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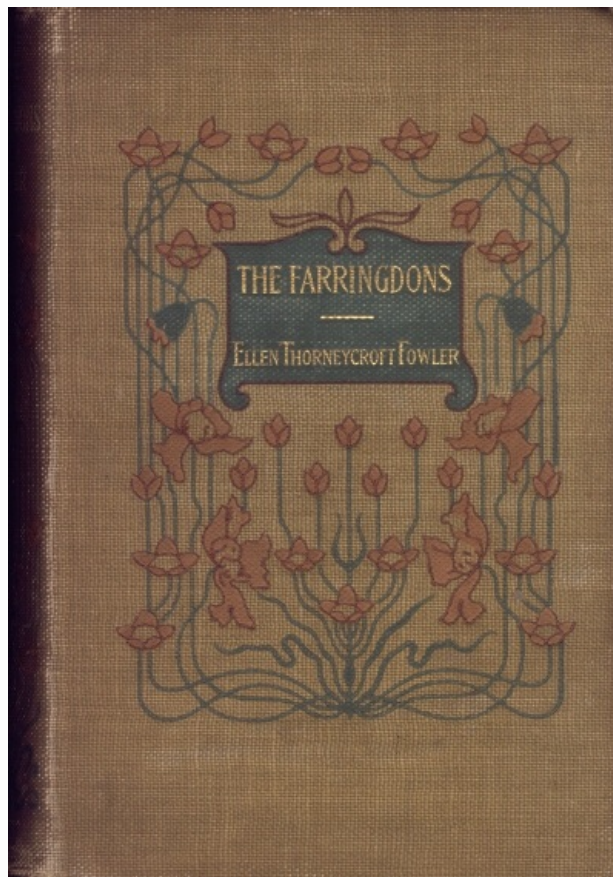
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# THE FARRINGDONS

BY ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER  
AUTHOR OF CONCERNING ISABEL  
CARNABY, A DOUBLE THREAD,  
ETC.



NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
1900

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### DEDICATION

For all such readers as have chanced to be  
Either in Mershire or in Arcady,  
I write this book, that each may smile, and say,  
"Once on a time I also passed that way."

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## THE FARRINGDONS

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# CHAPTER I

## THE OSIERFIELD

They herded not with soulless swine,  
Nor let strange snares their path environ:  
Their only pitfall was a mine—  
Their pigs were made of iron.

In the middle of Sedgehill, which is in the middle of Mershire, which is in the middle of England, there lies a narrow ridge of high table-land, dividing, as by a straight line, the collieries and ironworks of the great coal district from the green and pleasant scenery of the western Midlands. Along the summit of this ridge runs the High Street of the bleak little town of Sedgehill; so that the houses on the east side of this street see nothing through their back windows save the huge slag-mounds and blazing furnaces and tall chimneys of the weird and terrible, yet withal fascinating, Black Country; while the houses on the west side of the street have sunny gardens and fruitful orchards, sloping down toward a fertile land of woods and streams and meadows, bounded in the far distance by the Clee Hills and the Wrekin, and in the farthest distance of all by the blue Welsh mountains.

In the dark valley lying to the immediate east of Sedgehill stood the Osierfield Works, the largest ironworks in Mershire in the good old days when Mershire made iron for half the world. The owners of these works were the Farringdons, and had been so for several generations. So it came to pass that the Farringdons were the royal family of Sedgehill; and the Osierfield Works was the circle wherein the inhabitants of that place lived and moved. It was as natural for everybody born in Sedgehill eventually to work at the Osierfield, as it was for him eventually to grow into a man and to take unto himself a wife.

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The home of the Farringdons was called the Willows, and was separated by a carriage-drive of half a mile from the town. Its lodge stood in the High Street, on the western side; and the drive wandered through a fine old wood, and across an undulating park, till it stopped in front of a large square house built of gray stone. It was a handsome house inside, with wonderful oak staircases and Adams chimney-pieces; and there was an air of great stateliness about it, and of very little luxury. For the Farringdons were a hardy race, whose time was taken up by the making of iron and the saving of souls; and they regarded sofas and easy-chairs in very much the same light as they regarded theatres and strong drink, thereby proving that their spines were as strong as their consciences were stern.

Moreover, the Farringdons were of "the people called Methodists"; consequently Methodism was the established religion of Sedgehill, possessing there that prestige which is the inalienable attribute of all state churches. In the eyes of Sedgehill it was as necessary to salvation to pray at the chapel as to work at the Osierfield; and the majority of the inhabitants would as soon have thought of worshipping at any other sanctuary as of worshipping at the beacon, a pillar which still marks the highest point of the highest table-land in England.

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At the time when this story begins, the joint ownership of the Osierfield and the Willows was vested in the two Miss Farringdons, the daughters and co-heiresses of John Farringdon. John Farringdon and his brother William had been partners, and had arranged between themselves that William's only child, George, should marry John's eldest daughter, Maria, and so consolidate the brothers' fortunes and their interest in the works. But the gods—and George—saw otherwise. George was a handsome, weak boy, who objected equally to work and to Methodism; and as his father cared for nothing beyond those sources of interest, and had no patience for any one who did, the two did not always see eye to eye. Perhaps if Maria had been more unbending, things might have turned out differently; but Methodism in its severest aspects was not more severe than Maria Farringdon. She was a thorough gentlewoman, and extremely clever; but tenderness was not counted among her excellencies. George would have been fond of almost any woman who was pretty enough to be loved and not clever enough to be feared; but his cousin Maria was beyond even his powers of falling in love, although, to do him justice, these powers were by no means limited. The end of it was that George offended his father past forgiveness by running away to Australia

rather than marry Maria, and there disappeared. Years afterward a rumour reached his people that he had married and died out there, leaving a widow and an only son; but this rumour had not been verified, as by that time his father and uncle were dead, and his cousins were reigning in his stead; and it was hardly to be expected that the proud Miss Farringdon would take much trouble concerning the woman whom her weak-kneed kinsman had preferred to herself.

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William Farringdon left all his property and his share in the works to his niece Maria, as some reparation for the insult which his disinherited son had offered to her; John left his large fortune between his two daughters, as he never had a son; so Maria and Anne Farringdon lived at the Willows, and carried on the Osierfield with the help of Richard Smallwood, who had been the general manager of the collieries and ironworks belonging to the firm in their father's time, and knew as much about iron (and most other things) as he did. Maria was a good woman of business, and she and Richard between them made money as fast as it had been made in the days of William and John Farringdon. Anne, on the contrary, was a meek and gentle soul, who had no power of governing but a perfect genius for obedience, and who was always engaged on the Herculean task of squaring the sternest dogmas with the most indulgent practices.

Even in the early days of this history the Miss Farringdons were what is called "getting on"; but the Willows was, nevertheless, not without a youthful element in it. Close upon a dozen years ago the two sisters had adopted the orphaned child of a second cousin, whose young widow had died in giving birth to a posthumous daughter; and now Elisabeth Farringdon was the light of the good ladies' eyes, though they would have considered it harmful to her soul to let her have an inkling of this fact.

She was not a pretty little girl, which was a source of much sorrow of heart to her; and she was a distinctly clever little girl, of which she was utterly unconscious, it being an integral part of Miss Farringdon's system of education to imbue the young with an overpowering sense of their own inferiority and unworthiness. During the first decade of her existence Elisabeth used frequently and earnestly to pray that her hair might become golden and her eyes brown; but as on this score the heavens remained as brass, and her hair continued dark brown and her eyes blue-gray, she changed her tactics, and confined her heroine-worship to ladies of this particular style of colouring; which showed that, even at the age of ten, Elisabeth had her full share of adaptability.

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One day, when walking with Miss Farringdon to chapel, Elisabeth exclaimed, *à propos* of nothing but her own meditations, "Oh! Cousin Maria, I do wish I was pretty!"

Most people would have been too much afraid of the lady of the Willows to express so frivolous a desire in her august hearing; but Elisabeth was never afraid of anybody, and that, perhaps, was one of the reasons why her severe kinswoman loved her so well.

"That is a vain wish, my child. Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain; and the Lord looketh on the heart and not on the outward appearance."

"But I wasn't thinking of the Lord," replied Elisabeth: "I was thinking of other people; and they love you much more if you are pretty than if you aren't."

"That is not so," said Miss Farringdon—and she believed she was speaking the truth; "if you serve God and do your duty to your neighbour, you will find plenty of people ready to love you; and especially if you carry yourself well and never stoop." Like many another elect lady, Cousin Maria regarded beauty of face as a vanity, but beauty of figure as a virtue; and to this doctrine Elisabeth owed the fact that her back always sloped in the opposite direction to the backs of the majority of people.

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But it would have surprised Miss Farringdon to learn how little real effect her strict Methodist training had upon Elisabeth; fortunately, however, few elder people ever do learn how little effect their training has upon the young committed to their charge; if it were so, life would be too hard for the generation that has passed the hill-top. Elisabeth's was one of those happy, pantheistic natures that possess the gift of finding God everywhere and in everything. She early caught the Methodist habit of self-analysis and introspection, but in her it did not develop—as it does in more naturally religious souls—into an almost morbid conscientiousness and self-depreciation; she merely found an artistic and intellectual pleasure in taking the machinery of her soul to pieces and seeing how it worked.

In those days—and, in fact, in all succeeding ones—Elisabeth lived in a world of imagination. There was not a nook in the garden of the Willows which was not peopled by creatures of her fancy. At this particular time she was greatly fascinated by the subject of heathen mythology, as set forth in Mangnall's Questions, and had devoted herself to the service of Pallas Athene, having learned that that goddess was (like herself) not surpassingly beautiful, and was, moreover, handicapped by the possession of gray eyes. Miss Farrington would have been horrified had she known that a portion of the wood was set apart by Elisabeth as "Athene's Grove," and that the contents of the waste-paper basket were daily begged from the servants by the devotee, and offered up, by the aid of real matches, on the shrine of the goddess.

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"Have you noticed, sister," Miss Anne remarked on one occasion, "how much more thoughtful dear Elisabeth is growing?" Miss Anne's life was one long advertisement of other people's virtues. "She used to be somewhat careless in letting the fires go out, and so giving the servants the trouble to relight them; but now she is always going round the rooms to see if more coal is required, without my ever having to remind her."

"It is so, and I rejoice. Carelessness in domestic matters is a grave fault in a young girl, and I am pleased that Elisabeth has outgrown her habit of wool-gathering, and of letting the fire go out under her very nose without noticing it. It is a source of thanksgiving to me that the child is so much more thoughtful and considerate in this matter than she used to be."

Miss Farrington's thanksgiving, however, would have been less fervent had she known that, for the time being, her *protégée* had assumed the rôle of a Vestal virgin, and that Elisabeth's care of the fires that winter was not fulfilment of a duty but part of a game. This, however, was Elisabeth's way; she frequently received credit for performing a duty when she was really only taking part in a performance; which merely meant that she possessed the artist's power of looking at duty through the haze of idealism, and of seeing that, although it was good, it might also be made picturesque. Elisabeth was well versed in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Fairchild Family*. The spiritual vicissitudes of Lucy, Emily, and Henry Fairchild were to her a drama of never-failing interest; while each besetment of the Crosbie household—which was as carefully preserved for its particular owner as if sin were a species of ground game—never failed to thrill her with enjoyable disgust. She knew a great portion of the Methodist hymn-book by heart, and pondered long over the interesting preface to that work, wondering much what "doggerel" and "botches" could be—she inclined to the supposition that the former were animals and the latter were diseases; but even her vivid imagination failed to form a satisfactory representation of such queer kittle-cattle as "feeble expletives." Every Sunday she gloated over the frontispiece of John Wesley, in his gown and bands and white ringlets, feeling that, though poor as a picture, it was very superior to the letterpress; the worst illustrations being better than the best poetry, as everybody under thirteen must know. But Elisabeth's library was not confined to the volumes above mentioned; she regularly perused with interest two little periodicals, called respectively *Early Days* and *The Juvenile Offering*. The former treated of youthful saints at home; and its white paper cover was adorned by the picture of a shepherd, comfortably if peculiarly attired in a frock coat and top hat—presumably to portray that it was Sunday. The latter magazine devoted itself to histories dealing with youthful saints abroad; and its cover was decorated with a representation of young black persons apparently engaged in some religious exercise. In this picture the frock coats and top hats were conspicuous by their absence.

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There were two pictures in the breakfast-room at the Willows which occupied an important place in Elisabeth's childish imaginings. The first hung over the mantelpiece, and was called *The Centenary Meeting*. It represented a chapel full of men in suffocating cravats, turning their backs upon the platform and looking at the public instead—a more effective if less realistic attitude than the ordinary one of sitting the right way about; because—as Elisabeth reasoned, and reasoned rightly—if these gentlemen had not happened to be behind before when their portraits were taken, nobody would ever have known whose portraits they were. It was a source of great family pride to her that her grandfather appeared in this galaxy of Methodist worth; but the hero of the piece, in her eyes, was one gentleman who had managed to swarm up a pillar and there screw himself "to the sticking-place"; and how he had done it Elisabeth never could conceive.

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The second picture hung over the door, and was a counterfeit presentment of John Wesley's escape from the burning rectory at Epworth. In those days Elisabeth was so small and the picture hung so high that she could not see it very distinctly; but it appeared to her that the boy Wesley (whom she confused in her own mind with the infant Samuel) was flying out of an attic window by means of flowing white wings, while a horse was suspended in mid-air ready to carry him straight to heaven.

Every Sunday she accompanied her cousins to East Lane Chapel, at the other end of Sedgell, and here she saw strange visions and dreamed strange dreams. The distinguishing feature of this sanctuary was a sort of reredos in oils, in memory of a dead and gone Farrington, which depicted a gigantic urn, surrounded by a forest of cypress, through the shades whereof flitted "young-eyed cherubims" with dirty wings and bilious complexions, these last mentioned blemishes being, it is but fair to add, the fault of the atmosphere and not of the artist. For years Elisabeth firmly believed that this altar-piece was a trustworthy representation of heaven; and she felt, therefore, a pleasant, proprietary interest in it, as the view of an estate to which she would one day succeed.

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There was also a stained-glass window in East Lane Chapel, given by the widow of a leading official. The baptismal name of the deceased had been Jacob; and the window showed forth Jacob's Dream, as a delicate compliment to the departed. Elisabeth delighted in this window, it was so realistic. The patriarch lay asleep, with his head on a little white tombstone at the foot of a solid oak staircase, which was covered with a red carpet neatly fastened down by brass rods; while up and down this staircase strolled fair-haired angels in long white nightgowns and purple wings.

Not of course then, but in after years, Elisabeth learned to understand that this window was a type and an explanation of the power of early Methodism, the strength whereof lay in its marvellous capacity of adapting religion to the needs and use of everyday life, and of bringing the infinite into the region of the homely and commonplace. We, with our added culture and our maturer artistic perceptions, may smile at a Jacob's Ladder formed according to the domestic architecture of the first half of the nineteenth century; but the people to whom the other world was so near and so real that they perceived nothing incongruous in an ordinary stair-carpet which was being trodden by the feet of angels, had grasped a truth which on one side touched the divine, even though on the other it came perilously near to the grotesque. And He, Who taught them as by parables, never misunderstood—as did certain of His followers—their reverent irreverence; but, understanding it, saw that it was good.

The great day in East Lane Chapel was the Sunday School anniversary; and in Elisabeth's childish eyes this was a feast compared with which Christmas and Easter sank to the level of black-letter days. On these festivals the Sunday School scholars sat all together in those parts of the gallery adjacent to the organ, the girls wearing white frocks and blue neckerchiefs, and the boys black suits and blue ties. The pews were strewn with white hymn-sheets, which lay all over the chapel like snow in Salmon, and which contained special spiritual songs more stirring in their character than the contents of the Hymn-book; these hymns the Sunday School children sang by themselves, while the congregation sat swaying to and fro to the tune. And Elisabeth's soul was uplifted within her as she listened to the children's voices; for she felt that mystical hush which—let us hope—comes to us all at some time or other, when we hide our faces in our mantles and feel that a Presence is passing by, and is passing by so near to us that we have only to stretch out our hands in order to touch it. At sundry times and in divers manners does that wonderful sense of a Personal Touch come to men and to women. It may be in a wayside Bethel, it may be in one of the fairest fanes of Christendom, or it may be not in any temple made with hands: according to the separate natures which God has given to us, so must we choose the separate ways that will lead us to Him; and as long as there are different natures there must be various ways. Then let each of us take the path at the end whereof we see Him standing, always remembering that wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein; and never forgetting that—come whence and how they may—whosoever shall touch but the hem of His garment shall be made perfectly whole.

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## CHAPTER II



## CHRISTOPHER

And when perchance of all perfection  
You've seen an end,  
Your thoughts may turn in my direction  
To find a friend.

There are two things which are absolutely necessary to the well-being of the normal feminine mind—namely, one romantic attachment and one comfortable friendship. Elisabeth was perfectly normal and extremely feminine; and consequently she provided herself early with these two aids to happiness.

In those days the object of her romantic attachment was her cousin Anne. Anne Farrington was one of those graceful, elegant women who appear so much deeper than they really are. All her life she had been inspiring devotion which she was utterly unable to fathom; and this was still the case with regard to herself and her adoring little worshipper.

People always wondered why Anne Farrington had never married; and explained the mystery to their own satisfaction by conjecturing that she had had a disappointment in her youth, and had been incapable of loving twice. It never struck them—which was actually the case—that she had been incapable of loving once; and that her single-blessedness was due to no unforgotten love-story, but to the unromantic fact that among her score of lovers she had never found a man for whom she seriously cared. In a delicate and ladylike fashion she had flirted outrageously in her time; but she had always broken hearts so gently, and put away the pieces so daintily, that the owners of these hearts had never dreamed of resenting the damage she had wrought. She had refused them with such a world of pathos in her beautiful eyes—the Farrington gray-blue eyes, with thick black brows and long black lashes—that the poor souls had never doubted her sympathy and comprehension; nor had they the slightest idea that she was totally ignorant of the depth of the love which she had inspired, or the bitterness of the pain which she had caused.

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All the romance of Elisabeth's nature—and there was a great deal of it—was lavished upon Anne Farrington. If Anne smiled, Elisabeth's sky was cloudless; if Anne sighed, Elisabeth's sky grew gray. The mere sound of Anne's voice vibrated through the child's whole being; and every little trifle connected with her cousin became a sacred relic in Elisabeth's eyes.

Like every Methodist child, Elisabeth was well versed in her Bible; but, unlike most Methodist children, she regarded it more as a poetical than an ethical work. When she was only twelve, the sixty-eighth Psalm thrilled her as with the sound of a trumpet; and she was completely carried away by the glorious imagery of the Book of Isaiah, even when she did not in the least understand its meaning. But her favourite book was the Book of Ruth; for was not Ruth's devotion to Naomi the exact counterpart of hers to Cousin Anne? And she used to make up long stories in her own mind about how Cousin Anne should, by some means, lose all her friends and all her money, and be driven out of Sedgemoor and away from the Osierfield Works; and then how Elisabeth would say, "Entreat me not to leave thee," and would follow Cousin Anne to the ends of the earth.

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People sometimes smile at the adoration of a young girl for a woman, and there is no doubt but that the feeling savours slightly of school-days and bread-and-butter; but there is also no doubt that a girl who has once felt it has learned what real love is, and that is no small item in the lesson-book of life.

But Elisabeth had her comfortable friendship as well as her romantic attachment; and the partner in that friendship was Christopher Thornley, the nephew of Richard Smallwood.

In the days of his youth, when his father was still manager of the Osierfield Works, Richard had a very pretty sister; but as Emily Smallwood was pretty, so was she also vain, and the strict atmosphere of her home life did not recommend itself to her taste. After many quarrels with her stern old father (her mother having died when she was a baby), Emily left home, and took a situation in London as governess, in the house of some wealthy people with no pretensions to religion. For this her father never forgave her; he called it "consorting with children of Belial." In time she wrote to tell Richard

that she was going to be married, and that she wished to cut off entirely all communication with her old home. After that, Richard lost sight of her for many years; but some time after his father's death he received a letter from Emily, begging him to come to her at once, as she was dying. He complied with her request, and found his once beautiful sister in great poverty in a London lodging-house. She told him that she had endured great sorrow, having lost her husband and her five eldest children. Her husband had never been unkind to her, she said, but he was one of the men who lack the power either to make or to keep money; and when he found he was foredoomed to failure in everything to which he turned his hand, he had not the spirit to continue the fight against Fate, but turned his face to the wall and died. She had still one child left, a fair-haired boy of about two years old, called Christopher; to her brother's care she confided this boy, and then she also turned her face to the wall and died.

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This happened a year or so before the Miss Farringdons adopted Elisabeth; so that when that young lady appeared upon the scene, and subsequently grew up sufficiently to require a playfellow, she found Christopher Thornley ready to hand. He lived with his bachelor uncle in a square red house on the east side of Sedgehill High Street, exactly opposite to the Farringdons' lodge. It was one of those big, bald houses with unblinking windows, that stare at you as if they had not any eyebrows or eyelashes; and there was not even a strip of greenery between it and the High Street. So to prevent the passers-by from looking in and the occupants from looking out, the lower parts of the front windows were covered with a sort of black crape mask, which put even the sunbeams into half-mourning.

Unlike Elisabeth, Christopher had a passion for righteousness and for honour, but no power of artistic perception. His standard was whether things were right or wrong, honourable or dishonourable; hers was whether they were beautiful or ugly, pleasant or unpleasant. Consequently the two moved along parallel lines; and she moved a great deal more quickly than he did. Christopher had deep convictions, but was very shy of expressing them; Elisabeth's convictions were not particularly deep, but such as they were, all the world was welcome to them as far as she was concerned.

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As the children grew older, one thing used much to puzzle and perplex Christopher. Elisabeth did not seem to care about being good nearly as much as he cared: he was always trying to do right, and she only tried when she thought about it; nevertheless, when she did give her attention to the matter, she had much more comforting and beautiful thoughts than he had, which appeared rather hard. He was not yet old enough to know that this difference between them arose from no unequal division of divine favour, but was simply and solely a question of temperament. But though he did not understand, he did not complain; for he had been brought up under the shadow of the Osierfield Works, and in the fear and love of the Farringdons; and Elisabeth, whatever her shortcomings, was a princess of the blood.

