prophets have a different seat in their saddle, Harrie: that's not in my line of business any road, worse luck. You can call me a good brother though, if loving means good.'

'He's too sweet,' murmured Augusta despairingly to Harriet.

'So ye won't forgi' us?' said Harriet.

'There's no forgiving, you two,' said he: 'love can't

stop to forgive; and it can't find anything to forgive, being all blind.'

'How near and dear you are!' whispered Gussie: 'I can't believe—— If you only knew how undreamable it is to have you back, and how heavy we were——'

'Look at his hair,' said Harriet, with red eyes, fingering it, they two now on the sofa, whence they had coolly dispossessed Mrs. Hay of him: 'it is quite as black as a raven, and so thick. It was reddish when he was a boy. And he has the very beard of Pluto.'

'Who were you most in love with that time, Jack, at first—Harrie or me?'

'Oh, I know that he loves you more than me,' said Harriet: 'he always did, and has shown it several times lately.'

'Have I?' said he, 'don't make too sure of that, then'—and he rumbled her palace of hair with a romping embrace: 'but here are we all on about ourselves, when the old lad's gone, so sudden. No more laughing for nothing now. Nobody knows how sweet and good he was but me. Harrie, you'd better send telegrams at once to Gangrel's Ha' and Bedwick.'

'Well, he was an old man,' said Mrs. Hay: 'all must pay the debt of nature. Look at the brawn o' his arm, and the power in his throat: he's a brood o' sons, not one.'

'How she has gone right back, since—everything!' whispered Augusta behind Jack's back: 'she never would have said that a year ago.'

'It doesn't really matter,' Harriet whispered back.

'That's it, Gus and Harriet, and your mother,' called old Hay with a groan from the bed: 'hide him away among ye over there, as if a father had neither part nor lot in him.'

'Come, papa wants you, dear,' said Harriet, kissing him.

'May I be permitted to offer my congratulations——?' began Miss Ames, arising upon their crowded con-

sciousness with a face of pain, but just then the servant, looking in, deplored the spoiling dinner, and they all descended to the Norman-windowed 'front-parlour,' except Miss Ames, who, unable to eat, remained by the sick-bed. No one, in fact, could eat, except Jack, and he, interrupted by the coming of the ambulance, helped to remove the body.

After dinner all sat an hour by the bedside, till he, beginning to breathe heavily, went down with Harriet, and strolled in the back yard—a strip of land with a grass-plot, some bush, and beyond the bush a wall. They presently sat on a bench at the end under two pear-trees still in leaf, and thence could see moving shadows on Mr. Hay's blind. The night was warm and quiet, though all day it had threatened rain; there was some consciousness of a moon which worked invisibly behind the clouds, but under the trees it was very dark.

'Haven't you seen her at all?' asked Harriet.

'Once, at a place called Steinway Hall.'

'I refer to her because I divined that you might wish me to. Or don't you?'

'Ah, I don't know. That's the spot where I'm all indefinite and weak, Harrie, and a flea's sting could kill me dead. That's why I'm hooking it quick.'

'Is that settled?'

'All out.'

'It is too cruel of you, just for the sake of that one woman! You have not the right—— Is it true that you are going to part with all your money, as Stephane told us?'

'There'll be about £800 left to carry me through the doctoring.'

'But I don't know how to adore you, Jack! You handle my heart-strings like reins, and gallop it pit-a-pat. If you will say often to me "A' love thee," I'll run after thee through any fire, laddie, just to hear the flattery. Tha's the gallantest o' laddies——'

'Yes, but stop it, Harrie,' he said, irritated in spite of himself: 'your ideal of manhood must be terribly

poor, my poor dear, if you see anything so gallant in that. It's only the shockingly unmanly people that you've deliberately mixed with——'

'Well, yes, dear: I can't feel like you just yet—I will try—— Only, don't go! There is mamma and papa. Why should you for that one woman? Everything will seem so empty and stupid again to us. Make yourself poor, but stay, and then she won't care for you——'

'Who won't?'

'Mrs. Raby.'

'Ha! you know nothing of her.'

'She may have changed, you know, in eleven years.'

'In what way?'

'For the worse perhaps.'

'In what way?'

'I don't know exactly——'

'Then, don't say it. But one thing I'll ask you—has she been pretty happy? what we call "happy"?''

'I am not sure. Moderately, I should think. She twice left her husband——'

'What for?' he asked with grim shortness.

'I forget what the first time was for. The second time she was—jealous.'

'Of *him*! But could the beast have been untrue to her, then?'

'Not really, I am certain. But she may have thought so.'

'Who was the woman?'

She blushed vividly, saying:

'It is absurd. I—can't tell you.'

'You must.'

'Then it was supposed to be I. But there was really nothing——'

'You! My own sister——!' He tossed her hand from his shoulder, jumped up, and walked a little away; she followed, saying:

'Jack, listen——'

'Give me your word that there was nothing in that,' said he.

'Why, nothing,' she answered, not very truly, but alarmed at his vehemence.

'Did you write and tell her that there was nothing?'

'Why, no, dear. That would have been very extraordinary——'

'*You* should have done it, though. It is hard, Harriet, that she should have suffered through my own sister——'

'She did not suffer even in the least. It was only indigestion, bad temper, and dog-in-the-manger. There was nothing much to suffer for, and she is not fond of him.'

'She must be, or she would never have made a scandal. Was the—beast—in love with you, then?'

'He was more or less *épris* for a time——'

'No French evasions, Harriet! Was that—man—in love with you?'

'No, then. He had the impulse to flirt with me——'

'That was all?'

'Quite.'

'Then, Harriet, I demand the small sacrifice that you write and plainly tell Gracie so—to-night.'

'*I!* Oh, Jack, dearest, you would never let me humiliate myself in that fashion!'

'The humiliation was in the flirtation, my friend. To confess it is to wash it half away. You will have to, Harriet—there's no arguing and escaping.'

Bitterly she regretted now her improvident gossip, and stood entrapped. She felt that to do such a thing was impossible to her.

'But, Jack,—hear me,' she said: 'could you invent any pain that I would not lightly undergo to please you? But this would not be a pain, but a prank. If I must, I must—— But Mrs. Raby would simply scream all day with laughter! You would not care to subject me to another woman's ridicule. She would circulate my letter like a newspaper. It is all so forgotten—years ago; and, naturally, she has long since got every detail of whatever passed from her husband. Why, then, let me write? She cares not one straw for his dead flames, or his living——'

'Ah, she does, she does.'

'How shall I convince you? I *know* that she does not.'

'How do you?'

'Because she is thinking only of you——'

'Of me, Harriet?'

'Yes, of you.'

'That's not true. You must write the letter——'

'Jack, I can prove it. She is thinking only of you——'

'How can you prove it?'

'By a letter which Gussie received from her this very morning. It was Dutch to us when we read it, of course, not knowing that you were you. I will get it and show you, if you promise that I shan't have to write to her——' She started off.

'Stop——!' he called.

'Shan't I get it?'

'Yes.'

She ran into the house, and he sat again on the bench in the deep shade. His heart, which should have been the very home of calm, now beat fast: and thus did that old flirtation, which Harriet thought dead, have living claws to drag her beloved into troubled waters. He lit a fresh cigar, and now she came hurriedly again, saying:

'Have you matches?'

'Suppose she did not wish me——?'

'Oh, she says: "This letter is public"——'

He struck a match, the air was almost still, and she read aloud, he looking aside at her lips as if her words were substances:

'MY DEAR AUGUSTA,

'Excuse my long silence. You know that nothing happens at Beech How, except vegetation, and an occasional visit from Mrs. Sales with your charming Aimée, who is growing fast, and resembles your dead brother——'

The match burned out: Jack struck another.

'But I have not the heart to write circumlocutions. I understand that you and your sister are engaged at Mr. John Bennett's, and since it is important for me to know, for business reasons, whether that gentleman intends to visit Lonbydale at once, I use you as a *dernier ressort* to see whether by direct question, ruse, or otherwise you could——'

Another match.

'—— You could obtain that *definite* knowledge for me without delay. There are reasons why I cannot write to him. I asked Miss Ames, who knows him, if she would find out, and she very kindly sends me the stupidest, vaguest report. Will you, then? As my life hangs upon your answer, I write with absolute frankness, not caring what it may please you or anyone to think. Call me crazy, if you like. But the matter is purely financial *au fond*, and this letter is public, if it pleases you to send it to the *Times*. Even Mr. Bennett's wealth is tiny compared with my nonchalance and deep disdain.

'Yours as ever, dear Augusta,
'GRACIE RABY.'

Jack had glanced only once at the writing, but by that glance seen that it was penned in such a tempest of haste as to be almost illegible; and he said:

'Well, she seems to be in trouble. Has Augusta answered it?'

'Not yet.'

'Tell her not to.'

'You won't wish me now, Jack, to write to her about Nibbs—that is—her husband——?'

'No, that's all right.'

'Thank Heaven,' she said to herself. 'But, leaving Mrs. Raby, you won't go away, Jack?'

'Where to?'

He was absent, and heard her mechanically.

'To America.'

'Why, you must want me to, since you show me this letter. This proves that I ought, doesn't it?'

'Oh, don't say that, dear! But, Jack, I have been thinking: if you go, I will go with you.'

'How's that, then?'

'To be with you, and to become a doctor, I also. I could, you know, if I tried.'

'Well, that's gamely said: but what about the husband, then, that you're vowed to?'

'He wouldn't care at all, I think.'

'Well, in that case——'

He showed no enthusiasm, looking away, not thinking of her.

'I am eager to do something, Jack, dear, to prove that your pains have not been thrown away upon me at least. I divine the whole scheme of what you have done to us: you deliberately ruined those three men with your power and your "Buddo," didn't you? Ey, and all was well and wise—tha iron hand and velvet heart, dear love—and I never dreamed of such joy and pride as now when I bow my neck under my darling's yoke. You don't know what it is to find you again—I am so achingly related to you, really, fibre to fibre, and the heart waes. . . . Howd me tha lips to kiss at—I'se e'en got to threep i' Cumbrian wi' the lad—— Do you suppose that America would be any sacrifice to me, wi' thee? I'se too fond in love! The sacrifice would be to lack you. I only hope, Jack, that the giving us back of everything is not too soon—for Augusta. Do you think we shall be able? It is nice to be toffs——'

'That'll be all right,' he said absently: 'I didn't feel that I had the right to keep your goods, as I was going—— I must be off——'

'Not already!'

'I must. Good-night. There's no chop in going upstairs again: tell them all good-night. Whom do I love the best in the world?'

He asked it in that same hurried, absent manner.

'Do you mean me? or Gracie Raby?'

'Gracie, Stephane, Lord Harling, Titty and Dad. And who next?'

'Me—or Augusta?'

'Both the same, both the same. Where's this Raby now?'

'Mr. Raby?—he returned from the Continent three days ago, Miss Ames says: I don't know whether he is in town or country. Why?'

'Kiss me—good-night. Kiss them all——'

He started away with such strides, that she had to run to follow.

'Shall we see you to-morrow?' she asked, astonished and somehow scared.

'Not to-morrow. I'll write.'

He took his hat in the hall, they hurriedly kissed again at the front-door, and he got into the landau. It was then about 9; and at one place the clouds were all white and wild, where moonlight had worked through.

She went out, and stood at the pavement-edge, watching the carriage roll away to the first turning; then she heard him call to the driver, and saw it turn, and coming back. She ran out to it, as it stopped; and he bent close to her, saying:

'If you never see me again, don't forget the four things you promised——'

'*If!*' she breathed: 'what is the matter?'

'Nothing is. Something took me to come back and tell you. And promise me this: that Stephane shall always be your closest personal friend as long as you both live. Are those five things unalterably settled?'

'Yes—but—— What is it? Jack, are you going down to Cumberland?'

'Why should you ask that?'

'Jack, *don't* go! Gracie has changed—she will do you harm——!'

'*Drive on!*' he cried high, with that bleating tremble of his voice.

The carriage rolled, they were parted, and there she stood aghast with a pang in her bosom. But it was her own work.

He ordered the carriage to his Drury Lane house; but in Oxford Street he changed the order to the hotel,

having decided to lay his case before Stephane, and follow her teaching.

But when he got there she was out. He turned on the light, and waited ten minutes in the empty suite, pacing the drawing-room: but she did not come; so he descended, and drove to Drury Lane.

He stumbled up to his rooms a-top, lit the lamp; threw off his rough jacket and waistcoat, and put on the jacket again without waistcoat, but took the watch-chain, which had a small compass, from the waistcoat, and kept it; threw off next his big hat, took a dread-naught cap with ear-flaps and strings from a peg on the door, and tied it under his chin; next got a pair of boxcloth riding-gaiters and a spur from a wine-box in a corner, sat on a camp-stool, buttoned on the gaiters, put on the spur; next took a Raglan macintosh from behind the door, and put it on; then a riding-cane from a corner; put out the lamp, and descended.

He gave his coachman the address of some stables in Upper St. Martin's Lane, quite near, where his ex-racer, Freewill, was; and there he dismissed the carriage, rang, entered the dead yard, and overlooked the saddling. She was a black five-year-old with a blaze down her face, an 'eye like Mars,' and seemed made of watered silk—a peg above old Australian Alex. Also, she was in hard fettle—for Jack had had her well ridden—and could run, forgetting fence, stream, three-toes, and 'that which is behind.' She was the only part of his goods which he was about to resign with some regret.

He had a tiny racing-saddle put upon her, and racing martingale; and having walked all round her, he mounted, and went away north-westward through London on the Edgware Road.

He wanted time to think, to recognise and feel himself at home on the back of a horse in free nature, and so shunned the railway. When he was well at large in open country beyond Hendon, he put spurs to Freewill, and, fixed to her neck, raced darkly through

spitting rain and rising wind at nearly half-a-mile a minute.

And as he went, he remembered that the next morning he and Mr. Spender were to go to Paddington to meet Sir James H—— for a trip to Dartmoor Prison. But Mr. Spender was dead; and he, Jack, was going to Cumberland.

XL

AT BEECH HOW

SOON after midnight Jack rode into a big river-town, fifty miles from London, and to save his animal, which showed foam, stopped there the night. It was Bedford, and starting again at 8 a.m., to cover at least a hundred and ten miles before much of a stoppage (ninety miles in untracked country having been nothing to him), followed through level corn-country the high road by Bletsoe and Higham Ferrers towards Oakham. All day the drizzle of the previous night persisted, the sky was grey, and dreary all the land. All, to his eyes, was small, cultivated; the very sky smaller, lower, than in those old wilds, yet still infinite compared with man, enlarging the heart. He took off his Raglan, feeling hot, for the day was warm, though wet, and when, a mile before Kettering, it dropped aside from before him, he would not stop, but pelted on. In a monotony of ever-new combinations the country evolved about him and receded, as if it, and not he, were working: haystack, homestead, and the lonely horse at grass, brook and country-seat and the stubblefield. By Uppingham, his jacket, too, and collar were off, his shirt open at the neck, and now was 'the red country,' the very streams running red, with climbs and descents, larger forests, and secluded prosperous valleys that lay one beyond the other in regular succession, with their hamlets, sheep, and cattle; till he climbed to a place of broad prospects, where Oakham is on a height, and there had a brief feast, cared for his horse, and was away north-westward for Nottingham by Melton Mowbray.

Why he did not know. He was going to see Gracie—because 'her life hung' upon his going? or was it not to tell her the falseness of that old rumour about Raby and the marchioness? It occurred to him that that also might be the reason. Or was it not merely to keep his promise to go, made to her at Steinway Hall—if he had promised? or for no reason, but that a rope pulled, and Necessity was at him? He flew as though ruin tracked, wedded to the neck and shoulders of Freewill: he knew not why. But his motive was pure.

His reason for riding a horse was that he might think meanwhile; but he went without the least thought, everything asleep within him. The wild words 'my life hangs upon your answer' in Gracie's wild letter to Augusta had got into his consciousness, and alone reigned there. She was in trouble: it was necessary to go to her, though to comfort her once might obviously, if one thought of it, involve the need of comforting her twice. And as to the husband, what could one do about him? threaten him? kill him? eat him? somehow abolish and etherealize him? He was not a man who would readily submit to etherealization! nor would eat well. But Jack did not answer any questions, nor ask any. He simply measured off England at so much a mile behind him, because her life 'hung upon it,' and his, therefore, also.

He stopped as day declined at a townlet called Wadworth, put up his drooping horse, and there, as he lay down, at once slept. There, too, lying the next dawn, he for the first time deliberately consulted the Oracles, and now was troubled with all the old doubts. He had intended writing to Gracie that morning before the new start to say, 'I am coming'; instead of which he wrote to Stephane a full account of everything, Raby's crime and all, saying at the end: 'Write at once; I wait here for your decision.' He posted it, and, the rain being over, loitered about the village till near noon; but when the letter had only just started from the village post-office for London, he saddled his horse, and was away again northward.

Doncaster lay a few miles north, and thence he turned almost west through the West Riding, Freewill now fit as corn, free as Pegasus, more an over-over-horse than an overhorse through the long chastisement of the journey, as Jack would have said, and the long rest also. Through clean red-brick of Wakefield and that green neighbourhood the journey now was, and Bradford, more dark with smoke than London, and all a region of smokes, trades, ironworks, quarries, canals, chimneys, tramways and trains, yet all mixed up with 'Nature,' and leading to the most rural of the rural, a land of 'dales,' real England, Skipton in its pleasant valley, Bolton Abbey, parks and grassy slopes, with hills of Wharfedale, and square old towers, Barden Tower, and fells, screes, scars, and streams with 'strids' in them. Whence onward through real mountain-country, following an almost straight road, he came near midnight to a town sleeping under the stars in a charming valley—a wide-spaced place, all white houses with blue-slate roofs embowered in trees; and here all things communed direct with his heart in a language which he seemed to have known before he was born: for out of the same dust and mortar as this town his blood and brain were. It was Kendal. And here he slept till late the next morning (Friday).

Now he felt a reluctance to write of his coming to Gracie, or to go further, or to turn back. He had lunch there, and loitered on till 1.30 p.m., when he suddenly determined to telegraph to Stephane, who must now have received his letter of the day before (Thursday) from Wadworth. By two o'clock he had accordingly sent her two telegrams, one directed to the Floral Fête, one to the Hotel V——, both saying: 'Wire me instantly here your decision about my letter.' And he waited three hours till 5.15: but no answer came. She was, in fact, spending the half-day with the Hays in Camden Town: for Harriet, wishing to discuss with her Jack's sudden going, had invited her pressingly: and Stephane, having first sent off an answering letter to Wadworth, had gone to Camden

Town with Jack's letter in her bosom, and not till nine in the night received his telegram.

He was little more than two hours from his bourn now, and as night fell was well on the Penrith road, galloping straight northward by 'sides' and dale-waters, by pike and 'gill.' It was black night when, turning westward, he left the high-road, but soon thereafter was in familiar country, having only once to pull up, and strike a match at a sign-post. Bedwick was nine miles by the steep lane to the right, and he went forward at slower pace, his eyes unable to penetrate far into the shades of wood and cliff. There was no rain, but the air quite fresh, the trees wet, and the sky covered with wool-white clouds in great masses, not really like wool though, but like vapour puffed from starting trains, quite low, evanescent, and between them bits of sky like wells, ebon-black, showing wee, clean stars, but no moon. Once again in his nostrils was that smell of peats, the cottages had lattices, the rocks lichen, mountain-tarns gleamed darkling from heather-beds that grew to the roadside, yonder light shone out from an ivied homestead of many gables and slate-stone portico, now was the lake-village—a faint swarm of human lights blurred in the lake—and not far beyond, towering, the scar with vapour-clouds on its breast, and in Jack's heart now strange noises, like shell-murmurs, too strange to be articulate, and he thought within himself that the world was all very well to live and wander in, but here was that secret place to take a long breath, and die in. Freewill entered Bedwick at a walk, Jack's mouth open at the strangeness of Time and the dream that is the world.

He threw his bridle to a man whom he recognised, called Big Willie o' Thwaite, with whom he had many a time cross-buttocked behind the Long Meg, to which he had now come back. In front of the little slanting door-step stood a Druidical stone—well he knew it—and resting his palm on it, he looked along the two streets opening into the paved space before the inn, remembering the houses with delicate pleasures, one by

one, the white house of Dr. Buck, Snr., and the shop of Skerrett, the chemist, and yonder Spender and Crowther's, whose Mr. Spender lay to be buried o' Tuesday, to laugh never more, nor be seen by the sun in all the ages of the inhabited and frozen earth: for all was a dream of Time, and neither mountain nor star was solid, but cloth-of-vision that 'changed' and 'passed away.' Inside he saw that lank John Elliot and his daughter were gone, replaced by a round West Riding body with a tall wife, new-comers with an amateurish air at the bar, to whom this Bedwick trial-of-luck had assuredly been as a journey into far lands. He sat a while in the ingle of the sanded earth-floor parlour, unknown, but knowing two or three, who gave some glances, but said nothing to him, unconscious in all their jargoning of eleven-years-ago, and thinking to-night the crisis in things. Presently he went to the stable, and gave a look to Big Willie's handling of Freewill, then at a long 'board' ate some cold bacon-pie, where, in answer to his question, the new landlord said: 'Reaby? Reaby? A' doan't at knoa t' lattitude ov t' gentlefoaks abaght here, bein a stranger i' t' taan, but A' cuddant be far aght i' thinkin' at wor him at cum from Lunnon two days agone, at t' foaks cheered a t' railway——'

'What was the cheering about, then?' asked Jack.

