

The History of Sir Richard Calmady: A Romance

by Malet, Lucas

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THE HISTORY
OF
SIR RICHARD CALMADY

A Romance

By

Lucas Malet

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The History of Sir Richard Calmady

BOOK I

THE CLOWN

CHAPTER I

ACQUAINTING THE READER WITH A FAIR DOMAIN AND THE MAKER THEREOF

In that fortunate hour of English history, when the cruel sights and haunting insecurities of the Middle Ages had passed away, and while, as yet, the fanatic zeal of Puritanism had not cast its blighting shadow over all merry and pleasant things, it seemed good to one Denzil Calmady, esquire, to build himself a stately red-brick and freestone house upon the southern verge of the great plateau of moorland which ranges northward to the confines of Windsor Forest and eastward to the Surrey Hills. And this he did in no vainglorious spirit, with purpose of exalting himself above the county gentlemen, his neighbours, and showing how far better lined his pockets were than theirs. Rather did he do it from an honest love of all that is ingenious and comely, and as the natural outgrowth of an inquiring and philosophic mind. For Denzil Calmady, like so many another son of that happy age, was something more than a mere wealthy country squire, breeder of beef and brewer of ale. He was a courtier and traveler; and, if tradition speaks truly, a poet who could praise his mistress's many charms, or wittily resent her caprices, in well-turned verse. He was a patron of art, having brought back ivories and bronzes from Italy, pictures and china

from the Low Countries, and enamels from France. He was a student, and collected the many rare and handsome leather-bound volumes telling of curious arts, obscure speculations, half-fabulous histories, voyages, and adventures, which still constitute the almost unique value of the Brockhurst library. He might claim to be a man of science, moreover--of that delectable old-world science which has no narrow-minded quarrel with miracle or prodigy, wherein angel and demon mingle freely, lending a hand unchallenged to complicate the operations both of nature and of grace--a science which, even yet, in perfect good faith, busied itself with the mysteries of the Rosy Cross, mixed strange ingredients into a possible Elixir of Life, ran far afield in search for the Philosopher's Stone, gathered herbs for the confection of simples during auspicious phases of the moon, and beheld in comet and meteor awful forewarnings of public calamity or of Divine Wrath.

From all of which it may be premised that when, like the wise king, of old, in Jerusalem, Denzil Calmady "builded him houses, made him gardens and orchards, and planted trees in them of all kind of fruits"; when he "made him pools of water to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees"; when he "gathered silver and gold and the treasure of provinces," and got him singers, and players of musical instruments, and "the delights of the sons of men,"--he did so that, having tried and sifted all these things, he might, by the exercise of a ripe and untrammelled judgment, decide what amongst them is illusory and but as a passing show, and what--be it never so small a remnant--has in it the promise of eternal subsistence, and therefore of vital worth; and that, having so decided and thus gained an even mind, he might prepare serenely to take leave of the life he had dared so largely to live.

Commencing his labours at Brockhurst during the closing years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Denzil Calmady completed them in 1611 with a royal house-warming. For the space of a week, during the autumn of that year,--the last autumn, as it unhappily proved, that graceful and scholarly prince was fated to see,--Henry, Prince of Wales, condescended to be his guest. He was entertained at Brockhurst--as contemporary records inform the curious--with "much feasting and many joyous masques and gallant pastimes," including "a great slayinge of deer and divers beastes and fowl in the woods and coverts thereunto adjacent." It is added, with unconscious irony, that his host, being a "true lover of all wild creatures, had caused a fine bear-pit to be digged beyond the outer garden wall to the west." And that, on the Sunday afternoon of the Prince's visit, there "was held a most mighty baitinge," to witness which "many noble gentlemen of the neighbourhood did visit Brockhurst and lay there two nights."

Later it is reported of Denzil Calmady, who was an excellent churchman,--suspected even, notwithstanding his little turn for philosophy, of a greater leaning towards the old Mass-Book than towards the modern Book of Common Prayer,--that he notably assisted Laud, then Bishop of St. David's, in respect of certain delicate diplomacies. Laud proved not ungrateful to his friend; who, in due time, was honoured with one of King James's newly instituted baronetcies, not to mention some few score seedling Scotchfirs, which, taking kindly to the light moorland soil, increased and multiplied exceedingly and sowed

themselves broadcast over the face of the surrounding country.

And, save for the vigorous upgrowth of those same fir trees, and for the fact that bears and bear-pit had long given place to race-horses and to a great square of stable buildings in the hollow lying back from the main road across the park, Brockhurst was substantially the same in the year of grace 1842, when this truthful history actually opens, as it had been when Sir Denzil's workmen set the last tier of bricks of the last twisted chimney-stack in its place. The grand, simple masses of the house--Gothic in its main lines, but with much of Renaissance work in its details--still lent themselves to the same broad effects of light and shadow, as it crowned the southern and western sloping hillside amid its red-walled gardens and pepper-pot summer-houses, its gleaming ponds and watercourses, its hawthorn dotted paddocks; its ancient avenues of elm, of lime, and oak. The same panelings and tapestries clothed the walls of its spacious rooms and passages; the same quaint treasures adorned its fine Italian cabinets; the same air of large and generous comfort pervaded it. As the child of true lovers is said to bear through life, in a certain glad beauty of person and of nature, witness to the glad hour of its conception, so Brockhurst, on through the accumulating years, still bore witness to the fortunate historic hour in which it was planned.

Yet, since in all things material and mortal there is always a little spot of darkness, a germ of canker, at least the echo of a cry of fear--lest life being too sweet, man should grow proud to the point of forgetting he is, after all, but a pawn upon the board, but the sport and plaything of destiny and the vast purposes of God--all was not quite well with Brockhurst. At a given moment of time, the diabolic element had of necessity obtruded itself. And, in the chronicles of this delightful dwelling-place, even as in those of Eden itself, the angels are proven not to have had things altogether their own gracious way.

The pierced stone parapet, which runs round three sides of the house, and constitutes, architecturally, one of its most noteworthy features, is broken in the centre of the north front by a tall, stepped and sharply pointed gable, flanked on either hand by slender, four-sided pinnacles. From the niche in the said gable, arrayed in sugar-loaf hat, full doublet and trunk hose, his head a trifle bent so that the tip of his pointed beard rests on the pleatings of his marble ruff, a carpenter's rule in his right hand, Sir Denzil Calmady gazes meditatively down. Delicate, coral-like tendrils of the Virginian creeper, which covers the house walls, and strays over the bay windows of the Long Gallery below, twine themselves yearly about his ankles and his square-toed shoes. The swallows yearly attempt to fix their gray, mud nests against the flutings of the scallop-shell canopy sheltering his bowed head; and are yearly ejected by cautious gardeners armed with imposing array of ladders and conscious of no little inward reluctance to face the dangers of so aerial a height.

And here, it may not be unfitting to make further mention of that same little spot of darkness, germ of canker, echo of the cry of fear, that had come to mar the fair records of Brockhurst For very certain it was

that among the varying scenes, moving merry or majestic, upon which Sir Denzil had looked down during the two and a quarter centuries of his sojourn in the lofty niche of the northern gable, there was one his eyes had never yet rested upon--one matter, and that a very vital one, to which had he applied his carpenter's rule the measure of it must have proved persistently and grievously short.

Along the straight walks, across the smooth lawns, and beside the brilliant flower-borders of the formal gardens, he had seen generations of babies toddle and stagger, with gurglings of delight, as they clutched at glancing bird or butterfly far out of reach. He had seen healthy, clean-limbed, boisterous lads and dainty, little maidens laugh and play, quarrel, kiss, and be friends again. He had seen ardent lovers--in glowing June twilights, while the nightingales shouted from the laurels, or from the coppices in the park below--driven to the most desperate straits, to visions of cold poison, of horse-pistols, of immediate enlistment, or the consoling arms of Betty the housemaid, by the coquetries of some young lady captivating in powder and patches, or arrayed in the high-waisted, agreeably-revealing costume which our grandmothers judged it not improper to wear in their youth. He had seen husband and wife, too, wandering hand in hand at first, tenderly hopeful and elate. And then, sometimes, as the years lengthened,--they growing somewhat sated with the ease of their high estate,--he had seen them hand in hand no longer, waxing cold and indifferent, debating even, at moments, reproachfully whether they might not have invested the capital of their affections to better advantage elsewhere.

All this and much more Sir Denzil had seen, and doubtless measured, for all that he appears so immovably calm and apart. But that which he had never yet seen was a man of his name and race, full of years and honours, come slowly forth from the stately house to sun himself, morning or evening, in the comfortable shelter of the high, red-brick, rose-grown garden walls. Looking the while, with the pensive resignation of old age, at the goodly, wide-spreading prospect. Smiling again over old jokes, warming again over old stories of prowess with horse and hound, or rod and gun. Feeling the eyes moisten again at the memory of old loves, and of those far-away first embraces which seemed to open the gates of paradise and create the world anew; at remembrances of old hopes too, which proved still-born, and of old distresses, which often enough proved still-born likewise,--the whole of these simplified now, sanctified, the tumult of them stilled, along with the hot, young blood which went to make them, by the kindly torpor of increasing age and the approaching footsteps of greatly reconciling Death.

For Sir Denzil's male descendants, one and all,--so says tradition, so say too the written and printed family records, the fine monuments in the chancel of Sandyfield Church, and more than one tombstone in the yew-shaded church-yard,--have displayed a disquieting incapacity for living to the permitted "threescore years and ten," let alone fourscore, and dying decently, in ordinary, commonplace fashion, in their beds. Mention is made of casualties surprising in number and variety; and not always, it must be owned, to the moral credit of those who suffered them. It is told how Sir Thomas, grandson of Sir Denzil,

died miserably of gangrene, caused by a tear in the arm from the antler of a wounded buck. How his nephew Zachary--who succeeded him--was stabbed during a drunken brawl in an eating-house in the Strand. How the brother of the said Zachary, a gallant young soldier, was killed at the battle of Ramillies in 1706. Dueling, lightning during a summer storm, even the blue-brown waters of the Brockhurst Lake in turn claim a victim. Later it is told how a second Sir Denzil, after hard fighting to save his purse, was shot by highwaymen on Bagshot Heath, when riding with a couple of servants--not notably distinguished, as it would appear, for personal valour--from Brockhurst up to town.

Lastly comes Courtney Calmady, who, living in excellent repute until close upon sixty, seemed destined by Providence to break the evil chain of the family fate. But he too goes the way of all flesh, suddenly enough, after a long run with the hounds, owing to the opening of a wound, received when he was little more than a lad, at the taking of Frenchtown under General Proctor, during the second American war. So he too died, and they buried him with much honest mourning, as befitted so kindly and honourable a gentleman; and his son Richard--of whom more hereafter--reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER II

GIVING THE VERY EARLIEST INFORMATION OBTAINABLE OF THE HERO OF THIS BOOK

It happened in this way, towards the end of August, 1842.

In the gray of the summer evening, as the sunset faded and the twilight gathered, spreading itself tenderly over the pastures and corn-fields,--over the purple-green glooms of the fir forest--over the open moors, whose surface is scored for miles by the turf-slane of the cottager and squatter--over the clear brown streams that trickle out of the pink and emerald mosses of the peat-bogs, and gain volume and vigour as they sparkle away by woodside, and green-lane, and village street--and over those secret, bosky places, in the heart of the great common-lands, where the smooth, white stems and glossy foliage of the self-sown hollies spring up between the roots of the beech trees, where plovers cry, and stoat and weazel lurk and scamper, while the old poacher's lean, ill-favoured, rusty-coloured lurcher picks up a shrieking hare, and where wandering bands of gypsies--those lithe, onyx-eyed children of the magic East--still pitch their dirty, little, fungus-like tents around the camp-fire,--as the sunset died and the twilight thus softly widened and deepened, Lady Calmady found herself, for the first time during all the long summer day, alone.

For though no royal personage had graced the occasion with his presence, nor had bears suffered martyrdom to promote questionably amiable mirth, Brockhurst, during the past week, had witnessed a series of festivities hardly inferior to those which marked Sir Denzil's

historic house-warming. Young Sir Richard Calmady had brought home his bride, and it was but fitting the whole countryside should see her. So all and sundry received generous entertainment according to their degree.--Labourers, tenants, school-children. Weary old-age from Pennygreen poorhouse taking its pleasure of cakes and ale half suspiciously in the broad sunshine. The leading shopkeepers of Westchurch and their humbler brethren from Farley Row. All the country gentry too. Lord and Lady Fallowfeild and a goodly company from Whitney Park, Lord Denier and a large contingent from Grimshott Place, the Cathcarts of Newlands, and many more persons of undoubted consequence--specially perhaps in their own eyes.

Not to mention a small army of local clergy--who ever display a touching alacrity in attending festivals, even those of a secular character--with camp-followers, in the form of wives and families, galore.

And now, at last, all was over,--balls, sports, theatricals, dinners,--the last in the case of the labourers, with the unlovely adjunct of an ox roasted whole. Even the final garden-party, designed to include such persons as it was, socially speaking, a trifle difficult to place--Image, owner of the big Shotover brewery, for instance, who was shouldering his way so vigorously towards fortune and a seat on the bench of magistrates; the younger members of the firm of Goteway & Fox, Solicitors of Westchurch; Goodall, the Methodist miller from Parson's Holt, and certain sporting yeoman farmers with their comely womankind--even this final entertainment, with all its small triumphs and heart-burnings, flutterings of youthful inexperience, aspirations, condescensions, had gone, like the rest of the week's junketings, to swell the sum of things accomplished, of all that which is past and done with, and will never come again.

Fully an hour ago, Dr. Knott, "under plea of waiting cases, had hitched his ungainly, thick-set figure into his high gig.

"Plenty of fine folks, eh, Timothy?" he said to the ferret-faced groom beside him, as he gathered up the reins; and the brown mare, knowing the hand on her mouth, laid herself out to her work. "Handsome young couple as anybody need wish to see. Not much business doing there for me, I fancy, unless it lies in the nursery line."

"Say those Brockhurst folks mostly dies airly, though," remarked Timothy, with praiseworthy effort at professional encouragement.

"Eh! so you've heard that story too, have you?"--and John Knott drew the lash gently across the hollow of the mare's back.

"This 'ere Sir Richard's the third baronet I've a-seen, and I bean't so very old neither."

The doctor looked down at the spare little man with a certain snarling affection, as he said:--"Oh no! I'm not kept awake o' nights by the fear of losing you, Timothy. Your serviceable old carcass'll hang together for a good while yet."--Then his rough eyebrows drew into a

line and he stared thoughtfully down the long space of the clean gravel road under the meeting branches of the lime trees.

The Whitney _char a bancs_ had driven off but a few minutes later, to the admiration of all beholders; yet not, it must be admitted, without a measure of inward perturbation on the part of that noble charioteer, Lord Fallowfeild. Her Ladyship was constitutionally timid, and he was none too sure of the behaviour of his leaders in face of the string of very miscellaneous vehicles waiting to take up. However, the illustrious party happily got off without any occasion for Lady Fallowfeild's screaming. Then the ardour of departure became universal, and in broken procession the many carriages, phaetons, gigs, traps, pony-chaises streamed away from Brockhurst House, north, south, east and west.

Lady Calmady had bidden her guests farewell at the side-door opening on to the terrace, before they passed through the house to the main entrance in the south front. Last to go, as he had been first to come, was that worthy person, Thomas Caryll, the rector of Sandyfield. Mild, white-haired, deficient in chin, he had a natural leaning towards women in general, and towards those of the upper classes in particular. Katherine Calmady's radiant youth, her courtesy, her undeniable air of distinction, and a certain gracious gaiety which belonged to her, had, combined with unaccustomed indulgence in claret cup, gone far to turn the good man's head during the afternoon. Regardless of the slightly flustered remonstrances of his wife and daughters, he lingered, expending himself in innocently confused compliment, supplemented by prophecies regarding the blessings destined to descend upon Brockhurst and the mother parish of Sandyfield in virtue of Lady Calmady's advent.

But at length he also was gone. Katherine waited, her eyes full of laughter, until Mr. Caryll's footsteps died away on the stone quarries of the great hall within. Then she gently drew the heavy door to, and stepped out on to the centre of the terrace. The grass slopes of the park--dotted with thorn trees and beds of bracken,--the lime avenue running along the ridge of the hill, the ragged edge of the fir forest to the east, and the mass of the house, all these were softened to a vagueness--as the landscape in a dream--by the deepening twilight. An immense repose pervaded the whole scene. It affected Katherine to a certain seriousness. Her social excitements and responsibilities, the undoubted success that had attended her maiden essay as hostess during the past week, shrank to trivial proportions. Another order of emotion arose in her. She became sensible of a necessity to take counsel with herself.

She moved slowly along the terrace; paused in the arcaded garden-hall at the end of it--the carved stone benches and tables of which showed somewhat ghostly in the dimness--to put off her bonnet and push back the lace scarf from her shoulders. An increasing solemnity was upon her. There were things to think of, things deep and strange. She must needs place them, make an effort, anyhow, to do so. And, in face of this necessity, came an instinct to rid herself of all small impeding conventionalities, even in the matter of dress. For there was in Katherine that inherent desire of harmony with her surroundings, that

natural sense of fitness, which--given certain technical aptitudes--goes to make a great dramatic artist. But, since in her case, such technical aptitudes were either non-existent, or wholly in abeyance, it followed that, save in nice questions of private honour, she was quite the least self-conscious and self-critical of human beings. Now, as she passed out under the archway on to the square lawn of the troco-ground, bare-headed, in her pale dress, a sweet seriousness filling all her mind, even as the sweet summer twilight filled all the valley and veiled the gleaming surface of the Long Water far below, she felt wholly in sympathy with the aspect and sentiment of the place. Indeed it appeared to her, just then, that the four months of her marriage, the five months of her engagement, even the twenty-two years which made up all the sum of her earthly living, were a prelude merely to the present hour and to that which lay immediately ahead.

Yet the prelude had, in truth, been a pretty enough piece of music. Katharine's experience had but few black patches in it as yet. Furnished with a fair and healthy body, with fine breeding, with a character in which the pride and grit of her North Country ancestry was tempered by the poetic instincts and quick wit which came to her with her mother's Irish blood, Katherine Ormiston started as well furnished as most to play the great game that all are bound to play, whether they will or no, with fate. Mrs. Ormiston, still young and beloved, had died in bringing this, her only daughter, into the world; and her husband had looked somewhat coldly upon the poor baby in consequence. There was an almost misanthropic vein in the autocratic land-owner and iron-master. He had three sons already, and therefore found but little use for this woman-child. So, while pluming himself on his clear judgment and unswerving reason, he resented, most unreasonably, her birth, since it took his wife from him. Such is the irony of things, forever touching man on the raw, proving his weakness in that he holds his strongest point! In point of fact, however, Katherine suffered but slightly from the poor welcome that greeted her advent in the gray, many-towered house upon the Yorkshire coast. For her great-aunt, Mrs. St. Quentin, speedily gathered the small creature into her still beautiful arms, and lavished upon it both tenderness and wealth, along--as it grew to a companionable age--with the wisdom of a mind ripened by wide acquaintance with men and with public affairs. Mrs. St. Quentin--famous in Dublin, London, Paris, as a beauty and a wit--had passed her early womanhood amid the tumult of great events. She had witnessed the horrors of the Terror, the splendid amazements of the First Empire; and could still count among her friends and correspondents, politicians and literary men of no mean standing. A legend obtains that Lord Byron sighed for her--and in vain. For, as Katherine came to know later, this woman had loved once, daringly, finally, yet without scandal--though the name of him whom she loved (and who loved her) was not, it must be owned, St. Quentin. And perhaps it was just this, this hidden and somewhat tragic romance, which kept her so young, so fresh; kept her unworldly, though moving so freely in the world; had given her that exquisite sense of relative values and that knowledge of the heart, which leads, as the divine Plato has testified, to the highest and most reconciling philosophy.

Thus, the delicately brilliant old lady and the radiant young lady

lived together delightfully enough, spending their winters in Paris in a pretty apartment in the rue de Rennes--shared with one Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, whose friendship with Mrs. St. Quentin dated from their schooldays at the convent of the Sacre Coeur. Spring and autumn found Katherine and her great-aunt in London. While, in summer, there was always a long visit to Ormiston Castle, looking out from the cliff edge upon the restless North Sea. Lovers came in due course. For over and above its own shapeliness--which surely was reason enough--Katherine's hand was well worth winning from the worldly point of view. She would have money; and Mrs. St. Quentin's influence would count for much in the case of a great-nephew-by-marriage who aspired to a parliamentary or diplomatic career. But the lovers also went, for Katherine asked a great deal--not so much of them, perhaps, as of herself. She had taken an idea, somehow, that marriage, to be in the least satisfactory, must be based on love; and that love worth the name is an essentially two-sided business. Indirectly the girl had learnt much on this difficult subject from her great-aunt; and with characteristic directness had agreed with herself to wait till her heart was touched, if she waited a lifetime--though of exactly in what either her heart, or the touching of it, consisted she was deliciously innocent as yet.

And then, in the summer of 1841, Sir Richard Calmady came to Ormiston. He and her brother Roger had been at Eton together. Katherine remembered him, years ago, as a well-bred and courteously contemptuous schoolboy, upon whose superior mind, small female creatures--busy about dolls, and victims of the athletic restrictions imposed by petticoats--made but slight impression. Latterly Sir Richard's name had come to be one to conjure with in racing circles, thanks to the performances of certain horses bred and trained at the Brockhurst stables; though some critics, it is true, deplored his tendency to neglect the older and more legitimate sport of flat-racing in favour of steeple-chasing. It was said he aspired to rival the long list of victories achieved by Mr. Elmore's Gaylad and Lottery, and the successes of Peter Simple the famous gray. This much Katherine had heard of him from her brother. And having her haughty turns--as what charming woman has not?--set him down as probably a rough sort of person, notwithstanding his wealth and good connections, a kind of gentleman jockey, upon whom it would be easy to take a measure of pretty revenge for his boyish indifference to her existence. But the meeting, and the young man, alike, turned out quite other than she had anticipated. For she found a person as well furnished in all polite and social arts as herself, with no flavour of the stable about him. She had reckoned on one whose scholarship would carry him no further than a few stock quotations from Horace, and whose knowledge of art would begin and end with a portrait of himself presented by the members of a local hunt. And it was a little surprising--possibly a little mortifying to her--to hear him talking over obscure passages in Spencer's *Faerie Queene* with Mrs. St. Quentin, before the end of the dinner, and nicely apprising the relative merits of the water-colour sketches by Turner, that hung on either side the drawing-room fireplace.

Nor did Katherine's surprises end here. An unaccountable something was taking place within her, that opened up a whole new range of emotion.

She, the least moody of young women, had strange fluctuations of temper, finding herself buoyantly happy one hour, the next pensive, filled with timidity and self-distrust--not to mention the little fits of gusty anger, and purposeless jealousy which took her, hurting her pride shrewdly. She grew anxiously solicitous as to her personal appearance. This dress would not please her nor that. The image of her charming oval face and well-set head ceased to satisfy her. Surely a woman's hair should be either positively blond or black, not this indeterminate brown, with warm lights in it? She feared her mouth was not small enough, the lips too full and curved for prettiness. She wished her eyes less given to change, under their dark lashes, from clear gray-blue to a nameless colour like the gloom of the pools of a woodland stream, as her feelings changed from gladness to distress. She feared her complexion was too bright, and then not bright enough. And, all the while, a certain shame possessed her that she should care at all about such trivial matters; for life had grown suddenly larger and more august. Books she had read, faces she had watched a hundred times, the vast horizon looking eastward over the unquiet sea, all these gained a new value and meaning which at once enthralled and agitated her thought.

Sir Richard Calmady stayed a fortnight at Ormiston. And the two ladies crossed to Paris earlier, that autumn, than was their custom. Katherine was not in her usual good health, and Mrs. St. Quentin desired change of air and scene on her account. She took Mademoiselle de Mirancourt into her confidence, hinting at causes for her restlessness and wayward little humours unacknowledged by the girl herself. Then the two elder women wrapped Katherine about with an atmosphere of--if possible--deeper tenderness than before; mingling sentiment with their gaiety, and gaiety with their sentiment, and the delicate respect which refrains from question with both.

One keenly bright October afternoon Richard Calmady called in the rue de Rennes. It appeared he had come to Paris with the intention of remaining there for an indefinite period. He called again and yet again, making himself charming--a touch of deference tempering his natural suavity--alike to his hostesses and to such of their guests as he happened to meet. It was the fashion of fifty years ago to conduct affairs, even those of the heart, with a dignified absence of precipitation. The weeks passed, while Sir Richard became increasingly welcome in some of the very best houses in Paris.--And Katherine? It must be owned Katherine was not without some heartaches, which she proudly tried to deny to herself and conceal from others. But eventually--it was on the morning after the ball at the British Embassy--the man spoke and the maid answered, and the old order changed, giving place to new in the daily life of the pretty apartment of the rue de Rennes.

About five months later the marriage took place in London; and Sir Richard and Lady Calmady started forth on a wedding journey of the old-fashioned type. They traveled up the Rhine, and posted, all in the delicious, early summer weather, through Northern Italy, as far as Florence. They returned by Paris. And there, Mrs. St. Quentin watching--in almost painful anxiety--to see how it fared with her

recovered darling, was wholly satisfied, and gave thanks. For she perceived that, in this case, at least, marriage was no legal, conventional connection leaving the heart emptier than it found it--the bartering of precious freedom for a joyless bondage, an obligation, weary in the present, and hopeless of alleviation in the future, save by the reaching of that far-distant, heavenly country, concerning which it is comfortably assured us "that there they neither marry nor are given in marriage." For the Katherine who came back to her was at once the same, and yet another, Katherine--one who carried her head more proudly and stepped as though she was mistress of the whole fair earth, but whose merry wit had lost its little edge of sarcasm, whose sympathy was quicker and more instinctive, whose voice had taken fuller and more caressing tones, and in whose sweet eyes sat a steady content good to see. And then, suddenly, Mrs. St. Quentin began to feel her age as she had never, consciously, felt it before; and to be very willing to fold her hands and recite her *_Nunc Dimittis_*. For, in looking on the faces of the bride and bridegroom, she had looked once again on the face of Love itself, and had stood within the court of the temple of that Uranian Venus whose unsullied glory is secure here and hereafter, since to her it is given to discover to her worshippers the innermost secret of existence, thereby fencing them forever against the plagues of change, delusion, and decay. Love began gently to loosen the cords of life, and to draw Lucia St. Quentin home--home to that dear dwelling-place which, as we fondly trust--since God Himself is Love--is reserved for all true lovers beyond the grave and Gates of Death. Thus one flower falls as another opens; and to-day, however sweet, is only won across the corpse of yesterday.

And it was some perception of just this--the ceaseless push of event following on event, the ceaseless push of the yet unborn struggling to force the doors of life--which moved Katherine to seriousness, as she stood alone on the smooth expanse of the troco-ground, in the soft, all-covering twilight, at the close of the day's hospitality.

On her right the house, and its delicate twisted chimneys, showed dark against the fading rose of the western sky. The air, rich with the fragrance of the red-walled gardens behind her,--with the scent of jasmine, heliotrope and clove carnations, ladies-lilies and mignonette,--was stirred, now and again, by wandering winds, cool from the spaces of the open moors. While, as the last roll of departing wheels died out along the avenues, the voices of the woodland began to reassert themselves. Wild-fowl called from the alder-fringed Long Water. Night-hawks churred as they beat on noiseless wings above the beds of bramble and bracken. A cock pheasant made a most admired stir and keckling in seeing his wife and brood to roost on the branches of one of King James's age-old Scotch firs.

And this sense of nature coming back to claim her own, to make known her eternal supremacy, now that the fret of man's little pleasuring had past, was very grateful to Katherine Calmady. Her soul cried out to be free, for a time, to contemplate, to fully apprehend and measure its own happiness. It needed to stand aside, so that the love given, and all given with that love--even these matters of house and gardens, of men-servants and maid-servants, of broad acres, all the poetry, in

short, of great possessions--might be seen in perspective. For Katherine had that necessity--in part intellectual, in part practical, and common to all who possess a gift for rule--to resist the confusing importunity of detail, and to grasp intelligently the whole, which alone gives to detail coherence and purpose. Her mind was not one--perhaps unhappily--which is contented to merely play with bricks, but demands the plan of the building into which those bricks should grow. And she wanted, just now, to lay hold of the plan of the fair building of her own life. And to this end the solitude, the evening quiet, the restful unrest of the forest and its wild creatures should surely have ministered? She moved forward and sat on the broad stone balustrade which, topping the buttressed masonry that supports it above the long downward grass slope of the park, encloses the troco-ground on the south.

The landscape lay drowned in the mystery of the summer night. And Katherine, looking out into it, tried to think clearly, tried to range the many new experiences of the last months and to reckon with them. But her brain refused to work obediently to her will. She felt strangely hurried for all the surrounding quiet.

One train of thought, which she had been busy enough by day and honestly sleepy enough at night, to keep at arm's length during this time of home-coming and entertaining, now invaded and possessed her mind--filling it at once with a new and overwhelming movement of tenderness, yet for all her high courage with a certain fear. She cried out for a little space of waiting, a little space in which to take breath. She wanted to pause, here in the fulness of her content. But no pause was granted her. She was so happy, she asked nothing more. But something more was forced upon her. And so it happened that, in realising the ceaseless push of event on event, the ceaseless dying of dear to-day in the service of unborn to-morrow, her gentle seriousness touched on regret.

How long she remained lost in such pensive reflections Lady Calmady could not have said. Suddenly the terrace door slammed. A moment later a man's footsteps echoed across the flags of the garden-hall.

"Katherine," Richard Calmady called, somewhat imperatively, "Katherine, are you there?"

She turned and stood watching him as he came rapidly across the turf.

"Yes, I am here," she cried. "Do you want me?"

"Do I want you?" he answered curtly. "Don't I always want you?"

A little sob rose in her throat--she knew not why--for, hearing the tone of his voice, her sadness was strangely assuaged.

"I could not find you," he went on. "And I got into an absurd state of panic--sent Roger in one direction, and Julius in another, to look for you."

"Whereupon Roger, probably, posted down to the stables, and Julius up to the chapel to search. Where the heart dwells there the feet follow. Meanwhile, you came straight here and found me yourself."

"I might have known I should do that."

The importunate thought returned upon Katherine and with it a touch of her late melancholy.

"Ah! one knows nothing for certain when one is frightened," she said. She moved closer to him, holding out her hand. "Here," she continued, "you are a little too shadowy, too unsubstantial, in this light, Dick. I would rather make more sure of your presence."

Richard Calmady laughed very gently. Then the two stood silent, looking out over the dim valley, hand in hand. The scent of the gardens was about them. Moving lights showed through the many windows of the great house. The waterfowl called sleepily. The churring of the night-hawks was continuous, soothing as the hum of a spinning-wheel. Somewhere, away in the Warren, a fox barked. In the eastern sky, the young moon began to climb above the ragged edge of the firs. When they spoke again it was very simply, in broken sentences, as children speak. The poetry of their relation to one another and the scene about them were too full of meaning, too lovely, to call for polish of rhetoric, or pointing by epigram.

"Tell me," Katherine said, "were you satisfied? Did I entertain your people prettily?"

"Prettily? You entertained them as they had never been entertained before--like a queen--and they knew it. But why did you stay out here alone?"

"To think--and to look at Brockhurst."

"Yes, it's worth looking at now," he said. "It was like a body wanting a soul till you came."

"But you loved it?" Katherine reasoned.

"Oh yes! because I believed the soul would come some day. Brockhurst, and the horses, and the books, all helped to make the time pass while I was waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

"Why for you, of course, you dear, silly sweet. Haven't I always been waiting for you--just precisely and wholly you, nothing more or less--all through my life, all through all conceivable and inconceivable lives, since before the world began?"

Katherine's breath came with a fluttering sigh. She let her head fall back against his shoulder. Her eyes closed involuntarily. She loved these fond exaggerations--as what woman does not who has had the good

fortune to hear them? They pierced her with a delicious pain; and--perhaps therefore, perhaps not unwisely--she believed them true.

"Are you tired?" he asked presently.

Katherine looked up smiling, and shook her head.

"Not too tired to be up early to-morrow morning and come out with me to see the horses galloped? Sultan will give you no trouble. He is well-seasoned and merely looks on at things in general with intelligent interest, goes like a lamb and stands like a rock."

While her husband was speaking Katherine straightened herself up, and moved a little from him though still holding his hand. Her languor passed, and her eyes grew large and black.

"I think, perhaps, I had better not go to-morrow, Dick," she said slowly.

"Ah! you are tired, you poor dear. No wonder, after the week's work you have had. Another day will do just as well. Only I want you to come out sometimes in the first blush of the morning, before the day has had time to grow commonplace, while the gossamers are still hung with dew, and the mists are in hollows, and the horses are heady from the fresh air and the light. You will like it all, Kitty. It is rather inspiring. But it will keep. To-morrow I'll let you rest in peace."

"Oh no! it is not that," Katherine said quickly. The importunate thought was upon her again, clamouring, not only to be recognised, but fairly owned to and permitted to pass the doors of speech. And a certain modesty made her shrink from this. To know something in the secret of your own heart, or to tell it, thereby making it a hard concrete fact, outside yourself, over which, in a sense, you cease to have control, are two such very different matters! Katherine trembled on the edge of her confession, though that to be confessed was, after all, but the natural crown of her love.

"I think I ought not to ride now--for a time, Dick." All the blood rushed into her face and throat, and then ebbed, leaving her very white in the growing darkness.--"You have given me a child," she said.

CHAPTER III

TOUCHING MATTERS CLERICAL AND CONTROVERSIAL

Brockhurst had rarely appeared more blessed by spacious sunshine and stately cheerfulness than during the remaining weeks of that summer. A spirit of unclouded serenity possessed the place, both indoors and out. If rain fell, it was only at night. And this, as so much else, Julius March noted duly in his diary.

For that was the period of elaborate private chronicles, when persons of intelligence and position still took themselves, their doings and their emotions with most admired seriousness. Natural science, the great leveler, had hardly stepped in as yet. Therefore it was, that already, Julius's diary ran into many stout manuscript volumes; each in turn soberly but richly bound, with silver clasp and lock complete, so soon as its final page was written. Begun when he first went up to Oxford, some thirteen years earlier, it formed an intimate history of the influences of the Tractarian Movement upon a scholarly mind and delicately spiritual nature. At the commencement of his Oxford career he had come into close relations with some of the leaders of the movement. And the conception of an historic church, endowed with mystic powers--conveyed through an unbroken line of priests from the age of the apostles--the orderly round of vigil, fast, and festival, the secret, introspective joys of penance and confession, the fascinations of the strictly religious life, as set before him in eloquent public discourse or persuasive private conversation,--had combined to kindle an imagination very insufficiently satisfied by the lean spiritual meats offered it during an Evangelical childhood and youth. Julius yielded himself up to his instructors with passionate self-abandon. He took orders, and remained on at Oxford--being a fellow of his college--working earnestly for the cause he had so at heart. Eventually he became a member of the select band of disciples that dwelt, uncomfortably, supported by visions of reactionary reform at once austere and beneficent, in the range of disused stable buildings at Littlemore.

Of the storm and stress of this religious war, its triumphs, its defeats, its many agitations, Julius's diaries told with a deep, if chastened, enthusiasm. His was a singularly pure nature, unmoved by the primitive desires which usually inflame young blood. Ideas heated him; while the lust of the eye and the pride of life left him almost scornfully cold. He strove earnestly, of course, to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit; which was, calmly considered, a slight waste of time, since the said flesh showed the least possible inclination of revolt. The earlier diaries contain pathetic exaggerations of the slightest indiscretion. Innocent and virtuous persons have ever been prone to such little manias of self-accusation! Later, the flesh did assert itself, though in a hardly licentious manner. Oxford fogs and damp, along with plain living and high thinking, acting upon a constitution naturally far from robust, produced a commonplace but most disabling nemesis in the form of colds, coughs, and chronic asthma. Julius did not greatly care. He was in that exalted frame of mind in which martyrdom, even by phthisis or bronchial affections, is immeasurably preferable to no martyrdom at all. Perhaps fortunately his relations, and even his Oxford friends, took a quite other view of the matter, and insisted upon his using all legitimate means to prolong his life.

Julius left Oxford with intense regret. It was the Holy City of the Tractarian Movement; and at this moment the progress of that Movement was the one thing worth living for, if live indeed he must. He went forth bewailing his exile and enforced idleness, as a man bewails the

loss of the love of his youth. For a time he traveled in Italy and in the south of France. On his return to England he went to stay with his friend and cousin, Sir Richard Calmady. Brockhurst House had always been extremely congenial to him. Its suites of handsome rooms, the inlaid marble chimneypieces of which reach up to the frieze of the heavily moulded ceilings, its wide passages and stairways, their carved balusters and newel-posts, the treasures of its library--now overflowing the capacity of the two rooms originally designed for them, and filling ranges of bookcases between the bay windows of the Long Gallery running the whole length of the first floor from east to west,--the chapel in the southern wing, its richly furnished altar and the glories of its famous, stained-glass windows, all these were very grateful to his taste. While the light, dry, upland air and near neighbourhood of the fir forest eased the physical discomforts from which, at times, he still suffered shrewdly.

He found the atmosphere of the place both soothing and steadying. And of precisely this he stood sorely in need just now. For it must be admitted that a change had come over the spirit of Julius March's great ecclesiastical dream. Absence from Oxford and foreign travel had tended at once to widen and modify his thought. He had seen the Tractarian Movement from a distance, in due perspective. He had also seen Catholicism at close quarters. He had realised that the logical consequence of the teaching of the former could be nothing less than unqualified submission to the latter. On his return to England he learned that more than one of his Oxford friends was arriving, reluctantly, at the same conclusion. Then there arose within him the fiercest struggle his gentle nature had ever yet known. He was torn by the desire to go forward, risking all, with those whom he revered; yet was restrained by a sense of honour. For there was in Julius a strain of obstinate, almost fanatic, loyalty. To the Anglican Church he had pledged himself. Through her ministry he had received illumination. To the work of her awakening he had given all his young enthusiasm. How then could he desert her? Her rites might be maimed. The scandal of schism might tarnish her fair fame. Accusations of sloth and lukewarmness might not unjustly be preferred against her. All this he admitted; and it was very characteristic of the man that, just because he did admit it, he remained within her fold.

Yet the decision was dislocating to all his thought, even as the struggle had been. It left him bruised. It cruelly shook his self-confidence. For he was not one of those persons upon whom the shipwreck of long-cherished hopes and purposes have a stimulating effect, filling them merely with a buoyant satisfaction at the opportunity afforded them of beginning all over again! Julius was oppressed by the sense of a great failure. The diaries of this period are but sorrowful reading. He believed he should go softly all his days; and, from a certain point of view, in this he was right.

And it was here that Sir Richard Calmady intervened. He had watched his cousin's struggle, had accepted its reality, sympathising, through friendship rather than through moral or intellectual agreement. For he was one of those fortunate mortals who, while possessing a strong sense of God, have but small necessity to define Him. Many of Julius's

keenest agonies appeared to him subjective, a matter of words and phrases. Yet he respected them, out of the sincere regard he bore the man who suffered them. He did more. He tried a practical remedy. Modestly, as one asking rather than conferring a favour, he invited Julius to remain at Brockhurst, on a fair stipend, as domestic chaplain and librarian.

"In the fulness of your generosity towards me you are creating a costly sinecure," Julius had remonstrated.

"Not in the least. I am selfishly trying to secure myself a most welcome companion, by asking you to undertake a very modest cure of souls and to catalogue my books, when you might be filling some important post and qualifying for a bishopric."

Julius had shaken his head sadly enough. "The high places of the Church are not for me," he said. "Neither are her great adventures."

Thus did Julius March, somewhat broken both in health and spirit, become a carpet-priest. The trumpet blasts of controversy reached him as echoes merely, while his days passed in peaceful, if pensive monotony. He read prayers morning and evening to the assembled household in the chapel; reduced the confusion of the library shelves, doing a fair amount of study, both secular and theological, during the process; rode with his cousin on fine afternoons to distant farms, by high-banked lanes in the lowland, or across the open moors; visited the lodges, or the keepers' and gardeners' cottages within the limits of the park, on foot. Now and again he took a service, or preached a sermon, for good Mr. Caryll of Sandyfield, in whose amiable mind instinctive admiration of those, even distantly, related to persons of wealth and position jostled an equally instinctive terror of Mr. March's "well-known Romanising tendencies." And in that there was, surely, a touch of the irony of fate! Lastly, Julius did his utmost to exercise an influence for good over the twenty and odd boys at the racing stables--an unpromising generation at best, the majority of whom, he feared, accepted his efforts for their moral and spiritual welfare with the same somewhat brutish philosophy with which they accepted Tom Chifney, the trainer's, rough-and-ready system of discipline, and the thousand and one vagaries of the fine-limbed, queer-tempered horses which were at once the glory and torment of their young lives.

Things had gone on thus for rather more than a year, when Richard Calmady married. Julius was perhaps inclined, beforehand, to underrate the importance of that event. He was singularly innocent, so far, of the whole question of woman. He had no sisters. At Oxford he had lived exclusively among men, while the Tractarian Movement had offered a sufficient outlet to all his emotion. The severe and exquisite verses of the "Lyra Apostolica" fitly expressed the passions of his heart. To the Church, at once his mother and his mistress, he had wholly given his first love. He had gone so far, indeed, in a rapture of devotion one Easter day, during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, as to impose upon himself a vow of lifelong chastity. This he did--let it be added--without either the sanction or knowledge of his spiritual

advisers. The vow, therefore, remained unwitnessed and unratified, but he held it inviolable nevertheless. And it lay but lightly upon him, joyfully almost--rather as a ridding of himself of possible perturbations and obsessions, than as an act of most austere self-renunciation. In his ignorance he merely went forward with an increased freedom of spirit. All of which is set down, not without underlying pathos, in the diary of that date.

And that freedom of spirit remained by him, notwithstanding his altered circumstances. It even served--indirectly, since none knew the fact of his self-dedication save himself--as a basis of pleasant intercourse with the women of his own social standing whom he now met. It served him thus in respect of Lady Calmady, who accepted him as a member of her new household with charming kindness, treating him with a gentle solicitude born of pity for his far from robust health and for the mental struggles which she understood him to have passed through.

Many persons, it must be owned, described Julius as remarkably ugly. But he did not strike Katherine thus. His heavy black hair, beardless face and sallow skin--rendered dull and colourless, his features thickened, though not actually scarred, by smallpox, which he had had as a child,--his sensitive mouth, and the questioning expression of his short-sighted brown eyes, reminded her of a fifteenth-century Florentine portrait that had always challenged her attention when she passed it in the vestibule of a certain obscure, yet aristocratic, Parisian hotel, on the left bank--well understood--of the Seine.

The man of the portrait was narrow-chested, clothed in black. So was Julius March. He had long-fingered, finely shaped hands. So had Julius. He gave her the impression of a person endowed with a capacity of prolonged and silent self-sacrifice. So did Julius. She wondered about his story. For Julius, at least--little as she or he then suspected it--the deepest places of the story still lay ahead.

CHAPTER IV

RAISING PROBLEMS WHICH IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS HISTORY TO RESOLVE

It was not without a movement of inward thanksgiving that, the festivities connected with Sir Richard and Lady Calmady's home-coming being over, Julius March returned to his labours in the Brockhurst library. Humanity at first hand, whatever its social standing or its pursuits, was, in truth, always slightly agitating to him. He felt more at home when dealing with conclusions than with the data that go to build up those conclusions, with the thoughts of men printed and bound, than with the urgent raw material from which those thoughts arise. Revelation, authority--these were still his watchwords; and in face of them even the harmless spectacle of a country neighbourhood at play, let alone the spectacle of the human comedy generally, is singularly confusing.

He sought the soothing companionship of books with even heightened relief one fair morning some three weeks later. For Mrs. St. Quentin and Mademoiselle de Mirancourt had arrived at Brockhurst the day previously, and Julius had been sensible of certain perturbations of mind in meeting these two ladies, one of whom was a devout Catholic by inheritance and personal conviction; while the other, though nominally a member of his own communion, was known to temper her religion with a wide, if refined, philosophy. Conversation had drifted towards serious subjects in the course of the evening, and Mrs. St. Quentin had admitted, with a playful deprecation of her dear friend's rigid religious attitude, that no one creed, no one system, offered an adequate solution of the infinite mystery and complexity of life--as she knew it. The serene adherence of one charming and experienced woman to an authority which he had rejected, the almost equally serene indifference on the part of the other to the revelation he held as absolute and final, troubled Julius. Small wonder then, that early, after a solitary breakfast, he retired upon the society of the odd volumes cluttering the shelves of the Long Gallery, that he sorted, arranged, catalogued, grateful for that dulling of thought which mechanical labour brings with it.

But fate was malicious, and elected to make a sport of Julius this morning. Unexpectedly importunate human drama obtruded itself, the deep places of the story--such as, in the innocence of his ascetic refinement, he had never dreamed of--began to reveal themselves.

He had climbed the wide, carpeted steps of the library ladder and seated himself on the topmost one, at right angles to a topmost shelf the contents of which he proposed to investigate, duster and note-book in hand. The vast perspective of the gallery lengthened out before him, cool, faint-tinted, full of a diffused and silvery light. The self-coloured, unpainted paneling of the walls and bookcases--but one shade warmer in tone than that of the stone mullions and transoms of the lofty windows--gave an indescribable delicacy of effect to the atmosphere of the room. Through the many-paned, leaded lights of the eastern bay, the sunshine--misty, full of dancing notes--streamed in obliquely, bringing into quaint prominence of light and shadow a very miscellaneous collection of objects.--A marble Buddha, benign of aspect, his right hand raised in blessing, seated, cross-legged upon the many-petalled lotus. A pair of cavalier's jack-boots, standing just below, most truculent and ungainly of foot-gear, wooden, hinged, leather-covered. A trophy of Polynesian spears, shields, and canoe paddles. A bronze Antinous, seductive of bearing and dainty of limb, but roughened by green rust. A collection of old sporting prints, softly coloured, covering a bare space of wall, beneath a moose skull, from the broad flat antlers of which hung a pair of Canadian snow-shoes. Along the inside wall of the great room, placed at regular intervals, were consol tables bearing tall oriental jars and huge bowls of fine porcelain, filled with potpourri; so that the scent of dried rose leaves, bay, verbena, and many spices impregnated the air. The place was, in short, a museum. Whatever of strange, grotesque, and curious, Calmadays of past generations had collected in their wanderings, by land and sea, found lodgment here. It was a home of

half-forgotten histories, of valorous deeds grown dim through the lapse of years; a harbour of refuge for derelict gods, derelict weapons, derelict volumes, derelict instruments which had once discoursed sweet enough music, but the fashion of which had now passed away. The somewhat obsolete sentiment of the place harmonised with the thin, silvery light and the thin sweetness of spices and dead roses which pervaded it. It seemed to smile, as with the pitying tolerance of the benign image of Buddha, at the heat and flame, the untempered scarlet and purple of the fleeting procession of individual lives, that had ministered to its furnishing. For how much vigorous endeavour, now over and done with, never to be recalled, had indeed gone to supply the furnishing of that room!--And, after all, is not the most any human creature dare hope for the more or less dusty corner of some museum shelf at last? The passion of the heart testified to by some battered trinket, the sweat of the brain by some maggot-eaten manuscript, the agony of death, at best, by some round shot turned up by the ploughshare? And how shall any one dare complain of this, since have not empires before now only been saved from oblivion by a few buried potsherds, and whole races of mankind by childish picture-scratchings on a reindeer bone? _Tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse._ The individual--his arts, his possessions, his religion, his civilisation--is always as an envelope, merely, to be torn asunder and cast away. Nothing subsists, nothing endures but life itself, endlessly self-renewed, endlessly one, through the endless divergencies of its manifestations. And, as Julius March was to find, hide from it, deny it, strive to elude it as we may, the recognition of just that is bound to grip us sooner or later and hold us with a fearful and dominating power from which there is no escape.

Meanwhile, his occupation was tranquil enough, comfortably remote, as it seemed, from all such profound and disquieting matters. For the top shelf proved not very prolific of interest; and one book after another, examined and rejected as worthless, was dropped--with a reproachful flutter of pages and final thud--into the capacious paper-basket standing on the floor below. Then, at the far end of the said shelf, he came unexpectedly upon a collection of those quaint chap-books which commanded so wide a circulation during the eighteenth century.

Julius, with the true bibliophile's interest in all originals, examined his find carefully. The tattered and dogs-eared, little volumes, coarsely printed and embellished by a number of rough, square woodcuts, had, he knew, a distinct value. He soon perceived that they formed a very representative selection. He glanced at _The famous History of Guy of Warwick_; at that of _Sir Bevis of Southampton_; at _Joaks upon Joaks_, a lively work regarding the manners and customs of the aristocracy at the period of the Restoration; at the record of the amazing adventures of that lusty serving-wench _Long Meg of Westminster_; and at that refreshing piece of comedy known as _Merry Tales concerning the Sayings and Doings of the Wise Men of Gotham_.

Finally, hidden behind the outstanding frame of the bookcase, he discovered four tiny volumes tied together with a rusty, black ribbon. A heavy coating of dust lay upon them. A large spider, moreover, darted from behind them. Dust clung unpleasantly to its hairy and ill-favoured

person. It was a matter of principle with Julius never to take life; yet instinctively he drew back his hand from the book in disgust.

"_Araignee du matin, chagrin_" he said, involuntarily, while he watched the insect make good its escape over the top of the bookcase.

Then he flicked uneasily at the little parcel with his duster, causing a cloud of gray atoms to float up and out into the room. Julius was perhaps absurdly open to impressions. It took him some seconds to recover from his sense of repulsion and to untie the rusty ribbon around the little books. They proved all to be ragged and imperfect copies of the same work. The woodcuts in them were splotted with crude colour. The title-page was printed in assorted type--here a line of Roman capitals, there one in italics or old English letters. The inscription, consequently, was difficult to decipher, causing him to hold the tattered page very close to his short-sighted eyes. It ran thus--

"Setting forth a true and particular account of the dealings of Sir Thomas Calmady with the forester's daughter and the bloody death of her only child. To which is added her prophecy and curse."

Julius had been standing, so as to reach the length of the shelf. Now he sat down on the top step of the ladder again. A whole rush of memories came upon him. He remembered vaguely how, long ago, in his childhood, he had heard legends of this same curse. Staying here at Brockhurst, as a baby-child with his mother, maids had hinted at it, gossiping over the nursery fire at night; and his mind, irresistibly attracted, even then, by the supernatural, had been filled at once by desperate curiosity and by panic fear. He paused, thinking back, singularly moved, as one on the edge of the satisfaction of long-desired knowledge, yet slightly self-contemptuous, both of his own emotion and of the rather vulgar means by which that knowledge promised to be obtained.

The shafts of sunshine fell more obliquely across the eastern end of the gallery. Benign Buddha had passed into shadow; while a painting by Murillo, standing on an easel near by caught the light, starting into arresting reality. It represented a hideous and misshapen dwarf, holding a couple of graceful greyhounds in a leash--an unhappy creature who had made sport for the household of some Castilian grandee, and whose gorgeous garments were ingeniously designed to emphasise the physical degradation of his contorted body. This painting, appearing to Julius too painful for habitual contemplation, had, at his request, been removed from his study down-stairs to its present station. Just now he fancied it looked forth at him queerly insistent. At this distance he could distinguish little more than a flare of scarlet and cloth-of-gold, and the white of the hounds' flanks and bellies under the strong sunlight. But he knew the picture in all its details; and was oppressed by the remembrance of tragic eyes in a brutal face, eyes that protested dumbly against cruelty inflicted by nature and by mankind alike. He, Julius, was not, so he feared, quite guiltless in this matter. For had there not been a savour of cruelty in his ejection of the portrait of this unhappy being from his peaceful study?

And thinking of this his discomfort augmented. He was assailed by an unreasoning nervousness of something malign, something sinister, about to befall or to become known to him.

"_Araignee du matin, chagrin_" he repeated involuntarily.

He laid the four little chap-books back hastily behind the outstanding woodwork of the bookshelf, descended the steps, walked the length of the gallery, and leaning against one of the stone mullions of the great, eastern bay window looked out of the wide, open casement.

The prospect was, indeed, reassuring enough. The softly green square of the troco-ground, the brilliant beds and borders of the brick-walled gardens, the gray flags of the great terrace--its rows of little orange trees, heavy with flower and fruit, set in blue painted tubs--lay below him in a blaze of August sunshine. From the direction of the Long Water in the valley, Richard Calmady rode up, between the thorn trees and the beds of bracken, across the turf slopes of the park. It was a joy to see him ride. The rider and horse were one, in vigour and in the repose which comes of vigour--a something classic in the natural beauty and sympathy of rider and of horse. Half-way up the slope Richard swerved, turned towards the house, sat looking up, hat in hand, while Katherine stood at the edge of the terrace looking down, speaking with him. The warm breeze fluttered her full muslin skirts, rose and white, and the white lace of her parasol. The rich tones of her voice and the ring of her laughter came up to Julius, as he leant against the stone mullion, along with the droning of innumerable bees, and the cooing of the pink-footed pigeons--that bowed to one another, spreading their tails, drooping their wings amorously, upon the broad, gray string-course running along the house front just beneath. Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, a small, neat, gray and black figure, was beside Katherine, and, now and again, he heard the pretty staccato of her foreign speech. Then Richard Calmady rode onward, turning half round in the saddle, looking up for a moment at the woman he loved. His horse broke into a canter, bearing him swiftly in and out of the shadow of the glistening, domed oaks and ancient, stag-headed, Spanish chestnuts which crowned the ascent, and on down the long, softly-shaded vista of the lime avenue. While Camp, the bulldog, who had lain panting in the bracken, streaked like a white flash up the hillside in pursuit of his well-beloved master.

And Julius March moved away from the open window with a sigh. Yet what, after all, of malign or sinister was perceptible, conceivable even, in respect of this glorious morning and these happy people--unless, as he reflected, something of pathos is of necessity ever resident in all beauty, all happiness, the world being sinful, and existence so prolific of pain and melancholy happenings? So he went back, climbed the library steps again, and taking the little bundle of chap-books from their dusty resting-place, set himself, in a somewhat penitential spirit, to master their contents. If the occupation was distasteful to him, the more wholesome to pursue it! So, supplying the deficiencies of torn or defaced pages by reference to another of the copies, he arrived by degrees at a clear understanding of the whole matter. The story was

set forth in rhyming doggerel. The poet was not blessed with a gift of melody or of style. Absence of scansion tortured the ear. Coarseness of diction offended the taste. And yet, as he read on, Julius reluctantly admitted that the cruel tale gained credibility and moral force from the very homeliness of the language in which it was chronicled.

Thus Julius learned how, during the closing years of the Commonwealth, the young royalist gentleman, Sir Thomas Calmady, dwelling in enforced seclusion at Brockhurst, relieved the tedium of country life by indulgence in divers amours. He was large-hearted, apparently, and could not see a comely face without attempting intimate acquaintance with the possessor of it. Among other damsels distinguished by his attentions was his head forester's handsome daughter, whom, under reiterated promise of marriage, he seduced. In due time she bore him a child, ideally beautiful, according to the poet of the chap-book, blessed with "red-gold hair and eyes of blue," and many charms of infantile healthfulness. And yet, notwithstanding the noble looks of her little son, the forester's daughter still remained unwed. For just now came the Restoration, and along with it a notable change in the outlook of Sir Thomas Calmady and many another lusty young gallant, since the event in question not only restored Charles the Second to the arms of his devoted subjects, but restored such loyal gentlemen to the by no means too strait-laced society of town and court. Thence, some few years later, Sir Thomas--amiably willing in all things to oblige his royal master--brought home a bride, whose rank and wealth, according to the censorious chap-book, were extensively in excess of her youth and virtue.

Julius lingered a little in contemplation of the quaint wood-cut representing the arrival of this lady at Brockhurst. Clothed in a bottle-green bodice--very generously *_decolletee_*, her head adorned by a portentous erection of coronet and feathers, a sanguine dab of colour on her cheek, she craned a skinny neck out of the window of the family coach. Apparently she was engaged in directing the movements of persons--presumably footmen--clad in canary-coloured coats and armed with long staves. With these last, they treated a female figure in blue to, as it seemed, sadly rough usage. And the context informed Julius, in jingling verse, how that poor Hagar, the forester's daughter, inconveniently defiant of custom and of common sense, had stoutly refused to be cast forth into the social wilderness, along with her small Ishmael and a few pounds sterling as price of her honour and content, until she had stood face to face with Sarah, the safely church-wed, if none too reputable, wife. It informed him, further, how the said small Ishmael--whether alarmed by the violence of my lady's men-servants, or wanting merely, childlike, to welcome his returning father--ran to the coach door and clambered on the step; whence, thanks to a vicious thrust--so declares the chap-book--from "the painted Jezebel within," he fell, while the horses plunging forward caused the near hind wheel of the heavy, lumbering vehicle to pass over his legs, almost severing them from his body just above the knee.

Thereupon--and here the homely language of the gutter poet rose to a level of rude eloquence--the outraged mother, holding the mangled and dying child in her arms, cursed the man who had brought this ruin upon

her. Cursed him and his descendants, to the sixth and seventh generations, good and bad alike. Declaring, moreover, that as judgment on his perfidy and lust, no owner of Brockhurst should reach the life limit set by the Psalmist, and die quiet and Christianly in his bed, until a somewhat portentous event should have taken place--namely, until, as the jingling rhyme set forth:--

"--a fatherless babe to the birth shall have come,
Of brother or sister shall he have none,
But red-gold hair and eyes of blue
And a foot that will never know stocking or shoe.
If he opens his purse to the lamenter's cry,
Then the woe shall lift and be laid for aye."

Julius March, his spare, black figure crouched together, sat on the top step of the library ladder musing. His first movement had been one of refined and contemptuous disgust. Sensuality and the tragedies engendered by it were so wholly foreign to his nature and mental outlook, that it was difficult to him to reckon with them seriously and admit the very actual and permanent part which they play and always have played in the great drama of human life. It distressed, it, in a sense, annoyed him that the legend of Brockhurst, which had caused him elaborate imaginative terrors during his childhood, should belong to this gross and vulgar order of history. Yet indubitably--as he reluctantly admitted--each owner of Brockhurst had very certainly found death in the midst of life, and that according to some rather brutal and bloody pattern. This might, of course, be judged the result of merest coincidence. Had he leisure and opportunity to search them out, he could find, no doubt, plausible explanation of the majority of cases. Only that fact of persistent violence, persistent accident, did remain. It stared him in the face, so to speak, defiant of denial. And the deduction, consequent upon it, stared him in the face likewise. He was constrained to confess that the first clause of the deeply wronged mother's prediction had found ample fulfilment.--Julius paused, shifted his position uneasily, somewhat fearful of the conclusions of his own reasoning.

For how about the second clause of that same prediction? How about the advent of that strange child of promise, who preordained in his own flesh to bear the last and heaviest stroke at the hands of retributive justice, should, rightly bearing it, bring salvation both to himself and to his race? Behind the coarse and illiterate presentiment of the chap-book, Julius began dimly to apprehend a somewhat majestic moral and spiritual tragedy, a tragedy of vicarious suffering crowned by triumphant emancipation. Thus has God, as he reflected with a self-condemnatory emotion of humility, chosen the base things of the world and those which are despised--yea, and the things which are not, to bring to nought the things which are.--His heart, hungry of all martyrdom, all saintly doings, went forth to welcome the idea. But then, he asked himself almost awed, in this sceptical, rationalistic age, are such semi-miraculous moral examples still possible? And answered, with strong exultation--as one finding practical justification of a long, though silently, cherished conviction--yes, that even now, nineteen centuries after the death of that divine Saving

Victim to whose service he had devoted his life and the joys of his manhood, such nobly sad and strange happenings may still be.

And even while he thus answered, his eyes were drawn involuntarily to the portrait of the unsightly dwarf, painted by Velasquez. The broad shaft of sunlight had crept backward, away from it, leaving the canvas unobtrusive, no longer harshly evident either in violence of colour or grotesqueness of form. It had become part of the great whole, merely modulated to gracious harmony with the divers objects surrounding it, and like them softly overlaid by a diffused and silvery light.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH JULIUS MARCH BEHOLDS THE VISION OF THE NEW LIFE

He was aroused from these austere, yet, to him, inspiring reflections by the click of an opening door and the sound of women's voices. Mademoiselle de Mirancourt paused on the threshold, one hand raised in quick admiration, the other resting on Lady Calmady's arm.

"But this is superb," she cried gaily. "Your charming King Richard, _Coeur d' Or_, has given you a veritable palace to inhabit!"

"Ah yes! King Richard has indeed given me a palace to live in. But, better still, he has given me his dear heart of gold in which to hide the life of my heart forever and a day."

Katherine's words came triumphantly, more as song than as speech. She caught the elder woman's upraised hand gently and kissed it, looking her, meanwhile, full in the face.--"I am happy, very, very happy, best and dearest," she said. "And it is so delicious to be happy."

"Ah, my child, my beautiful child," Mademoiselle de Mirancourt cried.

There were tears in her pretty, patient eyes. For if youth finds age pathetic with the obvious pathos of spent body and of tired mind which has ceased to greatly hope, how far more deeply pathetic does age, from out its sad and settled wisdom, find poor gallant youth and all its still unbroken trust in the beneficence of destiny, its unbroken faith in the enchantments of earth!

Meanwhile, Julius March--product as he was of an arbitrary system of thought and training, and by so much divorced from the natural instincts of youth and age alike, the confident joy of the one, the mature acquiescence of the other--in overhearing this brief conversation suffered embarrassment amounting almost to shame. For not only Katherine's words, but the vital gladness of her voice, the sweet exuberance of her manner as she bent, in all her spotless bravery of white and rose, above the elder woman's hand and kissed it, came to him as a revelation before which he shrank with a certain fearful modesty.

Julius had read of love in the poets, of course; but, in actual fact, he had never wooed a woman, nor heard from any woman's lips the language of intimate devotion. The cold embraces of the Church--a church, as he too often feared, rendered barren by schism and heresy--were the only embraces he had ever suffered. Things read of and things seen, moreover, are singularly different in power. And so he trembled now at the mystery of human love, actual and concrete, here close beside him. He was, indeed, moved to the point of losing his habitual suavity of demeanour. He rose hastily and descended the library steps, forgetful of the handful of chap-books, which fell in tattered and dusty confusion upon the floor.

Katherine looked round. Until now she had been unobservant of his presence, innocent of other audience than the old friend, to whom it was fitting enough to confide dear secrets. For an instant she hesitated, embarrassed too, her pride touched to annoyance, at having laid bare the treasures of her heart thus unwittingly. She was tempted to retreat through the still open door, into the library, and leave the review of the Long Gallery and its many relics to a more convenient season. But it was not Katherine's habit to run away, least of all from the consequences of her own actions. And her sense of justice compelled her to admit that, in this case, the indiscretion--if indiscretion indeed there was--lay with her, in not having seen poor Julius; rather than with him, in having overheard her little outburst. So she called to him in friendly greeting, and came swiftly towards him down the length of the great room.

And Julius stood waiting for her, leaning against the frame of the library ladder; a spare, black figure, notably at variance with the broad glory of sunshine and colour reigning out of doors.

His usually quick instinct of courtesy was in abeyance, shaken, as he still was, and confused by the revelation that had just come to him. He looked at Lady Calmady with a new and agitated understanding. She made so fair a picture that he could only gaze dumbly at it. Tall in fact, Katherine was rendered taller by the manner--careless of passing fashion--in which her hair was dressed. The warm, brown mass of it, rolled up and back from her forehead, showed all the perfect oval of her face. Tender, lovely, smiling, her blue-brown eyes soft and lustrous, with a certain wondering serenity in their depths, there was yet something majestic about Katherine Calmady. No poor or unworthy line marred the nobility of her face or figure. The dark, arched eyebrows, the well-chiselled and slightly aquiline nose, the firm chin and throat, the shapely hands, all denoted harmony and completeness of development, and promised a reserve of strength, ready to encounter and overcome if danger were to be met. Years afterwards, the remembrance of Katherine as he just then saw her would return upon Julius, as prophetic of much. Quailing in spirit, still reluctant, in his asceticism, to comprehend and reckon with her personality in the fulness of its present manifestation, he answered her at random, and with none of the pause and playful evasiveness usual to his speech.

"I am very glad we have found you," Katherine said frankly. "I was afraid, by the fact of your not coming to breakfast, that you were

overtired. We talked late last night. Did we weary you too much?"

"Existence in itself is vexatiously wearisome at times--at least to feeble persons, like myself."

Katherine's smile faded. She looked at him with charming solicitude.

"Ah! you are not well," she declared. "Go out and enjoy the sunshine. Leave all those stupid books. Go," she repeated, "order one of the horses. Go and meet Richard. He has gone over to look at the new lodge. You could ride all the way through the east woods in the cool. See, I will put these tidy."

And, as she spoke, Katherine stooped to pick up the scattered chap-books from the ground. But, in the last few moments, while looking at her, yet further understanding had overtaken Julius March. Not only the mystery of human love, but the mystery of dawning motherhood had come close to him. And he put Lady Calmady aside with a determination of authority somewhat surprising.

"No, no, pardon me! They are dusty, they will soil your hands. You must not touch those books," he said.

Katherine straightened herself up. Her face was slightly flushed, her expression full of kindly amusement.

"Dear Julius, you are very imperative. Surely I may make my hands dirty, once in a way, in a good cause? They will wash, you know, just as well as your own, after all."

"A thousand times better. Still, I will ask you not to touch those books. I have valid reasons. For one, an evil beast in the form of a spider has dwelt among them. I disturbed it and it fled, looking as though it had grown old in trespasses and sins. It seemed to me a thing of ill omen."

He tried to steady himself, to treat the matter lightly. Yet his speech struck Katherine as hurried and anxious, out of all proportion to the matter in hand.

"Poor thing--and you killed it? Yet it couldn't help being ugly, I suppose," she answered, not without a touch of malice.

Julius was on his knees, his long, thin fingers gathering up the tattered pages, ranging them into a bundle, tying them together with the tag of rusty, black ribbon aforesaid. For an unreasoning, fierce desire was upon him--very alien to his usual gentle attitude of mind--to shield this beautiful woman from all acquaintance with the foul story set forth in those little books. To shield her, indeed, from more than merely that.--For a vague presentiment possessed him that she might, in some mysterious way, be intimately involved in the final developments of that same story which, though august, were so full of suffering, so profoundly sad. Meanwhile, in his excitement, he replied less to her gently mocking question than to the importunities of his

own thought.

"No," he said, "I let it go. I begin to fear it is useless to attempt to take short-cuts to the extinction of what is evil. It does not cease, but merely changes its form. Unwillingly I have learned that. No violent death is possible to things evil."

Julius rose to his feet.

"They must go on," he continued, "till, in the merciful providence of God, their term is reached, till their power is exhausted, till they have worn themselves out."

Lady Calmady turned and moved thoughtfully towards the far end of the room, where the sunshine still slanted in through the open casements of the bay window, and where the delicate, little spinster lady stood awaiting her. Amorous pigeons cooed below on the string-course. Bees droned sleepily against the glass.

"But," she said, in gentle remonstrance, "that is a rather terrible doctrine, Julius. Surely it is not quite just; for it would seem to leave us almost hopelessly at the mercy of the wrong-doing of others."

"Yes, but are we not, just that--all of us at the mercy of the wrong-doing of others?--The courageous forever suffering for the cowardly, the wise for the ignorant and brutish, the just for the unjust? Is not this, perhaps, the very deepest lesson of our religion?"

"Oh no, no!" Katherine cried incredulously. "There is something at once deeper and more comforting than that. Remember, in the beginning, when God created all things and reviewed His handiwork, He pronounced it very good."

Julius was recovering his suavity. The little packet of chap-books rested safely in the pocket of his coat.

"But that was a long time ago," he said, smiling.

They reached the bay window. Katherine took her old friend's hand once again and laid it caressingly upon her arm.

"Pardon me for keeping you waiting, dearest," she said. "Julius is in fault. He will argue with me about the date of the creation, and that takes time. He declares it was so long ago that everything has had time to grow very old and go very wrong. But, indeed, he is mistaken. Agree with me, tell him he is mistaken! The world is deliciously young yet. It was only made a little over twenty-two years ago. I must know, for I came into it then. And I found it all as new as I was myself, and a thousand times prettier--quite adorably gay, adorably fresh."

Katherine's voice sank, grew fuller in tone. She gazed out over the brilliant garden to the woodland shimmering in the noontide heat. Then she looked at Julius March, her eyes and lips eloquent with joyous conviction.

"Indeed, I think, God makes His whole creation over again for each one of us, it is so beautiful. As in the beginning, so now," she said; "behold it is very good--ah yes! who can doubt that--it is very good!"

"Amen. To you may it ever so continue," Julius murmured, bowing his head.

That evening there was a dinner party at Brockhurst. Lord Denier brought his handsome second wife. She was a Hellard, and took the judge *_faute de mieux_*, so said the wicked world, rather late in life. The Cathcarts of Newlands and their daughter Mary came; and Roger Ormiston too, who, being off duty, had run down from London for a few days' partridge shooting, bringing with him his cousin Colonel St. Quentin--invalided home, to his own immense chagrin, in the midst of the Afghan war. On the terrace, after dinner, for the night was warm enough for the whole company to take coffee out of doors, Lady Calmady--incited thereunto by her brother--had persuaded Mary Cathcart to sing, accompanying herself on her guitar. The girl's musical gifts were of no extraordinary order; but her young contralto was true and sweet. The charm of the hour and the place, moreover, was calculated to heighten the effect of the Jacobite songs and old-world love ditties which she selected.

Roger Ormiston unquestionably found her performance sufficiently moving. But then the girl's frank manner, her warm, gipsy-like colouring, and the way in which she could sit a horse, moved him also; had done so, indeed, ever since he first saw her, as quite a child, some eight or nine years ago, on one of his earliest visits to Brockhurst, fighting a half-broken, Welsh pony that refused at a grip by the roadside. The little maiden, her face pale, for once, from concentration of purpose, had forced the pony over the grip. Then, slipping out of the saddle, she coaxed and kissed the rough, unruly, little beast, with tears of apology for the hard usage to which she had been obliged to subject it. So stout, yet so tender, a heart, struck Roger as an excellent thing in woman. And now, listening to the full, rounded notes and thrumming of the guitar strings, in the evening quiet under the stars, he wished, remorsefully, that he had never been guilty of any pleasant sins, that his record was cleaner, his tastes less expensive; that he was a better fellow all round, in short, than he was, because, then, perhaps---

And Julius March, too, found the singing somewhat agitating, though to him the personality of the singer was of small account. Another personality, and a train of feeling evoked by certain new aspects of it, had pursued him all the day long. Katherine, mindful of her somewhat outspoken divergence of opinion from his, in the morning, had been particularly thoughtful of his pleasure and entertainment. At dinner she directed the conversation upon subjects interesting to him, and had thereby made him talk more unreservedly than was his wont. Not even the most saintly of human beings is wholly indifferent to social success. Julius was conscious of a stirring of the blood, of a subdued excitement. These sensations were pleasurable. But his training had taught him to distrust pleasurable sensations as too often the

offspring of very questionable parentage. And, while Mary Cathcart's voice still breathed upon the fragrant night air, he, standing on the outskirts of the listening company, slipped away unperceived.

His study, a long narrow room occupying, with his bedroom, the ground floor of the chapel wing of the house, struck chill as he entered it. Above the range of pigeon-holes and little drawers, forming the back of the writing-table, two candles burned on either side of a bronze *_pieta_*, which Julius had brought back with him from Rome. On the broad slab of the table below were the many quires of foolscap forming the library catalogue, neatly numbered and lettered; while his diary lay open upon the blotting-pad, ready for the chronicle of the past day. Beside it was the packet of chap-books, still tied together with their tag of rusty ribbon.

It was Julius March's habit to exchange his coat for a cassock in the privacy of his study. He did so now, and knotted a black cord about his waist. Let no one underrate the sustaining power of costume, whether it take the form of ballet-skirt or monk's frock. Human nature is but a weak thing at best, and needs outward and visible signs, not only to support its faith in its deity, but even its faith in its own poor self! Of persons of sensitive temperament and limited experience, such as Julius, this is particularly true. Putting off his secular garment, as a rule, he could put off secular thoughts as well. Beneath the severe and scanty folds of the cassock there was small space for remembrance of the pomp and glory of this perishing world. At least he hoped so. To-night, importuned as he had been by scenes and emotions quite other than ecclesiastical, Julius literally sought refuge in his cassock. It represented "port after stormy seas"--home, after travel in lands altogether foreign.

He took St. Augustine's *_De Civitate Dei_* from its place in the book shelves lining one side of the room. There should be peace in the soul, surely, emancipation from questioning of transitory things in reading of the City of God? But, alas, his attention strayed. That sense of subdued excitement was upon him yet. He thought of the conversation at dinner, of brilliant speeches he might have made, of the encouragement of Katherine's smiling eyes and sympathetic speech, of the scene in the gallery that morning, of Mary Cathcart's old-time love ditties. The City of God was far off. All these were things very near at hand. Notwithstanding the scanty folds of the cassock, they importuned him still.

Pained at his own lack of poise and seriousness, Julius returned the volume of St. Augustine to its place, and, sitting down at the writing-table prepared to chronicle the day's events. Perhaps by putting a statement of them on paper he could rid himself of their all too potent influence. But his thought was tumultuous, words refused to come in proper order and sequence; and Julius abhorred that erasures should mar the symmetry of his pages. Impatiently he pushed the diary from him. Clearly it, like the City of God, was destined to wait.

The guests had departed. He had heard the distant calling of voices in friendly farewell, the rumble of departing wheels. The night was very

soft and mild. He would go out and walk the gray flags of the terrace, till this unworthy restlessness gave place to reason and calm.

Passing along the narrow passage, he opened the door on to the garden-hall. And there paused. The hall itself, and the inner side of the carven arches of the arcade were in dense shadow. Beyond stretched the terrace bathed in moonlight, which glittered on the polished leaves of the little orange trees, on the leaded panes of the many windows, and strangely transmuted the colours of the range of pot-flowers massed beneath them along the base of the house. It was a fairy world upon which Julius looked forth. Nor did it need suitable inhabitants. Pacing slowly down the centre of the terrace came Richard and Katherine Calmady, hand in hand. Tall, graceful, strong in the perfection of their youth and their great devotion, amid that ethereal brightness, they seemed as two heroic figures--immortal, fairy lovers moving through the lovely wonder of that fairy-land. As they drew near, Katherine stopped, leant--with a superb abandon--back against her husband, resting her hand on his shoulder, drew his arm around her waist for support, drew his face down to her upturned face until their lips met, while the moonlight played upon the jewels on her bare arms and neck and gleamed softly on the surface of her white, satin dress.

To true lovers the longest kiss is all too sadly short--a thing brief almost in proportion to its sweetness. But to Julius March, watching from the blackness of the doorway, it seemed a whole eternity before Richard Calmady raised his head. Then Julius turned and fled down the passage and back into the chill study, where the candles burned on either side the image of the Virgin Mother cradling the dead Christ upon her knee.

Gentle persons, breaking from the lines of self-restraint, run to a curious violence in emotion. All day long, shrink from it, ignore it, as he might, a moral storm had been brewing. Now it broke. Not from those two lovers did Julius turn thus in amazement and terror; but from just that from which it is impossible for any one to turn in actual fact--namely from himself. He was appalled by the narrowness of his own past outlook; appalled by the splendour of that heritage which, by his own act, he had forfeited. The cassock ceased, indeed, to be a refuge, the welcome livery of home and rest. It had become a prison-suit, a badge of slavery, against which his whole being rebelled. For the moment--happily violence is short-lived, only for a very little while do even the gentlest persons "see red"--asceticism appeared to him as a blasphemy against the order of nature and of nature's God. His vow of perpetual chastity, made with so passionate an enthusiasm, for the moment appeared to him an act of absolutely monstrous vanity and self-conceit. In his stupid ignorance he had tried to be wiser than his Maker, preferring the ordinances of man, to the glad and merciful purposes of God. In so doing had he not, only too possibly, committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost?

Poor Julius, his thought had indeed run almost humorously mad! Yet it was characteristic of the man that the breaking of his self-imposed bonds never occurred to him. Made in ignorance, unwitnessed though his vow might be, it remained inviolable. He never, even in this most

heated hour of his trial, doubted that.

Stretching out his arms, he clenched his hands in anguish of spirit. The sacerdotal pride, the subjective joys of self-consecration, the mental luxury of feeling himself different from others, singled out, set apart,--all the Pharisee, in short, in Julius March,--was sick to death. He had supposed he was living to God--and now it appeared to him he had lived only to himself. He had trusted God too little, had come near reckoning the great natural laws--which, after all, must be of God's ordering--common and unclean. Katherine was right. The eternal purpose is joy, not sorrow; youth and health, not age and decay; thankful acceptance, not fastidious rejection and fear. Katherine--yes, Katherine--and there the young man's wild tirade stopped----

He flung himself down in front of the writing-table, leaning his elbows on it, pressing his face upon his folded arms. For in good truth, what did it all amount to? Not outraged laws of nature, not sins against the Holy Ghost; but just simply this, that the common fate had overtaken him. He loved a woman, and in so loving had, at last, found himself.

The most vital experiences are beyond language. When Julius looked up, his eyes rested upon the bronze *pieta*, age-old witness to the sanctity of motherhood and of suffering alike. His face was wet with tears. He was faint and weak; yet a certain calm had come to him. He no longer quarreled--though his attitude towards them was greatly changed--either with his priestly calling or his rashly made vow. Not as sources of pride did he now regard them; but as searching discipline to be borne humbly and faithfully, to the honour--as he prayed--both of earthly and heavenly love. He loved Katherine, but he loved her husband and that with the fulness of a loyal and equal friendship. And so no taint was upon his love, of this he felt certain. Indeed, he asked nothing better than that things might continue as they were at Brockhurst; and that he might continue to warm his hands a little--only a little--in the dear sunshine of Richard and Katherine Calmady's perfect love.

As Julius rose his knees gave under him. He rested both hands heavily on the table, looked down, saw the unsightly packet of dirty chap-books. Again, and almost with a cry, he prayed that things might continue as they were at Brockhurst.

"Give peace in my time, oh Lord!" he said. Then he wrapped up the little bundle carefully, sealed and labelled it, and locked it away in one of the table-drawers.

Thus, kneeling before the image of the stricken Mother and the dead Christ, did Julius March behold the Vision of the New Life. But the page of his diary, on which surely a matter of so great importance should have been duly chronicled, remains to this day a blank.