Christopher was a day-boy at the Grammar School at Silverhampton, a fine old town some three miles to the north of Sedgehill; and there and back he walked every day, wet or fine, and there he learned to be a scholar and a gentleman, and sundry other important things.

"Do you hear that noise?" said Elisabeth, one afternoon in the holidays, when she was twelve and Christopher fifteen; "that's Mrs. Bateson's pig being killed."

"Hear it?—rather," replied Christopher, standing still in the wood to listen.

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"Let's go and see it," Elisabeth suggested.

Christopher looked shocked. "Well, you are a horrid girl! Nothing would induce me to go, or to let you go either; but I'm surprised at your being so horrid as to wish for such a thing."

"It isn't really horridness," Elisabeth explained meekly; "it is interest. I'm so frightfully interested in things; and I want to see everything, just to know what it looks like."

"Well, I call it horrid. And, what's more, if you saw it, it would make you feel ill."

"No; it wouldn't."

"Then it ought to," said Christopher, who, with true masculine dulness of perception, confounded weakness of nerve with tenderness of heart.



Elisabeth sighed. "Nothing makes me feel ill," she replied apologetically; "not even an accident or an after-meeting."

Christopher could not help indulging in a certain amount of envious admiration for an organism that could pass unmoved through such physical and spiritual crises as these; but he was not going to let Elisabeth see that he admired her. He considered it "unmanly" to admire girls.

"Well, you are a rum little cove!" he said.

"Of course, I don't want to go if you think it would be horrid of me; but I thought we might pretend it was the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, and find it most awfully exciting."

"How you do go on about Mary Queen of Scots! Not long ago you were always bothering about heathen goddesses, and now you have no thought for anything but Mary."

"Oh! but I'm still immensely interested in goddesses, Chris; and I do wish, when you are doing Latin and Greek at school, you'd find out what colour Pallas Athene's hair was. Couldn't you?"

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"No; I couldn't."

"But you might ask one of the masters. They'd be sure to know."

Christopher laughed the laugh of the scornful. "I say, you are a duffer to suppose that clever men like schoolmasters bother their heads about such rot as the colour of a woman's hair."

"Of course, I know they wouldn't about a woman's," Elisabeth hastened to justify herself; "but I thought perhaps they might about a goddess's."

"It is the same thing. You've no idea what tremendously clever chaps schoolmasters are—much too clever to take any interest in girls' and women's concerns. Besides, they are too old for that, too—they are generally quite thirty."

Elisabeth was silent for a moment; and Christopher whistled as he looked across the green valley to the sunset, without in the least knowing how beautiful it was. But Elisabeth knew, for she possessed an innate knowledge of many things which he would have to learn by experience. But even she did not yet understand that because the sunset was beautiful she felt a sudden hunger and thirst after righteousness.

"Chris, do you think it is wicked of people to fall in love?" she asked suddenly.

"Not exactly wicked; more silly, I should say," replied Chris generously.

"Because if it is wicked, I shall give up reading tales about it." This was a tremendous and unnatural sacrifice to principle on the part of Elisabeth.

Christopher turned upon her sharply. "You don't read tales that Miss Farrington hasn't said you may read, do you?"

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"Yes; lots. But I never read tales that she has said I mustn't read."

"You oughtn't to read any tale till you have asked her first if you may."

Elisabeth's face fell. "I never thought of doing such a thing as asking her first. Oh! Chris, you don't really think I ought to, do you? Because she'd be sure to say no."

"That is exactly why you ought to ask." Christopher's sense of honour was one of his strong points.

Then Elisabeth lost her temper. "That is you all over! You are the most tiresome boy to have anything to do with! You are always bothering about things being wrong, till you make them wrong. Now I hardly ever think of it; but I can't go on doing things after you've said they are wrong, because that would be wrong of me, don't you see? And yet it wasn't a bit wrong of me before I knew. I hate you!"

"I say, Betty, I'm awfully sorry lo have riled you; but you asked me."

"I didn't ask you whether I need ask Cousin Maria, stupid! You know I didn't. I asked you whether it was wrong to fall in love, and then you went and dragged Cousin Maria

in. I wish I'd never asked you anything; I wish I'd never spoken to you; I wish I'd got somebody else to play with, and then I'd never speak to you again as long as I live."

Of course it was unwise of Christopher to condemn a weakness to which Elisabeth was prone, and to condone one to which she was not; but no man has learned wisdom at fifteen, and but few at fifty.

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"You are the most disagreeable boy I have ever met, and I wish I could think of something to do to annoy you. I know what I'll do; I'll go by myself and see Mrs. Bateson's pig, just to show you how I hate you."

And Elisabeth flew off in the direction of Mrs. Bateson's cottage, with the truly feminine intention of punishing the male being who had dared to disapprove of her, by making him disapprove of her still more. Her programme, however, was frustrated; for Mrs. Bateson herself intervened between Elisabeth and her unholy desires, and entertained the latter with a plate of delicious bread-and-dripping instead. Finally, that young lady returned to her home in a more magnanimous frame of mind; and fell asleep that night wondering if the whole male sex were as stupid as the particular specimen with which she had to do—a problem which has puzzled older female brains than hers.

But poor Christopher was very unhappy. It was agony to him when his conscience pulled him one way and Elisabeth pulled him the other; and yet this form of torture was constantly occurring to him. He could not bear to do what he knew was wrong, and he could not bear to vex Elisabeth; yet Elisabeth's wishes and his own ideas of right were by no means always synonymous. His only comfort was the knowledge that his sovereign's anger was, as a rule, short-lived, and that he himself was indispensable to that sovereign's happiness. This was true; but he did not then realize that it was in his office as admiring and sympathizing audience, and not in his person as Christopher Thornley, that he was necessary to Elisabeth. A fuller revelation was vouchsafed to him later.

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The next morning Elisabeth was herself again, and was quite ready to enjoy Christopher's society and to excuse his scruples. She knew that self of hers when she said that she wished she had somebody else to play with, in order that she might withdraw the light of her presence from her offending henchman. To thus punish Christopher, until she had found some one to take his place, was a course of action which would not have occurred to her. Elisabeth's pride could never stand in the way of her pleasure; Christopher's, on the contrary, might. It was a remarkable fact that after Christopher had reproved Elisabeth for some fault—which happened neither infrequently nor unnecessarily—he was always repentant and she forgiving; yet nine times out of ten he had been in the right and she in the wrong. But Elisabeth's was one of those exceptionally generous natures which can pardon the reproofs and condone the virtues of their friends; and she bore no malice, even when Christopher had been more obviously right than usual. But she was already enough of a woman to adapt to her own requirements his penitence for right-doing; and on this occasion she took advantage of his chastened demeanour to induce him to assist her in erecting a new shrine to Athene in the wood—which meant that she gave all the directions and he did all the work.

"You are doing it beautifully, Chris—you really are!" she exclaimed with delight. "We shall be able to have a splendid sacrifice this afternoon. I've got some feathers to offer up from the fowl cook is plucking; and they make a much better sacrifice than waste paper."

"Why?"

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Christopher was too shy in those days to put the fact into words; nevertheless, the fact remained that Elisabeth interested him profoundly. She was so original, so unexpected, that she was continually providing him with fresh food for thought. Although he was cleverer at lessons than she was, she was by far the cleverer at play; and though he had the finer character, hers was the stronger personality. It was because Elisabeth was so much to him that he now and then worried her easy-going conscience with his strictures; for, to do him justice, the boy was no prig, and would never have dreamed of preaching to anybody except her. But it must be remembered that Christopher had never heard of such things as spiritual evolutions and streams of tendency: to him right or wrong meant heaven or hell—neither more nor less; and he

was overpowered by a burning anxiety that Elisabeth should eventually go to heaven, partly for her own sake, and partly (since human love is stronger than dogmas and doctrines) because a heaven, uncheered by the presence of Elisabeth, seemed a somewhat dreary place wherein to spend one's eternity.

"Why do feathers make a better sacrifice than paper?" repeated Christopher, Elisabeth being so much absorbed in his work that she had not answered his question.

"Oh! because they smell; and it seems so much more like a real sacrifice, somehow, if it smells."

"I see. What ideas you do get into your head!"

But Elisabeth's volatile thoughts had flown off in another direction. "You really have got awfully nice-coloured hair," she remarked, Chris having taken his cap off for the sake of coolness, as he was heated with his toil. "I do wish I had light hair like yours. Angels, and goddesses, and princesses, and people of that kind always have golden hair; but only bad fairies and cruel stepmothers have nasty dark hair like me. I think it is horrid to have dark hair."

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"I don't: I like dark hair best; and I don't think yours is half bad." Christopher never overstated a case; but then one had the comfort of knowing that he always meant what he said, and frequently a good deal more.

"Don't you really, Chris? I think it is hideous," replied Elisabeth, taking one of her elf-locks between her fingers and examining it as if it were a sample of material; "it is like that ugly brown seaweed which shows which way the wind blows—no, I mean that shows whether it is going to rain or not."

"Never mind; I've seen lots of people with uglier hair than yours." Chris really could be of great consolation when he tried.

"Aren't the trees lovely when they have got all their leaves off?" said Elisabeth, her thoughts wandering again. "I believe I like them better now than I do in summer. Now they are like the things you wish for, and in the summer they are like the things you get; and the things you get are never half as nice as the things you wish for."

This was too subtle for Christopher. "I like them best with the leaves on; but anyhow they are nicer to look at than the chimneys that we see from our house. You can't think how gloomy it is for your rooms to look out on nothing but smoke and chimneys and furnaces. When you go to bed at night it's all red, and when you get up in the morning it's all black."

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"I should like to live in a house like that. I love the smoke and the chimneys and the furnaces—they are all so big and strong and full of life; and they make you think."

"What on earth do they make you think about?"

Elisabeth's gray eyes grew dreamy. "They make me think that the Black Country is a wilderness that we are all travelling through; and over it there is always the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, to tell us which way to go. I make up tales to myself about the people in the wilderness; and how they watch the pillar, and how it keeps them from idling in their work, or selling bad iron, or doing anything that is horrid or mean, because it is a sign to them that God is with them, just as it used to be to the Children of Israel."

Christopher looked up from his work. Here was the old problem: Elisabeth did not think about religion half as much as he did, and yet the helpful and beautiful thoughts came to her and not to him. Still, it was comforting to know that the smoke and the glare, which he had hated, could convey such a message; and he made up his mind not to hate them any more.

"And then I pretend that the people come out of the wilderness and go to live in the country over there," Elisabeth continued, pointing to the distant hills; "and I make up lovely tales about that country, and all the beautiful things there. That is what is so nice about hills: you always think there are such wonderful places on the other side of them."

For some minutes Christopher worked silently, and Elisabeth watched him. Then the latter said suddenly:

"Isn't it funny that you never hate people in a morning, however much you may have hated them the night before?"

"Don't you?" Rapid changes of sentiment were beyond Christopher's comprehension. He was by no means a variable person.

"Oh! no. Last night I hated you, and made up a story in my own mind that another really nice boy came to play with me instead of you. And I said nice things to him, and horrid things to you; he and I played in the wood, and you had to do lessons all by yourself at school, and had nobody to play with. But when I woke up this morning I didn't care about the pretending boy any more, and I wanted you."

Christopher looked pleased; but it was not his way to express his pleasure in words. "And so, I suppose, you came to look for me," he said.

"Not the first thing. Somehow it always makes you like a person better when you have hated them for a bit, so I liked you awfully when I woke this morning and remembered you. When you really are fond of a person, you always want to do something to please them; so I went and told Cousin Maria that I'd read a lot of books in the library without thinking whether I ought to or not; but that now I wanted her to say what I might read and what I mightn't."

This was a course of action that Christopher could thoroughly understand and appreciate. "Was she angry?" he asked.

"Not a bit. That is the best of Cousin Maria—she never scolds you unless you really deserve it; and she is very sharp at finding out whether you deserve it or not. She said that there were a lot of books in the library that weren't suitable for a little girl to read; but that it wasn't naughty of me to have read what I chose, since nobody had told me not to. And then she said it was good of me to have told her, for she should never have found it out if I hadn't."

"And so it was," remarked Christopher approvingly.

"No; it wasn't—and I told her it wasn't. I told her that the goodness was yours, because it was you that made me tell. I should never have thought of it by myself."

"I say, you are a regular brick!"

Elisabeth looked puzzled. "I don't see anything brickish in saying that; it was the truth. It was you that made me tell, you know; and it wasn't fair for me to be praised for your goodness."

"You really are awfully straight, for a girl," said Christopher, with admiration; "you couldn't be straighter if you were a boy."

This was high praise, and Elisabeth's pale little face glowed with delight. She loved to be commended.

"It was really very good of you to speak to Miss Farrington about the books," continued Christopher; "for I know you'll hate having to ask permission before you read a tale."

"I didn't do it out of goodness," said Elisabeth thoughtfully—"I did it to please you; and pleasing a person you are fond of isn't goodness. I wonder if grown-up people get to be as fond of religion as they are of one another. I expect they do; and then they do good things just for the sake of doing good."

"Of course they do," replied Christopher, who was always at sea when Elisabeth became metaphysical.

"I suppose," she continued seriously, "that if I were really good, religion ought to be the same to me as Cousin Anne."

"The same as Cousin Anne! What do you mean?"

"I mean that if I were really good, religion would give me the same sort of feelings as Cousin Anne does."

"What sort of feelings?"

"Oh! they are lovely feelings," Elisabeth answered—"too lovely to explain. Everything

is a treat if Cousin Anne is there. When she speaks, it's just like music trickling down your back; and when you do something that you don't like to please her, you feel that you do like it."

"Well, you are a rum little thing! I should think nobody ever thought of all the queer things that you think of."

"Oh! I expect everybody does," retorted Elisabeth, who was far too healthy minded to consider herself peculiar. After another pause, she inquired: "Do you like me, Chris?"

"Rather! What a foolish question to ask!" Christopher replied, with a blush, for he was always shy of talking about his feelings; and the more he felt the shyer he became.

But Elisabeth was not shy, and had no sympathy with anybody who was. "How much do you like me?" she continued.

"A lot."

"But I want to know exactly how much."

"Then you can't. Nobody can tell how much they like anybody. You do ask silly questions!"

"Yes; they can. I can tell how much I like everybody," Elisabeth persisted.

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"How?"

"I have a sort of thermometer in my mind, just like the big thermometer in the hall; and I measure how much I like people by that."

"How much do you like your Cousin Anne?" he asked.

"Ninety-six degrees," replied Elisabeth promptly.

"And your Cousin Maria?"

"Sixty."

"And Mrs. Bateson?"

"Fifty-four." Elisabeth always knew her own mind.

"I say, how—how—how much do you like me?" asked Christopher, with some hesitation.

"Sixty-two," answered Elisabeth, with no hesitation at all.

And Christopher felt a funny, cold feeling round his loyal heart. He grew to know the feeling well in after years, and to wonder how Elisabeth could understand so much and yet understand so little; but at present he was too young to understand himself.

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## CHAPTER III

### MRS. BATESON'S TEA-PARTY

The best of piggie when he dies  
Is not "interred with his bones,"  
But, in the form of porcine pies,  
Blesses a world that heard his cries,  
Yet heeded not those dying groans.

"Cousin Maria, please may I go to tea at Mrs. Bateson's with Christopher?" said Elisabeth one day, opening the library door a little, and endeavouring to squeeze her small person through as narrow an aperture as possible, as is the custom with children. She never called her playmate "Chris" in speaking to Miss Farrington; for this latter regarded it as actually sinful to address people by any abbreviation of their baptismal names, just as she considered it positively immoral to partake of any

nourishment between meals. "Mrs. Bateson has killed her pig, and there will be pork-pies for tea."

Miss Farrington looked over her spectacles at the restless little figure. "Yes, my child; I see no reason why you should not. Kezia Bateson is a God-fearing woman, and her husband has worked at the Osierfield for forty years. I have the greatest respect for Caleb Bateson; he is a worthy man and a good Methodist, as his father was before him."

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"He is a very ignorant man: he says Penny-lope."

"Says what, Elisabeth?"

"Penny-lope. I was showing him a book the other day about Penelope—the woman with the web, you know—and he called her Penny-lope. I didn't like to correct him, but I said Penelope afterward as often and as loud as I could."

"That was very ill-bred of you. Come here, Elisabeth."

The child came and stood by the old lady's chair, and began playing with a bunch of seals that were suspended by a gold chain from Miss Farrington's waist. It was one of Elisabeth's little tricks that her fingers were never idle when she was talking.

"What have I taught you are the two chief ends at which every woman should aim, my child?"

"To be first a Christian and then a gentlewoman," quoted Elisabeth glibly.

"And how does a true gentlewoman show her good breeding?"

"By never doing or saying anything that could make any one else feel uncomfortable," Elisabeth quoted again.

"Then do you think that to display your own knowledge by showing up another person's ignorance would make that person feel comfortable, Elisabeth?"

"No, Cousin Maria."

"Knowledge is not good breeding, remember; it is a far less important matter. A true gentlewoman may be ignorant; but a true gentlewoman will never be inconsiderate."

Elisabeth hung her head. "I see."

"If you keep your thoughts fixed upon the people to whom you are talking, and never upon yourself, you will always have good manners, my child. Endeavour to interest and not to impress them."

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"You mean I must talk about their things and not about mine?"

"More than that. Make the most of any common ground between yourself and them; make the least of any difference between yourself and them; and, above all, keep strenuously out of sight any real or fancied superiority you may possess over them. I always think that Saint Paul's saying, 'To the weak became I as weak,' was the perfection of good manners."

"I don't think I quite understand."

Miss Farrington spoke in parables. "Then listen to this story. There was once a common soldier who raised himself from the ranks and earned a commission. He was naturally very nervous the first night he dined at the officers' mess, as he had never dined with gentlemen before, and he was afraid of making some mistake. It happened that the wine was served while the soup was yet on the table, and with the wine the ice. The poor man did not know what the ice was for, so took a lump and put it in his soup."

Elisabeth laughed.

"The younger officers began to giggle, as you are doing," Miss Farrington continued; "but the colonel, to whom the ice was handed next, took a lump and put it in his soup also; and then the young officers did not want to laugh any more. The colonel was a perfect gentleman."

"It seems to me," said Elisabeth thoughtfully, "that you've got to be good before you

can be polite."

"Politeness appears to be what goodness really is," replied Miss Farrington, "and is an attitude rather than an action. Fine breeding is not the mere learning of any code of manners, any more than gracefulness is the mere learning of any kind of physical exercise. The gentleman apparently, as the Christian really, looks not on his own things, but on the things of others; and the selfish person is always both unchristian and ill-bred."

Elisabeth gazed wistfully up into Miss Farrington's face. "I should like to be a real gentlewoman, Cousin Maria; do you think I ever shall be?"

"I think it quite possible, if you bear all these maxims in mind, and if you carry yourself properly and never stoop. I can not approve of the careless manners of the young people of to-day, who loll upon easy-chairs in the presence of their elders, and who slouch into a room with constrained familiarity and awkward ease," replied Miss Farrington, who had never sat in an easy-chair in her life, and whose back was still as straight as an arrow.

So in the afternoon of that day Christopher and Elisabeth attended Mrs. Bateson's tea-party.

The Batesons lived in a clean little cottage on the west side of High Street, and enjoyed a large garden to the rearward. It was a singular fact that whereas all their windows looked upon nothing more interesting than the smokier side of the bleak and narrow street, their pigsties commanded a view such as can rarely be surpassed for beauty and extent in England. But Mrs. Bateson called her front view "lively" and her back view "dull," and congratulated herself daily upon the aspect and the prospect of her dwelling-place. The good lady's ideas as to what constitutes beauty in furniture were by no means behind her opinions as to what is effective in scenery. Her kitchen was paved with bright red tiles, which made one feel as if one were walking across a coral reef, and was flanked on one side with a black oak dresser of unnumbered years, covered with a brave array of blue-and-white pottery. An artist would have revelled in this kitchen, with its delicious effects in red and blue; but Mrs. Bateson accounted it as nothing. Her pride was centred in her parlour and its mural decorations, which consisted principally of a large and varied assortment of funeral-cards, neatly framed and glazed. In addition to these there was a collection of family portraits in daguerreotype, including an interesting representation of Mrs. Bateson's parents sitting side by side in two straight-backed chairs, with their whole family twining round them—a sort of Swiss Family Laocoon; and a picture of Mr. Bateson—in the attitude of Juliet and the attire of a local preacher—leaning over a balcony, which was overgrown with a semi-tropical luxuriance of artificial ivy, and which was obviously too frail to support him. But the masterpiece in Mrs. Bateson's art-gallery was a soul-stirring illustration of the death of the revered John Wesley. This picture was divided into two compartments: the first represented the room at Wesley's house in City Road, with the assembled survivors of the great man's family weeping round his bed; and the second depicted the departing saint flying across Bunhill Fields burying-ground in his wig and gown and bands, supported on either side by a stalwart angel.

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As Elisabeth had surmised, the entertainment on this occasion was pork-pie; and Mrs. Hankey, a near neighbour, had also been bidden to share the feast. So the tea-party was a party of four, the respective husbands of the two ladies not yet having returned from their duties at the Osierfield.

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"I hope that you'll all make yourselves welcome," said the hostess, after they had sat down at the festive board. "Master Christopher, my dear, will you kindly ask a blessing?"

Christopher asked a blessing as kindly as he could, and Mrs. Bateson continued:

"Well, to be sure, it is a pleasure to see you looking so tall and strong, Master Christopher, after all your schooling. I'm not in favour of much schooling myself, as I think it hinders young folks from growing, and puts them off their vittles; but you give the contradiction to that notion—doesn't he, Mrs. Hankey?"