'Ther wor a strange bussal cum on all ov a sudden, and when A' axt wot ther wor ta do, it wor t' gentleman, sed thay, at had builded the new schule a t' market cum hoam——'

'And was that Mr. Raby?'

'A'll ax t' woife.'

It turned out to be so: and Jack pondered those two things—that Raby had built a new school, and had come home.

But now the die was cast: he had to see her. After twenty minutes at the Long Meg, he told the landlord that he would return in two hours, and set out just as he was, spurred and gaitered, with his dreadnaught cap and whip, went up Commercial Street, all dead at this hour, and at the fountain

turned into dead High Street: at the end of High Street, where the country begins, he stopped before the imposing iron gates of Parklands, which stood slightly open, and entered; the garden was covered in dead leaves, and dark it all lay, till he got to the back, when he saw one light up yonder in Augusta's old room; he went on through the park by that coppice into which he had once thrown Bailey, the detective, and onward through shades so dark, that he walked into a cone of dead leaves, and twice stumbled upon felled trees; then, leaping an old brick wall at the end of an alley, he dropped into a gut, full of rocks, which led him upward through cliffs to Nabside. All was native as his own hand and heart, but dreamy, like a dream which we dream a second time, and recognise as a dream that was dreamed before. After climbing to the ridge of Nabside, he descended steeply by Three Yews Neck, stopping a little at that path in the bank to the left that led up and into the yews, where she had told him everything that old night of the dance; and he went on downward to the lake, and saw the little swarm of human lights blurred in the ebony water-floor, and Ealee Island, that had no rest, but was doomed to wander the lake all the dark nights for ever before the breaths of the wind; and he saw the darkling theatre of crag and fellside, with a light or two beyond the far shore of the lake that told that same tale of human lot and hope which evening church-bells tell, and strange last-words of the dying; and yonder to the right the mound, or 'how,' on which stood Beech How, and the inky grove of beeches, alders, hazels that hid it, and the opening of the lonnin just discernible in the dark; and above all a sky of vapour-clouds with black, deep holes between, and stars in the holes, each star by itself telling that same tale of the human lights on the fellsides, but singing it, not saying it.

He had almost reached the lonnin when he stopped, turned back, and came along the water again past the mouth of Three Yews Neck, then up a fellside path,

and behind a mountain-shoulder to a valley, where stood a cottage, clad like a Polish explorer in eglantine; it was the house of one Mrs. Sales, with whom was his sister's little Aimée; but there was no light, though he walked all round it, and he would not wake them, thinking to return on the morrow morning; so, retracing his steps now, he went back by the mere-path to Beech How lonnin, where he paused again, and contemplated the profound gloom of the dale, in which nothing seemed to move but faint winds, and forms of cloud and vapour. Then up the lonnin to the yard he went, where he could just discern the existence of the external gallery and the trefoil-top window, and the lantern before the Gothic door; and now he moved unconsciously softer, traversing the paved yard; then, going up the cobble-stone slope into the dark, ivied porch, he heard a sound of music. On each side of the portal was a casement, like a match-box in shape, low and broad, still curtained, as before, with dimity and valance of flowered chintz; but the curtains to the right were a little separated, and by stooping he could see perfectly into the hall: and there was she alone.

That great old room seemed to him his birthplace: it was his first childhood's-memory: and with bated breath he looked at it, and at her.

It was much as of old, because of an evident effort to keep it so: yet the fact of wealth was betrayed. There where the old grand-piano had been was a grand-piano still, but of new-shining ebony; the candle-sticks, no longer of brass, were of silver, and even the far corners were brightly lit; the row of latticed windows under the ceiling seemed new-varnished; there were some modern chairs; that old moulded ceiling was now white as snow. But unchanged was the grim black wainscot, the stand of fishing-rods, the salmon, the antlers, masks and brushes; within the hearthplace as of old burned a wood-fire in a bright steel basket. She sat in a blue-velvet lounge-chair near the centre, quite at her ease, in slippers and a gray-woollen dressing-gown, it being now near ten, and the Lonby-

dale day well over. On a table by her side were six candles, lighting her brightly, so that he could even see the sprinkling of freckles, and matted lashes of her closed lids. Music on a stand stood at her elbow, but she did not open her eyes to look at it at all, but played lying back, inert but for the slow under-movement of her right arm, the left being stretched to hold a violoncello aslant between her knees. Drowsily she worked the bow as if rubbing ointment of balm into her soul, and he could hear the human voice of the great fiddle telling its plight with moving, deep complaint.

For some time he looked and listened, stooping. She was slimmer, looser—different—with some new enigma of allurement in her, as it were the suppleness of the sphinx: with hidden sphinx-claws, too, perhaps. She suddenly rose with a sigh, and he, thinking that she was going, decided to knock, reaching sideways with his whip-handle; and now he saw her stand bloodless, the lines of her well-fitting gown limber as curves of oil-waves round her hips, waist and breasts.

‘Come in!’ she cried, scared yet daring, a half-apprehension of him in her; and he turned the handle and went in, but stopped within the door, his gaiters giving a special look of tallness to his long-legged mass, and a gallant power he seemed to her at that moment, full of energy and surprise; she made two steps with extended hand, but stopped, threw herself sideward into the chair again, and wept with her face hidden on the back.

‘Never mind,’ he said, standing over her, his pallor all gone, and only compassion in his eyes, that looked down upon her burden of hair sticking up from the nape.

‘Why have you made me suffer so cruelly?’ she asked in muffled words, still weeping to the chair.

‘Never mind, don’t cry.’

‘You must think I have no pride—to wait—and wait.’

‘Don’t cry. You may bet that I would have come, if I could.’

‘What kept you?’

‘I was afraid that you might not like me to.’

‘That *I* might not?’—with a half-laugh, looking up: ‘you said that before at Steinway Hall, and if it were not you, I should say that it sounds almost like an excuse.’

‘Believe more than that in me, as I in you.’

‘But to be quite rational—did I not plainly *ask* you to come, and did you not undertake? I thought so: and I have waited four months.’

‘P’raps I don’t love you any more, then.’

‘P’raps not: though eleven years seems a short time, Jack.’

‘Yes, it does rather, Gracie. Eternity, too, is short under certain conditions. We need not talk about what is more settled than the hills. We have not that much time, and business, I suppose, to discuss——’

‘Money-matters, my friend?’ she said, a hand on his shoulder, looking up with her smile; and something in these words, and her manner, caused him to thrill—very unpleasantly. He turned from her, saying:

‘Where’s your husband, then?’

‘Raby? He’s down here, but out somewhere. Yes, this is Friday—he goes out on Friday nights for some reason, and comes back late—eleven or twelve. It is only ten, now. Come, sit over here.’

They walked to the high-backed settle in the hearth-place, but as she sat, noticing the parted window-curtains, she jumped up, drew them together, and returned, saying:

‘I heard yesterday from Miss Ames of the absurd scene in Camden Town, and your sisters’ and mother’s hypocrisy——’

‘Why, which hypocrisy?’ he asked, again hurt by her.

‘Their hypocrisy of affection. I suppose you know that it is only because you are rich. No one loves you for yourself, except me—or could know anything about you.’

‘Well, that’s something, any road. But, talking of

my sisters, I have something to tell you straight away: please know at once, Gracie, that there was no truth, or only the slightest, in that rumour about your husband and Harriet——'

'You are strange, dear, to care. Why trouble? It does not concern us two. Raby kissed her in a boat one night at Iffley Mill, till she fainted——'

He flinched, murmuring: 'No, don't speak so.'

'So Raby told me, and I always believe his narratives, because he has no imagination, and no humour. But I am puzzled to know why you care. You can't think that *I* do!'

'But you left him for it?'

'Only to be rid of him a little. I was not angry, of course.'

'But you returned to him'

'Bad habit.'

'Is it his fault that you don't love him?'

'You are too odd! No, not his fault. He can't help for being himself. He does not, of course, beat me. It would be rather fun if he did, so that I might throw something back—which would be domestic bat-and-ball, or say cricket on the hearth. But he won't. He is too much afraid of me, and he has become too good.'

She laughed with loosely-shaken shoulders, like the movement of wings.

'In what way good, Gracie?'

She pointed to a book on the settle, which he found to be a book called 'Journée du Crézien, Sanctifiée par la Prière et la Méditation,' printed at Tours; on one of several fly-leaves were the neatly-written words: 'Souvenir du mois de Mai à St. Eustache. Confrérie de N. D. du Mont Carmel; Directeur M. l'Abbé Tuffon; Nibbs Raby'; then came a crowned Virgin, then a plate of angels, all gilt, carmine and blue, and pious engravings throughout; the rest was prayers, etc.; and all was very neat and pious with gilt edges, and a bookmark: but the point was, that it had been used brown by some hand; and this led Jack to ask: 'Whose is this, then?'

And she, with that cynical chuckle which shook up her shoulders, said :

‘His. He is a *dévo*t whenever he does not happen to be in love.’

‘Does that say that he’s sometimes—untrue to you, then?’

‘No, I don’t think so: don’t be odd. He usually falls in love with *me*, but he also loves the Virgin Mary, and as he can hardly love virginity and a wife, which are two opposite things, at the same time, he cultivates us in turn. If it is the Virgin one week, I do not repine, but wait, persuaded that I am the favourite *au fond*. I’m afraid he won’t part from me without some fuss, Jack. You may have to knock him down.’

He took up and passionately kissed her hand, with brimming eyes—tears of sheer agony of heart. All, all, that she said stabbed him, shocked him, miserably reminding him of Pole and Little Lord Archie. At the same time a totally new conception of Raby dawned upon his mind. He saw no longer Raby, the ‘beast,’ but Raby, the penitent, the poor struggling *man*, building a school, thumbing pious books, and loving virginity every second week. And at once into his heart a softness stole for the man, and at once it turned to terrible hate again at the sight of what in eleven years Raby had contrived to make of *her*. Under the Three Yews that old night the moonlight on the trees of the cliff had not been half so fair as she; he remembered every one the words then uttered through her mouth by that pure paraclete of love which had brooded in her bosom: but the paraclete, he saw clearly, had descended, and fluttered now in her reins. To him this was despair, and the blotting out of the sun, and letting her hand drop from his lips, he covered his face and mourned:

‘Oh, he had no right, he had no right. . . .’

Leaning over him, putting an arm round him, she said:

‘Dear, what is it?’

‘What on earth can I *do*?’ he cried, leaping up violently.

'Dear, I don't understand you. As to what?'

'Why did you wish me to come?'

'Why did you come, dear?'

'I haven't the faintest idea!'—and now his lifted voice pealed through the house.

'Don't be angry with me,' she said humbly: 'why are you angry? I assumed that you loved me still——'

'Don't I love you till my hands and feet and side drip blood for you! But what has that to do with it? Why do you talk such silly nonsense?'

'I have no notion what he means,' she murmured, her eyes on the floor.

'What can I *do*?' he repeated: 'why did you wish me to come?'

'I assumed that, since you love me, therefore you want me.'

'Do you mean want to take you from your *husband*, to have you for myself?'

'I assumed that that was why you came, dear.'

'Oh, good God——!' up he flung his arms, and went as if in flight, walking rapidly with that straddle of the legs which inveterate horsemen acquire, while she sat still in the hearthplace, cold to the toes, trembling, a new light breaking upon her. After two minutes she followed him, saying:

'Let me understand: that was not why you came?'

'I have never had such a thought! I never dreamed that you would ever listen to such a notion!'

'But why not?'

'Because it is wrong! We can't hurt a man who hasn't hurt us! that's double-dyed murder. The marriage-tie can't be broken in that way, just to please someone's whim, without committing a whole host of crimes. Harold Pole told me that you would, and I swore to God that you wouldn't! He knew you better than I. . . . Oh, that beast had no right to marry you, he had no right . . .!'

Again he covered his face with his hands, while she left him out there in the middle, and went back to the settle in the hearthplace; and there she sat staring,

staring at the fire, her chin on her fist. A sudden fear was upon her : for she knew that life without him now was not at all possible to her, nor for the last four months had such a thought as living without him entered her head. Daily had she expected him to come for her ; almost nightly she had given the lower servants 'leave,' that the house might be lonely ; nightly, going to bed, she took up a certain violin, to which she was attached, in case he should appear, or call from the island. When four months passed, and he did not come, she thought of death, never doubting his love, but conjecturing that he might by chance be married. Now she knew that he was not, or he would have said so by this time. Only certain moral ideas in his head intervened ; and suddenly she felt herself stronger in him than those could be, though they, too, were evidently strong enough. And with her underlook of love she out-reached her potent arms, saying :

'Come to me.'

He came, saying :

'There isn't anything to be said. I have committed a great wrong in coming here. But I thought you might have something to tell me that I could do for you. I saw a letter of yours to my sister in which you said that your life hung upon it. That was a very improper thing to write, Gracie. You have got to keep on living with your husband, learning what is right yourself, and teaching it to him, or letting him teach you, till God wills. I must leave you——'

'*To my fate?*' said she, drawing him strongly by the sleeve to sit down, and he sat.

'Which fate?' said he : 'don't say that, my love. . . .'

'You don't know how your dear has been mauled and sacrificed, and trampled into mud,'—now she sank to the floor before him, her face on his knee, gazing across the room ; and her tone was quiet, but her words furious : 'you don't know, or you would storm the world, and blaspheme Heaven, and follow me to Hell. God wickedly abandoned me, and the

pig you call my husband has rolled everything that I was in his sty. To whom shall I tell it but to my own? For I have nothing, but I have you—I could believe in a God when I say it—you, you, from of old and for ever, one asset at the least, one chattel and heirloom, more proper and peculiar to me than all the essence of my womanhood. I—love you—I swoon with delight—I can't tell it: so familiar, so homely, after all, like the abundant welcome to which the prodigal comes back. But I did not marry him: he inveigled me into a farce at a Registrar's, at a time when I was dying on account of your going, which only he brought about. Imagine if I hate him or not! with a hatred so infernal, that it soon became a wicked joy, and that was why I stayed, for I knew that if I left him for some other man, I should be back to him in a month. You don't know Raby. People would have called it vice, if I had left him, but in reality it would have been a virtuous effort, to which I was not equal. He is the crookedest of the devils, in everything depraved, even in his sanctimony and infected fastings. I know him well now, and, as I suspected him before, it was my duty to have killed myself on finding myself related to him, but a kind of spite against I don't know what kept me living; and I lived with him eleven years, till you came. We had all heard, and were certain, that you were dead: but you came—Jack—redeemer. And then all that was ever good in me stirred and hoped again; I knew my own, his power and presence, and awoke from the deadliest nightmare: I had thought it death, but it was only night, and the old sun was up again. If I am disappointed *now*——! but that won't be. My eyes close sweetly in you, Jackie, and I rest in peace: you will hide me secretly in your heart—you must kiss me without truce, you must fondle me to very death——'

Her face turned wildly up for his kiss, and he kissed her brow, holding her head, saying with furious eyes:

'Yes, you've been cruelly used by man and—God, too—God, too!—my own innocent darling. It seems hard, this thing! But those that are against you, be

it man, or be it God, are against me, too, and it's the two of us, or none. If you want to come with me, come, come—what am I there for but for you? and whatever you want, makes no matter what, only whisper it——'

But he stopped at this sudden call within him: 'But think what *you* lose, Jack, by that same deal! every crumb of your table, and sou of your income? and as to those songs of sirens in the night, never one other? Surely that were hard. All life, everything? And never in heaven or earth aught for your poor eye to rest upon but one lingering All-funeral?' And at the woe of that bereavement, overwhelmed by it, up he sprang with the cry:

'But what do *I* lose? All—all. . . .!'

Again he fled from the hearthplace, while she almost lay on her face on the settle, gazing after him, hanging upon his movements, the press of the battle seeming now to go against her: then, seeing him drop his head upon a table, she gathered herself up quickly, went and knelt on a wolf-skin beside him, her cheek against his rough cap.

'What will you lose?'

'That's nothing, Gracie. Leave me, and I'll fight my way through it. There's one drop in things bitterer than all the rest——'

She would not leave him, but pressed him, her cheek against his cap, looking vaguely away, saying:

'Do you mean that you will lose some sense of right? But if I tell you that there will be nothing wrong! I have never at all considered myself his wife! nor has he considered me so. Whenever I have suffered his embraces, I have always called him 'Jack':—There is no harm in taking me, but only the highest praise. And if there *were* any harm, you would not care to have the pleasant feeling of being all right, while I was all wrong——'

'No, by God!' said he grimly, hurriedly kissing her hair: 'if you are damned, I'll be, too, and don't have any fear about that. Get some clothes and a hat on.'

'Not *now*? What a lark! Do you mean to-night? But the last train is gone——'

She had sprung up, and stood panting, her few freckles heightening the dead-whiteness of her nose, whose nostrils gaped.

'Never mind trains,' said he: 'I'll see after that. Let's be out of this——'

She darted a kiss at his chin, and was gone running toward the stair, but under the row of lattices turned, and ran back, whispering:

'Come with me—I can dress—there is no light——'

She hurried away, expecting him to follow, and he, seeing that, went after her, but much slower than she, who seemed winged and wild, past the stair-lamp, up to the corridor behind the lattices, where it was rather dark. Now she had disappeared, he did not know whither, but he turned down a corridor to the left, making for her old room overlooking the mere and the island. He found the door open, as was also a leaf of the great cinquefoil window opposite, but the drawn curtains excluded all light from the outer night, itself very dark.

'Are you here?'

'Come in,' she answered breathlessly.

He went in, stood by the bedside, and for a minute, two, three, heard her moving about—presumably dressing.

'Better get a light,' said he presently: 'you'll never dress like this. I'll wait outside in the gallery.'

'No, it is all right,' she said, and there was something very agitated and infirm in her voice.

He stood silent again, hearing her movements, hardly able to see her: and for some time the darkness seemed to wait for something.

Then on a sudden he found himself involved in an embrace so guilty that she had dared to utter not one previous word. Her lips were with his, and in that kiss he felt her authority over him. He had just time to feel that here and now she had the prodigious power, if she chose, to turn his love into offal, and himself into Cain and Judas; but he was too en-

trapped to struggle, and no more able to free himself than fly: from the dawn of life his will had been prostrate before her throne. Her arms and shoulders were uncovered, and those arms were steel strengthened with flesh. Whatever was earthly in him with monstrous tragedy stirred from long sleep, admitting and answering her. It was the hour of his preoccupation, and even in the thick of his slumber, ruin, like an armed man, was roughly upon him. Some craze had undoubtedly possessed her, an intolerant impatience, like a flood that carries villages before it; after eleven years of the gospel according to Raby she had lost restraint; he felt her sustained trembling; and without ceasing from their embrace, or saying a word, they were sitting on a sofa, whither she had steadily guided him.

Not without resistance did he now continue the panting intimacy; no word, but murmurs came from him, and—once—a sound, not high, yet more mortal than any drowning cry: and now was everlasting loss not far from him; but as if that cry were despair's last appeal for pity, and was heard in heaven, it was followed by an outbreak of screaming from quite near.

At this alarum Gracie started from contact, and his hands were broken. He heard her hiss the word '*detestable*,' and in that moment ugly as a hag he found her; then there was a ruffle of cloth in the room, like the hurried throwing-on of a garment; then matches rattled in a match-box. His eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, could catch her form as she flew about, from a heap of clothes on the floor to the mantelpiece, from the mantelpiece to the dressing-table. By this time the screaming had ceased. He heard her turn a door-handle, and say, 'Don't come.' She then slipped through, and was gone.

He hesitated only a few instants, then went after. Facing the door through which she had passed out was another door across a corridor, and through this light came out. He went into a large, timbered room, which in old days had been unoccupied, and still was almost bare; the room yet beyond had been Dr.

Stanley's. This middle room now contained nothing but an old sofa, two doll-houses, three chairs, a confusion of toys, etc., a cot and a small bed, all which seemed lost in its high-roofed extent. Over the bed bent Gracie in an open dressing-gown, trying to get a cork with a handle into the mouth of a girl of ten. The long hair of the child was scattered over the bed, her pupils stared, her face was livid, and she lay unconscious, stiff and motionless, save that her head by a series of jerks was twisting more and more toward the left shoulder; but as Jack lifted the candle over her, her whole body was thrown into an agitation like earthquake, her toes knocking together with the regularity of a mechanism under the bed-clothes. This child, who was a more beautiful image of her mother, now presented a shocking spectacle, as it were vice made visible: her eyes rolled, her teeth gnashed, her breathing, like the breathing of some bound brute, filled the room with the noise of its labour, her lips or tongue had been bitten, and blood mixed with foam issued from her mouth. The mother had just managed to get the cork between her teeth, when two women, half-dressed, hurried in, one after the other. They were a nurse and a housekeeper, risen from bed at the screams, and both, seeing the stranger, started, but took no further notice of him. One held the quaking head, the other quickly brought water and a bottle, sprinkled the child's face, and presented nitrate of amyl to her nose. The mother held a wrist, looking wistfully at the child's face, yet in her pressed lips was resentment and severity. Jack held the candle. Gradually the quaking body ceased, the child's eyes rolled about with a look of half-consciousness, the cork was taken from her mouth; she tried to say something, and all bent to hear, but nothing could be made out. A minute afterwards, her eyes closed with stupor, and she sank into sleep.