ACCIDENT OR DESTINY, ACCORDING TO YOUR HUMOUR

On the 18th of October that year, St. Luke's day, a man died, and this was the manner of his passing.

There was nothing more to be done. Dr. Knott had gone out of the red drawing-room on the ground floor into the tapestry-hung dining-room next door, which struck cold as the small hours drew on towards the dawn. And Julius March, after reciting the prayer in which the Anglican Church commends the souls of her departing children to the merciful keeping of the God who gave them, had followed him. The doctor was acutely distressed. He hated to lose a patient. He also hated to feel emotion. It made him angry. Moreover, he was intolerant of the presence of the clergy and of their ministrations in sick rooms. He greeted poor Julius rather snarlingly.

"So your work's through as well as mine," he said. "No disrespect to your cloth, Mr. March, but I'm not altogether sorry. I dare say I'm a bit of a heathen; but I can't help fancying the dying know more of death and the way to meet it, than any of us can teach them."

A group of men-servants stood about the open door, at the further end of the room, with Iles, the steward, and Mr. Tom Chifney, the trainer from the racing stables. The latter advanced a little and, clearing his throat, inquired huskily--

"No hope at all, doctor?"

"Hope?" he returned impatiently.--The lamp on the great bare dining-table burned low, and John Knott's wide mouth, conical skull and thick, ungainly person looked ogreish, almost brutal in the uncertain light.--"There never was a grain of hope from the first, except in Sir Richard's fine constitution. He is as sound as only a clean-living man of thirty can be.--I wish there were a few more like him, though your beastly diseases do put money into my pocket.--That offered us a bare chance, and we were bound to act on that chance"--his loose lips worked into a bitterly humorous smile--"and torture him. Well, I've seen a good many men under the knife before now, and I tell you I never saw one who bore himself better. Men and horses alike, it's breeding that tells when it comes to the push. You know that, eh, Chifney?"

In the red drawing-room, where the drama of this sad night centred, Roger Ormiston had dropped into a chair by the fireside, his head sunk on his chest and his hands thrust into his pockets. He was very tired, very miserable. A shocking thing had happened, and, in some degree, he held himself responsible for that happening. For was it not he who had been so besotted with the Clown, and keen about its training? Therefore the young man cursed himself, after the manner of his kind; and cursed his luck, in that, if this thing was to happen, it had not happened to him instead of to Richard Calmady.

Mrs. Denny, the housekeeper, had retired to a straight-backed chair

stationed against the wall. She sat there, waiting till the next call should come for her skilful nursing, upright, her hands folded upon her silk apron, her attitude a model of discreet and self-respecting repose. Mrs. Denny knew her place, and had a considerable capacity for letting other persons know theirs. She ruled the large household with unruffled calm. But, to-night, even her powers of self-control were heavily taxed; and though she carried her head high, she could not help tears coursing slowly down her cheeks, and falling sadly to the detriment of the goffered frills of her white, lawn cross-over.

And Richard Calmady, meanwhile, lay still and very fairly peaceful upon the narrow camp-bed in the middle of the room. He had lain there, save during one hour,--the memory of which haunted Katherine with hideous and sickening persistence,--ever since Tom Chifney, the head-lad from the stables, and a couple of grooms had carried him in, on a hurdle, from the steeple-chase course four days ago.

The crimson-covered chairs and sofas, and other furniture of the large square room, had been pushed back against the walls in a sort of orderly confusion, leaving a broad passageway between the doors at either end, and a wide vacant space round the bed. At the head of this stood a high, double-shelved what-not, bearing medicine bottles, cups, basins, rolled bandages, dressings of rag and lint, a spirit-lamp over which simmered a vessel containing vinegar, and a couple of shaded candles in a tall, branched, silver candlestick. The light from these fell, in intersecting circles, upon the white bed, upon the man's brown, close curled hair, upon his handsome face--drawn and sharpened by suffering--and its rather ghastly three days' growth of beard.

It fell, too, upon Katherine, as she sat facing her husband, the side of her large easy-chair drawn up parallel to the side of the bed.

Silently, unlooked for, as a thief in the night, the end of Katherine's fair world had come. There had been no time for forethought or preparation. At one step she had been called upon to pass from the triumph to the terror of mortal life. But she was a valiant creature; and her natural courage was reinforced by the greatness of her love. She met the blow standing, her brain clear, her mind strong to help. Only once had she faltered--during the hideous hour when she waited, pacing the dining-room in the dusk, four evenings back. For, after consultation with Dr. Jewsbury and Mr. Thoms of Westchurch, John Knott had told her--with a gentleness and delicacy a little surprising in so hard-bitten a man--that, owing to the shattered condition of the bone, amputation of the right leg was imperative. He added that, only too probably, the left would have eventually to go too. They must operate, he said, and operate immediately. Katherine had pleaded to be present; but Dr. Knott was obdurate.

"My dear lady, you don't know what you ask," he said. "As you love him, let him be. If you are there it will just double the strain. He'd suffer for you as well as himself. Believe me he will be far best alone."

It must be remembered that in 1842 anaesthetics had not robbed the

operating-room of half its horrors. The victim went to execution wide-awake, with no mercy of deadened senses and dulled brain. And so Katherine had paced the dining-room, hearing at intervals, through the closed doors, the short peremptory tones of the surgeons, fearing she heard more and worse sounds than those. They were hurting him, sorely, sorely, dismembering and disfiguring the dear, living body which she loved. A tempest of unutterable woe swept over her. Breaking fiercely away from her brother and Denny--who strove to comfort her--she beat her poor, lovely head against the wall. But that, so far, had been her one moment of weakness. Since then she had fought steadily, with a certain lofty cheerfulness, for the life she so desired to save. The horror of the second operation had been spared her; but only because it might but too probably hasten, rather than retard, the approaching footsteps of death. Mortification had set in, in the bruised and mangled limb forty-eight hours ago. And now the scent of death was in the air. The awful presence drew very near. Yet only when doctor and priest alike rose and went, when her brother moved away, and even the faithful housekeeper stepped back from the bedside, did Katherine's mind really grasp the truth. Her well-beloved lay dying; and human tenderness, human skill, be they never so great, ceased to avail.

She was worn by the long vigil. Her face was colourless. Yet perhaps Katherine's beauty had never been more rare and sweet than as she sat there, leaning a little forward in the eagerness of her watchfulness. The dark circles about her eyes made them look very large and sombre. The corners of her mouth turned down and her under-lip quivered now and then, giving her expression a childlike piteousness of appeal. There was no trace of disorder in her appearance. Her white dressing-gown and all its pretty ribbons and laces were spotlessly fresh. Her hair was carefully dressed as usual--high at the back, showing the nape of her neck, her little ears, and the noble poise of her head. Katherine was not one of those women who appear to imagine that slovenliness is the proper exponent of sorrow.

Still, for all her high courage, as the truth came home to her, her spirit began to falter for the second time. It is comparatively easy to endure while there is something to be done; but it is almost intolerable, specially to the young when life is strong in them, merely to sit by and wait. Katherine's overwrought nerves began to play cruel tricks upon her, carrying her back in imagination to that other hideous hour of waiting, in the dining-room, four evenings ago. Again she seemed to hear the short peremptory tones of the surgeons, and those worse things--the stifled groan of one in the extremity of physical anguish, and the grate of a saw. These maddened her with pity, almost with rage. She feared that now, as then, she might lose her self-mastery and do some wild and desperate thing. She tried to keep her attention fixed on the quick irregular rise and fall of the linen sheet expressing the broad, full curve of the young man's chest, as he lay flat on his back, his eyes closed, but whether in sleep or in unconsciousness she did not know. As long as the sheet rose and fell he was alive at all events, still with her. But she was too exhausted for any sustained effort of will; and her glance wandered back to, and followed with agonised comprehension, the formless, motionless elevation and depression of that same sheet towards the foot of the

bed.

The air of the room seemed to grow more oppressive, the silence to deepen, and with it the terrible tension of her mind increased. Suddenly she started to her feet. The logs burning in the grate had fallen together with a crash, sending a rush of ruddy flame and an innumerable army of hurrying sparks up the wide chimney. All the mouldings of the ceiling--all the crossing bars and sinuous lines of the richly-worked pattern, all the depending bosses and roses of it, all the foliations of the deep cornice--sprang into bold relief, outlined, splashed, and stained with living scarlet. And this universal redness of carpet, curtains, furniture, and now of ceiling, even of white-draped bed, suggested to Katherine's distracted fancy another thing--unseen, yet known during her other hour of waiting--namely blood.

Roused by the crash of the falling logs and the rustle of Katherine's garments as she sprang up, Richard Calmady opened his eyes. For a few seconds his glance wavered in vague distress and perplexity. Then as fuller consciousness returned of how it all was with him, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows his glance steadied upon Katherine and he smiled.

"Ah! my poor Kitty," he whispered, "it takes a long time, doesn't it, this business of dying?"

Katherine's evil fancies vanished. As soon as the demand for action came she grew calm and sane. The ceiling and sheets were white again and her mind was clear.

"Are you easy, my dearest?" she asked; "in less pain?"

"No," he said, "no, I'm not in pain. But everything seems to sink away from me, and I float right out. It's all dream and mist--except--except just now your face."

Katherine's lips quivered too much for speech. She moved swiftly across to the what-not at the head of the bed. If he did not suffer, there could be no selfishness, surely, in trying to keep death at bay for a little space yet? But, alas, with what grotesquely paltry and inadequate weapons are all--even the most gallant--reduced to fighting death at the last! Here, on the one hand, a half wine-glass of champagne in a china feeding-cup, with a teapot-like spout to it, or a few spoonfuls of jelly, backed by the passion of a woman's heart. And, on the other hand, ranged against this pitiful display of absurdly limited resources,--as the hosts of the Philistines against the little army of Israel,--resistless laws of nature, incalculably far-reaching forces, physical and spiritual, the interminable progression of cause and effect.

Denny joined Lady Calmady at the table. The two women held brief consultation. Then the housekeeper went round to the farther side of the bed, and slipping her arm under the pillows gently raised Richard's head and shoulders, while Katherine kneeling beside him held the spout

of the feeding-cup to his lips.

"Must I? I don't think I can manage it," he said, drawing away slightly and closing his eyes.

But Katherine persisted.

"Oh! try to drink it," she pleaded, "never mind how little--only try. Help me to keep you here just as long as I can."

The young man's glance steadied on to her once again, and his eyes and lips smiled the same faint, wholly gracious smile.

"All right, my beloved," he said. "A little higher, Denny, please."

Not without painful effort and a choking contraction of the throat, he swallowed a few drops. But the greater part of the draught spilt out sideways, and would have dribbled down on to the pillows had not Katherine held her handkerchief to his mouth.

Ormiston, who had been standing at the foot of the bed in the hope of rendering some assistance, ground his teeth together with a half-audible imprecation, and went slowly over to the fireplace again. He had supposed himself as miserable as he well could be before. But this incident of the feeding-cup was the climax, somehow. It struck him as an intolerable humiliation and outrage that Richard Calmady, splendid fellow as he was, gifted, high-bred gentleman, should, of all men, come to this sorry pass! He was filled with impotent fury. And was it this pass, indeed, he asked himself, to which every human creature must needs come one day? Would he, Roger Ormiston, one day, find himself thus weak and broken; his body--now so lively a source of various enjoyment--degraded into a pest-house, a mere dwelling-place of suffering and corruption? The young man gripped the high, narrow mantel-shelf with both hands and pressed his forehead down between them. He really had not the nerve to watch what was going forward over there any longer. It was too painful. It knocked all the manhood out of him. But for very shame, before those two calm, devoted women, he would have broken down and wept.

Presently Richard's voice reached him, feeble yet uncomplaining.

"I am so sorry, but you see it's no use, Kitty. The machinery won't work. Let me lie flat again, Denny, please. That's better, thanks."

Then after a few moments of laboured breathing, he added--

"You mustn't trouble any more, it only disappoints you. We have just got to submit to fact, my beloved, I've taken my last fence."

Ormiston's shoulders heaved convulsively as he leaned his forehead against the cold, marble edge of the chimneypiece. His brother-in-law's words brought the whole dreadful picture up before him. Oh! that cursed slip and fall, that struggling, plunging, frenzied horse! And how the horse had plunged and struggled, good God! It seemed as though Chifney,

the grooms, all of them, would never get hold of it or draw Richard out from beneath the pounding hoofs. And then Ormiston went over his own share in the business again, lamenting, blaming himself. Yet what more natural, after all, than that he should have set his affections on the Clown? Chifney believed in the horse too--a five-year-old brother of Touchstone, resembling, in his black-brown skin and intelligent, white-reach face, that celebrated horse; and inheriting--less enviable distinction--the high shoulders and withers of his sire Camel. If the Clown did not make a name, Captain Ormiston had sworn, by all the gods of sport, he would never judge a horse again. And, heaven help us, was this the ghastly way the Clown's name was to be made then?

The room grew very quiet again, save for a strange gurgling, rattling sound Richard Calmady made, at times, in breathing. Mrs. Denny had retired beyond the circle of firelight. And Katherine, having drawn her chair a little further forward, so that the foot of the bed might be out of sight, sat holding her husband's hand, softly caressing his wrist and palm with her finger-tips. Soon the slow movement of her fingers ceased, while she felt, in quick fear, for the fluttering, intermittent pulse. Richard's breathing had become more difficult. He moved his head restlessly and plucked at the sheet with his right hand. It was a little more than flesh and blood could bear.

Katherine called to him softly under her breath,--"Richard, Dick, my darling."

"All right, I'm coming."

He opened his eyes wide, as in sudden terror.

"Oh! I say though, what's happened? Where am I?"

Katherine leant down, kissed his hand, caressed it.

"Here, my dearest," she said, "at home, at Brockhurst, with me."

"Ah yes!" he said, "of course, I remember, I'm dying." He waited a little space, and then, turning his head on the pillow so as to have a better view of her, spoke again:--"I was floating right out--the under-tow had got me--it was sucking me down into the deep sea of mist and dreams. I was so nearly gone--and you brought me back."

"But I wanted you so--I wanted you so," Katherine cried, smitten with sudden contrition. "I could not help it. Do you mind?"

"You silly sweet, could I ever mind coming back to you?" he asked wistfully. "Don't you suppose I would much rather stay here at Brockhurst, at home, with you--than sink away into the unknown?"

"Ah! my dear," she said, swaying herself to and fro in the misery of tearless grief.

"And yet I have no call to complain," he went on. "I have had thirty years of life and health. It is not a small thing to have seen the sun,

and to have rejoiced in one's youth. And I have had you"--his face hardened and his breath came short--"you, most enchanting of women."

"My dear, my dear!" Katherine cried, again bowing her head.

"God has been so good to me here that--I hope it is not presumptuous--I can't be much afraid of what is to follow. The best argument for what will be, is what has been. Don't you think so?"

"But you go and I stay," she said. "If I could only go too, go with you."

Richard Calmady raised himself in the bed, looked hard at her, spoke as a man in the fulness of his strength.

"Do you mean that? Would you come with me if you could--come through the deep sea of mist and dreams, to whatever lies beyond?"

For all answer Katherine bent lower, her face suddenly radiant, notwithstanding its pallor. Sorrow was still so new a companion to her that she would dare the most desperate adventures to rid herself of its hateful presence. Her reason and moral sense were in abeyance, only her poor heart spoke. She laid hold of her husband's hands and clasped them about her throat.

"Let us go together, take me," she prayed. "I love you, I will not be left. Closer, Dick, closer."

"Thank God! I am strong enough even yet," he said fiercely, while his jaw set, and his grasp tightened somewhat dangerously upon her throat. Katherine looked into his eyes and laughed. The blood was tingling through her veins.

"Ah! dear love," she panted, "if you knew how delicious it is to be a little hurt!"

But her ecstasy was short-lived, as ecstasy usually is. Richard Calmady unclasped his hands and dropped back against the pillows, putting her away from him with a certain authority.

"My beloved one, do not tempt me," he said, "we must remember the child. The devil of jealousy is very great, even when one lies, as I do now, more than half dead." He turned his head away, and his voice shook. "Ten years hence, twenty years hence, you will be as beautiful--more so, very likely--than ever. Other men will see you, and I----"

"You will be just what you were and always have been to me," Katherine interrupted. "I love you, and shall love."

She answered bravely, taking his hand again and caressing it, while he looked round and smiled at her. But she grew curiously cold. She shivered, and had a difficulty in controlling her speech. Her new companion, Sorrow, refused to be tricked and to leave her, and the

breath of sorrow is as sharp as a wind blowing over ice.

"You have made me perfectly content," Richard Calmady said presently. "There is nothing I would have changed. No hour of day--or night--ah, my God! my God!--which I could ask to have otherwise." He paused, fighting a sob which rose in his throat. "Still you are quite young----"

"So much the worse for me," Katherine said.

"Oh! I don't know about that," he put in quietly. "Anyhow, remember that you are free, absolutely and unconditionally free. I hold a man a cur who, in dying, tries to bind the woman he loves."

Katherine shivered. Despair had possession of her.

"Why reason about it?" she asked. "Don't you see that to be bound is the only comfort I shall have left?"

"My poor darling," Richard Calmady almost groaned.

His own helplessness to help her cut him to the quick. Wealth, and an inherent graciousness of disposition, had always made it so simple to be of service and of comfort to those about him. It was so natural to rule, to decide, to alleviate, to give little trouble to others and take a good deal of trouble on their behalf, that his present and final incapacity in any measure to shield even Katherine, the woman he worshipped, amazed him. Not pain, not bodily disfigurement,--though he recoiled, as every sane being must, from these,--not death itself, tried his spirit so bitterly as his own uselessness. All the pleasant, kindly activities of common intercourse were over. He was removed alike from good deeds and from bad. He had ceased to have part or lot in the affairs of living men. The desolation of impotence was upon him.

For a little time he lay very still, looking up at the firelight playing upon the mouldings of the ceiling, trying to reconcile himself to this. His mind was clear, yet, except when actually speaking, he found it difficult to keep his attention fixed. Images, sensations began to chase each other across his mental field of vision; and his thought, though definite as to detail, grew increasingly broken and incoherent, small matters in unseemly fashion jostling great. He wondered concerning those first steps of the disembodied spirit, when it has crossed the threshold of death; and then, incontinently, he passed to certain time-honoured jokes and impertinent follies at Eton, over which he, and Roger and Major St. Quentin had laughed a hundred times. They amused him greatly even yet. But he could not linger with them. He was troubled about the attics of the new lodge, now in building at the entrance to the east woods. The windows were too small, and he disliked that blind north gable. There were letters to be answered too. Lord Fallowfeild wanted to know about something--he could not remember what--Fallowfeild's inquiries had a habit of being vague. And through all these things--serious or trivial--a terrible yearning over Katherine and her baby--the new, little, human life which was his own life, and which yet he would never know or see. And through all

these things also, the perpetual, heavy ache of those severed nerves and muscles, flitting pains in the limb of which, though it was gone, he had not ceased to be aware.--He dozed off, and mortal weakness closed down on him, floating him out and out into vague spaces. And then suddenly, once more, he felt a horse under him and gripped it with his knees. He was riding, riding, whole and vigorous, with the summer wind in his face, across vast, flowering pastures towards a great light on the far horizon, which streamed forth, as he knew, from the throne of Almighty God.

Choking, with the harsh rattle in his throat, he awoke to the actual and immediate--to the familiar square room and its crimson furnishings, to Katherine's sweet, pale face and the touch of her caressing fingers, to some one standing beside her, whom he did not immediately recognise. It was Roger--Roger worn with watching, grown curiously older. But a certain exhilaration, born of that strange ride, remained by Richard Calmady. Both ache of body and distress of mind had abated. He felt a lightness of spirit; an eagerness, as of one setting forth on a promised journey, who--not unlovingly, yet with something of haste--makes his dispositions before he starts.

"Look here, darling," he said, "you'll let the stables go on just as usual. Chifney will take over the whole management of them. You can trust him implicitly. And--that is you, Roger, isn't it?--you'll keep an eye on things, won't you, so that Kitty shall have no bother? I should like to know nothing was changed at the stables. They've been a great hobby of mine, and if--if the baby is a boy, he may take after me and care for them. Make him ride straight, Roger. And teach him to care for sport for its own sake, dear old man, as a gentleman should, not for the money that may come out of it."

He waited, struggling for breath, then his hand closed on Katherine's.

"I must go," he said. "You'll call the boy after me, Kitty, won't you? I want there to be another Richard Calmady. My life has been very happy, so, please God, the name will bring luck."

A spasm took him, and he tried convulsively to push off the sheet. Katherine was down on her knees, her right arm under his head, while with her left hand she stripped the bedclothes away from his chest and bared his throat.

"Denny, Denny!" she cried, "come--tell me--is this death?"

And Ormiston, impelled by an impulse he could hardly have explained, crossed the room, dragged back the heavy curtains, and flung one of the casements wide open.

The soft light of autumn dawn flowed in through the great mullioned window, quenching the redness of fire and candles, spreading, dim and ghostly, over the white dress and bowed head of the woman, over the narrow bed and the form of the maimed and dying man. The freshness of the morning air, laden with the soothing murmur of the fir forest swaying in the breath of a mild westerly breeze, laden too with the

moist fragrance of the moorland, of dewy grass, of withered bracken and fallen leaves, flowed in also, cleansing the tainted atmosphere of the room. While, from the springy turf of the green ride--which runs eastward, parallel to the lime avenue--came the thud and suck of hoofs and the voices of the stable boys, as they rode the long string of dancing, snorting race-horses out to the training ground for their morning exercise.

Richard Calmady opened his eyes wide.

"Ah, it's daylight!" he cried, in accents of joyfulness. "I am glad. Kiss me, my beloved, kiss me.--You dear--yes, once more. I have had such a queer night. I dreamt I had been fearfully knocked about somehow, and was crippled, and in pain. It is good to wake, and find you, and know I'm all right after all. God keep you, my dearest, you and the boy. I am longing to see him--but not just now--let Denny bring him later. And tell them to send Chifney word I shall not be out to see the gallops this morning. I really believe those dreams half frightened me. I feel so absurdly used up. And then--Kitty, where are you?--put your arms round me and I'll go to sleep again."

He smiled at her quite naturally and stroked her cheek.

"My sweet, your face is all wet and cold!" he said. "Make Richard a good boy. After all that is what matters most--Julius will help you---- Ah! look at the sunrise--why--why----"

An extraordinary change passed over him. To Katherine it seemed like the upward leap of a livid flame. Then his head fell back and his jaw dropped.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. WILLIAM ORMISTON SACRIFICES A WINE-GLASS TO FATE

Mrs. St. Quentin's health became increasingly fragile that autumn; and the weight of the sorrow which had fallen upon Brockhurst bowed her to the earth. Her desire was to go to Lady Calmady, wrap her about with tenderness and strengthen her in patience. But, though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. Daily she assured Mademoiselle de Mirancourt that she was better, that she would be able to start for England in the course of the next week. Yet day after day, week after week passed by, and still the two ladies lingered in the pretty apartment of the rue de Rennes. Day by day, and week by week, moreover, the elder lady grew more feeble, left her bed later in the morning, sought it earlier at night, finally resigned the attempt to leave it at all. The keepers of Lucia St. Quentin's house of life trembled, desire--even of gentle ministries--began to fail, the sound of the grinding was low. Yet neither she, nor her lifelong friend, nor her doctor, nor the few intimate acquaintances who were still privileged to

visit her, admitted that she would never go forth on that journey to England at all; but only on that quite other journey,--upon which Richard Calmady had already set forth in the fulness of his manhood,--and upon which, the manifold uncertainties of human existence notwithstanding, we are, each one of us, so perfectly certain to set forth at last. Silently they agreed with her to treat her increasing weakness with delicate stoicism, to speak of it--if at all--merely as a passing indisposition, so allowing no dreary, lamentable element to obtrude itself. Sad Mrs. St. Quentin might be, bitterly sad at heart, perplexed by the rather incomprehensible dealings of God with man. Yet, to the end, she would remain charming, gently gay even, both out of consideration for others and a fine self-respect, since she held it the mark of a cowardly and ignoble nature to let anything squalid appear in her attitude towards grief, old age, or death.

But Brockhurst she would never see again. The way was too great for her. And so it came about that when Lady Calmady's child was born, towards the end of the following March, no more staid and responsible woman creature of her family was at hand to support her than that lively, young lady, her brother, William Ormiston's wife.

Meanwhile, the parish of Sandyfield rejoiced. Thomas Caryll, the rector, had caused the church bells to be rung immediately on receipt of the good news; while he selected, as text for his Sunday morning sermon, those words, usually reserved to another and somewhat greater advent--"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Good Mr. Caryll was innocent of the remotest intention of profanity. But his outlook was circumscribed, his desire to please abnormally large, and his sense of relative values slight. While that Lady Calmady should give birth to a son and heir was, after all, a matter of no small moment--locally considered at all events.

Brockhurst House rejoiced also, yet it did so not without a measure of trembling. For there had been twenty-four hours of acute anxiety regarding Katherine Calmady. And even now, on the evening of the second day, although Dr. Knott declared himself satisfied both as to her condition and that of the baby, an air of mystery surrounded the large state-bedroom,--where she lay, white and languid, slowly feeling her way back to the ordinary conditions of existence,--and the nursery next door. Mrs. Denny, who had taken possession by right divine of long and devoted service, not only did not encourage, but positively repulsed visitors. Her ladyship must not be disturbed. She, the nurse, the baby, in turn, were sleeping. According to Denny the god of sleep reigned supreme in those stately, white-paneled chambers, looking away, across the valley and the long lines of the elm avenue, to the faint blue of the chalk downs rising against the southern sky.

John Knott had driven over, for the second time that day, in the windy March sunset. He fell in very readily with Mrs. Ormiston's suggestion that he should remain to dinner. That young lady's spirits were sensibly on the rise. It is true that she had wept copiously at intervals while her sister-in-law's life appeared to be in danger--keeping at the same time as far from the sick room as the ample limits of Brockhurst House allowed, and wishing herself a thousand and

one time safe back in Paris, where her devoted and obedient husband occupied a subordinate post at the English Embassy. But Mrs. Ormiston's tears were as easily staunch'd as set flowing. And now, in her capacity of hostess, with three gentlemen--or rather "two and a half, for you can't," as she remarked, "count a brother-in-law for a whole one"--as audience, she felt remarkably cheerful. She had been over to Newlands during the afternoon, and insisted on Mary Cathcart returning with her--Mrs. Ormiston was a Desmolyns. The Cathcarts are distantly connected with that family. And, when the girl had protested that this was hardly a suitable moment for a visit to Brockhurst, Charlotte Ormiston had replied, with that hint of a brogue which gave her ready speech its almost rollicking character:--

"But, my dear child, propriety demands it. I depart myself to-morrow. And now that we're recovering our tone I daren't be left with such a houseful of men on my hands any longer. While we were tearing our hair over poor Kitty's possible demise, and agonising as to the uncertain sex of the baby, it did not matter. But now even that dear creature, Saint Julius, is beginning to pick up, and looks less as if his diet was mouldy peas and his favourite plaything a cat-o'-nine-tails. Scourge?--Yes, of course, but it's all the same in the application of the instrument, you know. And then in your secret soul, Mary dear," she added, not unkindly, "there's no denying it's far from obnoxious to you to spend a trifle of time in the society of Roger."

Mrs. Ormiston carried her point. It may be stated, in passing, that this sprightly, young matron was brilliantly pretty, though her facial angle might be deemed too acute, leaving somewhat to be desired in the matter of forehead and of chin. She was plump, graceful, and neat waisted. Her skin was exquisitely white and fine, and a charming colour flushed her cheeks under excitement. Her hair was always untidy, her hairpins displaying abnormal activity in respect of escape and independent action. Her eyes were round and very prominent, suggestive of highly-polished, brown agates. She was not the least shy or averse to attracting attention. She laughed much, and practised, as prelude to her laughter, an impudently, coquettish, little stare. And finally, as he sat on her right at dinner, her rattling talk and lightness of calibre generally struck John Knott as rather cynically inadequate to the demands made by her present position. Not that he underrated her good nature or was insensible to her personal attractions. But the doctor was in search of an able coadjutor just then, blessed with a steady brain and a tongue skilled in tender diplomacies. For there were trying things to be said and done, and he needed a woman of a fine spirit to do and say them aright.

"Head like an eft," he said to himself, as course followed course, and, while bandying compliments with her, he watched and listened. "As soon set a harlequin to lead a forlorn hope. Well it's to be trusted her husband's some use for her--that's more than I have anyhow, so the sooner we see her off the premises the better. Suppose I shall have to fall back on Ormiston. Bit of a rake, I expect, though in looks he is so curiously like that beautiful, innocent, young thing upstairs. Wonder how he'll take it? No mistake, it's a facer!"

Dr. Knott settled himself back squarely in his chair and pushed his cheese-plate away from him, while his shaggy eyebrows drew together as he fixed his eyes on the young man at the head of the table.

"A facer!" he repeated to himself. "Yes, the ancients knew what they were about in these awkward matters. The modern conscience is disastrously anaemic."

Although it looks on to the terrace, the dining-room at Brockhurst is among the least cheerful of the living rooms. The tapestry with which it is hung--representing French hunting scenes, each panel set in a broad border pattern of birds, fruits and leaves, interspersed with classic urns and medallions--is worked in neutral tints of brown, blue, and gray. The chimneypiece, reaching the whole height of the wall, is of liver-coloured marble. At the period in question, it was still the fashion to dine at the modestly early hour of six; and, the spring evenings being long, the curtains had been left undrawn, so that the dying daylight without and the lamplight within contended rather mournfully for mastery, while a wild, southeasterly wind, breaking in gusts against the house front, sobbed at the casements and made a loose pane, here and there, click and rattle.

And it was in the midst of a notably heavy gust, when dessert had been served and the servants had left the room, that Captain Ormiston leaned across the table and addressed his sister-in-law.

The young soldier had been somewhat gloomy and silent during dinner. He was vaguely anxious about Lady Calmady. The news of Mrs. St. Quentin was critical, and he cherished a very true affection for his great-aunt. Had she not been his confidant ever since his first term at Eton? Had she not, moreover, helped him on several occasions when creditors displayed an incomprehensibly foolish pertinacity regarding payment for goods supplied? He was burdened, too, by a prospective sense of his own uncommon righteousness. For, during the past five months, while he had been on leave at Brockhurst, assisting Katherine to master the details of the very various business of the estate, Ormiston had revised his position and decided on heroic measures of reform. He would rid himself of debt, forswear expensive London habits, and those many pleasant iniquities which every great city offers liberally to such handsome, fine gentlemen as himself. He actually proposed, just so soon as Katherine could conveniently spare him, to decline from the splendid inactivity of the Guards, upon the hard work of some line regiment under orders for foreign service. Ormiston was quite affected by contemplation of his own good resolutions. He appeared to himself in a really pathetic light. He would like to have told Mary Cathcart all about it and have claimed her sympathy and admiration. But then, she was just precisely the person he could not tell, until the said resolutions had, in a degree at all events, passed into accomplished fact! For--as not infrequently happens--it was not so much a case of being off with the old love before being on with the new; as being off with the intermediate loves, before being on with the old one again. To announce his estimable future, was, by implication at all events, to confess a not wholly estimable past. And so Roger Ormiston, sitting that night at dinner beside the object of his best

and most honest affections, proved but poor company; and roused himself, not without effort, to say to his sister-in-law:--

"It's about time to perform the ceremony of the evening, isn't it, Ella, and drink that small boy's health?"

"By all manner of means. I'm all for the observance of ancient forms and ceremonies. You can never be sure how much mayn't lie at the bottom of them, and it's best to be on the safe side of the unseen powers. You'll agree to that now, Mr. March, won't you?"--She took a grape skin from between her neat teeth and flicked it out on to her plate.--"So, for myself," she went on, "I curtsy nine times to the new moon, though the repeated genuflection is perniciously likely to give me the backache; touch my hat in passing to the magpies; wish when I behold a piebald; and bless my neighbour devoutly if he sneezes."

At the commencement of this harangue she met her brother-in-law's rather depreciative scrutiny with her bold little stare--in his present mood Ormiston found her vivacity tedious, though he was usually willing enough to laugh at her extravagancies--then she whipped Julius in with a side glance, and concluded with her round eyes set on Dr. Knott's rough-hewn and weather-beaten countenance.

"I'm afraid you are disgracefully superstitious, Mrs. Ormiston," the latter remarked.

She was a feather-headed chatterbox, he reflected; but her chatter served to occupy the time. And the doctor was by no means anxious the time should pass too rapidly. He felt slightly self-contemptuous; but in good truth he would be glad to put away some few glasses of sound port before administering the aforementioned facer to Captain Ormiston.

"Superstitious?" she returned. "Well I trust my superstition is not chronic, but nicely intermittent like all the rest of my many virtues. Charity begins at home, you know, and I would not like to keep any of the poor, dear creatures on guard too long for fear of tiring them out. But I give every one of them a turn, Dr. Knott, I assure you."

"And that's more than most of us do," he said, smiling rather savagely. "The majority of my acquaintance have a handsome power of self-restraint in the practice of virtue."

"And I'm the happy exception! Well, now that's an altogether pretty speech," Mrs. Ormiston cried, laughing. "But to return to the matter in hand, to this hero of a baby---- I dote on babies, Dr. Knott. I've one of my own of six months old, and she's a charming child I assure you."

"I don't doubt that for an instant, having the honour of knowing her mother. Couldn't be otherwise than charming if she tried," the doctor said, reaching out his hand again to the decanter.

Mrs. Ormiston treated him to her little stare, and then looked round the table, putting up one plump, bare arm as she pushed in a couple of hairpins.

"Ah! but she's a real jewel of a child," she said audaciously. "She's the comfort of my social existence. For she doesn't resemble me in the least, and therefore my reputation's everlastingly safe, thanks to her. Why, before the calumniating thought has had time to arise in your mind, one look in that child's face will dissipate it, she's so entirely the image of her father."

There was a momentary silence, but for the sobbing of the gale and rattling of the casements. Then Captain Ormiston broke into a rather loud laugh. Even if they sail near the wind, you must stand by the women of your family.

"Come, that will do, I think, Ella," he said. "You won't beat that triumphant bull in a hurry."

"But, my dear boy, so she is. Even at her present tender age, she's the living picture of your brother William."

"Oh! poor William," Roger said hastily.

He turned to Mary Cathcart. The girl had blushed up to the roots of her crisp, black hair. She did not clearly understand the other woman's speech, nor did she wish to do so. She was admirably pure-minded. But like all truly pure-minded persons, she carried a touchstone that made her recoil, directly and instinctively, from that which was of doubtful quality. The twinkle in Dr. Knott's gray eyes, as he sipped his port, still more the tone of Roger Ormiston's laugh, she did understand somehow. And this last jarred upon her cruelly. It opened the flood-gates of doubt which Mary--like so many another woman in respect of the man she loves--had striven very valiantly to keep shut. All manner of hints as to his indiscretions, all manner of half-told tales as to his debts, his extravagance, which rumour had conveyed to her unwilling ears, seemed suddenly to gather weight and probability, viewed in the moral light--so to speak--of that laugh. Great loves mature and deepen under the action of sorrow and the necessity to forgive; yet it is a shrewdly bitter moment, when the heart of either man or woman first admits that the god of its idolatry has, after all, feet of but very common clay. Her head erect, her eyes moist, Mary turned to Julius March and asked him of the welfare of a certain labourer's family that had lately migrated from Newlands to Sandyfield. But Ormiston's voice broke in upon the inquiries with a determination to claim her attention.

"Miss Cathcart," he said, "forgive my interrupting you. I can tell you more about the Spratleys than March can. They're all right. Iles has taken the man on as carter at the home-farm, and given the eldest boy a job with the woodmen. I told him to do what he could for them as you said you were interested in them. And now, please, I want you to drink my small nephew's health."

The girl pushed forward her wine-glass without speaking; and as he filled it Ormiston added in a lower tone:--

"He, at all events, unlike some of his relations, is guiltless of foolish words or foolish actions. I don't pretend to share Ella's superstitions, but some people's good wishes are very well worth having."

Unwillingly Mary Cathcart raised her eyes. Her head was still carried a little high and her cheeks were still glowing. Her god might not be of pure gold throughout--such gods rarely are unfortunately--yet she was aware she still found him a very worshipful kind of deity.

"Very well worth having," he repeated. "And so I should like that poor little chap to have your good wishes, Miss Cathcart. Wish him all manner of nice things, for his mother's sake as well as his own. There's been a pretty bad run of luck here lately, and it's time it changed. Wish him better fortune than his forefathers. I'm not superstitious, as I say, but Richard Calmady's death scared one a little. Five minutes beforehand it seemed so utterly improbable. And then one began to wonder if there could be any truth in the old legend. And that was ugly, you know."

Dr. Knott glanced at the speaker sharply.--"Oh! that occurred to you, did it?" he said.

"Bless me! why, it occurred to everybody," Ormiston answered impatiently. "Some idiot raked the story up, and it was canvassed from one end of the county to the other last autumn till it made me fairly sick."

"Poor boy!" cried Mrs. Ormiston, "and what is this wonderful story that so nauseates him, Dr. Knott?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," the doctor answered slowly. A nervous movement on the part of Julius March had attracted his attention. "I have never managed to get hold of the story as a whole, but I should like to do so uncommonly."

Julius pushed back his chair, and groped hurriedly for the dinner napkin which had slipped to the ground from his knees. The subject of the conversation agitated him. The untidy, little chap-books, tied together with the tag of rusty ribbon, had lain undisturbed in the drawer of his library table ever since the--to him--very memorable evening, when, kneeling before the image of the stricken Mother and the dead Christ, he had found the man's heart under the priest's cassock and awakened to newness of life. Much had happened since then; and Julius had ranged himself, accepting, open-eyed, the sorrows and alleviations of the fate he had created for himself. But to-night he was tired. The mental and emotional strain of the last few days had been considerable. Moreover, John Knott's presence always affected him. The two men stood, indeed, at opposing poles of thought--the one spiritual and ideal, the other material and realistic. And, though he struggled against the influence, the doctor's rather brutal common sense and large knowledge of physical causes, gained a painful ascendancy over his mind at close quarters. Knott, it must be owned, was slightly merciless to his clerical acquaintances. He loved to bait

them, to impale them on the horns of some moral or theological dilemma. And it was partly with this purpose of harrying and worrying, that he continued now:--

"Yes, Mrs. Ormiston, I should like to hear the story just as much as you would. And--it strikes me, if he pleased, Mr. March could tell it to us. Suppose you ask him to!"

Promptly the young lady fell upon Julius, regardless of Ormiston's hardly concealed displeasure.

"Oh! you bad man, what are you doing," she cried, "trying to conceal thrilling family legends from the nearest relatives? Tell us all about it, if you know, as Dr. Knott declares you do. I dote on terrifying stories--don't you, Mary?--that send the cold shivers all down my back. And if they deal with the history of my nearest and dearest, why, there's an added charm to them. Now, Mr. March, we're all attention. Stand and deliver, and make it all just as bad as you can."

"I am afraid I am not an effective _improvisatore_" he replied; "and the subject, if you will pardon my saying so, seems to me too intimate for mirth. A curse is supposed to rest on this place. The owners of Brockhurst die young and by violent means."

"We know that already, and look to you to tell us something more, Mr. March," Dr. Knott said dryly.

Julius was slightly nettled at the elder man's tone and manner. He answered with an accentuation of his usual refinement of enunciation and suavity of manner.

"There is a term to the curse, a saviour who, according to the old prediction, has the power, should he also have the will, to remove it altogether."

"Oh, really, is that so! And when does this saviour put in an appearance?" the doctor asked again.

"That is not revealed."

Julius would very gladly have said nothing further. But Dr. Knott's expression was curiously intent and compelling, as he sat fingering the stem of his wine-glass. All the ideality of Julius's nature rose in protest against the half-sneering rationalism he seemed to read in that expression. Mrs. Ormiston, who had an hereditary racial appreciation of anything approaching a fight, turned her round eyes first on one speaker and then on the other provokingly, inciting them to more declared hostilities, while she bit her lips in her effort to avoid spoiling sport by untimely laughter or speech.

"But unhappily," Julius proceeded, yielding under protest to these opposing forces, "the saviour comes in so questionable a shape, that I fear, whenever the appointed time may be, his appearance will only be welcomed by the discerning few."

"That's a pity," Dr. Knott said. He paused a minute, passed his hand across his mouth. "Still, if we are to believe the Bible, and other so-called, sacred histories, it's been the way of saviours from the beginning to try the faith of ordinary mortals by presenting themselves under rather queer disguises." He paused again, drawing in his wide lips, moistening them with his tongue. "But since you evidently know all about it, Mr. March, may I make bold to inquire in what special form of fancy dress the saviour in question is reported as likely to present himself?"

"He comes as a child of the house," Julius answered, with dignity. "A child who in person--if I understand the wording of the prophecy aright--is half angel, half monster."

John Knott opened his mouth as though to give passage to some very forcible exclamation. Thought better of it and brought his jaws together with a kind of grind. His heavy figure seemed to hunch itself up as in the recoil from a blow.

"Curious," he said quietly. Yet Julius, looking at him, could have fancied that his weather-beaten face went a trifle pale.

But Mrs. Ormiston, in the interests of a possible fight, had contained herself just as long as was possible. Now she clapped her hands, and broke into a little scream of laughter.

"That's just the most magnificently romantic thing I ever heard," she cried. "Come now, this requires further investigation. What's our baby like, Dr. Knott? I've seen nothing but an indistinguishable mass of shawls and flannels. Have we, by chance, got an angelic monstrosity up-stairs without being aware of it?"

"Charlotte!" Roger Ormiston called out sternly. The young man looked positively dangerous. "This conversation has gone quite far enough. I agree with March, it may all be stuff and nonsense, not worth a second thought, still it isn't a thing to joke about."

"Very well, dear boy, be soothed then," she returned, making a little grimace and putting her head on one side coquettishly. "I'll be as solemn as nine owls. But you must excuse a momentary excitement. It's all news to me, you know. I'd no notion Katherine had married into such a remarkable family. I'm bound to learn a little more. Do you believe it's possible at all, Dr. Knott, now tell me?"

"The fulfilment of prophecy is rather a wide and burning question to embark on," he said. "With Captain Ormiston's leave, I think we'd better go back to the point we started from and drink the little gentleman's health. I have my patient to see again, and it is getting rather late."

The lady addressed, laughed, held up her glass, and stared round the table with a fine air of bravado, looking remarkably pretty.

"Fire away, Roger, dear fellow," she said. "We're loaded, and ready."

Thus admonished, Ormiston raised his glass too. But his temper was not of the sweetest, just then; he spoke forcedly.

"Here's to the boy," he said; "good luck, and good health, and," he added hastily, "please God he'll be a comfort to his mother."

"Amen," Julius said softly.

Dr. Knott contemplated the contents of his glass, for a moment, whether critically or absently it would have been difficult to decide. But all the harshness had gone out of his face, and his loose lips worked into a smile pathetic in quality.

"To the baby.--And I venture to add a clause to your invocation of that heartless jade, Dame Fortune. May he never lack good courage and good friends. He will need both."

Julius March set down his wine untasted. He had received a very disagreeable impression.

"Come, come, it appears to me, we are paying these honours in a most lugubrious spirit," Mrs. Ormiston broke in. "I wish the baby a long life and a merry one, in defiance of all prophecies and traditions belonging to his paternal ancestry. Go on, Mr. March, you're shamefully neglecting your duty. No heel taps."

She threw back her head showing the whole of her white throat, drained her glass and then flung it over her shoulder. It fell on the black, polished boards, beyond the edge of the carpet, shattered into a hundred pieces, that lay glittering, like scattered diamonds in the lamplight. For the day had died altogether. Fleets of dark, straggling cloud chased each other across spaces of pallid sky, against the earthward edge of which dusky tree-tops strained and writhed in the force of the tearing gale.

Ella Ormiston rose laughing from her place at table.

"That's the correct form," she said, "it ensures the fulfilment of the wish. You ought all to have cast away your glasses regardless of expense. Come, Mary, we will remove ourselves. Mind and bid me good-bye before you go, Dr. Knott, and report on Lady Calmady. It's probably the last time you'll have the felicity of seeing me. I'm off at cockcrow to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER VIII

ENTER A CHILD OF PROMISE

After closing the door behind the two ladies, Ormiston paused by the near window and gazed out into the night. The dinner had been, in his opinion, far from a success. He feared his relation to Mary Cathcart had retrograded rather than progressed. He wished his sister-in-law would be more correct in speech and behaviour. Then he held the conversation had been in bad taste. The doctor should have abstained from pressing Julius with questions. He assured himself, again, that the story was not worth a moment's serious consideration; yet he resented its discussion. Such discussion seemed to him to tread hard on the heels of impertinence to his sister, to her husband's memory, and to this boy, born to so excellent a position and so great wealth. And the worst of it was, that like a fool, he had started the subject himself!

"The wind's rising," he remarked at last. "You'll have a rough drive home, Knott."

"It won't be the first one. And my beauty's of the kind which takes a lot of spoiling."

The answer did not please the young man. He sauntered across the room and dropped into his chair, with a slightly insolent demeanour.

"All the same, don't let me detain you," he said, "if you prefer seeing Lady Calmady at once and getting off."

"You don't detain me," Dr. Knott answered. "I'm afraid that it's just the other way about, and that I must detain you, Captain Ormiston, and that on rather unpleasant business."

Julius March had risen to his feet. "You--you have no fresh cause for anxiety about Lady Calmady?" he said hurriedly.

The doctor glanced up at the tall, spare, black figure and dark, sensitive face with a half-sneering, half-pitying smile.

"Oh no, no!" he replied; "Lady Calmady's going on splendidly. And it is to guard, just as far as we can, against cause for anxiety later, that I want to speak to Captain Ormiston now. We've got to be prepared for certain contingencies. Don't you go, Mr. March. You may as well hear what I've to say. It will interest you particularly, I fancy, after one or two things you have told us to-night!"

"Sit down, Julius, please."--Ormiston would have liked to maintain that same insolence of demeanour, but it gave before an apprehension of serious issues. He looked hard at the doctor, cudgeling his brains as to what the latter's enigmatic speech might mean--divined, put the idea away as inadmissible, returned to it, then said angrily:--"There's nothing wrong with the child, of course?"

Dr. Knott turned his chair sideways to the table and shaded his face with his thick, square hand.

"Well, that depends on what you call wrong," he slowly replied.

"It's not ill?" Ormiston said.

"The baby's as well as you or I--better, in fact, than I am, for I am confoundedly touched up with gout. Bear that in mind, Captain Ormiston--that the child is well, I mean, not that I am gouty. I want you to definitely remember that, you and Mr. March."

"Well, then, what on earth is the matter?" Ormiston asked sharply. "You don't mean to imply it is injured in any way, deformed?"

Dr. Knott let his hand drop on the table. He nodded his head. Ormiston perceived, and it moved him strangely, that the doctor's eyes were wet.

"Not deformed," he answered. "Technically you can hardly call it that, but maimed."

"Badly?"

"Well, that's a matter of opinion. You or I should think it bad enough, I fancy, if we found ourselves in the same boat." He settled himself back in his chair.--"You had better understand it quite clearly," he continued, "at least as clearly as I can put it to you. There comes a point where I cannot explain the facts but only state them. You have heard of spontaneous amputation?"

Across Ormiston's mind came the remembrance of a litter of puppies he had seen in the sanctum of the veterinary surgeon of his regiment. A lump rose in his throat.

"Yes, go on," he said.

"It is a thing that does not happen once in most men's experience. I have only seen one case before in all my practice and that was nothing very serious. This is an extraordinary example. I need not remind you of Sir Richard Calmady's accident and the subsequent operation?"

"Of course not--go on," Ormiston repeated.

"In both cases the leg is gone from here," the doctor continued, laying the edge of his palm across the thigh immediately above the knee. "The foot is there--that is the amazing part of it--and, as far as I can see, is well formed and of the normal size; but so embedded in the stump that I cannot discover whether the ankle-joint and bones of the lower leg exist in a contracted form or not."

Ormiston poured himself out a glass of port. His hand shook so that the lip of the decanter chattered against the lip of the glass. He gulped down the wine and, getting up, walked the length of the room and back again.

"God in heaven," he murmured, "how horrible! Poor Kitty, how utterly horrible!--Poor Kitty."

For the baby, in his own fine completeness, he had as yet no feeling but one of repulsion.

"Can nothing be done, Knott?" he asked at last.

"Obviously nothing."

"And it will live?"

"Oh! bless you, yes! It'll live fast enough if I know a healthy infant when I see one. And I ought to know 'em by now. I've brought them into the world by dozens for my sins."

"Will it be able to walk?"

"Umph--well--shuffle," the doctor answered, smiling savagely to keep back the tears.

The young man leaned his elbows on the table, and rested his head on his hands. All this shocked him inexpressibly--shocked him almost to the point of physical illness. Strong as he was he could have fainted, just then, had he yielded by ever so little. And this was the boy whom they had so longed for then! The child on whom they had set such fond hopes, who was to be the pride of his young mother, and restore the so rudely shaken balance of her life! This was the boy who should go to Eton, and into some crack regiment, who should ride straight, who was heir to great possessions!

"The saviour has come, you see, Mr. March, in as thorough-paced a disguise as ever saviour did yet," John Knott said cynically.

"He had better never have come at all!" Ormiston put in fiercely, from behind his hands.

"Yes--very likely--I believe I agree," the doctor answered. "Only it remains that he has come, is feeding, growing, stretching, and bellowing too, like a young bull-calf, when anything doesn't suit him. He is here, very much here, I tell you. And so we have just got to consider how to make the best of him, both for his own sake and for Lady Calmady's. And you must understand he is a splendid, little animal, clean skinned and strong, as you would expect, being the child of two such fine young people. He is beautiful,--I am old-fashioned enough, perhaps scientific enough, to put a good deal of faith in that notion,--beautiful as a child only can be who is born of the passion of true lovers."

He paused, looking somewhat mockingly at Julius.

"Yes, love is an incalculably great, natural force," he continued. "It comes uncommonly near working miracles at times, unconscious and rather deplorable miracles. In this case it has worked strangely against itself--at once for irreparable injury and for perfection. For the child is perfect, is superb, but for the one thing."

"Does my sister know?" Ormiston asked hoarsely.

"Not yet; and, as long as we can keep the truth from her, she had better not know. We must get her a little stronger, if we can, first. That woman, Mrs. Denny, is worth her weight in gold, and her weight's not inconsiderable. She has her wits about her, and has contrived to meet all difficulties so far."

Ormiston sat in the same dejected attitude.

"But my sister is bound to know before long."

"Of course. When she is a bit better, she'll want to have the baby to play with, dress and undress it and see what the queer little being is made of. It's a way young mothers have, and a very pretty way too. If we keep the child from her she will grow suspicious, and take means to find out for herself, and that won't do. It must not be. I won't be responsible for the consequences. So as soon as she asks a definite question, she must have a definite answer."

The young man looked up quickly.

"And who is to give the answer?" he said.

"Well, it rests chiefly with you to decide that. Clearly she ought not to hear this thing from a servant. It is too serious. It needs to be well told--the whole kept at a high level, if you understand me. Give Lady Calmady a great part and she will play it nobly. Let this come upon her from a mean, wet-nurse, hospital-ward sort of level, and it may break her. What we have to do is to keep up her pluck. Remember we are only at the beginning of this business yet. In all probability there are many years ahead. Therefore this announcement must come to Lady Calmady from an educated person, from an equal, from somebody who can see all round it. Mrs. Ormiston tells me she leaves here to-morrow morning?"

"Mrs. Ormiston is out of the question anyhow," Roger exclaimed rather bitterly.

Here Julius March, who had so far been silent, spoke; and in speaking showed what manner of spirit he was of. The doctor agitated him, treated him, moreover, with scant courtesy. But Julius put this aside. He could afford to forget himself in his desire for any possible mitigation of the blow which must fall on Katherine Calmady. And, listening to his talk, he had, in the last quarter of an hour, gained conviction not only of this man's ability, but of his humanity, of his possession of the peculiar gentleness which so often, mercifully, goes along with unusual strength. As the coarse-looking hand could soothe, touching delicately, so the hard intellect and rough tongue could, he believed, modulate themselves to very consoling and inspiring tenderness of thought and speech.

"We have you, Dr. Knott," he said. "No one, I think, could better break this terrible sorrow to Lady Calmady, than yourself."

"Thank you--you are generous, Mr. March," the other answered cordially; adding to himself,--"Got to revise my opinion of the black coat. Didn't quite deserve that after the way you've badgered him, eh, John Knott?"

He shrugged his big shoulders a little shamefacedly.

"Of course, I'd do my best," he continued. "But you see ten to one I shan't be here at the moment. As it is I have neglected lingering sicknesses and sudden deaths, hysterical girls, croupy children, broken legs, and all the other pretty little amusements of a rather large practice, waiting for me. Suppose I happen to be twenty miles away on the far side of Westchurch, or seeing after some of Lady Fallowfeild's numerous progeny engaged in teething or measles? Lady Calmady might be kept waiting, and we cannot afford to have her kept waiting in this crisis."

"I wish to God my aunt, Mrs. St. Quentin, was here!" Ormiston exclaimed. "But she is not, and won't be, alas."

"Well, then, who remains?"

As the doctor spoke he pressed his fingers against the edge of the table, leaned forward, and looked keenly at Ormiston. He was extremely ugly just then, ugly as the weather-worn gargoyle on some mediaeval church tower; but his eyes were curiously compelling.

"Good heavens! you don't mean that I've got to tell her!" Ormiston cried.

He rose hurriedly, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked a little unsteadily across to the window, crunching the shining pieces of Mrs. Ormiston's sacrificial wine-glass under foot. Outside the night was very wild. In the colourless sky stars reeled among the fleets of racing cloud. The wind hissed up the grass slopes and shouted among the great trees crowning the ridge of the hill. The prospect was not calculated to encourage. Ormiston turned his back on it. But hardly more encouraging was the sombre, gray-blue-walled room. The vision of all that often returned to him afterwards in very different scenes--the tall lamps, the two men, so strangely dissimilar in appearance and temperament, sitting on either side the dinner-table with its fine linen and silver, wines and fruits, waiting silently for him to speak.

"I can't tell her," he said, "I can't. Damn it all, I tell you, Knott, I daren't. Think what it will be to her! Think of being told that about your own child!" Ormiston lost control of himself. He spoke violently. "I'm so awfully fond of her and proud of her," he went on. "She's behaved so splendidly ever since Richard's death, laid hold of all the business, never spared herself, been so able and so just. And now the baby coming, and being a boy, seemed to be a sort of let up, a reward to her for all her goodness. To tell her this horrible thing will be like doing her some hideous wrong. If her heart has to be broken, in common charity don't ask me to break it."

There was a pause. He came back to the table and stood behind Julius March's chair.

"It's asking me to be hangman to my own sister," he said.

"Yes, I know it is a confoundedly nasty piece of work. And it's rough on you, very rough. Only, you see, this hanging has to be put through--there's the nuisance. And it is just a question whether your hand won't be the lightest after all."

Again silence obtained, but for the rush and sob of the gale against the great house.

"What do you say, Julius?" Ormiston demanded at last.

"I suppose our only thought is for Katherine--for Lady Calmady?" he said. "And in that case I agree with Dr. Knott."

Roger took another turn to the window, stood there awhile struggling with his natural desire to escape from so painful an embassy.

"Very well, if you are not here, Knott, I undertake to tell her," he said at last. "Please God, she mayn't turn against me altogether for bringing her such news. I'll be on hand for the next few days, and--you must explain to Denny that I am to be sent for whenever I am wanted. That's all,--I suppose we may as well go now, mayn't we?"

Julius knelt at the faldstool, without the altar rails of the chapel, till the light showed faintly through the grisaille of the stained-glass windows and outlined the spires and carven canopies of the stalls. At first his prayers were definite, petitions for mercy and grace to be outpoured on the fair, young mother and her, seemingly, so cruelly afflicted child; on himself, too, that he might be permitted to stay here, and serve her through the difficult future. If she had been sacred before, Katherine was rendered doubly sacred to him now. He bowed himself, in reverential awe, before the thought of her martyrdom. How would her proud and naturally joyous spirit bear the bitter pains of it? Would it make, eventually, for evil or for good? And then--the ascetic within him asserting itself, notwithstanding the widening of outlook produced by the awakening of his heart--he was overtaken by a great horror of that which we call matter; by a revolt against the body, and those torments and shames, mental, moral, and physical, which the body brings along with it. Surely the dualists were right? It was unregenerate, a thing, if made by God, yet wholly fallen away from Him and given over to evil, this fleshly envelope wherein the human soul is seated, and which, even in the womb, may be infected by disease or rendered hideous by mutilation? Then, as the languor of his long vigil overcame him, he passed into an ecstatic contemplation of the state of that same soul after death, clothed with a garment of incorruptible and enduring beauty, dwelling in clear, luminous spaces, worshipping among the ranks of the redeemed, beholding its Lord God face to face.

John Knott, meanwhile, after driving home beneath the reeling stars, through the roar of the forest and shriek of the wind across the open

moors, found an urgent summons awaiting him. He spent the remainder of that night, not in dreams of paradise and of spirits redeemed from the thralldom of the flesh, but in increasing the population of this astonishing planet, by assisting to deliver a scrofulous, half-witted shrieking servant-girl of twins--illegitimate--in the fusty atmosphere of a cottage garret, right up under the rat-eaten thatch.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH KATHERINE CALMADY LOOKS ON HER SON

More than a week elapsed before Ormiston was called upon to redeem his promise. For Lady Calmady's convalescence was slow. An apathy held her, which was tranquillising rather than tedious. She was glad to lie still and rest. She found it very soothing to be shut away from the many obligations of active life for a while; to watch the sunlight, on fair days, shift from east by south to west, across the warm fragrant room; to see the changing clouds in the delicate spring sky, and the slow-dying crimson and violet of the sunset; to hear the sudden hurry of falling rain, the subdued voices of the women in the adjoining nursery, and, sometimes, the lusty protestations of her baby when--as John Knott had put it--"things didn't suit him." She felt a little jealous of the comely, young wet-nurse, a little desirous to be more intimately acquainted with this small, new Richard Calmady, on whom all her hopes for the future were set. But immediately she was very submissive to the restrictions laid by Denny and the doctor upon her intercourse with the child. She only stood on the threshold of motherhood as yet. While the inevitable exhaustion, following on the excitement of her spring and summer of joy, her autumn of bitter sorrow, and her winter of hard work, asserted itself now that she had time and opportunity for rest.

The hangings and coverlet of the great, ebony, half-tester bed were lined with rose silk, and worked, with many coloured worsteds on a white ground, in the elaborate Persian pattern so popular among industrious ladies of leisure in the reign of good Queen Anne. It may be questioned whether the parable, wrought out with such patience of innumerable stitches, was closely comprehensible or sympathetic to the said ladies; since a particularly wide interval, both of philosophy and practice, would seem to divide the temper of the early eighteenth century from that of the mystic East. Still the parable was there, plain to whoso could read it; and not perhaps, rather pathetically, without its modern application.

The Powers of Evil, in the form of a Leopard, pursue the soul of man, symbolised by a Hart, through the Forest of This Life. In the midst of that same forest stands an airy, domed pavilion, in which--if so be it have strength and fleetness to reach it--the panting, hunted creature may, for a time, find security and repose. Above this resting-place the trees of the forest interlace their spreading branches, loaded with

amazing leaves and fruit; while companies of rainbow-hued birds, standing very upright upon nothing in particular, entertain themselves by holding singularly indigestible looking cherries and mulberries in their yellow beaks.

And so, Katherine, resting in dreamy quiet within the shade of the embroidered curtains, was even as the Hart pasturing in temporary security before the quaint pavilion. The mark of her bereavement was upon her sensibly still--would be so until the end. Often in the night, when Denny had at last left her, she would wake suddenly and stretch her arms out across the vacant space of the wide bed, calling softly to the beloved one who could give no answer; and then recollecting, would sob herself again to sleep. Often too, as Ormiston's step sounded through the Chapel-Room when he came to pay her those short, frequent visits, bringing the clean freshness of the outer air along with him, Katherine would look up in a wondering gladness, cheating herself for an instant with unreasoning delight--look up, only to know her sorrow, and feel the knife turn in the wound. Nevertheless these days made, in the main, for peace and healing. On more than one occasion she petitioned that Julius March should come and read to her, choosing, as the book he should read from, Spencer's *„Faerie Queene“*. He obeyed, in manner calm, in spirit deeply moved. Katherine spoke little. But her charm was great, as she lay, her eyes changeful in colour as a moorland stream, listening to those intricate stanzas, in which the large hope, the pride of honourable deeds, the virtue, the patriotism, the masculine fearlessness, the ideality, the fantastic imagination, of the English Renaissance so nobly finds voice. They comforted her mind, set by instinct and training to welcome all splendid adventures of romance, of nature, and of faith. They carried her back, in dear remembrance, to the perplexing and enchanting discoveries which Richard Calmady's visit to Ormiston Castle--the many-towered, gray house looking eastward across the unquiet sea--had brought to her. And specially did they recall to her that first evening--even yet she grew hot as she thought of it--when the supposed gentleman-jockey, whom she had purposed treating with gay and reducing indifference, proved not only fine scholar and fine gentleman, but absolute and indisputable master of her heart.

Dr. Knott came to see her, too, almost daily--rough, tender-hearted, humorous, dependable, never losing sight, in his intercourse with her, of the matter in hand, of the thing which immediately is.

Thus did these three men, each according to his nature and capacity, strive to guard the poor Hart, pasturing before the quaint pavilion, set--for its passing refreshment--in the midst of the Forest of This Life, and to keep, just so long as was possible, the pursuing Leopard at bay. Nevertheless the Leopard gained, despite of their faithful guardianship--which was inevitable, the case standing as it did.

For one bright afternoon, about three o'clock, Mrs. Denny arrived in the gun-room, where Ormiston sat smoking, while talking over with Julius the turf-cutting claims of certain squatters on Spendle Flats---arrived, not to summon the latter to further readings of the great Elizabethan poet, but to say to the former:--

"Will you please come at once, sir? Her ladyship is sitting up. She is a little difficult about the baby--only, you know, sir, if I can say it with all respect, in her pretty, teasing way. But I am afraid she must be told."

And Roger rose and went--sick at heart. He would rather have faced an enemy's battery, vomiting out shot and shell, than gone up the broad, stately staircase, and by the silent, sunny passageways, to that fragrant, white-paneled room.

On the stands and tables were bowls full of clear-coloured spring flowers--early primrose, jonquil, and narcissus. A wood-fire burned upon the blue-and-white tiled hearth. And on the sofa, drawn up at right angles to it, Katherine sat, wrapped in a gray, silk dressing-gown bordered with soft, white fur. She flushed slightly as her brother came in, and spoke to him with an air of playful apology.

"I really don't know why you should have been dragged up here, just now, dear old man," she said. "It is some fancy of Denny's. I'm afraid in the excess of her devotion she makes me rather a nuisance to you. And now, not contented with fussing about me, she has taken to being absurdly mysterious about the baby----"

She stopped abruptly. Something in the young man's expression and bearing impressed her, causing her to stretch out her hands to him in swift fear and entreaty.

"Oh, Roger!" she cried, "Roger--what is it?"

And he told her, repeating, with but a few omissions, the statement made to him by the doctor ten days ago. He dared not look at her while he spoke, lest seeing her should unnerve him altogether.

Katherine was very still. She made no outcry. Yet her very stillness seemed to him the more ominous, and the horror of the recital grew upon him. His voice sounded to him unnaturally loud and harsh in the surrounding quiet. Once her silken draperies gave a shuddering rustle--that was all.

At last it was over. At last he dared to look at her. The colour and youthful roundness had gone out of her face. It was gray as her dress, fixed and rigid as a marble mask. Ormiston was overcome with a consuming pity for her and with a violence of self-hatred. Hangman, and to his own sister--in truth, it seemed to him to have come to that! He knelt down in front of her, laying hold of both her knees.

"Kitty, can you ever forgive me for telling you this?" he asked hoarsely.

Even in this extremity Katherine's inherent sweetness asserted itself. She would have smiled, but her frozen lips refused. Her eyelids quivered a little and closed.

"I have nothing to forgive you, dear," she said. "Indeed, it is good of you to tell me, since--since so it is."

She put her hands upon his shoulders, gripping them fast, and bowed her head. The little flames crackled, dancing among the pine logs and the silk of her dress rustled as her bosom rose and fell.

"It won't make you ill again?" Roger asked anxiously.

Katherine shook her head.

"Oh, no!" she said, "I have no more time for illness. This is a thing to cure, as a cautery cures--to burn away all idleness and self-indulgent, sick room fancies. See, I am strong, I am well."

She stood up, her hands slipping down from Ormiston's shoulders and steadying themselves on his hands as he too rose. Her face was still ashen, but purpose and decision had come into her eyes.

"Do this for me," she said, almost imperiously. "Go to Denny, tell her to bring me the baby. She is to leave him with me. And tell her, as she loves both him and me,--as she values her place here at Brockhurst,--she is not to speak."

As he looked at her Ormiston turned cold. She was terrible just then.

"Katherine," he said quickly, "what on earth are you going to do?"

"No harm to my baby in any case--you need not be alarmed. I am quite to be trusted. Only I cannot be reasoned with or opposed, still less consoled with or comforted, yet. I want my baby, and I must have him, here, alone, the doors shut--locked if I please." Her lips gave, the corners of her mouth dropped. And watching her Ormiston swore a little under his breath. "We have something to say to each other, the baby and I," she went on, "which no one else may hear. So do what I ask you, Roger. And come back--I may want you--in about an hour, if I do not send for you before."

Alone with her child, Lady Calmady moved slowly across and bolted both the nursery and the chapel-room doors. Then she drew a low stool up in front of the fire and sat down, laying the infant upon her lap. It was a delicious, dimpled creature, with a quantity of silky golden-brown hair, that curled in a tiny crest along the top of its head. It was but half awake yet, the rounded cheeks pink with the comfort of food and slumber. And as the beautiful, young mother, bending that set, ashen face of hers above it, laid the child upon her knees, it stretched, clenching soft baby fists and rubbing them into its blue eyes.

Katherine unwrapped the shawls, and took off one small garment after another--delicate gossamer-like things of fine flannel, lawn and lace, such as women's fingers linger over in the making with tender joy. Once her resolution failed her. She wrapped the half-dressed child in its white shawls again, rose from her place and walked over to the sunny window, carrying it in the hollow of her arm--it staring up, meanwhile,

with the strange wonder of baby eyes, and cooing, as though holding communication with gracious presences haunting the moulded ceiling above. Katherine gazed at it for a few seconds. But the little creature's serene content, its absolute unconsciousness of its own evil fortune, pained her too greatly. She went back, sat down on the stool again, and completed the task she had set herself.

Then, the baby lying stark naked on her lap, she studied the fair, little face, the penciled eyebrows and fringed eyelids,--dark like her own,--the firm, rounded arms, the rosy-palmed hands, their dainty fingers and finger-nails, the well-proportioned and well-nourished body, without smallest mark or blemish upon it, sound, wholesome, and complete. All these she studied long and carefully, while the dancing glow of the firelight played over the child's delicate flesh, and it extended its little arms in the pleasant warmth, holding them up, as in act of adoration, towards those gracious unseen presences, still, apparently, hovering above the flood of instreaming sunshine against the ceiling overhead. Lastly she turned her eyes, with almost dreadful courage, upon the mutilated, malformed limbs, upon the feet--set right up where the knee should have been, thus dwarfing the child by a fourth of his height. She observed them, handled, felt them. And as she did so, her mother-love, which, until now, had been but a part and consequence--since the child was his gift, the crown and outcome of their passion, his and hers--of the great love she bore her husband, became distinct from that, an emotion by itself, heretofore unimagined, pervasive of all her being. It had none of the sweet self-abandon, the dear enchantments, the harmonising sense of safety and repose which that earlier passion had. This was altogether different in character, and made quite other demands on mind and heart. For it was fierce, watchful, anxious, violent with primitive instinct; the roots of it planted far back in that unthinkable remoteness of time, when the fertile womb of the great earth mother began to bring forth the first blind, simple forms of those countless generations of living creatures which, slowly differentiating themselves, slowly developing, have peopled this planet from that immeasurable past to the present hour. Love between man and woman must be forever young, even as Eros, Cupid, Krishna, are forever youthful gods. But mother-love is of necessity mature, majestic, ancient from the stamp of primal experience which is upon it.

And so, at this juncture, realising that which her motherhood meant, her immaturity, her girlhood fell away from Katherine Calmady. Her life and the purpose of it moved forward on another plane.

She bent down and solemnly kissed the unlovely, shortened limbs, not once or twice, but many times, yielding herself up with an almost voluptuous intensity to her own emotion. She clasped her hands about her knees, so that the child might be enclosed, overshadowed, embraced on all sides by the living defenses of its mother's love. Alone there, with no witnesses, she brooded over it, crooned to it, caressed it with an insatiable hunger of tenderness.

"And yet, my poor pretty, if we had both died, you and I, ten days ago," she murmured, "how far better. For what will you say to me when

you grow older--to me who have brought you, without any asking or will of yours, into a world in which you must always be at so cruel a disadvantage? How will you bear it all when you come to face it for yourself, and I can no longer shield you and hide you away as I can do now? Will you have fortitude to endure, or will you become sour, vindictive, misanthropic, envious? Will you curse the hour of your birth?"

Katherine bowed her proud head still lower.

"Ah! don't do that, my darling," she prayed in piteous entreaty, "don't do that. For I will share all your trouble, do share it even now, beforehand, foreseeing it, while you still lie smiling unknowing of your own distress. I shall live through it many times, by day and night, while you live through it only once. And so you must be forbearing towards me, my dear one, when you come----"

She broke off abruptly, her hands fell at her sides, and she sat rigidly upright, her lips parted, staring blankly at the dancing flames.

In repeating Dr. Knott's statement Ormiston had purposely abstained from all mention of Richard Calmady's accident and its tragic sequel. He could not bring himself to speak to Katherine of that. Until now, dominated by the rush of her emotion, she had only recognised the bare terrible fact of the baby's crippled condition, without attempting to account for it. But, now, suddenly the truth presented itself to her. She understood that she was herself, in a sense, accountable--that the greatness of her love for the father had maimed the child.

As she realised the profound irony of the position, a blackness of misery fell upon Katherine. And then, since she was of a strong, undaunted spirit, an immense anger possessed her, a revolt against nature which could work such wanton injury, and against God, who, being all-powerful, could sit by and permit it so to work. All the foundations of faith and reverence were, for the time being, shaken to the very base.

She gathered the naked baby up against her bosom, rocking herself to and fro in a paroxysm of rebellious grief.

"God is unjust!" she cried aloud. "He takes pleasure in fooling us. God is unjust!"

CHAPTER X

THE BIRDS OF THE AIR TAKE THEIR BREAKFAST

Ormiston's first sensation on reentering his sister's room was one of very sensible relief. For Katherine leaned back against the pink

brocade cushions in the corner of the sofa, with the baby sleeping peacefully in her arms. Her colour was more normal too, her features less mask-like and set. The cloud which had shadowed the young man's mind for nearly a fortnight lifted. She knew; therefore, he argued, the worst must be over. It was an immense gain that this thing was fairly said. Yet, as he came nearer and sat down on the sofa beside her, Ormiston, who was a keen observer, both of horses and women, became aware of a subtle change in Katherine. He was struck--he had never noticed it before--by her likeness to her--and his--father, whose stern, high-bred, clean-shaven face and rather inaccessible bearing and manner impressed his son, even to this day, as somewhat alarming. People were careful not to trifle with old Mr. Ormiston. His will was absolute in his own house, with his tenants, and in the great iron-works--almost a town in itself--which fed his fine fortune. While from his equals--even from his fellow-members of that not over-reverent or easily impressible body, the House of Commons--he required and received a degree of deference such as men yield only to an unusually powerful character. And there was now just such underlying energy in Katherine's expression. Her eyes were dark, as a clear midnight sky is dark, her beautiful lips compressed, but with concentration of purpose, not with weakness of sorrow. The force of her motherhood had awakened in Katherine a latent, titanic element. Like "Prometheus Bound," chained to the rock, torn, her spirit remained unquelled. For good or evil--as the event should prove--she defied the gods.

And something of all this--though he would have worded it very differently in the vernacular of passing fashion--Ormiston perceived. She was unbroken by that which had occurred, and for this he was thankful. But she was another woman to her who had greeted him in pretty apology an hour ago. Yet, even recognising this, her first words produced in him a shock of surprise.

"Is that horse, the Clown, still at the stables?" she asked.

Ormiston thrust his hands into his pockets; and sitting on the edge of the sofa with his knees apart, stared down at the carpet. The mention of the Clown always cut him, and raised in him a remorseful anger. Yes she was like his father, going straight to the point, he thought. And, in this case, the point was acutely painful to him personally. Ormiston's moral courage had been severely taxed, and he had a fair share of the selfishness common to man. It was all very well, but he wished to goodness she had chosen some other subject than this. Yet he must answer.

"Yes," he said; "Willy Taylor has been leading the gallops for the two-year-olds on him for the last month."--He paused. "What about the Clown?"

"Only that I should be glad if you would tell Chifney he must find some other horse to lead the gallops."

Ormiston turned his head.

"I see--you wish the horse sold," he said, over his shoulder.

Katherine looked down at the sleeping baby, its round head, crowned by that delicious crest of silky hair, cuddled in against her breast. Then she looked in her brother's eyes full and steadily.

"No," she answered. "I don't want it sold, I want it shot, by you, here, to-night."

"By Jove!" the young man exclaimed, rising hastily and standing in front of her.

Katherine gazed up at him, and held the child a little closer to her breast.

"I have been alone with my baby. Don't you suppose I see how it has come about?" she asked.

"Oh, damn it all!" Ormiston cried. "I prayed, at least, you might be spared thinking of that."

He flung himself down on the sofa again--while the baby clenching its tiny fist, stretched and murmured in its sleep--and bowed himself together, resting his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands.

"I'm at the bottom of it. It's all my fault," he said. "I am haunted by the thought of that day and night, for if ever one man loved another I loved Richard. And yet if I hadn't been so cursedly keen about the horse all this might never have happened. Oh! if you only knew how often I've wished myself dead since that ghastly morning. You must hate me, Kitty. You've cause enough. Yet how the deuce could I foresee what would come about?"

For the moment Katherine's expression softened. She laid her left hand very gently on his bowed head.

"I could never hate you, dear old man," she said. "You are innocent of Richard's death. But this last thing is different." Her voice became fuller and deeper in tone. "And whether I am equally innocent of his child's disfigurement, God only knows--if there is a God, which perhaps, just now, I had better doubt, lest I should blaspheme too loudly, hoping my bitter words might reach His hearing."

Yet further disturbed in the completeness of its comfort, as it would seem, by the seriousness of her voice, the baby's mouth puckered. It began to fret. Katherine rose and stood rocking it, soothing it--a queenly young figure in her clinging gray and white draperies, which the instreaming sunshine touched, as she moved, to a delicate warmth of colour.

"Hush, my pretty lamb," she crooned--and then softly yet fiercely to Ormiston, "You understand, I wish it. The Clown is to be shot."

"Very well," he answered.

"Sleep--what troubles you, my precious," she went on. "I want it done, now, at once.--Hush, baby, hush.--The sun shall not go down upon my wrath, because my wrath shall be somewhat appeased before the sunset."

Katherine swayed with a rhythmic motion, holding the baby a little away from her in her outstretched arms.

"Tell Chifney to bring the horse up to the square lawn, here, right in front of the house.--Hush, my kitty sweet.--He is to bring the horse himself. None of the stable boys or helpers are to come. It is not to be an entertainment, but an execution. I wish it done quietly."

"Very well," Ormiston repeated. He hesitated, strong protest rising to his lips, which he could not quite bring himself to utter. Katherine, the courage and tragedy of her anger, dominated him as she moved to and fro in the sunshine soothing her child.

"You know it's a valuable horse," he remarked, at last, tentatively.

"So much the better. You do not suppose I should care to take that which costs me nothing? I am quite willing to pay.--Sleep, my pet, so--is that better?--I do not propose to defraud--hush, baby darling, hush--Richard's son of any part of his inheritance. Tell Chifney to name a price for the Clown, an outside price. He shall have a cheque to-morrow, which he is to enter with the rest of the stable accounts.--Now go, please. We understand each other clearly, and it is growing late.--Poor honey love, what vexes you?--You will shoot the Clown, here, before sunset. And, Roger, it must lie where it falls to-night. Let some of the men come early to-morrow, with a float. It is to go to the kennels."

Ormiston got up, shaking his shoulders as though to rid himself of some encumbering weight. He crossed to the fireplace and kicked the logs together.

"I don't half like it," he said. "I tell you I don't. It seems such a cold-blooded butchery. I can't tell if it's wrong or right. It seems merciless. And it is so unlike you, Kitty, to be merciless."

He turned to her as he spoke, and Katherine--her head erect, her eyes full of the sombre fire of her profound alienation and revolt--drew her hand slowly down over the fine lawn and lace of the baby's long white robe, and held it flat against the soles of the child's hidden feet.

"Look at this," she said. "Remember, too, that the delight of my life has gone from me, and that I am young yet. The years will be many--and Richard is dead. Has much mercy been shown to me, do you think?"

And the young man seeing her, knowing the absolute sincerity of her speech, felt a lump rise in his throat. After all, when you have acted hangman to your own sister, as he reasoned, it is but a small matter to act slaughterman to a horse.

"Very well," he answered, huskily enough. "It shall be as you wish,

Kitty. Only go back to the sofa, and stay there, please. If I think you are watching, I can't be quite sure of myself. Something may go wrong, and we don't want a scene which will make talk. This is a business which should be got through as quickly and decently as possible."

The sun was but five minutes high, and no longer brightened the southern house front, though it spread a ruddy splendour over the western range of gables, and lingered about the stacks of slender twisted chimneys, and cast long slanting shadows across the lawns and carriage drives, before Lady Calmady's waiting drew to a close. From the near trees of the elm avenue, and from the wood overhanging the pond below the terraced kitchen gardens, came the singing of blackbirds and thrushes--whether raised as evening hymn in praise of their Creator, or as love-song each to his mate, who shall say? Possibly as both, since in simple minds--and that assuredly is matter for thankfulness--earthly and heavenly affections are bounded by no harsh dividing line. The chorus of song found its way in at the windows of Katherine's room--fresh as the spring flowers which filled it, innocent of hatred and wrong as the face of the now placid baby, his soft cheeks flushed with slumber, as he nestled in against his mother's bosom.