Mrs. Hankey shook her head. It was her rule in life never to look on the bright side of things; she considered that to do so was what she called "tempting Providence." Her theory appeared to be that as long as Providence saw you were miserable, that Power



was comfortable about you and let you alone; but if Providence discovered you could bear more sorrow than you were then bearing, you were at once supplied with that little more. Naturally, therefore, her object was to convince Providence that her cup of misery was full. But Mrs. Hankey had her innocent enjoyments, in spite of the sternness of her creed. If she took light things seriously, she took serious things lightly; so she was not without her compensations. For instance, a Sunday evening's discourse on future punishment and the like, with illustrations, was an unfailing source of pure and healthful pleasure to her; while a funeral sermon—when the chapel was hung with black, and the bereaved family sat in state in their new mourning, and the choir sang *Vital Spark* as an anthem—filled her soul with joy. So when Mrs. Bateson commented with such unseemly cheerfulness upon Christopher's encouraging appearance, it was but consistent of Mrs. Hankey to shake her head.

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"You can never tell," she replied—"never; often them that looks the best feels the worst; and many's the time I've seen folks look the very picture of health just before they was took with a mortal illness."

"Ay, that's so," agreed the hostess; "but I think Master Christopher's looks are the right sort; such a nice colour as he's got, too!"

"That comes from him being so fair complexioned—it's no sign of health," persisted Mrs. Hankey; "in fact, I mistrust those fair complexions, especially in lads of his age. Why, he ought to be as brown as a berry, instead of pink and white like a girl."

"It would look hideous to have a brown face with such yellow hair as mine," said Christopher, who naturally resented being compared to a girl.

"Master Christopher, don't call anything that the Lord has made hideous. We must all be as He has formed us, however that may be," replied Mrs. Hankey reprovingly; "and it is not our place to pass remarks upon what He has done for the best."

"But the Lord didn't make him with a brown face and yellow hair; that's just the point," interrupted Elisabeth, who regarded the bullying of Christopher as her own prerogative, and allowed no one else to indulge in that sport unpunished.

"No, my love; that's true enough," Mrs. Bateson said soothingly: "a truer word than that never was spoken. But I wish you could borrow some of Master Christopher's roses—I do, indeed. For my part, I like to see little girls with a bit of colour in their cheeks; it looks more cheerful-like, as you might say; and looks go a long way with some folks, though a meek and quiet spirit is better, taking it all round."

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"Now Miss Elisabeth does look delicate, and no mistake," assented Mrs. Hankey; "she grows too fast for her strength, I'll be bound; and her poor mother died young, you know, so it is in the family."

Christopher looked at Elisabeth with the quick sympathy of a sensitive nature. He thought it would frighten her to hear Mrs. Hankey talk in that way, and he felt that he hated Mrs. Hankey for frightening Elisabeth.

But Elisabeth was made after a different pattern, and was not in the least upset by Mrs. Hankey's gloomy forebodings. She was essentially dramatic; and, unconsciously, her first object was to attract notice. She would have preferred to do this by means of unsurpassed beauty or unequalled talent; but, failing these aids to distinction, an early death-bed was an advertisement not to be despised. In her mind's eye she saw a touching account of her short life in *Early Days*, winding up with a heart-rending description of its premature close; and her mind's eye gloated over the sight.

The hostess gazed at her critically. "She is pale, Mrs. Hankey, there's no doubt of that; but pale folks are often the healthiest, though they mayn't be the handsomest. And she is wiry, is Miss Elisabeth, though she may be thin. But is your tea to your taste, or will you take a little more cream in it?"

"It is quite right, thank you, Mrs. Bateson; and the pork-pie is just beautiful. What a light hand for pastry you always have! I'm sure I've said over and over again that I don't know your equal either for making pastry or for engaging in prayer."

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Mrs. Bateson, as was natural, looked pleased. "I doubt if I ever made a better batch of pies than this. When they were all ready for baking, Bateson says to me, '*Kezia*,' he says, 'them pies is a regular picture—all so smooth and even-like, you can't tell which

from t'other.' 'Bateson,' said I, 'I've done my best with them; and if only the Lord will be with them in the oven, they'll be the best batch of pies this side Jordan.'"

"And so they are," said Elisabeth; "they are perfectly lovely."

"I'm glad you fancy them, my love; take some more, deary, it'll do you good."

"No, thanks; I'd rather have a wig now." And Elisabeth helped herself to one of the three-cornered cakes, called "wigs," which are peculiar to Mershire.

"You always are fortunate in your pigs," Mrs. Hankey remarked; "such fine hams and such beautiful roaded bacon I never see anywhere equal to yours. It'll be a sad day for you, Mrs. Bateson, when swine fever comes into the district. I know no one as'll feel it more."

"Now you must tell us all about your niece's wedding, Mrs. Hankey," Mrs. Bateson said—"her that was married last week. My word alive, but your sister is wonderful fortunate in settling her daughters! That's what I call a well-brought-up family, and no mistake. Five daughters, and each one found peace and a pious husband before she was five-and-twenty."

"The one before last married a Churchman," said Mrs. Hankey apologetically, as if the union thus referred to were somewhat morganatic in its character, and therefore no subject for pride or congratulation.

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"Well, to be sure! Still, he may make her a good husband."

"He may or he may not; you never can tell. It seems to me that husbands are like new boots—you can't tell where they're going to pinch you till it's too late to change 'em. And as for creaking, why, the boots that are quietest in the shop are just the ones that fairly disgrace you when you come into chapel late on a Sunday morning, and think to slip in quietly during the first prayer; and it is pretty much the same with husbands—those that are the meekest in the wooing are the most masterful to live with."

"What was the name of the Churchman your niece married?" asked Mrs. Bateson. "I forget."

"Wilkins—Tom Wilkins. He isn't a bad fellow in some respects—he is steady and sober, and never keeps back a farthing of his wages for himself; but his views are something dreadful. I can not stand them at any price, and so I'm forever telling his wife."

"Dear me! That's sad news, Mrs. Hankey."

"Would you believe it, he don't hold with the good old Methodist habit of telling out loud what the Lord has done for your soul? He says religion should be acted up to and not talked about; but, for my part, I can't abide such closeness."

"Nor I," agreed Mrs. Bateson warmly; "I don't approve of treating the Lord like a poor relation, as some folks seem to do. They'll go to His house and they'll give Him their money; but they're fairly ashamed of mentioning His Name in decent company."

"Just so; and that's Tom Wilkins to the life. He's a good husband and a regular church-goer; but as for the word that edifieth, you might as well look for it from a naked savage as from him. Many a time have I said to his wife, 'Tom may be a kind husband in the time of prosperity, as I make no doubt he is—there's plenty of that sort in the world; but you wait till the days of adversity come, and I doubt that then you'll be wishing you'd not been in such a hurry to get married, but had waited till you had got a good Methodist!' And so she will, I'll be bound; and the sooner she knows it the better."

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Mrs. Bateson sighed at the gloomy prospect opening out before young Mrs. Wilkins; then she asked:

"How did the last daughter's wedding go off? She married a Methodist, surely?"

"She did, Mrs. Bateson; and a better match no mother could wish for her daughter, not even a duchess born; he's a chapel-steward and a master-painter, and has six men under him. There he is, driving to work and carrying his own ladders in his own cart, like a lord, as you may say, by day; and there he is on a Thursday evening, letting and

reletting the pews and sittings after service, like a real gentleman. As I said to my sister, I only hope he may be spared to make Susan a good husband; but when a man is a chapel-steward at thirty-four, and drives his own cart, you begin to think that he is too good for this world, and that he is almost ripe for a better one."

"You do indeed; there's no denying that."

"But the wedding was beautiful: I never saw its equal—never; and as for the prayer that the minister offered up at the end of the service, I only wish you'd been there to hear it, Mrs. Bateson, it was so interesting and instructive. Such a lot of information in it about love and marriage and the like as I'd never heard before; and when he referred to the bridegroom's first wife, and drew a picture of how she'd be waiting to welcome them both, when the time came, on the further shore—upon my word, there wasn't a dry eye in the chapel!" And Mrs. Hankey wiped hers at the mere remembrance of the scene.

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"But what did Susan say?" asked Elisabeth, with great interest. "I expect she didn't want another wife to welcome them on the further shore."

"Oh! Miss Elisabeth, what a naughty, selfish little girl you are!" exclaimed Susan's aunt, much shocked. "What would Miss Farrington think if she heard you? Why, you don't suppose, surely, that when folks get to heaven they'll be so greedy and grasping that they'll want to keep everything to themselves, do you? My niece is a good girl and a member of society, and she was as pleased as anybody at the minister's beautiful prayer."

Elisabeth was silent, but unconvinced.

"How is your sister herself?" inquired Mrs. Bateson. "I expect she's a bit upset now that the fuss is all over, and she hasn't a daughter left to bless herself with."

Mrs. Hankey sighed cheerfully. "Well, she did seem rather low-spirited when all the mess was cleared up, and Susan had gone off to her own home; but I says to her, 'Never mind, Sarah, and don't you worry yourself; now that the weddings are over, the funerals will soon begin.' You see, you must cheer folks up a bit, Mrs. Bateson, when they're feeling out of sorts."

"You must indeed," agreed the lady of the house, feeling that her guest had hit upon a happy vein of consolation; "it is dull without daughters when you've once got accustomed to 'em, daughters being a sight more comfortable and convenient than sons, to my mind."

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"Well, you see, daughters you can teach to know theirselves, and sons; you can't. Though even daughters can never rest till they've got married, more's the pity. If they knowed as much about men as I do, they'd be thanking the Lord that He'd created them single, instead of forever fidgeting to change the state to which they were born."

"Well, I holds with folks getting married," argued Mrs. Bateson; "it gives 'em something to think about between Sunday's sermon and Thursday's baking; and if folks have nothing to think about, they think about mischief."

"That's true, especially if they happen to be men."

"Why do men think about mischief more than women do?" asked Elisabeth, who always felt hankering after the why and wherefore of things.

"Because, my dear, the Lord made 'em so, and it is not for us to complain," replied Mrs. Hankey, in a tone which implied that, had the rôle of Creator been allotted to her, the idiosyncrasies of the male sex would have been much less marked than they are at present. "They've no sense, men haven't; that's what is the matter with them."

"You never spoke a truer word, Mrs. Hankey," agreed her hostess; "the very best of them don't properly know the difference between their souls and their stomachs; and they fancy that they are a-wrestling with their doubts, when really it is their dinners that are a-wrestling with them. Now take Bateson hisself, and a kinder husband or a better Methodist never drew breath; yet so sure as he touches a bit of pork, he begins to worn hisself about the doctrine of Election till there's no living with him."

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"That's a man all over, to the very life," said Mrs. Hankey sympathetically; "and he never has the sense to see what's wrong with him, I'll be bound."

"Not he—he wouldn't be a man if he had. And then he'll sit in the front parlour and engage in prayer for hours at a time, till I says to him, 'Bateson,' says I, 'I'd be ashamed to go troubling the Lord with a prayer when a pinch o' carbonate o' soda would set things straight again.'"

"And quite right, Mrs. Bateson; it's often a wonder to me that the Lord has patience with men, seeing that their own wives haven't."

"And to me, too. Now Bateson has been going on like this for thirty years or more; yet if there's roast pork on the table, and I say a word to put him off it, he's that hurt as never was. Why, I'm only too glad to see him enjoying his food if no harm comes of it; but it's dreary work seeing your husband in the Slough of Despond, especially when it's your business to drag him out again, and most especially when you particularly warned him against going in."

Mrs. Hankey groaned. "The Bible says true when it tells us that men are born to give trouble as the sparks fly upward; and it is a funny Providence, to my mind, as ordains for women to be so bothered with 'em. At my niece's wedding, as we were just speaking about, 'Susan,' I says, 'I wish you happiness; and I only hope you won't live to regret your marriage as I have done mine.' For my part, I can't see what girls want with husbands at all; they are far better without them."

"Not they, Mrs. Hankey," replied Mrs. Bateson warmly; "any sort of a husband is better than none, to my mind. Life is made up of naughts and crosses; and the folks that get the crosses are better off than those that get the naughts, though that husbands are crosses I can't pretend to deny; but I haven't patience with single women, I haven't—they have nothing to occupy their minds, and so they get to talking about their health and such-like fal-lals."

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"Saint Paul didn't hold with you," said Mrs. Hankey, with reproach in her tone; "he thought that the unmarried women minded the things of the Lord better than the married ones."

"Saint Paul didn't know much about the subject, and how could he be expected to, being only a bachelor himself, poor soul? But if he'd had a wife, she'd soon have told him what the unmarried women were thinking about; and it wouldn't have been about the Lord, I'll be bound. Now take Jemima Stubbs; does she mind the things of the Lord more than you and I do, Mrs. Hankey, I should like to know?"

"I can't say; it is not for us to judge."

"Not she! Why, she's always worrying about that poor little brother of hers, what's lame. I often wish that the Lord would think on him and take him, for he's a sore burden on Jemima, he is. If you're a woman you are bound to work for some man or another, and to see to his food and to bear with his tantrums; and, for my part, I'd rather do it for a husband than for a father or a brother. There's more credit in it, as you might say."

"There's something in that, maybe."

"And after all, in spite of the botheration he gives, there's something very cheerful in having a man about the house. They keep you alive, do men. The last time I saw Jemima Stubbs she was as low as low could be. 'Jemima,' I says, 'you are out of spirits.' 'Mrs. Bateson,' says she, 'I am that. I wish I was either in love or in the cemetery, and I don't much mind which.'"

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"Did she cry?" asked Elisabeth, who was always absorbingly interested in any one who was in trouble. With her, to pity was to love; and it was difficult for her ever to love where she did not pity. Christopher did not understand this, and was careful not to appeal to Elisabeth's sympathy for fear of depressing her. Herein, both as boy and man, he made a great mistake. It was not as easy to depress Elisabeth as it was to depress him; and, moreover, it was sometimes good for her to be depressed. But he did unto her as he would she should do unto him; and, when all is said and done, it is difficult to find a more satisfactory rule of conduct than this.

"Cry, lovey?" said Mrs. Bateson; "I should just think she did—fit to break her heart."

Thereupon Jemima Stubbs became a heroine of romance in Elisabeth's eyes, and a new interest in her life. "I shall go and see her to-morrow," she said, "and take her

something nice for her little brother. What do you think he would like, Mrs. Bateson?"

"Bless the child, she is one of the Good Shepherd's own lambs!" exclaimed Mrs. Bateson, with tears in her eyes.

Mrs. Hankey sighed. "It is the sweetest flowers that are the readiest for transplanting to the Better Land," she said; and once again Christopher hated her.

But Elisabeth was engrossed in the matter in hand. "What would he like?" she persisted—"a new toy, or a book, or jam and cake?"

"I should think a book, lovey; he's fair set on books, is Johnnie Stubbs; and if you'd read a bit to him yourself, it would be a fine treat for the lad." [Pg 45]

Elisabeth's eyes danced with joy. "I'll go the first thing to-morrow morning, and read him my favourite chapter out of The Fairchild Family; and then I'll teach him some nice games to play all by himself."

"That's a dear young lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Bateson, in an ecstasy of admiration.

"Do you think Jemima will cry when I go?"

"No, lovey; she wouldn't so far forget herself as to bother the gentry with her troubles, surely."

"But I shouldn't be bothered; I should be too sorry for her. I always am frightfully interested in people who are unhappy—much more interested than in people who are happy; and I always love everybody when I've seen them cry. It is so easy to be happy, and so dull. But why doesn't Jemima fall in love if she wants to?"

"There now!" cried Mrs. Bateson, in a sort of stage aside to an imaginary audience. "What a clever child she is! I'm sure I don't know, dearie."

"It is a pity that she hasn't got a Cousin Anne," said Elisabeth, her voice trembling with sympathy. "When you've got a Cousin Anne, it makes everything so lovely."

"And so it does, dearie—so it does," agreed Mrs. Bateson, who did not in the least understand what Elisabeth meant.

On the way home, after the tea-party was over, Christopher remarked:

"Old Mother Bateson isn't a bad sort; but I can't stand Mother Hankey."

"Why not?"

"She says such horrid things." He had not yet forgiven Mrs. Hankey for her gloomy prophecies respecting Elisabeth. [Pg 46]

"Not horrid, Chris. She is rather stupid sometimes, and doesn't know when things are funny; but she never means to be really horrid, I am sure."

"Well, I think she is an old cat," persisted Christopher.

"The only thing I don't like about her is her gloves," added Elisabeth thoughtfully; "they are so old they smell of biscuit. Isn't it funny that old gloves always smell of biscuit. I wonder why?"

"I think they do," agreed Christopher; "but nobody except you would ever have thought of saying it. You have a knack of saying what everybody else is thinking; and that is what makes you so amusing."

"I'm glad you think I'm amusing; but I can't see much funniness in just saying what is true."

"Well, I can't explain why it is funny; but you really are simply killing sometimes," said Christopher graciously.

The next day, and on many succeeding ones, Elisabeth duly visited Jemima Stubbs and the invalid boy, although Christopher entreated her not to worry herself about them, and offered to go in her place. But he failed to understand that Elisabeth was goaded by no depressing sense of duty, as he would have been in similar circumstances; she went because pity was a passion with her, and therefore she was always absorbingly interested in any one whom she pitied. Strength and success and

such-like attributes never appealed to Elisabeth, possibly because she herself was strong, and possessed all the qualities of the successful person; but weakness and failure were all-powerful in enlisting her sympathy and interest and, through these, her love. As Christopher grew older he dreamed dreams of how in the future he should raise himself from being only the nephew of Miss Farrington's manager to a position of wealth and importance; and how he should finally bring all his glories and honours and lay them at Elisabeth's feet. His eyes were not opened to see that Elisabeth would probably turn with careless laughter from all such honours thus manufactured into her pavement; but if he came to her bent and bruised and brokenhearted, crushed with failure instead of crowned with success, her heart would never send him empty away, but would go out to him with a passionate longing to make up to him for all that he had missed in life.

A few days after Mrs. Bateson's tea-party he said to Elisabeth, for about the twentieth time:

"I say, I wish you wouldn't tire yourself with going to read to that Stubbs brat."

"Tire myself? What rubbish! nothing can tire me. I never felt tired in my life; but I shouldn't mind it just once, to see what it feels like."

"It feels distinctly unpleasant, I can tell you. But I really do wish you'd take more care of yourself, or else you'll get ill, or have headaches or something—you will indeed."

"No, I shan't; I never had a headache. That's another of the things that I don't know what they feel like; and yet I want to know what everything feels like—even disagreeable things."

"You'll know fast enough, I'm afraid," replied Christopher; "but even if it doesn't tire you, you would enjoy playing in the garden more than reading to Johnnie Stubbs—you know you would; and I can go and read to the little chap, if you are set on his being read to."

"But you would much rather play in the garden than read to him; and especially as it is your holidays, and your own reading-time will soon begin."

"Oh! *I* don't matter. Never bother your head about *me*; remember I'm all right as long as you are; and that as long as you're jolly, I'm bound to have a good time. But it riles me to see you worrying and overdoing yourself."

"You don't understand, Chris; you really are awfully stupid about understanding things. I don't go to see Jemima and Johnnie because I hate going, and yet think I ought; I go because I am so sorry for them both that my sorriness makes me like to go."

But Christopher did not understand, and Elisabeth could not make him do so. The iron of duty had entered into his childish soul; and, unconsciously, he was always trying to come between it and Elisabeth, and to save her from the burden of obligation which lay so heavily upon his spirit. He was a religious boy, but his religion was of too stern a cast to bring much joy to him; and he was passionately anxious that Elisabeth should not be distressed in like manner. His desire was that she should have sufficient religion to insure heaven, but not enough to spoil earth—a not uncommon desire on behalf of their dear ones among poor, ignorant human beings, whose love for their neighbour will surely atone in some measure for their injustice toward God.

"You see," Elisabeth continued, "there is nothing that makes you so fond of people as being sorry for them. The people that are strong and happy don't want your fondness, so it is no use giving it to them. It is the weak, unhappy people that want you to love them, and so it is the weak, unhappy people that you love."

"But I don't," replied Christopher, who was always inclined to argue a point; "when I like people, I should like them just the same as if they went about yelling *Te Deums* at the top of their voices; and when I don't like them, it wouldn't make me like them to see them dressed from head to foot in sackcloth and ashes."

"Oh! that's a stupid way of liking, I think."

"It may be stupid, but it's my way."

"Don't you like me better when I cry than when I laugh?" asked Elisabeth, who never could resist a personal application.

"Good gracious, no! I always like you the same; but I'd much rather you laughed than cried—it is so much jollier for you; in fact, it makes me positively wretched to see you cry."

"It always vexes me," Elisabeth said thoughtfully, "to read about tournaments, because I think it was so horrid of the Queen of Beauty to give the prize to the knight who won."

Christopher laughed with masculine scorn. "What nonsense! Who else could she have given it to?"

"Why, to the knight who lost, of course. I often make up a tale to myself that I am the Queen of Beauty at a tournament; and when the victorious knight rides up to me with his visor raised, I just laugh at him, and say, 'You can have the fame and the glory and the cheers of the crowd; that's quite enough for you!' And then I go down from my daïs, right into the arena where the unhorsed knight is lying wounded, and take off his helmet, and lay his head on my lap, and say, 'You shall have the prize, because you have got nothing else!' So then that knight becomes my knight, and always wears my colours; and that makes up to him for having been beaten at the tournament, don't you see?"

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"It would have been a rotten sort of tournament that was carried on in that fashion; and your prize would have been no better than a booby-prize," persisted Christopher.

"How silly you are! I'm glad I'm not a boy; I wouldn't have been as stupid as a boy for anything!"

"Don't be so cross! You must see that the knight who wins is the best knight; chaps that are beaten are not up to much."

"Well, they are the sort I like best; and if you had any sense you'd like them best, too." Whereupon Elisabeth removed the light of her offended countenance from Christopher, and dashed off in a royal rage.