They hung round the bed, watching her weary rest.

'Poor Miss Gertie!' murmured the nurse: 'but this is the first she has had during the night for over two months, mum: it is lucky that you were awake.'

'Yes. Do not wait,' said Gracie: 'do not wait, Mrs. Palmer.'

The two women went away. She, without glancing at Jack, who did not glance at her, got up and walked into the almost darkness of the other end, and stood looking through one of two huge stone windows upon the lake. Jack, with the candle, stepped to the cot, and stooped over a boy of nearly three years, who, in spite of those screams, slept soundly. This boy was healthy, but as his conception dated from a time when his father was in the net of Harriet Stanley, and when his mother's mind was occupied, as usual, with Harriet's brother, the child had no resemblance to either father or mother, but was a Hay, the picture of Jack, and also of Harriet. Jack stood a long while over the cot, not daring to kiss the child's innocence, while Gracie looked at the lake. Now he realised that she had two children. His shoulders seemed unable to support their weight, so much they stooped. He looked the embodiment of fainting, weariness, and *abandon*. He put the light on a chair, and, all broken down and dejected went to her, saying:

'I suppose I must be going.'

'Well,' said she, not turning, 'go.'

'Things have gone hard with you. . . . I always prayed Almighty God to crush me, and spare you, but He wouldn't. He gave me good, though I've thrown that all away now, and to you bitter bad—I always said you couldn't stand it—it seems hard. But if we have to bear it—if *nothing* can be done. . . . For those two, only for them, if you will put up with their father—and try——'

'I like him, and I detest you.'

'Well, that's hard, too, though I so much deserve it. I did not come down to you, nor tell you to come away with me, with any thought of devouring you like the wolf I am—Oh God, that this thing should be!—but to help and save you, if I could. But I've got to begin to learn to save myself a little, before I can hope to save you, and the blind can't lead the blind any road—— Oh, good-bye, good-bye——'

He went headlong, dim-eyed, stumbled upon the door, ran along the corridor, but at the end heard her scream after him. He stopped, listened, heard no more, ran back, and found her lying on the floor, one hand upon the window-sill, her face to the wall. He lifted and bore her to her bed, ran back to the children's room, got the candle, and placed it on the mantelpiece near her. He bent over, and kissed her, and she sighed. Her eyes were closed, their lashes moist, her face white, and to his last lingering look nothing above or below the sun was half so loved and lovely. He hastened away down the stairs, and out through the hall to the open, like one passing through smoke and flames, bent and blind. Some distance down the lonninn, where he had leant his head upon one of a clump of hazels, he fell into lush underwood of long-grass, nettles, burdock, and lay there at his length for more than an hour. One passing with a lantern might have seen his boots and part of his gaiters, and no more of him, but, waiting, one would have heard a sound come from the thicket, a sob, the audible convulsion of a whole manhood, very pitiable, and presently, by waiting, another, and, after precisely the same number of minutes, another, like a natural tolling or very slow dripping in caverns of night, so permanent and confirmed was it. It was the needle trembling back toward its so beloved North, his return to the shelter of the Universe. Never, of course, was threat so futile as his—to be 'damned' with Gracie: for he was what he had become, and could no more make one hair black than he could make it white. He could dye it black for fun, but dye washes at the first drizzle, and the needle returns.

When at last he rose from the covert, near midnight, he sniffed-up in his quiet, characteristic fashion, and went stolidly on his way. The sky now presented a transformed appearance, every shred of those vapour-cloud masses having vanished by enchantment, and from horizon to horizon was nothing but black sky and bright stars, as it were a tree-top of life and knowledge

blooming with immortal blooms, fruit good for food, fruit to be desired to make one wise. Indeed, the dale now seemed nothing but a fairy place, teeming with enchantment; silent enough it lay, but within the blacknesses such things went forward as sea-shells tell of—elves and trances—which only the leering hare perhaps and the owl can see, but in the heart of man, too, are instincts and rumours of them. Three Yews Neck, which was stony, would now be so black, that Jack turned to the left from the lonnin, to trudge round by Brenthwaite Edge to the town, intending to start at once again southward for Kendal, and ride all night. He followed the beck-road past dark wood on his right, past the mound of Beech How on his left, and opposite Thorneyfell Crag came to Cribble's Fall and Hole, and heard again that old-known tumbling of the water, which through eleven years, indifferent if he were here or there, had not ceased to maunder all night its nocturnal meanings, like a kneeling water-woman that deeply prayed and mumbled, and her skirts had lace-frills and *frou-frou*; and to his right was that triangle of peat-land encumbered with bush, in which was the bee-hive hut—and the broch. He stopped when he cleared the edge of forest that runs from the cliffs to the road, and got sight of that tower; and he looked at it.

CHAPTER XLI

ON THE BROCH

LOOKING at the broch—he was not sure—but he thought that he saw someone standing on it. The night was instinct with starlight, but the broch, under the shadow of the cliffs, was pretty obscure. Yet his impression of a form was strong, though, when he peered deeper, he could not again see it. If there was someone, it could only be one man—Raby. Gracie had said that Raby disappeared on Friday nights, and Jack remembered that Dr. Stanley had been murdered on a Friday night; this was Friday night: and if someone was there, it was Raby. But that must be very unpleasant to Raby to be there: he could only be there for one reason—to punish himself for his crime: and Jack wished to be sure of this.

Quickly therefore he stepped and quietly, stooping beneath the bush that grew to the very road, till he came to the path leading through vegetation to the broch, and along this he stole so secretly, that when he ascended the outer steps to the door of the tower, he was sure that he had not been seen. By old art and habit, he could tread like a bushcat, boots or no boots, but at the bottom of the first stair he took off his boots, and went up to the first floor through darkness almost complete, and thence warily to the top, where, standing on the ladder, he reached up, and peeped.

There, in truth, was a man, not now standing, but kneeling at the parapet, his back toward the stair; Jack, listening, heard a steady murmur of prayer,

and a stirring of rosary-beads; and now was ruth in Jack Hay's heart, so that at that moment, if not in heaven, then on earth, all Nibbs Raby's debts were forgiven him.

But Raby sprang up with a face of horror, so sharply, that he saw Jack's cap before Jack could duck: for the top of Jack's riding-whip had unawares touched the ladder, making only the slightest sound, yet audible to Raby's strained ears. Indeed, those prayers by the parapet were no prayers of the heart, for Raby on the broch was at every moment all eye and ear; his eleven years' habit of praying here had not diminished by one iota his old terrors of the spot, but each Friday night he must thole them afresh, as old actors nightly anew feel the old 'stage-fright.' Catching sight of that cap, he shrank with a gurgle and murmur, but instantly afterwards ventured upon the sharp, ecstatic cry: 'Who's that?'

By this time Jack was descending, but hearing panic as well as menace in that cry, and feeling that his disappearance would only inspire worse fright, he ran briskly up, and sprang to the top.

Raby backed to the furthest possible point from this apparition, and while silence reigned, his hand stealthily moved to a pocket, got a revolver (which he always brought to use against Dr. Stanley's ghost in case of emergency), and suddenly had it covering Jack. The two tall forms, only ten feet apart, stood definite enough to each other against the sparkling sky in spite of shadow from the cliffs, Raby slim in a gray jacket-suit and a panama hat, whose rim was turned down in front, but turned up behind, Jack looming huge and long-legged in his gaiters, with some 'flash' tone of the over-sea and the adventurer in his cap, in his bearded roughness, and in all his air.

'Who are you?—quick!'

'There's no upsetting yourself: I am Jack Hay, then.'

It was known—Miss Ames knew; Raby must soon know; and Jack was no longer careful to hide it.

'Dead?' whispered Raby.

'No, living, Nibbs. There's no upsetting yourself for nonsense.'

'Who?'

'Jack Hay, I say. Shake my hand and see.'

He advanced, but Raby moved away round, and shook no hand.

'Jack Hay's dead. . . .'

'There's where you're wrong, then: listen to my voice: it's the same Jack.'

'Strike a match.'

Jack struck a match, and Raby, showing his own carefully-bearded face, peered near, slowly returning the revolver to his pocket. Then they stood in the dark again, Raby astounded, yet alert to fight for it, his left eye glinting small and hard with hostile thought. Here was this man—miraculously here, even while he prayed—but indubitably here: ear and eye confirmed it. But why here? Was Hell in it? Was God? Was Pole? Was Fate? Was it serious—or not? Was the man able now at last somehow to prove his innocence of the crime? Had he returned to England to prove it? That would be serious! Or had he come to try to take Gracie? Or did he only want money? That could be given, on certain conditions. These things passed rapidly through his mind; and he said, with fast-winking eyes:

'Now, Hay, if you've got anything to say, say it: only remember, no bluff and nonsense. If you remember me at all, you must know that I'm the wrong man. Let me understand why you are here. How come you to be alive at all? I heard that you were dead—and gone.'

'But you are taking the wrong tone with me,' said Jack: 'it's the same Jack: strike hands——'

'Come, no bluff, Hay, no bluff!' cried Raby, shrinking, 'remember that I can make you sleep in the Bedwick lock-up to-night. Innocent or not innocent don't matter to me—I simply do my duty as a Justice of the Peace. . . . You look a strong fellow, too, as

you always were, but I happen to be armed, my friend, and I can shoot straight to the heart, thank God, if I have to. You take my tip and keep off me, if you love your skin. Tell me quickly and quietly why you are here, and if it is anything in the money line, I don't say that I mayn't consent to put you straight, just for old times' sake. Where the—the—devil does the man spring from? Why are you here after me? Is it to prove your innocence? Out with it!

'Prove which innocence, old man?' said Jack wearily: 'there are damned few things in this world that I'm innocent of, Nibbs Raby: it's my guilt, man, that I'm gallied on.'

Raby winked fast, all uncertain of what was what.

'Which guilt?' said he: 'what does "gallied on" mean?'

'"Thinking about."'

'Do you mean, then, that you are "thinking about" admitting your guilt of the murder, if—anyone—makes it worth your while?'

'Oh, come, I don't want to be hanged, Nibbs.'

'You would not be hanged after all this time: you would only get a term of imprisonment—perhaps not very long——'

'Do you mean to propose, then, that I should publicly admit doing it? for money?'

'I propose nothing, sir! It is for you to make whatever proposal you have come to make, and then I could consider it.'

'Yes, but that's your talk only. You'd never let me be imprisoned for that, supposing you know that I didn't do it. You can't hide from me that you are trying to be a good man: I saw you praying, you know, and I'm so proud of it, that I can't mind your insults.'

'What's he mean? Why did you come spying? You took your boots off. I insist that you tell me straight out why the devil you are here. Is it proofs you are trying to fish up——?'

'Against you, you mean?'

'Yes, sir, against me!'

'Get that all out of your head. I never would—or rather—well, I admit that I did once attempt to get at the truth of Dr. Stanley's death: but it wasn't with any view to prove my penny-farthing innocence, but—for other reasons; there's no reason to be anxious——'

'Anxious, am I? None of that! You've forgotten me, my son. No man is going to throw out hints and meanings to me with impunity—he isn't going to! You sleep in prison this night! Why should I be so—damned—anxious, eh?'

'There is no reason I said. Don't quarrel. I didn't mean to "hint" anything. If you were guilty of a hundred murders, the mere fact that the children of the woman I love the best are your children, too——'

'Ha! ha! Well, my God! The woman that this tramp loves!—you mean my *wife*——?'

'Oh, well, I see you are in an angry mood, when I'm just the opposite. I don't see what harm my loving her can do to her or to you—if only my love was a little bit deep and pure—ah Lord God——'

He turned away groaning, and sat on the parapet; and Raby, too, sat and considered it. Before him was an enigma, an inscrutable being, and all that he could decide within himself was that the man had some object, and was playing a part to hide it, both the object and the part being equally puzzling. Every word was for Raby a step in the dark. He sat with his back toward the crags, Jack three feet forward toward the trap-door, very gently whipping his right gaiter as he gazed up dumb into all that scattered hoard of stars, both coin and dust, that shone with almost Australian brilliancy this night: there were they all, heart-rending, the virgin gold of Arcturus, Aldebaran flushed as a messenger, blue-eyed Aldair, and Sirius blanched in old transfiguration, with Boötes, and that Flying Horse, and all the wild Hair of Berenice; and while the one man gazed upward aghast, the other frowned downward at the floor; and down there below in the bush were little rushes and nocturnal sounds, and once a bleating voice.

'I am patiently waiting to hear what you want from me, Hay,' said Raby; and Jack looked down from the heights, saying:

'I don't want anything. I saw a figure on the broch as I was passing, I suspected it might be you, and, for the good of my own soul, I wished to be sure.'

'The good of your own—what? His own soul! What's the game, Hay? Come, my son, out with it! I'll soon know, and if I find you meddling and spying upon me, then I warn you to beware, Jack Hay. I am a quiet man, trying, as you said just now, to be a good man, living my life in a quiet and godly manner, without hurting anybody. Let nobody hurt and meddle with *me*, or woe to them! I warn you, Hay! Don't do it! To Hell with you! I haven't accused you of any crime, take care how you accuse me——'

'Well, then, I'll hook it at once, since I offend you. I told you that I'm not going to meddle with you, nor wouldn't, nor couldn't.'

'Then, why did you come spying? Stop, don't go: you are going to tell me first why you are here. Been—to—Beech How at all?'

'Yes.'

'Now I got him! You sleep this night in a cell!'

'Well, all right, if you think I deserve a cell. P'raps you won't be far out there, neither.'

'What's his game? . . . Have you really dared approach my wife in my absence, Jack Hay?'

'I came down to see Gracie; I see now that that was wrong; but it made no matter to me whether you were there or not, Nibbs: I simply went in——'

'My own house? and you didn't care whether I was there or not? You're going to care! And who is this "Gracie" that you speak of? You mean a man's own *wife*? And what were you after? Did you want her to run away with you?'

Jack did not answer.

'I ask a question: Did you want——?'

'Well, I'll admit that.'

'Oh, you do? All right! And—what did she say?' He bent forward with intense interest, winking.

'She said that she wouldn't.'

'Oh, she did?'—his rage relaxed in a crooked smile—'and how did she take it?'

'She only laughed at me, and said that she has a good husband and two sweet children.'

'Ah, you see, you see,' went Raby, intimately soothed, though doubting every word: 'nothing to be got there, Hay. That's a special bit, my son. But didn't she give you just one little kiss, just for old times' sake? Come—no lies!'

'Ah, Raby, Raby, you are hard to bear! No, old man, no: I tried to kiss her, of course, but married women won't kiss men.'

'Won't they, be gad! They'll kiss nothing else. But what beats me is your impudence, Hay, in going to a man's house to try to carry off his own wife. Who are you? What's your trade? The vile insolence! Didn't you remember that liberties can't be taken with me, Jack Hay? A common vagrant like you entering the house of one of the first men in the county, trying to kiss his wife? And you under suspicion of a murder which you may imagine that the police have forgotten, but which they haven't? God forbid that I should accuse you of anything, without being sure: but what is to keep me from giving you in charge this very night?'

Jack was gazing again at white Sirius and the diademed brow of Venus, and did not answer for a minute; then, looking down, he said:

'Well, now, I have been thinking, Nibbs, whether it wouldn't be better to tell you what I know. It is miserably painful, goodness knows, and I had no such thought: but I see now that you will never get quite right so long as you have that dreadful secret locked in your heart, and, until you are quite right, there'll be no hope for Gracie, that dear life of which you have made so terrible a mess, Nibbs. I pity you with all my soul, for I see your frightful difficulty: if you were a single man, or even a married man without any

children, you could write a letter to one of the papers, giving all the details of your wrongful act on this tower, and in that hour you would have full, free life and cleansing: but never, never, must you dream of such a thing, Nibbs Raby, while those two live that you are father to! You are bound, for their sakes, to guard your secret from the public; but to as many hearts as you can perfectly trust you should confide it: and with each new confession you will find a fetter fall from you. No doubt you have told your priest, but that's no chop, or not much: it's too easygoing and unreal; the confession that will free and save you must be made, not to procure absolution, or procure anything, but to lose only, to forfeit the secular esteem, perhaps dear to you, of those to whom you confess, to abase and purge yourself with shame. Only understand that there is *one* friend who must never know, and that's your poor wife——'

'Ha! ha! ha!'—Raby, with infuriate face, had the revolver again ready in his hand.

'Don't excite yourself, Nibbs, but bear it like a man. I am putting this knife into you with great torture to myself, because I feel from your words that your heart is not yet quite right with your God, and this may help you. Understand, then, that I—and also another man in London, a private detective—know all out that you were the—the—cause of Dr. Stanley's death, and we know how you did it——'

'*How, then?*' whispered Raby, with wild curiosity.

'By nicotine poison in his wine——'

'By Christ, at last!' he hissed, grinning, half-crouched forward, as if to spring.

'Oh, I think you might restrain yourself, Nibbs: you disappoint and pain a man. . . . Why all the bobbery, after all? Are you afraid of me, who love you, or want to? This knowledge of the pipe I have had for nine months now, and the detective for eight months, and are you any the worse for it? How can I convince you that I don't want to hurt you, but just the opposite? Listen to my voice, peer into my face. I wouldn't hurt you.'

Raby, on one knee, was crouched in the shadow of the parapet, bent headlong, panting like the winner of a foot-race, with such a stare at Jack, that another murder on the top of Lyullph's might easily have been possible, if Jack had not chanced to mention that some unknown man, too, knew the secret.

'What devil—told you?'

'No devil, Nibbs: it is God who made, and makes, everything, and He told me, you may bet, though I don't know why as yet. I found the pipe one night in the bush on the crags up there—that same night the traps were on for nobbling me—and I had it eleven years before I dropped to the truth one day in Delhi. Well, guess how I felt then, Nibbs. I believe—in fact I know—that I hated you then for marrying her. Oh, you shouldn't have married her. You must forgive me for loving her—you know that I can no more be off it than you can. So when I came to London I put the whole racket, pipe and all, in a detective's hand, that he might rout out your motive, and so on, of which I knew nothing. I see now that that was a very unchristian thing to do, and I ask you, Nibbs, to forgive me. I clean forgot all about the two kids!—God forgi' me. But you mustn't take it for granted that, children or no children, I should have run you to earth, supposing I had dropped to your motive. I had no definite, rational end in view at all, and it was really the act of an ape. However, the detective hasn't dropped to your motive, and I am dead certain that the secret of the pipe is all out inviolable with him: no one can ever know, but us three; so, unless you insult me afresh by mistrusting me, you see that there's no being frightened.'

'Who was that detective?'

'There's no good in naming him—a London Johnny—you wouldn't know him.'

'It wasn't Pole, Hay? it wasn't Pole?'

'Pole, no.'

'No, it wasn't Pole: my wits are all gone to Hell. Pole knows the motive, Hay, but doesn't know the pipe. You see, I confess to you—you see, Hay, I

trust in you. My God, I'm all shaking. Seen Pole, Hay?'

'Yes.'

'Spoken to him about me?'

'We said something.'

'And you uttered not one word about a pipe?'

'Of course not. Don't take me for a fool. I'm a man who's carried off larger affairs than ever you put hand to. How could I have been such a flat as to mention your secret to Pole, knowing that you and he are not pals?'

They were silent. Then Raby:

'But I don't understand you, Hay. I like to understand my man. I am a man that no man is going to do an injury, or a favour, to, without having it back just double, sooner or later, if it's in a thousand years. Am I to understand that you have it in your power to crush me with your little finger, and yet are protecting me, though by crushing me you prove your own innocence, and also you get my wife, whom you love, and who, I assure you, loves you a little too well? Is that so, or not? And if so, what's the motive? Let's have it! Are you hard up? Do you want cash?'

'Never mind about cash, Nibbs. There's richer coin than ever was stamped with the Queen's head, Nibbs. Look up among those stars, and let's learn to love them well, and to love one another.'

'So is love the motive?—the only motive? Jack, be frank! I don't believe in too much love, old man. What's the real game? Love of whom? Of Gracie?'

'Such love as we poor brutes can give, Nibbs: love of Gracie, yes, whom we have both got to love far better than we do, Nibbs, and what about those two children? and of you, too, now, Nibbs, of you, too, now.'

'But stop a bit! Do you know that it was I who twice set the police on to you for a crime which you never could have committed'—Raby's voice broke—
'I'm feeling shaky, Jack, boy, you gave me such a

damned fright—for a crime which you never could have committed, at that Duddon village, and at the house in Maida Vale? You wrote me a friend's letter, and I handed it over to the police, and you were innocent—and I was guilty—and you brought me cigars when I was in the cell——'

'That says nothing, Nibbs——'

'Did you know that I did that? yes or no?'

'Yes, I happened to know it, somehow.'

'My sweet friend Mr. Pole told you, of course?'

'Never mind about Harold. Harold is very ill: you can't be angry with him. I got to know it somehow, that's all: and I at once dropped to it that you were a bit frightened about that time, or you never would have done it. We are low and brutish, nearly everyone, at times, I more than you no doubt, if you only knew.'

Raby covered his face in his large hands, and began to sob, really 'shaky' after his fright.