Indeed a long time had passed. Twice Denny had looked in and, seeing that quiet reigned, had noiselessly withdrawn. For Katherine, still physically weak, drained, moreover, by the greatness of her recent emotion, her senses lulled to rest by the warm contact and even breathing of the child, had sunk away into a dreamless sleep.

The questioning neigh of a stallion, a scuffle of horse hoofs, footsteps approaching round the corner of the house, passing across the broad graveled carriage sweep and on to the turf, aroused her. And these sounds were so natural, full of vigorous outdoor life and the wholesome gladness of it, that for a moment she came near repentance of her purpose. But then feeling, as he rested on her arm, her baby's shortened, malformed limbs, and thinking of her well-beloved dying, maimed and spent, in the fulness of his manhood, her face took on that ashen pallor again and all relenting left her. There was a satisfaction of wild justice in the act about to be consummated. And Katherine raised herself from the pink brocade cushions, and sat erect, her lips parted in stern excitement, her forehead contracted in the effort to hear, her eyes fixed on the wide, carven, ebony bed and its embroidered hangings. The poor Hart had, indeed, ceased to pasture in reposeful security before the quaint pavilion, set--for its passing refreshment--in the midst of the Forest of This Life. Now it fled, desperate, by crooked tangled ways, over rocks, through briars, while Care, the Leopard, followed hard behind.

First Roger Ormiston's voice reached her in brief direction, and the trainer's in equally brief reply. The horse neighed again--a sound strident and virile, the challenge of a creature of perfect muscle, hot desire, and proud, quick-coursing blood. Afterwards, an instant's pause, and Chifney's voice again,--"So-ho--my beauty--take it easy--steady there, steady, good lad," and the slap of his open hand on the horse's shoulder straightening it carefully into place. While behind and below all this, in sweet incongruous undertone of

uncontrollable joy, arose the carolling of the blackbirds and thrushes praising, according to their humble powers, God, life, and love.

Finally, as climax of the drama, the sharp report of a pistol, ringing out in shattering disturbance of the peace of the fair spring evening, followed by a dead silence, the birds all scared and dumb--a silence so dead, that Katherine Calmady held her breath, almost awed by it, while the hissing and crackling of the little flames upon the hearth seemed to obtrude as an indecent clamour. This lasted a few seconds. Then the noise of a plunging struggle and the muffled thud of something falling heavily upon the turf.--

Dr. Knott had been up all night, but his patient, Lord Denier's second coachman, would pull through right enough; so he started on his homeward journey in a complacent frame of mind. He reckoned it would save him a couple of miles, let alone the long hill from Farley Row up to Spendle Flats, if on his way back from Grimshott he went by Brockhurst House. It is stretching a point, he admitted, to drive under even your neighbour's back windows at five o'clock in the morning. But the doctor being himself in an unusually amiable attitude, was inclined to accredit others with a like share of good temper. Moreover, the natural man in him cried increasingly loudly for food and bed.

John Knott was not given to sentimental rhapsodies over the beauties of nature. Like other beauties she had her dirty enough moods, he thought. Still, in his own half-snarling fashion, he dearly loved this forest country in which he had been born and bred, while he was too keen a sportsman to be unobservant of any aspect of wind and weather, any movement of bird or beast. With the collar of his long drab driving-coat turned up about his ears, and the stem of a well-coloured meerschaum pipe between his teeth, he sat huddled together in the high, swinging gig, with Timothy, the weazel-faced, old groom by his side, while the drama of the opening day unfolded itself before his somewhat critical gaze. He noted that it would be fine, though windy. In the valley, over the Long Water, spread beds of close, white mist. The blue of the upper sky was crossed by curved windows of flaky, opalescent cloud. In the east, above the dusky rim of the fir woods on the edge of the high-lying tableland, stretched a blinding blaze of rose-saffron, shading through amber into pale primrose colour above. The massive house front, and the walls fencing the three sides of the square enclosure before it, with the sexagonal, pepper-pot summer-houses at either corner, looked pale and unsubstantial in that diffused, unearthly light. At the head of the elm avenue, passing through the high, wrought-iron gates and along the carriage drive which skirts the said enclosure,--the great, square grass plot on the right hand, the red wall of the kitchen gardens on the left,--Dr. Knott had the reins nearly jerked out of his hand. The mare started and swerved, grazing the off wheel against the brickwork, and stopped, her head in the air, her ears pricked, her nostrils dilated showing the red.

"Hullo, old girl, what's up? Seen a ghost?" he said, drawing the whip quietly across the hollow of her back.

But the mare only braced herself more stiffly, refusing to move, while

she trembled and broke into a sudden sweat. The doctor was interested and looked about him. He would first find the cause of her queer behaviour, and give her a good dressing down afterwards if she deserved it.

The smooth, slightly up-sloping lawn was powdered with innumerable dewdrops. In the centre of it, neck outstretched, the fine legs doubled awkwardly together, the hind quarters and barrel rising, as it lay on its side, in an unshapely lump, gray from the drenching dew, was a dead horse. Along the top of the further wall a smart and audacious party of jackdaws had stationed themselves, with much ruffling of gray, neck feathers impudent squeakings and chatter. While a pair of carrion crows hopped slowly and heavily about the carcass, flapping up with a stroke or two of their broad wings in sudden suspicion, then settling down again nearer than before.

"Go to her head, Timothy, and get her by as quietly as you can. I'll be after you in a minute, but I'm bound to see what the dickens they've been up to here."

As he spoke Dr. Knott hitched himself down from off the gig. He was cramped with sitting, and moved forward awkwardly, his footsteps leaving a track of dark irregular patches upon the damp grass. As he approached, the jackdaws flung themselves gleefully upward from the wall, the sun glinting on their glossy plumage as they circled and sailed away across the park. But the crow who had just begun work in earnest, stood his ground, notwithstanding the warning croak of his more timid mate. He grasped the horse's skull with his claws, and tore away greedily at the fine skin about the eye-socket with his strong, black beak.

"How's this, my fine gentleman, in too much of a hurry this morning to wait for the flavour to get into your meat?" John Knott said, as the bird rose sullenly at last. "Got a small hungry family at home, I suppose, crying 'give, give.' Well, that's taught better men than you, before now, not to be too nice, but to snatch at pretty well anything they can get."

He came close and stood looking meditatively down at the dead race-horse--recognised its long, white-reach face, the colour and make of it, while his loose lips worked with a contemptuous yet pitying smile.

"So that's the way my lady's taken it, has she?" he said presently. "On the whole I don't know that I'm sorry. In some cases much benefit unquestionably is derivable from letting blood. This shows she doesn't mean to go under if I know her; and that's a mercy, for that poor little beggar, the baby's sake."

He turned and contemplated the stately facade of the house. The ranges of windows, blind with closed shutters and drawn curtains, in the early sunshine gave off their many panes a broad dazzle of white light.

"Poor little beggar," he repeated, "with his forty thousand a year and

all the rest of it. Such a race to run and yet so badly handicapped!"

He stooped down, examined the horse, found the mark of the bullet.

"Contradictory beings, though, these dear women," he went on. "So fanciful and delicate, so sensitive you're afraid to lay a finger on them. So unselfish, too, some of them, they seem too good for this old rough and tumble of a world. And yet touch 'em home, and they'll show an unscrupulous savagery of which we coarse brutes of men should be more than half ashamed. God Almighty made a little more than He bargained for when He made woman. She must have surprised Him pretty shrewdly, one would think, now and then since the days of the apple and the snake."

He moved away up the carriage drive, following Timothy, the sweating, straining mare, and swinging gig. The carrion crow flapped back, with a croak, and dropped on the horse's skull again. Hearing that bodeful sound the doctor paused a moment, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and looking round at the bird at its ugly work, set as foreground to that pure glory of the sunrise, and the vast noble landscape, misty valley, dewy grassland, far ranging hillside crowned with wood.

"The old story," he muttered, "always repeating itself. And it strikes one as rather a wasteful, clumsy contrivance, at times. Life forever feeding on death--death forever breeding life."

Thus ended the Clown, own brother to Touchstone, of merry name and mournful memory, paying the penalty of wholly involuntary transgressions. From which ending another era dated at Brockhurst, the most notable events of which it is the purpose of the ensuing pages duly to set forth.

BOOK II

THE BREAKING OF DREAMS

CHAPTER I

RECORDING SOME ASPECTS OF A SMALL PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, says the comfortable proverb. Which would appear to be but another manner of declaring that the law of compensation works permanently in human affairs. All quantities, material and immaterial alike, are, of necessity, stable; therefore the loss or defect of one participant must--indirectly, no doubt, yet very surely--make for the gain of some other. As of old, so now, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

Julius March would, how gladly, have been among the martyrs! But the lot fell otherwise. And--always admitting the harshness of the limitations he had imposed on himself--the martyrdom of those he held dearest, did, in fact, work to secure him a measure of content that had otherwise been unattainable. The twelve years following the birth of Lady Calmady's child were the most fruitful of his life. He filled a post no other person could have filled; one which, while satisfying his religious sense and priestly ideal of detachment, appeased the cravings of his heart and developed the practical man in him. The contemplative and introspective attitude was balanced by an active and objective one. For he continued to live under his dear lady's roof, seeing her daily and serving her in many matters. He watched her, admiring her clear yet charitable judgment and her prudence in business. He bowed in reverence before her perfect singleness of purpose. He was almost appalled, apprehending, now and then, the secret abysses of her womanhood, the immensity of her self-devotion, the swing of her nature from quick, sensitive shrinking to almost impious pride. Man is the outcome of the eternal common sense; woman that of some moment of divine folly. Meanwhile the ways of true love are many; and Julius March, thus watching his dear lady, discovered, as other elect souls have discovered before him, that the way of chastity and silence, notwithstanding its very constant heartache, is by no means among the least sweet. The entries in his diaries of this period are intermittent, concise, and brief--naturally enough, since the central figure of Julius's mental picture had ceased, happily for him, to be himself.

And not only Katherine's sorrows, but the unselfish action of another woman went to make Julius March's position at Brockhurst tenable. A few days after Ormiston's momentous interview with his sister, news came of Mrs. St. Quentin's death. She had passed hence peacefully in her sleep. Knowledge of the facts of poor, little Dickie Calmady's ill-fortune had been spared her. For it would be more satisfactory--so Mademoiselle de Mirancourt had remarked, not without a shade of irony--that if Lucia St. Quentin must learn the sad fact at all, she should do so where *_le bon Dieu_* Himself would be at hand to explain matters, and so, in a degree, set them right.

Early in April Mademoiselle de Mirancourt had gathered together her most precious possessions and closed the pretty apartment in the rue de Rennes. It had been a happy halting-place on the journey of life. It was haunted by well-beloved ghosts. It cost not a little to bid it, the neighbouring church of the St. Germain des Pres, where she had so long worshipped, and her little *_coterie_* of intimate friends, farewell. Yet she set forth, taking with her Henriette, the hard-featured, old, Breton maid, and *_Monsieur Pouf_*, the gray, Persian cat,--he protesting plaintively from within a large Manilla basket,--and thus accompanied, made pilgrimage to Brockhurst. And when Katherine, all the lost joys of her girlhood assailing her at sight of her lifelong friend, had broken down for once, and, laying her beautiful head on the elder woman's shoulder, had sobbed out a question as to when this visit must end, Marie de Mirancourt had answered--

"That, most dear one, is precisely as you shall see fit to decide. It need not end till I myself end, if you so please."

And when Katherine, greatly comforted yet fearing to be over-greedy of comfort, had reasoned with her, reminding her of the difference of climate, the different habits of living in that gay, little Paris home and this great English country house; reminding her, further, of her so often and fondly expressed desire to retire from the world while yet in the complete possession of her powers and prepare for the inevitable close within the calm and sacred precincts of the convent--the other replied almost gaily--

"Ah, my child! I have still a naughty little spirit of experiment in me which defiles the barbarities of your climate. While as to the convent, it has beckoned so long--let it beckon still! It called first when my _fiance_ died,--God rest his soul,--worn out by the hardships he endured in the war of La Vendee and I put from me forever all thought of marriage. But then my mother, an emigrant here in London, claimed all my care. It called me again when she departed, dear saintly being. But then there were my brother's sons--orphaned by the guillotine--to place. And when I had established them honourably, our beloved Lucia turned to me, with her many enchantments and exquisite tragedy of the heart. And, now, in my old age I come to you--whom I receive from her as a welcome legacy--to remain just so long as I am not a burden to you. Second childhood and first should understand one another. We will play delightful games together, the dear baby and I. So let the convent beckon. For the convent is perhaps, after all, but an impatient grasping at the rest of paradise, before that rest is fairly earned. I have a good hope that, after all, we give ourselves most acceptably to God in thus giving ourselves to His human creatures."

Thus did Marie de Mirancourt, for love's sake, condemn herself to exile, thereby rendering possible--among other things--Julius's continued residence at Brockhurst. For Captain Ormiston had held true to his resolve of scorning the delights of idleness, the smiles of ladies more kind than wise, and all those other pleasant iniquities to which idleness inclines the young and full-blooded, of bidding farewell to London and Windsor, and proceeding to "live laborious days" in some far country. He had offered to remain indefinitely with Katherine if she needed him. But she refused. Let him be faithful to the noble profession of arms and make a name for himself therein.

"Brockhurst has ceased to be a place for a soldier," she said. "Leave it to women and priests!" And then, repenting of the bitterness of her speech, she added:--"Really there is not more work than I can manage, with Julius to help me at times. Iles is a good servant if a little tediously pompous, and Chifney must see to the stables."--Lady Calmady paused, and her face grew hard. But for her husband's dying request, she would have sold every horse in the stud, razed the great square of buildings to the ground and made the site of it a dunghill. "Work is a drug to deaden thought. So it is a kindness to let me have plenty of it, dear old man. And I fear, even when the labour of each day is done, and Dickie is safe asleep,--poor darling,--I shall still have more than enough of time for thought, for asking those questions to which there

seems no answer, and for desires, vain as they are persistent, that things were somehow, anyhow, other than they are!"

Therefore it came about that a singular quiet settled down on Brockhurst--a quiet of waiting, of pause, rather than of accomplishment. But Julius March, for reasons aforesaid, and Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, in virtue of her unclouded faith in the teachings of her Church,--which assures its members of the beneficent purpose working behind all the sad seeming of this world,--alike rejoiced in that. A change of occupations and of interests came naturally with the change of the seasons, with the time to sow and reap, to plant saplings, to fell timber, to fence, to cut copsing, to build or rebuild, to receive rents or remit them, to listen to many appeals, to readjust differences, to feed game or to shoot it, to bestow charity of meat and fuel, to haul ice in winter to the ice-house from the lake. But beyond all this there was little going or coming at Brockhurst. The magnates of the countryside called at decent intervals, and at decent intervals Lady Calmady returned their civilities. But having ceased to entertain, she refused to receive entertainment. She shut herself away in somewhat jealous seclusion, defiant of possibly curious glances and pitying tongues. Before long her neighbours, therefore, came to raise their eyebrows a little in speaking of her, and to utter discreet regrets that Lady Calmady, though handsome and charming when you saw her, was so very eccentric, adding--"Of course every one knows there is something very uncomfortable about the little boy!" Then would follow confidences as to the disastrous results of popish influences and Romanising tendencies; and an openly expressed conviction--more especially on the part of ladies blessed with daughters of marriageable age--that it would have been so very much better for many people if the late Sir Richard Calmady had looked nearer home for a bride.

But these comments did not affect Katherine. In point of fact they rarely reached her ears. Alone among her neighbours, Mary Cathcart, of the crisp, black hair and gipsy-like complexion, was still admitted to some intimacy of intercourse. And the girl was far too loyal either to bring in gossip or to carry it out. Brockhurst held the romance of her heart. And, notwithstanding the earnest wooing--as the years went on--of more than one very eligible gentleman, Brockhurst continued to hold it.

Meanwhile the somewhat quaint fixed star around which this whole system of planets, large and small, very really revolved, shone forth upon them all with a cheerful enough light. For Dickie by no means belied the promise of his babyhood. He was a beautiful and healthy little boy, with a charming brilliance of colouring, warm and solid in tone. He had his mother's changeful eyes, though the blue of them was brighter than hers had now come to be. He had her dark eyebrows and eyelashes too, and her finely curved lips. While he bore likeness to his father in the straight, square-tipped nose and the close-fitting cap of bright, brown hair with golden stains in it, growing low in short curling locks on the broad forehead and the nape of the neck--expressing the shape of the head very definitely, and giving it something of antique nobility and grace.

And the little lad's appearance afforded, in these pleasant early days at all events, fair index to his temperament. He was gay-natured, affectionate, intelligent, full of a lively yet courteous curiosity, easily moved to laughter, almost inconveniently fearless and experimental; while his occasional thunderbursts of passion cleared off quickly into sunshine and blue sky again. For as yet the burden of deformity rested upon him very lightly. He associated hardly at all with other children, and had but scant occasion to measure his poor powers of locomotion against their normal ones. Lady Fallowfeild it is true, in obedience to suggestions on the part of her kindly lord and master, offered tentatively to import a carriage load--little Ludovic Quayle was just the same age as Dickie--from the Whitney nurseries to spend the day.

"Good fellow, Calmady. I liked Calmady," Lord Fallowfeild had said to her. His conversation, it may be observed, was nothing if not interjectional. "Pretty woman, Lady Calmady---terrible thing for her being left as she is. Always shall regret Calmady. Very sorry for her. Always have been sorry for a pretty woman in trouble. Ought to see something of her, my dear. The two estates join, and, as I always have said, it's a duty to support your own class. Can't expect the masses to respect you unless you show them you're prepared to stand by your own class. Just take some of the children over to see Lady Calmady. Pretty children, do her good to see them. Rode uncommonly straight did Calmady. Terribly upsetting thing his funeral. Never shall forget it. Always did like Calmady--good fellow, Calmady. Nasty thing his death."

But Katherine's pen was fertile in excuses to avoid the invasion from Whitney. Lady Fallowfeild's small brains and large domestic complacency were too trying to her. And that noble lady, it must be owned, was secretly not a little glad to have her advances thus firmly, though gently, repulsed. For she was alarmed at Lady Calmady's reported acquaintance with foreign lands and with books; added to which her simple mind harboured much grisly though vague terror concerning the Roman Church. Picture all her brood of little Quayles incontinently converted into little monks and nuns with shaven heads! How such sudden conversion could be accomplished Lady Fallowfeild did not presume to explain. It sufficed her that "everybody always said Papists were so dreadfully clever and unscrupulous you never could tell what they might not do next."

Once, when Dickie was about six years old, Colonel St. Quentin brought his young wife and two little girls to stay at Brockhurst. Katherine had a great regard for her cousin, yet the visit was never repeated. On the flat poor Dick could manage fairly well, his strangely shod feet traveling laboriously along in effort after rapidity; his hands hastily outstretched now and again to lay hold of door-jamb or table-edge, since his balance was none of the securest. But in that delightfully varied journey from the nursery, by way of his mother's bed-room, the Chapel-Room next door, the broad stair-head,--with its carven balusters, shiny oak flooring, and fine landscapes by Claude and Hobbema,--the state drawing-room and libraries, to that America of his childish dreams, that country of magnificent distances and large

possibility of discovery, the Long Gallery, he was speedily distanced by the three-year-old Betty, let alone her six-year-old sister Honoria, a tall, slim, little maiden, daintily high-bred of face and fleet of foot as a hind. This was bad enough. But the stairways afforded yet more afflicting experiences--the descent of even the widest and shallowest flights presented matter of insuperable difficulty; while the ascent was only to be achieved by recourse to all-fours, against the ignominy of which mode of progression Dickie's soul revolted. And so the little boy concluded that he did not care much about little girls; and confided to his devoted play-fellow Clara--Mrs. Denny's niece and sometime second still-room maid, now promoted, on account of her many engaging qualities, to be Dickie's special attendant--that:--

"They went so quick, they always left him behind, and it was not nice to be left behind, and it was very rude of them to do it; didn't Clara think so?"

And Clara, as in duty and affection bound, not without additional testimony in a certain dimness of her pretty, honest, brown eyes, did indeed very much think so. It followed, therefore, that Dickie saw the St. Quentin family drive away, nurses and luggage complete, quite unmoved. And returned with satisfaction and renewed self-confidence to the exclusive society of all those dear grown-up people--gentle and simple--who were never guilty of leaving him behind; to that of Camp, the old, white bulldog, and young Camp, his son and heir, who, if they so far forgot themselves as to run away, invariably ran back again and apologised, fawning upon him and pushing their broad, ugly, kindly muzzles into his hands; and to that of *Monsieur Pouf*, the gray Persian cat, who, far from going too quickly, displayed such majestic deliberation of movement and admirable dignity of waving fluffed tail, that it required much patient coaxing on Dickie's part ever to make him leave his cushion by the fire and go at all.

But, with the above-mentioned exception, the little boy's self-content suffered but slight disturbance. He took himself very much for granted. He was very curious of outside things, very much amused. Moreover, he was king of a far from contemptible kingdom; and in the blessed ignorance of childhood--that finds pride and honour in things which a wider and sadder knowledge often proves far from glad or glorious--it appeared to him not unnatural that a king should differ, even to the point of some slightly impeding disabilities, from the rank and file of his obedient and devoted subjects. For Dickie, happily for him, was as yet given over to that wholly pleasant vanity, the aristocratic idea. The rough justice of democracy, and the harsh breaking of all purely personal and individualistic dreams that comes along with it, for him, was not just yet.

And Richard's continued and undismayed acquiescence in his physical misfortune was fostered, indirectly, by the captivating poetry of myth and legend with which his mind was fed. He had an insatiable appetite for stories, and Mademoiselle de Mirancourt was an untiring *raconteuse*. On Sunday afternoons upon the terrace, when the park lay bathed in drowsy sunshine and sapphire shadows haunted the under edge of the great woods, the pretty old lady--her eyes shining with gentle

laughter, for Marie de Mirancourt's faith had reached the very perfect stage in which the soul dares play, even as lovers play, with that it holds most sacred--would tell Dickie--the fairy tales of her Church. Would tell him of blessed St. Francis and of Poverty, his sweet, sad bride; of his sermon to the birds dwelling in the oak groves along Tiber valley; of the mystic stigmata, marking as with nail prints his hands and feet, and of that indomitable love towards all creatures, which found alike in the sun in heaven and the heavy-laden ass, brothers and friends. Or she would tell him of that man of mighty strength and stature, St. Christopher, who, in the stormy darkness,--yielding to its reiterated entreaties,--set forth to bear the little child across the wind-swept ford. How he staggered in midstream, amazed and terrified under the awful weight of that, apparently so light, burden; to learn, on struggling ashore at last, that he had borne upon his shoulder no mortal infant, but the whole world and the eternal maker of it, Christ Himself.

These and many another wonder tale of Christian miracle did she tell to Dickie--he squatting on a rug beside her, resting his curly head against her knees, while the pink-footed pigeons hurried hither and thither, picking up the handfuls of barley he scattered on the flags, and the peacocks sunned themselves with a certain worldly and disdainful grace on the hand-rails of the gray balustrades, and young Camp, after some wild skirmish in search of sport, flung himself down panting, his tongue lolling out of his grinning jaws, by the boy's side.

And Katherine, putting aside her cares as regent of Dickie's kingdom and the sorrow that lay so chill against her heart, would tell him stories too, but of a different order of sentiment and of thought. For Katherine was young yet, and her stories were gallant--since her own spirit was very brave--or merry, because it delighted her to hear the boy laugh. And often, as he grew a little older, she would sit with her arm round him, in the keen, winter twilights before the lamps were lit, on the broad cushioned bench of the oriel window in the Chapel-Room. Outside, the stars grew in number and brightness as the dusk deepened. Within, the firelight played over the white-paneled walls, revealing fitfully the handsome faces of former Calmadys--short-lived, passing hence all unsated with the desperate joys of living--painted by Vandyke and Sir Peter Lely, or by Romney and Sir Joshua. Then she would tell him not only of Aladdin, of Cinderella, and time-honoured Puss-in-Boots, but of Merlin the great enchanter, and of King Arthur and his company of noble knights. And of the loves of Sigurd the Niblung and Brunhilda the wise and terrible queen, and of their lifelong sorrow, and of the fateful treasure of fairy gold which lies buried beneath the rushing waters of the Rhine. Or she would tell him of those cold, clear, far-off times in the northern sojourning places of our race--tell him of the cow Audhumla, alone in the vast plain at the very beginning of things, licking the stones crusted over with hoar frost and salt, till, on the third day, there sprung from them a warrior named Bur, the father of Boer, the father of Odin, who is the father of all the gods. She would tell him of wicked Loki too, the deceiver and cunning plotter against the peace of heaven. And of his three evil children--here Dickie would, for what reason he knew not,

always feel his mother hold him more closely, while her voice took a deeper tone--Fenrir the wolf, who, when Thor sought to bind him, bit off the brave god's right hand; and Joermungand the Midgard serpent, who, tail in mouth, circles the world; and Hela, the pale queen, who reigns in Niflheim over the dim kingdoms of the dead. And of Baldur the bright shining god, joy of Asgard, slain in error by Hoeder his blind twin-brother; for whom all things on earth--save one--weep, and will weep, till in the last days he comes again. And of All-Father Odin himself, plucking out his right eye and bartering it for a draught of wisdom-giving water from Mirmir's magic well. Again, she would tell him of the End--which it must be owned frightened Dickie a little, so that he would stroke her cheek, and say softly, "But, mummy, you really are sure, aren't you, it won't happen for a good while yet?"--Of Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods; of the Fimbul winter, and cheerless sun and hurrying, blood-red moon, and all the direful signs which must needs go before the last great battle between good and evil.

And through all of these stories, of Christian and heathen origin alike, Richard began dimly, almost unconsciously, to trace, recurrent as a strain of austere music, the idea--very common to ages less soft and fastidious than our own--of payment in self-restraint and labour, or in actual bodily pain, loss, or disablement, for all good gained and knowledge won.

He found the same idea again when, under the teaching of Julius March, he began reading history, and when his little skill in Greek and Latin carried him as far as the easier passages of the classic poets. Dick was a very apt, if somewhat erratic and inaccurate, scholar. His insatiable curiosity drove him forward. He scurried, in childish fashion by all shortcuts available, to get at the heart of the matter--a habit of mind detestable to pedants, since to them the letter is the main object, not the spirit. Happily Julius was ceasing to be a pedant, even in matters ecclesiastical. He loved the little boy, the mingled charm and pathos of whose personality held him as with a spell. With untiring patience he answered, to the best of his ability, Dickie's endless questions, of how and why. And, perhaps, he learned even more than he taught, under this fire of cross-examination. He had never come intimately in contact with a child's mind before; and Dickie's daring speculations and suggestions opened up very surprising vistas at times. The boy was a born adventurer; a gaily audacious sceptic moreover, notwithstanding his large swallow for romance, until his own morsel of reason and sense of dramatic fitness were satisfied.

And so, having once apprehended that idea of payment, he searched for justification of it instinctively in all he saw and read. He found it again in the immortal story of the siege of Troy, and in the long wanderings and manifold trials of that most experimental of philosophers, the great Ulysses. He found it too in more modern and more authentic history--in the lives of Galileo and Columbus, of Sir Walter Raleigh and many another hero and heroine, of whom, because of some unusual excellence of spirit or attainment, their fellow-men, and, as it would seem, the very gods themselves, have grown jealous, not enduring to witness a beauty rivalling or surpassing their own.

The idea was all confused as yet, coloured by childish fancies, instinctive merely, not realised. Yet it occupied a very actual place in the little boy's mind. He lingered over it silently, caressing it, returning to it again and again in half-frightened delight. It lent a fascination, somewhat morbid perhaps, to all ill-favoured and unsightly creatures--to blind worms and slow-moving toads; to trapped cats and dusty, disabled, winter flies; to a winged sea-gull, property of Bushnell, one of the under-gardeners, that paced, picking up loathsome living in the matter of slugs and snails, about the cabbage beds, all the tragedy of its lost power of flight and of the freedom of the sea in its wild, pale eyes.

It further provoked Dickie to expend all his not inconsiderable gift of draughtsmanship, in the production of long processions of half-human monsters of a grotesque and essentially uncomfortable character. He scribbled these upon all available pieces of paper, including the fly-leaves of Todhunter's Arithmetic, and of his Latin and Greek primers. In an evil hour, for the tidiness of his school-books, he came across the ballad of "Aiken-Drum," with its rather terrible mixture of humour, realism, and the supernatural. From thenceforth for some weeks--though he adroitly avoided giving any direct account of the origin of these grisly imaginative freaks--many margins were adorned, or rather defaced, by fancy portraits of that "foul and stalwart ghaist" the Brownie of Badnock.

So did Dickie dwell, through all his childhood and the early years of youth, in the dear land of dreams, petted, considered, sheltered with perhaps almost cruel kindness, from the keen winds of truth that blow forever across the world. Which winds, while causing all to suffer and bringing death to the weak and fearful, to the lovers of lies and the makers of them, go in the end to strengthen the strong who dare face them, and fortify these in the acceptance of the only knowledge really worth having--namely, the knowledge that romance is no exclusive property of the past, or eternal life of the future, but that both these are here immediately and actually for whoso has eyes to see and courage to possess.

The fairest dreams are true. Yet it is so ordered that to know that we must awake from them. And the awakening is an ugly process enough, too often. When Dickie was about thirteen, the awakening began for him. It came in time-honoured forms--those of horses and of a woman.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH OUR HERO IMPROVES HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH MANY THINGS--HIMSELF INCLUDED

It came about in this wise. Roger Ormiston was expected at Brockhurst, after an absence of some years. He had served with distinction in the Sikh war; and had seen fighting on a grand scale in the battles of

Sobraon and Chillianwallah. Later, the restless genius of travel had taken hold on him, leading him far eastward into China, and northward across the Himalayan snows. He had dwelt among strange peoples and looked on strange gods. He had hunted strange beasts, moreover, and learnt their polity and their ways. He had seen the bewildering fecundity of nature in the tropic jungle, and her barren and terrible beauty in the out-stretch of the naked desert. And the thought of all this set Dickie's imagination on fire. The return of Roger Ormiston was, to him, as the return of the mighty Ulysses himself.

For a change was coming over the boy. He began to weary of fable and cry out for fact. He had just entered his fourteenth year. He was growing fast; and, but for that dwarfing deformity, would have been unusually tall, graceful and well-proportioned. But along with this increase of stature had come a listlessness and languor which troubled Lady Calmady. The boy was sweet-tempered enough, had his hours, indeed, of overflowing fun and high spirits. Still he was restless and tired easily of each occupation in turn. He developed a disquieting relish for solitude; and took to camping-out on one of the broad window-seats of the Long Gallery, in company with volumes of Captain Cook's and Hakluyt's voyages, old-time histories of sport and natural history; not to mention Robinson Crusoe and the merry but doubtfully decent pages of Geoffrey Gambado. And his mother noted, not without a sinking of the heart, that the window-seat, which in his solitary moods Dickie most frequented, was precisely that one of the eastern bay which commanded--beyond the smooth, green expanse and red walls of the troco-ground--a good view of the grass ride, running parallel with the lime avenue, along which the horses from the racing stables were taken out and back, morning and evening, to the galloping ground. Then fears began to assail Katherine that the boy's childhood, the content and repose of it, were nearly past. Small wonder that her heart should sink!

On the day of her brother's return, Katherine, after rather anxious search, so found Richard. He was standing on the book-strewn window-seat. He had pushed open the tall narrow casement and leaned out. The April afternoon was fitfully bright. A rainbow spanned the landscape, from the Long Water in the valley to the edge of the forest crowning the table-land. Here and there showers of rain fell, showing white against huge masses of purple cloud piled up along the horizon.

And as Katherine drew near, threading her way carefully between the Chinese cabinets, oriental jars, and many quaint treasures furnishing the end of the great room, she saw that, along the grass ride, some twenty race-horses, came streeling homeward in single file--a long line of brown, chestnut, black, and of the raw yellows and scarlets of horse-clothing against the delicate green of springing turf and opening leaves. Beside them, clad in pepper-and-salt mixture, breeches and gaiters complete, Mr. Chifney pricked forward soberly on his handsome gray cob. The boys called to one another now and then, admonished a fretful horse breaking away from the string. One of them whistled shrilly a few bars of that then popular but undistinguished tune, "Pop goes the weazel." And Richard craned far out, steadying himself against the stone mullion on either side with uplifted hands, heedless alike of

his mother's presence and of the heavy drops of rain which splattered in at the open casement.

"Dickie, Dickie," Katherine called, in swift anxiety. "Be careful. You will fall."

She came close, putting her arm round him. "You reckless darling," she went on; "don't you see how dangerous the least slip would be?"

The boy straightened himself and looked round at her. His blue eyes were alight. All the fitful brightness, all the wistful charm of the April evening was in his face.

"But it's the only place where I can see them, and they're such beauties," he said. "And I want to see them so much. You know we always miss them somehow, mummy, when we go out."

Katherine was off her guard. Three separate strains of feeling influenced her just then. First, her growing recognition of the change in Richard, of that passing away of childhood which could not but make for difficulty and, in a sense, for pain. Secondly, the natural excitement of her brother's homecoming, disturbing the monotony of her daily life, bringing, along with very actual joy, memories of a past, well-beloved yet gone beyond recall. Lastly, the practical and immediate fear that Dickie had come uncommonly near tumbling incontinently out of the window. And so, being moved, she held the boy tightly and answered rather at random, thereby provoking fate.

"Yes, my dearest, I know we always miss them somehow when we go out. It is best so. But do pray be more careful with these high windows."

"Oh! I'm all right--I'm careful enough." His glance had gone back to where the last of the horses passed out of sight behind the red wall of the gardens. "But why is it best so? Ah! they're gone!" he exclaimed.

Katherine sat down on the window-seat, and Richard, clinging on to the window-ledge, while she still held him, lowered himself into a sitting position beside her.

"Thank you, mummy," he said. And the words cut her. They came so often in each day, and always with the same little touch of civil dignity. The courtesy of Richard's recognition of help given, failed to comfort her for the fact that help was so constantly required. Lady Calmady's sense of rebellion arose and waxed strong whenever she heard those thanks.

"Mother," he went on, "I want to ask you something. You won't mind?"

"Do I ever mind you questioning me?" Yet she felt a certain tightening about her heart.

"Ah, but this is different! I've wanted to for a long while, but I did not know if I ought--and yet I did not quite like to ask Auntie Marie or Julius. And, of course, one doesn't speak to the servants about

anything of that sort."

Richard's curly head went up with a fine, little air of pride as he said the last few words. His mother smiled at him. There was no doubt as to her son's breeding.

"Well, what then?" she said.

"I want to know--you're sure you don't mind--why you dislike the horses, and never go to the stables or take me there? If the horses are wrong, why do we keep them? And if they're not wrong, why, mother, don't you see, we may enjoy them, mayn't we?"

He flushed, looking up at her, spoke coaxingly, merrily, a trifle embarrassed by his own temerity, yet keen to prove his point and acquire possession of this so coveted joy.

Katherine hesitated. She was tempted to put aside his question with some playful excuse. And yet, where was the use? The question must inevitably be answered one day; and Katherine, as had been said, was moved just now, dumbness of long habit somewhat melted. Perhaps this was the appointed time. She drew her arm from around the boy and took both his hands in hers.

"My dearest," she said, "our keeping the horses is not wrong. But--one of the horses killed your father."

Richard's lips parted. His eyes searched hers.

"But how?" he asked presently.

"He was trying it at a fence, and it came down with him--and trampled him."

There was a pause. At last the boy asked rather breathlessly: "Was he killed then, mother, at once?"

It had been Katharine's intention to state the facts simply, gravely, and without emotion. But to speak of these things, after so long silence, proved more trying than she had anticipated. The scene in the red drawing-room, the long agony of waiting and of farewell rose up before her after all these years with a vividness and poignancy that refused to be gain-said.

"No," she answered, "he lived four days. He spoke to me of many things he wished to do. And--I have done them all, I think. He spoke to me of you----" Katherine closed her eyes. "The boy might care for the stables. The boy must ride straight." For the moment she could not look at Richard, knowing that which she must see. The irony of those remembered words appeared too great.--"But he suffered," she went on brokenly, "he suffered--ah! my dear----"

"Mummy, darling mummy, don't look like that!" Dickie cried. He wrenched his hands from her grasp and threw his arms impulsively about her neck.

"Don't--it hurts me. And--and, after all," he added, reasoningly, consolingly, "it wasn't one of these horses, you know. They've never done anybody any harm. It was an accident. There must always be accidents sometimes, mustn't there? And then, you see, it all happened long, long ago. It must have, for I don't remember anything about it. It must have happened when I was a baby."

"Alas, no," Katherine exclaimed, wrung by the pathos of his innocent egoism; "it happened even before then, my dearest, before you were born."

With the unconscious arrogance of childhood, Richard had, so far, taken his mother's devotion very much as a matter of course. He had never doubted that he was, and always had been, the inevitable centre of all her interests. So now, her words and her bearing, bringing--in as far as he grasped them--the revelation of aspects of her life quite independent of his all-important, little self, staggered him. For the first time poor Dickie realised that even one's own mother, be she never so devoted, is not her child's exclusive and wholly private property, but has a separate existence, joys and sorrows apart. Instinctively he took his arms from about her neck and backed away into the angle of the window-seat, regarding her with serious and somewhat startled attention. And, doing so, he for the first time realised consciously something more, namely, the greatness of her beauty.

For the years had dealt kindly with Katherine Calmady. Not the great sorrows of life, or its great sacrifices, but fretfulness, ignoble worries, sordid cares, are that which draw lines upon a woman's face and harshen her features. At six and thirty Lady Calmady's skin was smooth and delicate, her colour, still clear and softly bright. Her hair, though somewhat darker than of old, was abundant. Still she wore it rolled up and back from her forehead, showing the perfect oval of her face. Her eyes, too, were darker; and the expression of them had become profound--the eyes of one who has looked on things which may not be told and has chosen her part. Her bosom had become a little fuller; but the long, inward curve of her figure below it to the round and shapely waist, and the poise of her rather small hips, was lithe and free as ever. While there was that enchanting freshness about her which is more than the mere freshness of youth or of physical health--which would seem, indeed, to be the peculiar dowry of those women who, having once known love in all its completeness and its strength, of choice live ever afterwards in perfect chastity of act and thought.

And a perception not only of the grace of her person, as she sat sideways on the window-seat in her close-fitting, gray gown, with its frilled lace collar and ruffles at the wrists, came to Richard now. He perceived something of this more intimate and subtle charm which belonged to her. He was enthralled by the clear sweetness, as of dewy grass newly turned by the scythe, which always clung about her, and by the whispering of her silken garments when she moved. A sudden reverence for her came upon him, as though, behind her gracious and so familiar figure, he apprehended that which belonged to a region superior, almost divine. And then he was seized--it is too often the fate of worshippers--with jealousy of that past of hers of which he had

been, until now, ignorant. And yet another emotion shook him, for, in thus realising and differentiating her personality, he had grown vividly, almost painfully, conscious of his own.

He turned away, laying his cheek against the stone window-ledge, while the drops of a passing scud of rain beat in on his hot face.

"Then--then my father never saw me," he exclaimed vehemently. And, after a moment's pause, added, "I am glad of that--very glad."

"Ah! But, my dearest," Lady Calmady cried, bewildered and aghast, "you don't know what you are saying--think."

Richard kept his face to the splashing rain.

"I don't want to say anything wrong; but," he repeated, "I am glad."

He turned to her, his lips quivering a little, and a desolate expression in his eyes, which told Katherine, with only too bitter assurance, that his childhood and the repose of it were indeed over and gone.

She held out her arms to him in silent invitation, and drew the dear curly head on to her bosom.

"You're not displeased with me, mummy?"

"Does this seem as if I was displeased?" she asked.

Then they sat silent once more, Katherine swaying a little as she held him, soothing him almost as in his baby days.

"I won't lean out of the window again," he said presently, with a sigh of comfort. "I promise that."

"There's a darling. But I am afraid we must go. Uncle Roger will be here soon."

The boy raised his head.

"Mother," he said quickly, "will you send Clara, please, to put away these books? And may I have Winter to fetch me? I--I'm tired. If you don't mind? I don't care to walk."

Yet, since happily at thirteen Richard's moods were still as many and changeful as the aspects of that same April day, he enjoyed some royally unclouded hours before he--most unwillingly--retired to bed that night. For on close acquaintance the great Ulysses proved a very satisfactory hero. Roger Ormiston's character had consolidated. It was to some purpose that he had put away the pleasant follies of his youth. He looked out now with a coolness and patience, born of wide experience, upon men and upon affairs. He had ceased to lose either his temper or his head. Acquiescing with undismayed and cheerful common sense in the fact that life, as we know it, is but a sorry business, and that

rough things must of necessity be done and suffered every day, he had developed an active--though far from morbidly sentimental--compassion for the individual, man and beast alike. Not that Colonel Ormiston formulated all that, still less held forth upon it. He was content, as is so many another Englishman, to be a dumb and practical philosopher--for which those who have lived with philosophers of the eloquent sort will unquestionably give thanks, knowing, to their sorrow, how often handsome speech is but a cloak to hide incapacity of honest doing.

And so, after dinner, under plea of an imperative need of cigars, Ormiston had borne Dickie off to the Gun-Room; and there, in the intervals of questioning him a little about his tastes and occupations, had told him stories many and great. For he wanted to get hold of the boy and judge of what stuff he was made. Like all sound and healthy-minded men he had an inherent suspicion of the abnormal. He could not but fear that persons unusually constituted in body must be the victims of some corresponding crookedness of spirit. But as the evening drew on he became easy on this point. Whatever Richard's physical infirmity, his nature was wholesome enough. Therefore when, at close upon ten o'clock, Lady Calmady arrived in person to insist that Dickie must go, there and then, straight to bed, she found a pleasant scene awaiting her.

The square room was gay with lamplight and firelight, which brought into strong relief the pictures of famous horses and trophies of old-time weapons--matchlocks, basket-handled swords, and neat silver-hilted rapiers, prettiest of toys with which to pink your man--that decorated its white-paneled walls.

Ormiston stood with his back to the fire, one heel on the fender, his broad shoulders resting against the high chimneypiece, his head bent forward as he looked down, in steady yet kindly scrutiny, at the boy. His face was tanned by the sun and wind of the long sea voyage--people still came home from India by the Cape--till his hair and moustache showed pale against his bronzed skin. And to Richard, listening and watching from the deep armchair drawn up at right angles to the hearth, he appeared as a veritable demigod, master of the secrets of life and death--beheld, moreover, through an atmosphere of fragrant tobacco smoke, curiously intoxicating to unaccustomed nostrils. Dickie had tucked himself into as small a space as possible, to make room for young Camp, who lay outstretched beside him. The bull-dog's great underhung jaw and pendulous, wrinkled cheeks rested on the arm of the chair, as he stared and blinked rather sullenly at the fire--moved and choked a little, slipping off unwillingly to sleep, to wake with a start, to stare and blink once more. The embroidered *couvre-pieds*, which Dickie had spread across him, gathering the top edge of it up under the front of his Eton jacket, offered luxurious bedding. But Camp was a typical conservative, slow-witted, stubborn against the ingress of a new idea. This tall, somewhat masterful stranger must prove himself a good man and true--according to bull-dog understanding of those terms--before he could hope to gain entrance to that faithful, though narrow heart.

Ormiston meanwhile, finely contemptuous of canine criticism, greeted

his sister cheerily.

"You're bound to give us a little law to-night, Kitty," he said, holding out his hand to her. "We won't break rules and indulge in unbridled license as to late hours again, will we, Dick? But, you see, we've both been doing a good deal, one way and another, since we last met, and there were arrears of conversation to make up."--He smiled very charmingly at Lady Calmady, and his fingers closed firmly on her hand.--"We've been getting on famously, notwithstanding our long separation." He looked down at Richard again. "Fast friends, already, and mean to remain so, don't we, old chap?"

Thereupon Lady Calmady's soul received much comfort. Her pride was always on the alert, fiercely sensitive concerning Richard. And the joy of this meeting had, till now, an edge of jealous anxiety to it. If Roger did not take to the boy, then--deeply though she loved him--Roger must go. For the same elements were constant in Katherine Calmady. Not all the discipline of thirteen years had tamed the hot blood in her which made her order out the Clown for execution. But as Ormiston spoke, her face softened, her eyes grew luminous and smiled back at him with an exquisite gladness. The soft gloom of her black velvet dress emphasised the warm, golden whiteness of her bare shoulders and arms. Ormiston seeing her just then, understanding something of the drama of her thought, was moved from his habitual cool indifference of bearing.

"Katherine," he said, "do you know you take one rather by surprise. Upon my word you're more beautiful than ever."

And Richard's clear voice rang out eagerly from the depths of the big chair--

"Yes--yes--isn't she, Uncle Roger--isn't she--delicious?"

The man's smile broadened almost to laughter.

"You young monkey," he said very gently; "so you have discovered that fact already, have you? Well, so much the better. It's a safe basis to start from; don't you think so, Kitty?"

But Lady Calmady drew away her hand. The blood had rushed into her face and neck. Her beauty, now, for so long, had seemed a negligible quantity, a thing that had outlasted its need and use--since he who had so rejoiced in it was dead. What is the value of ever so royal a crown when the throne it represents has fallen to ruin? And yet, being very much a woman, those words of praise came altogether sweetly to Katherine from the lips of her brother and her son. She moved away, embarrassed, not quite mistress of herself, sat down on the arm of Richard's chair, leaned across him and patted the bull-dog--who raised his heavy head with a grunt, and slapped Dickie smartly in the stomach with his tail, by way of welcome.

"You dear foolish creatures," she said, "pray talk of something more profitable. I am growing old, and, in some ways, I am rather thankful for it. All the same, Dickie, darling, you positively must and shall go

to bed."

But Colonel Ormiston interrupted her. He spoke with a trace of hesitation, turning to the fireplace and flicking the ash off the end of his cigar.

"By the bye, Katherine, how's Mary Cathcart? Have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, last week."

"Then she's not gone the way of all flesh and married?"

"No," Lady Calmady answered. She bent a little lower, tracing out the lines on the dog's wrinkled forehead with her finger. "Several men have asked her to marry. But there is only one man in the world, I fancy, whom Mary would ever care to marry--poor Camp, did I tickle you?--and he, I believe, has not asked her yet."

"Ah! there," Ormiston exclaimed quickly, "you are mistaken."

"Am I?" Katherine said. "I have great faith in Mary. I suppose she was too wise to accept even him, being not wholly convinced of his love."

Lady Calmady raised her eyes. Ormiston looked very keenly at her. And Richard, watching them, felt his breath come rather short with excitement, for he understood that his mother was speaking in riddles. He observed, moreover, that Colonel Ormiston's face had grown pale for all its sunburn.

"And so," Katherine went on, "I think the man in question had better be quite sure of his own heart before he offers it to Mary Cathcart again."

Ormiston flung his half-smoked cigar into the fire. He came and stood in front of Richard.

"Look here, old chap," he said, "what do you say to our driving over to Newlands to-morrow? You can set me right if I've forgotten any of the turns in the road, you know. And you and Miss Cathcart are great chums, aren't you?"

"Mother, may I go?" the boy asked.

Lady Calmady kissed his forehead.

"Yes, my dearest," she said. "I will trust you and Uncle Roger to take care of each other for once. You may go."

The immediate consequence of all which was, that Richard went to bed that night with a brain rather dangerously active and eyes rather dangerously bright. So that when sleep at last visited him, it came burdened with dreams, in which the many impressions and emotions of the day took altogether too lively a part, causing him to turn restlessly to and fro, and throw his arms out wide over the cool linen sheets and

pillow.

For there was new element in Dickie's dreams to-night:--namely, a recurrent distress of helplessness and incapacity of movement, and therefore of escape, in the presence of some on-coming multitudinous terror. He was haunted, moreover, by a certain stanza of the ballad of Chevy Chase. It had given him a peculiar feeling, sickening yet fascinating, ever since he could remember first to have read it, a feeling which caused him to dread reading it beforehand, yet made him turn back to it again and again. And to-night, sometimes Richard was himself, sometimes his personality seemed merged in that of Witherington, the crippled fighting-man, of whose maiming and deadly courage that stanza tells. And the battle was long and fierce, as from out a background of steeple-shaped, honey-combed rocks and sparse trees with large golden leaves--like those on the panels of the great, lacquered cabinets in the Long Gallery--innumerable hordes of fanatic Chinamen poured down on him, a hideous bedizenment of vermilion war-devils painted on their blue tunics and banners and shields. And he, Richard,--or was it he, Witherington?--alone facing them all,--they countless in number, always changing yet always the same. From under their hard, upturned hats, a peacock feather erect in each, the cruel, oblique-eyed, impassive faces stared at him. They pressed him back and back against the base of a seven-storied pagoda, the wind bells of which jangled far above him from the angles of its tiers of fluted roofs. And the sky was black and polished. Yet it was broad, glaring daylight, every object fearfully distinct. And he was fixed there, unable to get away because--yes, of course, he was Witherington, so there was no need of further explanation of that inability of escape.

And still, at the same time, he could see Chifney on the handsome gray cob, trotting soberly along the green ride, beside the long string of race-horses coming home from exercise. The young leaves were fragile and green now, not sparse and metallic, and the April rain splashed in his face. He tried to call out to Tom Chifney, but the words died in his throat. If they would only put him on one of those horses! He knew he could ride, and so be safe and free. He called again. That time his voice came. They must hear. Were they not his own servants, after all, and his own horses--or would be soon, when he was grown up? But neither the trainer, nor the boys so much as turned their heads; and the living ribbon of brown and chestnut swept on and away out of sight. No one would heed him, no one would hearken to his cry.

Once his mother and some man, whom he knew yet did not know, passed by him hand in hand. She wore a white dress, and smiled with a look of ineffable content. Her companion was tall, gracious in bearing and movement, but unsubstantial, a luminous shadow merely. Richard could not see his face. Yet he knew the man was of near kin to him. And to them he tried to speak. But it was useless. For now he was not Richard any more. He was not even Witherington, the crippled fighting-man of the Chevy Chase ballad. He was--he was the winged sea-gull, with wild, pale eyes, hiding--abject yet fierce--among the vegetable beds in the Brockhurst kitchen-gardens, and picking up loathsome provender of snails and slugs. Roger Ormiston, calm, able, kindly, yet just a trifle insolent, cigar in mouth, sauntered up and looked at the bird, and it

crawled away among the cabbages ignominiously, covered with the shame of its incompleteness and its fallen estate.

And then from out the honey-combed rocks, under the black, polished sky, the blue tunicked Chinamen swept down on Richard again with the maddening horror of infinite number. They crushed in upon him, nearer and nearer, pressing him back against the wall of that evil pagoda. The air was hot and musky with their breath and thick with the muffled roar of their countless footsteps. And they came right in on him, trampling him down, suffocating, choking him with the heat of them and the dead weight.

Shouting aloud--as it seemed to him--in angry terror, the boy woke. He sat up trembling, wet with perspiration, bewildered by the struggle and the wild phantasmagoria of his dream. He pulled open the neck of his nightshirt, leaned his head against the cool brass rail of the back of the bedstead, while he listened with growing relief to the rumble of the wind in the chimney, and the swish of the rain against the casements, and watched the narrow line of light under the door of his mother's room.

Yes, he was Richard Calmady, after all, here in his own sheltered world, among those who had loved and served him all his life. Nothing hurtful could reach him here, nothing of which he need be afraid. There was no real meaning in that ugly dream.

And then Dickie paused a moment, still sitting up in the warm darkness, pressing his hands down on the mattress on either side to keep himself from slipping. For involuntarily he recalled the feeling which had prompted his declaration that he was glad his father had never seen him; recalled his unwillingness to walk, lest he should meet Ormiston unexpectedly; recalled the instinct which, even during that glorious time in the Gun-Room, had impelled him to keep the embroidered _couvre-pieds_ carefully over his legs and feet. And, recalling these things, poor Dickie arrived at conclusions regarding himself which he had happily avoided arriving at before. For they were harsh conclusions, causing him to cower down in the bed, and bury his face in the pillows to stifle the sound of the tearing sobs which would come.

Alas! was there not only too real a meaning in that same ugly dream and that shifting of personality? He understood, while his body quivered with the anguish of it, that he had more in common with, and was nearer, far nearer, to the maimed fighting-man of the old ballad, even to the poor seagull robbed of its power of flight, than to all those dear people whose business in life it seemed to pet and amuse him, and to minister to his every want--to the handsome soldier uncle, whose home-coming had so excited him, to Julius March, his indulgent tutor, to Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, his delightful companion, to Clara, his obedient playfellow, to brown-eyed Mary Cathcart, and even to his lovely mother herself!

Thus did the bitter winds of truth, which blow forever across the world, first touch Richard Calmady, cutting his poor boyish pride as with a whip. But he was very young. And the young, mercifully, know no

such word as the inevitable; so that the wind of truth is ever tempered for them--the first smart of it over--by the sunshine of ignorant and unlimited hope.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING THAT WHICH, THANK GOD, HAPPENS ALMOST EVERY DAY

The merry spring sky was clear, save in the south where a vast perspective of dappled cloud lay against it, leaving winding rivers of blue here and there, as does ribbed sand for the incoming tide. As the white gate of the inner park--the gray unpainted palings ranging far away to right and left--swung to behind them, and Henry the groom, after a smart run, clambered up into his place again beside Camp on the back seat of the double dog-cart, Richard's spirits rose. Straight ahead stretched out the long vista of that peculiar glory of Brockhurst, its avenue of Scotch firs. The trunks of them, rough-barked and purple below, red, smooth and glistening above, shot up some thirty odd feet--straight as the pillars of an ancient temple--before the branches, sweeping outward and downward, met, making a whispering, living canopy overhead, through which the sunshine fell in tremulous shafts, upon the shining coats and gleaming harness of the horses, upon Ormiston's clear-cut, bronzed face and upright figure, and upon the even, straw-coloured gravel of the road. The said road is raised by about three feet above the level of the land on either side. On the left, the self-sown firs grow in close ranks. The ground below them is bare but for tussocks of coarse grass and ruddy beds of fallen fir needles. On the right, the fir wood is broken by coppices of silver-stemmed birches, and spaces of heather--that shows a purple-brown against the gray of the reindeer moss out of which it springs. Tits swung and frolicked among the tree-tops, and a jay flew off noisily with a flash of azure wing-coverts and volley of harsh discordant cries.

The rapid movement, the moist, pungent odour of the woodland, the rhythmical trot of the horses, the rattle of the splinter-bar chains as the traces slackened going downhill, above all the presence of the man beside him, were pleasantly stimulating to Richard Calmady. The boy was still a prey to much innocent enthusiasm. It appeared to him, watching Ormiston's handling of the reins and whip, there was nothing this man could not do, and do skilfully, yet all with the same easy unconcern. Indeed, the present position was so agreeable to him that Dickie's spirits would have risen to an unusual height, but for a certain chastening of the flesh in the shape of the occasional pressure of a broad strap against his middle, which brought him unwelcome remembrance of recent discoveries it was his earnest desire to ignore, still better to forget.

For just at starting there had been a rather bad moment. Winter, having settled him on the seat of the dog-cart, was preparing to tuck him in

with many rugs, when Ormiston said--

"Look here, dear old chap, I've been thinking about this, and upon my word you don't seem to me very safe. You see this is a different matter to your donkey-chair, or the pony-carriage. There's no protection at the side, and if the horses shied or anything--well, you'd be in the road. And I can't afford to spill you the first time we go out together, or there'd be a speedy end of all our fun."

Richard tried to emulate his uncle's cool indifference, and take the broad strap as a matter of course. But he was glad the tongue of the buckle slipped so directly into place; and that Henry's attention was engaged with the near horse, which fretted at standing; and that Leonard, the footman, was busy making Camp jump up at the back; and that his mother, who had been watching him from the lowest of the wide steps, turned away and went up to the flight to join Julius March standing under the gray arcade. As the horses sprang forward, clattering the little pebbles of the drive against the body of the carriage, and swung away round the angle of the house, Katherine came swiftly down the steps again smiling, kissing her hand to him. Still, the strap hurt--not poor Dickie's somewhat ill-balanced body, to which in truth it lent an agreeable sense of security, but his, just then, all too sensitive mind. So that, notwithstanding a fine assumption of gaiety, as he kissed his hand in return, he found the dear vision of his mother somewhat blurred by foolish tears which he had resolutely to wink away.

But now that disquieting incident was left nearly ten minutes behind. The last park gate and its cluster of mellow-tinted thatched cottages was past. Not only out-of-doors and all the natural exhilaration of it, but the spectacle of the world beyond the precincts of the park--into which world he, in point of fact, so rarely penetrated--wooed him to interest and enjoyment. To Dickie, whose life through his mother's jealous tenderness and his own physical infirmity had been so singularly circumscribed, there was an element, slightly pathetic, of discovery and adventure in this ordinary afternoon drive.

He did not want to talk. He was too busy simply seeing, everything food for those young eyes and brain so greedy of incident and of beauty. He sat upright and stared at the passing show.--At the deep lane, its banks starred with primroses growing in the hollows of the gnarled roots of oaks and ash trees. At Sandyfield rectory, deep-roofed, bow-windowed, the red walls and tiles of it half smothered in ivy and cotton-wool. At the low, squat-towered, Georgian church, standing in its acre of close-packed graveyard, which is shadowed by yew trees and by the clump of three enormous Scotch firs in the rectory garden adjoining. At the Church Farm, just beyond--a square white house, the slated roofs of it running up steeply to a central block of chimneys, it having, in consequence, somewhat the effect of a monster extinguisher. At the rows of pale, wheat stacks, raised on granite straddles; at the prosperous barns, yards, and stables, built of wood on brick foundations, that surround it, presenting a mass of rich, solid colour and of noisy, crowded, animal life. At the fields, plough and pasture, marked out by long lines of hedgerow trees, broken by

coppices--these dashed with tenderest green--stretching up and back to the dark purple-blue range of the moorland. At scattered cottages, over the gates of whose gardens gay with daffodils and polyanthus, groups of little girls and babies, in flopping sunbonnets and scanty lilac pinafores, stared back at the passing carriage, and then bobbed the accustomed curtsy. In the said groups were no boys, save of infant years. The boys were away shepherding, or to plough, or bird-minding. For as yet education was free indeed--in the sense that you were free to take it, or leave it, as suited your pocket and your fancy.

Richard stared too at the pleasant, furze-dotted commons, spinning away to right and left as the horses trotted sharply onward--commons whereon meditative donkeys endured rather than enjoyed existence, after the manner of their kind; and prodigiously large families of yellow-gray goslings streeled after the flocks of white geese, across spaces of fresh sprung grass around shallow ponds, in which the blue and dapple of the sky was reflected. He stared at Sandyfield village too--a straight street of detached houses, very diverse in colour and in shape, standing back, for the most part, amid small orchards and gardens that slope gently up from the brook, which last, backed, here by a row of fine elms, there by one of Lombardy poplars, borders the road. Three or four shops, modest in size as they are ambitious in the variety of objects offered for sale in them, advance their windows boldly. So does the yellow-washed inn, the Calmady arms displayed upon its swinging sign-board. A miller's tented waggon, all powdery with flour, and its team of six horses, brave with brass harness and bells, a timber-carriage, and a couple of spring-carts, were drawn up on the half-moon of gravel before the porch; while, from out the open door, came a sound of voices and odour of many pipes and much stale beer.

And Richard had uninterrupted leisure to bestow on all this seeing, for his companion, Colonel Ormiston, was preoccupied and silent. Once or twice he looked down at the boy as though suddenly remembering his presence and inquired if he was "all right." But it was not until they had crossed the long, white-railed bridge, at the end of Sandyfield street--which spans not only the little brown river overhung by black-stemmed alders, but a bit of marsh, reminiscent of the ancient ford, lush with water grasses, beds of king-cups, and broad-leaved docks--not until then did Colonel Ormiston make sustained effort at conversation. Beyond the bridge the road forks.

"Left to Newlands, isn't it?" he asked sharply.

Then, as the carriage swept round the turn, he woke up from his long reverie; waking Richard up also, from his long dream of mere seeing, to human drama but dimly apprehended close there at his side.

"Oh, well, well!" the man exclaimed, throwing back his head in sharp impatience, as a horse will against the restraint of the bearing-rein. He raised his eyebrows, while his lips set in a smile the reverse of gay. Then he looked down at Richard again, an unwonted softness in his expression.

"Been happy?" he said. "Enjoyed your drive? That's right. You

understand the art of being really good company, Dick."

"What's that?"

"Allowing other people to be just as bad company as they like."

"I--I don't see how you could be bad company," Dickie said, flushing at the audacity of his little compliment.

"Don't you, dear old chap? Well, that's very nice of you. All the same, I find, at times, I can be precious bad company to myself."

"Oh! but I don't see how," the boy argued, his enthusiasm protesting against all possibility of default in the object of it. Richard wanted to keep his hands down,--unconsciousness, if only assumed, told for personal dignity--but in the agitation of protest, spite of himself, he laid hold of the top edge of that same chastening strap. "It must be so awfully jolly to be like you--able to do everything and go everywhere. There must be such a lot to think about."

The softness was still upon Ormiston's face. "Such a lot?" he said. "A jolly lot too much, believe me, very often, Dick."

He looked away up the copse-bordered road, over the ears of the trotting horses.

"You've read the story of Blue Beard and that unpleasant locked-up room of his, where the poor little wives hung all of a row? Well, I'm sorry to say, Dick, most men when they come to my age have a room of that sort. It's an inhospitable place. One doesn't invite one's friends to dine and smoke there. At least no gentleman does. I've met one or two persons who set the door open and rather gloried in inviting inspection--but they were blackguards and cads. They don't count. Still each of us is obliged to go in there sometimes himself. I tell you it's anything but lively. I've been in there just now."

The dappled cloud creeping upward from the southern horizon veiled the sun, the light of which grew pale and thin. The scent of the larch wood, on the right, hung in the air. Richard's eyes were wide with inquiry. His mind suffered growing-pains, as young minds of any intellectual and poetic worth needs must. The possibility of moral experience, incalculable in extent as that golden-gray outspread of creeping, increasing vapour overhead, presented itself to him. The vastness of life touched him to fear. He struggled to find a limit, clothing his effort in childish realism of statement.

"But in that locked-up room, Uncle Roger, you can't have dead women--dead wives."

Ormiston laughed quietly.

"You hit out pretty straight from the shoulder, master Dick," he said. "Happily I can reassure you on one point. All manner of things are hung up in there--some ugly--almost all ugly, now, to my eyes, though some

of them had charming ways with them once upon a time. But, I give you my word, neither ugly nor charming, dead nor alive, are there any wives."

The boy considered a moment, then said stoutly, "I wouldn't go in there again. I'd lock the door and throw away the key."

"Wait till your time comes! You'll find that is precisely what you can't do."

"Then I'd fetch them out, once and for all, and bury them."

The carriage had turned in at the lodge gate. Soon a long, low, white house and range of domed conservatories came into view.

"Heroic remedies!" Ormiston remarked, amused at the boy's vehemence. "But no doubt they do succeed now and then. To tell you the truth, Dick, I have been thinking of something of the kind myself. Only I'm afraid I shall need somebody to help me in carrying out so extensive a funeral."

"Anybody would be glad enough to help you," Richard declared, with a strong emphasis on the pronoun.

"Ah! but the bother is anybody can't help one. Only one person in all this great rough and tumble of a world can really help one. And often one finds out who that person is a little bit too late. However, here we are. Perhaps we shall know more about it all in the next half hour, if these good people are at home."

In point of fact the good people in question were not at home. Ormiston, holding reins and whip in one hand, felt for his card-case.

"So we've had our journey for nothing you see, Dick," he said.

And to Richard the words sounded regretful. Moreover, the drama of this expedition seemed to him shorn of its climax. He knew there should be something more, and pushed for it.

"You haven't asked for Mary," he said. "And I thought we came on purpose to see Mary. She won't like us to go away like this. Do ask."

Colonel Ormiston's expression altered, hardened. And Richard, in his present hypersensitive state, remembered the cool scrutiny bestowed on the winged sea-gull of his dream last night. This man had seemed so near him just now, while they talked. Suddenly he became remote again, all understanding of him shut away by that slight insolence of bearing. Still he did as Richard prayed him. Miss Cathcart was at home. She had just come in from riding.

"Tell her Sir Richard Calmady is here, and would like, if he may, to see her."

Without waiting for a reply, Ormiston unbuckled that same chastening

strap silently, quickly. He got down and, coming round to the farther side of the carriage, lifted Richard out; while Camp, who had jumped off the back seat, stood yawning, whining a little, shaking his heavy head and wagging his tail in welcome on the door-step. With the bull-dog close at his heels, Ormiston carried the boy into the house.

The inner doors were open, and, up the long, narrow, pleasantly fresh-tinted drawing-room, Mary Cathcart came to meet them. The folds of her habit were gathered up in one hand. In the other she carried a bunch of long-stalked, yellow and scarlet tulips. Her strong, supple figure stood out against the young green of the lawns and shrubberies, seen through the French windows behind her. She walked carefully, with a certain deliberation, thanks to her narrow habit and top-boots. The young lady carried her thirty-one years bravely. Her irregular features and large mouth had always been open to criticism. But her teeth, when her lips parted, were white and even, and her brown eyes frankly honest as ever.

"Why, Dickie dear, it is simply glorious to have you and Camp paying visits on your own account."--Her speech broke into a little cry, while her fingers closed so tightly on the tulips that the brittle stalks snapped, and the gay-coloured bells of them hung limply, some falling on to the carpet about her feet. "Roger--Colonel Ormiston--I didn't know you were home--were here!" Her voice was uncontrollably glad.

Still carrying the boy, Ormiston stood before her, observing her keenly. But he was no longer remote. His insolence, which, after all, may have been chiefly self-protective, had vanished.

"I'm very sorry--I mean for those poor tulips. I came to pay my respects to Mr. and Mrs. Cathcart, and not finding them was preparing to drive humbly home again. But----" Certainly she carried her years well. She looked absurdly young. The brown and rose-red of her complexion was clear as that of the little maiden who had fought with, and overcome, and kissed the rough Welsh pony refusing the grip by the roadside long ago. The hint of a moustache emphasised the upturned corners of her mouth--but that was rather captivating. Her eyes danced, under eyelids which fluttered for the moment. She was not beautiful, not a woman to make men run mad. Yet the comeliness of her body, and the spirit to which that body served as index, was so unmistakably healthful, so sincere, that surely no sane man, once gathering her into his arms, need ask a better blessing.--"But," Ormiston went on, still watching her, "nothing would satisfy Dick but he must see you. With many injunctions regarding his safety, Katherine made him over to me for the afternoon. I'm on duty, you see. Where he goes, I'm bound to go also--even to the destruction of your poor tulips."

Miss Cathcart made no direct answer.

"Sit here, Dickie," she said, pointing to a sofa.

"But you don't really mind our coming in, do you?" he asked, rather anxiously.

The young lady placed herself beside him, drew his hand on to her knee, patted it gently.

"Mind? No; on the whole, I don't think I do mind very much. In fact, I think I should probably have minded very much more if you had gone away without asking for me."

"There, I told you so, Uncle Roger," the boy said triumphantly. Camp had jumped up on to the sofa too. He put his arm comfortably around the dog's neck. It was as well to acquire support on both sides, for the surface of the glazed chintz was slippery, inconveniently unsustaining to his equilibrium. "It's an awfully long time since I've seen Mary," he continued, "more than three weeks."

"Yes, an awfully long time," Ormiston echoed, "more than six years."

"Dear Dickie," she said; "how pretty of you! Do you always keep count of my visits?"

"Of course I do. They were about the best things that ever happened, till Uncle Roger came home."

Forgetting herself, Mary Cathcart raised her eyes to Ormiston's in appeal. The boy's little declaration stirred all the latent motherhood in her. His fortunes at once passed so very far beyond, and fell so far short of, the ordinary lot. She wondered whether, and could not but trust that, this old friend and newcomer was not too self-centred, too hardened by ability and success to appreciate the intimate pathos of the position. Ormiston read and answered her thought.

"Oh! we are going to do something to change all that," he said confidently. "We are going to enlarge our borders a bit; aren't we, Dick? Only, I think, we should manage matters much better if Miss Cathcart would help us, don't you?"

Richard remembering the locked-up room of evil contents and that proposal of inclusive funeral rites, gave this utterance a wholly individual application. His face grew bright with intelligence. But, greatly restraining himself, he refrained from speech. All that had been revealed to him in confidence, and so his honour was engaged to silence.

Ormiston pulled forward a chair and sat down by him, leaning forward, his hands clasped about one knee, while he gazed at the tulips scattered on the floor.

"So tell Miss Cathcart we all want her to come over to Brockhurst just as often as she can," he continued, "and help us to make the wheels go round a little faster. Tell her we've grown very old, and discreet, and respectable, and that we are absolutely incapable of doing or saying anything foolish or naughty, which she would object to--and----"

But Richard could restrain himself no longer. "Why don't you tell her yourself, Uncle Roger?"

"Because, my dear old chap, a burnt child fears the fire. I tried to tell Miss Cathcart something once, long ago. She mayn't remember----"

"She does remember," Mary said quietly, looking down at Richard's hand and patting it as it lay on her lap.

"But she stopped me dead," Ormiston went on. "It was quite right of her. She gave the most admirable reasons for stopping me. Would you care to hear them?"

"Oh! don't, pray don't," Mary murmured. "It is not generous."

"Pardon me, your reasons were absolutely just--true in substance and in fact. You said I was a selfish, good-for-nothing spendthrift, and so----"

"I was odious," she broke in. "I was a self-righteous little Pharisee--forgive me----"

"Why--there's nothing to forgive. You spoke the truth."

"I don't believe it," Richard cried, in vehement protest.

"Dickie, you're a darling," Mary Cathcart said.

Colonel Ormiston left off nursing his knee, and leaned a little further forward.

"Well then, will you come over to Brockhurst very often, and help us to make the wheels go round, and cheer us all up, and do us no end of good, though--I am a selfish, good-for-nothing spendthrift? You see I run through the list of my titles again to make sure this transaction is fair and square and above-board."

A silence followed, which appeared to Richard protracted to the point of agitation. He became almost distressingly conscious of the man's still, bronzed, resolute face on the one hand, of the woman's mobile, vivid, yet equally resolute face on the other, divining far more to be at stake than he had clear knowledge of. Tired and excited, his impatience touched on anger.

"Say yes, Mary," he cried impulsively, "say yes. I don't see how anybody can want to refuse Uncle Roger anything."

Miss Cathcart's eyes grew moist. She turned and kissed the boy.

"I don't think--perhaps--Dickie, that I quite see either," she answered very gently.

"Mary, you know what you've just said?" Ormiston's tone was stern. "You understand this little comedy? It means business. This time you've got to go the whole hog or none."

She looked straight at him, and drew her breath in a long half-laughing sigh.

"Oh, dear me! what a plague of a hurry you are in!" she said.
"Well--then--then--I suppose I must--it is hardly a graceful expression, but it is of your choosing, not of mine--I suppose I must go the whole hog."

Roger Ormiston rose, treading the fallen tulips under foot. And Richard, watching him, beheld that which called to his remembrance, not the hopeless and impotent battle under the black polished sky of his last night's dream, but the gallant stories he had heard, earlier last night, of the battles of Sobraon and Chillianwallah, of the swift dangers of sport, and large daring of travel. Here he beheld--so it seemed to his boyish thought--the aspect of a born conqueror, of the man who can serve and wait long for the good he desires, and who winning it, lays hold of it with fearless might. And this, while causing Richard an exquisite delight of admiration, caused him also a longing to share those splendid powers so passionate that it amounted to actual pain.

Mary Cathcart's hand slid from under his hand. She too rose to her feet.

"Then you have actually cared for me all along, all these years," Ormiston declared in fierce joy.

"Of course--who else could I care for? And--and--you've loved me, Roger, all the while?"

And Ormiston answered "Yes,"--speaking the truth, though with a difference. There had been interludes that had contributed somewhat freely to the peopling of that same locked-up room. But it is possible for a man to love many times, yet always love one woman best.

All this, however, Dickie did not know. He only knew they dazzled him--the man triumphantly strong, the woman so bravely glad. He could not watch them any longer. He went hot all over, and his heart beat. He felt strangely desolate too. They were far away from him in thought, in fact, though so close by. Dickie shut his eyes, put his arms round the bull-dog, pressed his face hard against the faithful beast's shoulder; while Camp, stretching his short neck to the uttermost, nuzzled against him and essayed to lick his cheek.

Thus did Richard Calmady gain yet further knowledge of things as they are.

CHAPTER IV

WHICH SMELLS VERY VILELY OF THE STABLE

April softened into May, and the hawthorns were in blossom before Richard passed any other very note-worthy milestone on the road of personal development. Then, greatly tempted, he committed a venial sin; received prompt and coarse chastisement; and, by means of the said chastisement, as is the merciful way of the Eternal Justice, found unhoped of emancipation.

It happened thus. As the spring days grew warm Mademoiselle de Mirancourt failed somewhat. The darkness and penetrating chill of the English winter tried her, and this year her recuperative powers seemed sadly deficient. A fuller tide of life had pulsed through Brockhurst since Colonel Ormiston's arrival. The old stillness was departing, the old order changing. With that change Mademoiselle de Mirancourt had no quarrel, since, to her serene faith, all that came must, of necessity, come through a divine ordering and in conformity to a divine plan. Yet this more of activity and of movement strained her. The weekly drive over to Westchurch, to hear mass at the humble Catholic chapel tucked away in a side street, sorely taxed her strength. She returned fortified, her soul ravished by that heavenly love, which, in pure and innocent natures, bears such gracious kinship to earthly love. Yet in body she was outworn and weary. On such occasions she would rally Julius March, not without a touch of malice, saying:--

"Ah! *_tres cher ami_*, had you only followed the ever blessed footsteps of those dear Oxford friends of yours and entered the fold of the true Church, what fatigue might you not now spare me--let alone the incalculable advantages to your own poor, charming, fatally darkened soul!"

While Julius--who, though no less devout than of yore, was happily less fastidiously sensitive--would reply:--

"But, dearest lady, had I followed the footsteps of my Oxford friends, remember I should not be at Brockhurst at all."

"Clearly, then, everything is well ordered," she would say, folding her fragile hands upon her embroidery frame, "since it is altogether impossible we could do without you. Yet I regret for your soul. It is so capable of receiving illumination. You English--even the most finished among you--remain really deplorably stubborn, and nevertheless it is my fate perpetually to set my affections upon one or other of you."

It followed that Katherine devoted much of her time to Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, walked slowly beside her up and down the sunny, garden paths sheltered by the high, red walls whereon the clematis and jasmine began to show for flower; or took her for quiet, little drives within the precincts of the park. They spoke much of Lucia St. Quentin, of Katherine's girlhood, and of those pleasant days in Paris long ago. And this brought soothing and comfort, not only to the old lady, but to the young lady also--and of soothing and comfort the latter stood in need just now.

For it is harsh discipline even to a noble woman, whose life is still strong in her, to stand by and see another woman but a few years her junior entering on those joys which she has lost,—marriage, probably motherhood as well. Roger Ormiston's and Mary Cathcart's love-making was restrained and dignified. But the very calm of their attitude implied a security of happiness passing all need of advertisement. And Katherine was very far from grudging them this. She was not envious, still less jealous. She did not want to take anything of theirs; but she wanted, she sorely wanted, her own again. A word, a look, a certain quickness of quiet laughter, would pierce her with recollection. Once for her too, below the commonplaces of daily detail, flowed that same magic river of delight. But the springs of it had gone dry. Therefore it was a relief to be alone with Mademoiselle de Mirancourt—virgin and saint—and to speak with her of the days before she had sounded the lovely depths of that same magic flood—days when she had known of its existence only by the mirage, born of the dazzle of its waters, which plays over the innocent vacant spaces of a young girl's mind.

It was a relief even, though of sterner quality, to go into the red drawing-room on the ground floor and pace there, her hands clasped behind her, her proud head bowed, by the half hour together. If personal joy is dead past resurrection, there is bitter satisfaction in realising to the full personal pain. The room was duly swept, dusted, casements set open to welcome breeze and sunshine, fires lighted in the grate. But no one ever sat there. It knew no cheerfulness of social intercourse. The crimson curtains and covers had become faded. They were not renewed. The furniture, save for the absence of the narrow bed, stood in precisely the same order as on the night when Sir Richard Calmady died. It was pushed back against the walls. And in the wide empty way between the two doors, Katherine paced, saturating all her being with thoughts of that which was, and must remain, wholly and inalienably her own—namely, her immense distress.

And in this she took the more comfort, because something else, until now appearing wholly her own, was slipping a little away from her. Dickie's health had improved notably in the last few weeks. His listlessness had vanished, while his cheeks showed a wholesome warmth of colour. But his cry was ever. "Mother, Uncle Roger's going to such a place. He says he'll take me. I can go, can't I?" Or, "Mother, Mary's going to do such a thing. She says she'll show me how. She may, mayn't she?" And Katherine's answer was always "Yes." She grudged the boy none of his new-found pleasures, rejoiced indeed to see him interested and gay. Yet to watch the new broom, which sweeps so clean, is rarely exhilarating to those that have swept diligently with the old one. The nest had held her precious fledgling so safely till now; and this fluttering of wings, eager for flight, troubled her somewhat. Not only was Dickie's readiness to be away from her a trifle hard to bear; but she knew that disappointment, of a certainty, lay in wait for him, and that each effort towards wider action would but reveal to him how circumscribed his powers actually were.

Meanwhile, however, Richard enjoyed himself recklessly, almost feverishly, in the attempt to disprove the teaching of that ugly dream, and keep truth at bay. There had been further drives, and the

excitement of witnessing a forest fire--only too frequent in the Brockhurst country when the sap is up, and the easterly wind and May sun have scorched all moisture from the surface of the moorland. He and Mary had bumped over fir roots and scuttled down bridle-paths in the pony-carriage, to avoid the rush of flame and smoke; had skirmished round at a hand gallop, in search of recruits to reinforce Ormiston, and Iles, and a small army of beaters, battling against the blazing line that threatened destruction to the fir avenue. Now and again, with a mighty roar, which sent Dickie's heart into his mouth, great tongues of flame, clear as topaz and ruby in the steady sunshine, would leap upwards, converting a whole tall fir into a tree of fire, while the beaters running back, grimed with smoke and sweat, took a moment's breathing-space in the open.