As for him, he sighed over the unreasonableness of the weaker sex, but accepted it philosophically as one of the rules of the game; and Chris played games far too well to have anything but contempt for any one who rebelled against the rules of any game whatsoever. It was a man's business, he held, not to argue about the rules, but to play the game according to them, and to win; or, if that was out of his power, to lose pluckily and never complain.

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## CHAPTER IV

### SCHOOL-DAYS

Up to eighteen we fight with fears,  
And deal with problems grave and weighty,  
And smile our smiles and weep our tears,  
Just as we do in after years  
From eighteen up to eighty.

When Elisabeth was sixteen her noonday was turned into night by the death of her beloved Cousin Anne. For some time the younger Miss Farringdon had been in failing health; but it was her rôle to be delicate, and so nobody felt anxious about her until it was too late for anxiety to be of any use. She glided out of life as gracefully as she had glided through it, trusting that the sternness of her principles would expiate the leniency of her practice; and was probably surprised at the discovery that it was the leniency of her practice which finally expiated the sternness of her principles.

She left a blank, which was never quite filled up, in the lives of her sister Maria and her small cousin Elisabeth. The former bore her sorrow better, on the whole, than did the latter, because she had acquired the habit of bearing sorrow; but Elisabeth



mourned with all the hopeless misery of youth.

"It is no use trying to make me interested in things," she sobbed in response to Christopher's clumsy though well-meant attempts to divert her. "I shall never be interested in anything again—never. Everything is different now that Cousin Anne is gone away."

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"Not quite everything," said Christopher gently.

"Yes; everything. Why, the very trees don't look the same as they used to look, and the view isn't a bit what it used to be when she was here. All the ordinary things seem queer and altered, just as they do when you see them in a dream."

"Poor little girl!"

"And now it doesn't seem worth while for anything to look pretty. I used to love the sunsets, but now I hate them. What is the good of their being so beautiful and filling the sky with red and gold, if *she* isn't here to see them? And what is the good of trying to be good and clever if she isn't here to be pleased with me? Oh dear! oh dear! Nothing will ever be any good any more."

Christopher laid an awkward hand upon Elisabeth's dark hair, and began stroking it the wrong way. "I say, I wish you wouldn't fret so; it's more than I can stand to see you so wretched. Isn't there anything that I can do to make it up to you, somehow?"

"No; nothing. Nothing will ever comfort me any more; and how could a great, stupid boy like you make up to me for having lost her?" moaned poor little Elisabeth, with the selfishness of absorbing grief.

"Well, anyway, I am as fond of you as she was, for nobody could be fonder of anybody than I am of you."

"That doesn't help. I don't miss her so because she loved me, but because I loved her; and I shall never, never love any one else as much as long as I live."

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"Oh yes, you will, I expect," replied Christopher, who even then knew Elisabeth better than she knew herself.

"No—I shan't; and I should hate myself if I did."

Elisabeth fretted so terribly after her Cousin Anne that she grew paler and thinner than ever; and Miss Farrington was afraid that the girl would make herself really ill, in spite of her wiry constitution. After much consultation with many friends, she decided to send Elisabeth to school, for it was plain that she was losing her vitality through lack of an interest in life; and school—whatever it may or may not supply—invariably affords an unflinching amount of new interests. So Elisabeth went to Fox How—a well-known girls' school not a hundred miles from London—so called in memory of Dr. Arnold, according to whose principles the school was founded and carried on.

It would be futile to attempt to relate the history of Elisabeth Farrington without telling in some measure what her school-days did for her; and it would be equally futile to endeavour to convey to the uninitiated any idea of what that particular school meant—and still means—to all its daughters.

When Elisabeth had left her girlhood far behind her, the mere mention of the name, Fox How, never failed to send thrills all through her, as God save the Queen, and Home, sweet Home have a knack of doing; and for any one to have ever been a pupil at Fox How, was always a sure and certain passport to Elisabeth's interest and friendliness. The school was an old, square, white house, standing in a walled garden; and those walls enclosed all the multifarious interests and pleasures and loves and rivalries and heart-searchings and soul-awakenings which go to make up the feminine life from twelve to eighteen, and which are very much the same in their essence, if not in their form, as those which go to make up the feminine life from eighteen to eighty. In addition to these, the walls enclosed two lawns and an archery-ground, a field and a pond overgrown with water-lilies, a high mound covered with grass and trees, and a kitchen-garden filled with all manner of herbs and pleasant fruits—in short, it was a wonderful and extensive garden, such as one sees now and then in some old-fashioned suburb, but which people have neither the time nor the space to lay out nowadays. It also contained a long, straight walk, running its whole length and shaded by impenetrable greenery, where Elisabeth used to walk up and down, pretending that

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she was a nun; and some delightful swings and see-saws, much patronized by the said Elisabeth, which gave her a similar physical thrill to that produced in later years by the mention of her old school.

The gracious personality which ruled over Fox How in the days of Elisabeth had mastered the rarely acquired fact that the word *educate* is derived from *educō*, to *draw out*, and not (as is generally supposed) from *addo*, to *give to*; so the pupils there were trained to train themselves, and learned how to learn—a far better equipment for life and its lessons than any ready-made cloak of superficial knowledge, which covers all individualities and fits none. There was no cramming or forcing at Fox How; the object of the school was not to teach girls how to be scholars, but rather how to be themselves—that is to say, the best selves which they were capable of becoming. High character rather than high scholarship was the end of education there; and good breeding counted for more than correct knowledge. Not that learning was neglected, for Elisabeth and her schoolfellows worked at their books for eight good hours every day; but it did not form the first item on the programme of life.

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And who can deny that the system of Fox How was the correct system of education, at any rate, as far as girls are concerned? Unless a woman has to earn her living by teaching, what does it matter to her how much hydrogen there is in a drop of rain-water, or in what year Hannibal crossed the Alps? But it will matter to her infinitely, for the remainder of her mortal existence, whether she is one of those graceful, sympathetic beings, whose pathway is paved by the love of Man and the friendship of Woman; or one of that much-to-be-blamed, if somewhat-to-be-pitied, sisterhood, who are unloved because they are unlovely, and unlovely because they are unloved.

It is not good for man, woman, or child to be alone; and the companionship of girls of her own age did much toward deepening and broadening Elisabeth's character. The easy give-and-take of perfect equality was beneficial to her, as it is to everybody. She did not forget her Cousin Anne—the art of forgetting was never properly acquired by Elisabeth; but new friendships and new interests sprang up out of the grave of the old one, and changed its resting-place from a cemetery into a garden. Elisabeth Farringdon could not be happy—could not exist, in fact—without some absorbing affection and interest in life. There are certain women to whom "the trivial round" and "the common task" are all-sufficing who ask nothing more of life than that they shall always have a dinner to order or a drawing-room to dust, and to whom the delinquencies of the cook supply a drama of never-failing attraction and a subject of never-ending conversation; but Elisabeth was made of other material; vital interests and strong attachments were indispensable to her well-being. The death of Anne Farringdon had left a cruel blank in the young life which was none too full of human interest to begin with; but this blank was to a great measure filled up by Elisabeth's adoration for the beloved personage who ruled over Fox How, and by her devoted friendship for Felicia Herbert.

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In after years she often smiled tenderly when she recalled the absolute worship which the girls at Fox How offered to their "Dear Lady," as they called her, and of which the "Dear Lady" herself was supremely unconscious. It was a feeling of loyalty stronger than any ever excited by crowned heads (unless, perhaps, by the Pope himself), as she represented to their girlish minds the embodiment of all that was right, as well as of all that was mighty—and represented it so perfectly that through all their lives her pupils never dissociated herself from the righteousness which she taught and upheld and practised. And this attitude was wholly good for girls born in a century when it was the fashion to sneer at hero-worship and to scoff at authority when the word obedience in the Marriage Service was accused of redundancy, and the custom of speaking evil of dignities was mistaken for self-respect.

As for Felicia Herbert, she became for a time the very mainspring of Elisabeth's life. She was a beautiful girl, with fair hair and clear-cut features; and Elisabeth adored her with the adoration that is freely given, as a rule, to the girl who has beauty by the girl who has not. She was, moreover, gifted with a sweet and calm placidity, which was very restful to Elisabeth's volatile spirit; and the latter consequently greeted her with that passionate and thrilling friendship which is so satisfying to the immature female soul, but which is never again experienced by the woman who has once been taught by a man the nature of real love. Felicia was much more religious than Elisabeth, and much more prone to take serious views of life. The training of Fox How made for seriousness, and in that respect Felicia entered into the spirit of the place more

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profoundly than Elisabeth was capable of doing; for Elisabeth was always tender rather than serious, and broad rather than deep.

"I shall never go to balls when I leave school," said Felicia to her friend one day of their last term at Fox How, as the two were sitting in the arbour at the end of the long walk. "I don't think it is right to go to balls."

"Why not? There can be no harm in enjoying oneself, and I don't believe that God ever thinks there is."

"Not in enjoying oneself in a certain way; but the line between religious people and worldly people ought to be clearly marked. I think that dancing is a regular worldly amusement, and that good people should openly show their disapproval of it by not joining in it."

"But God wants us to enjoy ourselves," Elisabeth persisted. "And He wouldn't really love us if He didn't."

"God wants us to do what is right, and it doesn't matter whether we enjoy ourselves or not."

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"But it does; it matters awfully. We can't really be good unless we are happy."

Felicia shook her head. "We can't really be happy unless we are good; and if we are good we shall 'love not the world,' but shall stand apart from it."

"But I must love the world; I can't help loving the world, it is so grand and beautiful and funny. I love the whole of it: all the trees and the fields, and the towns and the cities, and the prim old people and the dear little children. I love the places—the old places because I have known them so long, and the new places because I have never seen them before; and I love the people best of all. I adore people, Felicia; don't you?"

"No; I don't think that I do. Of course I like the people that I like; but the others seem to me dreadfully uninteresting."

"But they are not; they are all frightfully interesting when once you get to know them, and see what they really are made of inside. Outsides may seem dull; but insides are always engrossing. That's why I always love people when once I've seen them cry, because when they cry they are themselves, and not any make-ups."

"How queer to like people because you have seen them cry!"

"Well, I do. I'd do anything for a person that I had seen cry; I would really."

Felicia opened her large hazel eyes still wider. "What a strange idea! It seems to me that you think too much about feelings and not enough about principles."

"But thinking about feelings makes you think about principles; feelings are the only things that ever make me think about principles at all."

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After a few minutes' silence Elisabeth asked suddenly:

"What do you mean to do with your life when you leave here and take it up?"

"I don't know. I suppose I shall fall in love and get married. Most girls do. And I hope it will be with a clergyman, for I do so love parish work."

"I don't think I want to get married," said Elisabeth slowly, "not even to a clergyman."

"How queer of you! Why not?"

"Because I want to paint pictures and to become a great artist. I feel there is such a lot in me that I want to say, and that I must say; and I can only say it by means of pictures. It would be dreadful to die before you had delivered the message that you had been sent into the world to deliver, don't you think?"

"It would be more dreadful to die before you had found one man to whom you would be everything, and who would be everything to you," replied Felicia.

"Oh! I mean to fall in love, because everybody does, and I hate to be behindhand with things; but I shall do it just as an experience, to make me paint better pictures. I read in a book the other day that you must fall in love before you can become a true

artist; so I mean to do so. But it won't be as important to me as my art," said Elisabeth, who was as yet young enough to be extremely wise.

"Still, it must be lovely to know there is one person in the world to whom you can tell all your thoughts, and who will understand them, and be interested in them."

"It must be far lovelier to know that you have the power to tell all your thoughts to the whole world, and that the world will understand them and be interested in them," Elisabeth persisted.

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"I don't think so. I should like to fall in love with a man who was so much better than I, that I could lean on him and learn from him in everything; and I should like to feel that whatever goodness or cleverness there was in me was all owing to him, and that I was nothing by myself, but everything with him."

"I shouldn't. I should like to feel that I was so good and clever that I was helping the man to be better and cleverer even than he was before."

"I should like all my happiness and all my interest to centre in that one particular man," said Felicia; "and to feel that he was a fairy prince, and that I was a poor beggar-maid, who possessed nothing but his love."

"Oh! I shouldn't. I would rather feel that I was a young princess, and that he was a warrior, worn-out and wounded in the battle of life; but that my love would comfort and cheer him after all the tiresome wars that he'd gone through. And as for whether he'd lost or won in the wars, I shouldn't care a rap, as long as I was sure that he couldn't be happy without me."

"You and I never think alike about things," said Felicia sadly.

"You old darling! What does it matter, as long as we agree in being fond of each other?"

At eighteen Elisabeth said farewell to Fox How with many tears, and came back to live at the Willows with Miss Farrington. While she had been at school, Christopher had been first in Germany and then in America, learning how to make iron, so that they had never met during Elisabeth's holidays; therefore, when he beheld her transformed from a little girl into a full-blown young lady, he straightway fell in love with her. He was, however, sensible enough not to mention the circumstance, even to Elisabeth herself, as he realized, as well as anybody, that the nephew of Richard Smallwood would not be considered a fitting mate for a daughter of the house of Farrington; but the fact that he did not mention the circumstance in no way prevented him from dwelling upon it in his own mind, and deriving much pleasurable pain and much painful pleasure therefrom. In short, he dwelt upon it so exclusively and so persistently that it went near to breaking his heart; but that was not until his heart was older, and therefore more capable of being broken past mending again.

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Miss Farrington and the people of Sedgemoor were alike delighted to have Elisabeth among them once more; she was a girl with a strong personality; and people with strong personalities have a knack of making themselves missed when they go away.

"It's nice, and so it is, to have Miss Elisabeth back again," remarked Mrs. Bateson to Mrs. Hankey; "and it makes it so much cheerfuller for Miss Farrington, too."

"Maybe it'll only make it the harder for Miss Farrington when the time comes for Miss Elisabeth to be removed by death or by marriage; and which'll be the best for her—poor young lady!—the Lord must decide, for I'm sure I couldn't pass an opinion, only having tried one, and that nothing to boast of."

"I wonder if Miss Farrington will leave her her fortune," said Mrs. Bateson, who, in common with the rest of her class, was consumed with an absorbing curiosity as to all testamentary dispositions.

"She may, and she may not; there's no prophesying about wills. I'm pleased to say I can generally foretell when folks is going to die, having done a good bit of sick-nursing in my time afore I married Hankey; but as to foretelling how they're going to leave their money, I can no more do it than the babe unborn; nor nobody can, as ever I heard tell on."

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"That's so, Mrs. Hankey. Wills seem to me to have been invented by the devil for the

special upsetting of the corpse's memory. Why, some of the peaceablest folks as I've ever known—folks as wouldn't have scared a lady-cow in their lifetime—have left wills as have sent all their relations to the right-about, ready to bite one another's noses off. Bateson often says to me, 'Kezia,' he says, 'call no man honest till his will's read.' And I'll be bound he's in the right. Still, it would be hard to see Miss Elisabeth begging her bread after the way she's been brought up, and Miss Farrington would never have the conscience to let her do it."

"Folks leave their consciences behind with their bodies," said Mrs. Hankey; "and I've lived long enough to be surprised at nothing where wills are concerned."

"That is quite true," replied Mrs. Bateson. "Now take Miss Anne, for instance: she seemed so set on Miss Elisabeth that you'd have thought she'd have left her a trifle; but not she! All she had went to her sister, Miss Maria, who'd got quite enough already. Miss Anne was as sweet and gentle a lady as you'd wish to see; but her will was as hard as the nether millstone."

"There's nothing like a death for showing up what a family is made of."

"There isn't. Now Mr. William Farrington's will was a very cruel one, according to my ideas, leaving everything to his niece and nothing to his son. True, Mr. George was but a barber's block with no work in him, and I'm the last to defend that; and then he didn't want to marry his cousin, Miss Maria, for which I shouldn't blame him so much; if a man can't choose his own wife and his own newspaper, what can he choose?—certainly not his own victuals, for he isn't fit. But if folks only leave their money to them that have followed their advice in everything, most wills would be nothing but a blank sheet of paper."

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"And if they were, it wouldn't be a bad thing, Mrs. Bateson; there would be less sorrow on some sides, and less crape on others, and far less unpleasantness all round. For my part, I doubt if Miss Farrington will leave her fortune to Miss Elisabeth, and her only a cousin's child; for when all is said and done, cousins are but elastic relations, as you may say. The well-to-do ones are like sisters and brothers, and the poor ones don't seem to be no connection at all."

"Well, let's hope that Miss Elisabeth will marry, and have a husband to work for her when Miss Farrington is dead and gone."

"Husbands are as uncertain as wills, Mrs. Bateson, and more sure to give offence to them that trust in them; besides, I doubt if Miss Elisabeth is handsome enough to get a husband. The gentry think a powerful lot of looks in choosing a wife."

Mrs. Bateson took up the cudgels on Elisabeth's behalf. "She mayn't be exactly handsome—I don't pretend as she is; but she has a wonderful way of dressing herself, and looking for all the world like a fashion-plate; and some men have a keen eye for clothes."

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"I think nothing of fine clothes myself. Saint Peter warns us against braiding of hair and putting on of apparel; and when all's said and done it don't go as far as a good complexion, and we don't need any apostle to tell us that—we can see it for ourselves."

"And as for cleverness, there ain't her like in all Mershire," continued Mrs. Bateson.

"Bless you! cleverness never yet helped a woman in getting a husband, and never will; though if she's got enough of it, it may keep her from ever having one. I don't hold with cleverness in a woman myself; it has always ended in mischief, from the time when the woman ate a bit of the Tree of Knowledge, and there was such a to-do about it."

"I wish she'd marry Mr. Christopher; he worships the very ground she walks on, and she couldn't find a better man if she swept out all the corners of the earth looking for one."

"Well, at any rate, she knows all about him; that is something. I always say that men are the same as kittens—you should take 'em straight from their mothers, or else not take 'em at all; for, if you don't, you never know what bad habits they may have formed or what queer tricks they will be up to."

"Maybe the manager's nephew ain't altogether the sort of husband you'd expect for a Farrington," said Mrs. Bateson thoughtfully; "I don't deny that. But he's wonderful

fond of her, Mr. Christopher is; and there's nothing like love for smoothing things over when the oven ain't properly heated, and the meat is done to a cinder on one side and all raw on the other. You find that out when you're married."

"You find a good many things out when you're married, Mrs. Bateson, and one is that this world is a wilderness of care. But as for love, I don't rightly know much about it, since Hankey would always rather have had my sister Sarah than me, and only put up with me when she gave him the pass-by, being set on marrying one of the family. I'm sure, for my part, I wish Sarah had had him; though I've no call to say so, her always having been a good sister to me."

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"Well, love's a fine thing; take my word for it. It keeps the men from grumbling when nothing else will; except, of course, the grace of God," added Mrs. Bateson piously, "though even that don't always seem to have much effect, when things go wrong with their dinners."

"That's because they haven't enough of it; they haven't much grace in their hearts, as a rule, haven't men, even the best of them; and the best of them don't often come my way. But as for Miss Elisabeth, she isn't a regular Farringdon, as you may say—not the real daughter of the works; and so she shouldn't take too much upon herself, expecting dukes and ironmasters and the like to come begging to her on their bended knees. She is only Miss Farringdon's adopted daughter, at best; and I don't hold with adopted children, I don't; I think it is better and more natural to be born of your own parents, like most folk are."

"So do I," agreed Mrs. Bateson; "I'd never have adopted a child myself. I should always have been expecting to see its parents' faults coming out in it—so different from the peace you have with your own flesh and blood."

Mrs. Hankey groaned. "Your own flesh and blood may take after their father; you never can tell."

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"So they may, Mrs. Hankey—so they may; but, as the Scripture says, it is our duty to whip the old man out of them."

"Just so. And that's another thing against adopted children—you'd hesitate about punishing them enough; I don't fancy as you'd ever feel the same pleasure in whipping 'em as you do in whipping your own. You'd feel you ought to be polite-like, as if they was sort of visitors."

"My children always took after my side of the house, I'm thankful to say," said Mrs. Bateson; "so I hadn't much trouble with them."

"I wish I could say as much; I do, indeed. But the Lord saw fit to try me by making my son Peter the very moral of his father; as like as two peas they are. And when you find one poor woman with such a double portion, you are tempted to doubt the workings of Providence."

Mrs. Bateson looked sympathetic. "That's bad for you, Mrs. Hankey!"

"It is so; but I take up my cross and don't complain. You know what a feeble creature Hankey is—never doing the right thing; and, when he does, doing it at the wrong time; well, Peter is just such another. Only the other day he was travelling by rail, and what must he do but get an attack of the toothache? Those helpless sort of folks are always having the toothache, if you notice."

"So they are."

"Peter's toothache was so bad that he must needs take a dose of some sleeping-stuff or other—I forget the name—and fell so sound asleep that he never woke at the station, but was put away with the carriage into a siding. Fast asleep he was, with his handkerchief over his face to keep the sun off, and never heard the train shunted, nor nothing."

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"Well, to be sure! Them sleeping-draughts are wonderful soothing, as I've heard tell, but I never took one on 'em. The Lord giveth His beloved sleep, and His givings are enough for them as are in health; but them as are in pain want something a bit stronger, doubtless."

"So it appears," agreed Mrs. Hankey. "Well, there lay Peter fast asleep in the siding,

with his handkerchief over his face. And one of the porters happens to come by, and sees him, and jumps to the conclusion that there's been a murder in the train, and that our Peter is the corpse. So off he goes to the station-master and tells him as there's a murdered body in one of the carriages in the siding; and the station-master's as put out as never was."

Mrs. Bateson's eyes and mouth opened wide in amazement and interest. "What a tale, to be sure!"

"And then," added Peter's mother, growing more dramatic as the story proceeded, "the station-master sends for the police, and the police sends for the crowner, so as everything shall be decent and in order; and they walks in a solemn procession—with two porters carrying a shutter—to the carriage where Peter lies, all as grand and nice as if it was a funeral."

"I never heard tell of such a thing in my life—never!"

"Then the station-master opens the door with one of them state keys which always take such a long time to open a door which you could open with your own hands in a trice—you know 'em by sight."

Mrs. Bateson nodded. Of course she knew them by sight; who does not?