'You are—divinely good—to me, Jack Hay,' he sobbed, utterly broken under Jack's light burden and easy yoke: 'I always—was fond of you. If you know what I did to Gracie—and how I got you away—I don't know how you can forgive me.'

'Yes, I do know. You were horribly base then, Nibbs. But judge if I am able to throw one stone at you when I tell you that not two hours since I was on the very point of committing the most hellish outrage upon your wife, ruining our dear for ever, ruining you for ever, ruining myself and the children, crime heaped on crime, like a mad orang-outang let loose in a church—my God. You have confessed to me, so now I confess to you, and we are quits, Nibbs. There's no throwing stones at one another. We are just two monkeys, that God has taken a fancy to: and in Him, Nibbs, is our hope.'

'What did—*she* say?'

'She didn't know. I only had the thought, I say, in my noddle. Nothing happened.'

'Didn't you even—kiss her?'

'Oh, don't begin that again. She never would let

me kiss her. I am going. Are you coming up to London within the next three weeks?’

‘I may—I will, if you want me to. Why?’

‘Because I am going away to America, and before I go I want to have a long, straight chat with you about—something—about your most hidden life. I wonder if you will listen to me? I am a blind guide, Nibbs, but it’s for *her* sake, old man, and to yourself I can promise a biggish reward, if you’ll hear me.’

‘Yes, I’ll hear you. I am not a man to sit down quietly and listen to other men’s advice, as you know, but I will to yours, Jack, and if I promise to follow it, as I will, then you may be sure it’s going to be done, don’t matter what it is, or what stands in the way: and I never expected to say that to any man. You were always a good friend to me, many a time, don’t think that I’ve forgotten one single instance; and then I was driven to do you that wrong—worse than the other thing—I’ve cursed God for it! And because I wronged you, this power was given you over me—Ah, that’s odd, isn’t it? that you alone of men should get to know. I *knew* that it would be known some day, though: the night in which it lay wrapped was a long night, but it had to have a morning, as sure as all things roll and roll, and won’t stop. Yes, it was nicotine: the pipe, you know, had a little knob at the end, and I tipped the juice right into his wine—’

‘Oh, why talk of that—dear, dear Nibbs—?’

‘I tipped it in! He was praying, and I tipped it right in! And when he was dying, he screamed till the hills rang again. It was *his* fault, and hell’s. He wanted to give me in charge for stealing a few pounds, and I should have been ruined, and Pole would have had Gracie. But don’t think that anything can be hidden: the whole creation rolls, and each vile thing has its hour for turning up to the light. All these years never made me feel secure, and as soon as you sprang up before me to-night, before ever you told your name, I had a feeling of an end and a settlement. Thank God that it is as it is. I didn’t think that it would be you to find out—I thought it would be that

Pole devil. But it's you—thank God for that! thank God, my heart! Not a devil, but an angel—thank the great and good God, whom my secret heart has been mocking all my life, but from to-night will never mock again! Oh, if I forget you, Jack Hay, may hell have me! But still, I don't feel safe with you, old man—that's the God's truth: not that I doubt your sweet soul that's like honey and ointment, but I do your head. I have a feeling, Jack—— Ah, I have a feeling of woe on woe. This morning when I opened my psalter the first thing I saw was: "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live." There's that poor woman that I married, she's going to take her own life, sure as fate, if she only gets a whisper—— And things come out! they do! it all rolls, and there's the dawning first, and then the blazing mad noon. Jack, if you love me and Gracie, you are going to make a vow now to me never more to speak with that devil. Ah, that's a vulture that can pick a man's inmost thoughts from his brain——'

'My word, can't you learn to be calm, Nibbs? There's not the least fear of Harold picking anything from my brain, not if I lived and slept with him; but I am off to America in three weeks for years, and Harold is in Davos—— No, he isn't though! he wrote me on Monday to say that he is coming back this week. I forgot that. But still——'

'Vow that he don't lay eyes on you! You don't leave this spot till you do——'

'I can hardly be off seeing him; he's all out fond of me, Nibbs—he's coming specially to see me, as he says. But since you ask me, I promise that I shan't see him, if I can be off it, and if I'm bound to, and he mentions you, I simply shan't reply. In any case, don't be galled about fancies: there's not even the slightest chance of his ever dropping to it, and if there were, trust in your God, who has seen your unjust acts, and your sorrow, and will no doubt work you, be it soon or in after ages, into His kingdom. We know little, but we know that He gives us many hints that He's fond and good, though frightful, too, sudden, and

disastrous at times. We can only trust in Him, though He slay us. Good-bye, young un. I think of riding all night: I came down on a horse, you know. Heard about poor old Spender?’

‘Yes: Gracie told me that Missie had written.’

‘Coming to the funeral o’ Tuesday? Then we can have our talk, and over and above we’ll tell each other how the world has treated us. I’ve been in the sea three days and nights on a mast-head, I’ve been captured by Bushmen, I’ve heard angels speak with human tongue, and seen dances to the devil.’

‘All right, I’ll soon hear it all. But not so soon as the funeral. That old Spender once refused to lend me £10; besides, I’m just home from the Continental baths: I’ve got gout always pinching at me with vile pincers. Say about ten days’ time—or seven.’

‘As you like, then. Gracie knows my address. Oh, look to her, Nibbs, and cherish her for all you’re worth, old man! And pray for me, and I for you. Good-bye again.’

‘Good-bye, Jack Hay, since you choose to shake my not too clean hand. I feel like parting with ten brothers and half-a-dozen fathers, and if you could be always with me, I feel that I should climb up straight, like a creeper up a pillar. It’s the same old Jack somehow, and yet I don’t quite recognise the animal: we have shifted relatively, my friend. Didn’t we use to be chums, my son, always together, till Hell came in? And I’ve never forgotten you, though little did I think that you were not done with me and with all this little world. I got some people to look you up in Australia—— Sure you don’t want any money, now? You always used to be hard up; and all that I’ve got is yours——’

‘That’s all right about money, thanks, old man. Say good-bye to her for me: and love her, Nibbs, I charge you—better, man, *far* better, than before. Well, once more—God bless you, till we meet again.’

Jack planted his feet on the ladder, and hurriedly descended into darkness; put on his boots below; and

when he was out on the road called : ' Good-bye ! ' to which Raby called ' Good-bye ! ' And so they parted, to meet very soon again : but in a dark place.

As Jack disappeared by Daleshead Pass, Raby fell sobbing to his knees by the parapet ; and now at last, on that very spot where Dr. Stanley had lain dead, a genuine prayer, without words, and without beads, went up from the murderer to Heaven.

Jack, meantime, was passing through a very gloomy old park ; the road narrowed almost to a path, moss-grown and vaulted over with trees in serried avenue, whose arch of foliage at the far end he could see ; but the path itself was invisible in shadow, though some of the trees were bare, and the ground thick with mast and leaves ; occasionally by by-paths and openings on his left he could catch glimpses of a darkling homestead of stone and green-slate : it was that Dale House, now a property of Mrs. Raby's, in which old Amos Mackay had made a will twenty-three years before, and died ; and just about there, in the avenue, Jack had an odd experience—the sensation that someone was with him, following him, so that twice he sharply turned his head to see. Common as such impressions are, it was strange in his case that he knew whose the presence was—a spirit, not of the dead, but of the living, the spirit of Stephane, his wife ; and though he felt her as a sad, reproachful presence, the sensation was in no way terrifying, but, on the contrary, consoling. It was with him all the way, till he reached that space at the end of Commercial Street, the camping-place of wild-beast-shows, caravans, and gipsies. Thence to the Long Meg was a minute's walk. He knocked up the inn, and the round West Riding body, appearing, put into his hand a telegram. It was from Stephane, who at nine that evening, on returning from the Hays in Camden Town, had found his Kendal telegram at the Hotel V— ; she had then hurried back to Camden Town, got the names of all the inns in Bedwick, and telegraphed both to them, and to the Kendal inn, the words :

'I earnestly beseech see neither of the Rabys. Have written you to Wadworth. Have had terrible dream about you and six others. All most dark about you. Do return instantly with all speed. Come straight to me at hotel.—STEPHANE.'

Jack read this with a peering frown, which was immediately interrupted by Big Willie o' Thwaite at his elbow, whom he followed to the stable. Freewill ready, he liberally tipped everyone, set off, and soon had the mare like a living machine steadily at work upon the road, so that within an hour all Cumberland lay well behind her heels.

It was past one in the morning when he set out, and about the same time Raby was on the way home, his bosom still burning with the influence of Jack, and revolving higher purposes than it had ever known.

Gracie now again sat in the blue chair where Jack had seen her playing the violoncello. She was reading a French novel, looking sleepy, though quite late hours were the rule at Beech How. When Raby entered, she did not look up: her lazy lids seemed too lazy to lift themselves.

'Hello, Gracie, still up?' he muttered.

She did not answer. He paced slowly about the room, his hands in his jacket-pockets, his panama-hat still on, shading his eyes, but not his chiselled nose and bottom-lip, and short-pointed beard.

'Gertrude has had a fit,' Gracie remarked after a time in the drowsiest murmur: 'it is time for her to see Dr. Carew again. I shall take her up to town by the 11.33 train to-morrow.'

'You going to London to-morrow?'

'Yes.'

He paced about, and presently asked:

'Any news?'

'No. Why?'

'Anyone been here?'

'No.'

'Oh come, Gracie!—not even Jack Hay?'

'Have you see him, then?'

'Seen him and spoken to him. But I think you might have told me, Gracie, without my asking.'

'Why so?'—her heavy eyes never ceasing to travel along the printed lines.

'Just for the news. I'm a jealous man, and I might be jealous of an angel, but don't think I'd be jealous of Jack Hay. I have spoken to him, I know him, that's all. He's like—I was going to say like a brother to me, Gracie—but fifty brothers aren't in it.'

'In spite of all you did to him?'

'Yes—upbraid me, Gracie, if you like—in spite of all I did to him, and you don't know all I did. He isn't like me and you, Gracie, you see: yes, Gracie, in spite of all.'

'How affecting,' she murmured, one shoulder disturbed by a little throe of laughter; 'it is no longer Harriet, then, but Jack now: I'm afraid you have caught Hay-fever from your wife, Raby. You should be pleased that our tastes coincide for once. I suppose you find him a brother because he is rich——'

'Jack rich? How do you mean? Why, I offered him money——!'

She chuckled, still reading.

'He is one of the richest men in the world. Your riches are to his what you are to him, what a cricket-ball is to the earth. Haven't you heard of Bennett, the financial person? That's Jack.'

Raby groaned.

'Then, why do you like him, if not for the riches?' asked Gracie: 'you can't understand him. What did he say?'

'He told me for one thing that you are a good woman, Gracie: that nothing passed between you; that he tried to kiss you, and you refused.'

Again she chuckled with shaken shoulders.

'Wasn't that true, then, Gracie? Am I to take it from your manner that he told a lie?'

'You can't understand the motives of a gentleman, Raby. Whether he wished to kiss me or not, I naturally kissed him, you know.'

‘But who is it you are talking to?’ he cried, in a high, changed voice. ‘Oh so? You dare say that to me?’

‘Yes, I dare,’ she droned sleepily: ‘my daring is in a state of blossom, Raby, and what it is capable of growing to I am sure you cannot dream. Your *régime* is over, Raby. I’m afraid you are on the point of losing me.’

Panic struck like a dart to his heart. He paced about, the pressure of his hands in his jacket-pockets expressing his tall shape behind.

‘How lose you, my friend?’ he asked.

‘In one of two ways—I don’t know which.’

‘Which two ways?’

‘Wait and you will see.’

‘I knew it wasn’t any Gertrude you wanted to take to London! Are you going after Jack Hay, then?’

‘I really want to take poor little Gertie, too. Does it seem incredible to you that I should love your children? Every woman is more or less the dupe of Nature, and I do love them, because I can’t help, though I quite see that it is absurd. But your intuition that my main motive is Jack is quite wonderfully true.’

‘Gracie, don’t dare me! I can’t stand it——!’

‘I dare you, because I see how powerless you are to hurt me, and because I hate and like to torture you. If you could hurt me, I shouldn’t dare you. You can strike me, indeed, but then I shall simply walk out of the house for ever, and you will lose one of your last nights with me.’

‘Ah, *shameless* to talk like that! If I locked you up in a room, and flogged you half to death——’

‘With a kiss in the middle?’

‘Shameless!’

‘Who taught me?’

‘I never taught you!—just the contrary. Oh God, oh God, you do hurt a husband’s heart, Gracie. . . .’ He covered his face with his hands.

‘“A husband’s heart” is delightful. You have your

merits, but your strength is hardly in your heart, Raby. I hope Jack Hay has not been tampering with you and making you good, for I have still some days with you, and should not care to have you spoiled——'

'But who is it you are talking to? You must be stark mad! What's happened? What are you going to London for? Jack Hay does not want you to go with him!'

'I'm afraid he doesn't.'

'Then, what are you going for? The man is a saint! Do you want to *seduce* him?'

'Yes.'

'Ah, shameless! What! And make him miserable *for ever!* Is that your love?'

'I don't care. The same thing was done to me.'

'But not done by him! Will you punish him for what he didn't do? Is that fair?'

'I don't care. It was done to me. He will be happier with me than with God—for a time at any rate.'

'Then, go! his God will deliver him from you, and he'll despise you to your face.'

'God can't!' she cried, starting to her feet with a certain triumph and radiance: 'he is mine!—he nearly was two hours ago, in spite of God—my birthright, all I ever had or wanted for my own, and I claim him from all things that are! Let God separate us by the breadth of space, and we shall still work and refine each other. He loves me better than any God. He can't escape me. Death might snatch him from me, and even then I should pursue and have him——'

She walked rapidly, panting hard, to one of the windows, and looked out at the night.

'But the woman's mad,' muttered Raby amazed, strange woe in his heart; and he said louder: 'All right, go, my friend: I shouldn't stop you, if I could. But you don't go alone though: I have the right to look after my wife, and after my friend, too.'

She turned round laughing.

'It won't be any good, but by all means come and'

look after us. You know that I always like you to be near me——' and she walked quickly to him, reached up, and whispered in his ear.

'Shame, Gracie,' he muttered.

She whispered urgently again.

'You go away,' said he now, with a crooked smile.

* * * * *

The next (Saturday) morning they took train together with their child, Gertrude, arriving in London about thirty hours before Jack Hay.

XLII

THE PIPE

JACK arrived at Drury Lane at midnight on Sunday. He had got his wife's letter at Wadworth, and taken train with Freewill part of the rest of the way, being eager both to see Stephane, and to be at business by the Monday morning, knowing that 'Buddo' and many others must be heaping maledictions upon him. At his rooms, he took off his mud-plastered clothes for his alternative suit, and at that late hour set off to the hotel, as she had bidden him. She would then, he assumed, be in bed, and his intention was to talk by her bedside; but at the vestibule door, even as he put hand to pocket for the key, he remembered that he had left it in the other trousers. Peeping through the key-hole, he saw all dark within: she was evidently in bed, the night chilly, and, reluctant to make her rise perhaps from warm sleep, he decided to return for the key, as he had already taken all the hotel's duplicates for his men. He therefore trudged back the considerable distance to Drury Lane, nodding on the way, for he had slept little during the last days, nor had ventured to sleep in the train, where sleep always produced an effect of stifling upon him. By the time he reached his rooms again he was so fordone, that he determined to await the morning to see her: for to the sleepy the present is the unheroic aristocrat to the labouring future, and a sleeping man both is, and looks, almost as base as a dead one: hence at bed-time lights are put out, and a bedroom is half a 'private vault.' He put on his slippers and campaign-cap, descended

to the back with his camel-hair sleeping-bag, mounted his ladder to the shed-roof, and was soon asleep against the railing that kept him from rolling. It was not then raining, but those piles of planks in the space where the three houses had been demolished were soaked: for since Saturday morning it had been wet over England.

The next morning a strange thing happened to him: he slept, not only late, but till it was high day. The semicircle of his face not protected by the campaign-cap was then all wet with rain; and three women at windows in the houses back of his, accustomed to see him rise early, were asking one another if anything could be the matter: for London was sounding thousandfold around him, and it was ten o'clock.

He rose in haste, went up, prepared himself, went out, had breakfast in a near shop, then took what he seldom took, a cab, and drove to the hotel. There everyone was already at work, but no Stephane: for she, supposing him not yet arrived, was gone to Whitechapel. He at once rang up her office at the Floral Fête, but was told after long delay and telephone-trouble that she had not yet arrived; 'Tell her ladyship,' said he, 'that I shall come to her at the Fête at two o'clock'; he then set vigorously to business, and was in the thick and chaos of his mail, when in stepped 'Buddo,' natty in snuff-coloured morning-coat, who, seeing Jack, stopped short with long-drawn face of reproach, saying, 'My Gord, Jack . . .!'

'Keep your hair on, young un,' said Jack: 'it'll all pan out straight in the end.'

'Where in God's name did you get to, Jack?'

'Nowhere in that name, perhaps. Don't make a bobbery.'

'You've got to spend every hour of this day at the Bank!'

'Well, I don't say not. Just let's clear off this lot.'

Buddo restlessly paced the vestibule and drawing-room twenty minutes, till the two set off in his landau

for Leadenhall Street, and were at the Bank by 11.30—a palatial place, with a rail of wrought brass over the panelled counter, the ceiling divided into squares sunk in frames of ornament, and supported by powerful Corinthian columns—a world in itself inhabited by clerks, and a symbol of the world, in that men were there to work and serve while it was day, but in the 'holy night' (σεμνή, ὑπνοδότειρα) they had left it for their home. Jack went through into an inner room, which, too, was light, sumptuous, and fairly large, and there, after a confab with Buddo, spent another hour of work, trilling electric bells, glancing aside, his hair now dropped aslant across his brow, at books brought him, sending telegrams, giving three interviews to an auditor, a solicitor, and a broker, signing and countersigning papers handed him one by one, hampered in all he did by the conflict of his eyes with his cigar-smoke. When the large-faced clock struck one, he was copying figures out of a number of books, which, with cashboxes, exchequer-bills, bonds, debentures, dividend warrants and cheques, now strewed the table, and, this done, he threw away his cigar-end and commenced to add, intending this to be his last job before lunch, for which he was getting hungry. The piece of paper with the pencilled figures was before him, and his lips were adding, the clock now pointing to 1.15, when that tower of figures in his head collapsed at a sound outside—a sound which he knew—a sepulchral cough, as it were the banshee's omen, with 'Ho! ho!' and with 'Come! come!'

A clerk looked in, saying: 'Mr. Harold Pole to see you, sir.'

'Did you say I was in?'

'Yes, sir: he said he is a friend. . . .'

'Bring him.'

With wild face entered Pole, and instantly broke into galloping speech; he had on a stiff sack-overcoat of blue cloth, with sable lapel and cuffs, all his neck and chest under cream-silk wraps, and his silk hat pressed upon his head. His disease had finally had its customary effect of hairiness, and his once-barren

chin-beard, now half-a-foot long, spread up in whiskers to his hair, which escaped in bounteous blonde waves under his hat-rim; but even now his moustache did not quite cover those lips that smiled. His face, all paly and rose under the azure moonlight of his eyes, was the very symbol of frailty, evanescence, and refinement to the vanishing point: he was like a creature of the moon, a half-ghost with lambent eyes, lost in a fur sack-coat.

'Why, I couldn't find you,' he broke out huskily, gasping, 'I went to the hotel—this is lucky, but I've lost an hour—he's in town, but may go out somewhere——'

'Sit down here, old man: you mustn't get out of breath——' Jack had swept a heavy easy-chair of green leather to a fire within the marble hearth.

'That's right, there's a fire,' panted Pole. 'Why on earth didn't you tell me that you wanted——?'

'Don't talk yet, Harold. Sit down. How are you, old man?'

'Ey, nearly well now, nearly well now'—feeling in a jacket pocket after something—'only this London air—fog, fog, and rain'—his overcoat was wet with some drops—'why on earth didn't you tell me——?'

'When did you come?'

'Last night—seven o'clock train from Newhaven. Didn't hear till eleven this morning——'

Now he had taken from his jacket two objects that he had been feeling for, and, before he sat, put them on the near edge of the table: they were a pipe, and a phial containing a finger-joint in a solution of formalin.

Jack's eye rested on that pipe under a frown: the mouthpiece was jagged; it had a reservoir under the bowl: it was Dr. Stanley's, which he, Jack, had left with Balfours': and seeing it there, he sickened, realising his fault, his fix, and the frightfulness of destiny, while his colour inwardly bled as it were to death. He backed into his arm-chair. Pole, bent toward the fire, did not see him.

Pole next spoke in a stronger voice, saying:

'Why you did not bring the pipe direct to me, Jack, I have been puzzling my brains in vain to discover. Was it your absurd fallacy that I was dying? My partner is no good——!'

'Are Balfours' your partners, Harold?'