There had been more peaceful pastimes as well--several days' fishing, enchanting beyond the power of language to describe. The clear trout-stream meandering through the rich water-meadows; the herds of cattle standing knee-deep in the grass, lazily chewing the cud and switching their tails at the cloud of flies; the birds and wild creatures haunting the streamside; the long dreamy hours of gentle sport, had opened up to Dickie a whole new world of romance. His donkey-chair had been left at the yellow-washed mill beneath the grove of silvery-leaved, ever-rustling, balsam poplars. And thence, while Ormiston and Mary sauntered slowly on ahead, the men--Winter in mufti, oblivious of plate-cleaning and cellarage, and the onerous duties of his high estate, Stamp, the water-bailiff, and Moorcock, one of the under-keepers--had carried him across the great green levels. Winter was an old and tried friend, and it was somewhat diverting to behold him in this novel aspect, affable and chatty with inferiors, displaying, moreover, unexpected knowledge in the mysteries of the angler's craft. The other two men--sharp-featured, their faces ruddy as summer apples, merry-eyed, clad in velveteen coats, that bulged about the pockets, and wrinkled leather gaiters reaching halfway up the thigh--charmed Richard, when his first shyness was passed. They were eager to please him. Their talk was racy. Their laughter ready and sincere. Did not Stamp point out to him a water-ouzel, with impudently jerking tail, dipping and wading in the shallows of the stream? Did not Moorcock find him a water-rail's nest, hidden in a tuft of reeds and grass, with ten, yellowish, speckled eggs in it? And did not both men pluck him handfuls of cowslips, of tawny-pink avens, and of mottled, snake-headed fritillaries, and stow them away in the fishing-baskets above the load of silver-and-red spotted trout?

Mary had protested Dickie could throw a fly, if he had a light enough rod. And not only did he throw a fly, but at the fourth or fifth cast a fish rose, and he played it--with skirling reel and much advice and most complimentary excitement on the part of the whole good company--and brought it skilfully within range of Stamp's landing-net. Never surely was trout spawned that begot such bliss in the heart of an angler! As, with panting sides and open gills, this three-quarter-pound treasure of treasures flopped about on the sunny stream bank all the hereditary instinct of sport spoke up clearly in Dickie. The boy--such is youthful masculine human nature--believed he understood at last why the world was made! At dressing-time he had his sacred fish carried on

a plate up to his room to show Clara; and, but for strong remonstrance on the part of that devoted handmaiden, would have kept it by his bedside all night, so as to assure himself at intervals, by sense of touch--let alone that of smell--of the adorable fact of its veritable existence.

But all this, inspiring though it was, served but as prelude to a more profoundly coveted acquaintance--that with the racing-stable. For it was after this last that Dickie still supremely longed--the more so, it is to be feared, because it was, if not explicitly, yet implicitly forbidden. A spirit of defiance had entered into him. Being granted the inch, he was disposed to take the ell. And this, not in conscious opposition to his mother's will; but in protest, not uncourageous, against the limitations imposed on him by physical misfortune. The boy's blood was up, and consequently, with greater pluck than discretion, he struggled against the intimate, inalienable enemy that so marred his fate. And it was this not ignoble effort which culminated in disobedience.

For driving back one afternoon, later than usual,--Ormiston had met them, and Mary and he had taken a by-path home through the woods,--the pony-carriage, turned along the high level road beside the lake, going eastward, just as the string of race-horses, coming home from exercise, passed along it coming west. Richard was driving, Chaplin, the second coachman, sitting in the dickey at the back of the low carriage. He checked the pony, and his eyes took in the whole scene--the blue-brown expanse of the lake dotted with water-fowl, on the one hand, the immense blue-brown landscape on the other, ranging away to the faint line of the chalk downs in the south; the downward slope of the park, to the great square of red stable buildings in the hollow; the horses coming slowly towards him in single file. Cawing rooks streamed back from the fallow-fields across the valley. Thrushes and blackbirds carolled. A wren, in the bramble brake close by, broke into sharp sweet song. The recurrent ring of an axe came from somewhere away in the fir plantations, and the strident rasping of a saw from the wood-yard in the beech grove near the house.

Richard stared at that oncoming procession. Half-way between him and the foremost of the horses the tan ride branched off, and wound down the hillside to the stables. The boy set his teeth. He arrived at a desperate decision,--touched up the pony, drove on.

Chaplin leaned forward, addressing him, over the back of the seat.

"Better wait here, hadn't we, Sir Richard? They'll turn off in a minute."

Richard did not look round. He tried to answer coldly, but his voice shook.

"I know. That's why I am going on."

There was a silence save for the cawing of the rooks, ring of the axe, and grinding of wheels on the gravel. Chaplin, responsible, correct,

over five-and-thirty, and fully intending to succeed old Mr. Wenham, the head coachman, on the latter's impending retirement from active service, went very red in the face.

"Excuse me, but I have my orders, Sir Richard," he said.

Dickie still looked straight ahead.

"Very well," he answered, "then perhaps you'd better get out and walk on home."

"You know I'm bound not to leave you, sir," the man said.

Dickie laughed a little in uncontrollable excitement. He was close to them now. The leading horse was just moving off the main road, its shadow lying long across the turf. How was it possible to give way with the prize within reach?--"You can go or stay Chaplin, as you please. I mean to speak to Chifney. I--I mean to see the stables."

"It's as much as my place is worth, sir."

"Oh! bother your place!" the boy cried impetuously.--Dear heart alive, how fine they were as they filed by! That chestnut filly, clean made as a deer, her ears laid back as she reached at the bit; and the brown, just behind her--"I mean, I mean you needn't be afraid, Chaplin--I'll speak to her ladyship. I'll arrange all that. Go to the pony's head."

At the end of the long string of horses came the trainer--a square-built, short-necked man, sanguine complexioned and clean shaven. Of hair, indeed, Mr. Chifney could only boast a rim of carrotty-gray stubble under the rim of the back of his hard hat. His right eye had suffered damage, and the pupil of it was white and viscous. His lips were straight and purplish in colour. He raised his hat and would have followed on down the slope, but Dickie called to him.

As he rode up an unwonted expression came over Mr. Chifney's shrewd, hard-favoured face. He took off his hat and sat there, bare-headed in the sunshine, looking down at the boy, his hand on his hip.

"Good-day, Sir Richard," he said. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, yes," Dickie stammered, all his soul in his eyes, his cheeks aflame, "you can do just what I want most. Take me down, Chifney, and show me the horses."

Here Chaplin coughed discreetly behind his hand. But that proved of small avail, save possibly in the way of provocation. For socially between the racing and house stables was a great gulf fixed; and Mr. Chifney could hardly be expected to recognise the existence of a man in livery standing at a pony's head, still less to accept direction from such a person. Servants must be kept in their place--impudent, lazy enough lot anyhow, bless you! On his feet the trainer had been known to decline to moments of weakness. But in the saddle, a good horse under him, he possessed unlimited belief in his own judgment, fearing neither

man, devil, nor even his own meek-faced wife with pink ribbons in her cap. Moreover, he felt such heart as he had go out strangely to the beautiful, eager boy gazing up at him.

"Nothing 'ud give me greater pleasure in life, Sir Richard," he said, "if you're free to come. We've waited a long time, a precious long time, sir, for you to come down and take a look at your horses."

"I'd have been to see them sooner. I'd have given anything to see them. I've never had the chance, somehow."

Chifney pursed up his lips, and surveyed the distant landscape with a very meaning glance. "I dare say not, Sir Richard. But better late than never, you know; and so, if you are free to come----"

Again Chaplin coughed.

"Free to come? Of course I am free to come," Dickie asserted, his pride touched to arrogance. And Mr. Chifney looked at him, an approving twinkle in his sound eye.

"I agree, Sir Richard. Quite right, sir, you're free, of course."

Stolen waters are sweet, says the proverb. And to Richard Calmady, his not wholly legitimate experience of the next hour was sweet indeed. For there remains rich harvest of poetry in all sport worth the name, let squeamish and sentimental persons declaim against it as they may. Strength and endurance, disregard of suffering have a permanent appeal and value, even in their coarsest manifestations. No doubt the noble gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who "lay at Brockhurst two nights" on the occasion of Sir Denzil's historic house-warming, to witness the mighty bear-baiting, were sensible of something more in that somewhat disgusting exhibition, than the mere gratification of brutal instincts, the mere savage relish for wounds and pain and blood. And to Sir Denzil's latest descendant the first sight of the training-stable--as the pony-carriage came to a standstill alongside the grass plot in the centre of the great, graveled square--offered very definite and stirring poetry of a kind.

On three sides the quadrangle was shut in by one-storied, brick buildings, the woodwork of doors and windows immaculate with white paint. Behind, over the wide archway,--closed fortress-like by heavy doors at night,--were the head-lad's and helpers' quarters. On either side, forge and weighing-room, saddler's and doctor's shop. To right and left a range of stable doors, with round swing-lights between each; and, above these, the windows of hay and straw lofts and of the boys' dormitories. In front were the dining-rooms and kitchens, and the trainer's house--a square clock tower, carrying an ornate gilt vane, rising from the cluster of red roofs. Twenty years had weathered the raw of brick walls, and painted the tiling with all manner of orange and rusty-coloured lichens; yet the whole place was admirably spick and span, free of litter. Many cats, as Dickie noted, meditated in sunny corners, or prowled in the open with truly official composure. Over all stretched a square of bluest sky, crossed by a skein of

homeward-wending rooks. While above the roofs, on either side the archway, the high-lying lands of the park showed up, broken, here and there, by clumps of trees.

Mr. Chifney slipped out of the saddle.--"Here boy, take my horse," he shouted to a little fellow hurrying across the yard. "I'm heartily glad to see you, Sir Richard," he went on. "Now, if you care, as your father's son can't very well be off caring, for horses----"

"If I care!" echoed Dickie, his eyes following the graceful chestnut filly as she was led in over the threshold of her stable.

"I like that. That'll do. Chip of the old block after all," the trainer said, with evident relish. "Well then, since you do care for horses as you ought to, Sir Richard, we'll just make you free of this establishment. About the most first-class private establishment in England, sir, though I say it that have run the concern pretty well single-handed for the best part of the last fifteen years--make you free of it right away, sir. And, look you, when you've got hold, don't you leave hold."

"No, I won't," Dickie said stoutly.

Mr. Chifney was in a condition of singular emotion, as he wrapped Richard's rug about him and bore him away into the stables. He even went so far as to swear a little under his breath; and Chifney was a very fairly clean-mouthed man, unless members of his team of twenty and odd naughty boys got up to some devilry with their charges. He carried Richard as tenderly as could any woman, while he tramped from stall to stall, loose-box to loose-box, praising his racers, calling attention to their points, recounting past prowess, or prophesying future victories.

And the record was a fine one; for good luck had clung to the masterless stable, as Lady Calmady's bank-books and ledgers could testify.

"Vinedresser by Red Burgundy out of Valeria--won two races at the Newmarket Spring Meeting the year before last. Lamed himself somehow in the horse-box coming back--did nothing for eighteen months--hope to enter him for some of the autumn events."--Then later:--"Sahara, by North African out of Sally-in-our-Alley. Beautiful mare? I believe you, Sir Richard. Why she won the Oaks for you. Jack White was up. Pretty a race as ever I witnessed, and cleverly ridden. Like to go up to her in the stall? She's as quiet as a lamb. Catch hold of her head, boy."

And so Dick found himself seated on the edge of the manger, the trainer's arm round him, and the historic Sahara snuffing at his jacket pockets.

Then they crossed the quadrangle to inspect the colts and fillies, where glories still lay ahead.

"Verdigris by Copper King out of Valeria again. And if he doesn't make

a name I'll never judge another horse, sir. Strain of the old Touchstone blood there. Rather ugly? Yes, they're often a bit ugly that lot, but devilish good uns to go. You ask Miss Cathcart about them. Never met a lady who'd as much knowledge as she has of a horse. The Baby, by Punch out of Lady Bountiful. Not much good, I'm afraid. No grip, you see, too contracted in the hoofs. Chloroform by Sawbones out of sister to Castinette."

And so forth, an endless repetition of genealogies, comments, anecdotes to which Dickie lent most attentive ear. He was keen to learn, his attention was on the stretch. He was in process of initiation, and every moment of the sacred rites came to him with power and value. Yet it must be owned that he found the lessening of the strain on his memory and attention not wholly unwelcome when Mr. Chifney, sitting beside him on the big, white-painted cornbin opposite Diplomacy's loose-box, began to tell him of the old times when he--a little fellow of eight to ten years of age--had been among the boys in his cousin, Sam Chifney's famous stable at Newmarket. Of the long, weary traveling before the days of railways, when the horses were walked by highroad and country lane, ankle deep in mud, from Newmarket to Epsom; and after victory or defeat, walked by slow stages all the way home again. Of how, later, he had migrated to Doncaster; but, not liking the "Yorkshire tykes," had got taken on in some well-known stables upon the Berkshire downs.

"And it was there, Sir Richard," he said, "I met your father, and we fancied each other from the first. And he asked me to come to him. These stables were just building then. And here I've been ever since."

Mr. Chifney stared down at the clean red quarries of the stable floor, and tapped his neat gaiters with the switch he held in his hand.

"Rum places, racing stables," he went on, meditatively; "and a lot of rum things go on in 'em, one way and another, as you'll come to know. And it ain't the easiest thing going, I tell you, to keep your hands clean. Ungrateful business a trainer's, Sir Richard--wearing business--shortens a man's temper and makes him old before his time. Out by four o'clock on summer mornings, minding your cattle and keeping your eye on those shirking blackguards of boys. No real rest, sir, day or night. Wearing business--studying all the meetings and entering your horses where you've reason to reckon they've most chance. And if your horse wins, the jockey gets all the praise and the petting. And if it fails the trainer gets all the blame. Yes, it's wearing work. But, confound it all, sir," he broke out hotly, "there's nothing like it on the face of God's earth. Horses--horses--horses--why the very smell of the bedding's sweeter than a bunch of roses. Love 'em? I believe you. And you'll love 'em too before you've done."

He turned and gripped Dickie hard by the shoulder.

"For we'll make a thorough-paced sportsman of you yet, Sir Richard," he said, "God bless you--danged if we don't."

Which assertion Mr. Chifney repeated at frequent intervals over his

grog that evening, as he sat, not in the smart dining-room hung round with portraits of Vinedresser and Sahara and other equine notabilities, but in the snug, little, back parlour looking out on to the yard. Mrs. Chifney was a gentle, pious woman, with whom her husband's profession went somewhat against the grain. She would have preferred a nice grocery, or other respectable, uneventful business in a country town, and dissipation in the form of prayer rather than of race-meetings. But as a slender, slightly self-righteous, young maiden she had fallen very honestly and completely in love with Tom Chifney. So there was nothing for it but to marry him and regard the horses as her appointed cross. She nursed the boys when they were sick or injured, intervened fairly successfully between their poor, little backs and her husband's all-too-ready ash stick; and assisted Julius March in promoting their spiritual welfare, even while deploring that the latter put his faith in forms and ceremonies rather than in saving grace. Upon the trainer himself she exercised a gently repressive influence.

"We won't swear, Mr. Chifney," she remarked mildly now.

"Swear! It's enough to make the whole bench of bishops swear to see that lad."

"I did see him," Mrs. Chifney observed.

"Yes, out of window. But you didn't carry him round, and hear him talk--knowledgeable talk as you could ask from one of his age. And watch his face--as like as two peas to his father's."

"But her ladyship's eyes," put in Mrs. Chifney.

"I don't know whose eyes they are, but I know he can use 'em. It was as pretty as a picture to see how he took it all."

Chifney tossed off the remainder of his tumbler of brandy and water at a gulp.

"Swear," he repeated, "I could find it in my heart to swear like hell. But I can find it in my heart to do more than that. I can forgive her ladyship. By all that's----"

"Thomas, forgiveness and oaths don't go suitably together."

"Well, but I can though, and I tell you, I do," he said solemnly. "I forgive her.--Shoot the Clown! by G--! I beg your pardon, Maria;--but upon my soul, once or twice, when I had him in my arms to-day, I felt I could have understood it if she'd had every horse shot that stood in the stable."

He held the tumbler up against the lamp. But it was quite empty.

"Uncommon glad she didn't though, poor lady, all the same," he added, parenthetically, as he set it down on the table again. "What do you say, Maria--about time we toddled off to bed?"

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH DICKIE IS INTRODUCED TO A LITTLE DANCER WITH BLUSH-ROSES IN HER HAT

"Her ladyship's inquired for you more than once, sir." This from Winter meeting the pony-carriage and the returning prodigal at the bottom of the steps.

The sun was low. Across the square lawn--whereon the Clown had found death some thirteen years before--peacocks led home their hens and chicks to roost within the two sexagonal, pepper-pot summer-houses that fill in the angles of the red-walled enclosure. The pea-fowl stepped mincingly, high-shouldered, their heads carried low, their long necks undulating with a self-conscious grace. Dickie's imagination was aglow like that rose-red sunset sky. The virile sentiment of all just heard and seen, and the exultation of admitted ownership were upon him. He felt older, stronger, more secure of himself than ever before. He proposed to go straight to his mother and confess. In his present mood he entertained no fear but that she would understand.

"Is Lady Calmady alone?" he asked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cathcart are with her, Sir Richard." Winter leant down, loosening the rug. His usual, undemonstrative speech took on a loftiness of tone. "Mrs. William Ormiston and her daughter have driven over with Mrs. Cathcart."--The butler was not without remembrance of that dinner on the day following Dickie's birth. Socially he had never considered Lady Calmady's sister-in-law quite up to the Brockhurst level.

Richard leaned back, watching the mincing peacocks. It was so fair here out of doors. The scent of the may hung in the air. The flame of the sunset bathed the facade of the stately house. No doubt it would be interesting to see new people, new relations; but he really cared to see no one just now, except his mother. From her he wanted to receive absolution, so that, his conscience relieved of the burden of his disobedience, he might revel to the full in the thought of the inheritance upon which--so it seemed to him--he had to-day entered. Still, in his present humour, Dickie's sense of *_noblesse oblige_* was strong.

"I suppose I've got to go in and help entertain everybody," he remarked.

"Her ladyship'll think something's wrong, Sir Richard, and be anxious if you stay away."

The boy held out his arms. "All right then, Winter," he said.

Here Chaplin again gave that admonitory cough. Richard, his face hardening to slight scorn, looked at him over the butler's shoulder.

"Oh! You need not be uneasy, Chaplin. When I say I'll do a thing, I don't forget."

Which brief speech caused the butler to reflect, as he bore the boy across the hall and up-stairs, that Sir Richard was coming to have an uncommonly high manner about him, at times, considering his age.

An unwonted loudness of conversation filled the Chapel-Room. It was filled also by the rose-red light of the sunset streaming in through the curve of the oriel-window. This confused and dazzled Richard slightly, entering upon it from the silence and sober clearness of the stair-head. A shrill note of laughter.--Mr. Cathcart's voice saying, "I felt it incumbent upon me to object, Lady Calmady. I spoke very plainly to Fallowfeild."--Julius March's delicately refined tones, "I am afraid spirituality is somewhat deficient in that case."--Then the high flute-like notes of a child, rising clearly above the general murmur, "_Ah! enfin--le voila, Maman. C'est bien lui, n'est-ce pas?_" And with that, Richard was aware of a sudden hush falling upon the assembled company. He was sensible every one watched him as Winter carried him across the room and set him down in the long, low armchair near the fireplace. Poor Dickie's self-consciousness, which had been so agreeably in abeyance, returned upon him, and a red, not of the sunset, dyed his face. But he carried his head proudly. He thought of Chifney and the horses. He refused to be abashed.

And Ormiston, breaking the silence, called to him cheerily:--

"Hello, old chap, what have you been up to? You gave Mary and me the slip."

"I know I did," the boy answered bravely. "How d'ye do, Mrs. Cathcart?" as the latter nodded and smiled to him--a large, gentle, comfortable lady, uncertain in outline, thanks to voluminous draperies of black silk and black lace. "How d'ye do, sir?" this to Mr. Cathcart--a tall, neatly-made man, but for a slight roundness of the shoulders. Seeing him, there remained no doubt as to whence Mary inherited her large mouth; but matter for thankfulness that she had avoided further inheritance. For Mr. Cathcart was notably plain. Small eyes and snub nose, long lower jaw, and gray forward-curved whiskers rendered his appearance unfortunately simian. He suggested a caricature; but one, let it be added, of a person undeniably well-bred.

"My darling, you are very late," Katherine said. Her back was towards her guests as she stooped down arranging the embroidered rug across Dickie's feet and legs. Laying his hand on her wrist he squeezed it closely for a moment.

"I--I'll tell you all about that presently, mummy, when they're gone. I've been enjoying myself awfully--you won't mind?"

Katherine smiled. But, looking up at her, it appeared to Richard that

her face was very white, her eyes very large and dark, and that she was very tall and, somehow, very splendid just then. And this fed his fearlessness, fed his young pride, even as, though in a more subtle and exquisite manner, his late experience of the racing-stable had fed them. His mother moved away and took up her interrupted conversation with Mr. Cathcart regarding the delinquencies of Lord Fallowfeild. Richard looked coolly round the room.

Every one was there--Julius, Mary, Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, while away in the oriel-window Roger Ormiston stood talking to a pretty, plump, very much dressed lady, who chattered, laughed, stared, with surprising vivacity. As Dickie looked at her she stared back at him through a pair of gold eye-glasses. Against her knee, that rosy light bathing her graceful, little figure, leant a girl about Dickie's own age. She wore a pale pink and blue frock, short and outstanding in the skirts. She also wore a broad-brimmed, white hat, with, a garland of blush-roses around the crown of it. The little girl did not stare. She contemplated Richard languidly, yet with sustained attention. Her attitude and bearing were attractive. Richard wanted to see her close, to talk to her. But to call and ask her to come to him was awkward. And to go to her--the boy grew a little hot again--was more awkward still.

Mrs. Ormiston dropped her gold eye-glasses into her lap.

"It really is ten thousand pities when these things happen in the wrong rank of life," she said. "Rightly placed they might be so profitable."

"For goodness sake, be careful, Ella," Ormiston put in quickly.

"Oh! My dear creature, don't be nervous. Everybody's attending to everybody else, and if they did hear they wouldn't understand. I'm one of the fortunate persons who are supposed never to talk sense and so I can say what I like." Mrs. Ormiston gave her shrill little laugh. "Oh! there are consolations, depend upon it, in a well-sustained reputation for folly!"

The laugh jarred on Richard. He decided that he did not quite like his aunt Charlotte Ormiston. All the same he wished the charming, little girl would come to him.

"But to return. It's a waste. To some poor family it might have been a perfect fortune. And I hate waste. Perhaps you have never discovered that?"

Ormiston let his glance rest on the somewhat showy figure.

"I doubt if William has discovered it either," he remarked.

"Oh! as to your poor brother William, heaven only knows what he has or has not discovered!--Now, Helen, this conversation becomes undesirable. You've asked innumerable questions about your cousin. Go and make acquaintance with him. I'm the best of mothers of course, but, at times, I really can do quite well without you."

Now surely this was a day of good fortune, for again Dickie had his desire. And a most surprisingly pretty, little desire it proved--seductive even, deliciously finished in person and in manner. The boy gazed at the girl's small hands and small, daintily shod feet, at the small, lovely, pink and white face set in a cloud of golden-brown hair, at the innocent, blue eyes, at the mouth with upturned corners to it. Richard was not of age to remark the eyes were rather light in colour, the lips rather thin. The exquisite refinement of the girl's whole person delighted him. She was delicate as a miniature, as a figure carved in ivory. She was like his Uncle Roger, when she was silent and still. She was like--oh, poor Dick!--some bright glancing, small, saucy bird when she spoke and her voice had those clear, flute tones in it.

"Since you did not come to me, I had to come to you," she said. "I have wanted so much to see you. I had heard about you at home, in Paris."

"Heard about me?" Dickie repeated, flattered and surprised. "But won't you sit down. Look--that little chair. I can reach it."

And leaning sideways he stretched out his hand. But his finger-tips barely touched the top rail. Richard flushed. "I'm awfully sorry," he said, "but I am afraid--it isn't heavy--I must let you get it yourself."

The girl, who had watched him intently, her hands clasped, gave a little sigh. Then the corners of her mouth turned up as she smiled. A delightful dimple showed in her right cheek.

"But, of course," she replied, "I will get it."

She settled herself beside him, folded her hands, crossed her feet, exposing a long length of fine, open-work, silk stocking.

"I desired enormously to see you," she continued. "But when you came in I grew shy. It is so with one sometimes."

"You should use your influence, Lady Calmady," Mr. Cathcart was saying. "Unquestionably the condition of the workhouse is far from satisfactory. And Fallowfeild is too lenient. That *_laissez-aller_* policy of his threatens to land us in serious difficulties. The place is insanitary, and the food is unnecessarily poor. I am not an advocate for extravagance, but I cannot bear to see discomfort which might be avoided. Fallowfeild is the most kind-hearted of men, but he has a fatal habit of believing what people tell him. And those workhouse officials have got round him. The whole matter ought to be subjected to the strictest investigation."

"It is very nice of you to have wanted so much to see me," Dickie said. His eyes were softly bright.

"Oh! but one always wants to see those who are talked about. It is a privilege to have them for one's relations."

"But--but--I'm not talked about?" the boy put in, somewhat startled.

"But certainly. You are so rich. You have this superb _chateau_. You are"--she put her head on one side with a pretty, saucy, birdlike movement--"_enfin_," she said, "I had the greatest curiosity to make your acquaintance. I shall tell all my young friends at the convent about this visit. I promised them that, as soon as mamma said we should probably come here. The good sisters also are interested. I shall recount a whole history of this beautiful castle, and of you, and your----"

She paused, clasped her hands, looking away at her mother, then sideways at Richard, bowing her little person backwards and forwards, laughing softly all the while. And her laughing face was extraordinarily pretty under the shade of her broad-brimmed hat.

"It is a great misfortune we stay so short a time," she continued. "I shall not see the half of all that I wish to see."

Then an heroic plan of action occurred to Richard. The daring engendered by his recent act of disobedience was still active in him. He was in the humour to attempt the impossible. He longed, moreover, to give this delectable little person pleasure. He was willing even to sacrifice a measure of personal dignity in her service.

"Oh! but if you care so much, I--I will show you the house," he said.

"Will you?" she cried. "You and I alone together. But that is precisely what I want. It would be ravishing."

Poor Dickie's heart misgave him slightly; but he summoned all his resolution. He threw off the concealing rug.

"I--I walk very slowly, I'm afraid," he said rather huskily, looking up at her, while in his expression appeal mingled pathetically with defiant pride.

"But, so much the better," she replied. "We shall be the longer together. I shall have the more to observe, to recount."

She was on her feet. She hovered round him, birdlike, intent on his every movement.

Meanwhile the sound of conversation rose continuous. Lady Calmady, calling to Julius, had moved away to the great writing-table in the farther window. Together they searched among a pile of papers for a letter of Dr. Knott's embodying his scheme of the new hospital at Westchurch. Mr. Cathcart stood by, expounding his views on the subject.

"Of course a considerable income can be derived from letters of recommendation," he was saying, "in-patient and out-patient tickets. The clergy come in there. They cannot be expected to give large donations. It would be unreasonable to expect that of them."

Mademoiselle de Mirancourt, Mrs. Cathcart, and Mary had drawn their chairs together. The two elder ladies spoke with a subdued enthusiasm, discussing pleasant details of the approaching wedding, which promised the younger lady so glad a future. Mrs. Ormiston chattered; while Ormiston, listening to her, gazed away down the green length of the elm avenue, beyond the square lawn and pepper-pot summer-houses, and pitied men who made such mistakes in the matter of matrimony as his brother William obviously had. The rose of the sunset faded in the west. Bats began to flit forth, hawking against the still warm house-walls for flies.

And so, unobserved, Dickie slipped out of the security of his armchair, and rose to that sadly deficient full height of his. He was nervous, and this rendered his balance more than ever uncertain. He shuffled forward, steadying himself by a piece of furniture here and there in passing, until he reached the wide open space before the door on to the stair-head. And it required some fortitude to cross this space, for here was nothing to lay hold of for support.

Little Helen Ormiston had kept close beside him so far. Now she drew back, leaving him alone. Leaning against a table, she watched his laborious progress. Then a fit of uncontrollable laughter took her. She flew half-way across to the oriel-window, her voice ringing out clear and gay, though broken by bursts of irrepressible merriment.

"_Regardez, regardez donc, Maman! Ma bonne m'avait dit qu'il etait un avorton, et que ce serait tres amusant de le voir. Elle m'a conseiller de lui faire marcher_"

She darted back, and clapping her hands upon the bosom of her charming frock, danced, literally danced and pirouetted around poor Dickie.

"_Moi, je ne comprenais pas ce que c'etait qu'un avorton_" she continued rapidly. "_Mais je comprends parfaitement maintenant. C'est un monstre, n'est-ce pas, Maman_"

She threw back her head, her white throat convulsed by laughter.

"_Ah! mon Dieu, qu'il est drole_" she cried.

Silence fell on the whole room, for sight and words alike were paralysing in their grotesque cruelty. Ormiston was the first to speak. He laid his hand somewhat roughly on his sister-in-law's shoulder.

"For God's sake, stop this, Ella," he said. "Take the girl away. Little brute," he added, under his breath, as he went hastily across to poor Dick.

But Lady Calmady had been beforehand with him. She swept across the room, flinging aside the dainty, dancing figure as she passed. All the primitive fierceness, the savage tenderness of her motherhood surged up within her. Katherine was in the humour to kill just then, had killing been possible. She was magnificently regardless of consequences, regardless of conventionalities, regardless of every obligation save

that of sheltering her child. She cowered down over Richard, putting her arms about him, knew--without question or answer--that he had heard and understood. Then gathering him up against her, she stood upright, facing them all, brother, sister, old and tried friends, a terrible expression in her eyes, the boy's face pressed down upon her shoulder. For the moment she appeared alienated from, and at war with, even Julius, even Marie de Mirancourt. No love, however faithful, could reach her. She was alone, unapproachable, in her immense anger and immense sense of outrage.

"I will ask you to go," she said to her sister-in-law,--"to go and take your daughter with you, and to enter this house no more."

Mrs. Ormiston did not reply. Even her chatter was for the moment stilled. She pressed a handkerchief against the little dancer's forehead, and it was stained with blood.

"Ah! she is a wicked woman!" wailed the child. "She has hurt me. She threw me against the table. _Maman quel malheur ca se verra. Il y aura certainement une cicatrice_"!

"Nonsense," Ormiston said harshly. "It's nothing, Kitty, the merest scratch."

"Yes, my dear, we will have the carriage at once,"--this from Mr. Cathcart to his wife. The incident, from all points of view, shocked his sense of decency. Immediate retirement became his sole object.

Lady Calmady moved away, carrying the boy. She trembled a little. He was heavy. Moreover, she sickened at the sight of blood. But little Helen Ormiston caught at her dress, looked up at her.

"I hate you," she said, hissing the words out with concentrated passion between her pretty even teeth. "You have spoilt me. I will hate you always, when I grow up. I will never forget."

Alone in the great state-bedroom next door, a long time elapsed before either Richard or Katherine spoke. The boy leaned back against the sofa cushions, holding his mother's hand. The casements stood wide open, and little winds laden with the scent of the hawthorns in the park wandered in, gently stirring the curtains of the ebony bed, so that the trees of the Forest of This Life thereon embroidered appeared somewhat mournfully to wave their branches, while the Hart fled forward and the Leopard, relentless in perpetual pursuit, followed close behind. There was a crunching of wheels on the gravel, a sound of hurried farewells. Then in a minute or two more the evening quiet held its own again.

Suddenly Dickie flung himself down across Katherine's lap, his poor body shaken by a tempest of weeping.

"Mother, I can't bear it--I can't bear it," he sobbed. "Tell me, does everybody do that?"

"Do what, my own precious?" she said, calm from very excess of sorrow.

Later she would weep too in the dark, lying lonely in the cold comfort of that stately bed.

"Laugh at me, mother, mock at me?" and his voice, for all that he tried to control it, tore at his throat and rose almost to a shriek.

CHAPTER VI

DEALING WITH A PHYSICIAN OF THE BODY AND A PHYSICIAN OF THE SOUL

History repeats itself, and to Katherine just now came most unwelcome example of such repetition. She had foreseen that some such crisis must arise as had arisen. Yet when it arose, the crisis proved none the less agonising because of that foreknowledge. Two strains of feeling struggled within her. A blinding sorrow for her child, a fear of and shame at her own violence of anger. Katherine's mind was of an uncompromising honesty. She knew that her instinct had, for a space at least, been murderous. She knew that, given equal provocation, it would be murderous again.

And this was, after all, but the active, objective aspect of the matter. The passive and subjective aspect showed danger also. In her extremity Katherine's soul cried out for God--for the sure resting-place only to be found by conscious union of the individual with the eternal will. But such repose was denied her. For her anger against God, even while thus earnestly desiring Him, was even more profound than her anger against man. The passion of those terrible early days when her child's evil fortune first became known to her--held in abeyance all these years by constant employment and the many duties incident to her position--returned upon her in its first force. To believe God is not, leaves the poor human soul homeless, sadly desolate, barren in labour as is a slave. But the sorrow of such belief is as a trifle beside the hideous fear that God is careless and unjust, that virtue is but a fond imagination of all-too-noble human hearts, that the everlasting purpose is not good but evil continually. And, haunted by such fears, Katherine once again sat in outer darkness. All gracious things appeared to her as illusions; all gentle delights but as passing anodynes with which, in his misery, man weakly tries to deaden the pain of existence for a little space. She suffered a profound discouragement.

And so it seemed to her but as part of the cruel whole when history repeated itself yet further, and Dr. Knott, pausing at the door of Richard's bedroom, turned and said to her:--

"It will be better, you know, Lady Calmady, to let him face it alone. He'll feel it less without you. Winter can give me all the assistance I want." Then he added, a queer smile playing about his loose lips:--"Don't be afraid. I'll handle him very gently. Probably I shan't hurt him at all--certainly not much."

"Ah!" Katherine said, under her breath.

"You see it is done by his own wish," John Knott went on.

"I know," she answered.

She respected and trusted this man, entertained for him, notwithstanding his harsh speech and uncouth exterior, something akin to affection. Yet remembering the part he had played in the fate of the father, it was very dreadful to her that he should touch the child. And Dr. Knott read her thought. He did not resent it. It was all natural enough! From his heart he was sorry for her, and would have spared her had that been possible. But he discriminated very clearly between primary and secondary issues, never sacrificing, as do feeble and sentimental persons, the former to the latter. In this case the boy had a right to the stage, and so the mother must stand in the wings. John Knott possessed a keen sense of values in the human drama which the exigencies of his profession so perpetually presented to him. He waited quietly, his hand on the door-handle, looking at Katherine from under his rough eyebrows, silently opposing his will to hers.

Suddenly she turned away with an impatient gesture.

"I will not come with you," she said.

"You are right."

"But--but--do you think you can really do anything to help him, to make him happier?" Katherine asked, a desperation in the tones of her voice.

"Happier? Yes, in the long run, because certainty of whatever kind, even certainty of failure, makes eventually for peace of mind."

"That is a hard saying."

"This is a hard world." Dr. Knott looked down at the floor, shrugging his unwieldy shoulders. "The sooner we learn to accept that fact the better, Lady Calmady. I know it is sharp discipline, but it saves time and money, let alone disappointment.--Now as to all these elaborate contrivances I've brought down from London, they're the very best of their kind. But I am bound to own the most ingenious of such arrangements are but clumsy remedies for natural deficiency. Man hasn't discovered how to make over his own body yet, and never will. The Almighty will always have the whip-hand of us when it comes to dealing with flesh and blood. All the same we've got to try these legs and things----"

Katherine winced, pressing her lips together. It was brutal, surely, to speak so plainly? But John Knott went on quietly, commiserating her inwardly, yet unswerving in common sense.

"Try 'em every one, and so convince Sir Richard one way or the other. This is a turning-point. So far his general health has been remarkably

good, and we've just got to set our minds to keeping it good. He must not fret if we can help it. If he frets, instead of developing into the sane, manly fellow he should, he may turn peevish, Lady Calmady, and grow up a morbid, neurotic lad, the victim of all manner of brain-sick fancies--become envious, spiteful, a misery to others and to himself."

"It is necessary to say all this?" Katherine asked loftily.

Dr. Knott's eyes looked very straight into hers, and there were tears in them.

"Indeed, I believe it is," he replied, "or, trust me, I wouldn't say it. I take no pleasure in giving pain at this time of day, whether mental or physical. All I want is to spare pain. But one must sacrifice the present to the future, at times, you know--use the knife to save the limb. Now I must go to my patient. It isn't fair to keep him waiting any longer. I'll be as quick as I can. I suppose I shall find you here when I've finished?"

As he opened the door Dr. Knott's heavy person showed in all its ungainliness against the brightness of sunlight flooding Dickie's room. And to Katherine he seemed hideous just then--inexorable in his great common sense, in the dead weight of his personality and of his will, as some power of nature. He was to her the incarnation of things as they are,--not things as they should be, not things as she so passionately desired they might be. He represented rationalism as against miracle, intellect as against imagination, the bitter philosophy of experience as against that for which all mortals so persistently cry out--namely, the all-consoling promise of extravagant hope. As with chains he bound her down to fact. Right home on her he pressed the utter futility of juggling with the actual. From the harsh truth that, neither in matters practical nor spiritual is any redemption without shedding of blood he permitted her no escape.

And all this Katherine's clear brain recognised and admitted, even while her poor heart only rebelled the more madly. To be convinced is not to be reconciled. And so she turned away from that closed door in a veritable tempest of feeling, and went out into the Chapel-Room. It was safer, her mind and heart thus working, to put a space between herself and that closed door.

Just then Julius March crossed the room, coming in from the stair-head. The austere lines of his cassock emphasised the height and emaciation of his figure. His appearance offered a marked contrast to that of the man with whom Katherine had just parted. His occupation offered a marked contrast also. He carried a gold chalice and paten, and his head was bowed reverentially above the sacred vessels. His eyes were downcast, and the dull pallor of his face and his long thin hands was very noticeable. He did not look round, but passed silently, still as a dream, into the chapel. Katherine paced the width of the great room, turned and paced back and forth again some half-dozen times, before he emerged from the chapel door. In her present humour she did not want him, yet she resented his abstraction. The physician of the soul, like the physician of the body, appeared to her lamentably devoid of power

to sustain and give comfort at the present juncture.

This, it so happened, was one of those days when the mystic joy of his priestly office held Julius March forcibly. He had ministered to others, and his own soul was satisfied. His expression was exalted, his short-sighted eyes were alive with inward light. Tired and worn, there was still a remarkable suavity in his bearing. He had come forth from the holy of holies, and the vision beheld there dwelt with him yet.

Meanwhile, brooding storm sat on Katherine's brow, on her lips, dwelt in her every movement. And something of this Julius perceived, for his devotion to her was intact, as was his self-abnegation. Throughout all these years he had never sought to approach her more closely. His attitude had remained as delicately scrupulous, untouched by worldliness, or by the baser part of passion, as in the first hour of the discovery of his love. Her near presence gave him exquisite pleasure; but, save when she needed his assistance in some practical matter, he refused to indulge himself by passing much time in her society. Abstinence still remained his rule of life. But just now, strong with the mystic strength of his late ministrations, and perceiving her troubled state, he permitted himself to remain and pace beside her.

"You have been out all day?" Katherine said.

"Yes, I stayed on to the end with Rebecca Light. They sent for me early this morning. She passed away very peacefully in that little attic at the new lodge looking out into the green heart of the woods."

"Ah! It's simple enough to die," Katherine said, "being old. The difficult thing is to live, being still young."

"Has my absence been inconvenient? Have you wanted me?" Julius asked.--Those quiet hours spent in the humble death-chamber suddenly appeared to him as an act of possible selfishness.

"Oh no!" she answered bitterly. "Why should I want you? Have I not sent Roger and Mary away? Am I not secretly glad dear Marie de Mirancourt is just sufficiently poorly to remain in her room? When the real need comes--one learns that among all the other merciless lessons--one is best by oneself."

For a while, only the whisper of Lady Calmady's skirts, the soft, even tread of feet upon the thick carpet. Then she said, almost sharply:--

"Dr. Knott is with Richard."

"Ah! I understand," Julius murmured.

But Lady Calmady took up his words with a certain heat.

"No, you do not understand. You none of you understand, and that is why I am better by myself. Mary and Roger in their happiness, dear Marie in her saintly resignation, and you"--Katherine turned her head, smiled at

him in lovely scorn--"you, my dear Julius, of all men, what should you know of the bitter pains of motherhood, you who are too good to be quite human, you who regard this world merely as the antichamber of paradise, you, whose whole affection is set on your Church--your God--how should you understand? Between my experience and yours there is a very wide interval. How can you know what I suffer--you who have never loved."

Under the stress of her excitement Katherine's pace quickened. The whisper of her skirts grew to a soft rush. Julius kept beside her. His head was bent reverently, even as over the sacred vessels he had so lately carried.

"I too have loved," he said at last.

Katherine stopped short, and looked at him incredulously.

"Really, Julius?" she said.

Raising his head, he looked back at her. This avowal gave him a strange sense of completeness and mastery. So he allowed his eyes to meet Katherine's, he allowed himself to reckon with her grace and beauty.

"Very really," he answered.

"But when?"

"Long ago--and always."

"Ah!" she said. Her expression had changed. Brooding storm no longer sat on her brow and lips. She was touched. For the moment the weight of her personal distress was lifted. Dickie and Dr. Knott together in that bedchamber, experimenting with unlovely, mechanical devices for aiding locomotion and concealing the humiliation of deformity, were almost forgotten. To those who have once loved, love must always supremely appeal. Julius appeared to her in a new aspect. She felt she had done him injustice. She placed her hand on his arm with a movement of apology and tenderness. And the man grew faint, trembled, feeling her hand; seeing it lie white and fair on the sleeve of his black cassock. Since childhood it was the first, the solitary caress he had received.

"Pardon me, dear Julius," she said. "I must have pained you at times, but I did not know this. I always supposed you coldly indifferent to those histories of the heart which mean so much to some of us; supposed your religion held you wholly, and that you pitied us as the wise pity the foolish, standing above them, looking down. Richard told me many things about you, before he brought me home here, but he never told me this."

"Richard never knew it," he answered, smiling. Her perfect unconsciousness at once calmed and pained him. He had kept his secret, all these years, only too well.

Katherine turned and began to pace again, her hands clasped behind her

back.

"But, tell me--tell me," she said. "You can trust me, you know. I will never speak of this unless you speak. But if I knew, it would bring us nearer together, and that would be comforting, perhaps, to us both. Tell me, what happened? Did she know, and did she love you? She must have loved you, I think. Then what separated you? Did she die?"

"No, thank God, she did not die," Julius said. He paused. He longed to gain the relief of fuller confession, yet feared to betray himself. "I believe she loved me truly as a friend--and that was sufficient."

"Oh no, no!" Katherine cried. "Do not decline upon sophistries. That is never sufficient."

"In one sense, yes--in another sense, no," Julius said. "It was thus. I loved her exactly as she was. Had she loved me as I loved her she would have become other than she was."

"Ah! but surely you are too ingenious, too fastidious." Katherine's voice took tones of delicate remonstrance and pleading. "That would be your danger, in such a case. *_Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien_*, and you would always risk sacrificing the real to the ideal. I am sorry. I would like you to have tasted the fulness of life. Even though the days of perfect joy are very few, it is well to have had them----"

She threw back her head, her eyebrows drew together, and her face darkened somewhat.

"Yes, it is well to have had them, though the memory of them cuts one to the very quick."--Then her manner changed again, gaining a touch of gaiety. "Really I am very unselfish in wishing all this otherwise," she said, "for it would have been a sore trial to part with you. I cannot imagine Brockhurst without you. I should have been in great straits deprived of my friend and counselor. And yet, I would like you to have been very happy, dear Julius."

Their pacing had just brought them to the arched doorway of the chapel. Katherine stopped, and raising her arm leaned her hand against the stone jamb of it above her head.

"See," she went on, "I want to be truly unselfish. I know how generous you are. Perhaps you remain here out of all too great kindness towards my poor Dick and me. You mustn't do that, Julius. You say she is still living. Consider--is it too late?"

Was it indeed too late? All the frustrated manhood cried aloud in Julius March. He covered his face with his hands. His carefully restrained imagination ran riot, presenting enchantments.

And Katherine, watching him, found herself strangely moved. For it was very startling to see this so familiar figure under so unfamiliar an aspect--to see Julius March, her everyday companion and assistant, his reticence, his priestly aloofness, his mild and courtly calm, swept

under by a tide of personal emotion. Lady Calmady was drawn to him by deepened sympathy. Yet regret arose in her that this man proved to be, after all, but as other men. She was vaguely disappointed, having derived more security than she had quite realised from his apparent detachment and impassibility. And, as an indirect consequence, her revolt against God suffered access of bitterness. For not only was He--to her seeing--callous regarding the fate of the many, but He failed to support those few most devoted to His cause. In the hour of their trial He was careless even of His own elect.

"Ah! I think it is indeed by no means too late!" she exclaimed.

Julius March let his hands drop at his sides. He gazed at her and her expression was of wistful mockery--compassionate rather than ironical. Then he looked away down the length of the chapel. In the warm afternoon light, the solid and rich brown of the arcaded stalls on either hand, emphasised the harmonious radiance of the great east window, a radiance as of clear jewels.--Ranks of kneeling saints, the gold of whose orioles rose in an upward curve to the majestic image of the Christ in the central light--a Christ risen and glorified, enthroned, His feet shining forever upon heaven's sapphire floor. Before the altar hung three silver-gilt lamps of Italian workmanship, in the crimson cup of each of which it had so long been Julius's pleasure to keep the tongue of flame constantly alive. The habits of a lifetime are not hastily set aside. Gazing on these things, his normal attitude returned to him. Not that which he essentially was but that which, by long and careful training of every thought, every faculty, he had become, authoritatively claimed him. His eyes fell from contemplation of the glories of the window to that of the long, straight folds of the cassock which clothed him. It was hardly the garb in which a man goes forth to woo! Then he looked at Lady Calmady--she altogether seductive in her innocence and in her wistful mockery as she leaned against the jamb of the door.

"You are mistaken, dear Katherine," he said. "It has always been too late."

"But why--why--if she is free to listen?"

"Because I am not free to speak."

Julius smiled at her. His suavity had returned, and along with it a dignity of bearing not observable before.

"Let us walk," he said. And then:--"After all I have given you a very mutilated account of this matter. Soon after I took orders, before I had ever seen the very noble, to me perfect, woman who unconsciously revealed to me the glory of human love, I had dedicated my life, and all my powers--poor enough, I fear--of mind and body to the service of the Church. I was ambitious in those days. Ambition is dead, killed by the knowledge of my own shortcomings. I have proved an unprofitable servant--for which may God in His great mercy forgive me. But, while my faith in myself has withered, my faith in Him has come to maturity. I have learned to think very differently on many subjects, and to

perceive that our Heavenly Father's purposes regarding us are more generous, more far-reaching, more august, than in my youthful ignorance I had ever dreamed. All things are lawful in His sight. Nothing is common or unclean--if we have once rightly apprehended Him, and He dwells in us. And yet--yet, a vow once made is binding. We may not do evil to gain however great a good."

Katherine listened in silence. The words came with the power of immutable conviction. She could not believe, yet she was glad to have him believe.

"And that vow precludes marriage?" she said at last.

"It does," Julius answered.

For a time they paced again in silence. Then Lady Calmady spoke, a delicate intimacy and affection in her manner, while once more, for a moment, she let her hand rest on his arm.

"So Brockhurst keeps you--I keep you, dear Julius, to the last?"

"Yes, if you will, to the very last."

"I am thankful for that," she said. "You must forgive me if in the past I have been inconsiderate at times. I am afraid the constant struggle, which certain circumstances of necessity create, tends to make me harsh and imperious. I carry a trouble, which calls aloud for redress, forever in my arms. They ache with the burden of it. And there is no redress. And the trouble grows stronger alas. Its voice--so dear, yet so dreaded--grows louder, till it deafens me to all other sounds. The music of this once beautiful world becomes faint. Only angry discord remains. And I become selfish. I am the victim of a fixed idea. I become heedless of the suffering of those about me. And you, my poor Julius, must have suffered very much!"

"Now, less than ever before," he answered. But even as he spoke, Katherine was struck by his pallor, by the drawn look of his features and languor of his bearing.

"Ah, you have fasted all day!" she cried.

"What matter?" he said, smiling. "The body surely can sustain a trifle of hunger, if the soul and spirit are fed. I have feasted royally to-day in that respect. I am strangely at ease. As to baser sort of food, what wonder if I forgot?"

The door of Dickie's bedchamber opened, letting in long shafts of sunlight, and Dr. Knott came slowly forward. His aspect was savage. Even his philosophy had been not wholly proof against the pathos of his patient's case. It irritated him to fall from his usual relentlessness of common sense into a melting mood. He took refuge in sarcasm, desirous to detect weakness in others, since he was, unwillingly, so disagreeably conscious of it in himself.

"Well, we're through with our business, Lady Calmady," he said. "Eh! Mr. March, what's wrong with you? Putty-coloured skin and shortness of breath. A little less prayer and a little more physical exercise is what you want. Successful, Lady Calmady?--Umph--I'm afraid the less said about that the better. Sir Richard will talk it out with you himself. Upset? Yes, I don't deny he is a little upset--and, like a fool, I'm upset too. You can go to him now, Lady Calmady. Keep him cheerful, please, and give him his head as much as you can."

John Knott watched her as she moved away. He shrugged his shoulders and thrust his hands into his breeches' pockets.

"She's going to hear what she won't much relish, poor thing," he said. "But I can't help that. One man's meat is another man's poison; and my affair is with the boy's meat, even if it should be of a kind to turn his mother's stomach. He shall have just all the chance I can get him, poor little chap. And now, Mr. March, I propose to prescribe for you, for you look uncommonly like taking a short-cut to heaven, and, if I know anything about this house, you've got your work cut out for you here below for a long time to come. Through with this business? Pooh! we've only taken a preliminary canter as yet. That boy's out of the common in more ways than one, and, cripple or no cripple, he's bound to lead you all a pretty lively dance before he's done."

CHAPTER VII

AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT

The day had been hot, though the summer was but young. A wealth of steady sunlight bathed the western front of the house. All was notably still, save for a droning of bees, a sound of wood-chopping, voices now and again, and the squeak of a wheelbarrow away in the gardens.

Richard lay on his back upon the bed. He had drawn the blue embroidered coverlet up about his waist; but his silk shirt was thrown open, exposing his neck and chest. His arms were flung up and out across the pillow on either side his gold-brown, close-curved head. As his mother entered he turned his face towards the open window. There was vigour and distinction in the profile--in the straight nose, full chin, and strong line of the lower jaw, in the round, firm throat, and small ear set close against the head. The muscles of his neck and arms were well developed. Seen thus, lying in the quiet glow of the afternoon sunshine, all possibility of physical disgrace seemed far enough from Richard Calmady. He might indeed, not unfitly, have been compared to one of those nobly graceful lads, who, upon the frieze of some Greek temple, set forth forever the perfect pattern of temperance and high courage, of youth and health.

As Katherine sat down beside the bed, Richard thrust out his left hand. She took it in both hers, held and stroked the palm of it. But for a

time she could not trust herself to speak. For she saw that, notwithstanding the resolute set of his lips, his breath caught in short quick sobs and that his eyelashes were glued in points by late shed tears. And seeing this, Katherine's motherhood arose and confronted her with something of reproach. It seemed to her she had been guilty of disloyalty in permitting her thought to be beguiled even for the brief space of her conversation with Julius March. She felt humbled, a little in Dickie's debt, since she had not realised to the uttermost each separate moment of his trial as each of those moments passed.

"My darling, I am afraid Dr. Knott has hurt you very much," she said at last.

"Oh! I don't know. I suppose he did hurt. He pulled me about awfully, but I didn't mind that. I told him to keep on till he made sure," Richard answered huskily, still turning his face from her. "But none of those beastly legs and things fitted. He could not fix them so that I could use them. It was horrid. They only made me more helpless than before. You see--my--my feet are in the way."

The last words came to Katherine as a shock. The boy had never spoken openly of his deformity, and in thus speaking he appeared to her to rend asunder the last of those veils with which she had earnestly striven to conceal the disgrace of it from him. She remained very still, bracing herself to bear--the while slowly stroking his hand. Suddenly the strong, young fingers closed hard on hers. Richard turned his head.

"Mother," he said, "the doctor can't do anything for me. It's no use. We've just got to let it be."

He set his teeth, choking a little, and drew the back of his right hand across his eyes.

"It's awfully stupid; but somehow I never knew I should mind so much. I--I never did mind much till just lately. It began--the minding, I mean--the day Uncle Roger came home. It was the way he looked at me, and hearing about things he'd done. And I had a beastly dream that night. And it's all grown worse since."

He paused a minute, making a strong effort to speak steadily.

"I suppose it's silly to mind. I ought to be accustomed to it by this time. I've never known anything else. But I never thought of all it meant and--and--how it looked to other people till Helen was here and wanted me to show her the house. I--I supposed every one would take it for granted, as you all do here at home. And then I'd a hope Dr. Knott might find a way to hide it and so help me. But--but he can't. That hope's quite gone."

"My own darling," Katherine murmured.

"Yes, please say that!" he cried, looking up eagerly. "I am your

darling, mother, aren't I, just the same? Dr. Knott said something about you just now. He's an awfully fine old chap. I like him. He talked to me for a long time after we'd sent Winter away, and he was ever so kind. And he told me it was bad for you too, you know--for both of us. I'm afraid I had not thought much about that before. I've been thinking about it since. And I began to be afraid that--that I might be a nuisance,--that you might be ashamed of me, later, when I am grown up, since I've always got to be like this, you see."

The boy's voice broke.

"Mother, mother, you'll never despise me, who ever does, will you?" he sobbed.

And it seemed to Lady Calmady that now she must have touched bottom in this tragedy. There could surely be no further to go? It was well that her mood was soft; that for a little while she had ceased to be under the dominion of her so sadly fixed idea. In talking with Julius March she had been reminded how constant a quantity is sorrow; how real, notwithstanding their silence, are many griefs; how strong is human patience. And this indirectly had fortified her. Wrung with anguish for the boy, she yet was calm. She knelt down by the bedside and put her arms round him.

"Most precious one--listen," she said. "You must never ask me such a question again. I am your mother--you cannot measure all that implies, and so you cannot measure the pain your question causes me. Only you must believe, because I tell it you, that your mother's love will never grow old or wear thin. It is always there, always fresh, always ready. In utter security you can come back to it again and again. It is like one of those clear springs in the secret places of the deep woods--you know them--which bubble up forever. Drink, often as you may, however heavy the drought or shrunken the streams elsewhere, those springs remain full to the very lip."--Her tone changed, taking a tender playfulness. "Why, my Dickie, you are the light of my eyes, my darling, the one thing which makes me still care to live. You are your father's gift to me. And so every kiss you give me, every pretty word you say to me, is treasured up for his, as well as for your own, dear sake."

She leaned back, laid her head on the pillow beside his, cheek to cheek. Katherine was a young woman still--young enough to have moments of delicate shyness in the presence of her son. She could not look at him now as she spoke.

"You know, dearest, if I could take your bodily misfortune upon me, here, directly, and give you my wholeness, I would do it more readily, with greater thankfulness and delight than I have ever done anything in----"

But Richard raised his hand and laid it, almost violently, upon her mouth.

"Oh stop, mother, stop!" he cried. "Don't--it's too dreadful to think of."

He flung away, and lay at as far a distance as the width of the bed would allow, gazing at her in angry protest.

"You can't do that. But you don't suppose I'd let you do it even if you could," he said fiercely. Then he turned his face to the sunny western window again. "I like to know that you're beautiful anyhow, mother, all--all over," he said.

There followed a long silence between them. Lady Calmady still knelt by the bedside. But she drew herself up, rested her elbows on the bed and clasped her hands under her chin. And as she knelt there something of proud comfort came to her. For so long she had sickened, fearing the hour when Richard should begin clearly to gauge the extent of his own ill-luck; yet, now the first shock of plain speech over, she experienced relief. For the future they could be honest, she and he,--so she thought,--and speak heart to heart. Moreover, in his so bitter distress, it was to her--not to Mary, his good comrade, not to Roger Ormiston, the Ulysses of his fancy--that the boy had turned. He was given back to her, and she was greatly gladdened by that. She was gladdened too by Richard's last speech, by his angry and immediate repudiation of the bare mention of any personal gain which should touch her with loss. Katherine's eyes kindled as she knelt there watching her son. For it was very much to find him chivalrous, hotly sensitive of her beauty and the claims of her womanhood. In instinct, in thought, in word, he had shown himself a very gallant, high-bred gentleman--child though he was. And this gave Katherine not only proud comfort in the present, but cheered the future with hope.

"Look here, Dickie, darling," she said softly at last, "tell me a little more about your talk with Dr. Knott."

"Oh! he was awfully kind," Richard answered, turning towards her again, while his face brightened. "He said some awfully jolly things to me."

The boy put out his hand and began playing with the bracelets on Katherine's wrists. He kept his eyes fixed on them as he fingered them.

"He told me I was very strong and well made--except, of course, for it. And that I was not to imagine myself ill or invalid, because I'm really less ill than most people, you know. And--he said--you won't think me foolish, mother, if I tell you?--he said I was a very handsome fellow."

Richard glanced up quickly, while his colour deepened.

"Am I really handsome?" he asked.

Katherine smiled at him.

"Yes, you are very handsome, Dickie. You have always been that. You were a beautiful baby, a beautiful little child. And now, every day you grow more like your father. I can't quite talk about him, my dear--but ask Uncle Roger, ask Marie de Mirancourt what he was when she knew him

first."

The boy's face flashed back her smile, as the sea does the sunlight.

"Oh! I say, but that's good news," he said. He lay quite still on his back for a little while, thinking about it.

"That seems to give one a shove, you know," he remarked presently. Then he fell to playing with her bracelets again. "After all, I've got a good many shoves to-day, mother. Dr. Knott's a regular champion shover. He told me about a number of people he'd known who had got smashed up somehow, or who'd always had something wrong, you know--and how they'd put a good face on it and hadn't let it interfere, but had done things just the same. And he told me I'd just got to be plucky--he knew I could if I tried--and not let it interfere either. He told me I mustn't be soft, or lazy, because doing things is more difficult for me than for other people. But that I'd just got to put my back into it, and go in and win. And I told him I would--and you'll help me, mummy, won't you?"

"Yes, darling, yes," Lady Calmady said.

"I want to begin at once," he went on hurriedly, looking hard at the bracelets. "I shouldn't like to be unkind to her, mother, but do you think Clara would give me up? I don't need a nurse now. It's rather silly. May one of the men-servants valet me? I should like Winter best, because he's been here always, and I shouldn't feel shy with him. Would it bore you awfully to speak about that now, so that he might begin to-night?"

Lady Calmady's brave smile grew a trifle sad. The boy was less completely given back to her than she had fondly supposed. This day was after all to introduce a new order. And the woman always pays. She was to pay for that advance, so was the devoted handmaiden, Clara. Still the boy must have his way--were it even towards a merely imagined good.

"Very well, dearest, I will settle it," she answered.

"You won't mind, though, mother?"

Katherine stroked the short curly hair back from his forehead.

"I don't mind anything that promises to make you happier, Dickie," she said. "What else did you and Dr. Knott settle--anything else?"

Richard waited, then he turned on his elbow and looked full and very earnestly at her.

"Yes, mother, we did settle something more. And something that I'm afraid you won't like. But it would make me happier than anything else--it would make all the difference that--that can be made, you know."

He paused, his expression very firm though his lips quivered.

"Dr. Knott wants me to ride."

Katherine drew back, stood up straight, threw out her hands as though to keep off some actual and tangible object of offense.

"Not that, Richard," she cried. "Anything in the world rather than that."

He looked at her imploringly, yet with a certain determination, for the child was dying fast in him and the forceful desires and intentions of youth growing.

"Don't say I mustn't, mother. Pray, pray don't, because----"

He left the sentence unfinished, overtaken by the old habit of obedience, yet he did not lower his eyes.

But Lady Calmady made no response. For the moment she was outraged to the point of standing apart, even from her child. For a moment, even motherhood went down before purely personal feeling--and this, by the irony of circumstance, immediately after motherhood had made supreme confession of immutability. But remembering her husband's death, remembering the source of all her child's misfortune, it appeared to her indecent, a wanton insult to all her past suffering, that such a proposition should be made to her. And, in a flash of cruelly vivid perception, she knew how the boy would look on a horse, the grotesque, to the vulgar, wholly absurd spectacle he must, notwithstanding his beauty, necessarily present. For a moment the completeness of love failed before pride touched to the very quick.

"But, how can you ride?" she said. "My poor child, think--how is it possible?"

Richard sat upright, pressing his hands down on the bedclothes on either side to steady himself. The colour rushed over his face and throat.

"It is possible, mother," he answered resolutely, "or Dr. Knott would never have talked about it. He couldn't have been so unkind. He drew me the plan of a saddle. He said I was to show it to Uncle Roger to-night. Of course it won't be easy at first, but I don't care about that. And Chifney would teach me. I know he would. He said the other day he'd make a sportsman of me yet."

"When did you talk with Chifney?" Lady Calmady spoke very quietly, but there was that in her tone which came near frightening the boy. It required all his daring to answer honestly and at once.

"I talked to him the day Aunt Ella and Helen were here. I--I went down to the stables with him and saw all the horses."

"Then either you or he did very wrong," Lady Calmady remarked.

"It was my fault, mother, all my fault. Chifney would have ridden on, but I stopped him. Chaplin tried to prevent me. I--I told him to mind his own business. I meant to go. I--I saw all the horses, and they were splendid," he added, enthusiasm gaining over fear. "I saw the stables, and the weighing-room, and everything. I never enjoyed myself so much before. I told Chaplin I would tell you, because he ought not to be blamed, you know. I did mean to tell you directly I came in. But all those people were here."--Richard's face darkened. "And you remember what happened? That put everything else out of my head."

A pause. Then he said: "Are you very angry?"

Katherine made no reply. She moved away round the foot of the bed and stood at the sunny window in silence. Bitterness of hot humiliation possessed her. Heretofore, whatever her trial, she had been mistress of the situation; she had reigned a queen-mother, her authority undisputed. And now it appeared her kingdom was in revolt, conspiracy was rife. Richard's will and hers were in conflict; and Richard's will must eventually obtain, since he would eventually be master. Already courtiers bowed to that will. All this was in her mind. And a wounding of feeling, far deeper and more intimate than this,--since Katherine's nobility of character was great and the worldly aspect, the greed of personal power and undisputed rule, could not affect her for long. It wounded her, as a slight upon the memory of the man she had so wholly loved, that this first conflict between Richard and herself should turn on the question of horses and the racing-stable. The irony of the position appeared unpardonable. And then, the vision of poor Richard--her darling, whom she had striven so jealously to shield ever since the day, over thirteen years ago, when undressing her baby she had first looked upon its malformed limbs--Richard riding forth for all the staring, mocking world to see, again arose before her.

Thinking of all this, Katherine gazed out over the stately home scene--grass plot and gardens, woodland and distant landscape, rich in the golden splendour of steady sunshine--with smarting eyes and a sense of impotent misery that wrapped her about as a burning garment. The boy was beginning to go his own way. And his way was not hers. And those she had trusted were disloyal, helping him to go it. Alone, in retirement, she had borne her great trouble with tremendous courage. But how should she bear it under changed conditions, amid publicity, gossip, comment?

Dickie, meanwhile, had let himself drop back against the pillows. He set his teeth and waited. It was hard. An opportunity of escape from the galling restraints of his infirmity had been presented to him, and his mother--his mother after promise given, after the sympathy of a lifetime; his mother, in whom he trusted absolutely--was unwilling he should accept it! As he lay there all the desperate longing for freedom and activity that had developed in him of late--all the passion for sport, for that primitive, half-savage manner of life, that intimate, if somewhat brutal, relation to nature, to wild creatures and to the beasts whom man by centuries of usage has broken to his service, which is the special heritage of Englishmen of gentle blood--sprang up in Richard, strong, all compelling. He must have his part in all this. He

would not be denied. He cried out to her imperiously:--

"Mother, speak to me! I haven't done anything really wrong. I've a right to do what any other boy has--as far as I can get it. Don't you see riding is just the one thing to--to make up--to make a man of me? Don't you see that?"

He sat bolt upright, stretching out his arms to her in fierce appeal, while the level sunshine touched his bright hair and wildly eager face.

"Mummy, mummy darling, don't you see? Try to see. You can't want to take away my one chance!"

Katherine turned at that reiterated cry, and her heart melted within her. The boy was her own, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh. From her he had life. From her he had also lifelong disgrace and deprivation. Was there anything then, which, he asking, she could refuse to give? She cast herself on her knees beside the bed again and buried her face in the sheet.

"My precious one," she sobbed, "forgive me. I am ashamed, for I have been both harsh and weak. I said I would help you, and then directly I fail you. Forgive me."

And the boy was amazed, speechless at first, seeing her broken thus; shamed in his turn by the humility of her attitude. To his young chivalry it was as an impiety to look upon her tears.

"Please don't cry, mother," he entreated tremulously, a childlike simplicity of manner taking him. "Don't cry--it is dreadful. I never saw you cry before."--Then, after a pause, he added: "And--never mind about my riding. I don't so very much care about it--really, I don't believe I do--after all."

At that dear lie Katherine raised her bowed head, a wonderful sweetness in her tear-stained face, tender laughter upon her lips. She drew the boy's hands on to her shoulders, clasped her hands across his extended arms, and kissed him upon the mouth.

"No, no, my beloved, you shall ride," she said. "You shall have your saddle--twenty thousand saddles if you want them. We will talk to Uncle Roger and Chifney to-night. All shall be as you wish."

"But you're not angry, mother, any more?" he asked, a little bewildered by her change of tone and by the passion of her lovely looks and speech.

Katherine shook her head, and still that tender laughter curved her lips.

"No, I am never going to be angry any more--with you at least, Dick. I must learn to be plucky too. A pair of us, Dickie, trying to keep up one another's pluck! Only let us go forward hand in hand, you and I, and then, however desperate our doings, I at least shall be content."

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING, INCIDENTALLY, OF A BROKEN-DOWN POSTBOY AND A COUNTRY FAIR

The Brockhurst-mail phaeton waited, in the shade of the three large sycamores, before Appleyard's shop at Farley Row. A groom stood stiff and straight at the horses' heads. While upon the high driving-seat, a trifle excited by the suddenness of his elevation, sat Richard. He held the reins in his right hand, and stretched his left to get the cramp out of his fingers. His arms ached--there was no question about it. He had never driven a pair before, and the horses needed a lot of driving. For the wind was gusty, piling up heavy masses of black-purple rain-cloud in the southeast. It made the horses skittish and unsteady, and Dickie found it was just all he could do to hold them, so that Chifney's reiterated admonition, "Keep 'em well in hand, Sir Richard," had been not wholly easy to obey.

From out the open shop-door came mingled odour of new leather and of horse clothing. Within Mr. Chifney delivered himself of certain orders; while Appleyard--a small, fair man, thin of nose, a spot of violent colour on either cheek-bone--skipped before him goat-like, in a fury of complacent intelligence. For it was not every day so notable a personage as the Brockhurst trainer crossed his threshold. To Josiah Appleyard, indeed--not to mention his two apprentices stretching eyes and ears from the back-shop, to catch any chance word of Mr. Chifney's conversation--it appeared as though the gods very really condescended to visit the habitations of men. While Mrs. Appleyard, peeping from behind the wire blind of the parlour, had--as she afterwards repeatedly declared--"felt her insides turn right over," when she saw the carriage draw up. The conversation was prolonged and low toned. For the order was of a peculiar and confidential character, demanding much explanation on the one part, much application on the other. It was an order, in short, wholly flattering to the self-esteem of the saddler, both as tribute to his social discretion and his technical skill. Thus did Josiah skip goat-like, being glad.

Meanwhile, Richard Calmady waited without, resting his aching arms, gazing down the wide, dusty street, his senses lulled by the flutter of the sycamore leaves overhead. The said street offered but small matter of interest. For Farley Row is one of those dead-alive little towns on the borders of the forest land, across which progress, even at the time in question, 1856, had written Ichabod in capital letters. During the early years of the century some sixty odd coaches, plying upon the London and Portsmouth road, would stop to change horses at the White Lion in the course of each twenty-four hours. That was the golden age of the Row. Horns twanged, heavy wheels rumbled, steaming teams were led away, with drooping heads, into the spacious inn yard, and fresh horses stepped out cheerily to take their place between the traces. The next stage across Spendle Flats was known as a risky one. Legends of

Claude Duval and his fellow-highwaymen still haunt the woods and moors that top the long hill going northward. And the passengers by those sixty coaches were wont to recover themselves from terrors escaped, or fortify themselves against terrors to come, by plentiful libations at the bar of the handsome red-brick inn. The house did a roaring trade. But now the traffic upon the great road had assumed a local and altogether undemonstrative character. The coaches had fallen into lumber, the spanking teams had each and all made their squalid last journey to the knacker's; and the once famous Gentlemen of the Road had long lain at rest in mother earth's lap--sleeping there none the less peacefully because the necks of many of them had suffered a nasty rick from the hangman's rope, and because the hard-trodden pavement of the prison-yard covered them.

The fine stables of the White Lion stood tenantless, now, from year's end to year's end. Rats scampered, and bats squeaked in unlovely ardours of courtship, about the ranges of empty stalls and cobweb-hung rafters. Yet one ghost from out the golden age haunted the place still--a lean, withered, bandy-legged, little stick of a man, arrayed in frayed and tarnished splendour of sky-blue waist-jacket, silver lace, and jack-boots of which the soles and upper leathers threatened speedy and final divorce. In all weathers this bit of human wreckage--Jackie Deeds by name--might be seen wandering aimlessly about the vacant yard, or seated upon the bench beside the portico of the silent, bow-windowed inn, pulling at a, too often empty, clay-pipe and spitting automatically.

Over Richard, tender-hearted as yet towards all creatures whom nature or fortune had treated cavalierly, the decrepit postboy exercised a fascination. One day, when driving through the Row with Mary Cathcart, he had succeeded in establishing relations with Jackie Deeds through the medium of a half-crown. And now, as he waited beneath the rustling sycamores, it was with a sensation of quick, yet half-shy, pleasure, that he saw the disreputable figure lurch out of the inn yard, stand for a minute shading eyes with hand while making observations, and then hobble across the street, touching the peak of a battered, black-velvet cap as it advanced.

"Be 'e come to zee the show, sir?" the old man coughed out, peering with dim, bleary eyes up into the boy's fresh face.

"No, we've come about something from Appleyard's. I--I didn't know there was a show."

"Oh! bain't there though, Sir Richard! I tell 'e there be a prime sight of a show. There be monkeys down town, and dorgs what dances on their 'inder legs, and gurt iron cages chock full er wild beastises, by what they tells me."

Dickie, feeling anxiously in his pockets for some coin of sufficient size to be worthy of Mr. Deeds' acceptance, ejaculated involuntarily:--"Oh! are there? I'd give anything to see them."

"Sixpence 'ud do most er they 'ere shows, I expect. The wild beastises

'ud run into a shilling may be."--The old postboy made a joyless, creaking sound, bearing but slightest affinity to laughter. "But you 'ud see your way round more'n a shilling, Sir Richard. A terrible, rich, young gentleman, by what they tells me."

Something a trifle malicious obtained in this attempt at jocosity, causing Dickie to bend down rather hastily over the wheel, and thrust his offering into the crumpled, shaky hands.

"There," he said. "Oh! it's nothing. I'm so pleased you--you don't mind. Where do you say this show is?"

"Gor a'mighty bless 'e, sir," the old man whimpered, with a change of tone. "'Tain't every day poor old Jackie Deeds runs across a rich, young gentleman as ull give him 'arf a crown. Times is bad, mortal bad--couldn't be much wuss."

"I'm so sorry," Richard answered. He felt apologetic, as though in some manner responsible for the decay of the coaching system and his companion's fallen estate.

"Mortal bad, couldn't be no wuss."

"I'm very sorry. But about the show--where is it please?" the boy asked again, a little anxious to change the subject.

"Oh! that there show. 'Tain't much of a show neither, by what they tells me."

Mr. Deeds spoke with sudden irritability. Uplifted by the possession of a half crown, he became contemptuous of the present, jealous of the past when such coin was more plentiful with him.

"Not much of a show," he repeated. "The young uns ull crack up most anything as comes along. But that's their stoopidness. Never zeed nothing better. Law bless 'e, this ain't a patch on the shows I've a' zeen in my day. Cock-fightings, and fellows--wi' a lot er money laid on 'em by the gentry too--a-pounding of each other till there weren't an inch above the belt of 'em as weren't bloody. And the Irish giant, and dwarfs 'ad over from France. They tell me most Frencheys's made that way. Ole Boney 'isself wasn't much of a one to look at. And I can mind a calf wi' two 'eads-'ud eat wi' both mouths at once, and all the food 'ud go down into the same belly. And a man wi' no arms, never 'ad none, by what they used to tell me----"

"Ah!" Richard exclaimed quickly.

"No, never 'ad none, and yet 'ud play the drum wi' 'is toes and fire off a horse pistol. Lor, you would 'er laughed to 'av zeen 'im. 'E made fine sport for the folks 'e did."

Jackie Deeds had recovered his good-humour. He peered up into the boy's face again maliciously, and broke into cheerless, creaking merriment.

"Gor a'mighty 'as 'is jokes too," he said. "I'm thinking, by the curious made creatures 'e sends along sometimes."

"Chifney," Richard called imperatively. "Chifney, are you nearly ready? We ought to get home. There's a storm coming up."

"Well, we shall get that matter of the saddle done right enough, Sir Richard," the trainer remarked presently, as the carriage bowled up the street. "Don't be too free with the whip, sir.--Steady, steady there.--Mind the donkey-cart.--Bear away to the right. Don't let 'em get above themselves. Excuse me, Sir Richard."

He leaned forward and laid both hands quietly on the reins.

"Look here, sir," he said, "I think you'd better let Henry lead the horses past all this variety business."

The end of the street was reached. On either hand small red or white houses trend away in a broken line along the edge of a flat, grass common, backed by plantations of pollarded oak trees. In the foreground, fringing the broad roadway, were booths, tents, and vans. And the staring colours of these last, raw reds and yellows, the blue smoke beating down from their little stove-pipe chimneys, the dirty white of tent flaps and awnings, stood out harshly in a flare of stormy sunlight against the solid green of the oaks and uprolling masses of black-purple cloud.

Here indeed was the show. But to Richard Calmady's eyes it lacked disappointingly in attraction. His nerves were somewhat a-quiver. All the coarse detail, all the unlovely foundations, of the business of pleasure were rather distressingly obvious to his sight. A merry-go-round was in full activity--wooden horses and most unseaworthy boats describing a jerky circle to the squeaking of tin whistles and purposeless thrummings of a drum. Close by a crop-eared lurcher, tied beneath one of the vans, dragged choking at his chain and barked himself frantic under the stones and teasing of a knot of idle boys. A half-tipsy slut of a woman threatened a child, who, in soiled tights and spangles, crouched against the muddy hind-wheel of a wagon, tears dribbling down his cheeks, his arm raised to ward off the impending blow. From the menagerie--an amorphous huddle of gray tents, ranged behind a flight of wooden steps leading up to an open gallery hung with advertisements of the many attractions within--came the hideous laughter of a hyena, and the sullen roar of a lion weary of the rows of stolid English faces staring daily, hourly, between the bars of his foul and narrow cage, heart-sick with longing for sight of the open, starlit heaven and the white-domed, Moslem tombs amid the prickly, desert thickets and plains of clean, hot sand. On the edge of the encampment horses grazed--sorry beasts for the most part, galled, broken-kneed and spavined, weary and heart-sick as the captive lion. But weary not from idleness, as he. Weary from heavy loads and hard traveling and scant provender. Sick of collar and whip and reiterated curses.

About the tents and booths, across the grass, and along the roadway,

loitered a sad-coloured, country crowd. Even to the children, it took its pleasure slowly and silently; save in the case of a hulking, young carter in a smock-frock, who, being pretty far gone in liquor, alternately shouted bawdy songs and offered invitation to the company generally to come on and have its head punched.

Such were the pictures that impressed themselves upon Richard's brain as Henry led the dancing carriage-horses up the road. And it must be owned that from this first sight of life, as the common populations live it, his soul revolted. Delicately nurtured, finely bred, his sensibility accentuated by the prickings of that thorn in the flesh which was so intimate a part of his otherwise noble heritage, the grossness and brutality of much which most boys of his age have already learnt to take for granted affected him to the point of loathing. And more especially did he loathe the last picture presented to him on the outskirts of the common. At the door of a gaudily-painted van, somewhat apart from the rest, stood a strapping lass, tambourine in one hand, tin mug for the holding of pennies in the other. She wore a black, velvet bodice, rusty with age, and a blue, silk skirt of doubtful cleanliness, looped up over a widely distended scarlet petticoat. Rows of amber beads encircled her brown throat. She laughed and leered, bold-eyed and coarsely alluring, at a couple of sheepish country lads on the green below. She called to them, pointing over her shoulder with the tin cup, to the sign-board of her show. At the painting on that board Richard Calmady gave one glance. His lips grew thin and his face white. He jerked at the reins, causing the horses to start and swerve. Was it possible that, as old Jackie Deeds said, God Almighty had His jokes too, jokes at the expense of His own creation? That in cynical abuse of human impotence, as a wanton pastime, He sent human beings forth into the world thus ludicrously defective? The thought was unformulated. It amounted hardly to a thought indeed,--was but a blind terror of insecurity, which, coursing through the boy's mind, filled him with agonised and angry pity towards all disgraced fellow-beings, all enslaved and captive beasts. Dimly he recognised his kinship to all such.

Meanwhile the carriage bowled along the smooth road and up the long hill, bordered by fir and beech plantations, which leads to Spendle Flats. And there, in the open, the storm came down, in rolling thunder and lashing rain. Tall, shifting, white columns chased each other madly across the bronze expanse of the moorland. Chifney, mindful of his charge, hurried Dickie into a greatcoat, buttoned it carefully round him, offered to drive, almost insisted on doing so. But the boy refused curtly. He welcomed the stinging rain, the swirling wind, the swift glare of lightning, the ache and strain of holding the pulling horses. The violence of it all heated his blood as with the stern passion of battle. And under the influence of that passion his humour changed from agonised pity to a fierce determination of conquest. He would fight, he would come through, he would win, he would slay dragons. Prometheus-like he would defy the gods. Again his thought was unformulated, little more than the push of young, untamed energy impatient of opposition. But that he could face this wild mood of nature and control and guide these high-mettled, headstrong horses gave him coolness and self-confidence. It yielded him assurance that there

was, after all, an immensity of distance between himself and all caged, outworn creatures, and that the horrible example of deformity upon the brazen-faced girl's show-board had really nothing to do with him. Dickie's last humour was less noble than his first, it is to be feared. But in all healthy natures, in all those in whom the love of beauty is keen, there must be in youth strong repudiation of the brotherhood of suffering. Time will teach a finer and deeper lesson to those that have faith and courage to receive it; yet it is well the young should defy sorrow, hate suffering, gallantly, however hopelessly, fight.