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"And then the crowner steps forward to take the handkerchief off the face of the body, it being the perquisite of a crowner so to do," Mrs. Hankey continued, with the maternal regret of a mother whose son has been within an inch of fame, and missed it; "and just picture to yourself the vexation of them all, when it was no murdered corpse they found, but only our Peter with an attack of the toothache!"

"Well, I never! They must have been put about; as you would have been yourself, Mrs. Hankey, if you'd found so little after expecting so much."

"In course I should; it wasn't in flesh and blood not to be, and station-master and crowner are but mortal, like the rest of us. I assure you, when I first heard the story, I pitied them from the bottom of my heart."

"And what became of Peter in the midst of it all, Mrs. Hankey?"

"Oh! it woke him up with a vengeance; and, of course, it flustered him a good deal, when he rightly saw how matters stood, to have to make his excuses to all them grand gentlemen for not being a murdered corpse. But as I says to him afterward, he'd no one but himself to blame; first for being so troublesome as to have the toothache, and then for being so presumptuous as to try and cure it. And his father is just the same; if you take your eye off him for a minute he is bound to be in some mischief or another."

"There's no denying that husbands is troublesome, Mrs. Hankey, and sons is worse; but all the same I stand up for 'em both, and I wish Miss Elisabeth had got one of the one and half a dozen of the other. Mark my words, she'll never do better, taking him all round, than Master Christopher."

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Mrs. Hankey sighed. "I only hope she'll find it out before it is too late, and he is either laid in an early grave or else married to a handsomer woman, as the case may be, and both ways out of her reach. But I doubt it. She was a dark baby, if you remember, was Miss Elisabeth; and I never trust them as has been dark babies, and never shall."

"And how is Peter's toothache now?" inquired Mrs. Bateson, who was a more tender-hearted matron than Peter's mother.

"Oh! it's no better; and I know no one more aggravating than folks who keep sayin' they are no better when you ask 'em how they are. It always seems so ungrateful. Only this morning I asked our Peter how his tooth was, and he says, 'No better, mother; it was so bad in the night that I fairly wished I was dead.' 'Don't go wishing that,' says I; 'for if you was dead you'd have far worse pain, and it 'ud last for ever and ever.' I really spoke quite sharp to him, I was that sick of his grumbling; but it didn't seem to do him no good."

"Speaking sharp seldom does do much good," Mrs. Bateson remarked sapiently, "except to them as speaks."

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## CHAPTER V

### THE MOAT HOUSE

You thought you knew me in and out  
And yet you never knew  
That all I ever thought about  
Was you.

Sedgehill High Street is nothing but a part of the great high road which leads from Silverhampton to Studley and Slipton and the other towns of the Black Country; but it calls itself Sedgehill High Street as it passes through the place, and so identifies itself with its environment, after the manner of caterpillars and polar bears and other similarly wise and adaptable beings. At the point where this road adopts the pseudonym of the High Street, close by Sedgehill Church, a lane branches off from it at right angles, and runs down a steep slope until it comes to a place where it evidently experiences a difference of opinion as to which is the better course to pursue—an experience not confined to lanes. But in this respect lanes are happier than men and women, in that they are able to pursue both courses, and so learn for themselves which is the wiser one, as is the case with this particular lane. One course leads headlong down another steep hill—so steep that unwary travellers usually descend from their carriages to walk up or down it, and thus are enabled to ensure relief to their horses and a chill to themselves at the same time; for it is hot work walking up or down that sunny precipice, and the cold winds of Mershire await one with equal gusto at the top and at the bottom. At the foot of the hill stretches a breezy common, wide enough to make one think "long, long thoughts"; and if the traveller looks backward when he has crossed this common, he will see Sedgehill Church, crowning and commanding the vast expanse, and pointing heavenward with its slender spire to remind him, and all other wayfaring men, that the beauty and glory of this present world is only an earnest and a foretaste of something infinitely fairer.

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The second course of the irresolute lane is less adventurous, and wanders peacefully through Badgering Woods, a dark and delightful spot, once mysterious enough to be a fitting hiding-place for the age-long slumbers of some sleeping princess. As a matter of fact, so it was; the princess was black but comely, and her name was Coal. There she had slept for a century of centuries, until Prince Iron needed and sought and found her, and awakened her with the noise of his kisses. So now the wood is not asleep any more, but is filled with the tramping of the prince's men. The old people wring their hands and mourn that the former things are passing away, and that Mershire's youthful beauty will soon be forgotten; but the young people laugh and are glad, because they know that life is greater than beauty, and that it is by her black coalfields, and not by her green woodlands, that Mershire will save her people from poverty, and will satisfy her poor with bread.

When Elisabeth Farringdon was a girl, the princess was still asleep in the heart of the wood, and no prince had yet attempted to disturb her; and the lane passed through a forest of silence until it came to a dear little brown stream, which, by means of a dam, was turned into a moat, encircling one of the most ancient houses in England. The Moat House had been vacant for some time, as the owner was a delicate man who preferred to live abroad; and great was the interest at Sedgehill when, a year or two after Elisabeth left school, it was reported that a stranger, Alan Tremaine by name, had taken the Moat House for the sake of the hunting, which was very good in that part of Mershire.

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So Alan settled there, and became one of the items which went to the making of Elisabeth's world. He was a small, slight man, interesting-looking rather than regularly handsome, of about five-and-twenty, who had devoted himself to the cultivation of his intellect and the suppression of his soul. Because his mother had been a religious woman, he reasoned that faith was merely an amiable feminine weakness, and because he himself was clever enough to make passable Latin verses, he argued that no Supernatural Being could have been clever enough to make him.

"Have you seen the new man who has come to the Moat House?" asked Elisabeth of Christopher. The latter had now settled down permanently at the Osierfield, and was

qualifying himself to take his uncle's place as general manager of the works, when that uncle should retire from the post. He was also qualifying himself to be Elisabeth's friend instead of her lover—a far more difficult task.

"Yes; I have seen him."

"What is he like? I am dying to know."

"When I saw him he was exactly like a man riding on horseback; but as he was obviously too well-dressed to be a beggar, I have no reason to believe that the direction in which he was riding was the one which beggars on horseback are proverbially expected to take."

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"How silly you are! You know what I mean."

"Perfectly. You mean that if you had seen a man riding by, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, it would at once have formed an opinion as to all the workings of his mind and the meditations of his heart. But my impressions are of slower growth, and I am even dull enough to require some foundation for them." Christopher loved to tease Elisabeth.

"I am awfully quick in reading character," remarked that young lady, with some pride.

"You are. I never know which impresses me more—the rapidity with which you form opinions, or their inaccuracy when formed."

"I'm not as stupid as you think."

"Pardon me, I don't think you are at all stupid; but I am always hoping that the experience of life will make you a little stupider."

"Don't be a goose, but tell me all you know about Mr. Tremaine."

"I don't know much about him, except that he is well-off, that he apparently rides about ten stone, and that he is not what people call orthodox. By the way. I didn't discover his unorthodoxy by seeing him ride by, as you would have done; I was told about it by some people who know him."

"How very interesting!" cried Elisabeth enthusiastically. "I wonder how unorthodox he is. Do you think he doesn't believe in anything?"

"In himself, I fancy. Even the baldest creed is usually self-embracing. But I believe he indulges in the not unfashionable luxury of doubts. You might attend to them, Elisabeth; you are the sort of girl who would enjoy attending to doubts."

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"I suppose I really am too fond of arguing."

"There you misjudge yourself. You are instructive rather than argumentative. Saying the same thing over and over again in different language is not arguing, you know; I should rather call it preaching, if I were not afraid of hurting your feelings."

"You are a very rude boy! But, anyway, I have taught you a lot of things; you can't deny that."

"I don't wish to deny it; I am your eternal debtor. To tell the truth, I believe you have taught me everything I know, that is worth knowing, except the things that you have tried to teach me. There, I must confess, you have signally failed."

"What have I tried to teach you?"

"Heaps of things: that pleasure is more important than duty; that we are sent into the world to enjoy ourselves; that the worship of art is the only soul-satisfying form of faith; that conscience is an exhausted force; that feelings and emotions ought to be labelled and scheduled; that lobster is digestible; that Miss Herbert is the most attractive woman in the world; etcetera, etcetera."

"And what have I taught you without trying?"

"Ah! that is a large order; and it is remarkable that the things you have taught me are just the things that you have never learned yourself."

"Then I couldn't have taught them."

"But you did; that is where your genius comes in."

"I really am tremendously quick in judging character," repeated Elisabeth thoughtfully; "if I met you for the first time I should know in five minutes that you were a man with plenty of head, and heaps of soul, and very little heart."

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"That would show wonderful penetration on your part."

"You may laugh, but I should. Of course, as it is, it is not particularly clever of me to understand you thoroughly; I have known you so long."

"Exactly; it would only be distinctly careless of you if you did not."

"Of course it would; but I do. I could draw a map of your mind with my eyes shut, I know it so well."

"I wish you would. I should value it even if it were drawn with your eyes open, though possibly in that case it might be less correct."

"I will, if you will give me a pencil and a sheet of paper."

Christopher produced a pencil, and tore a half-sheet off a note that he had in his pocket. The two were walking through the wood at the Willows at that moment, and Elisabeth straightway sat down upon a felled tree that happened to be lying there, and began to draw.

The young man watched her with amusement. "An extensive outline," he remarked; "this is gratifying."

"Oh yes! you have plenty of mind, such as it is; nobody could deny that."

"But why is the coast-line all irregular, with such a lot of bays and capes and headlands?"

"To show that you are an undecided person, and given to split hairs, and don't always know your own opinion. First you think you'll do a thing because it is nice; and then you think you won't do it because it is wrong; and in the end you drop between two stools, like Mahomet's coffin."

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"I see. And please what are the mountain-ranges that you are drawing now?"

"These," replied Elisabeth, covering her map with herring-bones, "are your scruples. Like all other mountain-ranges they hinder commerce, make pleasure difficult, and render life generally rather uphill work." "Don't I sound exactly as if I was taking a geography class?"

"Or conducting an Inquisition," added Christopher.

"I thought an Inquisition was a Spanish thing that hurt."

"So certain ignorant people say; but it was originally invented, I believe, to eradicate error and to maintain truth."

"I am going on with my geography class, so don't interrupt. The rivers in this map, which are marked by a few faint lines, are narrow and shallow; they are only found near the coast, and never cross the interior of the country at all. These represent your feelings."

"Very ingenious of you! And what is that enormous blotch right in the middle of the country, which looks like London and its environs?"

"That is your conscience; its outlying suburbs cover nearly the whole country, you will perceive. You will also notice that there are no seaports on the coast of my map; that shows that you are self-contained, and that you neither send exports to, nor receive imports from, the hearts and minds of other people."

"What ever are those queer little castellated things round the coast that you are drawing now?"

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"Those are floating icebergs, to show that it is a cold country. There, my map is finished," concluded Elisabeth, half closing her eyes and contemplating her handiwork through her eyelashes; "and I consider it a most successful sketch."

"It is certainly clever."

"And true, too."

Christopher's eyes twinkled. "Give it me," he said, stretching out his hand; "but sign it with your name first. Not there," he added hastily, as Elisabeth began writing a capital E in one corner; "right across the middle."

Elisabeth looked up in surprise. "Right across the map itself, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"But it is such a long name that it will cover the whole country."

"I know that."

"It will spoil it."

"I shouldn't be surprised; nevertheless, I always am in favour of realism."

"I don't know where the realism comes in; but I am such an obliging person that I will do what you want," said Elisabeth, writing her name right across the half-sheet of paper, in her usual dashing style.

"Thank you," said Christopher, taking the paper from her; and he smiled to himself as he saw that the name "Elisabeth Farringdon" covered the whole of the imaginary continent from east to west. Elisabeth naturally did not know that this was the only true image in her allegory; she was as yet far too clever to perceive obvious things. As Chris said, it was not when her eyes were open that she was most correct.

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"I have seen Mr. Tremaine," said Elisabeth to him, a day or two after this. "Cousin Maria left her card upon him, and he returned her call yesterday and found us at home. I think he is perfectly delightful."

"You do, do you? I knew you would."

"Why?"

"Because, like the Athenians, you live to see or to hear some new thing."

"It wasn't his newness that made me like him; I liked him because he was so interesting. I do adore interesting people! I hadn't known him five minutes before he began to talk about really deep things; and then I felt I had known him for ages, he was so very understanding."

"Indeed," Christopher said drily.

"By the time we had finished tea he understood me better than you do after all these years. I wonder if I shall get to like him better than I like you?"

"I wonder, too." And he really did, with an amount of curiosity that was positively painful.

"Of course," remarked Elisabeth thoughtfully, "I shall always like you, because we have been friends so long, and you are overgrown with the lichen of old memories and associations. But you are not very interesting in the abstract, you see; you are nice and good, but you have not heart enough to be really thrilling."

"Still, even if I had a heart, it is possible I might not always wear it on my sleeve for Miss Elisabeth Farringdon to peck at."

"Oh yes, you would; you couldn't help it. If you tried to hide it I should see through your disguises. I have X rays in my eyes."

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"Have you? They must be a great convenience."

"Well, at any rate, they keep me from making mistakes," Elisabeth confessed.

"That is fortunate for you. It is a mistake to make mistakes."

"I remember our Dear Lady at Fox How once saying," continued the girl, "that nothing is so good for keeping women from making mistakes as a sense of humour."

"I wonder if she was right?"

"She was always right; and in that as in everything else. Have you never noticed that it is not the women with a sense of humour who make fools of themselves? They know better than to call a thing romantic which is really ridiculous."

"Possibly; but they are sometimes in danger of calling a thing ridiculous which is really romantic; and that also is a mistake."

"I suppose it is. I wonder which is worse—to think ridiculous things romantic, or romantic things ridiculous? It is rather an interesting point. Which do you think?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it."

"You never do think about things that really matter," exclaimed Elisabeth, with reproof in her voice; "that is what makes you so uninteresting to talk to. The fact is you are so wrapped up in that tiresome old business that you never have time to attend to the deeper things and the hidden meanings of life; but are growing into a regular money-grubber."

"Perhaps so; but you will have the justice to admit it isn't my own money that I am grubbing," replied Christopher, who had only reconciled himself to giving up all his youthful ambitions and becoming sub-manager of the Osierfield by the thought that he might thereby in some roundabout way serve Elisabeth. Like other schoolboys he had dreamed his dreams, and prospected wonderful roads to success which his feet were destined never to tread; and at first he had asked something more of life than the Osierfield was capable of offering him. But finally he had submitted contentedly to the inevitable, because—in spite of all his hopes and ambitions—his boyish love for Elisabeth held him fast; and now his manly love for Elisabeth held him faster still. But even the chains which love had rivetted are capable of galling us sometimes; and although we would not break them, even if we could, we grumble at them occasionally—that is to say, if we are merely human, as is the case with so many of us.

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"It is a great pity," Elisabeth went on, "that you deliberately narrow yourself down to such a small world and such petty interests. It is bad enough for old people to be practical and sensible and commonplace and all that; but for a man as young as you are it is simply disgusting. I can not understand you, because you really are clever and ought to know better; but although I am your greatest friend, you never talk to me about anything except the merest frivolities."

Christopher bowed his head to the storm and was still—he was one of the people who early learn the power of silence; but Elisabeth, having once mounted her high horse, dug her spurs into her steed and rode on to victory. In those days she was so dreadfully sure of herself that she felt competent to teach anybody anything.

"You laugh at me as long as I am funny and I amuse you; but the minute I begin to talk about serious subjects—such as feelings and sentiments and emotions—you lose your interest at once, and turn everything into a joke. The truth is, you have so persistently suppressed your higher self that it is dying of inanition; you'll soon have no higher self left at all. If people don't use their hearts they don't have any, like the Kentucky fish that can't see in the dark because they are blind, don't you know? Now you should take a leaf out of Mr. Tremaine's book. The first minute I saw him I knew that he was the sort of man that cultivated his higher self; he was interested in just the things that interest me."

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The preacher paused for breath, and looked up to see whether her sermon was being "blessed" to her hearer; then suddenly her voice changed—

"What is the matter, Chris?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Because you look so awfully white. I was talking so fast that I didn't notice it; but I expect it is the heat. Do sit down on the grass and rest a bit; it is quite dry; and I'll fan you with a big dock leaf."

"I'm all right," replied Christopher, trying to laugh, and succeeding but indifferently.

"But I'm sure you are not, you are so pale; you look just as you looked the day that I tumbled off the rick—do you remember it?—and you took me into Mrs. Bateson's to have my head bound up. She said you'd got a touch of the sun, and I'm afraid you've got one now."

"Yes, I remember it well enough; but I'm all right now, Betty. Don't worry about me."

"But I do worry when you're ill; I always did. Don't you remember that when you had measles and I wasn't allowed to see you, I cried myself to sleep for three nights running, because I thought you were going to die, and that everything would be vile without you? And then I had a prayer-meeting about you in Mrs. Bateson's parlour, and I wrote the hymns for it myself. The Batesons wept over them and considered them inspired, and foretold that I should die early in consequence." And Elisabeth laughed at the remembrance of her fame.

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Christopher laughed too. "That was hard on you! I admit that verse-writing is a crime in a woman, but I should hardly call it a capital offence. Still, I should like to have heard the hymns. You were great at writing poetry in those days."

"Wasn't I? And I used to be so proud when you said that my poems weren't 'half bad!'"

"No wonder; that was high praise from me. But can't you recall those hymns?"

The hymnist puckered her forehead. "I can remember the beginning of the opening one," she said; "it was a six-line-eights, and we sang it to a tune called Stella; it began thus:

"How can we sing like little birds,  
And hop about among the boughs?  
How can we gambol with the herds,  
Or chew the cud among the cows?  
How can we pop with all the weasles  
Now Christopher has got the measles?"

"Bravo!" exclaimed the subject of the hymn. "You are a born hymn-writer, Elisabeth. The shades of Charles Wesley and Dr. Watts bow to your obvious superiority."

"Well, at any rate, I don't believe they ever did better at fourteen; and it shows how anxious I was about you even then when you were ill. I am just the same now—quite as fond of you as I was then; and you are of me, too, aren't you?"

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"Quite." Which was perfectly true.

"Then that's all right," said Elisabeth contentedly; "and, you see, it is because I am so fond of you that I tell you of your faults. I think you are so good that I want you to be quite perfect."

"I see."

The missionary spirit is an admirable thing; but a man rarely does it full justice when it is displayed—toward himself—by the object of his devotion.

"If I wasn't so fond of you I shouldn't try to improve you."

"Of course not; and if you were a little fonder of me you wouldn't want to improve me. I perfectly understand."

"Dear old Chris! You really are extremely nice in some ways; and if you had only a little more heart you would be adorable. And I don't believe you are naturally unfeeling, do you?"

"No—I do not; but I sometimes wish I was."

"Don't say that. It is only that you haven't developed that side of you sufficiently; I feel sure the heart is there, but it is dormant. So now you will talk more about feelings, won't you?"

"I won't promise that. It is rather stupid to talk about things that one doesn't understand; I am sure this is correct, for I have often heard you say so."

"But talking to me about your feelings might help you to understand them, don't you see?"

"Or might help you."

"Oh! I don't want any help; feelings are among the few things that I can understand

without any assistance. But you are sure you are all right, Chris, and haven't got a headache or anything?" And the anxious expression returned to Elisabeth's face.

"My head is very well, thank you."

"You don't feel any pain?"

"In my head? distinctly not."

"You are quite well, you are certain?"

"Perfectly certain and quite well. What a fidget you are! Apparently you attach as much importance to rosy cheeks as Mother Hankey does."

"A pale face and dark hair are in her eyes the infallible signs of a depraved nature," laughed Elisabeth; "and I have both."

"Yet you fly at me for having one, and that only for a short time. Considering your own shortcomings, you should be more charitable."

Elisabeth laughed again as she patted his arm in a sisterly fashion. "Nice old boy! I am awfully glad you are all right. It would make me miserable if anything went really wrong with you, Chris."

"Then nothing shall go really wrong with me, and you shall not be miserable," said Christopher stoutly; "and, therefore, it is fortunate that I don't possess much heart—things generally go wrong with the people who have hearts, you know, and not with the people who have not; so we perceive how wise was the poet in remarking that whatever is made after the best possible pattern, or words to that effect." With which consoling remark he took leave of his liege-lady.

The friendship between Alan Tremaine and Elisabeth Farringdon grew apace during the next twelve months. His mind was of the metaphysical and speculative order, which is interesting to all women; and hers was of the volatile and vivacious type which is attractive to some men. They discussed everything under the sun, and some things over it; they read the same books and compared notes afterward; they went out sketching together, and instructed each other in the ways of art; and they carefully examined the foundations of each other's beliefs, and endeavoured respectively to strengthen and undermine the same. Gradually they fell into the habit of wondering every morning whether or not they should meet during the coming day; and of congratulating themselves nearly every evening that they had succeeded in so meeting.

As for Christopher, he was extremely and increasingly unhappy, and, it must be admitted, extremely and increasingly cross in consequence. The fact that he had not the slightest right to control Elisabeth's actions, in no way prevented him from highly disapproving of them; and the fact that he was too proud to express this disapproval in words, in no way prevented him from displaying it in manner. Elisabeth was wonderfully amiable with him, considering how very cross he was; but are we not all amiable with people toward whom we—in our inner consciousness—know that we are behaving badly?

"I can not make out what you can see in that conceited ass?" he said to her, when Alan Tremaine had been living at the Moat House for something over a year.

"Perhaps not; making things out never is your strong point," replied Elisabeth suavely.

"But he is such an ass! I'm sure the other evening, when he trotted out his views on the Higher Criticism for your benefit, he made me feel positively ill."

"I found it very interesting; and if, as you say, he did it for my benefit, he certainly succeeded in his aim." There were limits to the patience of Elisabeth.

"Well, how women can listen to bosh of that kind I can not imagine! What can it matter to you what he disbelieves or why he disbelieves it? And it is beastly cheek of him to suppose that it can."