'Oh, you didn't know! That explains the whole thing, then! I made certain that you knew. But why on earth, then, did you take it to another detective than me? He would have been hanged months ago! I knew in every detail all that you set my partner to discover: the only thing I didn't know was this thing—this pipe. Ah, Jack Hay, I know myself better this morning than last night. I never was anything but an intellectual fop—a fop, the vilest of beings—puffed with conceit, but without value. Ha! ha! I thought myself a genius at one time—long ago though, long ago, in boyhood. I never was worth a straw. Why, I have had this thing in this vial'—he held up the finger-joint while he stopped to cough—'and for eleven years I have been asking myself why Raby mutilated one of his finger-nails that night, and I have groaned and drunk, and spat my heart's-blood, and God knew, and wouldn't tell. However, he's not a bad old God—I'll always love and serve Him now—He was only giving Raby time to feel quite safe, like an exquisite cat with a mouse; I admit Him now an Artist in revenge, though I always trusted in Him, He knows that, that He would not fail in the massacre of Raby, and this is His day, and ours, Jack. Yes, I would dance, if I were not so crushed with the sense of my own fatuity. The finger-joint was an absolute clue to the pipe! and any idiot, given the joint, should have divined the pipe. Why didn't I divine? It is a mystery to me! Dr. Stanley smoked—he was always smoking. Did I know that fact, or not? But from first to last *pipe* never entered my brain! nicotine-poisoning is so out-of-the-way a crime. But still, the finger-nail was a perfectly obvious clue! and Raby knew it, hence his anxiousness to hide it: and how that crow has laughed eleven long years at my delightful skull! However, I won't grieve: wine improves by keeping,

and there was one little sweet and sweetest glassful, mellow, mellow, which life reserved for Harold Pole. I mean to sit with the lawyers at the trial, just in front of him, and smile all the day; and I can get an order to see the hanging—I can get one for you, too, Jack, if you like—and I shall hold up the vial and the pipe, one in each hand, before his eyes, just at the last moment, when the noose is going to drop. Don't you understand what happened to his finger-nail, Jack? when he tipped the juice from this reservoir— By the way, aren't you listening, my friend?

Jack, his pallor all gone now, was adding up figures, with pimpling lips like prayer: but such lips, and such a face! having in them the resolution of a man beating down a fire. He had already decided how to 'grapple this racket.'

'You gas away, Harold,' he said: 'I'm hearing every word'— and he went on adding.

'Well, if you look at the nail,' said Pole, 'you will see that it is quite immature and dented, like a new nail: and what happened was this, that a little of the tobacco-juice fell upon it. Can't you just imagine Raby, Jack, as day breaks, catching sight of that brown stain?—I say "as day breaks," for the juice had been working for hours into the texture of the nail before ever he noticed it—though the doctor had matches—or he would never have had to scrape it away down to the quick, as he did. But day breaks, and he sees it. Imagine his shock! He has already thrown the pipe up on the Crag: he thinks that no trace of the crime remains; then he sees the stain. Imagine his realisation of the grim grip of old God! He at once sets to work to grate it away against the edge of one of those squares of tin on the parapet—he is the most morbidly cautious of beasts, you know—but the stain, fainter and fainter, still remains: he groans: layer after layer goes—and he has to be careful to scatter the very nail-powder which he makes—but the stain has impregnated the whole depth of the nail; at last in his fury, he reaches the quick, and, in doing so, leaves on the edge of tin a blood-speck

which I afterwards discovered with the microscope, wrote to tell him of, and then slept in the broch, till he came one midnight disguised from London to wipe it off. When I confronted him, he said that he was doing it for your sake, Jack. Ey, he hath a pretty invention, the vampire. He loved you so tenderly, Jack——'

'So he did: does now, worse than ever——' Jack flung the words, interrupting, then recatching, his addition.

'Who did and does? Our Nibbs?' went Pole: 'did I tell you, by the way, that it was he who set those two police-traps for you——'

'Sheer funk. He loved himself better than me, because he was young and green: but he loved me, too——' The words came flying from between the adding.

Pole slowly turned his head upon him, with lifted eyebrows. In the midst of his dawning astonishment, before he could speak, a clerk entered with two cards, on which Jack saw the names of the Marchioness of D—— and Lady Perowne; and he hurriedly wrote in pencil:

'My darlings, I can't possibly see you now. Too sorry. Forgive me for not writing since last Tuesday. Been away, and so occupied. Want to spend the evening with you to-night, and will bring Stephane, if possible.'

The moment the clerk disappeared with this note, he jumped up, pretended to look out of the door, stealthily locked it, pocketed the key, returned, and sat again, leaning back.

'Now, Harold, what have you got to say for yourself?'

'Not much: I see you are busy. I only wanted to be sure that your convenience won't suffer if we arrest at once. Everything seems favourable for to-day——'

'Said anything to the police yet?'

'No, I came straight to you——'

'Not said a word to anyone?'

‘Not a word. I left Gladys at Davos——’

‘Ah, how is she?’

‘She is hearty.’

‘Why, it used to be said that she was shook on Nibbs. If she was here, she would plead for him.’

‘You are pleasant, my friend,’ said Pole, with hard cynicism: ‘my sister was never shook on that crow in any other sense than a dog is shook on a bull’s throat. Do you desire me to proceed at once to the arrest——?’

‘Ah, Harold, Harold, you must forgive your enemies.’

Pole was taken with chuckling, which set him coughing far and hollow, with ‘Ho! ho! come! come!’ and he threw the paper-handkerchief upon the fire.

‘You teem with noble maxims, my friend,’ said he: ‘in this case I may be disposed to assent to your maxim, but observe that it specifies no date: I shall forgive Mr. Raby after he has been hanged. That is when society forgives its enemies.’

‘Society,’ muttered Jack: ‘shame, Harold, to make so putrid a thing your pattern. But you do as you like about that: only, understand clearly that it is not my will, it is not my intention, that Raby should suffer for his old, forgotten act on Lyullph’s Broch.’

With eyes of puzzlement, of alarm, of scrutiny, Pole stared at Jack’s face of rock.

‘Not suffer?’ he breathed.

‘No, not suffer.’

The clock’s ticking filled their silence a minute.

‘Ah, by God, he shall, Jack!’ screamed Pole suddenly.

‘Ah, by George, he shan’t, Harold!’ said Jack.

Both faces had reddened, and now turned pale; both panted; as for Pole, one could see his chest sink far in, then rise a little, and sink far in. He saw that Jack was serious, that Jack looked strong, and the glassful of sweet wine in danger. Having a little recovered breath, he rose, muttering:

‘Oh, I’m only losing time here——’ and caught up the vial and pipe from the table.

‘The door is locked: and, besides, that pipe is *my*

property'—saying which, Jack made so close a dart round the table, that his trousers were caught by the corner and torn in two lines a foot long, across and down, making a triangular flap; during that momentary check, Pole had slipped the pipe into his right coat-pocket, into which Jack dived, and a struggle began, Pole grasping the pipe, anon coughing, Jack tugging at the hand in the pocket. Pretty soon Pole felt himself yielding, and with a face of ashes, began to shout huskily: 'Help! Help!' so that people cashing cheques heard the outcry, and all that world of business stood in suspense. It made no difference to Jack, who with hard lips worked on at Pole's delicate hand, which yet had the strength of desperateness. At last Pole made these words heard: 'Jack—I *must* perish—I am dying'—crafty words, yet not without some truth: and at that gasp, Jack gave up. Pole dropped into the chair, with abandoned head and open mouth, but even in that state rushed the pipe into a trouser-pocket; and Jack went back to his chair, rather agitated.

For ten minutes no sound was heard, save Pole's breathing, and the clock, which during the struggle had struck two. At two Jack, as he had telephoned in the morning, was to have been at the Floral Fête, and there Stephane was awaiting him: but instead of Stephane there was Pole.

The Bank was hardly a ten minutes' bus-ride from the Floral Fête, and near 2.15, Stephane, keen to see him, troubled at his failure to appear, telephoned the Bank, heard that he was there, and before 2.30 had sent her name to him from the counter. The clerk found the door locked; he knocked, and receiving no answer, told her that Mr. Bennett was closely engaged with a gentleman. So she had to go away.

'Won't you spare him? not for me, Harold?'

'You jest, my friend.'

Now Jack was on his knees beside the green chair, facing the fire, his left hand on Pole's right shoulder.

'Hear me, Harold. I vowed to him. Did you know I'd been down to see them? Yes. I only came

back last night. First I saw Gracie, then, going back to Bedwick by Brentwaite Edge, I caught him on the broch at midnight—praying, praying—punishing himself—white-livered as a bushbuck for fear he should see the doctor's ghost. And I vowed to him. I told him about the pipe, and then he said that he felt all safe about my sweet soul, Harold—those were his words—about my sweet soul, but was galled about my head, and I must never even see you again; and I vowed to him that there was not the least chance of your dropping to it, not knowing that I myself had already given it all away to you. So what would he think o' me now?—have pity! I knew at the time when I was giving the pipe to Balfours' that it was wrong—I knew very well: but like a fool I did it, thinking o' Gracie, and I've suffered in my conscience since: but never I thought to suffer as I suffer now, Harold, nor that it would be *you*, Harold, that would make me——'

'The accent on the *you* means that you have given me £10,000,' said Pole, 'and saved me from certain death. Ey, that was kind, too, that was good. But I am happy to say that I am in a position to return you the greater part of that sum, which you will henceforth consider as a loan. As I can't repay you for my life, that much I must owe to you with my apologies. It is perfectly natural that you should remind me of your favours, without which you would hardly have taken the liberty of making me this wild request——'

'There's nothing about favours, Harold: we've got to talk deeper and truer than that, lad. The fact is, the very spirit of bale and destruction has been at us both, because we wouldn't obey what has been told us, and the dart is to get out of the fix into which it has led us, if that's possible. This is no hour for bantering and gasing about "favours," Harold. What beats me is that you don't see that you can't convict Raby without crushing Gracie to hell. Would you let her understand, then, that she has been sleeping in the bosom of her father's murderer for eleven years, and borne children to him? Why, she might kill herself——!'

'That would be regrettable, but not my fault. I neither like nor dislike the woman, and owe her no consideration: I simply do my obvious duty to society in bringing a criminal to justice.'

'Society? But you say that absurd word again? Oh, Harold, you're not a fool! How can society judge Raby, except by wrongful force? What Nero-butcher or Car of Juggernaut was ever so washed in the blood of murder as this society? Can the red judge the pink? Raby is all out an angel by the side of society. And how comes it that you fail to know this, Harold, and yet had brains enough to rout out Raby's hidden acts? It is because you have thought of the one, though you had no right to, but you have not thought of the other, though it was your duty to think of little else. If society is your motive, that'll be right all to pieces. Society itself was the cause of the doctor's murder—society committed it—if you were only detective enough to see it. You've got hold of the wrong man. Will you spare him? See me on my knees——!'

'I have had no lunch, my good sir,' said Pole, 'and I am in ill health. Mayn't I go? Why the deuce have you locked the door? Am I a prisoner that Mr. Raby may be free?'

'You shall go when you vow to me. . . . Just think of it, Harold! I care nothing for Raby, I care nothing for Gracie: they are grown-up people—but the kids, two of them. You haven't realised those two kids, Harold. One of them has epilepsy—isn't that enough? a little girl of nine or ten, the image of her mother, so afflicted, pretty as an angel. . . . And a little boy, very sweet, two or three years—he has black hair. They haven't done anything to society—— Spare them, spare them, spare them. . . .' His brow fell humbly low on the chair-handle, and upon that big head Pole, with tremulous lips, fastened a gaze of terror—terror of his own heart, and of Jack's power over it: for two opposite movements of nature now warred within him, the one to wound to death that head of sorrow, and the other to worship it.

He could not speak, and presently Jack :

'Ah, that touches him, the two kids: you hadn't thought o' those. What'd the boy think of himself when he heard that his father had murdered some one, and was hanged? He'd very likely murder some one, too, and there'd be no end to the bobbery. And the mother. . . . You are not going to carry it off with me, Harold, that you don't love her to the heart . . . so wronged, so helpless—fatherless, motherless in the world, that dear head. She only married Nibbs because you were laid up; the time was nearly expired for the legacy-money, and she couldn't work, she was too ill, and had nothing—to eat. . . . What, in God's name, was she to do? God is good—God is very good, really—but He was a bit—hard on her then, Harold: you ill, I away, she ill, nobody but Miss Ames and that Raby, she must have been like a hind at bay, bleeding from the dogs,—our white darling since we were little kids, oh, a woe's in it. She was bound to marry Nibbs: and, she once married to him, you and I are his, Harold, we can only live for him. But it was you she wanted, and when she looked for you, you were ill. What could she do, poor thing? But I know it was you she wanted, for said she to me one night: "Which shall it be, Jack, Nibbs or Harold?" and I said: "Harold is the better man of the two, Gracie"; and she said: "Yes, I mean to marry Harold, but I like you the best, Jack, and Harold won't mind, because he's so noble-minded—so noble-minded." It was only you she wanted, Harold: you can't crush her. Vow to me, vow to me. . . .'

Now something in Pole whispered: 'Vow quick,' and something: 'It is sweet to wound him.' He suddenly sprang up, and went bending with his cough, which outside at the counter sounded like watchdog's-bayings heard at midnight beyond mountain and valley, all void and formless.

'Will you, then?'

'May I not go?'

'Will you?'

'You jest. I'd see you a thousand times damned first, my good sir.'

Jack, who had remained on his knees, rose at last, and returned to his chair; Pole walked about a little, then sitting again, stared over the fire. Jack now began to look aside at him with a certain furtive leer under the brows, measuring and weighing him, then in a cheque-book which lay at his hand scribbled a cheque: 'Pay to Mr. Harold Pole the sum of fifty thousand pounds.' He tore it out of the book, held it a little, and still with that doubtful, measuring look, changed his mind, and slowly tore it into the basket.

'Harold Pole, what brute is in you?' said he, diagnosing Pole with fist on thigh.

'The brute of hunger and thirst for one. If you will permit me to remind you of the absolute illegality of this detention——'

Jack made a lip-movement of contempt, and impetuously leaning forward, scribbled another cheque: 'Pay to Mr. Harold Pole the sum of eighty thousand pounds. . . .'

'Here, you stick to that: I know you're a poor man'—and he tossed the cheque upon Pole's knees, eyeing him still with that furtive earnestness, while Pole took it up, read it with a flush of the brow, and then brushed it aside into the fire, just as the clock struck three.

'Now Hay, my liberty! You have done me some favours: but your infernal insolence in locking me into this room and in offering me that cheque counter-balances them. I give you three minutes, in which to say anything further that you may wish, and to open that door, before I make a scandal.'

'Well, in my three minutes I say that your firm is not an honourable firm, if in any way you use that pipe. I made it a condition with your partner that all right of action against Raby should rest only with me. It will be a most scandalous breach of trust——'

'Ey, perhaps. It won't, however, be my partner's fault, but mine alone. If it is dishonourable, I simply don't care. Haven't you sufficient imagination, my

friend, to see why nothing could possibly weigh one straw with me in this matter? Almighty God, with touching consideration, gave me bad lungs, a muddy brain, defeat tempered with brandy, a lurid eye and weary life, and curses in my bed at night: and, to make up, He with His own hand brewed me this one thimbleful of intense liqueur—my only potion and portion in life. Am I likely to miss it through any caprice of yours? Ey, but you jest, you jest. Who made you, my friend, a teacher and a saviour of men? I—hate you. You are an ass.'

'No doubt of that. But I am not—ass—enough not to know something of the heart of man, sir: and I say to you that you are in prison——'

'Then, open the door——'

'A closer sort of prison, I mean, which only yourself can open. But you don't even know that you are there. Ah, if you only did! we might pull this racket straight right off the reel, and you'd go out light-footed from this Bank, not with your thimbleful of liqueur, but with rivers of a still sweeter sort. By one little plucky effort you could do it—one stab of the lancet into your own bad blood. But I know very well that you won't: something tells me. . . . I don't know what more to say to him, my God: Oh, be with me. . . .' His eyes turned up welling.

'Now, then, Hay, the three minutes are up'—Pole rose briskly.

Jack first took two turns through the room, high-strung, quick-striding with his horseman's-straddle, fists clenched like iron, his lips, too: then he reached aside with the key, and flung the door wide.

'Go,' said he, 'and God go with you. Understand, however, that without fail you lose your wretched tot o' grog. The police believe that it was I who murdered Dr. Stanley, and they happen to be quite right, while you with your suspicions of Raby are quite wrong. It was I who did it right enough. I confess now.'

Pole touched his brow; his eyes seemed to reel; he succumbed into the chair again, and stared over the fire.

There burst from his dead-looking lips a chuckle of rancour and impotence.

'Ha! ha! ha! a godly man who lies like a strumpet!'

'There's no lie, I did it right enough; and the real motive of all the prayers I've made in vain to you was to prevent an innocent man from suffering for my crime. So don't worry about arresting Nibbs: the minute you're out of here, I start writing my confession.'

'What did you do it with?—ha! ha! ha!

'It wasn't morphia that I put into his glass: it was another white powder—arsenic.'

'Ha! ha! ha! he was poisoned with nicotine——'

'So true. I put nicotine, too. Don't think I found that pipe on any crags—not likely. I had poured the nicotine—yes—into the flask, before he left Beech How.'

'I can prove your innocence as clearly—ha! ha! ha!'

'You try—only give me one half-hour to think—and we'll see who's the smarter man at proving, you or me.'

'Don't do it!—Pole with twisted corpse-lips was on a sudden on the floor before Jack's knees—'I never—worshipped, but you: don't let me destroy you——'

'Destroy me! you can't! I escaped from your "society" before, and I'll escape again, by the help o' God! It'll take all the traps you can collect in London to scragg Jack Hay——'

'Don't do it! Whatever comes between me and Nibbs must go under—I shall have no pity—the Devil won't let me: and if you suffer, I couldn't live—I'm ill and weak—don't kill me!—he bent to the very floor, coughing—'You love me, too, you know that, and if you save Nibbs, you kill me, because you will have to suffer. How could I see you suffer? You have given me all my life. . . . But don't do it! I hate him more than I love you, and I hate you, too, more than I love you, for coming between him and me.'

Who made you a saviour? — you, Jack, whom I always looked down upon, till now—till now—— No, don't do it. I dare say I shall be able to prove your innocence, but only after a long imprisonment—for don't be so foolish as to think that you can escape me—and meantime Raby would clear out, and I should die—I feel very sick. And suppose I couldn't prove you innocent, you might be hanged—what mad God has turned your brain——? Will you drop it?'

'Of course I'll drop it, if you drop the prosecution: otherwise you might as well stash your godless ravings, or take them to that dead chair——'

Without one other word, Pole had sprung up, and was gone flying. The people in the Bank saw a face lit with lunacy. In the language of Scripture, 'Satan had entered into him,' and filled him full: and to betray the innocent blood he went.

XLIII

THE CATACOMBS

POLE knew very well what Jack would do: write at once a confession and clear out of England before the confession reached the police. The police were already prepossessed with a belief in his guilt, and, that confession once in their hand, he, Pole, might pile Pelions of proof against Raby in vain: to get at Raby, therefore, Jack would have to be first tried, and acquitted: and the thing now was, just to mention his name at Scotland Yard, and, in the second place, catch him—not too easy a job, perhaps.

Before he was in the street, all these thoughts had bloomed rank, like a gourd's burgeoning, in his head. Even as he dodged among vehicles, hasting across the street, he was scribbling on a shivering note-book the words: 'Send me quick Miss Fenton and the office-boy.' Nearly opposite the Bank was a Messenger-boys': thither he went, thence he sent off the note by cab to his partner in St. Martin's Lane, and there within the door he lurked, watching if Jack came out.

He saw the doors of the Bank close. It was four o'clock and drizzling; the tops of popular 'buses were caravanserais of umbrellas, the tops of others desert. The sky was London-gray, the streets muddy, men bent and hurried: and the dusks of evening began to gather.

When his young lady and office-boy arrived in a cab, Pole spoke an earnest secret to her, left her there with the boy, and himself took cab westward for Scotland Yard.

Within the Bank, now intimate and sacred from the public, the opaque lamp-globes made a galaxy of moons, while the clerks took up the tills, and Mammon made a great rattling noise, as it were the rattlesnake in agitation, weighing his gold, counting his silver, pouring into padlocked 'cans' to take down to the strong-room, while the Manager took the notes, checked them, turned a key upon them, and the cashbook-clerk bent over his cashbook, earnestly balancing income against outgone, winding up the clew of the day's operations, and making ready for the morrow's; then there was a washing of fingers black with metal; and one by one they went: but one, a prisoner by Jack's request, remained behind.

He, in his inner room, sat bent beside the electric table-lamp, writing fast, but with stoppages for thought; his brow sweated, his hair fell over his left eyebrow, and his inwards cried aloud for food. He would not stop. He wrote in ink on foolscap, and at his hand was a half-sheet of note-paper with pencilled notes. He was writing the confession, and here was a matter demanding all his wit and memory, if it was to be well done: for one flaw which scrutiny could detect, and all would be worse than useless. Four grew to five, five to six, and still he toiled at the minutely-invented story, sometimes scoring out so much, that it was necessary to rewrite a page: but near 6.30 he could no more, and gave up. He rose, opened a small safe with a key from his pocket, got a key from one of its drawers, and with it opened another larger safe, from which he took a cashbox. Into this, which contained money in notes, he put his manuscript with some blank paper, and a foolscap envelope. He then sat again, and wrote a long letter to 'Buddo,' who had left the Bank since three, and not returned; he enclosed it, and called the clerk, saying: 'I am leaving this letter here: show it to Mr. Brady in the morning. Before *you* come in the morning, I want you to call at this address'—he handed him a piece of paper with his Drury Lane address—'go up to the top-floor, the door will be

open, and take from the table a long envelope directed to the Criminal Investigation Department: keep it till lunch-time, then post it. Got it all? Top-floor—letter on table—keep it till lunch-time—then post it. It's important. If you get apoplexy, or the house burns down, or anything, let Lady St. Delmo know at the Floral Fête, and she will let me know. Sorry to have kept you so long, and for nothing, after all. I wanted to give you the letter before I left, but it isn't finished. Have some dinner with me? Just first telephone to A——'s, and tell them to have Freewill ready saddled for me.'