And the warlike instinct remained by Dickie all that evening. He was determined to assert himself, to measure his power, to obtain. While Winter was helping him dress for dinner he gave orders that his chair should be placed at the bottom of the table.

"But the colonel sits there, Sir Richard."

Dickie's face did not give in the least.

"He has sat there," he answered rather shortly. "But I have spoken to her ladyship, and in future he will sit by her. I'll go down early, Winter. I prefer being in my place when the others come in."

It must be added that Ormiston accepted his deposition in the best possible spirit, patting the boy on the shoulder as he passed him.

"Quite right, old chap. I like to see you there. Claim your own, and keep it."

At which a lump rose in Dickie's throat, nearly causing him to choke over his first spoonful of soup. But Mary Cathcart whose kind eyes saw most things, smiled first upon her lover and then upon him, and began talking to him of horses, as one sportsman to another. And so Dickie speedily recovered himself, and grew eager, playing host very prettily at his own table.

He demanded to sit up to prayers, moreover, and took his place in the dead Richard Calmady's stall nearest the altar rails on the left. Next him was Dr. Knott, who had come in unexpectedly just before dinner. He had the boy a little on his mind; and, while contemptuous of his own weakness in the matter, wanted badly to know just how he was. Lady Calmady had begged him to stay. He could be excellent company when he pleased. He had laid aside his roughness of manner and been excellent company to-night. Next him was Ormiston, while the seats immediately below were occupied by the men-servants, Winter at their head.

Opposite to Richard, across the chapel, sat Lady Calmady. The fair, summer moonlight streaming in through the east window spread a network of fairy jewels upon her stately, gray-clad figure and beautiful head. Beside her was Mary Cathcart, and then came a range of dark, vacant stalls. And below these was a long line of women-servants, ranging from Denny, in rustling, black silk, and Clara,--alert and pretty, though a trifle tearful,--through many grades and orders, down to the little scullery-maid, fresh from the keeper's cottage on the Warren--homesick,

and half scared by the grand gentlemen and ladies in evening-dress, by the strange, lovely figures in the stained-glass windows, by the great, gold cross and flowers, and the rich altar-cloth and costly hangings but half seen in the conflicting light of the moonbeams and quivering candles.

John Knott was impressed by the scene too, though hardly on the same lines as the little scullery-maid. He had long ago passed the doors of orthodoxy and dogma. Christian church and heathen temple--could he have had the interesting experience of entering the latter--were alike to him. The attitude and office of the priest, the same in every age and under every form of religion, filled him with cynical scorn. Yet he had to own there was something inexpressibly touching in the nightly gathering together of this great household, gentle and simple; and in this bowing before the source of the impenetrable mystery which surrounds and encloses the so curiously urgent and vivid consciousness of the individual. He had to own, too, that there was something inexpressibly touching in the tones of Julius March's voice as he read of the young Galilean prophet "going about and doing good"--simple and gracious record of human tenderness and pity, upon which, in the course of centuries, the colossal fabric of the modern Christianity, Catholic and Protestant, has been built up.

"And great multitudes came to Him," read Julius, "having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them; insomuch that the multitude marveled when they saw the dumb to speak, and the maimed to be whole, and the lame to walk----"

How simple it all sounded in that sweet, old-world story! And yet how lamentably, in striving to accomplish just these same things, his own far-reaching science failed!

"The maimed to be whole, the lame to walk"--involuntarily he looked round at the boy beside him.

Richard leaned back in his stall, tired with the long day and its varying emotions. His eyes were half closed, and his profile showed pale as wax against the background of dark woodwork. His eyebrows were drawn into a slight frown, and his face bore a peculiar expression of reticence. Once he glanced up at the reader, as though on a sudden a pleasant thought occurred to him. But the movement was a passing one. He leaned back in his stall again and folded his arms, with a movement of quiet pride, almost of contempt.

Later that night, as her custom was, Katherine opened the door of Richard's room softly, and entering bent over his bed in the warm dimness to give him a last look before going to rest herself. To-night Dickie was awake. He put his arms round her coaxingly.

"Stay a little, mummy darling," he said. "I am not a bit sleepy. I want to talk."

Katherine sat down on the edge of the bed. All the mass of her hair was

unbound, and fell in a cloud about her to the waist. Richard, leaning on one elbow, gathered it together, held and kissed it. He was possessed by the sense of his mother's great beauty. She seemed so magnificently far removed from all that is coarse, spoiled, or degraded. She seemed so superb, so exquisite a personage. So he gazed at her, kissed her hair, and gently touched her arms, where the open sleeves of her white dressing-gown left them bare, in reverential ecstasy.

Katherine became almost perplexed.

"My dearest, what is it?" she asked at last.

"Oh! it's only that you're so perfect, mother," he said. "You make me feel so safe somehow. I'm never afraid when you are there."

"Afraid of what?" she asked. A hope came upon her that he had grown nervous of riding, and wanted her to help him to retire gracefully from the matter. But his next words undeceived her. He threw himself back against the pillow and clasped his hands under his head.

"That's just it," he said. "I don't know exactly what I am afraid of, and yet I do get awfully scared at times. I suppose, mother, if one's in a good position--the position we're in, you know--nobody can ill-use one very much?"

Lady Calmady's eyes blazed with indignation. "Ill-use you? Who has ever dared to hint at, to dream of such a thing, dear Richard?"

"Oh, no one--no one! Only I can't help wondering about things, you know. And some--some people do get most awfully ill-used. I can't help seeing that."

Katherine paused before answering. The boy did not look at her. She spoke with quiet conviction, her eyes gazing out into the dimness of the room.

"I know," she said, almost reluctantly. "And perhaps it is as well you should know it too, though it is sad knowledge. People are not always very considerate of one another. But ill-usage cannot touch you, my dearest. You are saved by love, by position, by wealth."

"You are sure of that, mother?"

"Sure? Of course I am sure, darling," she answered. Yet even while speaking her heart sank.

Richard remained silent for a space. Then he said, with certain hesitancy: "Mother, tell me, it is true then that I am rich?"

"Quite true, Dick."

"But sometimes people lose their money."

Katherine smiled.--"Your money is not kept in a stocking, dearest."

"I don't suppose it is," the boy said, turning towards her. "But don't banks break?"

"Yes, banks break. But a good many broken banks would not affect you. It is too long a story to tell you now, Dickie, but your income is very safe. It would almost need a revolution to ruin you. You are rich now; and I am able to save considerable sums for you yearly."

"It's--it's awfully good of you to take so much trouble for me, mother," he interrupted, stroking her bare arm again delicately.

To Katherine his half-shy endearments were the most delicious thing in life--so delicious that at moments she could hardly endure them. They made her heart too full.

"Eight years hence, when you come of age and I give account of my stewardship, you will be very rich," she said.

Richard lay quite still, his eyes again fixed on the dimness.

"That--that's good news," he said at last, drawing a long breath. "I saw things to-day, mother, while we were driving. It was nobody's fault. There was a fair with a menagerie and shows at Farley Row. I couldn't help seeing. Don't ask me about it, mother. I'd rather forget, if I can. Only it made me understand that it is safer for any one--well, any one like--me--don't you know, to be rich."

Richard sat up, flung his arms round her and kissed her with sudden passion.

"Beautiful mother, honey-sweet mother," he cried, "you've told me just everything I wanted to know. I won't be afraid any more." Then he added, in a charming little tone of authority: "Now you mustn't stay here any longer. You must be tired. You must go to bed and go to sleep."

BOOK III

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH OUR HERO'S WORLD GROWS SENSIBLY WIDER

In the autumn of 1862 Richard Calmady went up to Oxford. Not through

ostentation, but in obedience to the exigencies of the case, his going was in a somewhat princely sort, so that the venerable city, moved from the completeness of her scholarly and historic calm, turned her eyes, in a flutter of quite mundane excitement, upon the newcomer. Julius March accompanied Richard. Time and thought had moved forward; but the towers and spires of Oxford, her fair cloisters and enchanting gardens, her green meadows and noble elms, her rivers, Isis and Cherwell, remained as when Julius too had been among the young and ardent of her sons. He was greatly touched by this return to the Holy City of his early manhood. He renewed old friendships. He reviewed the past, taking the measure calmly of what life had promised, what it had given of good. A pleasant house had been secured in St. Giles' Street; and a contingent of the Brockhurst household, headed by Winter, went with the two gentlemen, while Chaplin and a couple of grooms preceded them, in charge of a goodly number of horse-boxes.

For that first saddle, fashioned now some six years ago by Josiah Appleyard of Farley Row, had worked something as near a miracle as ever yet was worked by pigskin. It was a singularly ugly saddle, running up into a peak front and back, furnished with a complicated system of straps and buckles and--in place of stirrups and stirrup-leathers--with a pair of contrivances resembling old-fashioned holsters. Mary Cathcart's brown eyes had grown moist on first beholding it. And Colonel Ormiston had exclaimed, "Good God! Oh, well, poor dear little chap, I suppose it's the best we can do for him." An ugly saddle--yet had Josiah Appleyard ample reason to skip, goat-like, being glad. For, ugly or not, it fulfilled its purpose, bringing custom to the maker and happiness and health to the owner of it.

The boy rode fearlessly, while exercise and exertion begot in him a certain light-heartedness and audacity good to see. The window-seat of the Long Gallery, the book-shelves of the library, knew him but seldom now. He was no less courteous, no less devoted to his mother, no less in admiration of her beauty; but the young barbarian was well awake in Dickie, and drove him out of doors, on to the moorland or into the merry greenwood, with dog, and horse, and gun. On his well-broken pony he shot over the golden stubble fields in autumn, brought down his pheasants, stationed at the edge of the great coverts; went out for long afternoons, rabbiting in the warrens and field banks, escorted by spaniels and retrievers, and keepers carrying lithe, lemon-coloured ferrets tied up in a bag.

Later, when he was older,--but this tried Katherine somewhat, reminding her too keenly of another Richard Calmady and days long dead,--Winter, a trifle reluctant at such shortening of his own virtuous slumbers, would call Dickie and dress him, all in the gray of the summer morning; while, at the little arched doorway in the west front, Chifney and a groom with a led horse would await his coming, and the boy would mount and ride away from the great, sleeping house. At such times a charm of dewy freshness lay on grass and woodland, on hill and vale. The morning star grew pale and vanished in the clear-flashing delight of sunrise, as Richard rode forth to meet the string of racers; as he noted the varying form and fortune of Rattlepate or Sweet Rosemary, of Yellow Jacket, Morion or Light-o'-Love, over the short fragrant turf of the

gallop; as he felt the virile joy which the strength of the horses and the pounding rush of them as they swept past him ever aroused in him. Then he would ride on, by a short cut, to the old, red-brick rubbing-house, crowning the rising ground on the farther side of the lake, and wait there to see the finish, talking of professional matters with Chifney meanwhile; or, turning his horse's head towards the wide, distant view, sit silent, drawing near to nature and worshipping--with the innocent gladness of a still virgin heart--in the temple of the dawn.

Life at Oxford was set in a different key. The university city was well disposed towards this young man of so great wealth and so strange fortunes; and Richard was unsuspecting, and ready enough to meet friendliness half-way. Yet it must be owned he suffered many bad quarters of an hour. He was, at once, older in thought and younger in practical experience than his fellow-undergraduates. He was cut off, of necessity, from their sports. They would eat his breakfasts, drink his wine, and show no violent objection to riding his horses. They were considerate, almost anxiously careful of him, being generous and good-hearted lads. And yet poor Dick was perturbed by the fear that they were more at ease without him, that his presence acted as a slight check upon their genial spirits and their rattling talk. And so it came about that though his acquaintances were many, his friends were few. Chief among the latter was Ludovic Quayle, a younger son of Lord Fallowfeild--whom that kindly if not very intelligent nobleman had long ago proposed to export from the Whitney to the Brockhurst nursery with a view to the promotion of general cheerfulness. Mr. Ludovic Quayle was a rather superfine, young gentleman, possessed of an excellent opinion of himself, and a modest opinion of other persons--his father included. But under his somewhat supercilious demeanour there was a vein of true romance. He loved Richard Calmady; and neither time, nor opposing interests, nor certain black chapters which had later to be read in the history of life, destroyed or even weakened that love.

And so Dick, finding himself at sad disadvantage with most of the charming young fellows about him in matters of play, turned to matters of work, letting go the barbarian side of life for a while. In brain, if not in body, he believed himself the equal of the best of them. His ambition was fired by the desire of intellectual triumph. He would have the success of the schools, since the success of the river and the cricket-field were denied him. Not that Richard set any exaggerated value upon academic honours. Only two things are necessary--this at least was his code at that period--never to lapse from the instincts of high-breeding and honour, and to see just as much of life, of men and of affairs, as obedience to those instincts permits. Already the sense of proportion was strong in Richard, fed perhaps by the galling sense of personal deformity. Learning is but a part of the whole of man's equipment, and a paltry enough part unless wisdom go along with it. But the thirst of battle remained in Richard; and in this matter of learning, at least, he could meet men of his own age and standing on equal terms and overcome them in fair fight.

And so, during the last two years of his university course, he did meet them and overcame, honours falling liberally to his share. Julius March

looked on in pleased surprise at the exploits of his former pupil. While Ludovic Quayle, with raised eyebrows and half-tender, half-ironical amusement relaxing the corners of his remarkably beautiful mouth, would say:--

"Calmady, you really are a shameless glutton! How many more immortal glories, any one of which would satisfy an ordinary man, do you propose to swallow?"

"I suppose it's a bad year," Richard would answer. "The others can't amount to very much, or, needless to say, I shouldn't walk over the course."

"A charming little touch of modesty, as far as you yourself are concerned," Ludovic answered. "But not strikingly flattering to the others. I would rather suppose you abnormally clever, than all the rest abnormally stupid--for, after all, you know, am I, my great self, not among the rest?"

At which Dickie would laugh rather shamefacedly, and say:--"Oh you!--why you know well enough you could do anything you liked if you weren't so confoundedly lazy!"

And, meanwhile, at Brockhurst, as news arrived of these successes, Lady Calmady's soul received comfort. Her step was light, her eyes full of clear shining as she moved to and fro ordering the great house and great estate. She felt repaid for the bitter pain of parting with her darling, and sending him forth to face the curious, possibly scornful, world of the university city. He had proved himself and won his spurs. And this solaced her in the solitude and loneliness of her present life. For her dear friend and companion Marie de Mirancourt had found the final repose, before seeking that of the convent. Early one February morning, in the second year of Richard's sojourn at Oxford, fortified by the rites of the Church, she had passed the gates of death peacefully, blessing and blessed. Katherine mourned for her, and would continue to mourn with still and faithful sorrow, even while welcoming home her young scholar, hearing the details of his past achievements and hopes for the future, or entertaining--with all gracious hospitality--such of his Oxford friends as he elected to invite to Brockhurst.

It was on one of these last occasions, the young men having gone down to the Gun-Room to smoke and discuss the day's pheasant shooting, that Katherine had kept Julius March standing before the Chapel-Room fire, and had looked at him, a certain wistfulness in her face.

"He is happy--don't you think, Julius?" she said. "He seems to me really happier, more contented, than I have ever seen him since his childhood."

"Yes, I also think that," Julius answered. "He has reason to be contented. He has measured himself against other men and is satisfied of his own powers."

"Every one admires him at Oxford?"

"Yes, they admire and envy him. He has been brilliantly successful."

Katherine drew herself up, clasping her hands behind her, and smiling proudly as she mused, gazing into the crimson heart of the burning logs. Then, after a silence, she turned suddenly to her companion.

"It is very sweet to have you here at home again, Julius," she said gently. "I have missed you sorely since dearest Marie de Mirancourt died. Live a little longer than I do, please. Ah! I am afraid it is no small thing that I ask you to do for my sake, for I foresee that I shall survive to a lamentably old age. But sacrifice yourself, Julius, in the matter of living. Less than ever, when the shadows fall, shall I be able to spare you."

For which words of his dear lady's, though spoken lightly, half in jest, Julius March gave God great thanks that night.

It was about this period that two pieces of news, each proving eventually to have much personal significance, reached Lady Calmady from the outside world. The first took the form of a letter--a rather pensive and tired letter--from her brother, William Ormiston, telling her that his daughter Helen was about to marry the Comte de Vallorbes, a young gentleman very well known both to Parisian and Neapolitan society. The second took the form of an announcement in the *Morning Post*, to the effect that Lady Tobemory, whose lamented death that paper had already chronicled, had left the bulk of her not inconsiderable fortune to her god-daughter Honoria, eldest child of that distinguished officer General St. Quentin. In both cases Lady Calmady wrote letters of congratulation, in the latter with very sincere and lively pleasure. She held her cousin, General St. Quentin, in affection for old sake's sake. Honoria she remembered as a singularly graceful, high-bred, little maiden, fleet of foot as a hind--too fleet of foot indeed for little Dickie's comfort of mind, and therefore banished from the Brockhurst nursery. In the former case, her congratulations being somewhat conventional, she added--in her own name and that of Richard--a necklace of pearls, with a diamond clasp and bars to it, of no mean value.

In the spring of 1865 Richard left Oxford for good, and took up his residence once more at Brockhurst. But it was not until the autumn of the following year, when he had reached the age of three-and-twenty, and had already for some six months served his Queen and country in the capacity of Justice of the Peace for the county of Southampton, that any event occurred greatly affecting his fortunes, and therefore worthy to set forth at large in this history.

CHAPTER II

TELLING HOW DICKIE'S SOUL WAS SOMEWHAT SICK, AND HOW HE MET FAIR WOMEN

ON THE CONFINES OF A WOOD

RICHARD CALMADY rode homeward through the autumn woods, and the aspect of them was very lovely. But their loveliness was hectic, a loveliness as it seemed, at all events at first sight, of death and burial, rather than of life and hope. The sky was overcast, and a chill clung to the stream side and haunted the hollows. The young man's humour, unfortunately, was only too much in harmony with the more melancholy suggestions of the scene. For Richard was by nature something of a poet, though he but rarely wrote verses, and usually burned them as soon as written, being scholar enough to know and feel impatient of the "second best." And this inherent strain of poetry in him tempered the active and practical side of his character, making wealth and position, and all those things which the worldly-minded seek, seem of slight value to him at times. It induced in him many and very varying moods. It carried him back often, even now in the strength of his young manhood, to the fine fancies and exquisite unreason of the fairy world in which those so sadly ill-balanced footsteps of his had first been set. To-day had proved, so far, an unlucky one, prolific of warfare between his clear brain and all too sensitive heart. For it was the burden of Richard's temperament--the almost inevitable result of that ever-present thorn in the flesh--that he shrunk as a poet, even as a woman, while as a man, and a strong one, he reasoned and fought.

It fell out on this wise. He had attended the Quarter Sessions at Westchurch; and a certain restlessness, born of the changing seasons, being upon him, he had ridden. His habit, when passing outside the limits of his own property, was to drive. He became aware--and angrily conscious his groom was aware also--that his appearance afforded a spectacle of the liveliest interest to the passers-by; that persons of very various age and class had stopped and turned to gaze at him; and that, while crossing the bridge spanning the dark, oily waters of the canal, in the industrial quarter of the pushing, wide-awake, county town, he had been the subject of brutal comment, followed by a hoarse laugh from the collarless throats of some dozen operatives and bargees loitering thereupon.

The consequence was that the young man arrived in court, his eyes rather hard and his jaw set. Rich, well-born, not undistinguished too for his attainments, and only three and twenty, Dickie had a fine fund of arrogance to draw upon yet. He drew upon it this morning, rather to the confusion of his colleagues upon the bench. Mr. Cathcart, the chairman, was already present, and stood talking with Mr. Seymour, the rector of Farley, a shrewd, able parson of the old sporting type. Captain Fawkes of Water End was there too; and so was Lemuel Image, eldest son of the Mr. Image, sometime mayor of Westchurch, who has been mentioned in the early pages of this chronicle.

In the last twenty years, supported by ever-increasing piles of barrels, the Image family had mounted triumphantly upward in the social scale. Lemuel, the man in question, married a poor and distant relation of Lord Aldborough, the late lord lieutenant of the county; and had by this, and by a rather truculent profession of high Tory politics,

secured himself a seat on the bench. He had given a fancy price, too, for that pretty, little place, Frodsmill, the grounds of which form such an exasperating Naboth's vineyard in the heart of the Newland's property. Neither his person, nor his politics, nor his absence of culture, found favour in Richard Calmady's sight. And to-day, being somewhat on edge, the brewer's large, blustering presence and manner--at once patronising and servile--struck him as peculiarly odious. Image betrayed an evil tendency to emphasise his remarks by slapping his acquaintances upon the back. He was also guilty of supposing a defect of hearing in all persons older than, or in any measure denied the absolute plethora of physical vigour so conspicuous in, himself. He invariably raised his voice in addressing Richard. In return for which graceful attention Dickie most cordially detested him.

"Image is a bit of a cad, and certainly Calmady makes no bones about letting him know it," Captain Fawkes remarked to Mr. Seymour, as they drove back to Farley in the latter's dog-cart. "Fortunately he has a hide like a rhinoceros, or we should have had a regular row between them more than once this morning. Calmady's generally charming; but I must say, when he likes, he can be about the most insolent fellow I've ever met, in a gentleman-like way."

"A great deal of that is simply self-protective," the clergyman answered. "It is not difficult to see how it comes about, when you take his circumstances into account. If I was him, God forgive me, I know I shouldn't be half so sweet tempered. He bears it wonderfully well, all things considered."

Nor did the disturbing incidents of the day end with the familiarities of the loud-voiced brewer. The principal case to be tried was a melancholy one enough--a miserable history or wayward desire, shame and suffering, followed by a despairing course of lies and petty thieving to help support the poor baby whose advent seemed so wholly a curse. The young mother--a pretty, desperate creature--made no attempt at denial. She owned she had robbed her mistress of a shilling here and sixpence there, that she had taken now a bit of table silver and then a garment to the pawn-shop. How could she help it? Her wages were a trifle, since her character was damaged. Wasn't it a charity to employ a girl like her at all, so her mistress said? And yet the child must live. And Richard Calmady, sitting in judgment there, with those four other gentlemen of substantial means and excellent position, sickened as he listened to the sordid details, the relentless elementary arguments. For the girl, awed and frightened at first, grew eloquent in self-defense.--"She loved him"--he being a smart young fellow, who, with excellent recommendations from Chifney, had left the Brockhurst stables some two years before, to take service in Westchurch.--"And he always spoke her fair. Had told her he'd marry her right enough, after a bit--before God he would. But it would ruin his chance of first-class places if he married yet. The gentry wouldn't take any but single men of his age. A wife would stand in his way. And she didn't want to stand in his way--he knew her better than that. Not but that he reckoned her just as much his wife as any woman could be. Of course he did. What a silly she was to trouble about it. And then when there was no hiding any longer how it was with her, he up and awayed to London, saying he

would make a home for her there. And he kept on writing for a bit, but he never told her where to write to him in return, so she couldn't answer. And then his letters came seldom, and then stopped altogether, and then--and then----"

The girl was rebuked for her much speaking, and so wasting the time of the court. There were other cases. And Richard Calmady sickened yet more, recognising in that a parable of perpetual application. For are there not always other cases? The tragedy of the individual life reaching its climax seems, to the chief actor, worthy to claim and hold universal attention. Yet the sun never stands still in heaven, nor do the footsteps of men tarry upon earth. No one person may take up too much space, too much time. The movement of things is not stayed. The single cry, however bitter, is drowned in the roar of the pushing crowd. The individual, however keen his griefs, however heinous the offense done him, must make way for those same other cases. This is the everlasting law.

And so pained, out of tune, troubled too by smouldering fires of anger, Richard left Westchurch and his fellow-magistrates as early as he decently could. Avoiding the highroad leading by Newlands and through Sandyfield village, he cut across country by field lanes and over waste lands to Farley Row. The wide quiet of the autumn afternoon, the slight chill in the air, were grateful to him after the noise and close atmosphere of the court. Yet the young man strove vainly to think of pleasant things and to regain his serenity. The girl's tear-blotted face, the tones of her voice, haunted him. Six weeks' imprisonment. The sentence, after all, was a light one. Yet who was he, who were those four other well-to-do gentlemen, that they should judge her at all? How could they measure the strength of the temptation which had beset her? If temptation is strong enough, must not the tempted of necessity yield? If the tempted does not yield, is that not merely proof that the temptation was not strong enough? The whole thing appeared to him a matter of mathematics or mechanics. Given a greater weight than it can carry, the rope is bound to break. And then for those who have not felt the strain to blame the rope, punish the rope! It seemed to Richard, as he rode homeward, that human justice is too often a very comedy of injustice. It all appeared to him so exceedingly foolish. And yet society must be protected. Other pretty, weak, silly creatures must be warned, by such rather brutal object lessons, not to bear bastards or pawn their mistresses' spoons.

"_Je ne sais pas ce que c'est que la vie eternelle, mais celle ci est une mauvaise plaisanterie_," Dickie quoted to himself somewhat bitterly.

He turned aside at Farley Row, following the narrow road that runs behind the houses in the main street and the great, vacant stables and outbuildings of the White Lion Inn. And here, as though the immediate displeasures of this ill-starred day were insufficient, memory arose and recalled other displeasures of long ago. Recalled old Jackie Deeds lurching out of that same inn yard, empty pipe in mouth, greedy of alms. Recalled the old postboy's ugly morsel of profanity--"God Almighty had His jokes too." And, at that, the laughter of those

loafers upon the canal bridge saluted Richard's ears once more, as did the loud, familiar phrases of Mr. Lemuel Image, the Westchurch brewer.

Before him the flat expanse of Clerke's Green opened out; and the turf of it--beaded with dew which the frail sunshine of the early morning had failed to burn up--was crossed by long tracks of darker green, where flocks of geese had wandered over its misty surface. Here the traveling menagerie and all the booths of the fair had been stationed. Memory rigged up the tents once more, painted the vans in crude, glaring colours, set drums beating and merry-go-rounds turning, pointed a malicious finger at the sign-board of a certain show. How many times Richard had passed this way in the intervening years, and remembered in passing, yet thrown all hurt of remembrance from him directly and lightly! To-day it gripped him. He put his horse into a sharp trot.

Skirting the edge of the green, he rode down a rutted cart lane--farm buildings and well-filled rickyards on the left--and forded the shallow, brown stream which separates the parish of Farley from that of Sandyfield and the tithing of Brockhurst.

Ahead lay the wide, rough road, ending in a broken avenue of ancient oaks, and bordered on either hand by a strip of waste land overgrown with coarse grasses and low thickets of maple--which leads up to the entrance of the Brockhurst woods. Over these hung a soft, bluish haze, making them appear vast in extent, and upraising the dark ridge of the fir forest, which crowns them, to mountain height against the western sky. A covey of partridges ran up the sandy road before Richard's horse; and, rising at last, with a long-drawn whirl of wings, skimmed the top of the bank and dropped into the pale stubble field on the other side of it. He paused at the head of the avenue while the keeper's wife--in lilac apron and sunbonnet--ran out to open the big, white gate; the dogs meantime, from their kennels under the Spanish chestnuts upon the slope behind her gabled cottage, setting up a vociferous chorus. Thus heralded, Richard passed into the whispering, mysterious stillness of the autumn woods.

The summer had been dry and fine, the foliage unusually rich and heavy, all the young wood ripening well. Consequently the turn of the leaf was very brilliant that year. The sweetly, sober, English landscape seemed to have run mad and decked itself, as for a masquerade, in extravagant splendours of colour. The smooth-stemmed beeches had taken on every tint from fiery brown, through orange and amber, to verdigris green touching latest July shoots. The round-headed oaks, practising even in carnival time a measure of restraint, had arrayed themselves in a hundred rich, finely-gradated tones of russet and umber. While, here and there, a tall bird-cherry, waxing wanton, had clothed itself like the Woman of Babylon in rose-scarlet from crown to lowest black-barked twig. Higher up, the larch plantations rose in crowds of butter-coloured spires. Amethystine and blood-red, white-spotted toadstools, in little companies, pushed through the light soil on either side the road. Trailing sprays of bramble glowed as flame. Rowan berries hung in heavy coral bunches, and the dogwood spread itself in sparse china-pink clusters. Only the undergrowth of crooked alders, in swampy, low-lying places, kept its dark, purplish green; and the light

foliage of the ash waved in shadowy pallor against its knobbed and knotted branches; and the ranks of the encircling firs retained their solemn habit, as though in protest against the universal riot.

The stream hidden away in the hazel coppice gurgled and murmured. Beech-masts pattered down, startling the stillness as with a sudden dropping of thunder rain. Squirrels, disturbed in the ingathering of their winter store, whisked up the boles of the great trees and scolded merrily from the forks of the high branches. Shy wild things rustled and scampered unseen through the tangled undergrowth and beds of bracken. While that veil of bluish haze touched all the distance of the landscape with a delicate mystery, and softly blotted the vista of each wide shooting drive, or winding pathway, to left and right.

And as Richard rode onward, leaves gay even in death fluttering down around him, his mood began to suffer change. He ceased to think and began to feel merely. First came a dreamy delight in the beauty of the scene about him. Then the sense of mystery grew upon him--of mystery, not merely hanging in the delicate haze, but dwelling in the endless variety of form and colour which met his eyes, of mystery inviting him in the soft, multitudinous voices of the woodland. And as the minutes passed this sense grew increasingly provocative, became too increasingly elusive. The light leapt into Dickie's eyes. He smiled to himself. He was filled with unreasoning expectation. He seemed--it was absurd, yet very charming--to be playing hide-and-seek with some glad secret which at any instant might be revealed to him. It murmured to him in the brook. It scolded at him merrily with the scolding squirrels. It startled the surrounding stillness, with the down pattering beech-masts and fluttering of leaves. It eluded him deftly, rustling away unseen through the green and gold of the bracken. Lastly when, reaching the summit of the ridge of hill, he entered upon the levels of the great table-land, it hailed him in the long-drawn sighing of the fir forest. For a wind, suddenly awakened, swept towards him from some far distance, neared, broke overhead, as summer waves upon a shingly beach, died in delicious whispers, only to sweep up and break and die again. Meanwhile the gray pall of cloud parted in the west, disclosing spaces of faint yet clearest blue, and the declining sun, from behind dim islands of shifting vapour, sent forth immense rays of mild and misty light.

Richard laughed involuntarily to himself. For there was a fantastic, curiously alluring influence in all this. It spoke to him as in delicate persuasion. His sense of expectation intensified. He would not ride homeward and shut himself within four walls just yet; but yield himself to the wooing of these fair sylvan divinities; to that of the spirit of the evening wind, of the softly shrouding haze, and of the broadening sunlight, a little longer.

A turf-ride branches away to the left, leading along a narrow outstanding spur of table-land to a summer-house, the prospect from which is among the noted beauties of Brockhurst. This summer-house or Temple, as it has come to be called, is an octagonal structure. Round-shafted pillars rise at each projecting angle. In the recesses between them are low stone benches, save in front where an open

colonnade gives upon the view. The roof is leaded, and surmounted by a wooden ball and tall, three-sided spike. These last, as well as the plastered, windowless walls are painted white. Within, the hollow of the dome is decorated in fresco, with groups of gaily clad ladies and their attendant cavaliers, with errant cupids, garlands of flowers, trophies of rather impossible musical instruments, and cages full of imprisoned, and therefore doubtless very naughty, loves. The colours have grown faint by action of insweeping wind and weather; but this lends a pathos to the light-hearted, highly-artificial art, emphasising the contrast between it and its immediate surroundings.

For the Temple stands on a platform of turf at the extreme point of the spur of table-land. The hillside, clothed with heather and bracken, fringed lower down with a coppice of delicate birches, falls steeply away in front and on either hand. Outstretched below, besides the panorama of the great woods, lies all the country about Farley, on to Westchurch, and beyond again--pasture and cornlands, scattered hamlets and red-roofed farms half-hidden among trees, the glint of streams set in the vivid green of water-meadows, and soft blue range behind range of distance to that pale uprising of chalk down in the far south. Upon the right, some quarter of a mile away, blocking the end of an avenue of ancient Scotch firs, the eastern facade of Brockhurst House shows planted proudly upon the long gray and red lines of the terrace.

Richard checked his horse, pausing to look for a moment at that well-beloved home. Then musing, he let his horse go forward along the level turf-ride. The glistening, gray dome and white columns of the Temple standing out against the spacious prospect--the growing brightness of this last, still chastened by the delicious autumn haze--captivated his imagination. There was, seen thus, a simplicity and distinction altogether classic in the lonely building. To him it appeared not unfit shrine for the worship of that same all-pervasive spirit of mystery, not unfit spot for the revelation of that same glad, yet cunningly elusive secret, of which he suffered the so fond obsession.

And so it was that when, coming abreast of the building, the sound of young voices--women's voices--and finely modulated laughter saluted his ear, though startled for no stranger had the right of entry to the park, he was by no means displeased. This seemed but part of the all-pervasive magic of this strange afternoon. Richard smiled at the phantasies of his own mood; yet he forgot to be shy, forgot the distressing self-consciousness which made him shrink from the observation of strangers--specially those of the other sex. The adventure tempted his fancy. Even familiar things had put on a new and beguiling vesture in the last half hour, so there were miracles abroad, perhaps. Anyhow he would satisfy himself as to the aspect of those sweet voiced and, as yet, unseen trespassers. He let his horse go forward slowly across the platform of turf.

IN WHICH RICHARD CONFIRMS ONE JUDGMENT AND REVERSES ANOTHER

"How magnificently your imagination gallops when it once gets agoing. Here you are bearing away the spoils, when the siege is not yet even begun--never will be, I venture to hope, for I doubt if this would be a very honourable----"

The speaker broke off abruptly, as the shadow of horse and rider lengthened upon the turf. And, during the silence which followed, Richard Calmady received an impression at once arresting and subtly disquieting.

A young lady, of about his own age, leaned against one of the white pillars of the colonnade. Her attitude and costume were alike slightly unconventional. She was unusually tall, and there was a lazy, almost boyish indifference and grace in the pose of her supple figure and the gallant carriage of her small head. She wore a straight, pale gray-green jacket, into the pockets of which her hands were thrust. Her skirt, of the same colour and material, hung in straight folds to her feet, being innocent alike of trimming and the then prevailing fashion of crinoline. Further, she wore a little, round matador's hat, three black pompons planted audaciously upstanding above the left ear. Her eyes, long in shape and set under straight, observant brows, appeared at first sight of the same clear, light, warm brown as her hair. Her nose was straight, rather short, and delicately square at the tip. While her face, unlined, serenely, indeed triumphantly youthful, was quite colourless and sufficiently thin to disclose fine values of bone in the broad forehead and the cutting of jaw and cheek and chin.

In that silence, as she and Richard Calmady looked full at one another, he apprehended in her a baffling element, a something untamed and remote, a freedom of soul, that declared itself alike in the gallantries and severities of her dress, her attitude, and all the lines of her person. She bore relation to the glad mystery haunting the fair autumn evening. She also bore relation to the chill haunting the stream-side and the deep places of the woods. And her immediate action emphasised this last likeness in his mind. When he first beheld her she was bright, with a certain teasing insouciance. Then, for a minute, even more, she stood at gaze, as a hind does suddenly startled on the edge of the covert--her head raised, her face keen with inquiry. Her expression changed, became serious, almost stern. She recoiled, as in pain, as in an approach to fear--this strong, nymphlike creature.

"Helen," she called aloud, in tones of mingled protest and warning. And thereupon, without more ado, she retired, nay, fled, into the sheltering, sun-warmed interior of the Temple.

At this summons her companion, who until now had stood contemplating the wide view from the extreme verge of the platform, wheeled round. For an appreciable time she, too, looked at Richard Calmady, and that haughtily enough, as though he, rather than she, was the intruder. Her glance traveled unflinchingly down from his bare head and broad

shoulders to that pocket-like appendage--as of old-fashioned pistol holsters--on either side his saddle. Swiftly her bearing changed. She uttered an exclamation of unfeigned and unalloyed satisfaction--a little joyful outcry, such as a child will make on discovery of some lost treasure.

"Ah! it is you--you," she said, laughing softly, while she moved forward, both hands extended. Which hand, by the same token, she proposed to bestow on Dickie remained matter for conjecture, since in the one she carried a parasol with a staff-like gold and tortoise-shell handle to it, and in the other, between the first and second fingers, a cigarette, the blue smoke of which curled upward in transparent spirals upon the clear, still air.

As the lady of the gray-green gown retired precipitately within the Temple, a wave of hot blood passed over Richard's body. For notwithstanding his three-and-twenty years, his not contemptible mastery of many matters, and that same honourable appointment of Justice of the Peace for the county of Southampton, he was but a lad yet, with all a lad's quickness of sensitive shame and burning resentment. The girl's repulsion had been obvious---that instinctive repulsion, as poor Dickie's too acute sympathies assured him, of the whole for the maimed, of the free for the bound, of the artist for some jarring colour or sound which mars an otherwise entrancing harmony. And the smart of all this was, to him, doubly salted by the fact that he, after all, was a man, his critic merely a woman. The bitter mood of the earlier hours of the day returned upon him. He cursed himself for a doting fool. Who was he, indeed, to seek revelation of glad secrets, cherish fair dreams and tempt adventures?

Consequently it fell out when that other lady--she of the cigarette--advanced thus delightfully towards him, Richard's face was white with anger, and his lips rigid with pain--a rigidity begotten of the determination that they should not tremble in altogether too unmanly fashion. Sometimes it is very sad to be young. The flesh is still very tender, so that a scratch hurts more than a sword-thrust later. Only, let it be remembered, the scratch heals readily; while of the sword-thrust we die, even though at the moment of receiving it we seem not so greatly to suffer. And unquestionably as Dickie sat there, on his handsome horse, hat in hand, looking down at the lady of the cigarette, the hurt of that lately received scratch began quite sensibly to lessen. For her eyes, their first unsparing scrutiny accomplished, rested on his with a strangely flattering and engaging insistence.

"But this is the very prettiest piece of good fortune!" she exclaimed. "Had I arranged the whole matter to suit my own fancy it could not have turned out more happily."

Her tone was that of convincing sincerity; while, as she spoke, the soft colour came and went in her cheeks, and her lips parting showed little, even teeth daintily precious as a row of pearls. The outline of her face was remarkably pure--in shape an oval, a trifle wide in proportion to its length. Her eyebrows were arched, the eyelids arched

also--very thin, showing the movement of the eyeballs beneath them, drooping slightly, with a sweep of dark lashes at the outer corner. It struck Richard that she bore a certain resemblance to his mother, though smaller and slighter in build. Her mouth was less full, her hair fairer--soft, glistening hair of all the many shades of heather honey-comb, broken wax and sweet, heady liquor alike. Her hands, he remarked, were very finished--the fingers pointed, the palms rosy. The set of her black, velvet coat revealed the roundness of her bust. The broad brim of her large, black hat, slightly upturned at the sides, and with sweeping ostrich plumes as trimming to it, threw the upper part of her charming face into soft shadow. Her heavy, dove-coloured, silk skirts stood out stiffly from her waist, declaring its slenderness. The few jewels she wore were of notable value. Her appearance, in fact, spoke the last word of contemporary fashion in its most refined application. She was a great lady, who knew the world and the worth of it. And she was absolute mistress both of that knowledge, and of herself--notwithstanding those outstretched hands, and outcry of childlike pleasure,--there, perhaps, lay the exquisite flattery of this last to her hearer! She was all this, and something more than all this. Something for which Dickie, his heart still virgin, had no name as yet. It was new to his experience. A something clear, simple, and natural, as the sunlight, and yet infinitely subtle. A something ravishing, so that you wanted to draw it very close, hold it, devour it. Yet something you so feared, you needs must put it from you, so that, faint with ecstasy, standing at a distance, you might bow yourself and humbly worship. But such extravagant exercises being, in the nature of his case, physically as well as socially inadmissible, the young man was constrained to remain seated squarely in the saddle--that singularly ungainly saddle, moreover, with holster-like appendages to it--while he watched her, wholly charmed, curious and shy, carried indeed a little out of himself, waiting for her to make further disclosures, since he felt absurdly slow and unready of speech.

Nor was he destined to wait in vain. The fair lady appeared agreeably ready to declare herself, and that with the finest turns of voice and manner, with the most coercive variety of appeal, pathos, caprice, and dignity.

"I know on the face of it I have not the smallest right to have taken possession in this way," she continued. "It is the frankest impertinence. But if you realised how extremely I am enjoying myself, you could not fail to forgive me. All this park of yours, all this nature," she turned sideways, sketching out the great view with a broad gesture of the cigarette and graceful hand that held it, "all this is divinely lovely. It is wiser to possess oneself of it in an illicit manner, to defy the minor social proprieties and unblushingly to steal, than not to possess oneself of it at all. If you are really hungry, you know, you learn not to be too nice as to the ways and means of acquiring sustenance."

"And you were really hungry?" Richard found himself saying, as he feared rather blunderingly. But he wanted, so anxiously, the present to remain the present--wanted to continue to watch her, and to hear her. She turned his head. How then could he behave otherwise than with

stupidity?

"La! la!" she replied, laughing indulgently, and thereby enchanting him still more; "what must your experience of life be if you suppose one gets a full meal of divine loveliness every day in the week? For my part, I am not troubled with any such celestial plethora, believe me. I was ravening, I tell you, positively ravening."

"And your hunger is satisfied?" he asked, still as he feared blunderingly, and with a queer inward movement of envy towards the wide view she looked upon, and the glory of the sunset which dared touch her hair.

"Satisfied?" she exclaimed. "Is one's hunger for the divinely lovely ever satisfied? Just now I have stayed mine with the merest mouthful--as one snatches a sandwich at a railway _buffet_. And directly I must get into the train again, and go on with my noisy, dusty, stifling journey. Ah! you are very fortunate to live in this adorable and restful place; to see it in all its fine drama of changing colour and season, year in and year out."

She dropped the end of her cigarette into a little sandy depression in the turf, and drawing aside her silken skirts, trod out the red heart of it neatly with her daintily shod foot. Just then the other lady, she of the gray-green gown, came from within the shelter of the Temple, and stood between the white pillars of the colonnade. Dick's grasp tightened on the handle of the hunting-crop lying across his thigh.

"Am I so very fortunate?" he said, almost involuntarily.

His companion looked up, smiling, her eyes dwelling on his with a strange effect of intimacy, wholly flattering, wholly, indeed, distracting to common sense.

"Yes--you are fortunate," she answered, speaking slowly. "And some day, Richard, I think you will come to know that."

Sudden comprehension, sudden recognition struck the young man--very literally struck him a most unwelcome buffet.

"Oh! I see--I understand," he exclaimed, "you are my cousin--you are Madame de Vallorbes."

For a moment his sense of disappointment was so keen, he was minded to turn his horse and incontinently ride away. The misery of that episode of his boyhood set its tooth very shrewdly in him even yet. It seemed the most cruelly ironical turn of fate that this entrancing, this altogether worshipful, stranger should prove to be one and the same as the little dancer of long ago with blush-roses in her hat.

But though the colour deepened somewhat in the lady's cheeks, she did not lower her eyes, nor did they lose their smiling importunity. A little ardour, indeed, heightened the charm of her manner--an ardour of delicate battle, as of one whose honour has been ever so slightly

touched.

"Certainly, I am your cousin, Helen de Vallorbes," she replied. "You are not sorry for that, Richard, are you? At this moment I am increasingly glad to be your cousin--though not perhaps so very particularly glad to be Helen de Vallorbes." Then she added, rapidly:--"We are here in England for a few weeks, my father and I. Troublesome, distressing things had happened, and he perceived I needed change. He brought me away. London proved a desert and a dust-heap. There was no solace, no distraction from unpleasant thoughts to be found there. So we telegraphed and came down last night to the kind people at Newlands. Naturally my father wanted to see Aunt Katherine. I desired to see her also, well understood, for I have heard so much of her talent and her great beauty. But I knew they--the brother and sister--would wish to speak of the past and find their happiness in being very sad about it all. At our age--yours and mine--the sadness of any past one may possess is a good deal too present with one still to afford in the least consoling subject of conversation." Madame de Vallorbes spoke with a certain vehemence. "Don't you think so, Richard?" she demanded.

And Richard could but answer, very much out of his heart, that he did indeed think so.

She observed him a moment, and then her tone softened. The colour deepened yet more in her cheeks. She became at once prettily embarrassed and prettily sincere.

"And then, to tell you quite the truth, I am a trifle afraid of Aunt Katherine. I have always wanted to come here and to see you, but--it is an absurd confession to make--I have been scared at the idea of meeting Aunt Katherine, and that is the real reason why I made Honoria take refuge with me in this lovely park of yours, instead of going on with my father to the house. There is a legend, a thrice accursed legend in our family,--my mother employs it even yet when she proposes to reduce me to salutary depths of humility--that I came,--she brought me--here, once, long ago, when I was a child, and that I was fiendishly naughty, that I behaved odiously."

Madame de Vallorbes stretched out her hands, presenting the rosy palms of them in the most engaging manner.

"But it can't--it can't be true," she protested. "Why, in the name of all folly, let alone all common decency, should I behave odiously? It is not like me. I love to please, I love to have people care for me. And so I cannot but believe the legend is the malign invention of some nurse or governess, whom, poor woman, I probably plagued handsomely enough in her day, and who, in revenge, rigged up this detestable scarecrow with which to frighten me. Then, moreover, I have not the faintest recollection of the affair, and one generally has an only too vivid memory of one's own sins. Surely, *_mon cher cousin_*, surely I am innocent in your sight, as in my own? You do not remember the episode either?"

Whereupon Dickie, looking down at her,--and still enchanted notwithstanding his so sinister discovery, being first, and always a gentleman, and secondly, though as yet unconsciously, a lover,--proceeded to lie roundly. Lied, too, with a notable cheerfulness, born as cheerfulness needs must be of every act of faith and high generosity.

"I remember it? Of course not," he said. "So let the legend be abolished henceforth and forevermore. Here, once and for all, Cousin Helen, we combine to pull down and bury that scarecrow."

Madame de Vallorbes clapped her hands softly and laughed. And her laughter, having the merit of being perfectly genuine--for the young man very really pleased her fancy--was likewise very infectious. Richard found himself laughing too, he knew not why, save that he was glad of heart.

"And now that matter being satisfactorily disposed of, you will come to Brockhurst often," he said. It seemed to him that a certain joyous equality had been established between him and his divinity, both by his repudiation of all former knowledge of her, and by their moment of laughter. He began fearlessly to make her little offerings. "Do you care about riding? I am afraid there is not much to amuse you at Brockhurst; but there are always plenty of horses."

"And I adore horses."

"Do you care about racing? We've some rather pretty things in training this year. I should like awfully to show them to you."

But here the conversation, just setting forth in so agreeable a fashion, suffered interruption. For the other lady, she of the gray-green gown, sauntered forward from the Temple. The carriage of her head was gallant, her air nonchalant as ever; but her expression was grave, and the delicate thinness of her face appeared a trifle accentuated. She came up to Madame de Vallorbes and passed her hand through the latter's arm caressingly.

"You know, really, Helen, we ought to go, if we are not to keep your father and the carriage waiting."--Then she looked up with a certain determined effort at Richard Calmady. "We promised to meet Mr. Ormiston at the first park gate," she added in explanation. "That is nearly a mile from here, isn't it?"

"About three-quarters--hardly that," he answered. Her eyes were not brown, he perceived, but a clear, dim green, as the soft gloom in the under-spaces of a grove of ilexes. They affected him as fearlessly observant--eyes that could judge both men and things and could also keep their own counsel.

"Will you give your mother Honoria St. Quentin's love, please," she went on. "I stayed here with her for a couple of days the year before last, while you were at Oxford. She was very good to me. Now, Helen, come----"

"I shall see you again," Richard cried to the lady of the cigarette. But his horse, which for some minutes had been increasingly fidgety, backed away down the hillside, and he could not catch the purport of her answer. To the lady of the gray-green gown and eyes he said nothing at all.

CHAPTER IV

JULIUS MARCH BEARS TESTIMONY

"So you really wish me to ask them both to come, Richard?"

Lady Calmady stood on the tiger-skin before the Gun-Room hearth. Upon the said hearth a merry, little fire of pine logs clicked and chattered. Even here, on the dry upland, the night air had an edge to it; while in the valleys there would be frost before morning, ripening that same splendour of autumn foliage alike to greater glory and swifter fall. And the snap in the air, working along with other unwonted influences, made Katherine somewhat restless this evening. Her eyes were dark with unspoken thought. Her voice had a ring in it. The shimmering, black, satin dress and fine lace she wore gave a certain magnificence to her appearance. Her whole being was vibrant. She was rather dangerously alive. Her elder brother's unlooked-for advent had awakened her strangely from the reserve and stately monotony of her daily existence, had shaken even, for the moment, the completeness of the dominion of her fixed idea. She ceased, for the moment, to sink the whole of her personality in the maternal relationship. Memories of her youth, passed amid the varied interests of society and of the literary and political world of Paris and London, assailed her. All those other Katherines, in short, whom she might have been, and who had seemed to drop away from her, vanishing phantom-like before the uncompromising realities of her husband's death and her child's birth, crowded about her, importuning her with vague desires, vague regrets. The confines of Brockhurst grew narrow, while all that which lay beyond them called to her. She craved, almost unconsciously, a wider sphere of action. She longed to obtain, and to lend a hand in the shaping of events and making of history. Even the purest and most devoted among women--possessing the doubtful blessing of a measure of intellect--are subject to such vagrant heats, such uprisings of personal ambition, specially during the dangerous decade when the nine-and-thirtieth year is past.

Meanwhile Richard's answer to her question was unfortunately somewhat over-long in coming, for the young man was sunk in meditation and apparently oblivious of her presence. He leaned back in the long, low armchair, his hands clasped behind his head, the embroidered rug drawn about his waist, a venerable, yellow-edged, calf-bound volume lying face downwards on his lap. While young Camp--young no longer, full of years indeed beyond the allotted portion of his kind--reposed,

outstretched and snoring, on the all-too-wide space of rug and chair-seat at his feet. And this indifference, both of man and dog, grew irksome to Lady Calmady. She moved across the shining yellow and black surface of the tiger-skin and straightened the bronzes of Vinedresser and Lazy Lad standing on the high chimneypiece.

"My dear, it grows late," she said. "Let us settle this matter. If your uncle and cousin are to come, I must send a note over to Newlands to-morrow before breakfast. Remember I have no choice in the matter. I leave it entirely to you. Tell me seriously what you wish."

Richard stretched himself, turning his head in the hollow of his hands, and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"That is exactly what I would thank you so heartily to tell me," he answered. "Do I, or don't I seriously wish it? I give you my word, mother, I don't know."

"Oh; but, my dearest, that is folly! You must have inclination enough, one way or the other, to come to a decision. I was careful not to commit myself. It is still easy not to ask them without being guilty of any discourtesy."

"It isn't that," Richard said. "It is simply that being anything but heroic I am trying of two evils to choose the least. I should like to have my uncle--and Helen here immensely. But if the visit wasn't a success I should be proportionately disappointed and vexed. So is it worth the risk? Disappointments are sufficiently abundant anyhow. Isn't it slightly imbecile to run a wholly gratuitous risk of adding to their number?"

Then the fixed idea began stealthily, yet surely, to reassert its dominion; for there was a perceptible flavour of discouragement in the young man's speech.

"Dickie, there is nothing wrong, is there,--nothing the matter, to-night?"

"Oh, dear no, of course not!" he answered, half closing his eyes. "Nothing in the world's the matter."

He unclasped his hands, leaned forward and patted the bulldog lying across the rug at his feet. "At least nothing more than usual, nothing more than the abiding something which always has been and always will be the matter."

"Ah, my dear!" Katherine cried softly.

"I've just been reading Burton's Anatomy here," he went on bending down, so that his face was hidden, while he pulled the dog's soft ears. "He assures all--whom it may concern--that 'bodily imperfections do not a whit blemish the soul or hinder the operations of it, but rather help and much increase it.' There, Camp, poor old man, don't start--it's nothing worse than me. I wonder if the elaborate pains which have been

taken through generations of your ancestors to breed you into your existing and very royal hideousness--your flattened nose and perpetual grin, for instance--do help and much increase the operations of your soul!"

He looked up suddenly.

"What do you think, mother?"

"I think--think, my darling," she said, "that perhaps neither you nor I are quite ourselves to-night."

"Oh, well I've had rather a beastly day!" Richard dropped back against the chair cushions again, clasping his hands behind his head. "Or I've seemed to have it, which comes practically to much the same thing. I confess I have been rather hipped lately. I suppose it's the weather. You're not really in a hurry, mother, are you? Come and sit down."

And obediently Katherine drew forward a chair and sat beside him. Those uprisings of vagrant desire still struggled, combating the dominion of the fixed idea. But the struggle grew faint and fainter. And then, for a measurable time, Richard fell silent again while she waited. Verily there is no sharper discipline for a woman's proud spirit, than that administered, often quite unconsciously, by the man whom she loves.

"We gave a wretched girl six weeks to-day for robbing her mistress," he remarked at last. "It was a flagrant case, so I suppose we were justified. In fact I don't see how we could have done otherwise. But it went against me awfully, all the same. She has a child to support. Jim Gould got her into trouble and deserted her, like a cowardly, young blackguard. However, it's easy to be righteous at another person's expense. Perhaps I should have done the same in his place. I wonder if I should?"--

"My dear, we need hardly discuss that point, I think," Lady Calmady said.

Richard turned his head and smiled at her.

"Poor dear mother, do I bore you? But it is so comfortable to grumble. I know it's selfish. It's a horrid bad habit, and you ought to blow me up for it. But then, mother, take it all round, really I don't grumble much, do I?"

"No, no!" Katherine said quickly. "Indeed, Dickie, you don't."

"I have been awfully afraid though, lately, that I do grumble more than I imagine," he went on, straightening his head, while his handsome profile showed clear cut against the dancing brightness of the firelight. "But it's almost impossible always to carry something about with you which--which you hate, and not let it infect your attitude of mind and, in a degree, your speech. Twenty or thirty years hence it may prove altogether sufficient and satisfactory to know"--his lips worked, obliging him to enunciate his words carefully--"that bodily

imperfections do not a whit blemish the soul or hinder its operations--are, in short, an added means of grace. Think of it! Isn't it a nice, neat, little arrangement, sort of spiritual consolation stakes! Only I'm afraid I'm some two or three decades on the near side of that comfortable conclusion yet, and I find----"

Richard shifted his position, letting his arms drop along the chair arms with a little thud. He smiled again, or at all events essayed to do so.

"In fact, I find it's beastly difficult to care a hang about your soul, one way or another, when you clearly perceive your body's making you the laughing-stock of half the people--why, mother, sweet dear mother,--what is it?"

For Lady Calmady's two hands had closed down on his hand, and she bowed herself above them as though smitten with sharp pain.

"Pray don't be distressed," he went on. "I beg your pardon. I wasn't thinking what I was saying, I'm an ass. It's nothing I tell you but the weather. You're all a lot too good to me and indulge me too much, and I grow soft, and then every trifle rubs me the wrong way. I'm a regular spoilt child--I know it and a jolly good spanking is what I deserve. Burton, here, declares that the autumnal, like the vernal, equinox breeds hot humours and distempers in the blood. I believe we ought to be bled, spring and fall, like our forefathers. Look here, mother, don't take my grumbling to heart. I tell you I'm just a little hipped from the weather. Let's send for dear old Knott and get him to drive out the devil with his lancet? No, no, seriously, I tell you what we will do. It'll be good for us both. I have arrived at a decision. We'll have Uncle William and--Helen----"

Richard had spoken very rapidly, half ashamed, trying to soothe her. He paused on the last word. He was conscious of a singular pleasure in pronouncing it. The perfectly finished figure of his cousin, outstanding against the wide, misty brightness of the sunset, the scent of the wood and moorland, the haunting suggestion of glad secrets, even that upcurling of blue cigarette smoke, rising as the smoke of incense--with a difference--upon the clear evening air, above all that silent flattery of intimate and fearless glances, those gay welcoming gestures, that merry calling, as of birds in the tree-tops, from the spirit of youth within him to the spirit of youth so visibly and radiantly resident in her--all this rose up before Richard. He grew reckless, though reckless of precisely what, innocent as he was, in fact although mature in learning, he knew not as yet. Only he turned on his mother a face at once eager and shy, coaxing her as when in his long-ago baby-days he had implored some petty indulgence or the gift of some coveted toy on which his little heart was set.

"Yes, let us have them," he said. "You know Helen is very charming. You will admire her, mother. She is as clever as she can stick, one sees that at a glance. And she is very much *_grande dame_* too--and, oh, well, she is a whole lot of charming things! And her coming would be a wholesome breaking up of our ordinary ways of going on. We are usually

very contented--at least, I think so--you, and dear Julius, and I, but perhaps we are getting into a bit of a rut. Helen's society might prove an even more efficacious method of driving out my blue-devils than Knott's lancet or a jolly good spanking."

He laughed quietly, patting Katherine's hand, but looking away.

"And there is no denying it would be a vastly more graceful one--don't you think so?"

Thus were smouldering fires of personal ambition quenched in Lady Calmady, as so often before. Richard's tenderness brought her to her knees. She hugged, with an almost voluptuous movement of passion, that half-rejected burden of maternity, gathering it close against her heart once more. But, along with the rapture of self-surrender, came a thousand familiar fears and anxieties. For she had looked into Dickie's mind, as he spoke out his grumble, and had there perceived the existence of much which she had dreaded and to the existence of which she had striven to blind herself.

"My darling," she said, with a certain hesitation, "I will gladly have them if you wish it--only you remember what happened long ago when Helen was here last?"

"Yes, I know, I was afraid you would think of that. But you can put that aside. Helen's not the smallest recollection of it. She told me so this afternoon."

"Told you so?" Katherine repeated.

"Yes," he said. "It was awfully sweet of her. Evidently she'd been bullied about her unseemly behaviour when she was small, till you, and I, and Brockhurst, had been made into a perfect bugbear. She's quite amusingly afraid of you still. But she's no notion what really happened. Of course she can't have, or she could not have mentioned the subject to me." Richard shrugged his shoulders. "Obviously it would have been impossible."

There was a pause. Lady Calmady rose. The young man spoke with conviction, yet her anxiety was not altogether allayed.

"Impossible," he repeated. "Pretty mother don't disquiet yourself. Trust me. To tell you the truth I have felt to-day--is it very foolish?--that I should like some one of my own age for a little while, as--don't you know--a playfellow."

Katherine bent down and kissed him. But mother-love is not, even in its most self-sacrificing expression, without torments of jealousy.

"My dear, you shall have your playfellow," she said, though conscious of a tightening of the muscles of her beautiful throat. "Good-night. Sleep well."

She went out, closing the door behind her. The perspective of the

dimly-lighted corridor, and the great hall beyond, struck her as rather sadly lifeless and silent. What wonder, indeed, that Richard should ask for a companion, for something young! Love made her selfish and cowardly she feared. She should have thought of this before. She turned back, again opening the Gun-Room door.

Richard had raised himself. He stood on the seat of the chair, steadying himself by one hand on the chair-back, while with the other he pulled the rug from beneath the sleepy bull-dog.

"Wake up, you lazy old beggar," he was saying. "Get down, can't you. I want to go to bed, and you block the way, lying there in gross comfort, snoring. Make yourself scarce, old man. If I'd your natural advantages in the way of locomotion, I wouldn't be so slow of using them----"

He looked up, and slipped back into a sitting position hastily.

"Oh, mother, I thought you had gone!" he exclaimed, almost sharply.

And to Katherine, overstrung as she was, the words came as a rebuke.

"My dearest, I won't keep you," she said. "I only came back to ask you about Honoria St. Quentin."

"What about her?"

"She is staying at Newlands--the two girls are friends, I believe. She seemed to me a fine creature when last I saw her. She knows the world, yet struck me curiously untouched by it. She is well read, she has ideas--some of them a little extravagant, but time will modify that. Only her head is awake as yet, not her heart, I think. Shall I ask her to come too?"

"So that we may wake up her heart?" Richard inquired coldly. "No thanks, dear mother, that's, too serious an undertaking. Have her another time, please. I saw her to-day, and, no doubt my taste is bad, but I must confess she did not please me very much. Nor--which is more to the point in this connection perhaps--did I please her. Would you ring the bell, please, as you're there? I want Powell. Thanks so much. Good-night."

Some ten minutes later Julius March, after kneeling in prayer, as his custom was, before the divinely sorrowful and compassionate image of the Virgin Mother and the Dead Christ, looked forth through the many-paned study window into the clair-obscure of the windless autumn night. He had been sensible of an unusual element in the domestic atmosphere this evening, and had been vaguely disquieted concerning both Katherine and Richard. It was impossible but that, as time went on, life should become more complicated at Brockhurst, and Julius feared his own inability to cope helpfully with such complication. He entertained a mean opinion of himself. It appeared to him he was but an unprofitable servant, unready, tongue-tied, lacking in resource. A depression possessed him which he could not shake off. What had he to show, after all, for these fifty-odd years of life granted to him? He

feared his religion had walked in silver slippers, and would so walk to the end. Could it then, in any true and vital sense, be reckoned religion at all? Gross sins had never exercised any attraction over him. What virtue was there, then, in being innocent of gross sin? But to those other sins--sins of defective moral courage in speech and action, sins arising from over-fastidiousness--had he not yielded freely? Was he not a spiritual valetudinarian? He feared so. Offered, in the Eternal Mercy, endless precious opportunities of service, he had been too weak, too timorous, too slothful, to lay hold on them. And so, as it seemed to him very justly, to-night confession, prayer, adoration, left him unconsolated.

Then, looking out of the many-paned window, while the shame of his barrenness clothed him even as a garment, he beheld Lady Calmady pacing slowly over the gray quarries of the terrace pavement. A dark, fur-bordered mantle shrouded her tall figure from head to foot. Only her face showed, and her hands folded stiffly high upon her bosom, strangely pale against the blackness of her cloak. Ordinarily Julius would have scrupled to intrude upon her lonely walk. But just now the cry within him for human sympathy was urgent. Her near neighbourhood in itself was very dear to him, and she might let fall some gracious word testifying that, in her opinion at least, his life had not been wholly vain. For very surely that which survives when all other passions are uprooted and cast forth--survives even in the case of the true ascetic and saint--is the unquenchable yearning for the spoken approval of those whom we love and have loved.

And so, pushed by his poverty of self-esteem, Julius March, throwing a plaid on over his cassock, went out and paced the gray quarries beside Katherine Calmady.

On one hand rose the dark, rectangular masses of the house, crowned by its stacks of slender, twisted chimneys. On the other lay the indefinite and dusky expanse of the park and forest. The night was very clear. The stars were innumerable--fierce, cold points of pulsing light.--Orion's jeweled belt and sword flung wide against the blue-black vault. Cassiopeia seated majestic in her golden chair. Northward, above the walled gardens, the Bear pointing to the diamond flashing of the Pole star. While across all high heaven, dusty with incalculable myriads of worlds, stretched the awful and mysterious highroad of the Milky-Way. The air was keen and tonic though so still. An immense and fearless quiet seemed to hold all things--a quiet not of sleep, but of conscious and perfect equilibrium, a harmony so sustained and complete that to human ears it issued, of necessity, in silence.

And that silence Lady Calmady was in no haste to break. Twice she and her companion walked the length of the terrace, and back, before she spoke. She paused, at length, just short of the arcade of the further garden-hall.

"This great peace of the night puts all violence of feeling to the blush," she said. "One perceives that a thousand years are very really as one day. That calms one--with a vengeance."

Katherine waited, looking out over the vague landscape, clasping the fur-bordered edges of her cloak with either hand. It appeared to Julius that both her voice and the expression of her face were touched with irony.

"There is nothing new under the sun," she went on, "nor under the 'visiting moon,' nor under those somewhat heartless stars. Does it occur to you, Julius, how hopelessly unoriginal we are, how we all follow in the same beaten track? What thousands of men and women have stood, as you and I stand now, at once calmed--as I admit that I am--and rendered not a little homeless by the realisation of their own insignificance in face of the sleeping earth and this brooding immensity of space! _A quoi bon, a quoi bon?_ Why can't one learn to harden one's poor silly heart, and just move round, stone-like, with the great movement of things accepting fate and ceasing to struggle or to care?"

"Just because, I think," he answered, "the converse of that same saying is equally true. If, in material things, a thousand years are as one day, in the things of the spirit one day is as a thousand years. Remember the Christ crying upon the cross--'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' and suffering during that brief utterance the sum of all the agony of sensible insignificance and sensible homelessness human nature ever has borne or will bear."

"Ah, the Christ! the Christ!" Lady Calmady exclaimed, half wistfully as it seemed to Julius March, and half impatiently. She turned and paced the pale pavement again.

"You are too courteous, my dear friend, and cite an example august out of all proportion to my little lament." She looked round at him as she spoke, smiling; and in the uncertain light her smile showed tremulous, suggestive of a nearness to tears. "Instinctively you scale Olympus,--Calvary?--yes, but I am afraid both those heights take on an equally and tragically mythological character to me--and would bring me consolation from the dwelling-places of the gods. And my feet, all the while, are very much upon the floor, alas! That is happening to me which never yet happened to the gods, according to the orthodox authorities. Just this--a commonplace--dear Julius, I am growing old."

Katherine drew her cloak more severely about her and moved on hastily, her head a little bent.

"No, no, don't protest," she added, as he attempted to speak. "We can be honest and dispense with conventional phrases, here, alone, under the stars. I am growing old, Julius--and being, I suppose, but a vain, doting woman, I have only discovered what that really means to-day! But there is this excuse for me. My youth was so blessed, so--so glorious, that it was natural I should strive to delude myself regarding its passing away. I perceive that for years I have continued to call that a bride-bed which was, in truth, a bier. I have struggled to keep my youth in fancy, as I have kept the red drawing-room in fact, unaltered. Is not all this pitifully vain and self-indulgent? I have solaced myself with the phantom of youth. And I am old--old."

"But you are yourself, Katherine, yourself. Nothing that has been, has ceased to be," Julius broke in, unable in the fulness of his reverent honour of his dear lady to comprehend the meaning of her present bitterness. "Surely the mere adding of year to year can make no so vital difference?"

"Ah! you dear stupid creature," she cried,--"stupid, because, manlike, you are so hopelessly sensible--it makes just all the difference in the world. I shall grow less alert, less pliable of mind, less quick of sympathy, less capable of adjusting myself to altered conditions, and to entertaining new views. And, all the while, the demand upon me will not lessen."

Katherine stopped suddenly in her swift walk. The two stood facing one another.

"The demand will increase," she declared. "Richard is not happy."

And thereupon--since, even in the most devout and holy, the old Adam dies extremely hard--Julius March fell a prey to very lively irritation. While she talked of herself, bestowing unreserved confidence upon him, he could listen gladly, forever. But if that most welcome subject of conversation should be dropped, let her give him that which he craved to-night, so specially--a word for himself. Let her deal, for a little space, with his own private needs, his own private joys and sorrows.

"Ah! Richard is not happy!" he exclaimed, his irritation finding voice. "We reach the root of the matter. Richard is not happy. Alas, then, for Richard's mother!"

"Are you so much surprised?" Katherine asked hotly. "Do you venture to blame him? If so, I am afraid religion has made you rather cruel, Julius. But that is not a new thing under the sun either. Those who possess high spiritual consolations--unknown to the rank and file of us--have generally displayed an inclination to take the misfortunes of others with admirable resignation. Dearest Marie de Mirancourt was an exception to that rule. You might do worse perhaps than learn to follow her example."

As she finished speaking Lady Calmady turned from him rather loftily, and prepared to move away. But even in so doing she received an impression which tended to modify her resentful humour.

For an instant Julius March stood, a tall, thin, black figure, rigid and shadowless upon the pallor of the gray pavement, his arms extended wide, as once crucified, while he looked, not at her, not out into the repose of the night-swathed landscape, but up at the silent dance of the eternal stars in the limitless fields of space. As Katherine, earlier in the evening, had taken up the momentarily rejected burden of her motherhood, so Julius now, with a movement of supreme self-surrender, took up the momentarily rejected burden of the isolation of the religious life. Self-wounded by self-love, he had

sought comfort in the creature rather than the creator. And the creature turned and rebuked him. It was just. Now Julius gave himself back, bowed himself again under the dominion of his fixed idea; and, so doing, gained, unconsciously, precisely that which he had gone forth to seek. For Katherine, struck alike by the strange vigour, and strange resignation, of his attitude, suffered quick fear, not only for, but of him. His aloofness alarmed her.

"Julius! dear Julius!" she cried. "Come, let us walk. It grows cold. I enjoy that, but it is not very safe for you. And, pardon me, dear friend, I spoke harshly just now. I told you I was getting old. Put my words down to the peevishness of old age then."

Katherine smiled at him with a sweet, half-playful humility. Her face was very wan. And speech not coming immediately to him, she spoke again.

"You have always been very patient with me. You must go on being so."

"I ask nothing better," Julius said.

Lady Calmady stopped, drew herself up, shook back her head.

"Ah! what sorry creatures we all are," she cried, rather bitterly. "Discontented, unstable, forever kicking against the pricks, and fighting against the inevitable. Always crying to one another, 'See how hard this is, know how it hurts, feel the weight!' My poor darling cries to me--that is natural enough"--Katherine paused--"and as it should be. But I must needs run out and cry to you. In this we are like links of an endless chain. What is the next link, Julius? To whom will you cry in your turn?"

"The chain is not endless" he replied. "The last link of it is riveted to the steps of the throne of God. I will make my cry there--my threefold cry--for you, for Richard, and for myself, Katherine."

Lady Calmady had reached the arched side-door leading from the terrace into the house. She paused, with her hand on the latch.

"Your God and I quarreled nearly four-and-twenty years ago--not when Richard, my joy, died, but when Richard, my sorrow, was born," she said. "I own I see no way, short of miracle, of that quarrel being made up."

"Then a miracle will be worked," he answered.

"Ah! You forget I grow old," Katherine retorted, smiling; "so that for miracles the time is at once too long and too short."

CHAPTER V

TELLING HOW QUEEN MARY'S CRYSTAL BALL CAME TO FALL ON THE GALLERY FLOOR

This world is unquestionably a vastly stimulating and entertaining place if you take it aright--namely, if you recognise that it is the creation of a profound humorist, is designed for wholly practical and personal uses, and proceed to adapt your conduct to that knowledge in all light-heartedness and good faith. Thus, though in less trenchant phrase since she was still happily very young, meditated Madame de Vallorbes, while standing in the pensive October sunshine upon the wide flight of steps which leads down from the main entrance of Brockhurst House. Tall, stone pinnacles alternating with seated griffins--long of tail, fierce of beak and sharp of claw--fill in each of the many angles of the descending stone balustrade on either hand. Behind her, the florid, though rectangular, decoration of the house front ranged up, storey above storey, in arcade and pilaster, heavily mullioned window, carven plaque and string course, to pairs of matching pinnacles and griffins--these last rampant, supporting the Calmady shield and coat-of-arms--the quaint forms of which break the long line of the pierced, stone parapet in the centre of the facade, and rise above the rusty red of the low-pitched roofs, until the spires of the one and crested heads of the other are outlined against the sky. About her feet the pea-fowl stepped in mincing and self-conscious elegance--the cocks with rustlings of heavy trailing quills, the hens and half-grown chicks with squeakings and whifflings--subdued, conversational--accompanied by the dry tap of many bills picking up the glossy grains of Indian-corn which she let dribble slowly down upon the shallow steps from between her pretty fingers. She had huddled a soft sable tippet about her throat and shoulders. The skirt of her indigo-coloured, poplin dress, turning upon the step immediately above that on which she stood, showed some inches of rose-scarlet, silken frill lining the hem of it.

Helen de Vallorbes had a lively consciousness of her surroundings. She enjoyed every detail of them. Enjoyed the gentle, southwesterly wind which touched her face and stirred her bright hair, enjoyed the plaintive, autumn song of a robin perched on a rose-grown wall, enjoyed the impotent ferocity of the guardian griffins, enjoyed the small sounds made by the feeding pea-fowl, the modest quaker grays and the imperial splendours of their plumage. She enjoyed the turn of her own wrist, its gold chain-bracelet and the handsome lace falling away from and displaying it, as she held out the handfuls of corn. She enjoyed even that space of rose-scarlet declaring itself between the dull blue of her dress and the gray, weathered surface of the stone.

But all these formed only the accompaniment, the ground-tone, to more reasoned, more vital enjoyments. Before her, beyond the carriage sweep, lay the square lawn enclosed by red walls and by octagonal, pepper-pot summer-houses, whereon--unwillingly, yet in obedience to the wild justice of revenge--Roger Ormiston had shot the Clown, half-brother to Touchstone, race-horse of mournful memory. As a child Helen had heard that story. Now her somewhat light, blue-gray eyes, their beautiful lids raised wide for once, looked out curiously upon the space of dew-powdered turf; while the corners of her mouth--a mouth a trifle thin lipped, yet soft and dangerously sweet for kissing--turned upward

in a reflective smile. She, too, knew what it was to be angry, to the point of revenge; had indeed come to Brockhurst not without purpose of that last tucked away in some naughty convolution of her active brain. But Brockhurst and its inhabitants had proved altogether more interesting than she had anticipated. This was the fourth day of her visit, and each day had proved more to her taste than the preceding one. So she concluded this matter of revenge might very well stand over for the moment, possibly stand over altogether. The present was too excellent, of its kind, to risk spoiling. Helen de Vallorbes valued the purple and fine linen of a high civilisation; nor did she disdain, within graceful limits, to fare sumptuously every day. She valued all that is beautiful and costly in art, of high merit and distinction in literature. Her taste was sure and just, if a little more disposed towards that which is sensuous than towards that which is spiritual. And in all its many forms she appreciated luxury, even entertaining a kindness for that necessary handmaid of luxury--waste. Appreciated these the more ardently, that, with birth-pangs at the beginning of each human life, death-pangs and the corruption of the inevitable grave at the close of each, all this lapping, meanwhile, of the doomed flesh in exaggerations of ease and splendour seemed to her among the very finest ironies of the great comedy of existence. It heightened, it accentuated the drama. And among the many good things of life, drama, come how and where and when it might, seemed to her supremely the best. She desired it as a lover his mistress. To detect it, to observe it, gave her the keenest pleasure. To take a leading part in and shape it to the turn of her own heart, her own purpose, her own wit was, so far, her ruling passion.

And of potential drama, of the raw material of it, as the days passed, she found increasingly generous store at Brockhurst. It invaded and held her imagination, as the initial conception of his poem will that of the poet, or of his picture that of the painter. She brooded over it, increasingly convinced that it might be a masterpiece. For the drama--as she apprehended it--contained not only elements of virility and strength, but an element, and that a persistent one, of the grotesque. This put the gilded dome to her silent, and perhaps slightly unscrupulous, satisfaction. How could it be otherwise, since the presence of the grotesque is, after all, the main justification of the theory on which her philosophy of life was based--namely, the belief that above all eloquence of human speech, behind all enthusiasm of human action or emotion, the ear which hears aright can always detect the echo of eternal laughter? And this grim echo did not affect the charming young lady to sadness as yet. Still less did it make her mad, as the mere suspicion of it has made so many, and those by no means unworthy or illiterate persons. For the laugh, so far, had appeared to be on her side, never at her expense--which makes a difference. And the chambers of her house of life were too crowded by health and agreeable sensations, mental activities and sparkling audacities, to have any one of them vacant for reception, more than momentary, of that thrice-blessed guest, pity.

And so it followed that, as she fed the mincing pea-fowl, Madame de Vallorbes' smile changed in character from reflection to impatience. A certain heat running through her, she set her pretty teeth and fell to

pelting the pea-hens and chicks mischievously, breaking up all their aristocratic reserve and making them jump and squeak to some purpose. For this precious, this very masterpiece of a drama was not only here potentially, but actually. It was alive. She had felt it move under her hand--or under her heart, which was it?--yesterday evening. Again this morning, just now, she had noted signs of its vitality, wholly convincing to one skilled in such matters. Impatience, then, became very excusable.

"For my time is short and the action disengages itself so deplorably slowly!" she exclaimed. "Pah! you greedy, conceited birds, which do you hold dearest after all, the filling of your little stomachs, or the supporting of your little dignities? Be advised by a higher intelligence. Revenge yourselves on the grains that hit and sting you by gobbling them up. It is a venerable custom that of feasting upon one's enemies. And has been practised, in various forms, both by nations and individuals. There, I give you another chance of displaying wisdom--there--there!--La! la! what an absurd commotion! You little idiots, don't flutter. Agitation is a waste of energy, and advances nothing. I declare peace. I want to consider."

And so, letting the remaining handfuls of corn dribble down very slowly, while the sunshine grew warmer and the shadows of the guardian griffins more distinct upon the lichen-encrusted stones, Helen de Vallorbes sank back into meditation--Yes, unquestionably the drama was alive. But it seemed so difficult to bring it to the birth. And she wanted, very badly, to hear its first half-articulate cries and watch its first staggering footsteps. All that is so entertaining, you yourself safely grown-up, standing very firm on your feet, looking down! And it would be a lusty child, this drama, very soon reaching man's estate and man's inspiring violence of action, striking out like some blind, giant Samson, blundering headlong in its unseeing, uncalculating strength.--Helen laid her hands upon her bosom, and threw back her head, while her throat bubbled with suppressed laughter. Ah! it promised to be a drama of ten thousand, if she knew her power, and knew her world--and she possessed considerable confidence in her knowledge of both. Only, how on earth to set the crystal free of the matrix, how to engage battle, how to get this thing fairly and squarely born? For, as she acknowledged, in the flotation of all such merry schemes as her present one, chance encounters, interludes, neatly planned evasions and resultant pursuits, play so large and important a part. But at Brockhurst this whole chapter of accidents was barred, and received rules of strategy almost annihilated, by the fact of Richard Calmady's infirmity and the hard-and-fast order of domestic procedure, the elaborate system of etiquette, which that infirmity had gradually produced. At Brockhurst there were no haphazard exits and entrances. These were either hopelessly official and public, or guarded to an equally hopeless point of secrecy. A contingent of tall, civil men-servants was always on duty. Richard was invariably in his place at table when the rest of the company came down. The ladies took their after-dinner coffee in the drawing-room, and joined the gentlemen in the Chapel-Room, library, or gallery, as the case might be. If they rode, Richard was at the door ready mounted, along with the grooms and led-horses. If they drove, he was already seated in the carriage.