"But he is right in supposing it, and it does matter to me. I like to know how old-fashioned truths accord or do not accord with modern phases of thought."



"Modern phases of nonsense, you mean! Well, the old-fashioned truths are good enough for me, and I'll stick to them, if you please, in spite of Mr. Tremaine's overwhelming arguments; and I should advise you to stick to them, too."

"Oh! Chris, I wish you wouldn't be so disagreeable." And Elisabeth sighed. "It is so difficult to talk to you when you are like this."

"I'm not disagreeable," replied Christopher mendaciously; "only I can not let you be taken in by a stuck-up fool without trying to open your eyes; I shouldn't be your friend if I could." And he actually believed that this was the case. He forgot that it is not the trick of friendship, but of love, to make "a corner" in affection, and to monopolize the whole stock of the commodity.

"You see," Elisabeth explained, "I am so frightfully modern, and yet I have been brought up in such a dreadfully old-fashioned way. It was all very well for the last generation to accept revealed truth without understanding it, but it won't do for us."

"Why not?"

"Oh! because we are young and modern."

"So were they at one time, and we shall not be so for long."

Elisabeth sighed again. "How difficult you are! Of course, the sort of religion that did for Cousin Maria and Mr. Smallwood won't do for Mr. Tremaine and me. Can't you see that?"

"I can not, I am sorry to say."

"Their religion had no connection with their intellects."

"Still, it changed their hearts, which I have heard is no unimportant operation."

"They accepted what they were told without trying to understand it," Elisabeth continued, "which is not, after all, a high form of faith."

"Indeed. I should have imagined that it was the highest."

"But can't you see that to accept blindly what you are told is not half so great as to sift it all, and to separate the chaff from the wheat, and to find the kernel of truth in the shell of tradition?" Elisabeth had not talked to Alan Tremaine for over a year without learning his tricks of thought and even of expression. "Don't you think that it is better to believe a little with the whole intellect than a great deal apart from it?"

Christopher looked obstinate. "I can't and don't."

"Have you no respect for 'honest doubt'?"

"Honest bosh!"

Elisabeth's face flushed. "You really are too rude for anything."

Christopher was penitent at once; he could not bear really to vex her. "I am sorry if I was rude; but it riles me to hear you quoting Tremaine's platitudes by the yard—such rotten platitudes as they are, too!"

"You don't do Mr. Tremaine justice, Chris. Even though he may have outgrown the old faiths, he is a very good man; and he has such lovely thoughts about truth and beauty and love and things like that."

"His thoughts are nothing but empty windbags; for he is the type of man who is too ignorant to accept truth, too blind to appreciate beauty, and too selfish to be capable of loving any woman as a woman ought to be loved."

"I think his ideas about love are quite ideal," persisted the girl. "Only yesterday he was abusing the selfishness of men in general, and saying that a man who is really in love thinks of the woman he loves as well as of himself."

"He said that, did he? Then he was mistaken."

Elisabeth looked surprised. "Then don't you agree with him that a man in love thinks of the woman as well as of himself?"

"No; I don't. A man who is really in love never thinks of himself at all, but only of the

woman. It strikes me that Master Alan Tremaine knows precious little about the matter."

"I think he knows a great deal. He said that love was the discovery of the one woman whereof all other women were but types. That really was a sweet thing to say!"

"My dear Betty, you know no more about the matter than he does. Falling in love doesn't merely mean that a man has found a woman who is dearer to him than all other women, but that he has found a woman who is dearer to him than himself."

Elisabeth changed her ground. "I admit that he isn't what you might call orthodox," she said—"not the sort of man who would clothe himself in the rubric, tied on with red tape; but though he may not be a Christian, as we count Christianity, he believes with all his heart in an overruling Power which makes for righteousness."

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"That is very generous of him," retorted Christopher; "still, I can not for the life of me see that the possession of three or four thousand a year, without the trouble of earning it, gives a man the right to patronize the Almighty."

"You are frightfully narrow, Chris."

"I know I am, and I am thankful for it. I had rather be as narrow as a plumbing-line than indulge in the sickly latitudinarianism that such men as Tremaine nickname breadth."

"Oh! I am tired of arguing with you; you are too stupid for anything."

"But you haven't been arguing—you have only been quoting Tremaine verbatim; and that that may be tiring I can well believe."

"Well, you can call it what you like; but by any other name it will irritate you just as much, because you have such a horrid temper. Your religion may be very orthodox, but I can not say much for its improving qualities; it is the crossest, nastiest, narrowest, disagreeablest sort of religion that I ever came across."

And Elisabeth walked away in high dudgeon, leaving Christopher very angry with himself for having been disagreeable, and still angrier with Tremaine for having been the reverse.

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## CHAPTER VI

### WHIT MONDAY

Light shadows—hardly seen as such—  
Crept softly o'er the summer land  
In mute caresses, like the touch  
Of some familiar hand.

"I want to give your work-people a treat," said Tremaine to Elisabeth, in the early summer.

"That is very nice of you; but this goes without saying, as you are always planning and doing something nice. I shall be very glad for our people to have a little pleasure, as at present the annual tea-meeting at East Lane Chapel seems to be their one and only dissipation; and although tea-meetings may be very well in their way, they hardly seem to fulfil one's ideal of human joy."

"Ah! you have touched upon a point to which I was coming," said Alan earnestly; "it is wonderful how often our minds jump together! Not only am I anxious to give the Osierfield people something more enjoyable than a tea-meeting—I also wish to eliminate the tea-meeting spirit from their idea of enjoyment."

"How do you mean?" It was noteworthy that while Elisabeth was always ready to teach Christopher, she was equally willing to learn from Alan.

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"I mean that I want to show people that pleasure and religion have nothing to do with each other. It always seems to me such a mistake that the pleasures of the poor—

the innocent pleasures, of course—are generally inseparable from religious institutions. If they attend a tea-party, they open it with prayer; if they are taken for a country drive, they sing hymns by the way."

"Oh! but I think they do this because they like it, and not because they are made to do it," said Elisabeth eagerly.

"Not a bit of it; they do it because they are accustomed to do it, and they feel that it is expected of them. Religion is as much a part of their dissipation as evening dress is of ours, and just as much a purely conventional part; and I want to teach them to dissociate the two ideas in their own minds."

"I doubt if you will succeed, Mr. Tremaine."

"Yes, I shall; I invariably succeed. I have never failed in anything yet, and I never mean to fail. And I do so want to make the poor people enjoy themselves thoroughly. Of course, it is a good thing to have one's pills always hidden in jam; but it must be a miserable thing to belong to a section of society where one's jam is invariably full of pills."

Elisabeth smiled, but did not speak; Alan was the one person of her acquaintance to whom she would rather listen than talk.

"It is a morbid and unhealthy habit," he went on, "to introduce religion into everything, in the way that English people are so fond of doing. It decreases their pleasures by casting its shadow over purely human and natural joys; and it increases their sorrow and want by teaching them to lean upon some hypothetical Power, instead of trying to do the best that they can for themselves. Also it enervates their reasoning faculties; for nothing is so detrimental to one's intellectual strength as the habit of believing things which one knows to be impossible."

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"Then don't you believe in religion of any kind?"

"Most certainly I do—in many religions. I believe in the religion of art and of science and of humanity, and countless more; in fact, the only religion I do not believe in is Christianity, because that spoils all the rest by condemning art as fleshly, science as untrue, and humanity as sinful. I want to bring the old Pantheism to life again, and to teach our people to worship beauty as the Greeks worshipped it of old; and I want you to help me."

Elisabeth gasped as Elisha might have gasped when Elijah's mantle fell upon him. She was as yet too young to beware of false prophets. "I should love to make people happy," she said; "there seems to be so much happiness in the world and so few that find it."

"The Greeks found it; therefore, why should not the English? I mean to teach them to find it, and I shall begin with your work-people on Whit Monday."

"What shall you do?" asked the girl, with intense interest.

"It is no good taking away old lamps until you are prepared to offer new ones in their place; therefore I shall not take away the consolations (so called) of religion until I have shown the people a more excellent way. I shall first show them nature, and then art—nature to arouse their highest instincts, and art to express the same; and I am convinced that after they have once been brought face to face with the beautiful thus embodied, the old faiths will lose the power to move them."

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When Whit Monday came round, the throbbing heart of the Osierfield stopped beating, as it was obliged to stop on a bank-holiday; and the workmen, with their wives and sweethearts, were taken by Alan Tremaine in large brakes to Pembruge Castle, which the owner had kindly thrown open to them, at Alan's request, for the occasion.

It was a long drive and a wonderfully beautiful one, for the year was at its best. All the trees had put on their new summer dresses, and never a pair of them were of the same shade. The hedges were covered with a wreath of white May-blossom, and seemed like interminable drifts of that snow in summer which is as good news from a far country; and the roads were bordered by the feathery hemlock, which covered the face of the land as with a bridal veil.

"Isn't the world a beautiful place?" said Elisabeth, with a sigh of content, to Alan, who was driving her in his mail-phaeton. "I do hope all the people will see and understand how beautiful it is."

"They can not help seeing and understanding; beauty such as this is its own interpreter. Surely such a glimpse of nature as we are now enjoying does people more good than a hundred prayer-meetings in a stuffy chapel."

"Beauty slides into one's soul on a day like this, just as something—I forget what—slid into the soul of the Ancient Mariner; doesn't it?"

"Of course it does; and you will find that these people—now that they are brought face to face with it—will be just as ready to worship abstract beauty as ever the Greeks were. The fault has not been with the poor for not having worshipped beauty, but with the rich for not having shown them sufficient beauty to worship. The rich have tried to choke them off with religion instead, because it came cheaper and was less troublesome to produce."

"Then do you think that the love of beauty will elevate these people more and make them happier than Christianity has done?"

"Most assuredly I do. Had our climate been sunnier and the fight for existence less bitter, I believe that Christianity would have died out in England years ago; but the worship of sorrow will always have its attractions for the sorrowful; and the doctrine of renunciation will never be without its charm for those unfortunate ones to whom poverty and disease have stood sponsors, and have renounced all life's good things in their name before ever they saw the light. Man makes his god in his own image; and thus it comes to pass that while the strong and joyous Greek adored Zeus on Olympus, the anæmic and neurotic Englishman worships Christ on Calvary. Do you tell me that if people were happy they would bow down before a stricken and crucified God? Not they. And I want to make them so happy that they shall cease to have any desire for a suffering Deity."

"Well, you have made them happy enough for to-day, at any rate," said Elisabeth, as she looked up at him with gratitude and admiration. "I saw them all when they were starting, and there wasn't one face among them that hadn't joy written on every feature in capital letters."

"Then in that case they won't be troubling their minds to-day about their religion; they will save it for the gloomy days, as we save narcotics for times of pain. You may depend upon that."

"I'm not so sure: their religion is more of a reality to them than you think," Elisabeth replied.

While Alan was thus, enjoying himself in his own fashion, his guests were enjoying themselves in theirs; and as they drove through summer's fairyland, they, too, talked by the way.

"Eh! but the May-blossom's a pretty sight," exclaimed Caleb Bateson, as the big wagonettes rolled along the country roads. "I never saw it finer than it is this year—not in all the years I've lived in Mershire; and Mershire's the land for May-blossom."

"It do look pretty," agreed his wife. "I only wish Lucy Ellen was here to see it; she was always a one for the May-blossom. Why, when she was ever such a little girl she'd come home carrying branches of it bigger than herself, till she looked like nothing but a walking May-pole."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Hankey, who happened to be driving in the same vehicle as the Batesons, "she'll be feeling sad and homesick to see it all again, I'll be bound."

Lucy Ellen's mother laughed contentedly. "Folks haven't time to feel homesick when they've got a husband to look after; he soon takes the place of May-blossom, bless you!"

"You're in luck to see all your children married and settled before the Lord has been pleased to take you," remarked Mrs. Hankey, with envy in her voice.

"Well, I'm glad for the two lads to have somebody to look after them, I'm bound to say; I feel now as they've some one to air their shirts when I'm not there, for you never

can trust a man to look after himself—never. Men have no sense to know what is good for 'em and what is bad for 'em, poor things! But Lucy Ellen is a different thing. Of course I'm pleased for her to have a home of her own, and such nice furniture as she's got, too, and in such a good circuit; but when your daughter is married you don't see her as often as you want to, and it is no good pretending as you do."

"That's true," agreed Caleb Bateson, with a big sigh; "and I never cease to miss my little lass."

"She ain't no little lass now, Mr. Bateson," argued Mrs. Hankey; "Lucy Ellen must be forty, if she's a day."

"So she be, Mrs. Hankey—so she be; but she is my little lass to me, all the same, and always will be. The children never grow up to them as loves 'em. They are always our children, just as we are always the Lord's children; and we never leave off a-screening and a-sheltering o' them, any more than He ever leaves off a-screening and a-sheltering of us."

"I'm glad to hear as Lucy Ellen has married into a good circuit. Unless the Lord build the house we know how they labour in vain that build it; and the Lord can't do much unless He has a good minister to help Him. I don't deny as He *may* work through local preachers; but I like a regular superintendent myself, with one or more ministers under him."

"Oh! Lucy Ellen lives in one of the best circuits in the Connexion," said Mrs. Bateson proudly; "they have an ex-president as superintendent, and three ministers under him, and a supernumerary as well. They never hear the same preached more than once a month; it's something grand!"

"Eh! it's a fine place is Craychester," added Caleb; "they held Conference there two years ago."

"It must be a grand thing to live in a place where they hold Conference," remarked Mrs. Hankey.

"It is indeed," agreed Mrs. Bateson; "Lucy Ellen said it seemed for all the world like heaven, to see so many ministers about, all in their black coats and white neckcloths. And then such preaching as they heard! It isn't often young folks enjoy such privileges, and so I told her."

"When all's said and done, there's nothing like a good sermon for giving folks real pleasure. Nothing in this world comes up to it, and I doubt if there'll be anything much better in the next," said Caleb; "I don't see as how there can be."

His friends all agreed with him, and continued, for the rest of the drive, to discuss the respective merits of various discourses they had been privileged to hear.

It was a glorious day. The sky was blue, with just enough white clouds flitting about to show how blue the blue part really was; and the varying shadows kept passing, like the caress of some unseen yet ever-protecting Hand, over the green nearnesses and the violet distances of a country whose foundations seemed to be of emerald and amethyst, and its walls and gateways of pearl. The large company from the Osierfield drove across the breezy common at the foot of Sedgehill Ridge, and then plunged into a network of lanes which led them, by sweet and mysterious ways, to the great highway from the Midlands to the coast of the western sea. On they went, past the little hamlet where the Danes and the Saxons fought a great fight more than a thousand years ago, and which is still called by a strange Saxon name, meaning "the burying-place of the slain"; and the little hamlet smiled in the summer sunshine, as if with kindly memories of those old warriors whose warfare had been accomplished so many centuries ago, and who lie together, beneath the white blossom, in the arms of the great peacemaker called Death, waiting for the resurrection morning which that blossom is sent to foretell. On, between man's walls of gray stone, till they came to God's walls of red sandstone; and then up a steep hill to another common, where the sweet-scented gorse made a golden pavement, and where there suddenly burst upon their sight a view so wide and so wonderful that those who look upon it with the seeing eye and the understanding heart catch glimpses of the King in His beauty through the fairness of the land that is very far off. On past the mossy stone, like an overgrown and illiterate milestone, which marks the boundary between Mershire and Salopshire; and then through a typical English village, noteworthy because the rites of

Mayday, with May-queen and May-pole to boot, are still celebrated there exactly as they were celebrated some three hundred years ago. At last they came to a picturesque wall and gateway, built of the red stone which belongs to that part of the country, and which has a trick of growing so much redder at evening-time that it looks as if the cold stone were blushing with pleasure at being kissed Good-night by the sun; and then through a wood sloping on the left side down to a little stream, which was so busy talking to itself about its own concerns that it had not time to leap and sparkle for the amusement of passers-by; until they drew up in front of a quaint old castle, built of the same stone as the outer walls and gateway.

The family were away from home, so the whole of the castle was at the disposal of Alan and his party, and they had permission to go wherever they liked. The state-rooms were in front of the building and led out of each other, so that when all the doors were open any one could see right from one end of the castle to the other. Dinner was to be served in the large saloon at the back, built over what was once the courtyard; and while his servants were laying the tables with the cold viands which they had brought with them, Alan took his guests through the state-rooms to see the pictures, and endeavoured to carry out his plan of educating them by pointing out to them some of the finer works of art.

"This," he said, stopping in front of a portrait, "is a picture of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu, who was born here, painted by one of the first portrait-painters of her day. I want you to look at her hands, and to notice how exquisitely they are painted. Also I wish to call your attention to the expression of her face. You know that it is the duty of art to interpret nature—that is to say, to show to ordinary people those hidden beauties and underlying meanings of common things which they would never be able to find out for themselves; and I think that in the expression on this woman's face the artist has shown forth, in a most wonderful way, the dissatisfaction and bitterness of her heart. As you look at her face you seem to see right into her soul, and to understand how she was foredoomed by nature and temperament to ask too much of life and to receive too little."

"Well, to be sure!" remarked Mrs. Bateson, in an undertone, to her lord and master; "she is a bit like our superintendent's wife, only not so stout. And what a gown she has got on! I should say that satin is worth five-and-six a yard if it is worth a penny. And I call it a sin and a shame to have a dirty green parrot sitting on your shoulder when you're wearing satin like that. If she'd had any sense she'd have fed the animals before she put her best gown on."

"I never could abide parrots," joined in Mrs. Hankey; "they smell so."

"And as for her looking dissatisfied and all that," continued Mrs. Bateson, "I for one can't see it. But if she did, it was all a pack of rubbish. What had she to grumble at, I should like to know, with a satin gown on at five-and-six a yard?"

By this time Alan had moved on to another picture. "This represents an unhappy marriage," he explained. "At first sight you see nothing but two well-dressed people sitting at table; but as you look into the picture you perceive the misery in the woman's face and the cruelty in the man's, and you realize all that they mean."

"Well, I see nothing more at second sight," whispered Mrs. Hankey; "except that the tablecloth might have been cleaner. There's another of your grumbling fine ladies! Now for sure she'd nothing to grumble at, sitting so grand at table with a glass of sherry-wine to drink."

"The husband looks a cantankerous chap," remarked Caleb.

"Poor thing! it's his liver," said Mrs. Bateson, taking up the cudgels as usual on behalf of the bilious and oppressed. "You can see from his complexion that he is out of order, and that all that rich dinner will do him no good. It was his wife's duty to see that he had something plain to eat, with none of them sauces and fal-lals, instead of playing the fine lady and making troubles out of nothing. I've no patience with her!"

"Still, he do look as if he'd a temper," persisted Mr. Bateson.

"And if he do, Caleb, what of that? If a man in his own house hasn't the right to show a bit of temper, I should like to know who has? I've no patience with the women that will get married and have a man of their own; and then cry their eyes out because the man isn't an old woman. If they want meekness and obedience, let 'em remain single

and keep lapdogs and canaries; and leave the husbands for those as can manage 'em and enjoy 'em, for there ain't enough to go round as it is." And Mrs. Bateson waxed quite indignant.

Here Tremaine took up his parable. "This weird figure, clothed in skins, and feeding upon nothing more satisfying than locusts and wild honey, is a type of all those who are set apart for the difficult and unsatisfactory lot of heralds and forerunners. They see the good time coming, and make ready the way for it, knowing all the while that its fuller light and wider freedom are not for them; they lead their fellows to the very borders of the promised land, conscious that their own graves are already dug in the wilderness. No great social or political movement has ever been carried on without their aid; and they have never reaped the benefits of those reforms which they lived and died to compass. Perhaps there are no sadder sights on the page of history than those solitary figures, of all nations and all times, who have foretold the coming of the dawn and yet died before it was yet day."

"Did you ever?" exclaimed Mrs. Bateson *sotto voce*; "a grown man like that, and not to know John the Baptist when he sees him! Forerunners and heralds indeed! Why, it's John the Baptist as large as life, and those as don't recognise him ought to be ashamed of theirselves."

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"Lucy Ellen would have known who it was when she was three years old," said Caleb proudly.

"And so she ought; I'd have slapped her if she hadn't, and richly she'd have deserved it."

"It's a comfort as Mr. Tremaine's mother is in her grave," remarked Mrs. Hankey, not a whit behind the others as regards shocked sensibilities; "this would have been a sad day for her if she had been alive."

"And it would!" agreed Mrs. Bateson warmly. "I know if one of my children hadn't known John the Baptist by sight, I should have been that ashamed I should never have held up my head again in this world—never!"

Mr. Bateson endeavoured to take a charitable view of the situation. "I expect as the poor lad's schooling was neglected through having lost his parents; and there's some things as you never seem to master at all except you master 'em when you're young—the Books of the Bible being one of them."

"My lads could say the Books of the Bible through, without stopping to take breath, when they were six, and Lucy Ellen when she was five and a half."

"Well, then, Kezia, you should be all the more ready to take pity on them poor orphans as haven't had the advantages as our children have had."

"So I am, Caleb; and if it had been one of the minor prophets I shouldn't have said a word—I can't always tell Jonah myself unless there's a whale somewhere at the back; but John the Baptist—!"

When the inspection of the pictures had been accomplished, the company sat down to dinner in the large saloon; and Alan was slightly disconcerted when they opened the proceedings by singing, at the top of their voices, "Be present at our table, Lord." Elisabeth, on seeing the expression of his face, sorely wanted to laugh; but she stifled this desire, as she had learned by experience that humour was not one of Alan's strong points. Now Christopher could generally see when a thing was funny, even when the joke was at his own expense; but Alan took life more seriously, which—as Elisabeth assured herself—showed what a much more earnest man than Christopher he was, in spite of his less orthodox opinions. So she made up her mind that she would not catch Christopher's eye on the present occasion, as she usually did when anything amused her, because it was cruel to laugh at the frustration of poor Alan's high-flown plans; and then naturally she looked straight at the spot where Chris was presiding over a table, and returned his smile of perfect comprehension. It was one of Elisabeth's peculiarities that she invariably did the thing which she had definitely made up her mind not to do.