The clerk telephoned; they then turned off the lights, descended some steps at the back, and by a corridor emerged upon a court through an obscure door, which the clerk locked, and kept the key. They then passed down an alley, Jack with the cashbox, into Leadenhall Street, where, entering a cab, Jack said:

'I hope you won't be ashamed to dine with me: look at my trousers. . . .'

A triangular space of gray drawers was seen on the left thigh where the rent was; but by fixing the flap with his finger, as he walked into the restaurant in Cornhill where they stopped, he did very well: and there they dined.

When he had emerged from the alley into Leadenhall Street and entered the cab, when he had entered the restaurant, and when, leaving the restaurant, he parted with the clerk, he was seen by a young lady and an office-boy; and these two, when he drove on westward, drove westward behind him.

His destination now was the hotel, and at the near prospect of seeing his wife after such long delay his heart bounded, though the meeting would have to be pitifully short now; having seen her, he intended to get on Freewill and hurry to Camden Town for one last, wild kiss of his mother; then return to Drury Lane, finish the writing of the confession by half-an-hour's further work, and be off by the French night-train. He considered this promptitude masterly,

flattering himself that he was seizing occasion by the forelock, and stealing a march on Pole; the notion that Pole, for whose life he had fasted three days, might be still more masterly prompt, and have him arrested with ruthless suddenness before he had even time to write the confession, never entered his head.

He was driving by the New Law Courts, bound for the hotel, leaning over the cab-door, the night now fully come, and drizzle falling, when the nearness of his Drury Lane house, and the difficulty of the torn trousers, made him think that he would first go home before seeing Stephane, who, otherwise, would undertake the troublesome task of mending the rent on him. He therefore turned northward beyond the Law Courts, paid the cab at his door, went up, lit his little lamp, and put the cashbox on the table.

The question now was, whether he should brush the muddied trousers worn to Cumberland, or mend the rent: for, beside his dress-pair, he had only two. The less troublesome seemed to mend. He accordingly took off jacket and waistcoat, then his muddied boots, that he might pass the trousers unsoiled, then the trousers; and now in shirt and drawers alone, the drawers tucked under his socks, he looked a huge enough bulk, broad-bottomed, long-legged, yet automobile and agile, stronger than he was heavy: the shirt was a gray wool, the drawers undyed wool, light gray, the socks crimson. He had frequently not only mended, but made, his own garments, and taking a skein of whitey-brown thread and a leather palm-thimble from one of the calabashes on the mantel-piece, and a big needle from among a mass of mineral specimens in another, he put the lamp on the edge of the little table, drew a campstool to it, and bent to the work.

The thread was so hopelessly unsuited to the cloth, which was a reddish brown, that it was necessary to try to hide it, and, on the whole, the job took longer than he had thought, there being two rents a foot long. But he soon forgot what he did in the interest of his

thoughts, and worked mechanically. A mood of sadness overcame him: he was flying from the dear old country, which had Cumberland hills in it, and was home, after all, and if he might ever return he did not know. That could well happen, indeed, for Pole would certainly not live many years—and, Pole once dead, and Gracie and Raby loving each other better, he could then come, and stay, too. He would write Raby from America all that he had intended to counsel him at the arranged meeting: he hoped to be in America within three weeks by ship from Rouen. Still it was sad to go, though he might return: he would not, after all, see Lord Harling, who by now was coming; his mother had had him back only one transient hour after the long divorce, and not seen him since: he seemed to have said hardly anything to her, or kissed her properly, the others had so swarmed about him: then he had torn off full bat to Cumberland. She would lock herself into a room, and cry her old eyes out . . . and the old man, too, would yield a hard tear, and those other two. The whole of life was the same: that was sad all out, and no mistake: the involuntary passion of birth, the little that we know, or have, the much that we sigh for, and the silence of dead folk, and the clods that drop upon the coffin at sunset in its deep, dark grave—the whole was pretty pitiful and strange, and life an affair of starlight, spent apparently in time, but really in deep eternity, and the sun only an accident, for the moment. All his own life, all things that ever he did or suffered, came back to him sitting there, but in a new light, mournful, yet sweet; and, it was odd, but it seemed as if it was *she*, Stephane, who was bringing it all to him: she was somehow present and talking, consoling and ministering strength to him—praying for him somewhere perhaps, if he only knew it; and all mixed up with what she talked of was still a rhyme, which she repeated and repeated in accents of sorrow:

“Hath he marks to lead me to him, if he be my Guide?
In his feet and hands are wound-prints, and his side.”

He was so all out certain that she was somehow with him, that his thoughts were partly like answers to her and partly like receptions of what she said. With low-bent head and hanging underlip he sewed, communing with her, and his only sense of strangeness was caused by her apparent knowledge of all the details of his life, some of them so frivolous: how, many a time, he had gone home rolling and incapable from the Long Meg, he and Nibbs, and, waking the next morning, he used to wonder if Gracie could be off hearing of his carryings-on; and of strolls on the fells, all a long summer's-day, he, Nibbs, Harold, and Gracie; and how Kit, Mary's sister, nearly tore his eyes out one Saturday night with a hairpin; and of B——, the young poet, who was dead now of sloe gin and too much Chloe; and how Conce Ogilvie came like a mighty rushing wind upon him as he milked a two-year-old ewe under a messmate-shade 'out back,' and nearly did for him for ever that night; and of the altar of yellow wood which he built when a captive among the Bushmen, and he used to sacrifice silver herons on it; and of the civil-surgeon in India, who had told him of nicotine-poisoning, and the poor little nautch-girl, dressed up to the nines, with her spangles; and how strangely he had hit upon the idea of the Floral Fête with that coster's barrow, and had met Stephane; and how he worked the oracle with his sisters, and won their hearts, perhaps; and how basely Raby's voice had faltered when he said on the broch: 'Do you mean that you are willing to admit your guilt of the murder, if—anyone—makes it worth your while?' and of his will, how there were one or two little points which he had intended to alter, in case he should die before the turnover of his affairs to other hands, but had neglected it: of all his life she communed with him; and in all her communings she mixed up the Hero, the Lily, talking of other things, but meaning nothing but him, his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion, and how he carried it off that day, and no mistake, answering never a word, so sweet, so *chic*. And he had a fantasy, when the second side of the

rent was all but finished, that she was for leaving him now, looking him good-bye, a heavy good-bye of eyes loaded with gloom; and it was as if she said 'Good-bye,' so surely he knew it, only with her eyes, not with her lips, and again 'Good-bye; and I leave you, Jack, to your God alone: for truly, Jack, your hour cometh and now is; and it is for you now to bear yourself high up the scale, nor quiver in one nerve, like the over-overmen and high-transactors and vanguards of the world.'

He started alert, hearing a sound from nowhere. It was, as it were, the banshee: and 'Ho! ho!' it called, and 'Come! come!'

He made a dart, stretched headlong toward a front window, and, looking downward, could see by the lantern before the 6d.-bed house that the street seemed full of policemen.

'Oh, but how could you, Harold!' he went, shrinking: 'God forgive Harold for this——'

As soon as he had arrived at this house, Pole's young lady had sent the office-boy to tell Pole.

Instantly Jack was in action, caught up the trousers, and, as he was, in shirt, drawers, and socks, slipped through the door, and went flying down the dark steps, seeing at once that the top-rooms were simply a trap without escape, and remembering, too, that his lock was crazy, and could be sprung by a few efforts; he hoped to escape by the back, if he was not too late; if he was, he knew that the first-floor lock was better, and on the chance of finding it open, down he stole like a wind to the second-floor, there heard feet ascending the lowest flight, but still to meet them he ran down, saw some thronging forms, but saw also the first-floor front-door open, and slipped in. He slipped in, however, under the upward-turned beams of two bull's-eyes, and he heard the whisper: 'There he goes!'

He had the door well slammed and locked before the first shock fell upon it. The room was dark, though without blinds or curtains, but the outer night was murky, and the sashes so inveterate with grime,

that the 6d.-bed lamp just near hardly made a difference. It was the room of a widow who had two girl-children and lived by cleaning two offices in the Temple; he had given her this first-floor *in perpetuo*, but no one was now in. Almost at once the door began to be assailed; and he heard the gruff call: 'Better open, if you know what's good for yourself!'

He ran to one of the two windows, to see if they had been tricky enough to leave a guard outside: yes—at least thirty men were there, officers and gathering crowd. Bailey, the detective, now a full Inspector - Detective, had, in consultation with Pole, suggested seven officers all told, but Pole had only laughed, assuring him that Jack Hay was not a Whitechapel rough, and in the end fifteen had been arranged for, fifteen had come. Jack sat a minute on the unmade clothes of a bed in a corner near the door, put hand to brow, and considered it, while the bombardment acted upon the door with clubs and, it seemed to him, a crowbar also. So trapped, what had he to hope? But the very hopelessness roused his stubbornness to make a flutter for it. To yield was best—not to strive, nor cry: but if they took him, there were two hideous possibilities: first, that he might be proved innocent, then all his miseries before and during the trial would go for nothing: instantly afterwards Raby would be scragged; or, secondly, if they took him, he might be found guilty, but not hanged: Raby had said on the broch that he would not be hanged after so long, and the alternative was prison—fifteen, twenty years. Even as a lad he had not much feared the hanging, it was the cell, and now much worse he feared the cell: he fancied a prison airless like the Dorset Street doss-houses—fifteen years of Dorset Street, when one night was so bad. If he had only kept his appointment and gone with Sir James H—— to Dartmoor, he would have known better: but he had gone to Cumberland instead. And his enemies left him little time for thought or choice: the door was soon cracking: and up he jumped on the acme of alacrity, high-strung,

all thought driven out of him by the pressure of the moment, and the instinct to achieve his escape. For European police he had an ingrained contempt, and might have flung open the door and ruffled it among a phalanx with a certain gaiety, if he alone had been concerned: but he had to be cautious for others. What he knew for certain was, that if he once got upon the back of Freewill, which now stood saddled for him in St. Martin's Lane, no English police would ever come near catching him: without fail he would get to the coast, and clear out. The dart, then, was to drop among those in the street, scatter them, and spurt for St. Martin's Lane. He would have to write a new confession, and he would have no money, but, as to money, once in the country he would contrive to get into touch with 'Buddo.' . . .

But when he again glanced below, this hope left him: the little street was packed from end to end; if the public helped the police, he would fall, and that would be the end. . . .

He paced the room several times: it was empty of furniture, save a washstand, a table, a bed, and two old chairs, yet fragrant with flowers somewhere; there was no carpet: the boards creaked under his soft, swift tread. A tack's head, which had once nailed a carpet, caught and tore his left sock. He heard some laughs and calls from the crowd, and at the door the action of the crowbar, with thud, thud, and now, too, once more a coughing, like a ghost-drum.

When he could see a glimmer of the bull's-eyes through the cracking door, he pushed up a sash—a movement which threw the crowd into noise and agitation. By now he had conceived another plan—to get to the second-floor back, jump from the window into the yard, and escape over the wall behind the shed, a wall which separated his back-yard from a little alley before the houses at the back. The leap from the second-floor would certainly be bold: but he thought that he could, and decided to dare it—if he could get to the second-floor.

Outside the first-floor windows ran, as usual, a pro-

jection, a foot wide, covered with tin, and now also with pots of flowers. On this, when he was sure that the door was nearly gone, he stood, and the crowd, expecting to see him jump among them, hung murmuring upon his actions: instead of looking down, however, he looked up, and, before anyone knew what was pending, he had leapt, spurred to action by the inrush now into the first-floor room. One of the second-floor windows was open, and to the slanting ledge of this his fingers had caught by his leap—a feat impossible to a shorter or less active man: there he hung the tenth of a second stretched to an inordinate gray-white length, seeming to the eyes below quite certain to fall and break his back. The question whether he fell or not depended upon whether his left fingers could cling to the ledge during the second's space while his right hand gripped the sill within: this he managed, and now was no more an elongated form of white, but a struggling bent body, winning itself into the window, which swallowed him little by little as a fish-bird a large fish. When he got a knee upon the sill, the crowd gave up a noise which was more than half a cheer; but at the same time a calamity befel him: for his trousers, which he had had across his left shoulder, slipped to the ground. The shout: 'Stop, or we fire!' followed him from the outside group of officers: but he did not stop, and they did not fire.

He dashed across the room to the door: but he was already cut off from the back-room by some of the officers, who, while he scaled the window, had been running up. To reach the back-room, indeed, was now useless, unless he should decide to run through the streets without trousers, or could find a pair belonging to the man who lived there: but because he had started out to reach it, he made for it—in vain, however: for as he approached the door, it flew back and struck him on the brow, and with the first-arrived of the police he had a short shoulder-fight for the door, he pressing to close it, the other to force it back: it steadily closed, however, and he, with his right side against it, turned the key.

Immediately afterwards the forcing of this door, too, commenced.

He, panting now, turned to see a ghost in a chemise, a ghost which saw a ghost in drawers. The next moment a match was struck, and applied to a candle on a box by a woman who had leapt from bed.

'Bill got any trousers?' he came whispering to her; but immediately his interest was changed: 'who gave you that eye?'

All under her left eye was engorged and dark.

'Bill give me this afternoon,' said she, looking scared: 'what's all the bother?'

'The traps are after me. Don't you mind: get into bed again. Bill got any trousers here?'

'Not here: there's a pair o' cords in the back. What you lagged for?'

'Can't tell you now—I haven't done any wrong——'

'Good Gaud, they'll have that door down, and I'm half dead with the cold as it is——'

Her bed in truth was poorly clad, and she stooped in an attitude of cold: a little fair-haired ugliness she was, with sodden face and black left eye, and in the room nothing comely, save three bunches of flowers in beer-cans on the mantelpiece, and some in pots on the floor under the windows.

'I'm off, then,' he whispered hurriedly: 'don't wash the eye yourself: make Bill wash it, and kiss it each time, and as he kisses it, you say "I forgive you," and that road you may be dead certain he'll never do it again. Don't forget, now . . . good-bye. . . .'

He stooped to puff out the light, and stooping saw an old leather belt, half-an-inch wide, beside the box, which he took and fastened round him, since his drawers had a tendency to drop. This done, he puffed out the light, and ran to the door, seeing no object in waiting till it was broken in.

This door, frailer than that below, was not being bombarded, but strained open by the shoulder. One heard it labour more ominously with each fresh strain. But before the 'lock' was sprung, Jack, in the midst of a strain, turned the 'key', whereat two men tumbled

in with the door, and he was outside among his enemies.

At this point his mind was without plan: his object was to escape—no matter how, either through the back-room window, with or without trousers, or down the stairs, without. Now, therefore, was the moment for a flutter: they were all there, at least ten of them, on the landing, on the stairs, thronging in a semi-darkness deepened by bull's-eyes, some of them in plain clothes, some in thick blue, a rather dire force of flesh, and yonder in the dark below all, Pole, wild-eyed, in his sack-coat and silk wraps, whose orders they obeyed as if he were an official. Jack, indeed, took them by storm, and was half through the press before resistance had well begun. He had seen at a glance that the back-door was closed, and darted for the steps, on the third of which definite stoppage took place, and the fight began—not a fair fight, for they could hurt him as they chose, and he could not wilfully hurt them, but still a powerful fight, and a dubious, they ten to one, he ten in one. He used the banister with the right hand to drag against, and steadily as a clock's minute-hand half-imperceptibly wins its minutes, discarding the past, so he forged through that sea of sighs, a silent sea but for stamps, shufflings, and breaths, and sudden transformation-scenes of relative positions, and Jack's little smothered laughs. After two minutes there came a rather long deadlock, when all the force of either side could avail nothing, Pole, too, below, now propping an officer's back, clinging to the banisters, his face turned downward, Jack grinning with effort, the right leg stretched, the left bent and higher by two steps, both hands now on the banister, his hair wildly rumped; working at his lower hand were two, one at his upper, three at his body, four, including Pole, heaving the whole mass upward, and one running into the woman's room blowing a whistle. Through all the strain Jack was conscious of the foul breath of someone relentlessly haunting his nostrils, and once a voice wounded him—Pole's—panting: 'Someone catch—this right leg.' But now the struggle reeled a moment to the

middle of the stairs; his right hand had been wrenched from the banister, himself dragged away, and all the stumbling mass with him; and here, happening to get prise at the edge of a step with both feet, he pushed; the power of his weight disrupted them; three were hurled with such violence against the rail, that it gave way with a prolonged crackling fracas, and two went tumbling down the reverse arm of the stairs. Jack now was free; but he had burst from the strain with such suddenness, that it would have been a feat to escape a fall, even if he had not been tripped; but he was tripped: someone got a momentary hold of his right ankle, and he fell at his length on his face, his legs on the stairs, his head on the little landing below—a thump that thrilled the old house. The instant he fell, Pole, who had been hurled against a wall of the landing by the scattering, seeing that loved head suddenly at his feet, cut it quick—twice—with a bamboo-cane which he carried, during which act his face assumed an expression very like lunacy. And down they came at once, tumbling, staggering, over him, everything transacting itself in a confirmed half-dark, and no act of anyone now having the least premeditation; while on the stairs below, too, were men hurrying up, both the two who had tumbled, and the street-group summoned by whistle; but before these arrived, Jack had very agilely twisted himself to his feet again, and, taking everyone by surprise, was tearing himself out of the hands that gripped at him—up the stairs again. His motive for going up he could not have told; only, he felt rather than saw that the bigger mass was below, that he could not pass downward, and, since he *had* to escape, must escape upward. In fact, only two were above him, and these, one by one, failed to hold him: one of them—the one who had gone into the front-room blowing the whistle—was just in front of the back-room door, so that he could not enter without a struggle, and up his own stair he started. One of his feet was caught, and again he fell, but this time harmlessly on his hands, while one kick

freed his leg, and he was gone again, with the half-laughing shout: 'You shan't have me!' the bull's-eyes lighting a face now streaming red; up after him they came pelting with a hubbub of feet that was heard in the street, but he easily reached his front-room, and locked the door.

Now there was light, and he saw blood from his face dripping down his shirt and drawers: it was in his hair, on his hands, and all about him. That, however, was nothing: what he had to do now was to think, well and quickly, especially quickly, for the catch of this lock shot crooked, and only held by a corner. The back-room had no door opening upon the passage; but there was a door between back and front rooms, not in the middle of the partition, but at that end of it, near the outside passage. His first act was to catch up his trousers (the muddled pair), then the roll of notes from the cashbox: this he stuck in his shirt; he then ran into the unfurnished back-room, then back into the front aimlessly, then into the back again, thinking, wondering. He heard the lock straining. Running, he caught glimpses of his face in a little hanging mirror with red frame. He looked pretty wild, and no mistake: if Stephane saw him now, she would say that he was agitated—this thought flitted through his mind. Like the hunted stag he panted: if his face had not been all bruised, it would have been white. But he was only highstrung, not agitated: his breath, his physical heart was agitated, but in his other heart sat a calm life awaiting the outcome—with some interest. For the rest, his thoughts worked quickly, but coolly: he looked from a back-window down into the yard: that seemed the only way out. But that meant death—pretty certain: that, therefore, must not be thought of. On the other hand, he was not going to be taken by London bobbies, raw meat whose 'hand' would make a racer refuse a three-foot hedge, who perhaps couldn't back a broken two-year-old; if it had only been lawful to show them a bit of naked mauleys, he would have been free by now, much as tobacco had harmed his wind.

What, then, to do, to do? The wretched lock was going. He looked down again into the yard: there was the shed-roof. . . . It would be a tremendous leap. . . .

He lowered his left lid, and estimated it. The shed lay precisely in a line with the window at which he stood; it would break the fall by over ten feet; it was twenty feet from the house. A great leap: but if he were taken, he might be proved innocent; Pole had threatened that: and all would be for nothing; or he might have fifteen years. . . .

Quickly he rent away the inner guide of the lower sash, a strip of old wood, then the inner guide of the upper; ran soft-footed into the front-room, got a clasp-knife, ran back, cut the ropes, and in a jiffy had the sashes out.

Now he had a leg lifted to put into his trousers, when he was seized by the thought: 'But suppose the shed-roof gives way—suppose I'm killed—without the confession?' Then he would die for nothing: Raby would be scragged. It was necessary, therefore, to make the confession before the leap: for that some preparation was necessary: he would have no time. . . . To save time, he threw the trousers into the yard to take afterwards, first peering double over the sill to make sure that no one was there; then, bending double, reaching down, he dropped one by one his jacket, and his boots. The roll of notes he had in his shirt.

Now he ran back to the front room, took a Colt's revolver from a green-baize bag of old revolvers hanging beside the mantelpiece, and stuck it inside his shirt; he then caught up three campstools and laid them in a row some feet before the door of communication between the two rooms; with them he laid the lounge-chair on its side, throwing a couple of lion-skins with all, so as to make a well-defined frontier and limit. The door was now straining to its inevitable give-way, and even as he now ran into the back-room, the pop came, and the front room swarmed with eager feet—feet that halted on a sudden, for all

they could see of him was a hand emerging from the darkness, pointing a cocked revolver, and through the noise of the inrush his voice, strong-trembling, pealed:

'No man pass one step beyond that line of chairs, or I fire!' (The revolver was unloaded.)