"And how, how in the name of common sense," Madame de Vallorbes exclaimed, stamping her foot, and thereby throwing the now thoroughly nervous pea-fowl into renewed agitation, "are you to establish any relation worth mentioning with a man who is perpetually being carried in procession like a Hindu idol? My good birds, one's never alone with him--whether by design and arrangement, I know not. But, so far, never, never, picture that! And yet, don't tell me, matchless mixture of pride and innocence though he is, he wouldn't like it!"

However, she checked her irritation by contemplation of yesterday. Ah! that had been very prettily done assuredly. For riding in the forenoon along the road skirting the palings of the inner park, while they walked their horses over the soft, brown bed of fallen fir-needles,--she, her father, and Dick,--the conversation dealt with certain first editions and their bindings, certain treasures, unique in historic worth, locked in the glass tables and fine Florentine and *pietra dura* cabinets of the Long Gallery. Mr. Ormiston was a connoisseur and talked well. And Helen had sufficient acquaintance with such matters both to appreciate, and to add telling words to the talk.

"Ah! but I cannot go without seeing those delectable things, Richard," she said. "Would it be giving you altogether too much trouble to have them out for me?"

"Why, of course not. You shall see them whenever you like," he answered. "Julius knows all about them. He'll be only too delighted to act showman."

Just here the road narrowed a little, and Mr. Ormiston let his horse drop a few lengths behind, so that she, Helen, and her cousin rode forward side by side. The tones of the low sky, of the ranks of firs and stretches of heather formed a rich, though sombre, harmony of colour. Scents, pungent and singularly exhilarating, were given off by the damp mosses and the peaty moorland soil. The freedom of the forest, the feeling of the noble horse under her, stirred Helen as with the excitement of a mighty hunting, a positively royal sport. While the close presence of the young man riding beside her sharpened the edge of that excitement to a perfect keenness of pleasure.

"Ah, how glorious it all is!" she cried. "How glad I am that you asked me to come here."

And she turned to Richard, looking at him as, since the first day of their meeting, she had not, somehow, quite ventured to look.

"But, oh! dear me! please," she went on, "I know Mr. March is an angel, a saint--but--but--*mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, I don't want him to show me those special treasures of yours. He'll take the life out of them. I know it. And make them seem like things read of merely in a learned book. Be very charming to me, Richard. Waste half an hour upon me. Show me those moving relics yourself."

As she spoke, momentary suspicion rose in Dickie's eyes. But she gazed

back unflinchingly, with the uttermost frankness, so that suspicion died, giving place to the shy, yet triumphant, gladness of youth which seeks and finds youth.

"Do, Richard, pray do," she repeated.

The young man had averted his face rather sharply, and both horses, somehow, broke into a hand gallop.

"All right," he answered. "I'll arrange it. This evening, about six, after tea? Will that suit you? I'll send you word."

Then the road had widened, permitting Mr. Ormiston to draw up to them again. The remainder of the ride had been a little silent.

Yes, all that had been prettily done. Nor had the piece that followed proved unworthy of the prelude. She ran over the scene in her mind now, as she stood among the pocketing pea-fowl, and it caused her both mirth and delightful little heats, in which the heart has a word to say.--Madame de Vallorbes was ravished to feel her heart, just now and again.--For, contradictory as it may seem, no game is perfect that has not moments of seriousness.--She recalled the aspect of the Long Gallery, as one of those civil, ever-present men-servants had opened the door for her, and she waited a moment on the threshold. The true artist is never in a hurry. The breadth of the great room immediately before her showed very bright with candle-light and lamplight. But that died away, through gradations of augmenting obscurity, until the extreme end, towards the western bay, melted out into complete darkness. This produced an effect of almost limitless length which moved her to a childish, and at first pleasing, fancy of vague danger--an effect heightened by the ranges of curious and costly objects standing against, or decorating, the walls in a perspective of deepening gloom. Turquoise-coloured, satin curtains, faded to intimate accord with the silvered surface of the paneling, were drawn across the wide windows. They reached to the lower edge of the stonework merely, leaving blottings of impenetrable shadow below. While, as culmination of interest, as living centre of this rich and varied setting, was the figure of Richard Calmady--seen, as his custom was, only to the waist--seated in a high-backed chair drawn close against an antique, oak table, upon which a small *pietra dura* cabinet had been placed. The doors of the cabinet stood open, displaying slender columns of jasper and porphyry, and little drawers encrusted with raised work in marbles and precious stones. The young man sat stiffly upright, as one who listens, expectant. His expression was almost painfully serious. In one hand he held a string of pearls, attached to which, and enclosed by intersecting hoops of gold, was a crystal ball that shone with the mild effulgence of a mimic moon. And the great room was so very quiet, that Helen, in her pause upon the threshold, had remarked the sound of raindrops tapping upon the many window-panes as with impatiently nervous fingers.

And this bred in her a corresponding nervousness--sensation to her, heretofore, almost unknown. The darkness yonder began to provoke a disagreeable impression, queerly challenging both her eyesight and her

courage. Old convent teachings, regarding the Prince of Darkness and his emissaries, returned upon her. What if diabolic shapes lurked there, ready to become stealthily emergent? She had scoffed at such archaic fancies in the convent, yet, in lonely hours, had suffered panic fear of them, as will the hardiest sceptic. A certain little scar, moreover, carefully hidden under the soft hair arranged low on her right temple, smarted and pricked. In short, her habitual self-confidence suffered partial eclipse. She was visited by the disintegrating suspicion, for once, that the eternal laughter might, possibly, be at her expense, rather than on her side.

But she conquered such suspicion as contemptible, and cast out the passing weakness. The bare memory of it angered her now, causing her to fire a volley of yellow corn at a lordly peacock, which sent him scuttling down the steps on to the gravel in most plebeian haste. Yes, she had speedily cast out her weakness, thank heaven! What was all the pother about after all? This was not the first time she had played merry games with the affairs and affections of men. Madame de Vallorbes smiled to herself, recalling certain episodes, and shook her charming shoulders gleefully, as she looked out into the sunny morning. And then, was there not ample excuse? This man moved her more than most--more than any. She swore he did. Her attitude towards him was something new, something quite different, thereby justifying her campaign. And therefore, all the bolder for her brief self-distrust and hesitation, she had swept across the great room, light of foot, and almost impertinently graceful of carriage.

"Here you are at last!" Dickie had exclaimed, with a sigh as of relief. "I shan't want anything more, Powell. You can come back when the dressing-bell rings." Then, as the valet closed the door behind him, he continued rapidly:--"Not that I propose to victimise you till then, Helen. You mustn't stay a bit longer than you like. I confess I'm awfully fond of this room. I'm almost ashamed to think how much time I waste in it. Doing what? Oh, well, just dreaming! You see it contains samples of the doings of all my father's people, and I return to primitive faiths here and to perform acts of ancestor worship."

"Ah! I like that!" Helen said. And she did. Picture this man, long of arm, unnaturally low of stature, and astonishingly--yes, quite astonishingly good-looking, moving about among these books and pictures, these trophies of war and of sport, these oriental jars, tall almost as himself, and all the other strange furnishings from out distant years and distant lands! Picture him emerging from that well of soft darkness yonder, for instance! Helen's eyes danced under their arched and drooping lids, and she registered the fact that, though still frightened, her fright had changed in character. It was grateful to her palate. She relished it as the bouquet of a wine of finest quality. Meanwhile her companion talked on.

"The ancestor worship? Oh yes! I dare say you might like it for a change. Getting it as I do, as habitual diet, it is not remarkably stimulating. The natural man prefers to find occasion for worshipping himself rather than his ancestors, after all, you know. But a little turn of it will serve to fill in a gap and lessen the monotony of your

visit. I am afraid you must be a good deal bored, Helen. It must seem rather terribly humdrum here after Paris and Naples, and--well--most places, at that rate, as you know them."

Richard shifted his position. And the crystal moon encompassed by golden bands, crossing and intersecting one another like those of a sidereal sphere, gleamed as with an inward and unearthly light, swinging slowly upon the movement of his hand.

"You must feel here as though the clock had been put back two or three centuries. I know we move slowly, and conduct ourselves with tedious deliberation. And so, you understand, you mustn't let me keep you. Just look at what you like of these odds and ends, and then depart without scruple. It's rather a fraud, in any case, my showing them to you. Julius March, as I told you, is much better qualified to."

"Julius March, Julius March," Madame de Vallorbes broke in. "Do, I beseech you, dear Cousin Richard, leave him to the pious retirement of his study. Is he not middle-aged, and a priest into the bargain?"

"Unquestionably," Dickie said. "But, pardon me, I don't quite see what that has to do with it."

Thereupon Madame de Vallorbes made a very naughty, little grimace and drummed with her finger-tips upon the table.

"La! la!" she cried, "you're no better than all the rest. Commend me to a clever man for incapacity to apprehend what is patent to the intelligence of the most ordinary woman. Look about you."--Helen sketched in their surroundings with a quick descriptive gesture. "Observe the lights and shadows. The ghostly wavings of those pale curtains. Smell the potpourri and spices. Think of the ancestor worship. Listen to the protesting wind and rain. See the mysterious treasure you hold in your hand. And then ask me what middle-age and the clerical profession have to do with all this! Why, nothing, just precisely nothing, nothing in the whole world. That's the point of my argument. They'd ruin the sentiment, blight the romance, hopelessly blight it--for me at least."

The conversation was slightly embarrassed, both Helen and Richard talking at length, yet at random. But she knew that it was thus, and not otherwise, that it behooved them to talk. For that which they said mattered not in the least. The thing said served as a veil, as a cloak, merely, wherewith to disguise those much greater things which, perforce, remained unsaid.--To cover his and her lively consciousness of their present isolation, desired these many days and now obtained. To conceal the swift, silent approaches of spirit to spirit, so full of inquiry and self-revelation, fugitive reserves and fugitive distrusts. To hide, as far as might be, the existence of the hungry, all-compelling *_joie de vivre_* which is begotten whensoever youth thus seeks and finds youth.--These unspoken and, as yet, unspeakable things were alone of real moment, making eyes lustrous and lips quick with tremulous, uncalled-for smiles irrespective of the purport of their speech.

"Ah! but that's rather rough on poor dear Julius, you know," Dickie said. "I suppose you wanted to learn all----"

"Learn?" she interrupted. "I wanted to feel. Don't you know there is only one way any woman worth the name ever really learns--through her emotions? Only the living feel. Such men as he, if they are sincere, are already dead. He would have made feeling impossible."

A perceptible hush descended upon the room. Richard Calmady's hand usually was steady enough, but, in the silence, the pearls chattered against the table. He went rather pale and his face hardened.

"And are you getting anything of that which you wanted, Helen?" he asked. "For sometimes in the last few days--since you have been here--I--I have wondered if perhaps we were not all like that--all dead----"

"You mean do I get emotion, am I feeling?" she said. "Rest contented. Much is happening. Indeed I have doubted, during the last few days, since I have been here, whether I have ever known what it is to feel actually and seriously before."

She sat down at right angles to him, resting her elbows upon the table, her chin upon her folded hands, leaning a little towards him. One of those pleasant heats swept over her, flushing her delicate skin, lending a certain effulgence to her beauty. The scent of roses long faded hung in the air. But here was a rose sweeter far than they. No white rose of paradise, it must be confessed. Rather like her immortal namesake, that classic Helen, was she *_rosa mundi_*, glowing with warmth and colour, rose-red rose altogether of this dear, naughty, lower world?

"Richard," she said impulsively, "why don't you understand? Why do you underrate your own power? Don't you know that you are quite the most moving, the most attractive--well--cousin, a woman ever had?"

She looked closely at him, her lips a little parted, her head thrown back.

"Life is sweet, dear cousin. Reckon with yourself and with it, and live--live."--Then she put out her hand and held up the crystal between her face and his. "There," she went on, "tell me about this. I become indiscrete, thanks I suppose to your Brockhurst habit of putting back the clock, and speak with truly Elizabethan frankness. It belongs to semi-barbaric ages, doesn't it, this, to tell the true truth? Show me this. It seems rather fascinating."

And Richard obeyed mechanically, pointing out to her the signs of the Zodiac, those of the planets, and other figures of occult significance engraved on the encircling, golden bands. Showed her how those same bands, turning on a pivot, formed a golden cradle, in which the crystal sphere reposed. He lifted it out from that cradle, moreover, and laid it in the softer cradle of her palm. And of necessity in the doing of

all this, their heads--his and hers--were very near together, and their hands met. But they were very solemn all the while, solemn, eager, busy, as two babies revealing to each other the mysteries of a newly acquired toy. And it seemed to Madame de Vallorbes that all this was as pretty a bit of business as ever served to help forward such gay purposes as hers. She was pleased with herself too--for did she not feel very gentle, very sincere, really very innocent and good?

"No, hold it so," Richard said, rounding her fingers carefully, that the tips of them might alone touch the surface of the crystal. "Now gaze into the heart of it steadily, fixing your will to see. Pictures will come presently, dimly at first, as in a mist. Then the mist will lift and you will read your own fortune and--perhaps--some other person's fate."

"Have you ever read yours?"

"Oh! mine's of a sort that needs no crystal to reveal it," he answered, with a queer drop in his voice. "It's written in rather indecently big letters and plain type. Always has been."

Helen glanced at him. His words whipped up her sense of drama, fed her excitement. But she bent her eyes upon the crystal again, and the hush descended once more, disturbed only by that nervous tapping of rain.

"I see nothing, nothing," she said presently. "And there is much I would give very much to see."

"You must gaze with a simple intention." The young man's voice came curiously hoarse and broken. "Purify your mind of all desire."

Helen did not raise her head.

"Alas! if those are the conditions of revelation my chances of seeing are extremely limited. To purify one's mind of all desire is to commit emotional suicide. Of course I desire, all the while I desire. And equally, of course, you desire. Every one who is human and in their sober senses must do that. Absence of desire means idiotcy, or----"

"Or what?"

For an instant she looked up at him, a very devil of dainty malice in her expression, in the shrug of her shoulders too, beneath their fine laces and the affected sobriety of that same dull-blue, poplin gown.

"Or priestly, saintly middle-age--from which may heaven in its mercy ever deliver us," she said.

Richard shifted his position a little, gathering himself back from her so near neighbourhood--a fact of which the young lady was not unaware.

"I'm not quite sure whether I echo your prayer," he said slowly. "I doubt whether that attitude, or one approximate to it, is not the safest and best for some of us."

"Safest, no doubt." Madame de Vallorbes' eyes were bent on the crystal sphere again. "As it is safer to decline a duel, than go out and meet your man. Best? On that point you must permit me to hold my own opinion. The word best has many readings according to the connection in which it is employed. Personally I should always fight."

"Whatever the odds?"

"Whatever the odds."--And almost immediately Madame de Vallorbes uttered a little cry, curiously at variance with her bold words.

"Something is moving inside the crystal, something is coming. I don't half like it, Richard. Perhaps we are tempting Providence. Yes, it moves, it moves, like mist rising off a river. It is poisonous. Some woman has looked into this before--a woman of my temperament--and read an evil fortune. I know it. Tell me quick, how did the crystal come here, to whom did it belong?"

"To Mary Stuart--Mary, Queen of Scots," Dickie said.

"Ah! unhappy woman, ill-omened woman. You should have told me that before and I would never have looked. Here take it, take it. Lock it up, hide it. Let no woman ever look in it again."

As she spoke Helen crossed herself hastily, pushing the magic ball towards him. But, as though endowed with life and volition of its own--or was it merely that Dick's hand was even yet not quite of the steadiest?--it evaded his grasp, fell off the table edge and rolled, gleaming moonlike, far across the floor, away behind the pedestal of the bronze Pompeian Antinous, into the dusky shadow of those ghostly-waving, turquoise, satin curtains.

With a sense of catastrophe upon her Helen had sprung to her feet.--Even now, standing in the peaceful warmth of the autumn sunshine, among the feeding pea-fowl, the remembrance of it caused her a little shiver. For at sight of that gleaming ball hurrying across the carpet, all the nervousness, the distrust of herself, the vague spiritual alarms, which had beset her on first entering the room, returned on her with tenfold force. The superstitious terrors of the convent-bred girl mastered the light-hearted scepticism of the woman of the world, and regions of sinister possibility seemed disclosing themselves around her.

"Oh! how horrible! What does it mean?" she cried.

And Richard answered cheerily, somewhat astonished at her agitation, trying to reassure her.

"Mean? Nothing, except that I was abominably awkward and the crystal abominably slippery. What does it matter? We can find it again directly."

Then, self-forgetful in the fulness of his longing to pacify her, Richard had pushed his chair back from the table, intending to go in

search of the vagrant jewel. But the chair was high, and its make not of the most solid sort; and so he paused, instinctively calculating the amount of support it could be trusted to render him in his descent. And during that pause Helen had felt her heart stand still. She set her little teeth now, recalling it. For the extent of his deformity was fully apparent for once. And, apprehending that which he proposed to do, she was smitten by immense curiosity to realise the ultimate of the grotesque in respect of his appearance as he should move, walk, grope in the dimness over there after the lost crystal. But there are some indulgences which can be bought at too high a price, and along with the temptation to gratify her curiosity came an intensification of superstitious alarm. What if she had sinned, and trafficked with diabolic agencies, in trying to read the future? Payment of an actively disagreeable character might be exacted for that, and would not such payment risk disastrous augmentation if she gratified her curiosity thus further? Helen de Vallorbes became quite wonderfully prudent and humane.

"No, no, don't bother about it, don't move, dear Richard," she cried. "Let me find it please. I saw exactly the direction in which it went."

And to emphasise her speech, and keep the young man in his place, she laid her hands persuasively upon his shoulders. This brought her charming face, so pure in outline, set in its aureole of honey-coloured hair, very near to his, she looking down, he up. And in this position the two remained longer than was absolutely necessary, silent, quite still, while the air grew thick with the push of unspoken and as yet unspeakable matters, and Helen's hands resting upon his shoulders grew heavy, as the seconds passed, with languorous weight.

"There are better things than crystals to read in, after all, Richard," she said at last. Then she lifted her hands almost brusquely and stepped back. "All the same it is stupid I should have to go away," she continued, speaking more to herself than to him. "I am happy here. And when I am happy it's easy to be good--and I like to be good."

She crossed the room and passed behind the bronze Pompeian Antinous. Under the shadow of the curtains, in the angle of the bay, against the wainscot, Queen Mary's magic ball showed softly luminous. Helen could have believed that it watched her. She hesitated before stooping to pick it up and looked over her shoulder at Richard Calmady. His back was towards her, his chair close against the table again. He leaned forward on his elbows, his face buried in his hands. Something in the bowed head, in the set of the almost crouching figure reassured Madame de Vallorbes. She picked up the crystal without more ado, with, indeed, a certain flippancy of gesture. For she had received pleasing assurance that she had been frightened in the wrong place, and that the eternal laughter was very completely on her side after all.

And just then a bell had rung in some distant quarter of the great house. Powell, incarnation of decent punctualities, had appeared. Whereupon the temperature fell to below normal from fever-heat. Drama, accentuations of sensibility, in short all the unspoken and unspeakable, withered as tropic foliage at a touch of frost. No doubt

it was as well, Madame de Vallorbes reflected philosophically, since the really psychological moment was passed. There had been a dinner party last night, and---

But here the young lady's reminiscences broke off short. She gathered up her blue, poplin, scarlet-lined skirts, ran down the steps, scattering the pea-fowl to right and left, and hastened across the gravel.

"Wait half a minute for me, dear Aunt Katherine," she cried. "Are you going to the conservatories? I would so like to see them. May I go too?"

Lady Calmady stood by the door in the high, red-brick wall. She wore a white, lace scarf over her hair--turned up and back, dressed high, as of old, though now somewhat gray upon the temples. The lace was tied under her chin, framing her face. In her gray dress she looked as some stately, yet gracious lady abbess might--a lady abbess who had known love in all fulness, yet in all honour--a lady abbess painted, if such happy chance could be, by the debonair and clean-hearted Reynolds. She stood smiling, charmed--though a trifle unwillingly--by the brilliant vision of the younger woman.

"Assuredly you may come with me, if it would amuse you," she said.

"I may? Then let me open that door for you. La! la! how it sticks. Last night's rain must have swelled it;" and she wrestled unsuccessfully with the lock.

"My dear, don't try any more," Katherine said. "You will tire yourself. The exertion is too great for you. I will go back and call one of the servants."

"No, no;" and regardless of her fine laces, and trinkets, and sables Madame de Vallorbes put her shoulder against the resisting door and fairly burst it open.

"See," she cried, breathless but triumphant, "I am very strong."

"You are very pretty," Katharine said, almost involuntarily.

The steeply-terraced kitchen gardens, neat box edgings, wide flower borders in which a few clumps of chrysanthemum and Michaelmas daisy still resisted the frost, ranged down to greenish brown ponds in the valley bottom spotted with busy, quacking companies of white ducks. Beyond was an ascending slope of thick wood, the topmost trees of which showed bare against the sky line. All this was framed by the arch of the door. Madame de Vallorbes glanced at it, while she pulled down the soft waves of hair, which her late exertions had slightly disarranged, over her right temple. Then she turned impulsively to Lady Calmady.

"Thank you, dear Aunt Katherine," she said. "I would so like you to like me, you know."

"I should be rather unpardonably difficult to please, if I did not like you, my dear," Lady Calmady answered. But she sighed as she spoke.

The two women moved away, side by side, down the path to the glistening greenhouses. But Camp, who, missing Richard, had followed his mistress out of the house for a leisurely morning potter, turned back sulkily across the gravel homewards, his tail limp, his heavy head carried low. His instincts were conservative, as has been already mentioned. He was suspicious of newcomers. And whoever liked this particular newcomer, Madame de Vallorbes, he was sorry to say--and on more than one occasion he said it with quite inconvenient distinctness--he did not.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH DICKIE TRIES TO RIDE AWAY FROM HIS OWN SHADOW, WITH SUCH SUCCESS AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATED

That same morning Richard was up and out early. Fog had followed on the evening's rain, and at sunrise still shrouded all the landscape.

"Let her ladyship know I breakfast at the stables and shan't be in before luncheon," he had said to Powell while settling himself in the saddle. Then, followed by a groom, he fared forth. The house vanished phantom-like behind him, and the clang of the iron gates as they swung to was muffled by the heavy atmosphere, while he rode on by invisible ways across an invisible land, hemmed in, close-encompassed, passed upon, by the chill, ashen whiteness of the fog.

And for the cold silence and blankness surrounding him Richard was grateful. It was restful--after a grim fashion--and he welcomed rest, having passed a but restless night. For Dickie had been the victim of much travail of spirit. His imagination vexed him, pricking up slumbering lusts of the flesh. His conscience vexed him likewise, suggesting that his attitude had not been pure cousinly; and this shamed him, since he was still singularly unspotted from the world, noble modesties and decencies still paramount in him. He was keenly, some might say mawkishly, sensible of the stain and dishonour of turning, even involuntarily and passingly, covetous glances upon another man's goods. In sensation and apprehension he had lived at racing pace during the last few days. That hour in the Long Gallery last night had been the climax. The gates of paradise had opened before him. And, since opposites of necessity imply their opposites, the gates of hell had opened likewise. It appeared to Dickie that the great poets, and painters, and musicians, the great lovers even, had nothing left to tell him--for he knew. Knew, moreover, that his Eden had come to him with the angel of the fiery sword that "turneth every way" standing at the threshold of it--knew, yet further, as he had never known before, the immensity of the difficulties, disabilities, humiliations, imposed on him by his deformity. Bitterly, nakedly, he called his trouble by that offensive name. Then he straightened himself

in the saddle. Yes, welcome the cold weight against his chest, welcome the silence, the blankness, the dead, ashen pallor of the fog!

But just where the tan ride, leading down across the road to the left diverges from the main road, this source of negative consolation began to fail him. For a draw of fresher air came from westward, causing the blurred, wet branches to quiver and the pall of mist to gather, and then break and melt under its wholesome breath, while the rays of the laggard sun, clearing the edge of the fir forest, eastward, pierced it, hastening its dissolution. Therefore it followed that by the time Richard rode in under the stable archway, he found the great yard full of noise and confused movement. The stable doors stood wide along one side of the quadrangle. Stunted, boyish figures shambled hither and thither, unwillingly deserting the remnants of half-eaten breakfasts, among the iron mugs and platters of the long, deal tables of the refectory. Chifney and Preiston--the head-lad--hurried them, shouting orders, admonishing, inciting to greater rapidity of action. And the boys were sulky. The thick morning had promoted hopes of an hour or two of unwonted idleness. Now those poor, little hopes were summarily blighted. Lazy, pinched with cold by the raw morning air, still a bit hungry, sick even, or downright frightened, they must mount and away--the long line of race-horses streaming, in single file, up the hillside to the exercising ground--with as short delay as possible, or Mr. Chifney and his ash stick would know the reason why.

There were elements of brutality in the scene from which Richard would, oftentimes, have recoiled. To-day he was selfish, absorbed to the point of callousness. If he remarked them at all, it was in bitter welcome, as he had welcomed the chill and staring blankness of the fog. He was indifferent to the fact that Chifney was harsh, the horses testy or wicked, that the boys' noses were red, and that they blew their purple fingers before laying hold of the reins in a vain attempt to promote circulation. Dickie sat still as a statue in the midst of all the turmoil, the handle of his crop resting on his thigh, his eyes hot from sleeplessness and wild thoughts, his face hard as marble.--Unhappy? Wasn't he unhappy too? Suffer? Well, let them suffer--within reasonable limits. Suffering was the fundamental law of existence. They must bow to the workings of it along with the rest.

But one wretched, little chap fairly blubbered. He had been kicked in the stomach some three weeks earlier, and had been in hospital. This was his first morning out. He had grown soft, and was light-headed, his knees all of a shake. By means of voluminous threats Preiston got him up. But he sat his horse all of a huddle, as limp as a half-empty sack of chaff. Richard looked on feeling, not pity, but only irritation, finally amounting to anger. The child's whole aspect and the sniveling sounds he made were so hatefully ugly. It disgusted him.

"Here Chifney, leave that fellow at home," he said. "He's no good."

"He's malingering, Sir Richard. I know his sort. Give in to him now and we shall have the same game, and worse, over again to-morrow."

"Very probably," Richard answered. "Only it is evident he has no more

hand and no more grip than a sick cat to-day. We shall have some mess with him, and I'm not in the humour for a mess, so just leave him. There boy, stop crying. Do you hear?" he added, wheeling round on the small unfortunate. "Mr. Chifney'll give you another day off, and the doctor will see you. Only if he reports you fit and you give the very least trouble to-morrow, you'll be turned out of the stables there and then. We've no use for shirkers. Do you understand?"

In spite of his irritation, the hardness of Richard's expression relaxed as he finished speaking. The poor, little beggar was so abject--too abject indeed for common decency, since he too, after all, was human. Richard's own self-respect made it incumbent upon him to lift the creature out of the pit of so absolutely unseemly a degradation. He looked kindly at him, smiled, and promptly forgot all about him. While to the boy it seemed that the gods had verily descended in the likeness of men, and he would have bartered his little, dirty, blear-eyed rudiment of a soul thenceforward for another such a look from Richard Calmady.

Dickie promptly forgot the boy, yet some virtue must have been in the episode for he began to feel better in himself. As the horses filed away through the misty sunshine--Preiston riding beside the fourth or fifth of the string, while Richard and Chifney brought up the rear, his chestnut suiting its paces to the shorter stride of the trainer's cob--the fever of the night cooled down in him. Half thankfully, half amusedly, he perceived things begin to assume their normal relations. He filled his lungs with the pure air, felt the sun-dazzle pleasant in his eyes. He had run somewhat mad in the last twenty-four hours surely? He was not such a fatuous ass as to have mistaken Helen's frank _camaraderie_, her bright interest in things, her charming little ways of showing cousinly regard, for some deeper, more personal feeling? She had been divinely kind, but that was just her--just the outcome of her delightful nature. She would go away on Friday--Saturday perhaps--he rather hoped Saturday--and be just as divinely kind to other people. And then he shook himself, feeling the languid weight of her hands on his shoulders again. Would she--would--? For an instant he wanted to get at, and incontinently brain, those other people. After which, Richard mentally took himself by the throat and proceeded to choke the folly out of himself. Yes, she would go back to all those other people, back moreover to the Vicomte de Vallorbes--whom, by the way, it occurred to him she so seldom mentioned. Well, we don't continually talk about the people we love best, do we, to comparative strangers? She would go back to her husband--her husband.--Richard repeated the words over to himself sternly, trying to drive them home, to burn them into his consciousness past all possibility of forgetting.

Anyhow, she had been wonderfully sweet and charming to him. She had shown him--quite unconsciously, of course--what life might be for--for somebody else. She had revealed to him--what indeed had she not revealed! He remembered the spirit of expectation that possessed him riding back through the autumn woods the day he first met her. The expectation had been more than justified by the sequel. Only--only--and then Dick became stern with himself again. For, she having, unconsciously, done so much for him, was it not his first duty never to

distress her?--never to let her know how much deeper it had all gone with him than with her?--never to insult her beautiful innocence by a word or look suggesting an affection less frank and cousinly than her own?

Only, since even our strongest purposes have moments of lapse and weakness in execution, it would be safer, perhaps, not to be much alone with her--since she didn't know--how should she? Yes, Richard agreed with himself not to loaf, to allow no idle hours. He would ride, he would see to business. There were a whole heap of estate matters claiming attention. He had neglected them shamefully of late. Unquestionably Helen counted for very much, would continue to do so. He supposed he would carry the ache of certain memories about with him henceforth and forever. She had become part of the very fibre of his life. He never doubted that. And yet, he told himself--assuming a second-hand garment of slightly cynical philosophy which suited singularly ill with the love-light in his eyes, there radiantly apparent for all the world to see--that woman, even the one who first shows you you have a heart--and a body too, worse luck--even she is but a drop in the vast ocean of things. There remains all The Rest. And with praiseworthy diligence Dickie set himself to reckon how immensely much all The Rest amounts to. There is plenty, exclusive of her, to think about. More than enough, indeed, to keep one hard at work all day, and send one to bed honestly tired, to sleeping-point, at night. Politics for instance, science, literature, entertaining little controversial rows of sorts--the simple, almost patriarchal duties of a great land-owner; pleasant hobbies such as the collection of first editions, or a pretty taste in the binding of favourite books--the observation of this mysterious, ever young, ever fertile nature around him now, immutable order underlaying ceaseless change, the ever new wonder and beauty of all that, and:--"I say, Chifney, isn't the brown Lady-Love filly going rather short on the off foreleg? Anything wrong with her shoulder?"--and sport. Yes, thank God, in the name of everything healthy and virile, sport and, above all, horses--yes, horses.

Thus did Richard Calmady reason with and essay to solace himself for the fact that some fruits are forbidden to him who holds honour dear. Reasoned with and solaced himself to such good purpose, as he fondly imagined, that when, an hour and a half later, he established himself in the trainer's dining-room, a mighty breakfast outspread before him, he felt quite another man. Racing cups adorned the chimneypiece and sideboard, portraits of race-horses and jockeys adorned the walls. The sun streamed in between the red rep curtains, causing the pot-plants in the window to give off a pleasant scent, and the canary, in his swinging blue and white painted cage above them, to sing. Mrs. Chifney, her cheeks pink, her manner slightly fluttered,--as were her lilac cap strings,--presided over the silver tea and coffee service, admonished the staid and bulky tom-cat who, jumping on the arm of Dickie's chair, extended a scooping tentative paw towards his plate, and issued gentle though peremptory orders to her husband regarding the material needs of her guest. To Mrs. Chifney such entertainings as the present marked the red-letter days of her calendar. Temporarily she forgave Chifney the doubtful nature of his calling and his occasional outbreaks of profane

swearing alike. She ceased to regret that snug might-have-been, little, grocery business in a country town. She forgot even to hanker after prayer meetings, anniversary teas, and other mild, soul-saving dissipations unauthorised by the Church of England. She ruffled her feathers, so to speak, and cooed to the young man half in feudal, half in unsatisfied maternal affection--for Mrs. Chifney was childless. And it followed that as he teased her a little, going back banteringly on certain accepted subjects of difference between them, praised, and made a hole, in her fresh-baked rolls, her nicely browned, fried potatoes, her clear, crinkled rashers, assuring her it gave one an appetite merely to sit down in a room so shiningly clean and spick and span, she was supremely happy. And Dickie was happy too, and blessed the exercise, the food, and the society of these simple persons, which, after his evil night, seemed to have restored to him his wiser and better self.

"He always was the noblest looking young gentleman I ever saw," Mrs. Chifney remarked subsequently to her husband. "But here at breakfast this morning, when he said, 'If you won't be shocked, Mrs. Chifney, I believe I could manage a second helping of that game pie,' his face was like a very angel's from heaven. Unearthly beautiful, Thomas, and yet a sort of pain at the back of it. It gave me a regular turn. I had to shed a few tears afterwards when I got alone by myself."

"You're one of those that see more than's there, half your time, Maria," the trainer answered, with an unusual effort at sarcasm, for he was not wholly easy about the young man himself.--"There's something up with him, and danged if I know what it is." But these reflections he kept to himself.

Dr. Knott, later that same day, made reflections of a similar nature. For though Dickie adhered valiantly to his good resolutions--going out with the second lot of horses between ten and eleven o'clock, riding on to Banister's farm to inspect the new barn and cowsheds in course of erection, then hurrying down to Sandyfield Street and listening to long and heated arguments regarding a right-of-way reported to exist across the meadows skirting the river just above the bridge, a right strongly denied by the present occupier. Notwithstanding these improving and public-spirited employments, the love-light grew in his eyes all through the long morning, causing his appearance to have something, if not actually angelic, yet singularly engaging, about it. For, unquestionably, next to a fortunate attachment, an unfortunate one, if honest, is among the most inspiring and grace-begetting of possessions granted to mortals. Helen must never know--that was well understood. Yet the more Dickie thought the whole affair over, the more he recognised the fine romance of thus cherishing a silent and secret devotion. He was very young in this line as yet, it may be observed. Meanwhile it was nearly two o'clock. He would need to ride home sharply if he was to be in time for luncheon. And at luncheon he would meet her. And remembering that, his heart--traitorous heart--beat quick, and his lips--traitorous lips--began to repeat her name. Thus do the gods of life and death love to play chuck-farthing with the wise purposes of men, the theory of the eternal laughter having a root of truth in it, as it would seem, after all! And there ahead of him, under the

shifting, dappled shadow of the overarching firs, Dr. Knott's broad, cumbersome back, and high, two-wheeled trap blocked the road, while Timothy, the old groom,--stiff-kneed now and none too active,--slowly pushed open the heavy, white gate of the inner park.

As Richard rode up, the doctor turned in his seat and looked at him from under his rough eyebrows, while his loose lips worked into a half-ironical smile. He loved this lad of great fortune, and great misfortune, more tenderly than he quite cared to own. Then, as Dick checked his horse beside the cart, he growled out:--

"No need to make anxious inquiries regarding your health, young sir. What have you been doing with yourself, eh? You look as fit as a fiddle and as fresh as paint."

"If I look as I feel I must look ravenously hungry," Richard answered, flushing up a little. "I've been out since six."

"Had some breakfast?"

"Oh dear, yes! Enough to teach one to know what a jolly thing a good meal is, and make one wish for another."

"Hum!" Dr. Knott said. "That's a healthy state of affairs, anyhow. Young horses going well?"

"Famously."

"Bless me, everything's beer and skittles with you just at present then!"

Richard looked away down the smooth yellow road whereon the dappled shadows kissed and mingled, mingled and kissed, and his heart cried "Helen, Helen," once again.

"Oh! I don't know about that," he said. "I get my share as well as the rest I suppose--at least--anyway the horses are doing capitally this season."

"I should like to have a look at them."

"Oh, well you've only got to say when, you know. I shall be only too delighted to show them you."

As he walked the trap through the gateway, Dr. Knott watched Richard riding alongside.--"What's up with the boy," he thought. "His face is as keen as a knife, and as soft as--God help us, I hope there's no sweethearting on hand! It's bound to come sooner or later, but the later the better, for it'll be a risky enough set out, come when it may.--Ah, look out there now, you old fool,"--this to Timothy,--"don't go missing the step and laying yourself up with broken ribs for another three months, just when my work's at its heaviest. Be careful, can't you?"

"But why not come in to luncheon now?" Richard said, wisdom whipping up good resolutions once more, and bidding him check the gladness that gained on him at thought of that approaching meeting. Oh yes! he would be discreet, he would erect barriers, he would flee temptation. Knott's presence offered a finely rugged barrier, surely. Therefore, he repeated, "Come in now. My mother will be delighted to see you, and we can have a look round the stables afterwards."

"I'll come fast enough if Lady Calmady will take me as I am. Workaday clothes, and second best lot at that. You're alone, I suppose?"

He watched the young man as he spoke. Noted the lift of his chin, and the slightly studied indifference of his manner.

"No, for once we're not. But that doesn't matter. My Uncle William Ormiston is with us. You remember him?"

"I remember his wife."

"Oh! she's not here," Dickie said. "Only he and his daughter, Madame de Vallorbes. You'll come?"

"Oh! dear yes, I'll come, if you'll be good enough to prepare your ladies for a rough-looking customer. Don't let me keep you. Wonder what the daughter's like?" he added to himself. "The mother was a bit of a baggage."

CHAPTER VII

WHEREIN THE READER IS COURTEOUSLY INVITED TO IMPROVE HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH CERTAIN PERSONS OF QUALITY

But Richard might have spared himself the trouble of erecting barriers against too intimate intercourse with his cousin. Providence, awaking suddenly as it would seem, to the perils of his position, had already seen to all that. For since he went forth, hot-eyed and hot-headed, into the blank chill of the fog, the company at Brockhurst--as Powell announced to him--had suffered large and unlooked-for increase. Ludovic Quayle was the first of the self-invited guests to appear when Richard was settled in the dining-room. He sauntered up to the head of the table with his accustomed air of slightly supercilious inquiry, as of one who expects to meet little save fools and foolishness, yet suffers these gladly, being quite secure of his own wisdom.

"How are you, Dickie?" he said. "Fairly robust I hope, for the Philistines are upon you. Still it might have been worse. I have done what I could. My father, who has never grasped that there is an element of comedy in the numerical strength of his family, wished to bring us over a party of eight. But I stopped that. Four, as I tried to make him comprehend, touched the limits of social decency. He didn't comprehend.

He rarely does. But he yielded, which was more to the point perhaps. Understand though, we didn't propose to add surprise to the other doubtful blessings of our descent on you. I wrote to you yesterday, but it appears you went out at some unearthly hour this morning superior alike to the state of the weather and arrival of your letters."

"Fine thing going out early---excellent thing going out early. Very glad to see you, Calmady, and very kind indeed of you and Lady Calmady to take us in in this friendly way and show us hospitality at such short notice----"

This from Lord Fallowfeild--a remarkably tall, large, and handsome person. He affected a slightly antiquated style of dress, with a sporting turn to it,--coats of dust colour or gray, notably long as to the skirts, well fitted at the waist, the surface of them traversed by heavy seams. His double chin rested within the points of a high, white collar, and was further supported by voluminous, black, satin stock. His face, set in soft, gray hair and gray whisker, brushed well forward, suggested that of a benign and healthy infant--an infant, it may be added, possessed of a small and particularly pretty mouth. Save in actual stature, indeed, his lordship had never quite succeeded in growing up. Very full of the milk of human kindness, he earnestly wished his fellow-creatures--gentle and simple alike--to be as contented and happy as he, almost invariably, himself was. When he had reason to believe them otherwise, it perplexed and worried him greatly. It followed that he was embarrassed, apologetic even, in Richard Calmady's presence. He felt vaguely responsible as for some neglected duty, as though there was something somehow which he ought to set right. And this feeling harassed him, increasing the natural discursiveness and inconsequence of his speech. He was so terribly nervous of forgetting and of hurting the young man's feelings by saying the wrong thing, that all possible wrong things got upon his brain, with the disastrous result that of course he ended by saying them. In face of a person so sadly stationary as poor Dick, moreover, his own perfect ability to move freely about appeared to him as little short of discourteous, not to say coarse. He, therefore, tried to keep very still, with the consequence that he developed an inordinate tendency to fidget. Altogether Lord Fallowfeild did not show to advantage in Richard Calmady's company.

"Ah, yes! fine thing going out early," he repeated. "Always made a practice of it myself at your age, Calmady. Can't stand doctor's stuff, don't believe in it, never did. Though I like Knott, good fellow Knott--always have liked Knott. But never was a believer in drugs. Nothing better than a good sharp walk, now, early, really early before the frost's out of the grass. Excellent for the liver walking----"

Here, perceiving that his son Ludovic looked very hard at him, eyebrows raised to most admonitory height, he added hastily--

"Eh?--yes, of course, or riding. Riding, nothing like that for health--better exercise still----"

"Is it?" Richard put in. He was too busy with his own thoughts to be

greatly affected by Lord Fallowfeild's blunders just then. "I'm glad to know you think so. You see it's a matter in which I'm not very much of a judge."

"No--no--of course not.--Queer fellow Calmady," Lord Fallowfeild added to himself. "Uncommonly sharp way he has of setting you down."

But just then, to his relief, Lady Calmady, Lady Louisa Barking, and pretty, little Lady Constance Quayle entered the room together. Mr. Ormiston and John Knott followed engaged in close conversation, the rugged, rough-hewn aspect of the latter presenting a strong contrast to the thin, tall figure and face, white and refined to the point of emaciation, of the diplomatist. Julius March, accompanied by Camp--still carrying his tail limp and his great head rather sulkily--brought up the rear. And Dickie, while greeting his guests, disposing their places at table, making civil speeches to his immediate neighbour on the left,--Lady Louisa,--smiling a good-morning to his mother down the length of the table, felt a wave of childish disappointment sweep over him. For Helen came not, and with a great desiring he desired her. Poor Dickie, so wise, so philosophic in fancy, so enviably, disastrously young in fact!

"Oh! thanks, Lady Louisa--it's so extremely kind of you to care to come. The fog was rather beastly this morning wasn't it? And I shouldn't be surprised if it came down on us again about sunset. But it's a charming day meanwhile.--There Ludovic please,--next Dr. Knott. We'll leave this chair for Madame de Vallorbes. She's coming, I suppose?"

And Richard glanced towards the door again, and, so doing, became aware that little Lady Constance, sitting between Lord Fallowfeild and Julius March, was staring at him. She had an innocent face, a small, feminine copy of her father's save that her eyes were set noticeably far apart. This gave her a slow, ruminant look, distinctly attractive. She reminded Richard of a gentle, well-conditioned, sweet-breathed calf staring over a bank among ox-eyed daisies and wild roses. As soon as she perceived--but Lady Constance did not perceive anything very rapidly--that he observed her, she gave her whole attention, to the contents of her plate and her colour deepened perceptibly.

"Pretty country about you here, uncommonly pretty," Lord Fallowfeild was saying in response to some remark of Lady Calmady's. "Always did admire it. Always liked a meet on this side of the county when I had the hounds. Very pleasant friendly spirit on this side too. Now Cathcart, for instance--sensible fellow Cathcart, always have liked Cathcart, remarkably sensible fellow. Plain man though--quite astonishingly plain. Daughter very much like him, I remember. Misfortune for a girl that. Always feel very much for a plain woman. She married well though--can't recall who just now, but somebody we all know. Who was it now, Lady Calmady?"

Between that haunting sense of embarrassment, and the kindly wish to carry things off well, and promote geniality, Lord Fallowfeild spoke loud. At this juncture Mr. Quayle folded his hands and raised his eyes

devoutly to heaven.

"Oh, my father! oh, my father!" he murmured. Then he leant a little forward watching Lady Calmady.

"But, as you may remember, Mary Cathcart had a charming figure," she was saying, very sweetly, essaying to soften the coming blow.

"Ah! had she though? Great thing a good figure. I knew she married well."

"Naturally I agree with you there. I suppose one always thinks one's own people the most delightful in the world. She married my brother."

"Did she though!" Lord Fallowfeild exclaimed, with much interest. Then suddenly his tumbler stopped half-way to his mouth, while he gazed horror-stricken across the table at Mr. Ormiston.

"Oh no, no! not that brother," Katherine added quickly. "The younger one, the soldier. You wouldn't remember him. He's been on foreign service almost ever since his marriage. They are at the Cape now."

"Oh! ah! yes--indeed, are they?" he exclaimed. He breathed more easily. Those few thousand miles to the Cape were a great comfort to him. A man could not overhear your strictures on his wife's personal appearance at that distance anyhow.--"Very charming woman, uncommonly tactful woman, Lady Calmady," he said to himself gratefully.

Meanwhile Lady Louisa Barking, at the other end of the table, addressed her discourse to Richard and Julius, on either side of her, in the high, penetrating key affected by certain ladies of distinguished social pretensions. Whether this manner of speech implies a fine conviction of superiority on the part of the speaker, or a conviction that all her utterances are replete with intrinsic interest, it is difficult to determine. Certain it is that Lady Louisa practically addressed the table, the attendant men-servants, all creation in point of fact, as well as her two immediate neighbours. Like her father she was large and handsome. But her expression lacked his amiability, her attitude his pleasing self-distrust. In age she was about six-and-thirty and decidedly mature for that. She possessed a remarkable power of concentrating her mind upon her own affairs. She also laboured under the impression that she was truly religious, listening weekly to the sermons of fashionable preachers on the convenient text that "worldliness is next to godliness" and entertaining prejudices, finely unqualified by accurate knowledge, against the abominable errors of Rome.

"I was getting so terribly fagged with canvassing that my doctor told me I really must go to Whitney and recruit. Of course Mr. Barking is perfectly secure of his seat. I am in no real anxiety, I am thankful to say. He does not speak much in the House. But I always feel speaking is quite a minor matter, don't you?"

"Doubtless," Julius said, the remark appearing to be delivered at him

in particular.

"The great point is that your party should be able to depend absolutely upon your loyalty. Being rather behind the scenes, as I can't help being, you know, I do feel that more and more. And the party depends absolutely upon Mr. Barking. He has so much moral stamina, you know. That is what they all feel. He is ready at any moment to sacrifice his private convictions to party interests. And so few members of any real position are willing to do that. And so, of course, the leaders do depend on him. All the members of the Government consult him in private."

"That is very flattering," Richard remarked.--Still Helen tarried, while again, glancing in the direction of the door, he encountered Lady Constance's mild, ruminant stare.

"Can one pronounce anything flattering when one sees it to be so completely deserved?" Ludovic Quayle inquired in his most urbane manner. "Prompt and perpetual sacrifice of private conviction to party interest, for example--how can such devotion receive recognition beyond its deserts?"

"Do have some more partridge, Lady Louisa," Richard put in hastily.

"In any case such recognition is very satisfactory.--No more, thank you, Sir Richard," the lady replied, not without a touch of acerbity. Ludovic was very clever no doubt; but his comments often struck her as being in equivocal taste. He gave a turn to your words you did not expect and so broke the thread of your conversation in a rather exasperating fashion. "Very satisfactory," she repeated. "And, of course, the constituency is fully informed of the attitude of the Government towards Mr. Barking, so that serious opposition is out of the question."

"Oh! of course," Richard echoed.

"Still I feel it a duty to canvass. One can point out many things to the constituents in their own homes which might not come quite so well, don't you know, from the platform. And of course they enjoy seeing one so much."

"Of course, it makes a great change for them," Richard echoed dutifully.

"Exactly, and so on their account, quite putting aside the chance of securing a stray vote here or there, I feel it a duty not to spare myself, but to go through with it just for their sakes, don't you know."

"My sister is nothing if not altruistic, you'll find, Calmady," Mr. Quayle here put in in his most exquisitely amiable manner.

But now encouraged thereto by Lady Calmady, Lord Fallowfeild had recovered his accustomed serenity and discoursed with renewed

cheerfulness.

"Great loss to this side of the county, my poor friend Denier," he remarked. "Good fellow Denier--always liked Denier. Stood by him from the first--so did your son.--No, no, pardon me--yes, to be sure--excellent claret this--never tasted a better luncheon claret.--But there was a little prejudice, little narrowness of feeling about Denier, when he first bought Grimshott and settled down here. Self-made man, you see, Denier. Entirely self-made. Father was a clergyman, I believe, and I'm told his grandfather kept an umbrella shop in the Strand. But a very able, right-minded man Denier, and wonderfully good-natured fellow, always willing to give you an opinion on a point of law. Great advantage to have a first-rate authority like that to turn to in a legal difficulty. Very useful in county business Denier, and laid hold of country life wonderfully, understood the obligations of a land-owner. Always found a fox in that Grimshott gorse of his, eh, Knott?"

"Fox that sometimes wasn't very certain of his country," the doctor rejoined. "Hailed from the neighbourhood of the umbrella shop perhaps, and wanted to get home to it."

Lord Fallowfeild chuckled.

"Capital," he said, "very good--capital. Still, it's a great relief to know of a sure find like that. Keeps the field in a good temper. Yes, few men whose death I've regretted more than poor Denier's. I miss Denier. Not an old man either. Shouldn't have let him slip through your fingers so early, Knott, eh?"

"Oh! that's a question of forestry," John Knott answered grimly. "If one kept the old wood standing, where would the saplings' chances come in?"

"Oh! ah! yes--never thought of that before,"--and thinking of it now the noble lord became slightly pensive. "Wonder if it's unfair my keeping Shotover so long out of the property?" he said to himself. "Amusing fellow Shotover, very fond of Shotover--but extravagant fellow, monstrously extravagant."

"Lord Denier's death gave our host here a seat on the local bench just at the right moment," the doctor went on. "One man's loss is another man's opportunity. Rather rough, perhaps, on the outgoing man, but then things usually are pretty rough on the outgoing man in my experience."

"I suppose they are," Lord Fallowfeild said, rather ruefully, his face becoming preternaturally solemn.

"Not a doubt of it. The individual may get justice. I hope he does. But mercy is kept for special occasions--few and far between. One must take things on the large scale. Then you find they dovetail very neatly," Knott continued, with a somewhat sardonic mirthfulness. The simplicity and perplexity of this handsome, kindly gentleman, amused him hugely. "But to return to Lord Denier--let alone my skill, that of the whole

medical faculty put together couldn't have saved him."

"Couldn't it, though?" said Lord Fallowfeild.

"That's just the bother with your self-made man. He makes himself--true. But he spends himself physically in the making. All his vitality goes in climbing the ladder, and he's none left over by the time he reaches the top. Lord Denier had worked too hard as a youngster to make old bones. It's a long journey from the shop in the Strand to the woolsack you see, and he took sick at two-and-thirty I believe. Oh yes! early death, or premature decay, is the price most outsiders pay for a great professional success. Isn't that so, Mr. Ormiston?"

But at this juncture the conversation suffered interruption by the throwing open of the door and entrance of Madame de Vallorbes.

"Pray let no one move," she said, rather as issuing an order than preferring a request--for her father, Lord Fallowfeild, all the gentlemen, had risen on her appearance--save Richard.--Richard, his blue eyes ablaze, the corners of his mouth a-tremble, his heart going forth tumultuously to meet her, yet he alone of all present denied the little obvious act of outward courtesy from man to woman.

"Pinned to his chair, like a specimen beetle to a collector's card," John Knott said grimly to himself. "Poor dear lad--and with that face on him too. I hoped he might have been spared taking fire a little longer. However, here's the conflagration. No question about that. Now let's have a look at the lady."

And the lady, it must be conceded, manifested herself under a new and somewhat agitating aspect, as she swept up the room and into the vacant place at Richard's right hand with a rush of silken skirts. She produced a singular effect at once of energy and self-concentration--her lips thin and unsmiling, an ominous vertical furrow between the spring of her arched eyebrows, her eyes narrow, unresponsive, severe with thought under their delicate lids.

"I am sorry to be late, but it was unavoidable. I was kept by some letters forwarded from Newlands," she said, without giving herself the trouble of looking at Richard as she spoke.

"What does it matter? Luncheon's admittedly a movable feast, isn't it?"

Madame de Vallorbes made no response. A noticeable hush had descended upon the whole company, while the men-servants moved to and fro serving the newcomer. Even Lady Louisa Barking ceased to hold high discourse, political or other, and looked disapprovingly across the table. An hour earlier she had resented the younger woman's merry wit, now she resented her sublime indifference. Both then and now she found her perfect finish of appearance unpardonable. Lord Fallowfeild's disjointed conversation also suffered check. He fidgeted, vaguely conscious that the atmosphere had become somewhat electric.--"Monstrously pretty woman--effective woman--very effective--rather dangerous though. Changeable too. Made me laugh a little too much before luncheon. Louisa

didn't like it. Very correct views, my daughter Louisa. Now seems in a very odd temper. Quite the grand air, but reminds me of somebody I've seen on the stage somehow. Suppose all that comes of living so much in France," he said to himself. But for the life of him he could not think of anything to say aloud, though he felt it would be eminently tactful to throw in a casual remark at this juncture. Little Lady Constance was disquieted likewise. For she, girl-like, had fallen dumbly and adoringly in love with this beautiful stranger but a few years her senior. And now the stranger appeared as an embodiment of unknown emotions and energies altogether beyond the scope of her small imagination. Her innocent stare lost its ruminant quality, became alarmed, tearful even, while she instinctively edged her chair closer to her father's. There was a great bond of sympathy between the simple-hearted gentleman and his youngest child. Mr. Quayle looked on with lifted eyebrows and his air of amused forbearance. And Dr. Knott looked on also, but that which he saw pleased him but moderately. The grace of every movement, the distinction of face and figure, the charm of that finely-poised, honey-coloured head showing up against the background of gray-blue tapestried wall, were enough, he owned--having a very pretty taste in women as well as in horses--to drive many a man crazy.--"But if the mother's a baggage, the daughter's a vixen," he said to himself. "And, upon my soul if I had to choose between 'em--which God Almighty forbid--I'd take my chance with the baggage." As climax Lady Calmady's expression was severe. She sat very upright, and made no effort at conversation. Her nerves were a little on edge. There had been awkward moments during this meal, and now her niece's entrance struck her as unfortunately accentuated, while there was that in Richard's aspect which startled the quick fears and jealousies of her motherhood.

And to Richard himself, it must be owned, this meeting so hotly desired, and against the dangers of which he had so wisely guarded, came in fashion altogether different to that which he had pictured. Helen's manner was cold to a point far from flattering to his self-esteem. The subtle intimacies of the scene in the Long Gallery became as though they had never been. Dickie thinking over his restless night, his fierce efforts at self-conquest, those long hours in the saddle designed for the reduction of a perfervid imagination, wrote himself down an ass indeed. And yet--yet--the charm of Helen's presence was great. And surely she wasn't quite herself just now, there was something wrong with her? Anybody could see that. Everybody did see it in fact, he feared, and commented upon it in no charitable spirit. Hostility towards her declared itself on every side. He detected that--or imagined he did so--in Lady Louisa's expression, in Ludovic Quayle's extra-superfine smile, in the doctor's close and rather cynical attitude of observation, and, last but not least, in the reserve of his mother's bearing and manner. And this hostility, real or imagined, begot in Richard a new sensation--one of tenderness, wholly unselfish and protective, while the fighting blood stirred in him. He grew slightly reckless.

"What has happened? We appear to have fallen most unaccountably silent," he said, looking round the table, with an air of gallant challenge pretty to see.

"So we have, though," exclaimed Lord Fallowfeild, half in relief, half in apology. "Very true--was just thinking the same thing myself."

While Mr. Ouayle, leaning forward, inquired with much sweetness:--"To whom shall I talk? Madame de Vallorbes is far more profitably engaged in discussing her luncheon, than she could be in discussing any conceivable topic of conversation with such as I. And Dr. Knott is so evidently diagnosing an interesting case that I have not the effrontery to interrupt him."

Disregarding these comments Richard turned to his neighbour on the left.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Louisa," he said, "but before this singular dumbness overtook us all, you were saying?"--

The lady addressed, electing to accept this as a tribute to the knowledge, and the weight, and distinction, of her discourse, thawed, became condescending and gracious again.

"I believe we were discussing the prospects of the party," she replied. "I was saying that, you know, of course there must be a large Liberal majority."

"Yes, of course."

"You consider that assured?" Julius put in civilly.

"It is not a matter of personal opinion, I am thankful to say--because of course every one must feel it is just everything for the country. There is no doubt at all about the majority among those who really know--Mr. Barking, for instance. Nobody can be in a better position to judge than he is. And then I was speaking the other night to Augustus Tremiloe at Lord Combmartin's--not William, you know, but Augustus Tremiloe, the man in the Treasury, and he----"

"Uncommonly fine chrysanthemums those," Lord Fallowfeild had broken forth cheerfully, finding sufficient, if tardy, inspiration in the table decorations. "Remarkably perfect blossoms and charming colour. Nothing nearly so good at Whitney this autumn. Excellent fellow my head gardener, but rather past his work--no enterprise, can't make him go in for new ideas."

Mr. Ormiston, leaning across Dr. Knott, addressed himself to Ludovic, while casting occasional and rather anxious glances upon his daughter. Thus did voices rise, mingle, and the talk get fairly upon its legs again. Then Richard permitted himself to say quietly--

"You had no bad news, I hope, in those letters, Helen?"

"Why should you suppose I have had bad news?" she demanded, her teeth meeting viciously in the morsel of kissing-crust she held in her rosy-tipped fingers.

It was as pretty as a game to see her eat. Dickie laughed a little, charmed even with her naughtiness, embarrassed too, by the directness of her question.

"Oh! I don't exactly know why--I thought perhaps you seemed----"

"You do know quite exactly why," the young lady asserted, looking full at him. "You saw that I was in a detestable, a diabolic temper."

"Well, perhaps I did think I saw something of the sort," Richard answered audaciously, yet very gently.

Helen continued to look at him, and as she did so her cheek rounded, her mouth grew soft, the vertical line faded out from her forehead.--"You are very assuaging, Cousin Richard," she said, and she too laughed softly.

"Understands the vineries very well though," Lord Fallowfeild was saying; "and doesn't grow bad peaches, not at all bad peaches, but is stupid about flowers. He ought to retire. Never shall have really satisfactory gardens till he does retire. And yet I haven't the heart to tell him to go. Good fellow, you know, good, honest, hard-working fellow, and had a lot of trouble. Wife ailing for years, always ailing, and youngest child got hip disease--nasty thing hip disease, very nasty--quite a cripple, poor little creature, I am afraid a hopeless cripple. Terrible anxiety and burden for parents in that rank of life, you know."

"It can hardly be otherwise in any rank of life," Lady Calmady said slowly, bitterly. An immense weariness was upon her--weariness of the actual and present, weariness of the possible and the future. Her courage ebbed. She longed to go away, to be alone for a while, to shut eyes and ears, to deaden alike perception and memory, to have it all cease. Then it was as though those two beautiful, and now laughing, faces of man and woman in the glory of their youth, seen over the perspective of fair, white damask, glittering glass and silver, rich dishes, graceful profusion of flowers and fruit, at the far end of the avenue of guests, mocked at her. Did they not mock at the essential conditions of their own lives too? Katherine feared, consciously or unconsciously they did that. Her weariness dragged upon her with almost despairing weight.

"Do you get your papers the same day here, Sir Richard?" Lady Louisa asked imperatively.

"Yes, they come with the second post letters, about five o'clock," Julius March answered.

But Lady Louisa Barking intended to be attended to by her host.

"Sir Richard," she paused, "I am asking whether your papers reach you the same day?"

And Dickie replied he knew not what, for he had just registered the discovery that barriers are quite useless against a certain sort of intimacy. Be the crowd never so thick about you, in a sense at least, you are always alone, exquisitely, delicately, alone with the person you love.

CHAPTER VIII

RICHARD PUTS HIS HAND TO A PLOUGH FROM WHICH THERE IS NO TURNING BACK

"Dearest mother, you look most deplorably tired."

Richard sat before the large study table, piled up with letters, papers, county histories, racing calendars, in the Gun-Room, amid a haze of cigar smoke. "I don't wonder," he went on, "we've had a regular field-day, haven't we? And I'm afraid Lord Fallowfeild bored you atrociously at luncheon. He does talk most admired foolishness half his time, poor old boy. All the same Ludovic shouldn't show him up as he does. It's not good form. I'm afraid Ludovic's getting rather spoilt by London. He's growing altogether too finicking and elaborate. It's a pity. Lady Louisa Barking is a rather exterminating person. Her conversation is magnificently deficient in humour. It is to be hoped Barking is not troubled by lively perceptions or he must suffer at times. Lady Constance is a pretty little girl, don't you think so? Not oppressed with brains, I dare say, but a good little sort."

"You liked her?" Katherine said. She stood beside him, that mortal weariness upon her yet.

"Oh yes!--well enough--liked her in passing, as one likes the wild roses in the hedge. But you look regularly played out, mother, and I don't like that in the least."

Richard twisted the revolving-chair half round, and held out his arms in invitation. As his mother leaned over him, he stretched upward and clasped his hands lightly about her neck.--"Poor dear," he said coaxingly, "worn to fiddle-strings with all this wild dissipation! I declare it's quite pathetic."--He let her go, shrugging his shoulders with a sigh and a half laugh. "Well, the dissipation will soon enough be over now, and we shall resume the even tenor of our way, I suppose. You'll be glad of that, mother?"

The caress had been grateful to Katherine, the cool cheek dear to her lips, the clasp of the strong arms reassuring. Yet, in her present state of depression, she was inclined to distrust even that which consoled, and there seemed a lack in the fervour of this embrace. Was it not just a trifle perfunctory, as of one who pays toll, rather than of one who claims a privilege?

"You'll be glad too, my dearest, I trust?" she said, craving further

encouragement.

Richard twisted the chair back into place again, leaned forward to note the hour of the clock set in the centre of the gold and enamel inkstand.

"Oh! I'm not prophetic. I don't pretend to go before the event and register my sensations until both they and I have fairly arrived. It's awfully bad economy to get ahead of yourself and live in the day after to-morrow. To-day's enough--more than enough for you, I'm afraid, when you've had a large contingent of the Whitney people to luncheon. Do go and rest, mother. Uncle William is disposed of. I've started him out for a tramp with Julius, so you need not have him on your mind."

But neither in Richard's words nor in his manner did Lady Calmady find the fulness of assurance she craved.

"Thanks dearest," she said. "That is very thoughtful of you. I will see Helen and find out----"

"Oh! don't trouble about her either," Richard put in. Again he studied the jewel-rimmed dial of the little clock. "I found she wanted to go to Newlands to bid Mrs. Cathcart good-bye. It seems Miss St. Quentin is back there for a day or two. So I promised to drive her over as soon as we were quit of the Fallowfeild party."

"It is late for so long a drive."

Richard looked up quickly and his face wore that expression of challenge once again.

"I know it is--and so I am afraid we ought to start at once. I expect the carriage round immediately." Then repenting:--"You'll take care of yourself won't you, mother, and rest?"

"Oh yes! I will take care of myself," Katherine said. "Indeed, I appear to be the only person I have left to take care of, thanks to your forethought. All good go with you, Dick."

It followed--perhaps unreasonably enough--that Richard, some five minutes later, drove round the angle of the house and drew the mail-phaeton up at the foot of the gray, griffin-guarded flight of steps--whereon Madame de Vallorbes, wrapped in furs, the cavalier hat and its trailing plumes shadowing the upper part of her face and her bright hair, awaited his coming--in a rather defiant humour. His cousin was troubled, worried, and she met with scant sympathy. This aroused all his chivalry. Whatever she wished for, that he could give her, she should very certainly have. Of after consequences to himself he was contemptuous. The course of action which had shown as wisdom a couple of hours ago, showed now as selfishness and pusillanimity. If she wanted him, he was there joyfully to do her bidding, at whatever cost to himself in subsequent unrest of mind seemed but a small thing. If heartache and insidious provocations of the flesh came later, let them come. He was strong enough to bear the one and crush out the other, he

hoped. It would give him something to do--he told himself, a little bitterly--and he had been idle of late!

And so it came about that Richard Calmady held out his hand, to help his cousin into her place at his side, with more of meaning and welcome in the gesture than he was quite aware. He forgot the humiliation of the broad strap about his waist, of the high, ingeniously contrived driving-iron against which his feet rested, steadying him upon the sharply sloping seat. These were details, objectionable ones it was true, but, to-day, of very secondary importance. In the main he was master of the situation. For once it was his to render, rather than receive, assistance. Helen was under his care, in a measure dependent on him, and this gratified his young, masculine pride, doomed too often to suffer sharp mortification. A fierce pleasure possessed him. It was fine to bear her thus away, behind the fast trotting horses, through the pensive, autumn brightness. Boyish self-consciousness and self-distrust died down in Richard, and the man's self-reliance, instinct of possession and of authority, grew in him. His tone was that of command, for all its solicitude, as he said:--

"Look here, are you sure you've got enough on? Don't go and catch cold, under the impression that there's any meaning in this sunshine. It is sure to be chilly driving home, and it's easy to take more wraps."

Helen shook her head, unsmiling, serious.

"I could face polar snows."

Richard let the horses spring forward, while little pebbles rattled against the body of the phaeton, and the groom, running a few steps, swung himself up on to the back seat, immediately becoming immovable as a wooden image, with rigidly folded arms.

"Oh! the cold won't quite amount to that," Richard said. "But I observe women rarely reckon with the probabilities of the return journey."

"The return journey is invariably too hot, or too cold, too soon, or too late--for a woman. So it is better not to remember its existence until you are compelled to do so. For myself, I confess to the strongest prejudice against the return journey."

Madame de Vallorbes' speech was calm and measured, yet there was a conviction in it suggestive of considerable emotion. She sat well back in the carriage, her head turned slightly to the left, so that Richard, looking down at her, saw little but the pure firm line of her jaw, the contour of her cheek, and her ear--small, lovely, the soft hair curling away from above and behind it in the most enticing fashion. Physical perfection, of necessity, provoked in him a peculiar envy and delight. And nature appeared to have taken ingenious pleasure, not only in conferring an unusual degree of beauty upon his companion, but in finishing each detail of her person with unstinted grace. For a while the young man lost himself in contemplation of that charming ear and partially averted face. Then resolutely he bestowed his attention upon the horses again, finding such contemplation slightly enervating to his

moral sense.

"Yes, return journeys are generally rather a nuisance, I suppose," he said, "though my experience of that particular form of nuisance is limited. I have not been outward-bound often enough to know much of the regret of being homeward-bound. And yet, I own, I should not much mind driving on and on everlastingly on a dreamy afternoon like this, and--and as I find myself just now--driving on and seeking some El Dorado--of the spirit, I mean, not of the pocket--seeking the Fortunate Isles that lie beyond the sunset. For it would be not a little fascinating to give one's accustomed self, and all that goes to make up one's accepted identity, the slip--to drive clean out of one's old circumstances and find new heavens, a new earth, and a new personality elsewhere. What do you say, Helen, shall we try it?"

But Helen sat immobile, her face averted, listening intently, revolving many things in her mind, meditating how and when most advantageously to speak.

"It would be such an amiable and graceful experiment to try on my own people, too, wouldn't it?" the young man continued, with a sudden change of tone. "And I am so eminently fitted to lose myself in a crowd without fear of recognition, just the person for a case of mistaken identity!"

"Do not say such things, Richard, please. They distress me," Madame de Vallorbes put in quickly. "And, believe me, I have no quarrel with the return journey in this case. At Brockhurst I could fancy myself to have found the Fortunate Isles of which you spoke just now. I have been very happy there--too happy, perhaps, and therefore, to-day, the whip has come down across my back, just to remind me."

"Ah! now you say the painful things," Dick interrupted. "Pray don't--I--I don't like them."

Madame de Vallorbes turned her head and looked at him with the strangest expression.

"My metaphor was not out of place. Do you imagine horses are the only animals a man drives, *_mon beau cousin_*? Some men drive the woman who belongs to them, and that not with the lightest bit, I promise you. Nor do they forget to tie blood-knots in the whip-lash when it suits them to do so."

"What do you mean?" he asked abruptly.

"Merely that the letters, which so stupidly endangered my self-control at luncheon, contained examples of that kind of driving."

"How--how damnable," the young man said between his teeth.

The red and purple trunks of the great fir trees reeled away to right and left as the carriage swept forward down the long avenue. To Richard's seeing they reeled away in disgust, even as did his thought

from the images which his companion's words suggested. While, to her seeing, they reeled, smitten by the eternal laughter, the echoes of which it stimulated her to hear.--"The drama develops," she said to herself, half triumphant, half abashed. "And yet I am telling the truth, it is all so--I hardly even doctor it."--For she had been angered, genuinely and miserably angered, and had found that odious to the point of letting feeling override diplomacy. There was subtle pleasure in now turning her very lapse of self-control to her own advantage. And then, this young man's heart was the finest, purest-toned instrument upon which she had ever had the chance to play as yet. She was ravished by the quality and range of the music it gave forth. Madame de Vallorbes pressed her hands together within the warm comfort of her sable muff, averted her face again, lest it should betray the eager excitement that gained on her, and continued:--

"Yes, whip and rein and bit are hardly pretty in that connection, are they? If you would willingly give your identity the slip at times, dear cousin, I have considerably deeper cause to wish to part company with mine! You, in any case, are morally and materially free. A whole class of particularly irritating and base cares can never approach you. And it was in connection with just such cares that I spoke of the hatefulness of return journeys."

Helen paused, as one making an effort to maintain her equanimity.

"My letters recall me to Paris," she said, "where detestable scenes and most ignoble anxieties await me."

"How soon must you go?"

"That is what I asked myself," she said, in the same quiet, even voice. "I have not yet arrived at a decision, and so I asked you to bring me out Dickie, this afternoon."--She looked up at him, smiling, lovely and with a certain wistful dignity, wholly coercive. "Can you understand that the orderly serenity of your splendid house became a little oppressive? It offered too glaring a contrast to my own state of mind and outlook. I fancied my brain would be clearer, my conclusions more just, here out of doors, face to face with this half-savage nature."

"Ah, I know all that," Richard said. Had not the blankness of the fog brought him help this very morning?--"I know it, but I wish you did not know it too."

"I know many things better not known," Helen replied. Her conscience pricked her. She thanked her stars confession had ceased with enlargement from the convent-school, and was a thing of the past. "You see, I want to decide just how long I dare stay--if you will keep me?"

"We will keep you," Richard said.

"You are very charming to me, Dick," she exclaimed impulsively, sincerely, again slightly abashed. "How long can I stay, I wonder, without making matters worse in the end, both for my father and for myself? I am young, after all, and I suppose I am tough. The cuticle of

the soul--if souls can have a cuticle--like that of the body, thickens under repeated blows. But my father is no longer young. He is terribly sensitive where I am concerned. And he is inevitably drawn into the whirlpool of my wretched affair sooner or later. On his account I should be glad to defer the return journey as long----"

"But--but--I don't understand," Richard broke out, pity and deep concern for her, a blind fury against a person, or persons, unknown, getting the better of him. "Who on earth has the power to plague you and make you miserable, or your father either?"

The young man's face was white, his eyes full of pain, full of a great love, burning down on her. As once, long ago, Helen de Vallorbes could have danced and clapped her hands in naughty glee. For her hunting had prospered above her fondest hopes. She had much ado to stifle the laughter which bubbled up in her pretty throat. She was in the humour to pelt peacocks royally, had such pastime been possible. As it was, she closed her eyes for a little minute and waited, biting the inside of her lip. At last, she said slowly, almost solemnly:--

"Don't you know that for certain mistakes, and those usually the most generous, there is no redress?"

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Mean?--the veriest commonplace in my own case," she answered. "Merely an unhappy marriage. There are thousands such."

They had left the shadow of the fir woods now. The carriage crossed the white-railed culvert--bridging the little stream that takes its rise amid the pink and emerald mosses of the peat-bog, and meanders down the valley--and entered the oak plantation just inside the park gate. Russet leaves in rustling, hurrying companies, fled up and away from the rapidly turning wheels and quick horse hoofs. The sunshine was wan and chill as the smile on a dead face. Lines of pale, lilac cloud--shaped like those flights of cranes which decorate the oriental cabinets of the Long Gallery--crossed the western sky above the bare balsam poplars, the cluster of ancient half-timbered cottages at the entrance to Sandyfield church lane, and the rise of the gray-brown fallow beyond, where sheep moved, bleating plaintively, within a wattled fold.

The scene, altogether familiar though it was, impressed itself on Richard's mind just now, as one of paralysing melancholy. God help us, what a stricken, famished world it is! Will you not always find sorrow and misfortune seated at the root of things if, disregarding overlaying prettiness of summer days, of green leaf and gay blossom, you dare draw near, dig deep, look close? And can nothing, no one, escape the blighting touch of that canker stationed at the very foundations of being? Certainly it would seem not--Richard reasoned--listening to the words of the radiant woman beside him, ordained, in right of her talent and puissant grace, to be a queen and idol of men. For sadder than the thin sunshine, bare trees and complaint of the hungry flock, was that assured declaration that loveless and unlovely marriages--of which her

own was one--exist by the thousand, are, indeed, the veriest commonplace!

These reflections held Richard, since he had been thinker and poet--in his degree--since childhood; lover only during the brief space of these last ten surprising days. Thus the general application claimed his attention first. But hard on the heels of this followed the personal application. For, as is the way of all true lovers, the universality of the law under which it takes its rise mitigates, by most uncommonly little, either the joy or sorrow of the particular case. Poignant regret that she suffered, strong admiration that she bore suffering so adherent with such lightness of demeanour--then, more dangerous than these, a sense of added unlooked-for nearness to her, and a resultant calling not merely of the spirit of youth in him to that same spirit resident in her, but the deeper, more compelling, more sonorous call from the knowledge of tragedy in him to that same terrible knowledge now first made evident in her.--And here Richard's heart--in spite of pity, in spite of tenderness which would have borne a hundred miseries to save her five minutes' discomfort--sang *Te Deum*, and that lustily enough! For by this revelation of the infelicity of her state, his whole relation to, and duty towards her changed and took on a greater freedom. To pour forth worship and offers of service at the feet of a happy woman is at once an impertinence to her and a shame to yourself. But to pour forth such worship, such offers of service, at the feet of an unhappy woman--age-old sophistry, so often ruling the speech and actions of men to their fatal undoing!--this is praiseworthy and legitimate, a matter not of privilege merely, but of obligation to whoso would claim to be truly chivalrous.

The perception of his larger liberty, and the consequences following thereon, kept Richard silent till Sandyfield rectory, the squat-towered, Georgian church and the black-headed, yew trees in the close-packed churchyard adjoining, the neighbouring farm and its goodly show of golden-gray wheat-ricks were left behind, and the carriage entered on the flat, furze-dotted expanse of Sandyfield common. Flocks of geese, arising from damp repose upon the ragged autumn turf, hissed forth futile declarations of war. A gipsy caravan painted in staring colours, and hung all over with heath-brooms and basket-chairs, caused the horses to swerve. Parties of home-going school-children backed on to the loose gravel at the roadside, bobbing curtsies or pulling forelocks, staring at the young man and his companion, curious and half afraid. For in the youthful, bucolic mind a mystery surrounded Richard Calmady and his goings and comings, causing him to rank with crowned heads, ghosts, the Book of Daniel, funerals, the Northern Lights, and kindred matters of dread fascination. So wondering eyes pursued him down the road.

And wondering eyes, as the minutes passed, glanced up at him from beneath the sweeping plumes and becoming shadow of the cavalier's hat. For his prolonged silence rendered Madame de Vallorbes anxious. Had she spoken unadvisedly with her tongue? Had her words sounded crude and of questionable delicacy? Given his antecedents and upbringing, Richard was bound to hold the marriage tie in rather superstitious reverence, and was likely to entertain slightly superannuated views regarding the

obligation of reticence in the discussion of family matters. She feared she had reckoned insufficiently with all this in her eagerness, forgetting subtle diplomacies. Her approach had lacked tact and finesse. In dealing with an adversary of coarser fibre her attack would have succeeded to admiration. But this man was refined and sensitive to a fault, easily disgusted, narrowly critical in questions of taste.

Therefore she glanced up at him again, trying to divine his thought, her own mind in a tumult of opposing purposes and desires. And just as the contemplation of her beauty had so deeply stirred him earlier this same afternoon, so did the contemplation of his beauty now stir her. It satisfied her artistic sense. Save that the nose was straighter and shorter, the young man reminded her notably of a certain antique, terracotta head of the young Alexander which she had once seen in a museum at Munich, and which had left an ineffaceable impression upon her memory. But, the face of the young Alexander beside her was of nobler moral quality than that other--undebauched by feasts and licentious pleasures as yet, masculine yet temperate, the sanctuary of generous ambitions--merciless it might be, she fancied, but never base, never weak. Thus was her artistic sense satisfied, morally as well as physically. Her social sense was satisfied also. For the young man's high-breeding could not be called in question. He held himself remarkably well. She approved the cut of his clothes moreover, his sure and easy handling of the spirited horses.

And then her eyes, following down the lines of the fur rug, received renewed assurance of the fact of his deformity--hidden as far as might be, with decent pride, yet there, permanent and unalterable. This worked upon her strongly. For, to her peculiar temperament, the indissoluble union in one body of elements so noble and so monstrous, of youthful vigour and abject helplessness, the grotesque in short, supplied the last word of sensuous and dramatic attraction. As last evening, in the Long Gallery, so now, she hugged herself, at once frightened and fascinated, wrought upon by excitement as in the presence of something akin to the supernatural, and altogether beyond the confines of ordinary experience.

And to think that she had come so near holding this inimitable creature in her hand, and by overhaste, or clumsiness of statement should lose it! Madame de Vallorbes was wild with irritation, racked her brain for means to recover her--as she feared--forfeited position. It would be maddening did her mighty hunting prove but a barren pastime in the end. And thereupon the little scar on her temple, deftly concealed under the soft, bright hair, began to smart and throb. Ah! well, the hunting should not prove quite barren anyhow, of that she was determined, for, failing her late gay purpose, that small matter of long-deferred revenge still remained in reserve. If she could not gratify one passion, she would gratify quite another. For in this fair lady's mind it was--perhaps unfortunately--but one step from the Eden bowers of love to the waste places of vindictive hate.--"Yet I would rather be good to him, far rather," she said to herself, with a movement of quite pathetic sincerity.

But here, just at the entrance to the village street, an altogether unconscious _deus ex machina_--destined at once to relieve Helen of further anxiety, and commit poor Dickie to a course of action affecting the whole of his subsequent career--presented itself in the shape of a white-tented miller's waggon, which, with somnolent jingle of harness bells and most admired deliberation, moved down the centre of the road. A yellow-washed garden-wall on one side, the brook on the other, there was not room for the phaeton to pass.

"Whistle," Richard commanded over his shoulder. And the wooden image thereby galvanised into immediate activity whistled shrilly, but without result as far as the waggon was concerned.