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After dinner the party broke up and wandered about, in small detachments, over the park and through the woods and by the mere, until it was tea-time. Alan spent most of his afternoon in explaining to Elisabeth the more excellent ways whereby the poor may

be enabled to share the pleasures of the rich; and Christopher spent most of his in carrying Johnnie Stubbs to the mere and taking him for a row, and so helping the crippled youth to forget for a short time that he was not as other men are, and that it was out of pity that he, who never worked, had been permitted to take the holiday which he could not earn.

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After tea Alan and Elisabeth were standing on the steps leading from the saloon to the garden.

"What a magnificent fellow that is!" exclaimed Alan, pointing to the huge figure of Caleb Bateson, who was talking to Jemima Stubbs on the far side of the lawn. Caleb certainly justified this admiration, for he was a fine specimen of a Mershire puddler—and there is no finer race of men to be found anywhere than the puddlers of Mershire.

Elisabeth's eyes twinkled. "That is one of your anæmic and neurotic Christians," she remarked demurely.

Displeasure settled on Alan's brow; he greatly objected to Elisabeth's habit of making fun of things, and had tried his best to cure her of it. To a great extent he had succeeded (for the time being); but even yet the cloven foot of Elisabeth's levity now and then showed itself, much to his regret.

"Exceptions do not disprove rules," he replied coldly. "Moreover, Bateson is probably religious rather from the force of convention than of conviction." Tremaine never failed to enjoy his own rounded sentences, and this one pleased him so much that it almost succeeded in dispelling the cloud which Elisabeth's ill-timed gibe had created.

"He is a class-leader and a local preacher," she added.

"Those terms convey no meaning to my mind."

"Don't they? Well, they mean that Caleb not only loyally supports the government of Providence, but is prepared to take office under it," Elisabeth explained.

Alan never quarrelled with people; he always reprovved them. "You make a great mistake—and an extremely feminine one—Miss Farrington, in invariably deducting general rules from individual instances. Believe me, this is a most illogical form of reasoning, and leads to erroneous, and sometimes dangerous, conclusions."

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Elisabeth tossed her head; she did not like to be reprovved, even by Alan Tremaine. "My conclusions are nearly always correct, anyhow," she retorted; "and if you get to the right place, I don't see that it matters how you go there. I never bother my head about the 'rolling stock' or the 'permanent way' of my intuitions; I know they'll bring me to the right conclusion, and I leave them to work out their Bradshaw for themselves."

In the meantime Jemima Stubbs was pouring out a recital of her grievances into the ever-sympathetic ear of Caleb Bateson.

"You don't seem to be enjoying yourself, my lass," he had said in his cheery voice, laying a big hand in tender caress upon the girl's narrow shoulders.

"And how should I, Mr. Bateson, not having a beau nor nobody to talk to?" she replied in her quavering treble. "What with havin' first mother to nurse when I was a little gell, and then havin' Johnnie to look after, I've never had time to make myself look pretty and to get a beau, like other gells. And now I'm too old for that sort of thing, and yet I've never had my chance, as you may say."

"Poor lass! It's a hard life as you've had, and no mistake."

"That it is, Mr. Bateson. Men wants gells as look pretty and make 'em laugh; they don't care for the dull, dowdy ones, such as me; and yet how can a gell be light-hearted and gay, I should like to know, when it's work, work, work, all the day, and nurse, nurse, nurse, all the night? Yet the men don't make no allowance for that—not they. They just see as a gell is plain and stupid, and then they has nothing more to do with her, and she can go to Jericho for all they cares."

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"You've had a hard time of it, my lass," repeated Bateson, in his full, deep voice.

"Right you are, Mr. Bateson; and it's made my hair gray, and my face all wrinkles, and my hands a sight o' roughness and ugliness, till I'm a regular old woman and a



fright at that. And I'm but thirty-five now, though no one 'ud believe it to look at me."

"Thirty-five, are you? B'ain't you more than that, Jemima, for surely you look more?"

"I know I does, but I ain't; and lots o' women—them as has had easy times and their way made smooth for them—look little more than gells when they are thirty-five; and the men run after 'em as fast as if they was only twenty. But I'm an old woman, I am, and I've never had time to be a young one, and I've never had a beau nor nothing."

"It seems now, Jemima, as if the Lord was dealing a bit hard with you; but never you fret yourself; He'll explain it all and make it all up to you in His own good time."

"I only hope He may, Mr. Bateson."

"My lass, do you remember how Saint Paul said, 'From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'? Now it seems to me that all the gray hairs and the wrinkles and the roughness that come to us when we are working for others and doing our duty, are nothing more nor less than the marks of the Lord Jesus."

"That's a comfortin' view of the matter, I don't deny."

"There are lots o' men in this world, Jemima, and still more women, who grow old before their time working for other people; and I take it that when folks talk o' their wrinkles, the Lord says, 'My Name shall be in their foreheads'; and when folks talk o' their gray hairs, He says, 'They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.' And why do we mark the things that belong to us? Why, so as we can know 'em again and can claim 'em as our own afore the whole world. And that's just why the Lord marks us: so as all the world shall know as we are His, and so as no man shall ever pluck us out of His Hand."

Jemima looked gratefully up at the kindly prophet who was trying to comfort her. "Law! Mr. Bateson, that's a consolin' way of looking at things, and I only hope as you're right. But all the same, I'd have liked to have had a beau of my own just for onst, like other gells. I dessay it's very wicked o' me to feel like this, and it's enough to make the Lord angry with me; but it don't seem to me as there's anything in religion that quite makes up for never havin' had a beau o' your own."

"The Lord won't be angry with you, my lass; don't you fear. He made women and He understands 'em, and He ain't the one to blame 'em for being as He Himself made 'em. Remember the Book says, 'as one whom his mother comforteth'; and I hold that means as He understands women and their troubles better than the kindest father ever could. And He won't let His children give up things for His sake without paying them back some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold; and don't you ever get thinking that He will."

"As Jemima says, yours is a comfortable doctrine, Bateson, but I am afraid you have no real foundation for your consoling belief," exclaimed Alan Tremaine, coming up and interrupting the conversation.

"Eh! but I have, sir, saving your presence; I know in Whom I have believed; and what a man has once known for certain, he can never not know again as long as he lives."

"But Christianity is a myth, a fable. You may imagine and pretend that it is true, but you can not know that it is."

"But I do know, sir, begging your pardon, as well as I know you are standing here and the sun is shining over yonder."

Alan smiled rather scornfully: how credulous were the lower classes, he thought in his pride of intellectual superiority. "I do not understand how you can know a thing that has never been proved," he said.

The giant turned and looked on his fragile frame with eyes full of a great pity. "You do not understand, you say, sir that's just it; and I am too foolish and ignorant to be able to explain things rightly to a gentleman like you; but the Lord will explain it to you when He thinks fit. You are young yet, sir, and the way stretches long before you, and the mysteries of God are hidden from your eyes. But when you have loved and cherished a woman as your own flesh, and when you have had little children clinging round your knees, you'll understand rightly enough then without needing any man to

teach you."

"My good man, do you suppose a wife and children would teach me more than the collected wisdom of the ages?"

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"A sight more, Mr. Tremaine—a sight more. Folks don't learn the best things from books, sir. Why, when the Lord Himself wrote the law on tables of stone, they got broken; but when He writes it on the fleshly tables of our hearts, it lives forever. And His Handwriting is the love we bear for our fellow-creatures, and—through them—for Him; at least, so it seems to me."

"That is pure imagination and sentiment, Bateson. Very pretty and poetic, no doubt; but it won't hold water."

Caleb smiled indulgently. "Wait till you've got a little lass of your own, like my Lucy Ellen, sir. Not that you'll ever have one quite as good as her, bless her! for her equal never has been seen in this world, and never will. But when you've got a little lass of your own, and know as you'd be tortured to death quite cheerful-like just to save her a minute's pain, you'll laugh at all the nonsense that's written in books, and feel you know a sight better than all of 'em put together."

"I don't quite see why."

"Well, you see, sir, it's like this. When the dove came back to the ark with the olive leaf in her mouth, Noah didn't begin sayin' how wonderful it was for a leaf to have grown out of nothing all of a sudden, as some folks are so fond of saying. Not he; he'd too much sense. He says to his sons, 'Look here: a leaf here means a tree somewhere, and the sooner we make for that tree the better!' And so it is with us. When we feel that all at onst there's somebody that matters more to us than ourselves, we know that this wonderful feelin' hasn't sprung out of the selfishness that filled our hearts before, but is just a leaf off a great Tree which is a shadow and resting-place for the whole world."

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Tremaine looked thoughtful; Caleb's childlike faith and extensive vocabulary were alike puzzles to him. He did not understand that in homes—however simple—where the Bible is studied until it becomes as household words, the children are accustomed to a "well of English undefiled"; and so, unconsciously, mould their style upon and borrow their expressions from the Book which, even when taken only from a literary standpoint, is the finest Book ever read by man.

After a minute's silence he said: "I have been wondering whether it really is any pleasure to the poor to see the homes of the rich, or whether it only makes them dissatisfied. Now, what do you think, Bateson?"

"Well, sir, if it makes 'em dissatisfied it didn't ought to."

"Perhaps not. Still, I have a good deal of sympathy with socialism myself; and I know I should feel it very hard if I were poor, while other men, not a whit better and probably worse than myself, were rich."

"And so it would be hard, sir, if this was the end of everything, and it was all haphazard, as it were; so hard that no sensible man could see it without going clean off his head altogether. But when you rightly understand as it's all the Master's doing, and that He knows what He's about a sight better than we could teach Him, it makes a wonderful difference. Whether we're rich or poor, happy or sorrowful, is His business and He can attend to that; but whether we serve Him rightly in the place where He has put us, is our business, and it'll take us all our time to look after it without trying to do His work as well."

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Tremaine merely smiled, and Bateson went on—

"You see, sir, there's work in the world of all kinds for all sorts; and whether they be lords and ladies, or just poor folks like we, they've got to do the work that the Lord has set them to do, and not to go hankering after each other's. Why, Mr. Tremaine, if at our place the puddlers wanted to do the work of the shinglers, and the shinglers wanted to do the work of the rollers, and the rollers wanted to do the work of the masters, the Osierfield wouldn't be for long the biggest ironworks in Mershire. Not it! You have to use your common sense in religion as in everything else."

"You think that religion is the only thing to make people contented and happy? So do

I; but I don't think that the religion to do this effectually is Christianity."

"No more do I, sir; that's where you make a mistake, begging your pardon; you go confusing principles with persons. It isn't my love for my wife that lights the fire and cooks the dinner and makes my little home like heaven to me—it's my wife herself; it wasn't my children's faith in their daddy that fed 'em and clothed 'em when they were too little to work for themselves—it was me myself; and it isn't the religion of Christ that keeps us straight in this world and makes us ready for the next—it is Christ Himself."

Thus the rich man and the poor man talked together, moving along parallel lines, neither understanding, and each looking down upon the other—Alan with the scornful pity of the scholar who has delved in the dust of dreary negatives which generations of doubters have gradually heaped up; and Caleb with the pitiful scorn of one who has been into the sanctuary of God, and so learned to understand the end of these men.

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Late that night, when all the merrymakers had gone to their homes, Tremaine sat smoking in the moonlight on the terrace of the Moat House.

"It is strange," he said to himself, "what a hold the Christian myth has taken upon the minds of the English people, and especially of the working classes. I can see how its pathos might appeal to those whose health was spoiled and whose physique was stunted by poverty and misery; but it puzzles me to find a magnificent giant such as Bateson, a man too strong to have nerves and too healthy to have delusions, as thoroughly imbued with its traditions as any one. I fail to understand the secret of its power."

At that very moment Caleb was closing the day, as was his custom, with family prayer, and his prayer ran thus—

"We beseech Thee, O Lord, look kindly upon the stranger who has this day shown such favour unto Thy servants; pay back all that he has given us sevenfold into his bosom. He is very young, Lord, and very ignorant and very foolish; his eyes are holden so that he can not see the operations of Thy Hands; but he is not very far from Thy Kingdom. Lead him, Heavenly Father, in the way that he should go; open his eyes that he may behold the hidden things of Thy Law; look upon him and love him, as Thou didst aforetime another young man who had great possessions. Lord, tell him that this earth is only Thy footstool; show him that the beauty he sees all around him is the hem of Thy garment; and teach him that the wisdom of this world is but foolishness with Thee. And this we beg, O Lord, for Christ's sake. Amen."

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Thus Caleb prayed, and Alan could not hear him, and could not have understood him even if he had heard.

But there was One who heard, and understood.

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## CHAPTER VII

### BROADER VIEWS

He proved that Man is nothing more  
Than educated sod,  
Forgetting that the schoolmen's lore  
Is foolishness with God.

"Do you know what I mean to do as soon as Cousin Maria will let me?" Elisabeth asked of Christopher, as the two were walking together—as they walked not unfrequently—in Badgering Woods.

"No; please tell me."

"I mean to go up to the Slade School, and study there, and learn to be a great artist."

"It is sometimes a difficult lesson to learn to be great."

"Nevertheless, I mean to learn it." The possibility of failure never occurred to

Elisabeth. "There is so much I want to teach the world, and I feel I can only do it through my pictures; and I want to begin at once, for fear I shouldn't get it all in before I die. There is plenty of time, of course; I'm only twenty-one now, so that gives me forty-nine years at the least; but forty-nine years will be none too much in which to teach the world all that I want to teach it."

"And what time shall you reserve for learning all that the world has to teach you?"

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"I never thought of that. I'm afraid I sha'n't have much time for learning."

"Then I am afraid you won't do much good by teaching."

Elisabeth laughed in all the arrogance of youth. "Yes, I shall; the things you teach best are the things you know, and not the things you have learned."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Surely genius does greater things than culture."

"I grant you that culture without genius does no great things; neither, I think, does genius without culture. Untrained genius is a terrible waste of power. So many people seem to think that if they have a spark of genius they can do without culture; while really it is because they have a spark of genius that they ought to be, and are worthy to be, cultivated to the highest point."

"Well, anyway—culture or no culture—I mean to set the Thames on fire some day."

"You do, do you? Well, it is a laudable and not uncommon ambition."

"Yes, I do; and you mustn't look so doubtful on the subject, as it isn't pretty manners."

"Did I look doubtful? I'm very sorry."

"Horribly so. I know exactly what you will do, you are so shockingly matter-of-fact. First you will prove to a demonstration that it is utterly impossible for such an inferior being as a woman to set the Thames on fire at all. Then—when I've done it and London is illuminated—you will write to the papers to show that the 'flash-point' of the river is decidedly too low, or else such an unlooked-for catastrophe could never have occurred. Then you will get the Government to take the matter up, and to bring a charge of arson against the New Woman. And, finally, you will have notices put up all along the banks from Goring to Greenwich, 'Ladies are requested not to bring inflammatory articles near the river; the right of setting the Thames on fire is now—as formerly—reserved specially for men.' And then you will try to set it on fire yourself."

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"A most characteristic programme, I must confess. But now tell me; when you have set your Thames on fire, and covered yourself with laurels, and generally turned the world upside down, sha'n't you allow some humble and devoted beggarman to share your kingdom with you? You might find it a little dull alone in your glory, as you are such a sociable person."

"Well, if I do, of course I shall let some nice man share it with me."

"I see. You will stoop from your solitary splendour and say to the devoted beggarman, 'Allow me to offer you the post of King Consort; it is a mere sinecure, and confers only the semblance and not the reality of power; but I hope you will accept it, as I have nothing better to give you, and if you are submissive and obedient I will make you as comfortable as I can under the circumstances.'"

"Good gracious! I hope I am too wise ever to talk to a man in that way. No, no, Chris; I shall find some nice man, who has seen through me all the time and who hasn't been taken in by me, as the world has; and I shall say to him, 'By the way, here is a small fire and a few laurel leaves; please warm your hands at the one and wear the others in your button-hole.' That is the proper way in which a woman should treat fame—merely as a decoration for the man whom she has chosen."

"O noble judge! O excellent young woman!" exclaimed Christopher. "But what are some of the wonderful things which you are so anxious to teach?"

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Elisabeth's mood changed at once, and her face grew serious. "I want to teach people that they were sent into the world to be happy, and not to be miserable; and

that there is no virtue in turning their backs to the sunshine and choosing to walk in the shade. I want to teach people that the world is beautiful, and that it is only a superficial view that finds it common and unclean. I want to teach people that human nature is good and not evil, and that life is a glorious battlefield and not a sordid struggle. In short, I want to teach people the dignity of themselves; and there is no grander lesson."

"Except, perhaps, the unworthiness of themselves," suggested Christopher.

"No, no, Chris; you are wrong to be so hard and cynical. Can't you understand how I am longing to help the men and women I see around me, who are dying for want of joy and beauty in their lives? It is the old struggle between Hellenism and Hebraism—between happiness and righteousness. We are sorely in need, here in England to-day, of the Greek spirit of Pantheism, which found God in life and art and nature, 'as well as in sorrow and renunciation and death."

"But it is in sorrow and renunciation and death that we need Him; and you, who have always had everything you want, can not understand this: no more could the Pagans and the Royalists; but the early Christians and the persecuted Puritans could."

"Puritanism has much to answer for in England," said Elisabeth; "we have to thank Puritanism for teaching men that only by hurting themselves can they please their Maker, and that God has given them tastes and hopes and desires merely in order to mortify the same. And it is all false—utterly false. The God of the Pagan is surely a more merciful Being than the God of the Puritan."

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"A more indulgent Being, perhaps, but not necessarily a more merciful one, Elisabeth. I disagree with the Puritans on many points, but I can not help admitting that their conception of God was a fine one, even though it erred on the side of severity. The Pagan converted the Godhead into flesh, remember; but the Puritan exalted manhood into God."

"Still, I never could bear the Puritans," Elisabeth went on; "they turned the England of Queen Elizabeth—the most glorious England the world has ever known—into one enormous Nonconformist Conscience; and England has never been perfectly normal since. Besides, they discovered that nature, and art, and human affection, which are really revelations of God, were actually sins against Him. As I said before, I can never forgive the Puritans for eradicating the beauty from holiness, and for giving man the spirit of heaviness in place of the garment of praise."

"I wonder if Paganism helped you much when you were poor and ill and unhappy, and things in general had gone wrong with you. I daresay it was very nice for the cheerful, prosperous people; but how about those who had never got what they wanted out of life, and were never likely to get it?" Christopher, like other people, looked at most matters from his own individual standpoint; and his own individual standpoint was not at all a comfortable spot just then.

"The Greeks suffered and died as did the Jews and the Christians," replied Elisabeth, "yet they were a joyous and light-hearted race. It is not sorrow that saddens the world, but rather modern Christianity's idealization of sorrow. I do not believe we should be half as miserable as we are if we did not believe that there is virtue in misery, and that by disowning our mercies and discarding our blessings we are currying favour in the eyes of the Being, Who, nevertheless, has showered those mercies and those blessings upon us."

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Thus had Alan Tremaine's influence gradually unmoored Elisabeth from the old faiths in which she had been brought up; and he had done it so gradually that the girl was quite unconscious of how far she had drifted from her former anchorage. He was too well-bred ever to be blatant in his unbelief—he would as soon have thought of attacking a man's family to his face as of attacking his creed; but subtly and with infinite tact he endeavoured to prove that to adapt ancient revelations to modern requirements was merely putting new wine into old bottles and mending old garments with new cloth; and Elisabeth was as yet too young and inexperienced to see any fallacy in his carefully prepared arguments.

She had nobody to help her to resist him, poor child! and she was dazzled with the consciousness of intellectual power which his attitude of mind appeared to take for granted. Miss Farrington was cast in too stern a mould to have any sympathy or

patience with the blind gropings of an undisciplined young soul; and Christopher—who generally understood and sympathized with all Elisabeth's difficulties and phases—was so jealous of her obvious attachment to Tremaine, and so unhappy on account of it, that for the time being the faithful friend was entirely swallowed up in the irate lover, sighing like one of the Osierfield furnaces. Of course this was very unfair and tiresome of him—nobody could deny that; but it is sometimes trying to the amiability of even the best of men to realize that the purely mundane and undeserved accident of want of money can shut them off entirely from ever attaining to the best kind of happiness whereof their natures are capable—and especially when they know that their natures are capable of attaining and appreciating a very high standard of happiness indeed. It may not be right to be unsociable because one is unhappy, but it is very human and most particularly masculine; and Christopher just then was both miserable and a man.

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There was much about Alan that was very attractive to Elisabeth: he possessed a certain subtlety of thought and an almost feminine quickness of perception which appealed powerfully to her imagination. Imagination was Elisabeth's weak, as well as her strong, point. She was incapable of seeing people as they really were; but erected a purely imaginary edifice of character on the foundations of such attributes as her rapid intuition either rightly or wrongly perceived them to possess. As a rule, she thought better of her friends than they deserved—or, at any rate, she recognised in them that ideal which they were capable of attaining, but whereto they sometimes failed to attain.

Life is apt to be a little hard on the women of Elisabeth's type, who idealize their fellows until the latter lose all semblance of reality; for experience, with its inevitable disillusionment, can not fail to put their ideal lovers and friends far from them, and to hide their etherealized acquaintances out of their sight; and to give instead, to the fond, trusting souls, half-hearted lovers, semi-sincere friends, and acquaintances who care for them only as the world can care. Poor imaginative women—who dreamed that you had found a perfect knight and a faithful friend, and then discovered that these were only an ordinary selfish man and woman after all—life has many more such surprises in store for you; and the surprises will shock you less and hurt you more as the years roll on! But though life will have its surprises for you, death perchance will have none; for when the secrets of all hearts are opened, and all thwarted desires are made known, it may be that the ordinary selfish man and woman will stand forth as the perfect knight and faithful friend that God intended them, and you believed them, and they tried yet failed to be; and you will be satisfied at last when you see your beloved ones wake up after His likeness, and will smile as you say to them, "So it is really you after all."