They paused in a mass, young faces, some of them, bathed in sweat, two of the foremost bearded and burly, all stalwart, and over the shoulder of a slim giant with moustaches peeped the wildness of Pole's face, who, in the involuntary pause and silence, cried out:

'Have him! he won't fire. . . .'

'Oh, yes, I will, Harold, my old friend,' said Jack. 'Men! you've got me now: just hear a few words I have to say beforehand——'

'Hear nothing——' began Pole, but was seized with coughing that filled the room with echoes.

'Look alive, then, and say it,' called square-browed Bailey from the middle of the throng.

Jack dropped the revolver, and said in a tone that would have been ordinary, but for his pantings:

'I only want to own up straight away that I did do it, since you've been smart enough to nab me. You're after me for that murder of Dr. Stanley, aren't you, on the night of the 11th of August, 18—? Well, there's no use my saying that I didn't do it. He had a flask which he used to drink from every night, and I tipped the juice of my pipe into it when he wasn't looking, as we two sat together at his house. But I wasn't too sure of the tobacco-juice doing it, and so I tried to put into his glass some arsenic, which I had stolen that day from my friend Skerrett, the chemist: but he caught me in the act, and howled out that I wanted to poison him. The two servants heard him all right: one of them was called "Burnie," and the other's name was Jean Armstrong: no doubt they are still alive—*Burnie*, and *Jean Armstrong*. But, of course, he didn't drink any of the arsenic, after dropping to it: what killed him was the tobacco-juice. I wanted

to kill him so as to run away with his daughter. All the other details you will find written out on a document in that cashbox on the table there—God bless you. . . .’

‘Quick! Shoot his legs! he’s going to leap——!’ shrieked Pole.

But Jack was gone.

Some of them rushed just in time to see the great white form stand on the window-sill, his head and shoulders hidden behind the window-top; and upon their ears there burst a shout, uttered as it were in the passion of death: ‘Into Thy hands I commit my spirit. . . .’ and he was there no more.

At that outcry sudden lights appeared all along the row of windows at the back yonder, and peering eyes peered under them. If they were soon enough, and if the night had been less murky, they would have seen a feat: for as a cat alights, so Jack, after all that voyage, alighted, easily on his toes in the centre of the shed-roof, and the roof gave and bounced beneath his weight, but did not break. Four days before this, or four days after this, he might have made the leap with success: but it had been raining; the old slanting roof was slippery: and the instant he touched it, he slipped. The next thing that happened was the impact of his feet upon the wooden railings at the edge, and like match-wood they flew, so that the fall from the window to the roof, and that from the roof to the ground, were not like two falls, but like one, so instantaneous was the giving-way of the rail at the mere wind, as it were, of his travelling; then the quickest of the women up yonder at the windows heard two distinct thuds: the first was when his head and shoulders struck the ground; the second, which happened at a perceptible interval afterwards, was when his feet slapped down together; and with the first, his head was twisted under his weight, so that his neck brake. And in Upper St. Martin’s Lane, nibbling the bit, nodding the head, stood Free-will, ready saddled for him, to take him to Camden Town.

As for Pole, no one ever descended a stair more wildly quick than he that night, and, coming to where the body was, he lay with it in the mud, making a whimpering like a dog, and fondling the dead head, with the bubbled words 'dead' and 'love,' repeated and repeated. When the others came down they saw all the bosom and face of the corpse covered with such a quantity of blood as could never have come from his own bruises, but had come from Pole's lungs. And now Pole felt and knew that he was dying.

He was supported by one man, while two others wiped the blood and mud from his clothes, mouth and beard; then he was lifted out through the crowd to Drury Lane, and put into a cab. He gave the address 'Victoria Street' in the old strong voice, then lay back, and the officer beside him could hear his final breathings.

Midway he stopped the cab at a pillar-box, and made the officer post a letter to Gracie, which contained the details of Raby's crime, and of Jack's interposition. He had written it that afternoon, intending to keep it by him, in case any event might make it necessary, never dreaming that he would post it that night.

Tears streamed down his convulsed face.

He stopped again at a large house with a porch not far from Buckingham Palace, and said to the officer: 'Help me out'; then, leaning on a pillar, he said: 'Don't wait, officer: I'm all right'—and he insisted. The officer gone, he bid the cabman wait, then moved forward to knock: but he was five minutes leaning again before he knocked.

A footman in half-dress opened.

'Is Mr. Raby in?'

'I'll see, sir——'

'An old friend: he wants to see me. Mrs. Raby in?'

'No, sir.'

'Look here, I have had a hæmorrhage: just lend me a hand up.' He leant upon the footman, and they moved inwards.

The rooms here were magnificent, but desert. It

was the house of intimate friends, now abroad, with whom the Rabys always stayed. No one but Raby and four of the housekeeper's-staff happened to be in. Miss Ames was gone to a dinner, Gracie to some musical evening. Raby had dined alone with the child, Gertrude. The hour was nearly nine, and the child now abed.

Passing slowly by a morning-room Pole, seeing some paper, said: 'Stay, I will write a line to Mrs. Raby,' and in the light of one jet, he wrote her in a few words that Jack was dead, and why. 'Let her see this,' he said, and left it on a table.

'Have you a card, sir?' asked the man in a first-floor reception-room.

'Say Mr. Hay.'

'You look very poorly, sir. Can I——?'

'No: you hurry.'

The footman left him. Pole had now sunk into a chair the picture of exhaustion and debility, a moon-eyed skeleton that still breathed, and was fevered, and poured sweat from every pore; his cavernous breathing was mixed with *râles* whose loudness shocked the ear; he felt a soreness of the mouth: and knowing that this soreness was the last, by a great effort he rose again as the footman disappeared, and tottering, yet wary, went after him, now leaning a while, now spurring himself to follow. In most of the rooms were lights, but low; some of the furniture was in hollands. This house, with its heavy elegance so dim-lit, and its spaciousness more than ordinary in London, had a melancholy of dead cities. Out in the corridor, and up to the second-floor whither Pole shadowed the footman, it was almost dark. Pole heard the man knock, and the 'Come in' of a well-known voice; he heard the announcement: 'Mr. Hay, sir.'

'Hay?' cried Raby: 'I'll be down in one——' But he started, hearing quite near a sound all tell-tale of the tomb, that banshee-cough, weird gossip of the tolling bell, and closed lids, and good-night for ever. And immediately, still coughing, Pole had slipped past

the footman, and sunk into the nearest chair, a high-backed wooden arm-chair Henri Quatre.

'You go,' whispered Raby close and intimately to the footman, knowing panic in his heart: and he locked the door.

'You here, man?' said he, arms akimbo.

Pole, with open mouth and languished eye, panted a little, pouring his death-sweats.

'Jack's dead for you,' he gasped: 'you have to die, too—to-night—to-night. All's known—here's the pipe: he took it to my partner, not knowing. When he found that I knew, he confessed the murder. I tried to arrest—he jumped from a window. He's dead. You can't live. I've written it all to Gracie—motive, means, everything—*she'll* hang you—he's dead, he's dead——'

No other word he spoke: for Raby, after darting once through the room, stooping, with clenched fist, darted back, knelt before the chair, and smiled; and though in that smile Pole saw his own speedier death, yet he, too, faintly smiled. Deliberately Raby with his ten stretched fingers took his enemy by the throat; and as if by that action he had touched the spring of a mechanism, Pole's arms rose up, and so remained, spread out; he made not the least resistance, but, sitting back, underwent his death; only, a continuous creak of the throat was heard through a crooked corner of his mouth, till his arms dropped, and he was dead—within five minutes of his entrance into the room.

Raby then went and sat some distance away in a shadow of bed-curtains, his hands and sleeves wet by a trickle which had issued from Pole's mouth; and there for some twenty minutes he sat, panting, but silent. The chamber was very large, more like two rooms than one, containing three windows looking upon the street, and occupying the whole breadth of the house except for one other, narrow room, which was ordinarily a *cabinet de toilette*, but for the present the bedroom of little Gertrude. This large chamber, now brightly lit, contained a French bed with Henri

Quatre canopy and hangings, the carpet, wardrobes and other furniture, including a book-case, being in the same sombre and massive style. Raby usually made it as much his dwelling-room as his bedroom, and at the moment of Pole's entrance had been reading compline in the easy-chair where he now sat, wearing slippers and a dressing-gown of red and gold. Yonder now in the high-backed chair he had a face for company, no longer of lily and rose, which being dead, yet spoke. It had been sweet to choke him, though brief: but the afterwards of such pleasures is not nice—always the heavy corpse, the heavy babe, the gross paunch, the excrement. Raby knew now this elementary truth—had begun to learn it lately: if he and Jack had lived, Jack would have taught him fully. But time was too short for him, and destiny cut him off. He knew that he could not live: Gracie knew all; he had murdered Pole; far above all, Jack had died because of him: he, too, must die. But look at his face now, and what is the expression? Stubborn resentment—hard-headed as a mule's: a stubbornness by no means irrational, a resentment by no means unjust. What he knew for certain was what each man knows in his heart: that it was not his fault. Something within him or without him had been stronger than he, such as he was. He had stolen a few pounds, and his state of mind in stealing them had not been a criminal state: it was as if he had been stealing from his father. For this the doctor had locked him into the broch, to ruin him; and in this hour of his death he saw with indignation the wickedness of that act. Just it might have been, if the doctor had been an angel: but the doctor, too, had stolen, half-consciously stolen in at least two ways, unconsciously stolen in a million ways; had been born on stolen ground, brought up in a den of half-selfconscious thieves: but, having allowed himself to believe what society teaches, that one who steals in certain ways is more a thief than one who steals in other ways, he had had no forgiveness for Raby—*he*, a Christian priest, who had read the words of Christ, but believed not one, reading

with eyes all preoccupied with other beliefs, which, seeing, could not see. He had taken Raby into the brooch: and for Raby to murder just there and then, with his own internal brutishness and those external conditions, had been as irresistible as to murder Pole this night, or for streams to flow. The breviary at his feet Raby kicked a little way across the floor with languid contempt: all his maudlin repentance, his clerical prayers and states-of-mind, in a moment now his mind was cleared of them as of cobwebs: he saw that he was what the earth first, and society afterwards, had made him: a jackanapes wronged by a world of jackanapes, without 'sin,' but loaded with misfortune, and the Devil was all in it. That the Devil may be only one of God's disguises did not enter into his poor heated heart.

Sharply he rose after twenty minutes, opened a wardrobe, groped in a drawer, and brought out a revolver. He put it on the bed. On a table was a four-ounce bottle of medicine marked 'Poison,' a few drops of which he was then taking daily: it contained strychnine, and was nearly full. He put it on the bed with the revolver. He then walked across toward the corridor-door, passing on the way a towel-horse and also Pole: he took a towel, and tossed it, without looking, and not very successfully, over Pole's face, lest any eyes, still open, should see, and rejoice. He then went out, locking the door, and taking the key.

On the first-floor was a study of one of his hosts, the St. John-Heygates, who had travelled much, and on its walls, arranged in figures, were many kinds of outlandish weapons. Raby made his way to that room; he found it dark; he had no matches; and with sudden fright, his hair bristling, out he flew again, catching wildly, as he flew, at some paper on a desk; he then ran along a passage to a lighted room, and entered it with a ghastly little laugh of escape. By his catch-out at the paper he had secured a sheet, and twisting it, he applied it to the gasalier. Quick, therefore, now, he ran with it alight, apprehensive that one should dare to puff it out, and

when it burned blue, his heart, suspecting malice, quailed: if it had gone out, he could never have returned to the study: but in the nick of time he got the gas alight.

From a fan-group on the wall he now selected a Toledo *puñal* (or dagger) with a slightly-curved bone handle: and with this he returned to his room, locked the door upon himself, and placed the *puñal* beside the revolver and the poison.

He was much paler than Pole, as he stood now and contemplated them, making grim choice. But he said aloud with hard brow:

'It's got to be done, and it's going to be done'—and it was a man with a will who said that.

He took up the *puñal*, and with wild-winking eyes pointed it to his heart; then put it upon the bed again.

Now he threw off his dressing-gown, his tie, his collar, upon the chair where he had been sitting; cast his braces from his shoulders; threw off his shirt, too, upon the chair; and now he was a manly slim form in undervest and trousers.

Now he looked down at the three instruments of death again; and he said:

'Yes, you have died for me: and if my living could do you any good, and I could manage it, I'd live, only for your dear sake: but I've got to go, too, you see. . . .'

To his wife, his children, he gave not a thought: they and all, except Jack, were to him like food already enjoyed, swallowed, and done with for ever.

He glanced behind, where he would have to fall, and quick, catching up the *puñal*, with wild-winking eyes he aimed, and stabbed his breast.

Blood ran out, slowly, but copiously: he waited, however, to fall and die, and did not.

Suddenly, with hand clapped on mouth, as if to hush himself, he flew across the room, wild of eye, without aim, a lugubrious sound of 'Oh-h!' proceeding from his throat; and back again he flew, caught up the revolver, and with random aim, shot it at his head;

but as he pulled the trigger his head flinched sideways to evade, and the bullet struck him in the right jaw, shattering the integuments which hold up the lower jaw to the upper on that side: the lower jaw dropped crooked, and through his crooked mouth came a cry.

What was impossible to him was to renew with the same instrument an attempt which had once failed, while another instrument remained: he dropped the revolver, seized the bottle, and tried to drink: but from his wry-hung mouth it nearly all flowed away; his doddering hand rattled the bottle's mouth among his teeth and lips like a clock's pendulum working without the weight; so that he could get hardly a drop.

His plight now was so deplorably mortal, that gladly one would turn from it, if one might. Surely now all the huntsmen have caught thee, poor Raby, and the dogs have thee: but in God be thy hope. Already the savour of the worm is in his mouth, and lonesome nights in the grave; the menace of Eternity, most great and starless, appals him, yet, eager to know the worst, he is eager to be away: but he cannot die. Where all the blood came from, if from one man or from ten, and how all things got so freely and quickly dabbled, it seemed hard to say. He caught up the *puñal* from the floor, ran, flung open the book-case doors, forced the handle between two of a tight row of books at the height of his heart, then ran away, turned, and started to run upon the dagger's point; and it was in the midst of that run that there burst from him the first of a series of shouts, the shout '*Help!*' which sounded through the house, and was heard in the street; but as his lips could not close to pronounce the 'p' lip-sound, his shout was '*Hel!*' and mad with horror he repeated it, when, at his impact upon the *puñal*, the point sprang upward, tearing his breast and vest, but not entering the body; again he fixed it straight, and as he ran away, he shouted '*Hel!*' and as he turned to run again upon it, he shouted '*Hel!*' Now he bled freely enough, and all himself,

and where he ran, and what he touched, were red. Again he ran upon the point, again it sprang upward, and he was ripped, but lived; and now, as he again uttered his panting hell-cry, there were knockings at the locked door, and, hearing it, he cried in answer 'Hel!' but did not otherwise notice their poundings and imploring cries to open. For the third time with piteous obstinacy he fixed the *puñal*, though now feeble and dying: he ran away again, turned, and, shouting for help, started to run upon the point: but this time he failed in the midway, and almost stopped: however, he did not quite stop, for, as if seized by an inspiration, he changed his course, dashed for the nearest window, threw up the sash, and from the sill itself, shouting 'Hel!' into the astonished street, cast himself down, and was killed.

Soon men were knocking at the street door, and a whistle calling. The footman ran down, three officers came up, and a lock was picked. When they got in they saw the room like a scene of carnage, and the body of Pole with a towel half-over the face.

The four servants huddled together in the morning-room after the bodies had been removed, Proteus presenting to them a new shape now: for horror was all in the midst of life, and an hour ago a different world from now. They discussed among themselves the coming of Mrs. Raby, asking who should tell her. In this way nearly two hours passed.

She had left her entertainment early, and driven to the Hotel V——, breaking a promise made to her husband to come straight home. At the door of Jack's suite, to her great surprise, she was faced by the gloom-laden eyes of Stephane, who was alone in the suite. They shook hands at the door, for they had met before, and Stephane said: 'He is not in: I do not know where he is. He would have been here, if all had only been well.'

'Is not all well?'

'Not all.'

'With him?'

'Not even with him.'

'But—you terrify me! he is my friend. . . .'

'Don't be terrified, dear Mrs. Raby. Underneath everything, where Hell should be, there is our Creator; and if a thing drop down, or if it fly up, it comes at last to Him, passing through Him. I say this to comfort you.'

'But—what is wrong with Jack, Lady St. Delmo?'

'I don't know. Better go home to your husband. I won't ask you in: only let me kiss you. . . .'

This kiss was most surprising, both for its unusualness, and its supplicating tenderness. Gracie drove home in a singular state, half soothed, half apprehensive: and she no sooner saw the footman's face than she had a knowledge of tragedy.

He followed her, catching up from the hall-table a plate with Pole's letter on it, the other servants peeping after them from a doorway. In the reception-room above, now brightly lit, he gave her the letter: and, under the gasalier, she read that Jack was dead, and why.

He, with eyes fixed on the ground, wringing his hands, stood some distance off; she, throwing herself into a chair, said:

'Well, why do you wait?'

'I'm bound to tell you, mum——' he began with studied speech.

'Don't be afraid,' said she.

'I'm bound to tell you, mum, that Mr. Raby is no more.'

'What, has he committed suicide?'

'I regret to say, mum—yes.'

'Well, don't wait. Tell Alice I shall ring when I want her.'

'If you please, mum, the women-servants have instructed me to say that you should not go into the second-floor front-room——'

'Very well, then. Don't wait.'

He bowed low, and left her, and there she sat now, her face propped on her hand, with closed eyes, exhibiting no feeling but weariness: only, her white bosom rocked some pear-shaped pearl-drops that

poured in rays from her necklace, rocked them with the motion of a hand that waves a weary, slow good-bye. She was in cream, with a furred cloak, and about her head something light in Spanish hand-lace.

One might have thought her asleep, but for the pinched look of her nose, its freckled white. After some time, however, she rose, peeped out of two doors, cautious to be unobserved, and stole up swiftly to that forbidden room, bent upon finding something. The lock had been spoiled, and the police unable to secure the door again; she found the chamber dim, and turned up two of the lights, with a wild heart now. Many objects were black and still glutinous, everything more or less plague-spotted with red. Having turned up two bracket-jets, she went back and shut the door, and with her back against it, looked at it all, with gloomy underlook. When her mouth filled, she went to the washstand to spit, and there again stood still, looking. At her feet not far from the bed was a considerable pool, still wet, there where he had first stabbed his breast: and looking down, she dribbled deliberately upon it, her lips curved with scorn, now hardly sane. She next turned to the washstand, and found on one of its shelves what she had come for—a leather roll: a key was in it, and, opening, she found it stuck full of razors. She took two, one with a white handle, one with a black, and put them into her cloak-pocket. She next threw off her head-scarf, and going, with quick step now, to a wardrobe, stooped to get something. In the midst of this act she heard a call—the call "*Mamma!*" She took no notice, but continued to grope: she wanted a hat, and drew the first that came to hand, one with an extravagant ostrich-feather that from the front stretched like an arch, and fell in plumage behind. Now she heard her child's voice call again: 'Is anyone there?' She took no notice, but with lifted arms proceeded to pin on the hat before the wardrobe-mirror, and she was still doing this, when she saw in the mirror a door open, and Gertrude's night-dressed image. This child, sleeping or waking, was never left

long alone : but her father had undertaken to be near her that evening, allowing her attendant to go out, and his death had caused her to be forgotten. She had been asleep, and neither the suicide's pistol-shot, nor his shouts for help, had waked her. Now she stood perhaps ten seconds white as a sheet at sight of all the blood, then uttered one scream, and then, like a mummy allowed to fall, stiffly, helplessly, fell in a fit. Her mother ran, and with crazy eyes stood over her, motionless, poring upon space ; the child's head was now moving by a series of jerks toward the left shoulder, biting the tongue. The mother did nothing for her, but rushed toward the corridor-door, and listened to determine if her scream had been heard : no one came : the servants, still herding like sheep, were in the basement. She shut the door, and ran back to the child, who was now in the second stage, presenting that shocking appearance of epilepsy, when the body is in agitation. Not an instant now did the poor mother hesitate, but running sneakishly to the bed, got a pillow, ran back, placed it over the child's face, and, kneeling, held it there. She meant well : she did not mean to be cruel : she was hardly sane. Into her mother's-face, while the pearl-drops on her bosom tremble, the ostrich-feather also, let us not glance. Nearly all the time while she held the pillow, the agitation of epilepsy continued, and the child, dying unconscious, perhaps died without the least pain. When all was still, the mother snatched up her hands from the pillow with a gasp. And, quite breathless, she went to look out of that window from which her husband had thrown himself, that she might recover her wind. She found it still open : for all in the room, by instructions of the police, remained as it had been.

There, looking out on her elbows, she observed that a cab, when it approaches one, shows two white lights ; but when it recedes from one, it shows two smaller red lights ; and there are cabs which, in receding, show a red light on one side, and a green on the other, like a ship. This she had not noticed before.