"The fellow's asleep. Go and tell him to pull out of the way."

Then, while the groom ran neatly forward in twinkling, white breeches and flesh-coloured tops, Richard, bending towards her, as far as that controlling strap about his waist permitted, shifted the reins into his right hand and laid his left upon Madame de Vallorbes' sable muff.

"Look here, Helen," he said, rather hoarsely, "I am indescribably shocked at what you have just told me. I supposed it was all so different with you. I'd no suspicion of this. And--and--if I may say so, you've taught me a lesson which has gone home--steady there--steady, good lass"--for the horses danced and snorted--"I don't think I shall ever grumble much in future about troubles of my own, having seen how splendidly you bear yours. Only I can't agree with you no remedy is possible for generous mistakes. The world isn't quite so badly made as all that. There is a remedy for every mistake except--a few physical ones, which we euphuistically describe as visitations of God.--Steady, steady there--wait a bit.--And I--I tell you I can't sit down under this unhappiness of yours and just put up with it. Don't think me a meddling fool, please. Something's got to be done. I know I probably appear to you the last person in the world to be of use. And yet I'm not sure about that. I have time--too much of it--and I'm not quite an ass. And you--you must know, I think, there's nothing in heaven or earth I would not do for you that I could----"

The miller hauled his slow-moving team aside, with beery-thick objurgations and apologies. The groom swung himself up at the back of the carriage again. The impatient horses, getting their heads, swung away down Sandyfield Street--scattering a litter of merry, little, black pigs and remonstrant fowls to right and left--past modest village shop, and yellow-washed tavern, and red, lichen-stained cottage, beneath the row of tall Lombardy poplars that raised their brown-gray spires to the blue-gray of the autumn sky. Richard's left hand held the reins again.

"Half confidences are no good," he said. "So, as you've trusted me thus far, Helen, don't you think you will trust somewhat further? Be explicit. Tell me the rest?"

And hearing him, seeing him just then, Madame de Vallorbes' heart melted within her, and, to her own prodigious surprise, she had much

do not to weep.

CHAPTER IX

WHICH TOUCHES INCIDENTALLY ON MATTERS OF FINANCE

As Richard had predicted the fog reappeared towards sun sunset. At first, as a frail mist, through which the landscape looked colourless and blurred. Later it rose, growing in density, until all objects beyond a radius of some twenty paces were engulfed in its nothingness and lost. Later still--while Helen de Vallorbes paid her visit at Newlands--it grew denser yet, heavy, torpid, close yet cold, penetrated by earthy odours as the atmosphere of a vault, oppressive to the senses, baffling to sight and hearing alike. From out it, half-leafless branches, like gaunt arms in tattered draperies, seemed to claw and beckon at the passing carriage and its occupants. The silver mountings of the harness showed in points and splashes of hard, shining white as against the shifting, universal dead-whiteness of it, while the breath from the horses' nostrils rose into it as defiant jets of steam, that struggled momentarily with the opaque, all-enveloping vapour, only to be absorbed and obliterated as light by darkness, or life by death.

The aspect presented by nature was sinister, had Richard Calmady been sufficiently at leisure to observe it in detail. But, as he slowly walked the horses up and down the quarter of a mile of woodland drive, leading from the thatched lodge on the right of the Westchurch road to the house, he was not at leisure. He had received enlightenment on many subjects. He had acquired startling impressions, and he needed to place these, to bring them into line with the general habit of his thought. The majority of educated persons--so-called--think in words, words often arbitrary and inaccurate enough, prolific mothers of mental confusion. The minority, and those of by no means contemptible intellectual calibre,--since the symbol must count for more than the mere label,--think in images and pictures. Dickie belonged to the minority. And it must be conceded that his mind now projected against that shifting, impalpable background of fog, a series of pictures which in their cynical pathos, their suggestions at once voluptuous and degraded, were hardly unworthy of the great master, William Hogarth, himself.

For Helen, in the reaction and relief caused by finding her relation to Richard unimpaired, caused too by that joyous devilry resident in her and constantly demanding an object on which to wreak its derision, had by no means spared her lord and master, Angelo Luigi Francesco, Vicomte de Vallorbes. And this only son of a thrifty, hard-bitten, Savoyard banker-noble and a Neopolitan princess of easy morals and ancient lineage, this Parisian *viveur*, his intrigues, his jealousies, his practical ungodliness and underlying superstition, his outbursts of temper, his shrewd economy in respect of others, and extensive personal extravagance, offered fit theme, with aid of little romancing, for such

a discourse as it just now suited his very brilliant, young wife to pronounce.

The said discourse opened in a low key, broken by pauses, by tactful self-accusations, by questionings as to whether it were not more merciful, more loyal, to leave this or that untold. But as she proceeded, not only did Helen suffer the seductions of the fine art of lying, but she really began to have some ado to keep her exuberant sense of fun within due limits. For it proved so excessively exhilarating to deal thus with Angelo Luigi Francesco! She had old scores to settle. And had she not this very day received an odiously disquieting letter from him, in which he not only made renewed complaint of her poor, little miseries of debts and flirtations, but once more threatened retaliation by a cutting-off of supplies? In common justice did he not deserve villification? Therefore, partly out of revenge, partly in self-justification, she proceeded with increasing enthusiasm to show that to know M. de Vallorbes was a lamentably liberal education in all civilised iniquities. With a hand, sure as it was light, she dissected out the unhappy gentleman, and offered up his mangled and bleeding reputation as tribute to her own so-perpetually outraged moral sense and feminine delicacy, not to mention her so-repeatedly and vilely wounded heart. And there really was truth--as at each fresh flight of her imagination she did not fail to remind herself--in all that which she said. Truth?--yes, just that misleading sufficiency of it in which a lie thrives. For, as every artist "in this kind" is aware, precisely as you would have the overgrowth of your improvisation richly phenomenal and preposterous, must you be careful to set the root of it in the honest soil of fact. To omit this precaution is to court eventual detection and consequent confusion of face.

As it was, Helen entered the house at Newlands, a house singularly unused to psychological aberrations, in buoyant spirits, mischief sitting in her discreetly downcast eyes, laughter perplexing her lips. She had placed her cargo of provocation, of resentment, to such excellent advantage! She was, moreover, slightly intoxicated by her own eloquence. She was at peace with herself and all mankind, with de Vallorbes even since his sins had afforded her so rare an opportunity. And this occasioned her to congratulate herself on her own conspicuous magnanimity. It is so exceedingly pleasing not only to know yourself clever, but to believe yourself good! She would be charming to these dear kind, rather dull people. Not that Honoria was dull, but she had inconveniently austere notions of honour and loyalty at moments. And then the solitary drive home with Richard Calmady lay ahead, full of possible drama, full of, well, heaven knew what! Oh! how entrancing a pastime is life!

But to Richard, walking the snorting and impatient horses slowly up and down the woodland drive in the blar and sightless fog, life appeared quite other than an entrancing pastime. The pictures projected by his thought, and forming the medium of it, caused him black indignation and revolt, desolated him, too, with a paralysing disgust of his own disabilities. For poor Dick had declined somewhat in the last few hours, it must be owned, from the celestial altitudes he had reached

before luncheon. Some part of his cousin's discourse had been dangerously intimate in character, suggesting situations quite other than platonic. To him there appeared a noble innocence in her treatment of matters not usually spoken of. He had listened with a certain reverent amazement. Only out of purity of mind could such speech come. And yet an undeniable effect remained, and it was not altogether elevating. Richard was no longer the young Sir Galahad of the noontide of this eventful day. He was just simply a man--in a sensible degree the animal man--loving a woman, hating that other man to whom she was legally bound. Hating that other man, not only because he was unworthy and failed to make her happy, but because he stood in his--Richard's--way. Hating the man all the more fiercely because, whatever the uncomeliness of his moral constitution, he was physically very far from uncomely. And so, along with nobler incitements to hatred, went the fiend envy, which just now plucked at poor Dickie's vitals as the vulture at those of the chained Titan of old. Whereupon he fell into a meditation somewhat morbid. For, contemplating in pictured thought that other man's bodily perfection, contemplating his property and victim,--the fair modern Helen, who by her courage and her trials exercised so potent a spell over his imagination,--Richard loathed his own maimed body, maimed chances and opportunities, as he had never loathed them before. How often since his childhood had some casual circumstance or trivial accident brought the fact of his misfortune home to him, causing him--as he at the moment supposed--to reckon, once and for all, with the sum total of it! But as years passed and experience widened, below each depth of this adhering misery another deep disclosed itself. Would he never reach bottom? Would this inalienable disgrace continue to show itself more restricting and impeding to his action, more repulsive and contemptible to his fellow-men, through all the succeeding stages and vicissitudes of his career, right to the very close?

To her hosts Madame de Vallorbes appeared in her gayest and most engaging humour. It was only a flying visit, she mustn't stay, Richard was waiting for her. Only she felt she must just have two words with Honoria. And say good-bye? Yes, ten thousand sorrows, it was good-bye. She was recalled to Paris, home, and duty. She made an expressive little grimace at Miss St. Quentin.

"Your husband will be"--began Mrs. Cathcart, in her large, gently authoritative manner.

"Enchanted to see me, of course, dear Cousin Selina, or he would not have required my return thus urgently. We may take that for said. Meanwhile what strange sprigs of nobility flourish in the local soil here."

And she proceeded to give an account of the Fallowfeild party at luncheon more witty, perhaps, than veracious. Helen could be extremely entertaining on occasion. She gave reins to her tongue, and it galloped away with her in most surprising fashion.

"My dear, my dear," interrupted her hostess, "you are a little unkind surely! My dear, you are a little flippant!"

But Madame de Vallorbes enveloped her in the most assuaging embrace.

"Let me laugh while I can, dearest Cousin Selina," she pleaded. "I have had a delightful little holiday. Every one has been charming to me. You, of course--but then you always are that. Your presence breathes consolation. But Aunt Katherine has been charming too, and that, quite between ourselves, was a little more than I anticipated. Now the holiday draws to a close and pay-day looms large ahead. You know nothing about such pay-days, thank heaven, dear Cousin Selina. They are far from joyous inventions; and so"--the young lady spread abroad her hands, palms upward, and shrugged her shoulders under their weight of costly furs--"and so I laugh, don't you understand, I laugh!"

Miss St. Quentin's delicate, square-cut face wore an air of solicitude as she followed her friend out of the room. There was a trace of indolence in her slow, reflective speech, as in her long, swinging stride--the indolence bred of unconscious strength rather than of weakness, the leisureliness which goes with staying power both in the moral and the physical domain.

"See here, Nellie," she said, "forgive brutal frankness, but which is the real thing to-day--they're each delightful in their own way--the tears or the laughter?"

"Both! oh, well-beloved seeker after truth," Madame de Vallorbes answered. "There lies the value of the situation."

"Fresh worries?"

"No, no, the old, the accustomed, the well-accredited, the normal, the stock ones--a husband and a financial crisis."

As she spoke Madame de Vallorbes fastened the buttons of her long driving-coat. Miss St. Quentin knelt down and busied herself with the lowest of these. Her tall, slender figure was doubled together. She kept her head bent.

"I happen to have a pretty tidy balance just now," she remarked parenthetically, and as though with a certain diffidence. "So you know, if you are a bit hard up--why--it's all perfectly simple, Nellie, don't you know."

For a perceptible space of time Madame de Vallorbes did not answer. A grating of wheels on the gravel arrested her attention. She looked down the long vista of ruddily lighted hall, with its glowing fire and cheerful lamps to the open door, where, against the blar whiteness of the fog, the mail-phaeton and its occupant showed vague, in outline and in proportions almost gigantic against the thick, shifting atmosphere. Miss St. Quentin raised her head, surprised at her companion's silence. Helen de Vallorbes bent down, took the upturned face in both hands and kissed the soft cheeks with effusion.

"You are adorable," she said. "But you are too generous. You shall lend

me nothing more. I believe I see my way. I can scrape through this crisis."

Miss St. Quentin rose to her feet.

"All right," she said, smiling upon her friend from her superior height with a delightful air of affection and apology. "I only wanted you just to know, in case--don't you see. And--and--for the rest, how goes it Helen? Are you turning all their poor heads at Brockhurst? You're rather an upsetting being to let loose in an ordinary, respectable, English country-house. A sort of *_Mousquetaire au couvent_* the other way about, don't you know. Are you making things fly generally?"

"I am making nothing fly," the other lady rejoined gaily. "I am as inoffensive as a stained-glass saint in a chapel window. I am absolutely angelic."

"That's worst of all," Honoria exclaimed, still smiling. "When you're angelic you are most particularly deadly. For the preservation of local innocents, somebody ought to go and hoist danger signals."

Miss St. Quentin, after just a moment's hesitation, followed her friend through the warm, bright hall to the door. Then Helen de Vallorbes turned to her.

"*_Au revoir_*, dearest Honoria," she said, "and the sooner the better. Leave your shopgirls and distressed needlewomen, and all your other good works for a still better one--namely for me. Come and reclaim, and comfort, and support me for a while in Paris."

Again she kissed the soft cheek.

"I am as good as gold. I am just now actually mawkish with virtue," she murmured, between the kisses.

Richard witnessed this exceedingly pretty leave-taking not without a movement of impatience. The fog was thickening once more. It grew late. He wished his cousin would get through with these amenities. Then, moreover, he did not covet intercourse with Miss St. Quentin. He pulled the fur rug aside with his left hand, holding reins and whip in his right.

"I say, are you nearly ready?" he asked. "I don't want to bother you; but really it's about time we were moving."

"I come, I come," Madame de Vallorbes cried, in answer. She put one neatly-shod foot on the axle, and stepped up--Richard holding out his hand to steady her. A sense, at once pleasurable and defiant, of something akin to ownership, came over him as he did so. Just then his attention was claimed by a voice addressing him from the further side of the carriage. Honoria St. Quentin stood on the gravel close beside him, bare-headed, in the clinging damp and chill of the fog.

"Give my love to Lady Calmady," she said. "I hope I shall see her again

some day. But, even if I never have the luck to do that, in a way it'll make no real difference. I've written her name in my private calendar, and shall always remember it."--She paused a moment. "We got rather near each other somehow, I think. We didn't dawdle or beat about the bush, but went straight along, passed the initial stages of acquaintance in a few hours, and reached that point of friendship where forgetting becomes impossible.

"My mother never forgets," Richard asserted, and there was, perhaps, a slight edge to his tone. Looking down into the girl's pale, finely-moulded face, meeting the glance of those steady, strangely clear and observant eyes, he received an impression of something uncompromisingly sincere and in a measure protective. This, for cause unknown, he resented. Notwithstanding her high breeding. Miss St. Quentin's attitude appeared to him a trifle intrusive just then.

"I am very sure of that--that your mother never forgets, I mean. One knows, at once, one can trust her down to the ground and on to the end of the ages."--Again she paused, as though rallying herself against a disinclination for further speech. "All captivating women aren't made on that pattern, unfortunately, you know, Sir Richard. A good many of them it's wisest not to trust anything like down to the ground, or longer than--well--the day before yesterday."

And without waiting for any reply to this cryptic utterance, she stepped swiftly round behind the carriage again, waved her hand from the door-step and then swung away, with lazy, long-limbed grace, past the waiting men-servants and through to the ruddy brightness of the hall.

Madame de Vallorbes settled herself back rather languidly in her place. She was pricked by a sharp point of curiosity, regarding the tenor of Miss St. Quentin's mysterious colloquy with Richard Calmady. She had been able to catch but a word here and there, and these had been provokingly suggestive. Had the well-beloved Honoria, in a moment of overscrupulous conscientiousness permitted herself to hoist danger signals? She wanted to know, for it was her business to haul such down again with all possible despatch. She intended the barometer to register set fair whatever the weather actually impending. Yet to institute direct inquiries might be to invite suspicion. Helen, therefore, declined upon diplomacy, upon the inverted sweetnesses calculated nicely to mask an intention quite other than sweet. She really held her friend in very warm affection. But Madame de Vallorbes never confused secondary and primary issues. When you have a really big deal on hand--and of the bigness of her present deal the last quarter of an hour had brought her notably increased assurance--even the dearest friend must stand clear and get very decidedly out of the way. So, while the muffled thud of the horses' hoofs echoed up from the hard gravel of the carriage drive through the thick atmosphere, and the bare limbs of the trees clawed, as with lean arms clothed in tattered draperies, at the passing carriage and its occupants, she contented herself by observing:--

"I am grateful to you for driving me over, Richard. Honoria is very

perfect in her own way. It always does me good to see her. She's quite unlike anybody else, isn't she?"

But Richard's eyes were fixed upon the blank wall of fog just ahead, which, though always stable, always receded before the advancing carriage. The effect of it was unpleasant somehow, holding, as it did to his mind, suggestions of other things still more baffling and impending, from which--though you might keep them at arm's length--there was no permanent or actual escape. The question of Miss St. Quentin's characteristics did not consequently greatly interest him. He had arrived at conclusions. There was a matter of vital importance on which he desired to speak to his cousin. But how to do that? Richard was young and excellently modest. His whole purpose was rather fiercely focused on speech. But he was diffident, fearing to approach the subject which he had so much at heart clumsily and in a tactless, tasteless manner.

"Miss St. Quentin? Oh yes!" he replied, rather absently. "I really know next to nothing about her. And she seems merely to regard me as a vehicle of communication between herself and my mother. She sent her messages just now--I hope to goodness I shan't forget to deliver them! She and my mother appear to have fallen pretty considerably in love with one another."

"Probably," Madame de Vallorbes said softly. An agreeable glow of relief passed over her. She looked up at Richard with a delightful effect of pensiveness from beneath the sweeping brim of her cavalier hat.--"I can well believe Aunt Katherine would be attracted by her," she continued. "Honorias is quite a woman's woman. Men do not care very much about her as a rule. There is a good deal of latent vanity resident in the members of your sex, you know, Richard; and men are usually conscious that Honorias does not care so very much about them. They are quite right, she does not. I really believe when poor, dreadful, old Lady Tobermory left her all that money Honorias's first thought was that now she might embrace celibacy with a good conscience. The St. Quentins are not precisely millionaires, you know. Her wealth left her free to espouse the cause of womanhood at large. She is a little bit Quixotic, dear thing, and given to tilting at windmills. She wants to secure to working women a fair business basis--that is the technical expression, I believe. And so she starts clubs, and forms circles. She says women must be encouraged to combine and to agitate. Whether they are capable of combining I do not pretend to say. These high matters transcend my small wit. But, as I have often pointed out to her, agitation is the natural attitude of every woman. It would seem superfluous to encourage or inculcate that, for surely wherever two or three petticoats are gathered together, there, as far as my experience goes, is agitation of necessity in the midst of them."

Madame de Vallorbes leaned back with a little sigh and air of exquisite resignation.

"All the same, the majority of women are unhappy enough, heaven knows! If Honorias, or any other sweet, feminine Quixote, can find means to lighten the burden of our lives, she has my very sincere thanks, well

understood."

Richard drew his whip across the backs of the trotting horses, making them plunge forward against that blank, impalpable wall of all-encircling, ever-receding, ever-present fog. The carriage had just crossed the long, white-railed bridge, spanning the little river and space of marsh on either side, and now entered Sandyfield Street. The tops of the tall Lombardy poplars were lost in gloom. Now and again the redness of a lighted cottage window, blurred and contorted in shape, showed through the gray pall. Slow-moving, country figures, passing vehicles, a herd of some eight or ten cows--preceded by a diabolic looking billy-goat, and followed by a lad astride the hind-quarters of a bare-backed donkey--grew out of pallid nothingness as the carriage came abreast of them, and receded with mysterious rapidity into nothingness again. The effect was curiously fantastic and unreal. And as the minutes passed that effect of unreality gained upon Richard's imagination, until now--as last evening in the stately solitude of the Long Gallery--he became increasingly aware of the personality of his companion, increasingly penetrated by the feeling of being alone with that personality, as though the world, so strangely blotted out by these dim, obliterating vapours, were indeed vacant of all human interest, human purpose, human history, save that incarnate in this fair woman and his own relation to her. She alone existed, concrete, exquisite, sentient, amid the vague, shifting immensities of fog. She alone mattered. Her near neighbourhood worked upon him strongly, causing an excitement in him which at once hindered and demanded speech.

Night began to close in in good earnest. Passing the broad, yellowish glare streaming out from the rounded tap-room window of the Calmady Arms, and passing from the end of the village street on to the open common, the light had become so uncertain that Richard could no longer see his companion's face clearly. This was almost a relief to him, so that, mastering at once his diffidence and his excitement, he spoke.

"Look here, Helen," he said, "I have been thinking over all that you told me. I don't want to dwell on subjects that must be very painful to you, but I can't help thinking about them. It's not that I won't leave them alone, but that they won't leave me. I don't want to presume upon your confidence, or take too much upon myself. Only, don't you see, now that I do know it's impossible to sit down under it all and let things go on just the same.--You're not angry with me?"

The young man spoke very carefully and calmly, yet the tones of his voice were heavily charged with feeling.

Madame de Vallorbes clasped her hands rather tightly within her sable muff. Unconsciously she began to sway a little, just a very little, as a person will sway in time to strains of stirring music. An excitement, not mental merely but physical, invaded her. For she recognised that she stood on the threshold of developments in this very notable drama. Still she answered quietly, with a touch even of weariness.

"Ah! dear Richard, it is so friendly and charming of you to take my

infelicities thus to heart! But to what end, to what end, I ask you? The conditions are fixed. Escape from them is impossible. I have made my bed--made it most abominably uncomfortably, I admit, but that is not to the point--and I must lie on it. There is no redress. There is nothing to be done."

"Yes, there is this," he replied. "I know it is wretchedly inadequate, it doesn't touch the root of the matter. Oh! it's miserably inadequate--I should think I did know that! Only it might smooth the surface a bit, perhaps, and put a stop to one source of annoyance. Forgive me if I say what seems coarse or clumsy--but would not your position be easier if, in regard to--to money, you were quite independent of that--of your husband, I mean--M. de Vallorbes?"

For a moment the young lady remained very still, and stared very hard at the fog. The most surprising visions arose before her. She had a difficulty in repressing an exclamation.

"Ah! there now, I have blundered. I've hurt you. I've made you angry," Dickie cried impulsively.

"No, no, dear Richard," she answered, with admirable gentleness, "I am not angry. Only what is the use of romancing?"

"I am not romancing. It is the simplest thing out, if you will but have it so."

He hesitated a little. The horses were pulling, the fog was in his throat thick and choking--or was it, perhaps, something more unsubstantial and intangible even than fog? The spacious barns and rickyards of the Church Farm were just visible on the right. In less than five minutes more, at their present pace, the horses would reach the first park gate. The young man felt he must give himself time. He quieted the horses down into a walk.

"If I were your brother, Helen, I should save you all these sordid money worries as a matter of course. You have no brother--so, don't you see, I come next. It's a perfectly obvious arrangement. Just let me be your banker," he said.

Madame de Vallorbes shut her pretty teeth together. She could have danced, she could have sung aloud for very gaiety of heart. She had not anticipated this turn to the situation; but it was a delicious one. It had great practical merits. Her brain worked rapidly. Immediately those practical merits ranged themselves before her in detail. But she would play with it a little--both diplomacy and good taste, in which last she was by no means deficient, required that.

"Ah! you forget, dear Richard," she said, "in your friendly zeal you forget that, in our rank of life, there is one thing a woman cannot accept from a man. To take money is to lay yourself open to slanderous tongues, is to court scandal. Sooner or later it is known, the fact leaks out. And however innocent the intention, however noble and honest the giving, however grateful and honest the receiving, the world puts

but one construction upon such a transaction."

"The world's beastly evil-minded then," Richard said.

"So it is. But that is no news, Dickie dear," Madame de Vallorbes answered. "Nor is it exactly to the point."

Inwardly she trembled a little. What if she had headed him off too cleverly, and he should regard her argument as convincing, her refusal as final? Her fears were by no means lessened by the young man's protracted silence.

"No, I don't agree," he said at last. "I suppose there are always risks to be run in securing anything at all worth securing, and it seems to me, if you look at it all round, the risks in this case are very slight. Only you--and M. de Vallorbes need know. I suppose he must. But then, if you will pardon my saying so, after what you have told me I can't imagine he is the sort of person who is likely to object very much to an arrangement by which he would benefit, at least indirectly. As for the world,"--Richard ceased to contemplate his horses. He tried to speak lightly, while his eyes sought that dimly seen face at his elbow. "Oh, well, hang the world, Helen! It's easy enough for me to say so, I dare say, being but so slightly acquainted with it and the ways of it. But the world can't be so wholly hide-bound and idiotic that it denies the existence of exceptional cases. And this case, in some of its bearings at all events, is wholly exceptional, I am--happy to think."

"You are a very convincing special pleader, Richard," Madame de Vallorbes said softly.

"Then you accept?" he rejoined exultantly. "You accept?"

The young lady could not quite control herself.

"Ah! if you only knew the prodigious relief it would be," she exclaimed, with an outbreak of impatience. "It would make an incalculable difference. And yet I do not see my way. I am in a cleft stick. I dare not say Yes. And to say No----" Her sincerity was unimpeachable at that moment. Her eyes actually filled with tears. "Pah! I am ashamed of myself," she cried, "but to refuse is distracting."

The gate of the outer park had been reached. The groom swung himself down and ran forward, but confused by the growing darkness and the thick atmosphere he fumbled for a time before finding the heavy latch. The horses became somewhat restive, snorting and fidgeting.

"Steady there, steady, good lass," Richard said soothingly. Then he turned again to his companion. "Believe me it's the very easiest thing out to accept, if you'll only look at it all from the right point of view, Helen."

Madame de Vallorbes withdrew her right hand from her muff and laid it,

almost timidly, upon the young man's arm.

"Do you know, you are wonderfully dear to me, Dick?" she said, and her voice shook slightly. She was genuinely touched and moved. "No one has ever been quite so dear to me before. It is a new experience. It takes my breath away a little. It makes me regret some things I have done. But it is a mistake to go back on what is past, don't you think so? Therefore we will go forward. Tell me, expound. What is this so agreeably reconciling point of view?"

But along with the touch of her hand, a great wave of emotion swept over poor Richard, making his grasp on the reins very unsteady. The sensations he had suffered last evening in the Long Gallery again assailed him. The flesh had its word to say. Speech became difficult. Meanwhile his agitation communicated itself strangely to the horses. They sprang forward against that all-encircling, ever-present, yet ever-receding, blank wall of fog, to which the overarching trees lent an added gloom and mystery, as though some incarnate terror pursued them. The gate clanged-to behind the carriage. The groom scrambled breathlessly into his place. Sir Richard's driving was rather reckless, he ventured to think, on such a nasty, dark night, and with a lady along of him too. He was not sorry when the pace slowed down to a walk. That was a long sight safer, to his thinking.

"The right point of view is this," Richard said at last; "that in accepting you would be doing that which, in some ways, would make just all the difference to my life."

He held himself very upright on the sloping driving-seat, rather cruelly conscious of the broad strap about his waist, and the high, unsightly driving-iron against which, concealed by the heavy, fur rug, his feet pushed as he steadied himself. He paused, gazing away into the silent desolation of the now invisible woods, and when he spoke again his voice had deepened in tone.

"It must be patent to you--it is rather detestably patent to every one, I suppose, if it comes to that--that I am condemned to be of precious little use to myself or any one else. I share the fate of the immortal Sancho Panza in his island of Barataria. A very fine feast is spread before me, while I find myself authoritatively forbidden to eat first of this dish and then of that, until I end by being every bit as hungry as though the table was bare. It becomes rather a nuisance at times, you know, and taxes one's temper and one's philosophy. It seems a little rough to possess all that so many men of my age would give just anything to have, and yet be unable to get anything but unsatisfied hunger, and--in plain English--humiliation, out of it."

Madame de Vallorbes sat very still. Her charming face had grown keen. She listened, drawing in her breath with a little sobbing sound--but that was only the result of accentuated dramatic satisfaction.

"You see I have no special object or ambition. I can't have one. I just pass the time. I don't see any prospect of my ever being able to do more than that. There's my mother, of course. I need not tell you she

and I love one another. And there are the horses. But I don't care to bet, and I never attend a race-meeting. I--I do not choose to make an exhibition of myself."

Again Helen drew her hand out of her muff, but this time quickly, impulsively, and laid it on Richard's left hand which held the reins. The young man's breath caught in his throat, he leaned sideways towards her, her shoulder touching his elbow, the trailing plumes of her hat--now limp from the clinging moisture of the fog--for a moment brushing his cheek.

"Helen," he said rapidly, "don't you understand it's in your power to alter all this? By accepting you would do infinitely more for me than I could ever dream of doing for you. You'd give me something to think of and plan about. If you'll only have whatever wretched money you need now, and have more whenever you want it--if you'll let me feel, however rarely we meet, that you depend on me and trust me and let me make things a trifle easier and smoother for you, you will be doing such an act of charity as few women have ever done. Don't refuse, for pity's sake don't! I don't want to whine, but things were not precisely gay before your coming, you know. Need it be added they promise to be less so than ever after you are gone? So listen to reason. Do as I ask you. Let me be of use in the only way I can."

"Do you consider what you propose?" Madame de Vallorbes asked, slowly. "It is a good deal. It is dangerous. With most men such a compact would be wholly inadmissible."

Then poor Dickie lost himself. The strain of the last week the young, headlong passion aroused in him, the misery of his deformity, the accumulated bitterness and rebellion of years arose and overflowed as a great flood. Pride went down before it, and reticence, and decencies of self-respect. Richard turned and rent himself, without mercy and, for the moment, without shame. He pelted himself with cruel words, with scorn and self-contempt, while he laughed, and the sound of that laughter wandered away weirdly through the chill density of the fog, under the tall, shadowy firs of the great avenue, over the sombre-heather, out into the veiled, crowded darkness of the wide woods.

"But I am not as other men are," he answered. "I am a creature by myself, a unique development as much outside the normal social, as I am outside the normal physical law. I--alone by myself--think of it!--abnormal, extraordinary! You are safe enough with me, Helen. Safe to indulge and humour me as you might a monkey or a parrot. All the world will understand that! Only my mother, and a few old friends and old servants take me seriously. To every one else I am an embarrassment, a more or less distressing curiosity."--He met little Lady Constance Quale's ruminant stare again in imagination, heard Lord Fallowfeild's blundering speech.--"Remember our luncheon to-day. It was flattering, at moments, wasn't it? And so if I do queer things, things off the conventional lines, who will be surprised? No one, I tell you, not even the most strait-laced or censorious. Allow me at least the privileges of my disabilities. I am a dwarf--a cripple. I shall never

be otherwise. Had I lived a century or two ago I should have made sport for you, and such as you, as some rich man's professional fool. And so, if I overstep the usual limits, who will comment on that? Queer things, crazy things, are in the part. What do I matter?"

Richard laughed aloud.

"At least I have this advantage, that in my case you can do what you can do in the case of no other man. With me you needn't be afraid. No one will think evil. With me--yes, after all, there is a drop of comfort in it--with me, Helen, you're safe enough."

CHAPTER X

MR. LUDOVIC QUAYLE AMONG THE PROPHETS

That same luncheon party at Brockhurst, if not notably satisfactory to the hosts, afforded much subsequent food for meditation to one at least of the guests. During the evening immediately following it, and even in the watches of the night, Lady Louisa Barking's thought was persistently engaged with the subject of Richard Calmady, his looks, his character, his temper, his rent-roll, the acreage of his estates, and his prospects generally. Nor did her interest remain hidden and inarticulate. For, finding that in various particulars her knowledge was superficial and clearly insufficient, on her journey from Westchurch up to town next day, in company with her brother Ludovic, she put so many questions to that accomplished young gentleman that he shortly divined some serious purpose in her inquiry.

"We all recognise, my dear Louisa," he remarked presently, laying aside the day's Times, of which he had vainly essayed the study, with an air of gentle resignation, crossing his long legs and leaning back in his corner of the railway carriage, "that you are the possessor of an eminently practical mind. You have run the family for some years now, not without numerous successes, among which may be reckoned your running of yourself into the arms--if you will pardon my mentioning them--of my estimable brother-in-law, Barking."

"Really, Ludovic!" his sister protested.

"Let me entreat you not to turn restive, Louisa," Mr. Quayle rejoined with the utmost suavity. "I am paying a high compliment to your intelligence. To have run into the arms of Mr. Barking, or indeed of anybody else, casually and involuntarily, to have blundered into them--if I may so express myself--would have been a stupidity. But to run into them intentionally and voluntarily argues considerable powers of strategy, an intelligent direction of movement which I respect and admire."

"You are really exceedingly provoking, Ludovic!"

Lady Louisa pushed the square, leather-covered dressing-case, on which her feet had been resting, impatiently aside.

"Far from it," the young man answered. "Can I put that box anywhere else for you? You like it just where it is?--Yes? But I assure you I am not provoking. I am merely complimentary. Conversation is an art, Louisa. None of my sisters ever can be got to understand that. It is dreadfully crude to rush in waist-deep at once. There should be feints and approaches. You should nibble at your sugar with a graceful coyness. You should cut a few frills and skirmish a little before setting the battle actively in array. And it is just this that I have been striving to do during the last five minutes. But you do not appear to appreciate the commendable style of my preliminaries. You want to engage immediately. There is usually a first-rate underlying reason for your interest in anybody----"

Again the lady shifted the position of the dressing-case.

"To the right?" inquired Mr. Quayle extending his hand, his head a little on one side, his long neck directed forward, while he regarded first his sister and then the dressing-case with infuriating urbanity. "No? Let us come to Hecuba, then. Let us dissemble no longer, but put it plainly. What, oh, Louisa! what are you driving at in respect of my very dear friend, Dickie Calmady?"

Now it was unquestionably most desirable for her to keep on the fair-weather side of Mr. Quayle just then. Yet the flesh is weak. Lady Louisa Barking could not control a movement of self-justification. She spoke with dignity, severely.

"It is all very well for you to say those sort of things, Ludovic----"

"What sort of things?" he inquired mildly.

"But I should be glad to know what would have become of the family by now, unless some one had come forward and taken matters in hand? Of course one gets no thanks for it. One never does get any thanks for doing one's duty, however wearing it is to oneself and however much others profit. But somebody had to sacrifice themselves. Mama is unequal to any exertion. You know what papa is----"

"I do, I do," murmured Mr. Quayle, raising his gaze piously to the roof of the railway carriage.

"If he has one of the boys to tramp over the country with him at Whitney, and one of the girls to ride with him in London, he is perfectly happy and content. He is alarmingly improvident. He would prefer keeping the whole family at home doing nothing----"

"Save laughing at his jokes. My father craves the support of a sympathetic audience."

"Shotover is worse than useless."

"Except to the guileless Israelite he is. Absolutely true, Louisa."

"Guy would never have gone into the army when he left Eton unless I had insisted upon it. And it was entirely through the Barkings' influence--at my representation of course--that Eddie got a berth in that Liverpool cotton-broker's business. I am sure Alicia is very comfortably married. I know George Winterbotham is not the least interesting, but he is perfectly gentlemanlike and presentable, and so on, and he makes her a most devoted husband. And from what Mr. Barking heard the other day at the Club from somebody or other, I forget who, but some one connected with the Government, you know, there is every probability of George getting that permanent under-secretaryship."

"Did I not start by declaring you had achieved numerous successes?" Ludovic inquired. "Yet we stray from the point, Louisa. For do I not still remain ignorant of the root of your sudden interest in my friend Dickie Calmady? And I thirst to learn how you propose to work him into the triumphant development of our family fortunes."

The proportions of Lady Louisa's small mouth contracted still further into an expression of great decision, while she glanced at the landscape reeling away from the window of the railway carriage. In the past twelve hours autumn had given place to winter. The bare hedges showed black, while the fallen leaves of the hedgerow trees formed unsightly blotches of sodden brown and purple upon the dirty green of the pastures. Over all brooded an opaque, gray-brown sky, sullen and impenetrable. Lady Louisa saw all this. But she was one of those persons happily, for themselves, unaffected by such abstractions as the aspects of nature. Her purposes were immediate and practical. She followed them with praiseworthy persistence. The landscape merely engaged her eyes because she preferred, just now, looking out of the window to looking her brother in the face.

"Something must be done for the younger girls," she announced. "I feel pretty confident about Emily's future. We need not go into that. Maggie, if she marries at all--and she really is very useful at home, in looking after the servants and entertaining, and so on--if she marries at all, will marry late. She has no particular attractions as girls go. Her figure is too solid, and she talks too much. But she will make a very presentable middle-aged woman--sensible, dependable, an excellent *menagere*. Certainly she had better marry late."

"A mature clergyman when she is rising forty--a widowed bishop, for instance. Yes, I approve that," Mr. Quayle rejoined reflectively. "It is well conceived, Louisa. We must keep an eye on the Bench and carefully note any episcopal matrimonial vacancy. Bishops have a little turn, I observe, for marrying somebody who *is* somebody--specially *en secondes nocces*, good men. Yes, it is well thought of. With careful steering we may bring Maggie to anchor in a palace yet. Maggie is rather dogmatic, she would make not half a bad Mrs. Proudie. So she is disposed of, and then?"

For a few seconds the lady held silent converse with herself. At last

she addressed her companion in tones of unwonted cordiality.

"You are by far the most sensible of the family, Ludovic," she began.

"And in a family so renowned for intellect, so conspicuous for 'parts and learning,' as Macaulay puts it, that is indeed a distinction!"--Mr. Quayle bowed slightly in his comfortable corner. "A thousand thanks, Louisa," he murmured.

"I would not breathe a syllable of this to any of the others," she continued. "You know how the girls chatter. Alicia, I am sorry to say, is as bad as any of them. They would discuss the question without intermission--simply, you know, talk the whole thing to death."

"Poor thing!--Yet, after all, what thing?" the young man inquired urbanely.

Lady Louisa bit her lip. He was very irritating, while she was very much in earnest. It was her misfortune usually to be a good deal in earnest.

"There is Constance," she remarked, somewhat abruptly.

"Precisely--there is poor, dear, innocent, rather foolish, little Connie. It occurred to me we might be coming to that."

In his turn Mr. Quayle fell silent, and contemplated the reeling landscape. Pasture had given place to wide stretches of dark moorland on either side the railway line, with a pallor of sour bog-grasses in the hollows. The outlook was uncheerful. Perhaps it was that which caused the young man to shake his head.

"I recognize the brilliancy of the conception, Louisa. It reflects credit upon your imagination and--your daring," he said presently. "But you won't be able to work it."

"Pray why not?" almost snapped Lady Louisa.

Mr. Quayle settled himself back in his corner again. His handsome face was all sweetness, indulgent though argumentative. He was nothing, clearly, unless reasonable.

"Personally, I am extremely fond of Dickie Calmady," he began. "I permit myself--honestly I do--moments of enthusiasm regarding him. I should esteem the woman lucky who married him. Yet I could imagine a prejudice might exist in some minds--minds of a less emancipated and finely comprehensive order than yours and my own of course--against such an alliance. Take my father's mind, for instance--and unhappily my father dotes on Connie. And he is more obstinate than nineteen dozen--well, I leave you to fill in the comparison mentally, Louisa. It might be slightly wanting in filial respect to put it into words."

Again he shook his head in pensive solemnity.

"I give you credit for prodigious push and tenacity, for a remarkable capacity of generalship, in short. Yet I cannot disguise from myself the certainty that you would never square my father."

"But suppose she wishes it herself. Papa would deny Connie nothing," the other objected. She was obliged to raise her voice to a point of shrillness, hardly compatible with the dignity of the noble house of Fallowfeild, _double_ with all the gold of all the Barkings, for the train was banging over the points and roaring between the platforms of a local junction. Mr. Quayle made a deprecating gesture, put his hands over his ears, and again gently shook his head, intimating that no person possessed either of nerves or self-respect could be expected to carry on a conversation under existing conditions. Lady Louisa desisted. But, as soon as the train passed into the comparative quiet of the open country, she took up her parable again, and took it up in a tone of authority.

"Of course I admit there is something to get over. It would be ridiculous not to admit that. And I am always determined to be perfectly straightforward. I detest humbug of any kind. So I do not deny for a moment that there is something. Still it would be a very good marriage for Constance, a very good marriage, indeed. Even papa must acknowledge that. Money, position, age, everything of that kind, in its favour. One could not expect to have all that without some make-weight. I should not regret it, for I feel it might really be bad for Connie to have so much without some make-weight. And I remarked yesterday--I could not help remarking it--that she was very much occupied about Sir Richard Calmady."

"Connie is a little goose," Mr. Quayle permitted himself to remark, and for once there was quite a sour edge to his sweetness.

"Connie is not quick, she is not sensitive," his sister continued. "And, really, under all the circumstances, that perhaps is just as well. But she is a good child, and would believe almost anything you told her. She has an affectionate and obedient disposition, and she never attempts to think for herself. I don't believe it would ever occur to her to object to his--his peculiarities, unless some mischievous person suggested it to her. And then, as I tell you, I remarked she was very much occupied about him."

Once again Mr. Quayle sought counsel of the landscape which once again had changed in character. For here civilisation began to trail her skirts very visibly, and the edges of those skirts were torn and frayed, notably unhandsome. The open moorland had given place to flat market-gardens and leafless orchards sloppy with wet. Innumerable cabbages, innumerable stunted, black-branched apple and pear trees, avenues of dilapidated pea and bean sticks, reeled away to right and left. The semi-suburban towns stretched forth long, rawly-red arms of ugly, little, jerry-built streets and terraces. Tall chimneys and unlovely gasometers--these last showing as collections of some monstrous spawn--rose against the opaque sky, a sky rendered momentarily more opaque, dirtier and more dingy, by the masses of London smoke hanging along the eastern horizon.

Usually Ludovic knew his own mind clearly enough. The atmosphere of it was very far from being hazy. Now that atmosphere bore annoying resemblance to the opacity obtaining overhead and along the eastern horizon. The young man's sympathies--or were they his prejudices?--had a convenient habit of ranging themselves immediately on one side or other of any question presenting itself to him. But in the present case they were mixed. They pulled both ways, and this vexed him. For he liked to suppose himself very ripe, cynical, and disillusioned, while, in good truth, sentiment had more than a word to say in most of his opinions and decisions. Now sentiment ruled him strongly and pushed him--but, unfortunately, in diametrically opposite directions. The sentiment of friendship compelled him hitherward. While another sentiment, which he refused to define--he recognised it as wholesome, yet he was a trifle ashamed of it--compelled him quite other-where. He took refuge in an adroit begging of the question.

"After all are you not committing the fundamental error of reckoning without your host, Louisa?" he inquired. "Connie may be a good deal occupied about Calmady, but thereby may only give further proof of her own silliness. I certainly discovered no particular sign of Calmady being occupied about Connie. He was very much more occupied about the fair cousin, Helen de Vallorbes, than about any one of us, my illustrious self included, as far as I could see."

In her secret soul his hearer had to own this statement just. But she kept the owning to herself, and, with a rapidity upon which she could not help congratulating herself, instituted a flanking movement.

"You hear all the gossip, Ludovic," she said. "Of course it is no good my asking Mr. Barking about that sort of thing. Even if he heard it he would not remember it. His mind is too much occupied. If a woman marries a man with large political interests she must just give herself to them generously. It is very interesting, and one feels, of course, one is helping to make history. But still one has to sacrifice something. I hear next to nothing of what is going on--the gossip, I mean. And so tell me, what do you hear about her, about Madame de Vallorbes?"

"At first hand only that which you must know perfectly well yourself, my dear Louisa. Didn't you sit opposite to her at luncheon, yesterday?--That she is a vastly good-looking and attractive woman."

"At second hand, then?"

"At second hand? Oh! at second hand I know various amiable little odds and ends such as are commonly reported by the uncharitable and censorious," Ludovic answered mildly. "Probably more than half of these little treasures are pure fiction, generated by envy, conceived by malice."

"Pray, Ludovic!" his sister exclaimed. But she recovered herself, and added:--"you may as well tell me all the same. I think, under the circumstances, it would be better for me to hear."

"You really wish to hear? Well, I give it you for what it is worth. I don't vouch for the truth of a single item. For all we can tell, nice, kind friends may be recounting kindred anecdotes of Alicia and the blameless Winterbotham, or even of you, Louisa, and Mr. Barking."

Mr. Quayle fixed a glance of surpassing graciousness upon his sister as he uttered these agreeable suggestions, and fervid curiosity alone enabled her to resist a rejoinder and to maintain a dignified silence.

"It is said--and this probably is true--that she never cared two straws for de Vallorbes, but was jockeyed in the marriage--just as you might jockey Constance, you know, Louisa--by her mother, who has the reputation of being a somewhat frisky matron with a keen eye to the main chance. She is not quite all, I understand, a tender heart could desire in the way of a parent. It is further said that *_la belle Helene_* makes the dollars fly even more freely than did de Vallorbes in his best days, and he has the credit of having been something of a *_viveur_*. He knew not only his Paris, but his Baden-Baden, and his Naples, and various other warm corners where great and good men do commonly congregate. It is added that *_la belle Helene_* already gives promise of being playful in other ways beside that of expenditure. And that de Vallorbes has been heard to lament openly that he is not a native of some enlightened country in which the divorce court charitably intervenes to sever overhard connubial knots. In short, it is rumoured that de Vallorbes is not a conspicuous example of the wildly happy husband."

"In short, she is not respec----"

But the young man held up his hands and cried out feelingly:--

"Don't, pray don't, my dear Louisa. Let us walk delicately as Agag--my father's morning ministrations to the maids again! For how, as I pointed out just now, do we know what insidious little tales may not be in circulation regarding yourself and those nearest and dearest to you?"

Ludovic Quayle turned his head and once again looked out of the window, his beautiful mouth visited by a slightly malicious smile. The train was sliding onward above crowded, sordid courts and narrow alleys, festering, as it seemed, with a very plague of poverty-stricken and unwholesome humanity. Here the line runs parallel to the river--sullen to-day, blotted with black floats and lines of grimy barges, which straining, smoke-vomiting steam-tugs towed slowly against a strong flowing tide. On the opposite bank the heavy masses of the Abbey, the long decorated facade and towers of the Houses of Parliament, stood out ghostly and livid in a gleam of frail, unrelated sunshine against the murk of the smoky sky.

"I should have supposed Sir Richard Calmady was steady," Lady Louisa remarked, inconsequently and rather stiffly. Ludovic really was exasperating.

"Steady? Oh! perfectly. Poor, dear chap, he hasn't had much chance of being anything else as yet."

"Still, of course, Lady Calmady would prefer his being settled. Clearly it would be much better in every way. All things considered, he is certainly one of the people who should marry young. And Connie would be an excellent marriage for him, excellent--thoroughly suitable, better, really, than on the face of it he could hope for. Ludovic, just look out please and see if the carriage is here. Pocock always loses her head at a terminus, and misses the men-servants. Yes, there is Frederic--with his back to the train, looking the wrong way, of course. He really is too stupid."

Mr. Quayle, however, succeeded in attracting the footman's attention, and, assisted by that functionary and the lean and anxious Pocock--her arms full of bags and umbrellas--conveyed his sister out of the railway carriage and into the waiting brougham. She graciously offered to put him down at his rooms, in St. James's Place, on her way to the Barking mansion in Albert Gate, but the young man declined that honour.

"Good-bye, Louisa," he said, leaning his elbows on the open window of the brougham and thereby presenting the back view of an irreproachably cut overcoat and trousers to the passers-by. "I have to thank you for a most interesting and instructive journey. Your efforts to secure the prosperity of the family are wholly praiseworthy. I commend them. I have a profound respect for your generalship. Still, pauper though I am, I am willing to lay you a hundred to one in golden guineas that you will never square papa."

Subsequently the young man bestowed himself in a hansom, and rattled away in the wake of the Barking equipage down the objectionably steep hill which leads from the roar and turmoil of the station into the Waterloo Bridge road.

"I might have offered heavier odds," he said to himself, "for never, never will she square papa."

And, not without a light sense of shame, he was conscious that he made this reflection with a measure of relief.

CHAPTER XI

CONTAINING SAMPLES BOTH OF EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY LOVE

Katherine stood in the central space of the great, state bedroom. It was just upon midnight, yet she still wore her jewels and her handsome, trailing, black, velvet dress. She was very tired. But that tiredness proceeded less from physical than mental weariness. This she recognised, and foresaw that weariness of this character was not likely to find relief and extinction within the shelter of the curtains of the

stately bed, whereon the ancient Persian legend of the flight of the Hart through the tangled Forest of This Life was so deftly and quaintly embroidered. For, unhappily to-night, the leopard, Care, followed very close behind. And Katherine, taking the ancient legend as very literally descriptive of her existing state of mind feared that, should she undress and seek the shelter of the rose-lined curtains the leopard would seek it also, and, crouching at her feet, his evil yellow eyes would gaze into her own, wide open, all through that which remained of the night. The night, moreover, was very wild. A westerly gale, with now and again tumultuous violence of rain, rattled the many panes of the windows, wailed in every crevice of door and casement, roared through the mile-long elm avenue below, and roared in the chimneys above. The Prince of the Power of the Air was let loose, and announced his presence as with the shout of battle. Sleep was out of the question under present conditions and in her present humour. Therefore Lady Calmady had dismissed Clara--now promoted to the dignified office of lady's-maid--and that bright-eyed and devoted waiting-woman had departed reluctant, almost in tears, protesting that:--"it was quite too bad, for her ladyship was being regularly worn out with all the talking and company. And she, for her part, should be heartily glad when the entertaining was over and they were all comfortably to themselves again."

Nor could Katherine honestly assert that she would be altogether sorry when the hour struck, to-morrow, for the departure of her guests. For it appeared to her that, notwithstanding the courtesy and affection of her brother and the triumphant charm of her niece, a spirit of unrest had entered Brockhurst along with their entry. Would that same spirit depart along with their departing? She questioned it. She was oppressed by a fear that that spirit of unrest had come to stay. And so it was that as she walked the length and breadth of the lofty, white-paneled room, for all the rage and fury of the storm without, she still heard the soft padding of Care, the leopard, close behind.

Then a singular desolation and sense of homelessness came upon Katherine. Turn where she would there seemed no comfort, no escape, no sure promise of eventual rest. Things human and material were emptied not of joy only, but of invitation to effort. For something had happened from which there was no going back. A fair woman from a far country had come and looked upon her son, with the inevitable result, that youth had called to youth. And though the fair woman in question, being already wedded wife,--Katherine was rather pathetically pure-minded,--could not in any dangerously practical manner steal away her son's heart, yet she would, only too probably, prepare that heart and awaken in it desires of subsequent stealing away on the part of some other fair woman, as yet unknown, whose heart Dickie would do his utmost to steal in exchange. And this filled her with anxiety and far-reaching fears, not only because it was bitter to have some woman other than herself hold the chief place in her son's affections, but because she--as John Knott, even as Ludovic Quayle, though from quite other causes--could not but apprehend possibilities of danger, even of disaster, surrounding all question of love and marriage in the strange and unusual case of Richard Calmady.

And thinking of these things, her sensibilities heightened and intensified by fatigue and circumstances of time and place, a certain feverishness possessed her. That bedchamber of many memories--exquisite and tragic--became intolerable to her. She opened the double doors and passed into the Chapel-Room beyond, the light thrown by the tall wax candles set in silver branches upon her toilet-table, passing with her through the widely open doors and faintly illuminating the near end of the great room. There was other subdued light in the room as well. For a glowing mass of coal and wood still remained in the brass basket upon the hearth, and the ruddy brightness of it touched the mouldings of the ceiling, glowed on the polished corners and carvings of tables, what-nots, and upon the mahogany frames of solid, Georgian sofas and chairs.

At first sight, notwithstanding the roaring of wind and ripping of rain without, there seemed offer of comfort in this calm and spacious place, the atmosphere of it sweet with bowls of autumn violets and greenhouse-grown roses. Katherine sat down in Richard's low armchair and gazed into the crimson heart of the fire. She made a valiant effort to put away haunting fears, to resume her accustomed attitude of stoicism, of tranquil, if slightly defiant, courage. But Care, the leopard, refused to be driven away. Surely, stealthily he had followed her out of her bedchamber and now crouched at her side, making his presence felt so that all illusion of comfort speedily fled. She knew that she was alone, consciously and bitterly alone, waking in the midst of the sleeping house. No footstep would echo up the stairs, hot to find her. No voice would call her name, in anxiety for her well-being or in desire. It seemed to Katherine that a desert lay outstretched about her on every hand, while she sat desolate with Care for her sole companion. She recognised that her existing isolation was, in a measure at all events, the natural consequence of her own fortitude and ability. She had ruled with so strong and discreet a hand that the order she had established, the machinery she had set agoing, could now keep going without her. Hence her loneliness. And that loneliness as she sat by the dying fire, while the wind raved without, was dreadful to her, peopled with phantoms she dared not look upon. For, not only the accustomed burden of her motherhood was upon her, but that other unaccustomed burden of admitted middle-age. And this other burden, which it is appointed a woman shall bear while her heart often is still all too sadly young, dragged her down. The conviction pressed home on her that for her the splendid game was indeed over, and that, for very pride's sake, she must voluntarily stand aside and submit to rank herself with things grown obsolete, with fashions past and out of date.

Katherine rose to her feet, filled, for the moment, by an immense compassion for her own womanhood, by an overmastering longing for sympathy. She was so tired of the long struggle with sorrow, so tired of her own attitude of sustained courage. And now, when surely a little respite and repose might have been granted her, it seemed that a new order of courage was demanded of her, a courage passive rather than active, a courage of relinquishment and self-effacement. That was a little too much. For all her valiant spirit, she shrank away. She grew weak. She could not face it.

And so it happened that to-night--as once long ago, when poor Richard suffered his hour of mental and physical torment at the skilful, yet relentless hands of Dr. Knott, in the bedchamber near by--Katherine's anguish and revolt found expression in restless pacings, and those pacings brought her to the chapel door. It stood ajar. Before the altar the three hanging lamps showed each its tongue of crimson flame. A whiteness of flowers, set in golden vases upon the re-table, was just distinguishable. But the delicately carved spires and canopies of stalls, the fair pictured saints, and figure of the risen Christ--His wounded feet shining like pearls upon the azure floor of heaven--in the east window, were lost in soft, thick, all-pervading gloom. The place was curiously still, as though waiting silently, in solemn and strained expectation for the accomplishment of some mysterious visitation. And, all the while without, the gale flung itself wailing against the angles of the masonry, and the rain beat upon the glass of the high, narrow windows as with a passion of despairing tears.

For some time Katherine waited in the doorway, a sombre figure in her trailing, velvet dress. The hushed stillness of the chapel, the confusion and clamour of the tempest, taken thus in connection, were very telling. They exercised a strong influence over her already somewhat exalted imagination. Could it be, she asked herself, that these typified the rest of the religious, and the unrest of the secular life? Julius March would interpret the contrast they afforded in some such manner no doubt. And what if Julius, after all, were right? What if, shutting God out of the heart, you also shut that heart out from all peaceful dwelling-places, leaving it homeless, at the mercy of every passing storm? Katherine was bruised in spirit. The longing for some sure refuge, some abiding city was dominant in her. The needs of her soul, so long ignored and repudiated, asserted themselves. Yes, what if Julius were right, and if content and happiness--the only happiness which has in it the grace of continuance--consisted in submission to, and glad acquiescence in, the will of God?

Thus did she muse, gazing questioningly at the whiteness of the altar flowers and those steady tongues of flame, hearing the silence, as of reverent waiting, which dwelt in the place. But, on the other hand, to give, in this her hour of weakness, that which she had refused in the hours of clear-seeing strength;--to let go, because she was alone and the unloveliness of age claimed her, that sense of bitter injury and injustice which she had hugged to her breast when young and still aware of her empire,--would not such action be contemptibly poor spirited? She was no child to be humbled into confession by the rod, frightened into submission by the dark. To abase herself, in the hope of receiving spiritual consolation, appeared to her as an act of disloyalty to her dead love and her maimed and crippled son. She turned away with a rather superb lift of her beautiful head, and went back to her own bedchamber again. She hardened herself in opposition, putting the invitations of grace from her as she might have put those of temptation. She would yield to weakness, to feverish agitations and aimless longings, no more. Whether sleep elected to visit her or not, she would undress and seek her bed.

But hardly had she closed the door and, standing before her

toilet-table, began to unclasp the pearls from her throat and bracelets from her wrists, than a sound, quite other than agreeable or reassuring, saluted her ears from close by. It proceeded from the room next door, now unoccupied, since Richard, some five or six years ago, jealous of the dignity of his youth, had petitioned to be permitted to remove himself and his possessions to the suite of rooms immediately below. This comprised the Gun-Room, a bed and dressing-room, and a fourth room connecting with the offices, which came in handy for his valet. Since his decline upon this more commodious apartment, the old nursery had stood vacant. Katherine could not find it in her heart to touch it. It was furnished now as in Dickie's childish days, when, night and morning, she had visited it to make sure of her darling's health and safety.

And it was in this shrine of tender recollections that disquieting sounds now arose. Hard claws rattled upon the boarded spaces of the floor. Some creature snored and panted against the bottom of the door, pushed it with so heavy a weight that the panels creaked, flung itself down uneasily, then moved to and fro again, with that harsh rattling of claws. The image of Care, the leopard, as embroidered upon the curtains of her bed, was so present to Katherine's imagination to-night that, for a moment, she lost her hold on probability and common sense. It appeared to her that the anxieties and perturbations which oppressed her had taken on bodily form, and, in the shape of a devouring beast, besieged her chamber door. The conception was grisly. Both mind and body being rather overstrained, it filled her with something approaching panic. No one was within call. To rouse her brother, or Julius, she must make a tour of half the house. Again the creature pushed against the creaking panels, and, then, panting and snoring, began ripping away the matting from the door-sill.

The terror of the unknown is, after all, greater than that of the known. It was improbable, though the hour was late and the night wild, that savage beasts or cares incarnate should actually be in possession of Dickie's disused nursery. Katherine braced herself and turned the handle. Still the vision disclosed by the opening door was at first sight monstrous enough. A moving mass of dirty white, low down against the encircling darkness, bandy legs, and great grinning mouth. The bull-dog stood up, whining, fawning upon her, thrusting his heavy head into her hand.

"Why Camp, good old friend, what brings you here? Are you, too, homeless to-night? But why have you deserted your master?"

And then Lady Calmady's panic fears took on another aspect. Far from being allayed they were increased. An apprehension of something actively evil abroad in the great, sleeping house assailed her. She trembled from head to foot. And yet, even while she shrank and trembled, her courage reawoke. For she perceived that as yet she need not rank herself wholly among fashions passed and things grown obsolete. She had her place and value still. She was wanted, she was called for--that she knew--though by whom wanted and for what purpose she, as yet, knew not.

The bull-dog, meanwhile, his heavy head carried low, his crooked tail drooping, trotted slowly away into the darkness and then trotted back. He squatted upon his haunches, looking up with anxious, bloodshot eyes. He trotted away again, and again returned and stood waiting, his whole aspect eloquent in its dumb appeal. He implored her to follow, and Katherine, fetching one of the silver candlesticks from her dressing-table, obeyed.

She followed her ugly, faithful guide across the vacant disused nursery, and on down the uncarpeted turning staircase which opens into the square lobby outside the Gun-Room. The diamond panes of the staircase windows chattered in their leaded frames, and the wind shrieked in the spouts, and angles, and carved stonework, of the inner courtyard as she passed. The gale was at its height, loud and insistent. Yet the many-toned violence of it seemed to bear strange and intimate relation--as that of a great orchestra to a single dominant human voice--to the subtle, evil influence which she felt to be at large within the sleeping house. And so, without pausing to consider the wisdom of her action, pushed by the conviction that something of profound import was taking place, and that some one, or something, must be saved by her from threatening danger, Katherine threw open the Gun-Room door.

The shout of the storm seemed far away. This place was quick with stillness too, with the hush of waiting for the accomplishment of some mysterious event or visitation, even as the dark chapel up-stairs had been. Only here moving effect of soft, brilliant light, of caressing warmth, of vague, insidious fragrance met her. Katherine Calmady had only known passion in its purest and most legitimate form. It had been for her, innocent of all grossness, or suggestion of degradation, fair and lovely and natural, revelation of highest and most enchanting secrets. But having once known it in its fulness, she could not fail to recognise its presence, even though it wore a diabolic, rather than angelic face. That passion met her now, exultant, effulgent, along with that light and heat and fragrance, she did not for an instant doubt. And the splendour of its near neighbourhood turned her faint with dread and with poignant memories. She paused upon the threshold, steadying herself with one hand against the cold, stone jamb of the arched doorway, while in the other she held the massive candlestick and its flickering, draught-driven lights.

A mist was before her eyes, a singing in her ears, so that she had much ado to see clearly and reckon justly with that which she did see. Helen de Vallorbes, clothed in a flowing, yet clinging, silken garment of turquoise, shot with blue purple and shimmering glaucous green--a garment in colour such as that with which the waves of Adriatic might have clothed the rosy limbs of new-born Aphrodite, as she rose from the cool, translucent sea-deeps--knelt upon the tiger-skin before the dancing fire. Her hands grasped the two arms of Richard's chair. She leaned down right across it, the lines and curves of her beautiful body discernible under her delicate draperies. The long, open sleeves of her dress fell away from her outstretched arms, showing them in their completeness from wrist to shoulder. Her head was thrown back, so that her rounded throat stood out, and the pure line of her lower jaw was

salient. Her eyes were half closed, while all the mass of her honey-coloured hair was gathered low down on the nape of her neck into a net of golden thread. A golden, netted girdle was knotted loosely about her loins, the tasseled ends of it dragging upon the floor. She wore no jewels, nor were they needed, for the loveliness of her person, discovered rather than concealed by those changeful sea-blue draperies, was already dangerously potent.

All this Katherine saw--a radiant vision of youth, an incarnation, not of care and haunting fears, but of pleasure and haunting delights. And she saw more than this. For in the depths of that long, low armchair Richard sat, stiffly erect, his face dead white, thin, and strained--Richard, as she had never beheld him before, though she knew the face well enough. It was his father's face as she had seen it on her marriage night, and on his death night too, when his fingers had been clasped about her throat to the point of strangulation. Katherine dared look no longer. Her heart stood still. Shame and anger took her, and along with these an immense nostalgia for that which had once been and was not. Her instinct was of flight. But Camp trotted forward, growling, and squatted between the pedestals of the library-table, his red eyes blinking sullenly in the square shadow. Involuntarily Katherine followed him part way across the room.

Richard looked full at his cousin, absorbed, rigid, an amazement of question in his eyes. Not a muscle of his face moved. But Madame de Vallorbes' absorption was less complete. She started slightly and half turned her head.

"Ah! there is that dog again," she said. "What has brought him back? He hates me."

"Damn the dog!" Richard exclaimed, hoarsely under his breath. Then he said:--"Helen, Helen, you know----"

But Madame de Vallorbes had turned her head yet further, and her arched eyelids opened quite wide for once, while she smiled a little, her lips parting and revealing her pretty teeth tightly set.

"Ah! the advent of the bull-dog explains itself," she exclaimed. "Here is Aunt Katherine herself!"

Slowly, and with an inimitable grace, she rose to her feet. Her long, winged sleeves floated back into place, covering her bare arms. Her composure was astonishing, even to herself. Yet her breath came a trifle quick as she contemplated Lady Calmady with the same enigmatic smile, her chin carried high--the finest suggestion of challenge and insolence in it--her eyes still unusually wide open and startlingly bright.

"Richard holds a little court to-night," she continued airily, "thanks to the storm. You also have come to seek the protection of his presence it appears, Aunt Katherine. Indeed, I am not surprised, for you certainly brew very wild weather at Brockhurst, at times."

Something in the young lady's bearing had restored Katherine's self-control.

"The wind is going down," she replied calmly. "The storm need not alarm you, or keep you watching any longer, Helen."

"Ah! pardon me--you know you are accustomed to these tempests," the younger woman rejoined. "To me it still sounds more than sufficiently violent."

"Yes, but merely on this side of the house, where Richard's and my rooms are situated. The wind has shifted, and I believe on your side you will suffer no further disturbance. You will find it quite quiet. Then, moreover, you have to rise early to-morrow--or rather to-day. You have a long journey before you and should secure all the rest you can."

Madame de Vallorbes gathered her silken draperies about her absently. For a moment she looked down at the tiger-skin, then back at Lady Calmady.

"Ah yes!" she said, "it is thoughtful of you to remind me of that. To-day I start on my homeward journey. It should give me very much pleasure, should it not? But--do not be shocked, Aunt Katherine--I confess I am not altogether enraptured at the prospect. I have been too happy, too kindly treated, here at Brockhurst, for it to be other than a sorrow to me to depart."

She turned to Richard, her expression serious, intimate, appealing. Then she shook back her fair head, and as though in obedience to an irresistible movement of tenderness, stooped down swiftly over him--seeming to drown him in the shimmering waves of some azure, and thin, clear green, and royal, blue-purple sea--while she kissed him full and daringly upon the mouth.

"Good-night, good-bye, dear Dickie," she said. "Yes, good-bye--for I almost hope I may not see you in the morning. It would be a little chilly and inadequate, any other farewell after this. I am grateful to you.--And remember, I too am among those who, to their sorrow, never forget."

She approached Lady Calmady, her manner natural, unabashed, playful even, and gay.

"See, I am ready to go to bed like a good child, Aunt Katherine," she said, "supported by your assurance that my side of the house is no longer rendered terrific by wind and rain. But--I am so distressed to trouble you--but all the lamps are out, and I am none too sure of my way. It would be a rather tragic ending to my happy visit if I incontinently lost myself and wandered till dawn, disconsolate, up and down the passages and stairways of Richard's magnificent house. I might even wander in here by mistake again, and that would be unpardonably indiscreet, wouldn't it? So, will you light me to my own quarters, Aunt Katherine? Thank you--how charmingly kind and sweet you are!"

As she spoke Madame de Vallorbes moved lightly away and passed on to the lobby, the heels of her pretty, cloth-of-gold slippers ringing quite sharply on the gray, stone quarries without. And, even as a little while back she had followed the heavy-headed and ungainly bull-dog, so now Lady Calmady, in her trailing, black, velvet dress, silver candlestick in hand, followed this radiant, fleet-footed creature, whose every movement was eloquent of youth and health and an almost prodigal joy of living. Neither woman spoke as they crossed the lobby, and passed the pierced and arcaded stone screen which divides the outer from the inner hall. Now and again the flickering candle-light glinted on the younger woman's girdle or the net which controlled the soft masses of her honey-coloured hair. Now and again a draught taking the folds of her silken raiment blew it hither and thither, disclosing her beautiful arms or quick-moving slippered feet. She was clothed with splendour of the sea, crowned, and shod, and girt about the loins, with gold. And she fled on silently, till the wide, shallow-stepped stairway, leading up to the rooms she occupied, was reached. There, for a moment, she paused.

"Pray come no further," she said, and went on rapidly up the flight. On the landing she stopped, a dimly discerned figure, blue and gold against the dim whiteness of high paneled walls, moulded ceiling, stairway, and long descending balustrade.

"I have arrived!" she cried, and her clear voice took strange inflections of mockery and laughter. "I have arrived! I am perfectly secure now and safe. Let us hope all other inmates of Brockhurst are equally so this stormy night. A thousand thanks, dear Aunt Katherine, for your guidance, and a thousand apologies for bringing you so far. Now let me trouble you no longer."

The Gun-Room Katherine found just as she had left it, save that Camp stood on the tiger-skin before the fire, his fore-paws and his great, grinning muzzle resting on the arm of Richard's chair. Camp whined a little. Mechanically the young man raised his hand and pulled the dog's long, drooping ears. His face was still dead white, and there were lines under his eyes and about the corners of his mouth, as of one who tries to subdue expression of physical pain. He looked straight at Lady Calmady.

"Ah!" he said, "so you have come back! You observe I have changed partners!"

And again he pulled the dog's ears, while it appeared to his listener that his voice curiously echoed that other voice which had so lately addressed and dismissed her, taking on inflections of mockery. But as she nerved herself to answer, he continued, hastily:--

"I want nothing, dear mother, nothing in the world. Pray don't concern yourself any more about me to-night. Haven't I Camp for company? Lamps? Oh! I can put them out perfectly well myself. You were right, of course, perfectly right, to come if you were anxious about me. But now surely you are satisfied?"

Suddenly Richard bowed his head, putting both hands over his eyes.

"Only now, mother, if you love me, go," he said, with a great sob in his voice. "For God's sake go, and leave me to myself."

But after sleepless hours, in the melancholy, bleak dawn of the November day, Katherine lying, face downwards, within the shelter of the embroidered curtains of the state bed, made her submission at last and prayed.

"I am helpless, oh, Father Almighty! I have neither wit nor understanding, nor strength. Have mercy, lest my reason depart from me. I have sinned, for years I have sinned, setting my will, my judgment, my righteousness against Thine. Take me, forgive me, teach me. I bring nothing. I ask everything. I am empty. Fill me with Thyself, even as with water one fills an empty cup. Give me the courage of patience instead of the courage of battle. Give me the courage of meekness in place of the courage of pride."

BOOK IV

A SLIP BETWIXT CUP AND LIP

CHAPTER I

LADY LOUISA BARKING TRACES THE FINGER OF PROVIDENCE

The spirit of unrest, which had entered Brockhurst in the dim October weather, along with certain guests, did not--Lady Calmady had foreseen as much--leave with their leaving. It remained a constant quantity. Further, it engendered events very far away from and, at first sight, wholly at variance with those which had accompanied its advent.

For example, Lady Louisa Barking, passing through Lowndes Square one bleak, March morning on her way from Albert Gate to do a little quiet shopping in Sloane Street, observed that the Calmadys' house--situated at the corner of the square and of ---- Street--was given over to a small army of work-people. During Richard's minority it had been let for a term of years to Sir Reginald Aldham, of Aldham Revel in Midlandshire. Since Dickie's coming of age it had stood empty, pending a migration of the Brockhurst establishment, which migration had, in point of fact, never yet taken place. But now, as Lady Louisa, walking with a firm and distinguished tread along the gray, wind-swept pavements, remarked, the house was in process of redecoration, of painting within and without. And, looking on these things, Lady Louisa's soul received very sensible comfort. She was extremely tenacious of purpose. And, in respect of one purpose at least, heaven

had not seen fit, during the last four or five months, to smile upon her. Superstitious persons might have regarded this fact as a warning. Lady Louisa, however, merely regarded it as an oversight. Now at last, so it appeared to her, heaven had awakened to a consciousness of its delinquencies, with the satisfactory result that her own commendable patience touched on reasonable hope of reward. And this was the more agreeable and comforting to her because the Quayle family affairs were not, it must be owned, at their brightest and best just at present. Clouds lowered on the family horizon. For some weeks she had felt the situation called for effective action on her part. But then, how to act most effectively she knew not. Now the needed opportunity stared her in the face, along with those high ladders and scaffolding poles surrounding the Calmady mansion. She decided, there and then, to take the field; but to take it discreetly, to effect a turning movement, not attempt a front attack.

So, on her return to Albert Gate, after the completion of her morning shopping, she employed the half hour before luncheon in writing an affectionate, sisterly letter to Ludovic Quayle. That accomplished, young gentleman happened, as she was aware, to be staying at Brockhurst. She asked his opinion--in confidence--on the present very uncomfortable condition of the family fortunes, declaring how implicitly she trusted his good sense and respected his judgment. Then, passing adroitly to less burning questions, she ended thus--

"Pray let Lady Calmady know how really delighted everybody is to hear she and Sir Richard will be up this season. I do trust, as I am such a near neighbour, that if there is anything I can do for her, either now, or later when they are settling, she will not hesitate to let me know. It would be such a sincere pleasure to me. Mr. Barking is too busy with tiresome, parliamentary committees to be able to allow himself more than a week at Easter. I should be thankful for a longer rest, for I am feeling dreadfully fagged. But you know how conscientious he always is; and of course one must pay a certain price for the confidence the leaders of one's party repose in one. So do tell Lady Calmady we are quite sure to be back immediately after Easter."

Reading which sentences Mr. Quayle permitted himself a fine smile on more than one count.

"Louisa reminds me of the sweet little poem of 'Bruce and the Spider,'" he said to himself. "She displays heroic persistence. Her methods are a trifle crude though. To provoke statements by making them is but a primitive form of diplomacy. Yet why be hard upon Louisa? Like my poor, dear father, she, more often than not, means well."

It followed that some few days later, on his return to Whitney, Ludovic indited a voluminous letter to his sister, in his very best style. "It is rather a waste," he reflected regretfully. "She will miss the neatest points. The happiest turns of phrase will be lost upon Louisa!" To recoup himself for which subjective loss the young man amused himself by giving a very alarmist account of certain matters, though he was constrained to admit the pleasing fact that Sir Richard and Lady

Calmady really had it in contemplation to go up to town somewhere about Easter.

And, truth to tell, the main subject of Mr. Quayle's letter could hardly be otherwise than disquieting, for it was undeniable that Lord Shotover's debts were causing both himself and others serious embarrassment at this period. There was nothing new in this, that young nobleman's indebtedness being a permanent factor in his family's financial situation. This spring his indebtedness had passed from the chronic to the acute stage, that was all. With the consequence that it became evident Lord Shotover's debts must be paid, or his relations must submit to the annoyance of seeing him pass through the Bankruptcy Court. Which of these objectionable alternatives was least objectionable Lord Fallowfeild still stood in doubt, when, in obedience to the parental summons, the young man reached Whitney. Lord Fallowfeild had whipped himself up into a laudable heat of righteous indignation before the arrival of the prodigal. Yet he contrived to be out when the dog-cart conveying the said prodigal, and Mr. Decies of the 101st Lancers--a friend of Guy Quayle, home on leave from India, whence he brought news of his fellow-subaltern--actually drove up to the door. When, pushed thereto by an accusing conscience, he did at last come in, Lord Fallowfeild easily persuaded himself that there really was not time before dinner for the momentous conversation. Moreover, being very full of the milk of human kindness, he found it infinitely more agreeable to hear the praises of the absent son, Guy, than to fall foul of the present son, Shotover. So that it was not till quite late that night, by which time he was slightly sleepy, while his anger had sensibly evaporated, that the interview did, actually, take place.

"Now then, Shotover, march off to the place of execution," Ludovic Quayle said sweetly, as he picked up his bedroom candlestick. "It was a deep and subtle thought that of bringing down Decies. Only, query, did you think of it, or was it just a bit of your usual luck?"

Lord Shotover smiled rather ruefully upon his prosperous, and, it may be added, slightly parsimonious, younger brother.

"Well, I don't deny it did occur to me it might work," he admitted. "And after all, you know, one mercy is there's no real vice about his dear old lordship."

Lord Fallowfeild fidgeted about the library, his expression that of a well-nourished and healthy, but rather fretful infant.

"Oh! ah!--well--so here you are, Shotover," he said. "Unpleasant business this of yours--uncommonly disagreeable business for both of us."

"Deuced unpleasant business," the younger man echoed heartily. He closely resembled his father in looks, save that he was clean shaven and of a lighter build. Both father and son had the same slight lisp in speaking. "Deuced unpleasant," he repeated. "Nobody can feel that more than I do."

"Can't they though," said Lord Fallowfeild, with a charmingly innocent air of surprise. "There, sit down, Shotover, won't you? It's a painful thing to do, but we've got to talk it over, I suppose."

"Well, of course, if you're kind enough to give me the time, you know,--that's rather what I came down here for."

"So you did though," the elder man returned, brightening as though making an illuminating discovery. Then, fearing he was forgetting his part and becoming amiable too rapidly, he made a gallant effort to whip up his somnolent indignation. "It's very distressing to me to put it so plainly, but in my opinion it's a disgraceful business."

"Oh! I give you my word I know it," Lord Shotover replied, with most disarming candour. His father affected, with difficulty, not to hear the remark.

"It doesn't do for a man in your position to be owing money all over the country. It brings the aristocracy into contempt with the shop-keeping class. They're always on the lookout for the shortcomings of their superiors, those people. And they do pay their debts, you see."

"They've always got such a thundering lot of money," Lord Shotover put in. "Don't know how they'd contrive to spend it unless they did pay their debts."

"Oh! ah!--yes----" His father hesitated. It struck him Shotover was a reasonable fellow, very reasonable, and he took the whole matter in a very proper spirit. In short, it was not easy to blow up Shotover. Lord Fallowfeild thrust his hands far down into his trouser pockets and turned sideways in the great, leather-covered chair.

"I'm not narrow-minded or prejudiced," he began. "I always have kept on civil terms with those sort of people and always will. Courtesy is an obligation on the part of a gentleman and a Christian. I'd as soon be rude to my tailor as eat with my knife. But a man must respect his own rank or others won't respect it, especially in these nasty, radical, leveling times. You must stand by your class. There's a vulgar proverb about the bird that fouls its own nest, you know. Well, I never did that. I've always stood by my own class. Helped my poor brother Archibald--you can't remember him--weren't born at the time--to run away with Lady Jane Bateman. Low, common fellow Bateman. I never liked Bateman. She left Ludovic all that money, you know----"

"Wish to goodness she'd left it to me," murmured Lord Shotover.

"Eh?" inquired his father. Then he fell into a moralising vein. "Nasty, disreputable things elopements. I never did approve of elopements. Leave other men's wives alone, Shotover."

The younger man's mouth worked a little.

"The nuisance is sometimes they won't leave you alone."

Lord Fallowfeild gazed at him a moment, very genially.

"Oh! ah!--well--I suppose they won't," he said, and he chuckled.

"Anyhow I stood by your poor Uncle Archibald. He was my brother of course, and she was a second cousin of your mother's, so I felt bound to. And I saw them across the Channel and into the Paris train.

Dreadfully bad crossing that night I remember, no private cabins to be had, and Lady Jane was dreadfully ill. Never take your wife to sea on your honeymoon, Shotover. It's too great a risk. That business cost me a lot of money one way and another, and let me in for a most painful scene with Bateman afterwards. But, as I say, you're bound to stand by your own class. That'll be my only reason for helping you, you understand, Shotover, if I do help you."

"And I am sure I hope you will."--The young man rose and stood with his back to the fire and his hands under his coat-tails. He stooped a little, looking down pensively at the hearth-rug between his feet. His clothes--not yet paid for, or likely to be--claimed admiration, so did the length of his legs and the neatness of his narrow hips.

"I can only assure you I shall be most awfully grateful if you do help me," he said quietly. "I don't pretend to deserve it--but that doesn't lessen gratitude--rather the other way, don't you know. I shall never forget it."

"Won't you though?"

And for the life of him Lord Fallowfeild could not help beaming upon this handsome prodigal. "Uncommonly highbred looking fellow, Shotover," he said to himself. "Don't wonder women run after him. Uncommonly high bred, and shows very nice feeling too."

And then the kindly and simple gentleman drew himself up with a mental jerk, remembering that he was there to curse rather than to bless. He fidgeted violently.

"Not that I have actually made up my mind to help you yet," he went on.

"I am very much inclined to cast you adrift. It distresses me to put it to you so plainly, but you are disgracefully extravagant, you know, Shotover."

"Oh! I know," the young man admitted.

"You're a selfish fellow."--Lord Fallowfeild became relentless. "Yes, it's extremely painful to me to say it to you, but you are downright selfish. And that, in the long run, comes uncommonly hard on your sisters. Good girls, your sisters. Never given your mother or me any trouble, your sisters. But money has to come from somewhere, and each time I pay your debts I have to cut down your sisters' portions."

"Yes, I know, and that's what's made me so infernally unwilling to come to you about my affairs," Lord Shotover said, in tones of perfectly

genuine regret.

"Is it though?" his father commented. "Good fellow at heart," he added to himself. "Displays very proper feeling. Always was a good-hearted fellow."

"I can only tell you I've been awfully wretched about it for the last three months."

"Have you though?" said Lord Fallowfeild, with sympathy.

"I got just about as low as I well could. I felt I was nothing but a nuisance and encumbrance. It was beastly to think of fleecing the girls, don't you know. I came precious near cutting my throat--only that seemed rather a dirty way of getting out of it all."

"So it is--poor boy--quite right. Nasty mean way of shirking your responsibilities. Quite agree with you. I have never had any opinion of a man who cut his throat. Never mention such a thing, Shotover." He blew his nose resonantly.--"Never talk of such a thing," he repeated. "And--poor boy--I--I'll pay your debts. Only I tell you this really is the last time. There must be no misunderstanding about that. You must reform, Shotover, if it's only on account of your sisters. I don't want to take an unfair advantage of you in alluding to your sisters. Only you must understand clearly this is the last time. You see it's becoming too frequent. I don't want to press the case unduly against you, but you recollect--I'm sure you do--I paid your debts in fifty-eight, and again in sixty-two, or sixty-three, was it? Yes, it must have been sixty-three, because that was the year my poor friend Tom Henniker died. Good fellow Henniker--I missed Henniker. And they wanted me to take over the hounds. Nice fellow in the hunting-field, Henniker. Never saw him lose his temper but once, and that was when Image rode over the hounds on the edge of Talepenny Wood."

"Rather coarse sort of brute, Image," put in Lord Shotover.

"And Henniker had such an excellent manner with the farmers, genial and cheery, very cheery at times and yet without any loss of dignity. Great test of a man's breeding that, being cheery without loss of dignity. Now my poor friend, Henniker--oh! ah! yes, where was I though? Your debts now, Shotover. Yes, it must have been sixty-three, because they all wanted me to succeed him as master, and I had to tell them I could not afford it, so it must have been just after I cleared you."

He looked at his erring son with the most engaging air of appeal and remonstrance.

"Really it won't do, Shotover," he repeated. "You must reform. It's becoming too frequent. You'd better travel for a time. That's the proper thing for a man in your position to do when he's in low water. Not scuttle, of course. I wouldn't on any account have you scuttle. But, three weeks or a month hence when things are getting into shape, just travel for a time. I'll arrange it all for you. Only never talk of cutting your throat again. And you quite understand this is positively

the last time. I am very much in earnest, my dear boy, nothing will move me. This settlement is final. And we'll just run up quietly to town to-morrow and have a talk with my lawyers, Fox and Goteway. Very civil and accommodating fellow, Goteway--he may be able to make some suggestions. Very nice, confidential-mannered person, Goteway. Knows how to hold his tongue and doesn't ask unnecessary questions--useful man, Goteway----"

Which things coming to the knowledge of Lady Louisa Barking moved her at once to wrath, and to deepened conviction that the moment for decisive action had arrived. It appeared to her that her father had put himself out of court. His weakness regarding his eldest son had practically delivered him into her hand. She congratulated herself upon the good which is thus beneficently permitted to spring out of evil. Yet while recognising that a just Providence sometimes, at all events, overrules human folly to the production of happy results, she was by no means disposed to spare the mortal whose individual foolishness had given the divine wisdom its opportunity. Therefore when, some few days later, Lord Fallowfeild called on her, after a third or fourth interview with Messrs. Fox and Goteway--beaming, expansive, from the sense of a merciful action accomplished--she received him in a distinctly repressive manner. The great, white and gold drawing-rooms in Albert Gate were not more frigid or unbending than the bearing of their mistress as she suffered her father's embrace. And that amiable nobleman, notwithstanding his large frame and exalted social position, felt himself shiver inwardly in the presence of his daughter, even as he could remember shivering when, as a small schoolboy, he had been summoned to the dread presence of the headmaster.

"Very good rooms these of yours, Louisa," he began hastily. "Always have admired these rooms. Capital space for entertaining. Barking was quite right to secure the house as soon as it was in the market. I told him at the time he would never regret it."

Lady Louisa did not answer, but called after the retreating footman, who had just brought in a stately and limited tea-tray, much silver and little food:--"I am not at home, William."

Then, as she put small and accurate measures of tea into a massive teapot, she added severely:--"What is all this I hear about Shotover, papa?"

"Oh! ah! yes--poor Shotover. Came up to town together again to-day. Good-hearted fellow, your brother Shotover, but thoughtless. However I have had a most satisfactory talk with my men of business, Fox and Goteway. I know Barking does not think much of Fox and Goteway. Wanted me to go to his own lawyers, Hodges and Banquet. But if any one serves you conscientiously you should not leave them. It's against my principles to turn off those who serve me conscientiously. I told Barking so at the time, I remember. It came out of the business about your settlements, wasn't it--or the last time I paid Shotover's----" He cleared his throat hurriedly. "I see the Calmadys' house is being done up," he continued. "Nice young fellow, Calmady. But I never can help feeling a certain awkwardness with him. Takes you up rather short in

conversation too sometimes. Terribly distressing thing his deformity and all that, both for himself and Lady Calmady. Hope, perhaps, she doesn't feel it as some women would though--tactful woman, Lady Calmady, and very good woman of business. Still, never feel quite at my ease with Lady Calmady. Can't help wondering how they'll do in London, you know. Rather difficult thing his going about much with that----"

Lady Louisa held out a small teacup. Her high penetrating voice asserted itself resolutely against her father's kindly, stumbling chatter, as she asked:--

"Is it true you are not coming up from Whitney this season?"

"Oh!--tea--yes, thank you very much, my dear. No--well, I think possibly we may not come up this year. Goteway believes he has heard of a very eligible tenant for the Belgrave Square house, very eligible. And so, nothing actually decided yet, but I think very possibly we may not come up."

He spoke apologetically, regarding his daughter, over the small teacup, with an expression of entreaty. Every feature of his handsome, innocent countenance begged her not to deal harshly with him. But Lady Louisa remained obdurate.

"Shotover's conduct is becoming a positive scandal," she said.

"Not conduct, my dear--no, not conduct, only money," protested Lord Fallowfeild.

"If money is not conduct I really don't know what is," retorted his daughter. "I do not pretend to go in for such fine distinctions. In any case Mr. Barking heard the most shocking rumours at his club the other day."

"Did he though?" ejaculated Lord Fallowfeild.

"He was too considerate to tell me anything very definite, but he felt that, going out and seeing everybody as of course I have to, it was only right I should have some hint of what was being said. Every one is talking about Shotover. You can imagine how perfectly intolerable it is for me to feel that my brother's debts are being canvassed in this sort of way."

"I am very sorry there should be any gossip," Lord Fallowfeild said humbly. "Nasty thing gossip--lies, too, mostly, all of it. Nasty, low, unprofitable thing gossip."

"And, of course, your all not coming up will give colour to it."

"Will it though? I never thought of that. You always see straight through things, Louisa. You have by far the best head in the family, except Ludovic--uncommonly clever fellow Ludovic. Wonder if I had better talk it all over with Ludovic. If you and he agree in thinking our not coming up will make more talk, why, if only on Shotover's

account, I----"

But this was not in the least the turn which his daughter desired the conversation to take.

"Pray remember you have other children besides Shotover, papa!" she said hastily. "And for every one's sake run no further risk of impoverishing yourself. It is obvious that you must save where you can. If there is the chance of a good let for the Belgrave Square house, it would be madness to refuse it. And, after all, you do not really care about London. If there are any important debates in the Lords, you can always come up for a night or so. It does not matter about you."

"Oh! doesn't it though?" Lord Fallowfeild put in quite humbly and gently.

"And mama would always rather stay on at Whitney. Only it must not appear as if we were the least uncomfortable at meeting people. I shall make it a point to go everywhere. I shall be dreadfully fagged, of course, but I feel it a duty to all of you to do so. And I should like the girls to go out too. People must not suppose they have no gowns to their backs. Maggie and Emily have had several seasons. I am less worried about them. But Connie must be seen. She is looking extremely pretty."

"Isn't she though?" Lord Fallowfeild chimed in, brightening. The picture of those reportedly gownless backs had depressed him abominably.

"Yes, and she must have every advantage. I have quite decided that. She must come up to me at once. I shall write to mama and point out to her how necessary it is that one of the girls, at least, should be very much en evidence this year. And I am most anxious it should be Connie. As I undertake all the fatigue and responsibility I feel I have a right of choice. I will see that she is properly dressed. I undertake everything. Now, papa, if you are going down by the 6:10 train you ought to start. Will you have a hansom?"

Then, as she shook hands with him, and presented an unresponsive cheek to the paternal lips, Lady Louisa clinched the matter.

"I may consider it quite settled, then, about Constance?" she said. "I mentioned it to Mr. Barking yesterday, and we agreed it ought to be done even if it entailed a little inconvenience and expense. It is not right to be indifferent to appearances. The other two girls can come up for a little while later. Alicia must help. Of course there is not much room in that wretched, little Chelsea house of hers, but George Winterbotham can turn out of his dressing-room. Alicia must exert herself for once. And, papa, Connie need not bring a maid. Those country girls from Whitney don't always fit in quite well with the upper servants, and yet there is a difficulty about keeping them out of the housekeeper's room. I will provide a maid for her. I'll write to mama about everything to-morrow. And, papa, I do beg you will discourage Shotover from coming here, for really I would much rather

not see him at present. Good-bye. Pray start at once. You have barely time to get to Waterloo."

And so Lord Fallowfeild started, a little flustered, a little crestfallen, on his homeward journey.

"Able woman, Louisa," he said to himself. "Uncommonly clear-sighted woman, Louisa. But a trifle hard. Wonder if Barking ever feels that, now? Not very sensitive man, Barking, though. Suppose that hardness in Louisa comes of her having no children. Always plenty of children in our family--except my poor brother Archibald and Lady Jane, they had no children. Yet somebody told me she'd had one by Bateman, which died. Never understood about that. Capital thing for Ludovic she never did have any by Archibald. But it's always curious to me Louisa should have no children. Shouldn't have expected that somehow of Barking and Louisa. Sets her more free, of course, in regard to her sisters. Very thoughtful for her sisters, Louisa. I suppose she must have Connie. Nuisance all this gossip about Shotover. Pretty child, Connie--best looking of the lot. People say she's like me. Wonderfully pretty child, Connie. That young fellow Decies thinks so too, or I'm very much mistaken. Very much attracted by Connie. Fine young fellow, Decies--comfort to hear of Guy from him. Suppose she must go up to Louisa. Gentlemanlike fellow, Decies. I shouldn't care to part with Connie----"

And then, his reflections becoming increasingly interjectional as the train trundled away southwestward, Lord Fallowfeild leaned back in the corner of the railway carriage and fell very fast asleep.

CHAPTER II

TELLING HOW VANITY FAIR MADE ACQUAINTANCE WITH RICHARD CALMADY

There was no refusing belief to the fact. The old, cloistered life at Brockhurst, for good or evil, was broken up. Katherine Calmady recognised that another stage had been reached on the relentless journey, that new prospects opened, new horizons invited her anxious gaze. She recognised also that all which had been was dead, according to its existing form, and should receive burial, silent, somewhat sorrowful, yet not without hope of eventual resurrection in regard to the nobler part of it. The fair coloured petals of the flower fall away from the maturing fruit, the fruit rots to set free the seed. Yet the vital principle remains, life lives on, though the material clothing of it change. And, therefore, Katherine--an upspringing of patience and chastened fortitude within her, the result of her reconciliation to the Divine Light and resignation of herself to its indwelling--set herself, not to arrest the falling of the flower, but to help the ripening of the seed. If the old garments were out of date, too straight and narrow for her child's growth, then let others be found him. She did not wait to have him ask, she offered, and that without hint of reproach or of

unwillingness.

Yet so to offer cost her not a little. For it was by no means easy to sink her natural pride, and go forth smiling with this son of hers, at once beautiful and hideous in person, for all the world to see. Something of personal heroism is demanded of whoso prescribes heroic remedies, if those remedies are to succeed. At night, alone in the darkness, Katherine, suddenly awaking, would be haunted by perception of the curious glances, and curious comments, which must of necessity attend Richard through all the brilliant pageant of the London season. How would he bear it? And then--self-distrust laying fearful hands upon her--how would she bear it, too? Would her late acquired serenity of soul depart, her faith in the gracious purposes of Almighty God suffer eclipse? Would she fall back into her former condition of black anger and revolt? She prayed not. So long as these evils did not descend upon her, she could bear the rest well enough. For, could she but keep her faith, Katherine was beginning to regard all other suffering which might be in store for her as a negligible quantity. With her healthy body, and wholesome memories of a great and perfect human love, it was almost impossible that she should adopt a morbid and self-torturing attitude. Yet any religious ideal, worth the name, will always have in it an ascetic element. And that element was so far present with her that personal suffering had come to bear a not wholly unlovely aspect. She had ceased to gird against it. So long as Richard was amused and fairly content, so long as the evil which had been abroad in Brockhurst House, that stormy autumn night, could be frustrated, and the estrangement between herself and Richard,--unacknowledged, yet sensibly present,--which that evil had begotten, might be lessened she cared little what sacrifices she made, what fatigue, exertion, even pain, she might be called on to endure. An enthusiasm of self-surrender animated her.

During the last five months, slowly and with stumbling feet; yet very surely, she had carried her life and the burden of it up to a higher plane. And, from that more elevated standpoint, she saw both past events and existing relationships in perspective, according to their just and permanent values. Only one object, one person, refused to range itself, and stood out from the otherwise calm, if pensive, landscape as a threatening danger, a monument of things wicked and fearful. Katherine tried to turn her eyes from that object, for it provoked in her a great hatred, a burning indignation, sadly at variance with the saintly ideals which had so captivated her mind and heart. Katherine remained--always would remain, happily for others--very much a woman. And, as woman and mother, she could not but hate that other woman who had, as she feared, come very near seducing her son.

Therefore very various causes combined to reconcile her to the coming adventure. Indeed she set forth on it with so cheerful a countenance, that Richard, while charmed, was also a trifle surprised by the alacrity with which she embraced it. He regarded her somewhat critically, questioning whether his mother was of a more worldly and light-minded disposition than he had heretofore supposed.

There had been some talk of Julius March joining the contemplated exodus. But he had declined, smiling rather sadly.

"No, no," he said. "To go would be a mistake and a weakly selfish one on my part. I have long ceased to be a man of cities, and am best employed, and indeed am most at my ease, herding my few sheep here in the wilderness. I am part and parcel of just all that which we have agreed it is wise you shall leave behind you for a while. My presence would lessen the thoroughness of the change of scene and of thought. You take up a way of life which was familiar to you years ago. The habits of it will soon come back. I have never known them. I should be a hindrance, rather than a help. No, I will wait and keep the lamps burning before the altar, and the fire burning upon the hearth until--and, please God, it may be in peace, crowned with good fortune--you both come back."

But the adventure, fairly embarked on, displayed quite other characteristics--as is the way with such skittish folk--than Katherine had anticipated. Against possibilities of mortification, against possibilities of covert laughter and the pointing fingers of the crowd, she had steeled herself. But it had not occurred to her that both Richard's trial and her own might take the form of an exuberant and slightly vulgar popularity, and that, far from being shoved aside into the gutter, the young man might be hoisted, with general acclamation, on to the very throne of Vanity Fair.

The Brockhurst establishment moved up to town at the beginning of April. And by the end of the month, Sir Richard Calmady, his wealth, his house, his horses, his dinners, his mother's gracious beauty, and a certain mystery which surrounded him, came to be in every one's mouth. A new star had arisen in the social firmament, and all and sundry gathered to observe the reported brightness of its shining. Rich, young, good-looking, well-connected, and strangely unfortunate, here indeed was a novel and telling attraction among the somewhat fly-blown shows of Vanity Fair! Many-tongued rumour was busy with Dickie's name, his possessions and personality. The legend of the man--a thing often so very other than the man himself--grew, Jonah's gourd-like, in wild luxuriance. All those many persons who had known Lady Calmady before her retirement from the world, hastened to renew acquaintance with her. While a larger, and it may be added less distinguished, section of society, greedy of intimacy with whoso, or whatsoever, might represent the fashion of the hour, crowded upon their heels. Invitations showered down thick as snowflakes in January. To get Sir Richard and Lady Calmady was to secure the success of your entertainment, whatever that entertainment might be--to secure it the more certainly because the two persons in question exercised a rather severe process of selection, and were by no means to be had for the asking.

All these things Ludovic Quayle noted, in a spirit which he flattered himself was cynical, but which was, in point of fact, rather anxiously affectionate. It had occurred to him that this sudden and unlooked-for popularity might turn Richard's head a little, and develop in him a morbid self-love, that vanite de monstre not uncommon to persons disgraced by nature. He had feared Richard might begin to plume

himself--as is the way of such persons--less upon the charming qualities and gifts which he possessed in common with many other charming persons, than upon those deplorable peculiarities which differentiated him from them. And it was with a sincerity of relief, of which he felt a trifle ashamed, that, as time went on, Mr. Quayle found himself unable to trace any such tendency, that he observed his friend's wholesome pride and carefulness to avoid all exposure of his deformity. Richard would drive anywhere, and to any festivity, where driving was possible. He would go to the theatre and opera. He would dine at a few houses, and entertain largely at his own house. But he would not put foot to ground in the presence of the many women who courted him, or in that of the many men who treated him with rather embarrassed kindness and courtesy to his face and spoke of him with pitying reserve behind his back.

Other persons, besides Mr. Quayle, watched Richard Calmady's social successes with interest. Among them was Honoria St. Quentin. That young lady had been spending some weeks with Sir Reginald and Lady Aldham in Midlandshire, and had now accompanied them up to town. Lady Aldham's health was indifferent, confining her often for days together to the sofa and a darkened room. Her husband, meanwhile, possessed a craving for agreeable feminine society, liable to be gratified in a somewhat errant manner abroad, unless gratified in a discreet manner at home. So Honoria had taken over the duty, for friendship's sake, of keeping the well-favoured, genial, middle-aged gentleman innocently amused. To Honoria, at this period, no experience came amiss. For the past three years, since the death of her godmother, Lady Tobermory, and her resultant access of fortune, she had wandered from place to place, seeing life, now in stately English country houses, now among the overtaxed, under-fed women-workers of Whitechapel and Soho, now in some obscure Italian village among the folds of the purple Apennines. Now she would patronise a middle-class British lodging-house, along with some girl friend richer in talent than in pence, in some seaside town. Now she would fancy the stringent etiquette of a British embassy at foreign court and capital. Honoria was nothing if not various. But, amid all mutations of occupation and of place, her fearlessness, her lazy grace, her serious soul, her gallant bearing, her loyalty to the oppressed, remained the same. "Chaste and fair" as Artemis, experimental as the Comte de St. Simon himself, Honoria roamed the world--fascinating yet never quite fascinated, enthusiastic yet evasive, seeking earnestly to live yet too self-centred as yet to be able to recognise in what, after all, consists the heart of living.

She and Mr. Quayle had met at Aldham Revel during the past winter. She attracted, while slightly confusing, that accomplished young gentleman--confusing his judgment, well understood, since Mr. Quayle himself was incapable of confusion. Her views of men and things struck him as distinctly original. Her attitude of mind appeared unconventional, yet deeply rooted prejudices declared themselves where he would least have anticipated their existence. And so it became a favourite pastime of Mr. Quayle's to present to her cases of conscience, of conduct, of manners or morals--usually those of a common acquaintance--for discussion, that he might observe her verdict. He imagined this a scientific, psychologic exercise. He desired, so he

supposed, to gratify his own superior, masculine intelligence, by noting the aberrations and arriving at the rationale of her thought. From which it may be suspected that even Ludovic Quayle had his hours of innocent self-deception. Be that, however, as it may, certain it is that in pursuit of this pastime he one day presented to her the peculiar case of Richard Calmady for discussion, and that, not without momentous, though indirect, result.

It happened thus. One noon in May, Ludovic had the happiness of finding himself seated beside Miss St. Quentin in the Park, watching the endless string of passing carriages and the brilliant crowd on foot. Sir Reginald Aldham had left his green chair--placed on the far side of the young lady's--and leaned on the railings talking to some acquaintance.

"A gay maturity," Ludovic remarked with his air of patronage, indicating the elder gentleman's shapely back. "The term 'old boy' has, alas, declined upon the vernacular, and been put to base uses of jocosity, so it is a forbidden one. Else, in the present instance, how applicable, how descriptive a term! Should we, I wonder, give thanks for it, Miss St. Quentin, that the men of my generation will mature according to a quite other pattern?"

"Will not ripen, but sour?" Honoria asked maliciously. Her companion's invincible self-complacency frequently amused her. Then she added:--"But, you know, I'm very fond of him. It isn't altogether easy to keep straight as a young boy, is it? Depend upon it, it is ten times more difficult to keep straight as an old one. For a man of that temperament it can't be very plain sailing between fifty and sixty."

Mr. Quayle looked at her in gentle inquiry, his long neck directed forward, his chin slightly raised.

"Sailing? The yacht is?"--

"The yacht is laid up at Cowes. And you understand perfectly well what I mean," Honoria replied, somewhat loftily. Her delicate face straightened with an expression of sensitive pride. But her anger was short-lived. She speedily forgave him. The sunshine and fresh air, the radiant green of the young leaves, the rather superb spectacle of wealth, vigour, beauty, presented to her by the brilliant London world in the brilliant, summer noon was exhilarating, tending to lightness of heart. There was poetry of an opulent, resonant sort in the brave show. Just then a company of Life Guards clattered by, in splendour of white and scarlet and shining helmets. The rattle of accoutrements, and thud of the hoofs of their trotting horses, detached itself arrestingly from the surrounding murmur of many voices and ceaseless roar of the traffic at Hyde Park Corner. A light came into Honoria's eyes. It was good to be alive on such a day! Moreover, in her own purely platonic fashion, she really entertained a very great liking for the young man seated at her side.

"You have missed your vocation," she said, while her eyes narrowed and her upper lip shortened into a delightful smile. "You were born to be a

schoolmaster, a veritable pedagogue and terror of illiterate youth. You love to correct. And my rather sketchy English gives you an opportunity of which I observe you are by no means slow to take advantage. You care infinitely more for the manner of saying, than for the thing said. Whereas I"--she broke off abruptly, and her face straightened, became serious, almost severe, again. "Do you see who Sir Reginald is speaking to?" she added. "There are the Calmadys."

A break had come in the loitering procession of correctly clothed men and gaily clothed women, of tall hats and many coloured parasols, and in the space thus afforded, the Brockhurst mail-phaeton became apparent drawn up against the railings. The horses, a noticeably fine and well-matched pair of browns, were restless, notwithstanding the groom at their heads. Foam whitened the rings of their bits and falling flakes of it dabbled their chests. Lady Calmady leaned sideways over the leather folds of the hood, answering some inquiry of Sir Reginald, who, hat in hand, looked up at her. She wore a close-fitting, gray, velvet coat, which revealed the proportions of her full, but still youthful figure. The air and sunshine had given her an unusual brightness of complexion, so that in face as well as in figure, youth still, in a sensible measure, claimed her. She turned her head, appealing, as it seemed, to Richard, and the nimble breeze playing caressingly with the soft white laces and gray plumes of her bonnet added thereby somehow to the effect of glad and gracious content pervading her aspect. Richard looked round and down at her, half laughing. Unquestionably he was victoriously handsome, seen thus, uplifted above the throng, handling his fine horses, all trace of bodily disfigurement concealed, a touch of old-world courtliness and tender respect in his manner as he addressed his mother.

Ludovic Quayle watched the little scene with close attention. Then, as the ranks of the smart procession closed up again, hiding the carriage and its occupants from sight, he leaned back with a movement of quiet satisfaction and turned to his companion. Miss St. Quentin sat round in her chair, presenting her long, slender, dust-coloured lace-and-silk-clad person in profile to the passers-by, and so tilting her parasol as to defy recognition. The expression of her pale face and singular eyes was far from encouraging.

"Indeed--and why?" Ludovic permitted himself to remark, in tones of polite inquiry. "I had been led to believe that you and Lady Calmady were on terms of rather warm friendship."

"We are," Honoria answered, "that is, at Brockhurst."

"Forgive my indiscretion--but why not in London?"

The young lady looked full at him.

"Mr. Quayle," she asked, "is it true that you are responsible for this new departure of theirs, for their coming up, I mean?"

"Responsible? You do me too great an honour. Who am I that I should direct the action of my brother man? But Lady Calmady is good enough to

trust me a little, and I own that I advocated a modification of the existing _regime_."--Ludovic crossed his long legs and fell to nursing one knee. "It is not breach of confidence to tell you--since you know the fact already--that fate decreed an alien element should obtrude itself into the situation at Brockhurst last autumn. I need name no names, I think?"

Honorias head was raised. She regarded him steadfastly, but made no sign.

"Ah! I need not name names," he repeated; "I thought not. Well, after the alien element removed itself--the two facts may have no connection--Lady Calmady very certainly never implied that they had--but, as I remarked, after the alien element removed itself, it was observable that our poor, dear Dickie Calmady became a trifle difficult, a trifle distraught, in plain English most remarkably grumpy, and far from delightful to live with. And his mother----"

"It's too bad, altogether too bad!" broke out Honorias hotly.

"Too bad of whom?" Mr. Quayle asked, with the utmost suavity. "Of the nameless, obtrusive, alien element, or of poor, dear Dick?"

The young lady closed her parasol slowly, and turning, faced the sauntering crowd again.

"Of Sir Richard Calmady, of course," she said.

Her companion did not answer immediately. His eyes pursued a receding carriage far down the string, amid the gaily shifting sunshine and shadow, and the fluttering lace and gray feathers of a woman's bonnet. When he spoke, at last, it was with an unusual trace of feeling.

"After all, you know, there are a good many excuses for Richard Calmady."

"If it comes to that there are a good many excuses for Helen de Vallorbes," Honorias put in quickly.

"For? For?" the young man repeated, relaxing into the blandest of smiles. "Yes, thanks--I see I was right. It was unnecessary to name names.--Oh! undoubtedly, innumerable excuses, and of the most valid description, were they needed--were they not swallowed up in the single, self-evident excuse that the lady you mention is a supremely clever and captivating person."

"You think so?" said Honorias.

"Think so? Show me the man so indifferent to his reputation for taste that he could venture to think otherwise!"

"Still she should have left him alone."--Honorias's indolent, reflective speech took on a peculiar intonation, and she pressed her long-fingered hands together, as though controlling a shudder. "I--I'm ashamed to

confess it, I do not like him. But, as I told you, just on that account----"

"Pardon me, on what account?"

Miss St. Quentin was quick to resent impertinence, and now momentarily anger struggled with her natural sincerity. But the latter conquered. Again she forgave Mr. Quayle. But a dull flush spread itself over her pale skin, and he perceived that she was distinctly moved. This piqued his curiosity.

"I know I'm awfully foolish about some things," she said. "I can't bear to speak of them. I dread seeing them. The sight of them takes the warmth out of the sunshine."

Again Ludovic fell to nursing his knee.--What an amazing invention is the feminine mind! What endless entertainment is derivable from striving to follow its tergiversations!

"And you saw that which takes the warmth out of the sunshine just now?" he said. "Ah! well--alas, for Dickie Calmady!"

"Still I can't bear any one not to play fair. You should only hit a man your own size. I told Helen de Vallorbes so. I'm very, very fond of her, but she ought to have spared him."--She paused a moment. "All the same if I had not promised Lady Aldham to stay on--as she's so poorly I should have gone out of town when I found the Calmadys had come up."

"Oh! it goes as far as that, does it?" Ludovic murmured.

"I don't like to see them with all these people. The extent to which he is petted and fooled becomes rather horrible."

"Are you not slightly--I ask it with all due deference and humility--just slightly merciless?"

"No, no," the girl answered earnestly. "I don't think I'm that. The women who run after him, and flatter him so outrageously, are really more merciless than I am. I do not pretend to like him--I can't like him, somehow. But I'm growing most tremendously sorry for him. And still more sorry for his mother. She was very grand--a person altogether satisfying to one's imagination and sense of fitness, at home, with that noble house and park and racing stable for setting. But here, she is shorn of her glory somehow."

The girl rose to her feet with lazy grace.

"She is cheapened. And that's a pity. There are more than enough pretty cheap people among us already.--I must go. There's Sir Reginald looking for me.--If I could be sure Lady Calmady hated it all I should be more reconciled."

"Possibly she does hate it all, only that it presents itself as the least of two evils."

"There is a touch of dancing dogs about it, and that distresses me," Miss St. Quentin continued. "It is Lady Calmady's role to be apart, separate from and superior to the rest."

"The thing's being done as well as it can be," Mr. Quayle put in mildly.

"It shouldn't be done at all," the girl declared.--"Here I am, Sir Reginald. You want to go on? I'm quite ready."

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH KATHERINE TRIES TO NAIL UP THE WEATHERGLASS TO SET FAIR

It is to be feared that intimate acquaintance with Lady Calmady's present attitude of mind would not have proved altogether satisfactory to that ardent idealist Honoria St. Quentin. For, unquestionably, as the busy weeks of the London season went forward, Katherine grew increasingly far from "hating it all." At first she had found the varied interests and persons presented to her, the rapid interchange of thought, the constant movement of society, slightly bewildering. But, as Julius March had foretold, old habits reasserted themselves. The great world, and the ways of it, had been familiar to her in her youth. She soon found herself walking in its ways again with ease, and speaking its language with fluency. And this, though in itself of but small moment to her, procured her, indirectly, a happiness as greatly desired as it had been little anticipated.

For to Richard the great world was, as yet, something of an undiscovered country. Going forth into it he felt shy and diffident, though a lively curiosity possessed him. The gentler and more modest elements of his nature came into play. He was sensible of his own inexperience, and turned with instinctive trust and tender respect to her in whom experience was not lacking. He had never, so he told himself, quite understood how fine a lady his mother was, how conspicuous was her charm and distinguished her intelligence. And he clung to her, grown man though he was, even as a child, entering a bright room full of guests, clings to its mother's hand, finding therein much comfort of encouragement and support. He desired she should share all his interests, reckoning nothing worth the doing in which she had not a part. He consulted her before each undertaking, talked and laughed over it with her in private afterwards, thereby unconsciously securing to her halcyon days, a honeymoon of the heart of infinite sweetness, so that she, on her part, thanked God and took courage.

And, indeed, it might very well appear to Katherine that her heroic remedy was on the road to work an effectual cure. The terror of lawless passion and of evil, provoked by that fair woman clothed as with the

sea waves, crowned and shod with gold, whom she had withstood so manfully in spirit in the wild autumn night, departed from her. She began to fear no more. For surely her son was wholly given back to her--his heart still free, his life still innocent? And, not only did this terror depart, but her anguish at his deformity was strangely lessened, the pain of it lulled as by the action of an anodyne. For, witnessing the young man's popularity, seeing him so universally courted and welcomed, observing his manifest power of attraction, she began to ask herself whether she had not exaggerated the misfortune of that same deformity and the impediment that it offered to his career and chances of personal happiness. She had been morbid, hypersensitive. The world evidently saw in his disfigurement no such horror and hopeless bar to success as she had seen. It was therefore a dear world, a world rich in consolation and promise. It smiled upon Richard, and so she smiled upon it, gratefully, trustfully, finding in the plenitude of her thankfulness no wares save honest ones set out for sale in the booths of Vanity Fair. A large hopefulness arose in her. She began to form projects calculated, as she believed, to perpetuate the gladness of the present.

Among other tender customs of Richard's boyhood into which Katherine, at this happy period, drifted back was that of going, now and again, to his room at night, and gossiping with him, for a merry, yet somewhat pathetic half-hour, before herself retiring to rest. It fell out that, towards the middle of June, there had been a dinner party at the Barkings on a scale of magnificence unusual even in that opulent house. It was not the second, or even the third, time Richard and his mother had dined in Albert Gate. For Lady Louisa had proved the most assiduously attentive of neighbours. Little Lady Constance Quayle was with her. The young girl had brightened notably of late. Her prettiness was enhanced by a timid and appealing playfulness. She had been seized, moreover, with one of those innocent and absorbing devotions towards Lady Calmady, that young girls often entertain towards an elder woman, following her about with a sort of dog-like fidelity, and watching her with eyes full of wistful admiration. On the present occasion the guests at the Barking dinner had been politicians of distinction--members of the then existing government. A contingent of foreign diplomatists from the various embassies had been present, together with various notably smart women. Later there had been a reception, largely attended, and music, the finest that Europe could produce and money could buy.

"Louisa climbs giddy heights," Mr. Quayle had said to himself, with an attempt at irony. But, in point of fact, he was far from displeased, for it appeared to him the house of Barking showed to uncommon advantage to-night. "Louisa has no staying power in conversation, and her voice is too loud, but in snippets she is rather impressive," he added. "And, oh! how very diligent is Louisa!"

Driving home, Richard kept silence until just as the brougham drew up, then he said abruptly:--

"Tired? No--that's right. Then come and sit with me. I want to talk. I haven't an ounce of sleep in me somehow to-night."

It was hot, and when, some three-quarters of an hour later, Katherine entered the big bedroom on the ground floor, the upper sashes of the window were drawn low behind the blinds, letting in the muffled roar of the great city as an undertone to the intermittent sound of footsteps, or the occasional passing of a belated carriage or cab. It formed an undertone, also, to Richard's memory of the music to which he had lately listened, and the delight of which was still in his ears and pulsing in his blood, making his blue eyes bright and dark and curving his handsome lips into a very eloquent smile as he lay back against the piled-up pillows of the bed.

"Good heavens, how divinely Morabita sang," he said, looking up at his mother as she stood looking down on him, "better even than in Faust last night! I want to hear her again just as often as I can. Her voice carries one right away, out of oneself, into regions of pure and unmitigated romance. All things are possible for the moment. One becomes as the gods, omnipotent. We've got the box as usual on Saturday, mother, haven't we? Do you remember if she sings?"

Katherine replied that the great soprano did sing.

"I'm glad," Richard said; "and yet I don't know that it's particularly wholesome to hear her. After being as the gods, one descends with rather too much of a run to the level of the ordinary mortal."--He turned on his elbow restlessly, and the movement altered the lie of the bedclothes, thereby disclosing the unsightly disproportion of his person through the light blanket and sheet. "And if one's own level happens unfortunately to be below that of even the ordinary mortal--well--well--don't you know----"

"My dear!" Katherine put in softly.

Richard lay straight on his back again, and held out his hand to her.

"Sit down, do," he said. "Turn the big chair round so that I may see you. I like you in that frilly, white dressing-gown thing. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to be a brute and grumble. You're much too good to me, and I know I am disgustingly selfish at times. I was this winter, but----"

"The past is past," Katherine put in again very softly.

"Yes, please God, it is," he said,--"in some ways."--He paused, and then spoke as though with an effort returning from some far distance of thought:--"Yes, I like you in that white, frilly thing. But I liked that new, black gown of yours to-night too. You looked glorious, do you mind my saying so? And no woman walks as well as you do. I compared, I watched. There's nothing more beautiful than seeing a woman walk really well--or a man either, for that matter."

Then he caught at her hand again, laughing a little.--"No, I'm not going to grumble," he said. "Upon my word, mother, I swear I'm not. Here let's talk about your gowns. I should like to know, shall you

never wear anything but gray or black?"

"Never, not even to please you, Dickie."

"Ah, that's so delicious with you!" he exclaimed. "Every now and then you bring one up short, one knocks one's head against a stone wall! There is an indomitable strain in you. I only hope you've transmitted it to me. I'm afraid I need stiffening.--I beg your pardon," he added quickly and courteously, "it strikes me I am becoming slightly impertinent. But that woman's voice has turned my brain and loosed the string of my tongue so that I speak words of unwisdom. You enjoyed her singing too, though, didn't you? I thought so, catching sight of you while it was going on, attended by the faithful Ludovic and little Lady Constance. It's quite touching to see how she worships you. And wasn't Miss St. Quentin with you too? Yes, I thought so. I can't quite make up my mind about Honoria St. Quentin. Sometimes she strikes me as one of the loveliest women here--and she can walk, if you like, it's a joy to see her. And then again, she seems to me altogether too long, and off-hand somehow, and boyish! And then, too,"--Richard moved his head against the white pillows, and stared up at the window, where the blind sucked, with small creaking noises, against the top edge of the open sash,--"she fights shy of me, and personal feeling militates against admiration, you know. I am sorry, for I rather want to talk to her about--oh, well, a whole lot of things. But she avoids me. I never get the opportunity."

"My darling, don't you think that is partly imagination?"

"Perhaps it is," he answered. "I dare say I do indulge in unnecessary fancies about people's manner and so on. I can't very well be off it, you know. And every one is really very kind to me. Morabita was perfectly charming when I thanked her in very floundering Italian. It's a pity she's so fat. But, never mind, the fat vanishes, to all intents and purposes, when she begins to sing. And old Barking is as kind as he can be. I feel awfully obliged to him, though his ministrations to-night amounted to being slightly embarrassing. He brought me cabinet ministers and under-secretaries, and gorgeous Germans and Turks, in batches--and even a real live Chinaman with a pig-tail. Mother, do you remember the cabinets at home in the Long Gallery? I used to dream about them. And that Chinaman gave me the queerest feeling to-night. It was idiotic, but--did I ever tell you--when I was a little chap, I was always dreaming about war or something, from which I couldn't get away. Others could, but for me--from circumstances, don't you know--there was no possibility of scuttling. And the little Chinese figures on the black, lacquer cabinets were mixed up with it. As I say, it gripped me to-night in the midst of all those people and--- Oh yes! old Barking is very kind," he went on, with a change of tone. "Only I wish Lady Louisa would warn him he need not trouble himself to be amusing. He came and sat by me, towards the end of the evening, and told me the most inane stories in that inflated manner of his. Verily, they were ancient as the hills, and a weariness to the spirit. But that good-looking, young fellow, Decies, swallowed them all down with the devoutest attention and laughed aloud in all that he conceived to be the right places."

A pause came in Richard's flow of words. He moved again restlessly and clasped his hands under his head. Katherine had seldom seen him thus excited and feverish. A sense of alarm grew on her, lest her heroic remedy was, after all, not working a wholly satisfactory cure. For there was a violence in his utterance, and in his face, a certain recklessness of speech and of demeanour, very agitating to her.

"Oh, every one's kind, awfully kind," he repeated, looking away at the sucking blind again, "and I'm awfully grateful to them, but---- Oh! I tell you, that woman's voice has got me and made me drunk, made me mad drunk. I almost wish I had never heard her. I think I won't go to the opera again. Emotion that finds no outlet in action only demoralises one and breaks up one's philosophy, and she makes me know all that might be, and is not, and never, never can be. Good God! what a glorious, what an amazing, business I could have made of life if----" He slipped a little on the pillows, had to unclasp his hands hastily and press them down on either side him, to keep his body fairly upright in the bed. His features contracted with a spasm of anger. "If I had only had the average chance," he added harshly. "If I had only started with the normal equipment."

And, as she listened, the old anguish, lately lulled to rest in Katherine's heart, arose and cried aloud. But she sought resolutely to stifle its crying, strong in faith and hope.

"I know, my dearest, I know," she said pleadingly. "And yet, since we have been here, I have thought perhaps we had a little underrated both your happy gift of pleasing and the readiness of others to be pleased. It seems to me, Dickie, all doors open if you stretch out your hand. Well, my dear, I would have you go forward fearlessly. I would have you more ambitious, more self-confident. I see and deplore my own cowardly mistake. Instead of hiding you away at home, and keeping you to myself, I ought to have encouraged you to mix in the world and fill the position to which both your powers and your birth entitle you. I was wrong--I lament my folly. But there is ample time in which to rectify my mistake."

Richard's face relaxed.

"I wonder--I wonder," he said.

"I am sure," she replied.

"You are too sanguine," he said. "Your love for me blinds you to fact."

"No, no," she replied again. "Love is the only medium in which vision gains perfect clearness, becomes trustworthy and undistorted."--Instinctively Katherine folded her hands as in prayer, while the brightness of a pure enthusiasm shone in her sweet eyes. "That I have learned beyond all possibility of dispute. It has been given me, through much tribulation, to arrive at that."

Richard smiled upon her tenderly, then, turning his head, remained

silent for a while. The sullen roar of the great city invaded the quiet room through the open windows, the heavy regular tread of a policeman on his beat, a shrill whistle hailing a hansom from a house some few doors distant up the square, and then an answering rumble of wheels and clatter of hoofs. Richard's face had grown fierce again, and his breath came quick. He turned on his side, and once more the dwarfed proportions of his person became perceptible. Lady Calmady averted her eyes, fixing them upon his. But even there she found sad lack of comfort, for in them she read the inalienable distress and desolation of one unhandsomely treated by Nature, maimed and incomplete. Even the Divine Light, resident within her, failed to reconcile her to that reading. She shrank back in protest, once again, against the dealing of Almighty God with this only child of hers. And yet--such is the adorable paradox of a living faith--even while shrinking, while protesting, she flung herself for support, for help, upon the very Being who had permitted, in a sense caused, her misery.

"Mother can I say something to you?" Richard asked, rather hoarsely, at last.

"Anything--in heaven or earth."

"But it is a thing not usually spoken of as I want to speak of it. It may seem indecent. You won't be disgusted, or think me wanting in respect or in modesty?"

"Surely not," Lady Calmady answered quietly, yet a certain trembling took her, a nervousness as in face of the unknown. This strong, young creature developed forces, presented aspects, in his present feverish mood, with which she felt hardly equal to cope.

"Mother, I--I want to marry."

"I, too, have thought of that," she said.

"You don't consider that I am debarred from marriage?"

"Oh, no, no!" Katherine cried, a little sob in her voice.

He looked at her steadily, with those profoundly desolate eyes.

"It would not be wrong? It would not be otherwise than honourable?" he asked.

If doubts arose within Katherine of the answer to that question, she crushed them down passionately.

"No, my dearest, no," she declared. "It would not be wrong--it could not, could not be so--if she loved you, and you loved whomsoever you married."

"But I'm not in love--at least not in love with any person who can become my wife. Yet that does not seem to me to matter very much. I should be faithful, no fear, to any one who was good enough to marry

me. Enough of love would come, if only out of gratitude, towards the woman who would accept me as--as I am--and forgive that--that which cannot be helped."

Again trembling shook Katherine. So terribly much seemed to her at stake just then! Silently she implored wisdom and clear-seeing might be accorded her. She leaned a little forward, and taking his left hand held it closely in both hers.

"Dearest, that is not all. Tell me all," she said, "or I cannot quite follow your thought."

Richard flung his body sideways across the bed, and kissed her hands as they held his. The hot colour rushed over his face and neck, up to the roots of his close-cropped, curly hair. He spoke, lying thus upon his chest, his face half buried in the sheet.

"I want to marry because--because I want a child--I want a son," he said.

No words came to Katherine just then. But she disengaged one hand and laid it upon the dear brown head, and waited in silence until the violence of the young man's emotion had spent itself, until the broad, muscular shoulders had ceased to heave and the strong, young hands to grasp her wrist. Suddenly Richard recovered himself, sat up, rubbing his hands across his eyes, laughing, but with a queer catch in his voice.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I'm a fool, an awful fool. Hang Morabita and her voice and the golden houses of the gods, and beastly, showy omnipotence to which her voice carries one away! To talk sense--mother--just brutal common sense. My fate is fixed, you know. There's no earthly use in wriggling. I am condemned to live a cow's life and die a cow's death. The pride of life may call, but I can't answer. The great prizes are not for me. I'm too heavily handicapped. I was looking at that young fellow, Decies, to-night and considering his chances as against my own---- Oh! I know there's wealth in plenty. The pasture's green enough to make many a man covet it, and the stall's well bedded-down. I don't complain. Only mother, you know--I know. Where's the use of denying that which we neither of us ever really forget?--And then sometimes my blood takes fire. It did to-night. And the splendour of living being denied me, I--I--am tempted to say a Black Mass. One must take it out somehow. And I know I could go to the devil as few men have ever gone, magnificently, detestably, with subtleties and refinements of iniquity."

He laughed again a little. And, hearing him, his mother's heart stood still.

"Verily, I have advantages," he continued. "There should be a picturesqueness in my descent to hell which would go far to place my name at the head of the list of those sinners who have achieved immortality----"

"Richard! Richard!" Lady Calmady cried, "do you want to break my heart quite?"

"No," he answered, simply. "I'd infinitely rather not break your heart. I have no ambition to see my name in that devil's list except as an uncommonly ironical sort of second best. But then we must make some change, some radical change. At times, lately, I've felt as if I was a caged wild beast--blinded, its claws cut, the bars of its cage soldered and riveted, no hope of escape, and yet the vigour, the immense longing for freedom and activity, there all the while."

Richard stretched himself.

"Poor beast, poor beast, poor beast!" he said, shaking his head and smiling. "I tell you I get absurdly sentimental over it at times."

And then, happily, there came a momentary lapse in the entirety of his egoism. He turned on his side and took Lady Calmady's hand again, and fell to playing absently with her bracelets.

"You poor darling, how I torture you," he said. "And yet, now we've once broken the ice and begun talking of all this, we're bound to talk on to the finish--if finish there is. You see these few weeks in London--I've enjoyed them--but still they've made me understand, more than ever, all I've missed. Life calls, mother, do you see? And though the beast is blind, and his claws are cut, and his cage bolted, yet, when life calls, he must answer--must--or run mad--or die--do you see?"

"And you shall answer, my beloved. Never fear, you will answer," Katherine replied proudly.

Richard's hand closed hard upon hers.

"Thank you," he said. "You were made to be a mother of heroes, not of a useless log like me.--And that's just why I want to be good. And to be good I want a wife, that I may have that boy. I could keep straight for him, mother, though I'm afraid I can't keep straight for myself, and simply because it's right, much longer. I want him to have just all that I am denied. I want him to restore the balance, both for you and for me. I may have something of a career myself, perhaps, in politics or something. It's possible, but that will come later, if it comes at all. And then it would be for his sake. What I want first is the boy, to give me an object and keep up my pluck, and keep me steady. I, giving him life, shall find my life in him, be paid for my wretched circumscribed existence by his goodly and complete one. He may be clever or not--I'd rather, of course, he was not quite a dunce--but I really don't very much mind, so long as he isn't an outrageous fool, if he's only an entirely sound and healthy human animal."

Richard stretched himself upon the bed, straightened the sheet across his chest, and clasped his hands under his head again. The desolation had gone out of his eyes. He seemed to look afar into the future, and therein see manly satisfaction and content. His voice was vibrant, rising to a kind of chant.

"He shall run, and he shall swim, he shall fence, and he shall row," he said. "He shall learn all gallant sports, as becomes an English gentleman. And he shall ride,--not as I ride, God forbid! like a monkey strapped on a dog at a fair, but as a centaur, as a young demigod. We will set him, stark naked, on a bare-backed horse, and see that he's clean-limbed, perfect, without spot or blemish, from head to heel."

And once more Katherine Calmady held her peace, somewhat amazed, somewhat tremulous, since it seemed to her the young man was drawing a cheque upon the future which might, only too probably, be dishonoured and returned marked no account. For who dare say that this child would ever come to the birth, or coming, what form it would bear? Yet, even so, she rejoiced in her son and the high spirit he displayed, while the instinct of romance which inspired his speech touched an answering chord in, and uplifted, her.

By now the brief June night was nearly spent. The blind still creaked against the open window sash, but the thud of horse-hoofs and beat of passing footsteps had become infrequent, while the roar of the mighty city had dwindled to a murmur, as of an ebbing tide upon a shallow, sand-strewn beach. The after-light of the sunset, walking the horizon, beneath the Pole star from west to east, broadened upward now towards the zenith. Even here, in the heart of London, the day broke with a spacious solemnity. Richard raised himself, and, sitting up, blew out the candles placed on the table at the bedside.

"Mother," he said, "will you let in the morning?"

Lady Calmady was pale from her long vigil, and her unspoken, yet searching, emotion. She appeared very tall, ghostlike even, in her soft, white raiment, as she moved across and drew up the sucking blind. Above the gray parapets of the houses, and the ranks of contorted chimney-pots, the loveliness of the summer dawn grew wide. Warm amber shaded through gradations of exquisite and nameless colour into blue. While, across this last, lay horizontal lines of fringed, semi-transparent, opalescent cloud. To Katherine those heavenly blue interspaces spoke of peace, of the stilling of all strife, when the tragic, yet superb, human story should at last be fully told and God be all in all. She was very tired. The struggle was so prolonged. Her soul cried out for rest. And then she reminded herself, almost sternly, that the kingdom of God and the peace of it is no matter of time or of place, but is within the devout believer, ever present, immediate, possessing his or her soul, and by that soul in turn possessed. Just then the sparrows, roosting in the garden of the square, awoke with manifold and vociferous chirping and chattering. The voice from the bed called to her.

"Mother," it said imperatively, "come to me. You are not angry at what I have told you? You understand? You will find her for me?"

Lady Calmady turned away from the open window and the loveliness of the summer dawn. She was less tired somehow. God was with her, so she could not be otherwise than hopeful. Moreover, the world had proved itself

very kind towards her son. It would not deny him this last request, surely?

"My dearest, I think I have found her already," Lady Calmady answered.

Yet, even as she spoke, she faltered a little, recognising the energy and strength manifest in the young man's countenance, remembering his late discourse, and the pent-up fires of his nature to which that discourse had borne only too eloquent testimony. For who was a young girl, but just out of the schoolroom, a girl in pretty, fresh frocks--the last word of contemporary fashion,--whose baby face and slow, wide-eyed gaze bore witness to her entire innocence of the great primitive necessities, the rather brutal joys, the intimate vices, the far-ranging intellectual questionings which rule and mould the action of mankind,--who was she, indeed, to cope with a nature such as Richard's?

"Mother, tell me, who is it?"

And instinctively Katherine fell to pleading. She sat down beside the bed again and smoothed the sheet.

"You will be tender and loving to her, Dickie?" she said. "For she is young and very gentle, and might easily be made afraid. You will not forget what is due to your wife, to your bride, in your longing for a child?"

"Who is it?" Richard demanded again.

"Ludovic's sister--little Lady Constance Quayle."

He drew in his breath sharply.

"Would she--would her people consent?" he said.

"I think so. Judging by appearances, I am almost sure they would consent."

A long silence followed. Richard lay still, looking at the rosy flush that broadened in the morning sky and touched the bosoms of those delicate clouds with living, pulsating colour. And he flushed too, all his being softened into a great tenderness, a great shyness, a quick yet noble shame. For his whole attitude towards this question of marriage changed strangely as it passed from the abstract, from regions of vague purpose and desire, to the concrete, to the thought of a maiden with name and local habitation, a maiden actual and accessible, whose image he could recall, whose pretty looks and guileless speech he knew.

"I almost wish she was not Ludovic's sister, though," he remarked presently. "It is a great deal to ask."

"You have a great deal to offer," Katherine said, adding: "You can care for her, Dickie?"

He turned his head, his lips working a little, his flushed face very young and bright.

"Oh yes! I can care fast enough," he said. "And I think--I think I could make her happy. And you see, already she worships you. We would pet her, mother, and give her all manner of pretty things, and make a little queen of her--and she would be pleased--she's a child, such a child."

Richard remained awake far into the morning, till the rose had died out of the sky, and the ascending smoke of many kitchen-chimneys began to stain the expanse of heavenly blue. The thought of his possible bride was very sweet to him. But when at last sleep came, dreams came likewise. Helen de Vallorbes' perfect face arose, in reproach, before him, and her azure and purple draperies swept over him, stifling and choking him as the salt waves of an angry sea. Then some one--it was the comely, long-limbed young soldier, Mr. Decies--whom he had seen last night at the Barkings' great party when Morabita sang--and the soprano's matchless voice was mixed up, in the strangest fashion, with all these transactions--lifted Helen and all her magic sea-waves from off him, setting him free. But even as he did so, Dickie perceived that it was not Helen, after all, whom the young soldier carried in his arms, but little Lady Constance Quayle. Whereupon Richard, waking with a start, conceived a wholly unreasoning detestation of Mr. Decies, while, along with that, his purpose of marrying Lady Constance increased notably, waxed strong and grew, putting forth all manner of fair flowers of promise and of hope.

CHAPTER IV

A LESSON UPON THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT--"PARENTS OBEY YOUR CHILDREN"

A family council was in course of holding in the lofty, white-and-gold boudoir, overlooking the Park, in Albert Gate. Lady Louisa Barking had summoned it. She had also exercised a measure of selection among intending members. For instance Lady Margaret and Lady Emily,--the former having a disposition, in the opinion of her elder sister, to put herself forward and support the good cause with more zeal than discretion, the latter being but a weak-kneed supporter of the cause at best,--were summarily dismissed.

"It was really perfectly unnecessary to discuss this sort of thing before the younger girls," she said. "It put them out of their place and rather rubbed the freshness off their minds. And then they would chatter among themselves. And it all became a little foolish and missy. They never knew when to stop."

One member of the Quayle family, and that a leading one, had taken his dismissal before it was given and, with a nice mixture of defective

moral-courage and good common-sense, had removed himself bodily from the neighbourhood of the scene of action. Lord Shotover was still in London. Along with the payment of his debts had come a remarkable increase of cheerfulness. He made no more allusions to the unpleasant subject of cutting his throat, while the proposed foreign tour had been relegated to a vague future. It seemed a pity not to see the season out. It would be little short of a crime to miss Goodwood. He might go out with Decies to India in the autumn, when that young soldier's leave had expired, and look Guy up a bit. He would rather like a turn at pig-sticking--and there were plenty of pig, he understood, in the neighbourhood of Agra, where his brother was now stationed. On the morning in question, Lord Shotover, in excellent spirits, had walked down Piccadilly with his father, from his rooms in Jermyn Street to Albert Gate. The elder gentleman, arriving from Westchurch by an early train, had solaced himself with a share of the by no means ascetic breakfast of which his eldest son was partaking at a little after half-past ten. It was very much too good a breakfast for a person in Lord Shotover's existing financial position--so indeed were the rooms--so, in respect of locality, was Jermyn Street itself. Lord Fallowfeild knew this, no man better. Yet he was genuinely pleased, impressed even, by the luxury with which his erring son was surrounded, and proceeded to praise his cook, praise his valet's waiting at table, praise some fine old sporting prints upon the wall. He went so far, indeed, as to chuckle discreetly--immaculately faithful husband though he was--over certain photographs of ladies, more fair and kind than wise, which were stuck in the frame of the looking-glass over the chimneypiece. In return for which acts of good-fellowship Lord Shotover accompanied him as far as the steps of the mansion in Albert Gate. There he paused, remarking with the most disarming frankness:--

"I would come in. I want to awfully, I assure you. I quite agree with you about all this affair, you know, and I should uncommonly like to let the others know it. But, between ourselves, Louisa's been so short with me lately, so infernally short--if you'll pardon my saying so--that it's become downright disagreeable to me to run across her. So I'm afraid I might only make matters worse all round, don't you know, if I put in an appearance this morning."

"Has she, though?" ejaculated Lord Fallowfeild, in reference presumably to his eldest daughter's reported shortness. "My dear boy, don't think of it. I wouldn't have you exposed to unnecessary unpleasantness on any account."

Then, as he followed the groom-of-the-chambers up the bare, white, marble staircase--which struck almost vaultlike in its chill and silence, after the heat and glare and turmoil of the great thoroughfare without--he added to himself:--

"Good fellow, Shotover. Has his faults, but upon my word, when you come to think of it, so have all of us. Very good-hearted, sensible fellow at bottom, Shotover. Always responds when you talk rationally to him. No nonsense about him."--His lordship sighed as he climbed the marble stair. "Great comfort to me at times Shotover. Shows very proper feeling on the present occasion, but naturally feels a diffidence about

expressing it."

Thus, in the end, it happened that the family council consisted only of the lady of the house, her sister Lady Alicia Winterbotham, Mr. Ludovic Quayle, and the parent whom all three of them were, each in their several ways, so perfectly willing to instruct in his duty towards his children.

Ludovic, perhaps, displayed less alacrity than usual in offering good advice to his father. His policy was rather that of masterly inactivity. Indeed, as the discussion waxed hot--his sisters' voices rising slightly in tone, while Lord Fallowfeild's replies disclosed a vein of dogged obstinacy--he withdrew from the field of battle and moved slowly round the room staring abstractedly at the pictures. There was a seductive, female head by Greuze, a couple of reposeful landscapes by Morland, a little Constable--waterways, trees, and distant woodland, swept by wind and weather. But upon these the young man bestowed scant attention. That which fascinated his gaze was a series of half-length portraits in oval frames, representing his parents, himself, his sisters, and brothers. These portraits were the work of a lady whose artistic gifts, and whose prices, were alike modest. They were in coloured chalks, and had, after adorning her own sitting-room for a number of years, been given, as a wedding present, by Lady Fallowfeild to her eldest daughter. Mr. Quayle reviewed them leisurely now, looking over his shoulder now and again to note how the tide of battle rolled, and raising his eyebrows in mute protest when the voices of the two ladies became more than usually elevated.

"You see, papa, you have not been here"--Lady Louisa was saying.

"No, I haven't," interrupted Lord Fallowfeild. "And very much I regret that I haven't. Should have done my best to put a stop to this engagement at the outset--before there was any engagement at all, in fact."

"And so you cannot possibly know how the whole thing--any breaking off I mean--would be regarded."

"Can't I, though?" said Lord Fallowfeild. "I know perfectly well how I should regard it myself."

"You do not take the advantages sufficiently into consideration, papa. Of course with their enormous wealth they can afford to do anything."--Mr. Winterbotham's income was far from princely at this period, and Lady Alicia was liable to be at once envious of, and injured by, the riches of others. Her wardrobe was limited. She was, this morning, vexatiously conscious of a warmer hue in the back pleats than in the front breadth of her mauve, cashmere dress, sparsely decorated with bows of but indifferently white ribbon. "It has enabled them to make an immense success. One really gets rather tired of hearing about them. But everybody goes to their house, you know, and says that he is perfectly charming."

"Half the parents in London would jump at the chance of one of their

girls making such a marriage,"--this from Lady Louisa.

Mr. Quayle looked over his shoulder and registered a conviction that his father did not belong to that active, parental moiety. He sat stubbornly on a straight-backed, white-and-gold chair, his hands clasped on the top of his favourite, gold-headed walking-stick. He had refused to part with this weapon on entering the house. It gave him a sense of authority, of security. Meanwhile his habitually placid and infantile countenance wore an expression of the acutest worry.

"Would they, though?" he said, in response to his daughter's information regarding the jumping moiety.--"Well, I shouldn't. In point of fact, I don't. All that you and Alicia tell me may be perfectly true, my dear Louisa. I would not, for a moment, attempt to discredit your statements. And I don't wish to be intemperate.--Stupid thing intemperance, sign of weakness, intemperance.--Still I must repeat, and I do repeat, I repeat clearly, that I do not approve of this engagement."

"Did not I prophesy long, long ago what my father's attitude would be, Louisa?" Mr. Quayle murmured gently, over his shoulder.

Then he fell to contemplating the portrait of his brother Guy, aged seven, who was represented arrayed in a brown-holland blouse of singular formlessness confined at the waist by a black leather belt, and carrying, cupid-like, in his hands a bow and arrows decorated with sky-blue ribbons.--"Were my brothers and I actually such appallingly insipid-looking little idiots?" he asked himself. "In that case the years do bring compensations. We really bear fewer outward traces of utter imbecility now."

"I don't wish to be harsh with you, my dears--never have been harsh, to my knowledge, with any one of my children. Believe in kindness. Always have been lenient with my children----"

"And as indirect consequence thereof note my eldest brother's frequent epistles to the Hebrews!" commented Mr. Quayle softly. "The sweet simplicity of this counterfeit presentment of him, armed with a pea-green bait-tin and jointless fishing-rod, hardly shadows forth the copious insolvencies of recent times!"

"Never have approved of harshness," continued Lord Fallowfeild. "Still I do feel I should have been given an opportunity of speaking my mind sooner. I ought to have been referred to in the first place. It was my right. It was due to me. I don't wish to assert my authority in a tyrannical manner. Hate tyranny, always have hated parental tyranny. Still I feel that it was due to me. And Shotover quite agrees with me. Talked in a very nice, gentlemanly, high-minded way about it all this morning, did Shotover."

The two ladies exchanged glances, drawing themselves up with an assumption of reticence and severity.

"Really!" exclaimed Lady Alicia. "It seems a pity, papa, that

Shotover's actions are not a little more in keeping with his conversation, then."

But Lord Fallowfeild only grasped the head of his walking-stick the tighter, congratulating himself the while on the unshakable firmness both of his mental and physical attitude.

"Oh! ah! yes," he said, rising to heights of quite reckless defiance. "I know there is a great deal of prejudice against Shotover, just now, among you. He alluded to it this morning with a great deal of feeling. He was not bitter, but he is very much hurt, is Shotover. You are hard on him, Alicia. It is a painful thing to observe upon, but you are hard, and so is Winterbotham. I regret to be obliged to put it so plainly, but I was displeased by Winterbotham's tone about your brother, last time you and he were down at Whitney from Saturday to Monday."

"At all events, papa, George has never cost his parents a single penny since he left Balliol," Lady Alicia replied, with some spirit and a very high colour.

But Lord Fallowfeild was not to be beguiled into discussion of side issues, though his amiable face was crumpled and puckered by the effort to present an uncompromising front to the enemy.

"Some of you ought to have written and informed me as soon as you had any suspicion of what was likely to happen. Not to do so was underhand. I do not wish to employ strong language, but I do consider it underhand. Shotover tells me he would have written if he had only known. But, of course, in the present state of feeling, he was shut out from it all. Ludovic did know, I presume. And, I am sorry to say it, but I consider it very unhandsome of Ludovic not to have communicated with me."

At this juncture Mr. Quayle desisted from contemplation of the family portraits and approached the belligerents, threading his way carefully between the many tables and chairs. There was much furniture, yet but few ornaments, in Lady Louisa's boudoir. The young man's long neck was directed slightly forward and his expression was one of polite inquiry.

"It is very warm this morning," he remarked parenthetically, "and as a family we appear to feel it. You did me the honour to refer to me just now, I believe, my dear father? Since my two younger sisters have been banished it has happily become possible to hear both you, and myself, speak. You were saying?"

"That you might very properly have written and told me about this business, and given me an opportunity of expressing my opinion before things reached a head."

Mr. Quayle drew forward a chair and seated himself with mild deliberation. Lord Fallowfeild began to fidget. "Very clever fellow, Ludovic," he said to himself. "Wonderfully cool head"--and he became suspicious of his own wisdom in having made direct appeal to a person

thus distinguished.

"I might have written, my dear father. I admit that I might. But there were difficulties. To begin with, I--in this particular--shared Shotover's position. Louisa had not seen fit to honour me with her confidence.--I beg your pardon, Louisa, you were saying?--And so, you see, I really hadn't anything to write about."

"But--but--this young man"--Lord Fallowfeild was sensible of a singular reluctance to mention the name of his proposed son-in-law--"this young Calmady, you know, he's an intimate friend of yours----"

"Difficulty number two. For I doubted how you would take the matter----"

"Did you, though?" said Lord Fallowfeild, with an appreciable smoothing of crumples and puckers.

"I'm extremely attached to Dickie Calmady. And I did not want to put a spoke in his wheel."

"Of course not, my dear boy, of course not. Nasty unpleasant business putting spokes in other men's wheels, specially when they're your friends. I acknowledge that."

"I am sure you do," Mr. Quayle replied, indulgently. "You are always on the side of doing the generous thing, my dear father,--when you see it."

Here his lordship's grasp upon the head of his walking-stick relaxed sensibly.

"Thank you, Ludovic. Very pleasant thing to have one's son say to one, I must say, uncommonly pleasant."--Alas! he felt himself to be slipping, slipping. "Deuced shrewd, diplomatic fellow, Ludovic," he remarked to himself somewhat ruefully. All the same, the little compliment warmed him through. He knew it made for defeat, yet for the life of him he could not but relish it.--"Very pleasant," he repeated. "But that's not the point, my dear boy. Now, about this young fellow Calmady's proposal for your sister Constance?"

Mr. Quayle looked full at the speaker, and for once his expression held no hint of impertinence or raillery.

"Dickie Calmady is as fine a fellow as ever fought, or won, an almost hopeless battle," he said. "He is somewhat heroic, in my opinion. And he is very lovable."

"Is he, though?" Lord Fallowfeild commented, quite gently.

"A woman who understood him, and had some idea of all he must have gone through, could not well help being very proud of him."

Yet, even while speaking, the young man knew his advocacy to be but

half-hearted. He praised his friend rather than his friend's contemplated marriage.--"But his dear, old lordship's not very quick. He'll never spot that," he added mentally. And then he reflected that little Lady Constance was not very quick either. She might marry obediently, even gladly. But was it probable she would develop sufficient imagination ever to understand, and therefore be proud of, Richard Calmady?

"He is brilliant too," Ludovic continued. "He is as well read as any man of his standing whom I know, and he can think for himself. And, when he is in the vein he is unusually good company."

"Everybody says he is extraordinarily agreeable," broke in Lady Alicia. "Old Lady Combmartin was saying only yesterday--George and I met her at the Aldhams', Louisa, you know, at dinner--that she had not heard better conversation for years. And she was brought up among Macaulay and Rogers and all the Holland House set, so her opinion really is worth having."

But Lord Fallowfeild's grasp had tightened again upon his walking-stick.

"Was she, though?" he said rather incoherently.

"Pray, from all this, don't run away with the notion Calmady is a prig," Ludovic interposed. "He is as keen a sportsman as you are--in as far, of course, as sport is possible for him."

Here Lord Fallowfeild, finding himself somewhat hard pressed, sought relief in movement. He turned sideways, throwing one shapely leg across the other, grasping the supporting walking-stick in his right hand, while with the left he laid hold of the back of the white-and-gold chair.

"Oh! ah! yes," he said valiantly, directing his gaze upon the tree-tops in the Park. "I quite accept all you tell me. I don't want to detract from your friend's merits--poor, mean sort of thing to detract from any man's friend's merits. Gentlemanlike young fellow, Calmady, the little I have seen of him--reminds me of my poor friend his father. I liked his father. But, you see, my dear boy, there is--well, there's no denying it, there is--and Shotover quite----"

"Of course, papa, we all know what you mean," Lady Louisa interposed, with a certain loftiness and, it must be owned, asperity. "I have never pretended there was not something one had to get accustomed to. But really you forget all about it almost immediately--every one does--one can see that--don't they, Alicia? If you had met Sir Richard everywhere, as we have this season, you would realise how very very soon that is quite forgotten."

"Is it, though?" said Lord Fallowfeild somewhat incredulously. His face had returned to a sadly puckered condition.

"Yes, I assure you, nobody thinks of it, after just the first little

shock, don't you know,"--this from Lady Louisa.

"I think one feels it is not quite nice to dwell on a thing of that kind," her sister chimed in, reddening again. "It ought to be ignored."--From a girl, the speaker had enjoyed a reputation for great refinement of mind.

"I think it amounts to being more than not nice," echoed Lady Louisa. "I think it is positively wrong, for nobody can tell what accident may not happen to any of us at any moment. And so I am not at all sure that it is not actually unchristian to make a thing like that into a serious objection."

"You know, papa, there must be deformed people in some families, just as there is consumption or insanity."

"Or under-breeding, or attenuated salaries," Mr. Quayle softly murmured. "It becomes evident, my dear father, you must not expect too much of sons, or I of brothers-in-law."

"Think of old Lord Sokeington--I mean the great uncle of the present man, of course--of his temper," Lady Louisa proceeded, regardless of ironical comment. "It amounted almost to mania. And yet Lady Dorothy Hellard would certainly have married him. There never was any question about it."

"Would she, though? Bad, old man, Sokeington. Never did approve of Sokeington."

"Of course she would. Mrs. Crookenden, who always has been devoted to her, told me so."

"Did she, though?" said Lord Fallowfeild. "But the marriage was broken off, my dear."

He made this remark triumphantly, feeling it showed great acuteness.

"Oh, dear no! indeed it wasn't," his daughter replied. "Lord Sokeington behaved in the most outrageous manner. At the last moment he never proposed to her at all. And then it came out that for years he had been living with one of the still-room maids."

"Louisa!" cried Lady Alicia, turning scarlet.

"Had he, though? The old scoundrel!"

"Papa," cried Lady Alicia.

"So he was, my dear. Very bad old man, Sokeington. Very amusing old man too, though."

And, overcome by certain reminiscences, Lord Fallowfeild chuckled a little, shamefacedly. His second daughter thereupon arranged the folds of her mauve cashmere, with bent head.--"It is very clear papa and

Shotover have been together to-day," she thought. "Shotover's influence over papa is always demoralising. It's too extraordinary the subjects men joke about and call amusing when they get together."

A pause followed, a brief cessation of hostilities, during which Mr. Quayle looked inquiringly at his three companions.

"Alicia fancies herself shocked," he said to himself, "and my father fancies himself wicked, and Louisa fancies herself a chosen vessel. Strong delusion is upon them all. The only question is whose delusion is the strongest, and who, consequently, will first renew the fray? Ah! the chosen vessel! I thought as much."

"You see, papa, one really must be practical," Lady Louisa began in clear, emphatic tones. "We all know how you have spoiled Constance. She and Shotover have always been your favourites. But even you must admit that Shotover's wretched extravagance has impoverished you, and helped to impoverish all your other children. And you must also admit, notwithstanding your partiality for Constance, that----"

"I want to see Connie. I want to hear from herself that she"--broke out Lord Fallowfeild. His kindly heart yearned over this ewe-lamb of his large flock. But the eldest of the said flock interposed sternly.

"No, no," she cried, "pray, papa, not yet. Connie is quite contented and reasonable--I believe she is out shopping just now, too. And while you are in this state of indecision yourself, it would be the greatest mistake for you to see her. It would only disturb and upset her--wouldn't it, Alicia?"

And the lady thus appealed to assented. It is true that when she arrived at the great house in Albert Gate that morning she had found little Lady Constance with her pretty, baby face sadly marred by tears. But she had put that down to the exigencies of the situation. All young ladies of refined mind cried under kindred circumstances. Had she not herself wept copiously, for the better part of a week, before finally deciding to accept George Winterbotham? Moreover, a point of jealousy undoubtedly pricked Lady Alicia in this connection. She was far from being a cruel woman, but, comparing her own modest material advantages in marriage with the surprisingly handsome ones offered to her little sister, she could not be wholly sorry that the latter's rose was not entirely without thorns. That the flower in question should have been thornless, as well as so very fine and large, would surely have trenched on injustice to herself. This thought had, perhaps unconsciously, influenced her when enlarging on the becomingness of a refined indifference to Sir Richard Calmady's deformity. In her heart of hearts she was disposed, perhaps unconsciously, to hail rather than deplore the fact of that same deformity. For did it not tend subjectively to equalise her lot and that of her little sister, and modify the otherwise humiliating disparity of their respective fortunes? Therefore she capped Lady Louisa's speech, by saying immediately:--

"Yes, indeed, papa, it would only be an unkindness to run any risk of

upsetting Connie. No really nice girl ever really quite likes the idea of marriage----"

"Doesn't she, though?" commented Lord Fallowfeild, with an air of receiving curious, scientific information.

"Oh, of course not! How could she? And then, papa, you know how you have always indulged Connie"--Lady Alicia's voice was slightly peevish in tone. She was not in very good health at the present time, with the consequence that her face showed thin and bird-like. While, notwithstanding the genial heat of the summer's day, she presented a starved and chilly appearance.--"Always indulged Connie," she repeated, "and that has inclined her to be rather selfish and fanciful."

The above statements, both regarding his own conduct and the effect of that conduct upon his little ewe-lamb, nettled the amiable nobleman considerably. He faced round upon the speaker with an intention of reprimand, but in so doing his eyes were arrested by his daughter's faded dress and disorganised complexion. He relented.--"Poor thing, looks ill," he thought. "A man's an unworthy brute who ever says a sharp word to a woman in her condition."--And, before he had time to find a word other than sharp, Lady Louisa Barking returned to the charge.

"Exactly," she asserted. "Alicia is perfectly right. At present Connie is quite reasonable. And all we entreat, papa, is that you will let her remain so, until you have made up your own mind. Do pray let us be dignified. One knows how the servants get hold of anything of this kind and discuss it, if there is any want of dignity or any indecision. That is too odious. And I must really think just a little of Mr. Barking and myself in the matter. It has all gone on in our house, you see. One must consider appearances, and with all the recent gossip about Shotover, we do not want another _esclandre_--the servants knowing all about it too. And then, with all your partiality for Constance, you cannot suppose she will have many opportunities of marrying men with forty or fifty thousand a year."

"No, papa, as Louisa says, in your partiality for Connie you must not entirely forget the claims of your other children. She must not be encouraged to think exclusively of herself, and it is not fair that you should think exclusively of her. I know that George and I are poor, but it is through no fault of our own. He most honourably refuses to take anything from his mother, and you know how small my private income is. Yet no one can accuse George of lack of generosity. When any of my family want to come to us he always makes them welcome. Maggie only left us last Thursday, and Emily comes to-morrow. I know we can't do much. It is not possible with our small means and establishment. But what little we can do, George is most willing should be done."

"Excellent fellow, Winterbotham," Lord Fallowfeild put in soothingly. "Very steady, painstaking man, Winterbotham."

His second daughter looked at him reproachfully.

"Thank you, papa," she said. "I own I was a little hurt just now by the tone in which you alluded to George."

"Were you, though? I'm sure I'm very sorry, my dear Alicia. Hate to hurt anybody, especially one of my own children. Unnatural thing to hurt one of your own children. But you see this feeling of all of yours about Shotover has been very painful to me. I never have liked divisions in families. Never know where they may lead to. Nasty, uncomfortable things divisions in families."

"Well, papa, I can only say that divisions are almost invariably caused by a want of the sense of duty." Lady Louisa's voice was stern. "And if people are over-indulged they become selfish, and then, of course, they lose their sense of duty."

"My sister is a notable logician," Mr. Quayle murmured, under his breath. "If logic ruled life, how clear, how simple our course! But then, unfortunately, it doesn't."

"Shotover has really no one but himself to thank for any bitterness that his brothers and sisters may feel towards him. He has thrown away his chances, has got the whole family talked about in a most objectionable manner, and has been a serious encumbrance to you, and indirectly to all of us. We have all suffered quite enough trouble and annoyance already. And so I must protest, papa, I must very strongly and definitely protest, against Connie being permitted, still more encouraged, to do exactly the same thing."

Lord Fallowfeild, still grasping his walking-stick,--though he could not but fear that trusted weapon had proved faithless and sadly failed in its duty of support,--gazed distractedly at the speaker. Visions of Jewish money-lenders, of ladies more fair and kind than wise, of guinea points at whist, of the prize ring of Baden-Baden, of Newmarket and Doncaster, arose confusedly before him. What the deuce,--he did not like bad language, but really,--what the dickens, had all these to do with his ewe-lamb, innocent little Constance, her virgin-white body and soul, and her sweet, wide-eyed prettiness?

"My dear Louisa, no doubt you know what you mean, but I give you my word I don't," he began.

"Hear, hear, my dear father," put in Mr. Quayle. "There I am with you. Louisa's wing is strong, her range is great. I myself, on this occasion, find it not a little difficult to follow her."

"Nonsense, Ludovic," almost snapped the lady. "You follow me perfectly, or can do so if you use your common sense. Papa must face the fact, that Constance cannot afford--that we cannot afford to have her--throw away her chances, as Shotover has thrown away his. We all have a duty, not only to ourselves, but to each other. Inclination must give way to duty--though I do not say Constance exhibits any real disinclination to this marriage. She is a little flurried. As Alicia said just now, every really nice-minded girl is flurried at the idea of marriage. She ought to be. I consider it only delicate that she should be. But she

understands--I have pointed it out to her--that her money, her position, and those two big houses--Brockhurst and the one in Lowndes Square--will be of the greatest advantage to the girls and to her brothers. It is not as if she was nobody. The scullery-maid can marry whom she likes, of course. But in our rank of life it is different. A girl is bound to think of her family, as well as of herself. She is bound to consider----"

The groom-of-the-chambers opened the door and advanced solemnly across the boudoir to Lord Fallowfeild.

"Sir Richard Calmady is in the smoking-room, my lord," he said, "to see you."

CHAPTER V

IPHIGENIA

Chastened in spirit, verbally acquiescent, yet unconvinced, a somewhat pitiable sense of inadequacy upon him, Lord Fallowfeild traveled back to Westchurch that night. Two days later the morning papers announced to all whom it might concern,--and that far larger all, whom it did not really concern in the least,--in the conventional phrases common to such announcements, that Sir Richard Calmady and Lady Constance Quayle had agreed shortly to become man and wife. Thus did Katherine Calmady, in all trustfulness, strive to give her son his desire, while the great, and little, world looked on and made comments, various as the natures and circumstances of the units composing them.

Lady Louisa was filled with the pride of victory. Her venture had not miscarried. At church on Sunday--she was really too busy socially, just now, to attend what it was her habit to describe as "odds and ends of week-day services," and therefore worshipped on the Sabbath only, and then by no means in secret or with shut door--she repeated the General Thanksgiving with much unction and in an aggressively audible voice. And Lady Alicia Winterbotham expressed a peevish hope that,--"such great wealth might not turn Constance's head and make her just a little vulgar. It was all rather dangerous for a girl of her age, and she"--the speaker--"trusted _somebody_ would point out to Connie the heavy responsibilities towards others such a position brought with it." And Lord Shotover delivered it as his opinion that,--"It might be all right. He hoped to goodness it was, for he'd always been uncommonly fond of the young un. But it seemed to him rather a put-up job all round, and so he meant just to keep his eye on Con, he swore he did." In furtherance of which laudable determination he braved his eldest sister's frowns with heroic intrepidity, calling to see the young girl whenever all other sources of amusement failed him, and paying her the compliment--as is the habit of the natural man, when unselfishly desirous of giving

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