The street was neither empty nor full, the theatres hardly yet over. The day had been specially rainy; the pavements were mires; but at this hour the rain persisted only as a drizzle. Down there below rolled bus after bus, waves of a great river, carrying happy angels—so it seemed to Gracie. And she took a great interest in those happy beings, so foreign to her, looking down at them as at a show of Chinese or Martians. They were not like her.

All the time her mouth filled, and she carried it awhile, then spat.

When she had well recovered her breath, she turned inward, and, guarding her eyes from looking at the still pillow on the floor, drew a certain wardrobe-drawer, whence she took an old photograph, shapeless now and brown—the photograph of a boy in an Eton-jacket; also an old letter which Jack had written her from the Cumberland mountains when flying the police: it was written on three pieces of foolscap, and still bore traces of the black sealing-wax that had sealed it. This and the photograph she put into her bosom. She then went out, and down, very guiltily, and passed out of the front door, which she left a little open, dreading to make a sound. And now she ran a little eastward, toward the Abbey, till she came upon a policeman in wet oil-skins, to whom she said:

‘I wish to know where the body of a man would be who leapt this evening from a window of the Hotel V——. Do you know?’ (She assumed that it was from the Hotel V—— that Jack had leapt, for Pole’s note had not said whence.)

‘He’d be in the Catacombs beyond a doubt,’ said the officer: ‘do you want, then——?’

‘Which Catacombs?’

‘Under St. Martin’s Church—just the other side of Charing Cross. Are you thinking, then——?’

She heard no more, but ran again, and took the first cab. She heard Big Ben strike eleven. In five minutes she was at the church.

She found, on taking her purse from the pocket in her cloak-lining, that she had a shilling and half-a-

sovereign. To the cabman she paid the shilling, and, armed with the half-sovereign, having asked her further way, went forward through an iron gate into a yard surrounded with railings on three sides; some plane-trees and the shadow of the north side of the church made the yard dark; but, just before her, as she entered, she saw a policeman.

‘Can you tell me if a Mr. Bennett, who leapt from a window this evening, is here?’

‘I couldn’t, miss.’

‘He is a friend of mine. I want to make sure: can I—see?’

‘Too late now, miss, I’m afraid.’

She slipped the half-sovereign into his hand. He peered and saw that it was not sixpence.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘I’m only on for an hour or two for the mortuary-keeper. . . . P’raps I might show you round, if you’ll follow me.’

He led down some stone steps hard by the side of the church. They came first to a landing overhung by a lantern, which lit little more than the landing itself, and thence descended still further into a vaulted passage, paved with flags; at its beginning lay two or three fire-ladders mixed with hose, with a notice on the wall; its end was lost in a darkness into which they walked with echoes, till the policeman stopped at a door on the left, turned a key, and disappeared from her sight. She followed a few steps into rayless gloom, till he struck a match and applied it to one of two burners hung from a vault, the gas-piping being an inverted T, with thin, long arms. She saw herself in a chamber surrounded with a bench, and on the bench piles of coffins, reaching nearly to the roof. The man surveyed it and her from his height, showing some green teeth in a smile. He was a stout, easy-going man of forty with a beard, and when he came forth on duty his thought was of going off again; his occupation was to wait, patience his *forte*, and like patience itself he stared at Grief, not seeing it, but foreseeing dinner and bed.

‘They don’t put ’em here any more,’ said he: ‘this

is one o' the old parts. You mayn't believe it, but there's nigh a thousand o' them 'ere, though the Catacombs proper is on the other side o' the passage, under the church. It wasn't only those that met a violent death that come here in former times: all up above, and round about here, was burial-grounds. This is the *Royal* Parish of St. Martin's, you know. Oh, yes. You have heard tell of Nell Gwynn, no doubt: it was she built this church, or the King built it for her—one of the two. This is the *Royal* parish. Oh, yes.'

She was about to say: 'But he is not here,' but held her peace, thinking that he may have assumed the office of showman for the half-sovereign, and timorous of offending him, since she had a favour to ask. He for his part, seeing now her raiment, her astonishing necklace, spoke and smiled with a certain deference of the born slave, searching himself to give her all his scraps of information, while she both pretended and felt an interest in all those piles of dead, this atmosphere of death, whose gloom the gas-jet could not lift.

'There's no smell,' said he: 'you can see for yourself.'

'No,' said she, 'no smell'—and clandestinely spat.

He turned out the gas; they went out; he locked the door.

'This way, miss.'

Following now in the semi-darkness of the passage, she reached up to him, saying in a timorous voice:

'He was a great friend of mine. Will you leave us together twenty minutes? I suppose he is certainly here?'

'Where did it happen?'

'At the Hotel V——'

'Oh, he's sure to be here somewhere. But I couldn't very well leave you, miss. That'd be agen everything.'

She heard this with dismay, having no more money. He had led her into a narrower passage to the right, densely black again. He struck a match, a series of matches, showing her the grim, damp walls, saying

again and again: 'they're all in there, you see. . . . There's no smell; people think there's a smell; but you can see for yourself.'

'No,' she murmured, 'no smell'—and meekly acquiescing in all his talk, she followed, this gloom, this atmosphere, these dead, vaguely stirring in her what nearly every form of sensation now stirred: her consciousness of sex. At every half a chance, when the matches went out, she spat.

Turning to the left, they entered a passage which opened here and there into rooms; in the first of these he struck matches, showing empty coffins, saying: 'This is the coffin-store'; and here shells, lined with zinc, lay about on trestles and on tables; they were black-painted and of many sizes, the size of each being indicated by a white figure painted at the foot of the lid, as 5, 9, like boots; upon each shell lay its lid loosely in oblique positions. The next widening of the corridor was, he told her, 'the jury-room,' and here there hung another thin-armed gas-piping like an inverted T, of which he lit a burner; here were chairs, a table, and on the left a grille, behind which lay a coffin on a slanting bench, the foot nearest the grille, the head higher. On the grille hung a frame with a moveable card in it, printed with: 'Parish of St. Martin's. Public Mortuary'; and under this, in a row, the words: 'Registered Number, Name, Age.' The registered number of this coffin was high, 11,903: that was in writing, so was the name, Lily Waite, and the age, 35.

'This is where the jury views 'em,' said he, and, drawing the lid a little, he showed the dim face. She peered close and long, interested, her throat dry as sand, her mouth full. The dead had blonde frizzy hair, and showed part of one blue eye; all by the right corner of her mouth was discoloured: and here was pallor—startling; and here humanity fixed in meanness.

'This one's a case of carbolic,' said he: 'they'll be sitting on her in the morning. You see, there's no smell.'

She could not answer for what was in her mouth:

but when he turned away a little she found her chance.

'Did she commit suicide?'

'You may be sure. That's how they all go, very near.'

'How many—a day?'

'I've known as many as twenty-five in one day, but more often it's three or four a day: there's never a day without one. Look over here at the register.'

She followed him to a desk, on which lay a flat book, its pages ruled into compartments, with printed headings; and he showed her entries till she wondered when he would cease. 'Here again, you see,' he would say, 'this is another carbolic one'; or 'this one's a drowning'; or 'here's a hanging, but they're not too common.' Only the turning leaves broke the stillness; the quivering gas-jet hardly disturbed the prevalent gloom. Above them London roared: but they could not hear it at all; and the world of life seemed very far away.

'Nice lot, aren't they?' said he, looking at her.

This was what she dreaded—a question; she answered with one word, 'Yes,' but at the expense of an overflow and slavering chin.

Entry after entry: and once there was the name of a lord. 'There's Lord Edmond F——,' said he: 'I seed him with my own eyes: he had dropped dead with heart-disease.' Only one lord, however: the rest were poor, and came not for heart-disease, like the lord, but for poverty. Not very many had actually starved to death, but still they came for poverty, directly or indirectly, as had also come our three poor friends, Jack, Pole, and Raby, for the poverty of Dr. Stanley. But usually they came for poverty much more directly—a daily massacre of, say, two hundred in London, none really 'suicides' (such a thing could not be), but all murdered, and murdered, too, thousands who do not come to mortuaries, but die in their beds—a very great slaughter. Who, then, killed poor Cock Robin?

'I,' said the Louse,
'With my Upper House,
I killed Cock Robin.'

Who saw him die?
'I,' said the High,
'With my gloomy Eye,
I saw him die. . . .'

Drearly long the man turned the dreary leaves with apparent pleasure, himself bent to read in the dimness, while she looked over his shoulder, seeing nothing. At last she walked away to the grille to look again, above all to spit, and, passing under the gaslight, her nose looked now as pinched as it would be in death. When he joined her again, she said :

'I hope that you will let me be alone with him at least some minutes. He was my lover.'

He moved his head negatively.

'I could hardly do that, miss.'

She said nothing more.

He now opened an iron gate, and led still further down the corridor, at the next widening of which, striking more matches, he showed wooden shells, ambulances, blocks of wood with hollows for pillowing dead heads, and buckets with hose in them, which, he said, were for sousing bodies that came in dirty; the next was a post-mortem room, and contained a narrow zinc-lined table, heavily timbered, with a rim; on it lay a body covered with a white macintosh, which he drew back, showing a young man of twenty, who had been shaven in life, but his lip and cheek now bristled; in his throat was a wound, and fixed in meanness he lay.

'That one'll be opened in the morning. You see, it isn't much of a gash he's got; if it had been a woman, now, her head would ha' been half cut off, for women do cut their throats cruel. That there's the dissecting-table; this hole in it is for the stuff to run through, you see, and underneath is a hook and a bucket on it, to catch what comes. You can see for yourself there's no smell.'

'Oh no,' said she, 'nothing.'

'My wife says I've got no nerves to be always mixed up with the likes o' this. But I tell her it's only natural. We all must die.'

'It is nothing,' said she. 'But where—is he?'

'He'd be over yonder somewhere, I should say. You aren't seen the tank yet——'

Now still further he led to a room where, striking matches, they saw one of the ponderous zinc-lined tables, and also a very large coffin of metal on the floor with knobs studding it round, and, above it, a deep cover with knobs, hanging by a chain. 'That's for them that's getting bad,' said he, 'like old drownings and such like. They lower that there cover on them, and there's a glass window in the cover. What you smell is only the disinfectants. There's no smell.'

'Ah, yes, here,' she murmured, shrinking.

'Now if we go along down there, p'raps we'll come to your lot.'

They went down another corridor in which he found a door, and they entered a room. She heard his tread on bare earth, but could not even guess his form with her eyes, till, some distance away, he struck a light to one of the mean T-shaped gas-pipings. This room was large, with a low roof, and black-earth floor; it seemed half-full of rubbish at the further end, planks, boxes, benches, ladders, broken coffins, etc.; in the middle stood six of the heavy zinc-lined tables in a row, on four of them being masses covered with thin white macintosh.

'These should be fresh ones,' said the man: 'see if any o' them is yours.'

She knew at once which was hers: the biggest mass: that second one of the four; but he uncovered all the faces in rapid succession. The first was a woman with gray hair, next came Jack, then Pole, then Raby: mean and bloody were they all. She had not known that Pole was dead: but had taken it for granted, and little she recked.

She stood by the side of Jack's table, and looked at

them with a pale smile. Their heads lay in hollows cut out of blocks.

‘Is one of those yours?’ he asked.

‘This one: but all his hair. . . .’

Someone, however, had closed his eyes, while Pole stood somewhat open, and one of Raby’s fixedly peeped, like Lily Waite’s out yonder in her dark shell. She observed their details, as she had observed the passengers in the ’buses from her window, not sanely. Jack had a swelling at the right side of his neck, at which she stood, and on the top of it a lilac spot large as a sixpence; all in his beard was dry blood and mud, and on his face and head: he shewed the teeth a little, and his hair fell over his brow. Pole’s ears were of a delicate purple, like a leper’s blush. Raby’s mouth seemed open to shout; all his vest was bloody rags. Livid and fixed and mean were they all; defeated, dead; unable to make one little remark on their death and defeat, so dead and defeated were they.

Pole did not scowl at Raby, nor Raby at Pole; nor did Jack beseech Pole any more, on his knees; but each lay dead for himself.

When the macintoshes were taken from their faces, they breathed no breath of relief; and when the man covered the old woman again, she did not stifle. The light, mixed with the darkness, beshone them gloomily; no sound was heard from them; only the silence of Raby’s shout was heard.

Here death was the world: to her now it seemed odd that anyone could suppose that there was anything but death. That world which rolled inaudibly abovehead was the remotest dream. Her stomach sickened in sympathy with death; her mouth watered for it like a well. She said:

‘You must let me watch alone with him for a time.’

‘I daren’t, miss.’

It did not occur to her to bribe him with her necklace, rings, cloak: to her mental habit money was the only wealth, and she had none. There remained to

her herself: and though already half with death, by an effort easy to her, she recurred to life. She went round two of the tables to him.

'Say that you will, to please me.'

'Yes, I would to please you, but I dursn't.'

'You must be very cold, to refuse a pretty woman'—she put a hand on his shoulder, looking up, and he, smiling, contemplated her from his height.

'It isn't that,' said he.

'Isn't it dark and secret down here? I bet that you sometimes bring your sweethearts down here.'

He grinned, shifting from one leg to the other.

'Well, it's no use saying it hasn't been done neither; not but what I'm a married man with five little toddlers.'

'All the more reason. It is the depravity that makes the fun.'

'Well, that may be.'

'You must be very cold.'

'Not so much of that neither, my word. What's your reason?'

'Some men, down here alone with me, would have had one well courted and conquered by now.'

Now he leered.

'Why, you: you're too much the lady.'

'The ladies are the worst.'

'Well, I've heerd my wife say them very words.'

'You mustn't be afraid of a lady. Kiss me, you can.'

His hand was already on her. She spat behind his shoulder. The infamy that followed cannot be contemplated. A man is not a pretty thing, and one would rather be a frank ape, with prominent eye-socket ridges. . . . This particular man smelled of mixed onions and whisky.

Her eyes followed the direction of his leer toward a corner where there was a quantity of sacking.

'But you must promise me,' she said—'only twenty minutes. I want to be quite alone with him.'

'Oh, you keep all on about that. . . .'

‘But promise.’

‘Don’t ask that.’

‘Then, take your arm from me. You don’t truly love me.’

‘All right, I promise, if you’ll promise me to come again often.’

‘Well, I promise that. Twenty minutes, then?’

‘Well, you shall have your twenty minutes.’

‘Swear by God.’

‘Oh, I swear all right.’

The dead gave no sign. Even Jack did not stir. All was soundless. After an interval the man said in a new tone :

‘Well, I give you fifteen minutes, to be as good as my word, not a minute more’—and he went out.

She went after him, peeped after him, without a hat now, listened to his receding steps, closed the door, and now busily, secretly, she ran, and was exultantly with Jack, lying with him on the table, whispering : ‘*It’s I,*’ kissing him ; she urged her left arm under his neck, her head on his breast, the razor in her right.

Nor did she lose time, but spat, and with a face no more screwed than when one tastes an acid, cut under her left jaw : with caution at first, with reluctance : till, enraged by pain, she passioned and put strength to it with momentarily stern face and one gruff grunt, as the steel slipped deep. . .

When the man came back, she was already growing rigid ; and when she was examined, it was found that she had cut quite into the internal carotid.

The next morning, within one hour little Gertrude and Mrs. Hay joined them four in that room. Near 10 a.m. Mrs. Hay had started out from Camden Town in a cab, to go to see Jack at the hotel. There on all the newspaper placards was the announcement of his death : but she did not look, did not see it. When she reached his suite about 10.15, a clerk told her the news in the drawing-room, having no suspicion that she was his mother. She had only had him for one

hour or so, after losing him so long: and hearing that thing, she put her palms to her loins, bawled out, and dropped dead. Nor did Mr. Hay long survive her, for he died at nine that night, ten hours after hearing the double news, having a degenerated heart; and he was taken to a northern mortuary.

XLIV

HARRIET TO AUGUSTA

'D— ABBEY,
Dec. 18th.

' . . . A FEW lines to tell you how I fare. On Tuesday I was taken down to see the three slabs, and yesterday Charlie took me quite to the Lower Terrace: but whether that was too much or not, I now write in bed, with a touch of the fever again. . . . I have several times read your letter of Monday, and like it; but do get thoroughly well before attempting any task. Your description of "the Home" is charming, and I am sorry now that I was not taken to some such place . . . my illness has been so weary . . . the room . . . much too big and lonely . . . I have been a castaway on a bed . . . a long intrigue about funerals, catacombs, and medicine-bottles, with vague doctors. . . . All the world seems dead. . . . How dark the grief of that cutting-off and plague of dying! Red eyes cannot half match its crimson, and to weep, and weep, and weep is but drops in its ocean. Oh, Gussie, there was that in this thing that reached deep to the centre, and must have moved the heart of the hard earth that bare us. . . . With him, with them, blitheness lies buried, and for us only black weeds for ever, and cloisters of abnegation and regret. . . . And all through—what? Going as far back as one can with the new knowledge, one can only say that it began with Dr. Stanley's acceptance of the Mackay will. That may have been wrong—was wrong: but surely both the men meant well. The *Hamlets* and book-tragedies

begin with some dark crime, which, working underground, bursts up at last, destroying innocent and guilty together : but where was your dark crime here ? It is not very apparent, though, of course, it *was* there, somewhere without fail. . . . That *pipe* was a symbol of the mischief : Dr. Stanley began to smoke because everyone else smokes. . . . It is *the* modern crime, and lies at the roots of misery : the acceptance of ideas because they are universal, without respect to their truth ; the allowing one's self to become a mere "product-of-society" and copy of Lady Smith next door because Mrs. Brown is coarse and simple enough to approve of Lady Smith ; the habitual slighting and gradual weakening of our reason ; and especially the subordinating of all life to the pecuniary *motif*, because everyone else does it. There's bloodshed in it ! When I questioned Lord Harling, of whose visit I wrote you a word on Tuesday, he looked very grave one second, and then replied that Dr. Stanley had no doubt forgotten "for the moment" that a teacher of Christ's teachings cannot himself "take thought" for the future as to how he or his daughter shall "eat and drink and look to the world. . . ." He told me afterwards on another subject that in three chapters of the gospel of Matthew is contained "all science, all wit and humour, the whole secret and scheme of the world." "Many statements have been made," he said, "some very true-looking, such as that 'the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles,' or that 'the sky is blue,' or that 'two and two make four' : but probably no statement ever made by a dweller on the earth was wholly true, except some of the statements contained and implied in those chapters." In which case, certainly, civilisation is not 'cute : for who believes them ? Christ is regarded by the world and the church as a first-century idealist, not to be taken seriously. But for those that believe and do, ah Heaven, what distinction ! Lord Harling has quite opened my eyes to what Jack meant that day on the river by his "overman" ; one *feels*, really, Gussie, that Lord Harling is not a man. He himself said the same thing as Jack : for

when I said something about "a good man," he told me, with that most meek smile, that the expression was convenient, but "very" self-contradictory: for if one is good, one is no longer a man, and if one is a man, one is not good. . . . He was by my bedside nearly an hour after seeing the slab. He said that as soon as Stephane showed him Jack's photograph, he recognised it: he remembers seeing Jack at an Australian township where he spoke to a few men, noticed his lithe big beardedness, and, in fact, for some reason, spoke *at* him. . . . He twice wiped his eyes, and, going, kissed me. . . . I have also a long letter from Stephane, containing, for one thing, the singular statement that she and Jack were *husband and wife* in some sense which, as our sweet would have said, I don't "drop to." She throws out the suggestion that, when you are strong, you should begin to devote yourself to acquiring a working knowledge of Floral Fête administration, with a view to taking her place in a year or two, since she hankers after her old trade of nursing. This will be a biggish job for you, dear: but I have no doubt that you will achieve it, and am writing to tell her so to-day; then she will write you direct. As to my own little scheme of becoming a doctor, she is enthusiastic. . . . To be a little like our dear! . . . Oh, a thrilling heat of pride sweeps through my blood when I think that the same red which itched in those veins flows in mine, too; and I was proud at one time to mix it with—a Stanley's: that was not pretty. Have we been two crude little geese, my Gussie—or not? . . . When I said to Lord Harling: "But whom has he saved? He has given his precious life, and the people for whom he gave it perished also"—he looked at me with such reproach—what eyes he has!—put his hand upon mine, and said: "You don't know how wrong is what you say," implying, I suppose, that he *has* saved them. . . . Gracie's poor little Jack is to be divided between the Duchess of T——e and me, as neither of us would yield; Charlie went down to Lonbydale last Thursday, and removed him from Beech How to

Mrs. Sales with Aimée for the present: he says that the boy and Aimée resemble each other like brother and sister! . . . What about Markham? Has he paid you the expected visit? And Markham, Senr.? Does he run down as often as before? . . . My poor C. is very good, and I'm fond of him. He acquiesces without a murmur in all my plans as to the properties, and took infinite thought about the three graves and slabs. . . . I shall be glad when you see them: all is now completed. He lies in the middle, just before the altar,* three feet to the east of the fourth marquess. His Gracie is on his right—C. would have it so—his "Titty" on his left. His slab bears nothing but the intaglio of a lily (Stephane's will), then his name and age, and underneath in one line: "He washed his hands in innocency. . . ."

* She means the altar of the chapel in D—Abbey.

THE END.



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