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Although Tremaine might be lacking in his duty toward God, he fulfilled (in the spirit if not in the letter) his duty toward his neighbour; and Elisabeth was fairly dazzled by his many schemes for making life easier and happier to the people who dwelt in the darkness of the Black Country.

It was while he was thus figuring as her ideal hero that Elisabeth went to stay with Felicia Herbert, near a manufacturing town in Yorkshire. Felicia had been once or twice to the Willows, and was well acquainted with the physical and biographical characteristics of the place; and she cherished a profound admiration both for Miss Farrington and Christopher Thornley. Tremaine she had never met—he had been abroad each time that she had visited Sedgehill—but she disapproved most heartily of his influence upon Elisabeth, and of his views as set forth by that young lady. Felicia had been brought up along extremely strict lines, and in a spirit of comfortable intolerance of all forms of religion not absolutely identical with her own; consequently, a man with no form of religion at all was to her a very terrible monster indeed. On the Sundays of her early youth she had perused a story treating of an Unbeliever (always spelled with a capital U), and the punishments that were meted out to the daughter of light who was unequally yoked with him; and she was imbued with a strong conviction that these same punishments were destined to fall upon Elisabeth's head, should Elisabeth incline favourably to the (at present) hypothetical suit of the master of the Moat House. Thus it happened that when Elisabeth came to the Herberts', full of girlish admiration for Alan Tremaine, Felicia did her best to ripen that admiration into love by abusing Alan in and out of season, and by endeavouring to prove that an attachment to him would be a soul-destroyer of the most irreparable completeness.

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"It is no use talking to me about his goodness," she said; "nobody is good who isn't a

Christian."

"But he is good," persisted Elisabeth—"most tremendously good. The poor people simply adore him, he does such a lot for them; and he couldn't have lovelier thoughts and higher ideals if he were a girl instead of a man. There must be different ways of goodness, Felicia."

"There are not different ways of goodness; mamma says there are not, and it is very wicked to believe that there are. I am afraid you are not half as religious as you were at Fox How."

"Yes, I am; but I have learned that true religion is a state of mind rather than a code of dogmas."

Felicia looked uncomfortable. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that; I am sure mamma wouldn't like it—she can not bear anything that borders on the profane."

"I am not bordering on the profane; I am only saying what I uphold is true. I can not take things for granted as you do; I have to think them out for myself; and I have come to the conclusion that what a man is is of far more importance than what a man believes."

"But you ought not to think things like that, Elisabeth; it isn't right to do so."

"I can't help thinking it. I am an independent being with a mind of my own, and I must make up that mind according to what I see going on around me. What on earth is the good of having an intellect, if you submit that intellect to the will of another? I wonder how you can take your ideas all ready-made from your mother," exclaimed Elisabeth, who just then was taking all hers ready-made from Alan Tremaine.

"Well, I can not argue. I am not clever enough; and, besides, mamma doesn't like us to argue upon religious subjects—she says it is unsettling; so I will only say that I know you are wrong, and then we will let the matter drop and talk about Christopher. How is he?"

"Oh, he is all right, only very horrid. To tell you the truth, I am getting to dislike Christopher."

"Elisabeth!" Felicia's Madonna-like face became quite sorrowful.

"Well, I am; and so would you, if he was as stand-off to you as he is to me. I can't think what is wrong with him; but whatever I do, and however nice I try to be to him, the North Pole is warm and neighbourly compared with him. I'm sick of him and his unsociable ways!"

"But you and he used to be such friends."

"I know that; and I would be friends now if he would let me. But how can you be friends with a man who is as reserved as the Great Pyramid and as uncommunicative as the Sphinx, and who sticks up iron palings all round himself, like a specimen tree in the park, so that nobody can get near him? If a man wants a girl to like him he should be nice to her, and not require an introduction every time they meet."

Felicia sighed: her sweet, placid nature was apt to be overpowered by Elisabeth's rapid changes of front. "But he used to be so fond of you," she expostulated feebly.

Elisabeth shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I suppose he likes me now, in his cold, self-satisfied way: it isn't that. What I complain of is that he doesn't admire me enough, and I do so love to be admired."

"Do you mean he doesn't think you are pretty?" Felicia always had to have things fully explained to her; excess of imagination could never lead her astray, whatever it might do to her friend.

"Of course not; I don't see how he could, considering that I'm not: women don't expect men to admire them for things that they don't possess," replied Elisabeth, who had still much to learn. "What I mean is he doesn't realize how clever I am—he despises me just as he used to despise me when I was a little girl and he was a big boy—and that is awfully riling when you know you are clever."

"Is it? I would much rather a man liked me than thought I was clever."

"I wouldn't; anybody can like you, but it takes a clever person to appreciate cleverness. I have studied myself thoroughly, and I have come to the conclusion that I need appreciation far more than affection: I'm made like that."

"I don't understand you. To me affection is everything, and I can not live without it. If people are really fond of me, they can think me as stupid as they like."

Elisabeth's face grew thoughtful; she was always interested in the analysis of herself and her friends. "How different we two are! I couldn't forgive a person for thinking me stupid, even if I knew that person adored me. To me no amount of affection would make up for the lack of appreciation. I want to be understood as well as liked, and that is where Christopher and I come across each other; he never understands me in the least. Now that is why Mr. Tremaine and I get on so well together; he understands and appreciates me so thoroughly."

Felicia's pretty mouth fell into stern lines of disapproval. "I am sure I should hate Mr. Tremaine if I knew him," she said.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't—you simply couldn't, Felicia, he is so delightful. And, what is more, he is so frightfully interesting; whatever he says and does, he always makes you think about him. Now, however fond you were of Chris—and he really is very good and kind in some ways—you could never think about him: it would be such dreadfully uninteresting thinking, if you did."

"I don't know about that; Christopher is very comfortable and homelike, somehow," replied Felicia.

"So are rice-puddings and flannel petticoats, but you don't occupy your most exalted moments in meditating upon them."

"Do you know, Elisabeth, I sometimes think that Christopher is in love with you." Unlike Elisabeth, Felicia never saw what did not exist, and therefore was able sometimes to perceive what did.

"Good gracious, what an idea! He'd simply roar with laughter at the mere thought of such a thing! Why, Christopher isn't capable of falling in love with anybody; he hasn't got it in him, he is so frightfully matter-of-fact."

Felicia looked dubious. "Then don't you think he will ever marry?"

"Oh, yes, he'll marry fast enough—a sweet, domestic woman, who plays the piano and does crochet-work; and he will talk to her about the price of iron and the integrity of the empire, and will think that he is making love, and she will think so too. And they will both of them go down to their graves without ever finding out that the life is more than meat or the body than raiment."

Elisabeth was very hard on Christopher just then, and nothing that Felicia could say succeeded in softening her. Women are apt to be hard when they are quite young—and sometimes even later.

Felicia Herbert was the eldest of a large family. Her parents, though well-to-do, were not rich; and it was the dream of Mrs. Herbert's life that her daughter's beauty should bring about a great match. She was a good woman according to her lights, and a most excellent wife and mother; but if she had a weakness—and who (except, of course, one's self) is without one?—that weakness was social ambition.

"You will understand, my dear," she said confidentially to Elisabeth, "that it would be the greatest comfort to Mr. Herbert and myself to see Felicia married to a God-fearing man; and, of course, if he kept his own carriage as well we should be all the better satisfied."

"I don't think that money really makes people happy," replied Elisabeth, strong in the unworldliness of those who have never known what it is to do without anything that money can buy.

"Of course not, my dear—of course not; nothing but religion can bring true happiness. Whenever I am tempted to be anxious about my children's future, I always check myself by saying, 'The Lord will provide; though I can not sometimes help hoping that the provision will be an ample one as far as Felicia is concerned, because she is so extremely nice-looking.'"



"She is perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Elisabeth enthusiastically; "and she gets lovelier and lovelier every time I see her. If I were to change places with all the rich men in the world, I should never do anything but keep on marrying Felicia."

"Still, she could only marry one of you, my dear. But, between ourselves, I just want to ask you a few questions about a Mr. Thornley whom Felicia met at your house. I fancied she was a wee bit interested in him."

"Interested in Chris! Oh! she couldn't possibly be. No girl could be interested in Christopher in that way."

"Why not, my dear? Is he so unusually plain?"

"Oh! no; he is very good-looking; but he has a good head for figures and a poor eye for faces. In short, he is a sensible man, and girls don't fall in love with sensible men."

"I think you are mistaken there; I do indeed. I have known many instances of women becoming sincerely attached to sensible men."

"You don't know how overpoweringly sensible Christopher is. He is so wise that he never makes a joke unless it has some point in it."

"There is no harm in that, my dear. I never see the point of a joke myself, I admit; but I like to know that there is one."

"And when he goes for a walk with a girl, he never talks nonsense to her," continued Elisabeth, "but treats her exactly as if she were his maiden aunt."

"But why should he talk nonsense to her? It is a great waste of time to talk nonsense; I am not sure that it is not even a sin. Is Mr. Thornley well off?"

"No. His uncle, Mr. Smallwood, is the general manager of our works; and Christopher has only his salary as sub-manager, and what his uncle may leave him. His mother was Mr. Smallwood's sister, and married a ne'er-do-weel-who left her penniless; at least, that is to say, if he ever had a mother—which I sometimes doubt, as he understands women so little."

"Still, I think we can take that for granted," said Mrs. Herbert, smiling with pride at having seen Elisabeth's little joke, and feeling quite a wit herself in consequence. One of the secrets of Elisabeth's popularity was that she had a knack of impressing the people with whom she talked, not so much with a sense of her cleverness as with a sense of their own. She not only talked well herself, she made other people talk well also—a far more excellent gift.

"So," she went on, "if his uncle hadn't adopted him, I suppose Chris would have starved to death when he was a child; and that would have been extremely unpleasant for him, poor boy!"

"Ah! that would have been terrible, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Herbert, so full of pity for Christopher that she was willing to give him anything short of her firstborn. She was really a kind-hearted woman.

Elisabeth looked out of the window at the group of stunted shrubs with black-edged leaves which entitled Felicia's home to be called Wood Glen. "There is one thing to be said in favour of starvation," she said solemnly, "it would keep one from getting stout, and stoutness is the cruellest curse of all. I'd rather be dead than stout any day."

"My dear child, you are talking nonsense. What would be the advantage of being thin if you were not alive?"

"When you come to that, what would be the advantage of being alive if you weren't thin?" retorted Elisabeth.

"The two cases are not parallel, my dear; you see you couldn't be thin without being alive, but you could be alive without being thin."

"It is possible; I have come across such cases myself, but I devoutly trust mine may never be one of them. As the hymn says, I shall always be 'content to fill a little space.'"

"Ah! but I think the hymn doesn't mean it quite in that sense. I believe the hymn refers rather to the greatness of one's attainments and possessions than to one's

personal bulk."

Elisabeth opened her eyes wide with an expression of childlike simplicity. "Do you really think so?"

"I do, my dear. You know one must not take poetry too literally; verse writers are allowed what is termed 'poetic license,' and are rarely, if ever, quite accurate in their statements. I suppose it would be too difficult for anybody to get both the truth and the rhyme to fit in, and so the truth has to be somewhat adapted. But about Mr. Thornley, my love; you don't think that he and Felicia are at all interested in one another?"

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"Good gracious, no! I'm sure they are not. If they had been, I should have spotted it and talked about it ages ago."

"I hope you are not given to talk about such things, even if you do perceive them," said Mrs. Herbert, with reproof in her tone; "talking scandal is a sad habit."

"But it isn't scandal to say that a man is in love with a woman—in fact, it is the very opposite. It is much worse scandal never to talk about a woman in that way, because that means that you think she is either too old or too ugly to have a lover, and that is the worst scandal of all. I always feel immensely tickled when I hear women pluming themselves on the fact that they never get talked about; and I long to say to them, 'There is nothing to be proud of in that, my dears; it only means that the world is tacitly calling you stupid old frights.' Why, I'd rather people found fault with me than did not talk about me at all."

"Then I am afraid you are not 'content to fill a little space,'" said Mrs. Herbert severely.

"To tell you the truth I don't think I am," replied Elisabeth, with engaging frankness; "conceit is my besetting sin and I know it. Not stately, scornful, dignified pride, but downright, inflated, perky, puffed-up conceit. I have often remarked upon it to Christopher, and he has always agreed with me."

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"But, my dear, the consciousness of a fault is surely one step toward its cure."

"Not it," replied Elisabeth, shaking her head; "I've always known I am conceited, yet I get conceiteder and conceiteder every year. Bless you! I don't want to 'fill a little space,' and I particularly don't want 'a heart at leisure from itself'; I think that is such a dull, old-maidish sort of thing to have—I wouldn't have one for anything. People who have hearts at leisure from themselves always want to understudy Providence, you will notice."

Mrs. Herbert looked shocked. "My dear, what do you mean?"

"I mean that really good people, who have no interests of their own, are too fond of playing the part of Providence to other people. That their motives are excellent I admit; they are not a bit selfish, and they interfere with you for your own good; but they successfully accomplish as much incurable mischief in half an hour as it would take half a dozen professional mischief-makers at least a year to finish off satisfactorily. If they can not mind their own business it doesn't follow that Providence can't either, don't you see?"

Whereupon Felicia entered the room, and the conversation was abruptly closed; but not before Mrs. Herbert had decided that if Providence had selected her daughter as the consoler of Christopher's sorrows, Providence must be gently and patiently reasoned with until another and more suitable comforter was substituted. She did not, of course, put the matter to herself thus barely; but this was what her decision practically amounted to.

But although people might not be talking, as Mrs. Herbert imagined, about Christopher and Felicia, the tongues of Sedgemoor were all agog on the subject of the evident attachment between Elisabeth Farrington and the master of the Moat House.

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"I'm afeared as our Miss Elisabeth is keeping company with that Mr. Tremaine; I am indeed," Mrs. Bateson confided to her crony, Mrs. Hankey.

Mrs. Hankey, as was her wont, groaned both in spirit and in person. "So I've heard tell, more's the pity! Miss Elisabeth is no favourite of mine, as you know, being so

dark-complexioned as a child, and I never could abide dark babies. I haven't much to be thankful for, I'm sure, for the Lord has tried me sore, giving me Hankey as a husband, and such a poor appetite as I never enjoy a meal from one year's end to another; but one thing I can boast of, and that is my babies were all fair, with as clear a skin as you could want to see. Still, I don't wish the young lady no harm, it not being Christian to do so; and it is sad at her age to be tied to a husband from which there is no outlet but the grave."

"I don't hold with you there, Mrs. Hankey; it is dull work for the women who have nobody to order 'em about and find fault with 'em. Why, where's the good of taking the trouble to do a thing well, if there's no man to blame you for it afterward? But what I want to see is Miss Elisabeth married to Master Christopher, them two being made for one another, as you might say."

"He has a new heart and a nice fresh colour, has Master Christopher; which is more than his own mother—supposing she was alive—could say for Mr. Tremaine."

"That is so, Mrs. Hankey. I'm afeared there isn't much religion about him. He don't even go to church on a Sunday, let alone chapel; though he is wonderful charitable to the poor, I must admit."

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Mrs. Hankey pursed up her mouth. "And what are works without faith, I should like to know!"

"Quite true—quite true; but maybe the Lord ain't quite as hard on us as we are on one another, and makes allowances for our bringing-up and such."

"Maybe," replied Mrs. Hankey, in a tone which implied that she hoped her friend was mistaken.

"You see," continued Mrs. Bateson, "there's nothing helps you to understand the ways of the Lord like having children of your own. Why, afore I was married, I was for whipping every child that was contrary till it got good again; but after my Lucy Ellen was born, I found that her contrairiness made me sorry for her instead of angry with her, and I knowed as the poor little thing was feeling poorly or else she'd never have been like that. So instead of punishing her, I just comforted her; and the more contradictious she got, the more I knowed as she wanted comfort. And I don't doubt but the Lord knows that the more we kick against Him the more we need Him; and that He makes allowance accordingly."

"You seem to have comfortable thoughts about things; I only hope as you are not encouraging false hopes and crying peace where there is no peace," remarked Mrs. Hankey severely.

But Mrs. Bateson was not affrighted. "Don't you know how ashamed you feel when folks think better of you than you deserve? I remember years ago, when Caleb came a-courting me, I was minded once to throw him over, because he was full solemn to take a young maid's fancy. And when I was debating within myself whether I'd throw him over or no, he says to me, 'Kezia, my lass,' he says, 'I'm not afeared as ye'll give me the slip, for all your saucy ways; other folks may think you're a bit flirty, but I know you better than they do, and I trust you with all my heart.' Do you think I could have disappointed him after that, Mrs. Hankey? Not for the whole world. But I was that ashamed as never was, for even having thought of such a thing. And if we poor sinful souls feel like that, do you think the Lord is the One to disappoint folks for thinking better of Him than He deserves? Not He, Mrs. Hankey; I know Him better than that."

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"I only wish I could see things in such a cheerful light as you do."

"It was only after my first baby was born that I began to understand the Lord's ways a bit. It's wonderful how caring for other folks seems to bring you nearer to Him—nearer even than class meetings and special services, though I wouldn't for the world say a word against the means of grace."

This doctrine was too high for Mrs. Hankey; she could not attain to it, so she wisely took refuge in a side issue. "It was fortunate for you your eldest being a girl; if the Lord had thought fit to give me a daughter instead of three sons, things might have been better with me," she said, contentedly moving the burden of personal responsibility from her own shoulders to her Maker's.

"Don't say that, Mrs. Hankey. Daughters may be more useful in the house, I must confess, and less mischievous all round; but they can't work as hard for their living as the sons can when you ain't there to look after them."

"You don't know what it is to live in a house full of nothing but men, with not a soul to speak to about all the queer tricks they're at, many a time I feel like Robinson Crusoe on a desert island among a lot of savages."

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"And I don't blame you," agreed Mrs. Bateson sympathetically; "for my part I don't know what I should have done when Caleb and the boys were troublesome if I couldn't have passed remarks on their behaviour to Lucy Ellen; I missed her something terrible when first she was married for that simple reason. You see, it takes another woman to understand how queer a man is."

"It does, Mrs. Bateson; you never spoke a truer word. And then think what it must be on your death-bed to have the room full of stupid men, tumbling over one another and upsetting the medicine-bottles and putting everything in its wrong place. Many a time have I wished for a daughter, if it was but to close my eyes; but the Lord has seen fit to withhold His blessings from me, and it is not for me to complain: His ways not being as our ways, but often quite the reverse."

"That is so; and I wish as He'd seen fit to mate Miss Elisabeth with Master Christopher, instead of letting her keep company with that Mr. Tremaine."

Mrs. Hankey shook her head ominously. "Mr. Tremaine is one that has religious doubts."

"Ah! that's liver," said Mrs. Bateson, her voice softening with pity; "that comes from eating French kickshaws, and having no mother to see that he takes a dose of soda and nitre now and then to keep his system cool. Poor young man!"

"I hear as he goes so far as to deny the existence of a God," continued Mrs. Hankey.

"All liver!" repeated Mrs. Bateson; "it often takes men like that; when they begin to doubt the inspiration of the Scriptures you know they will be all the better for a dose of dandelion tea; but when they go on to deny the existence of a God, there's nothing for it but chamomile. And I don't believe as the Lord takes their doubts any more seriously than their wives take 'em. He knows as well as we do that the poor things need pity more than blame, and dosing more than converting; for He gave 'em their livers, and we only have to bear with them and return thanks to Him for having made ours of a different pattern."

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"And what do the women as have doubts need, I should like to know?"

"A husband and children is the best cure for them. Why, when a woman has a husband and children to look after, and washes at home, she has no time, bless you! to be teaching the Lord His business; she has enough to do minding her own."

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## CHAPTER VIII

### GREATER THAN OUR HEARTS

The world is weary of new tracks of thought  
That lead to nought—  
Sick of quack remedies prescribed in vain  
For mortal pain,  
Yet still above them all one Figure stands  
With outstretched Hands.

"Cousin Maria, do you like Alan Tremaine?" asked Elisabeth, not long after her return from Yorkshire.

"Like him, my dear? I neither like nor dislike persons with whom I have as little in common as I have with Mr. Tremaine. But he strikes me as a young man of parts, and his manners are admirable."

"I wasn't thinking about his manners, I was thinking about his views," said the girl, walking across the room and looking through the window at the valley smiling in the light of the summer morning; "don't you think they are very broad and enlightened?"

"I daresay they are. Young persons of superior intelligence are frequently dazzled by their own brilliance at first, and consider that they were sent into the world specially to confute the law and the prophets. As they grow older they learn better."

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Elisabeth began playing with the blind-cord. "I think he is awfully clever," she remarked.

"My dear, how often must I beg you not to use that word *awfully*, except in its correct sense? Remember that we hold the English tongue in trust—it belongs to the nation and not to us—and we have no more right to profane England's language by the introduction of coined words and slang expressions than we have to disendow her institutions or to pollute her rivers."

"All right; I'll try not to forget again. But you really do think Alan is clever, don't you?"

"He is undoubtedly intelligent, and possesses the knack of appearing even more intelligent than he is; but at present he has not learned his own limitations."

"You mean that he isn't clever enough to know that he isn't cleverer," suggested Elisabeth.

"Well, my dear, I should never have put it in that way, but that approximately expresses my ideas about our young friend."

"And he is aw—I mean frightfully well off."

Miss Farrington looked sternly at the speaker. "Never again let me hear you refer to the income of persons about whom you are speaking, Elisabeth; it is a form of ill-breeding which I can not for a moment tolerate in my house. That money is a convenience to the possessor of it, I do not attempt to deny; but that the presence or the absence of it should be counted as a matter of any moment (except to the man himself), presupposes a standpoint of such vulgarity that it is impossible for me to discuss it. And even the man himself should never talk about it; he should merely silently recognise the fact, and regulate his plan of life accordingly."

"Still, I have heard quite nice people sometimes say that they can not afford things," argued Elisabeth.

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"I do not deny that; even quite nice people make mistakes sometimes, and well-mannered persons are not invariably well-mannered. Your quite nice people would have been still nicer had they realized that to talk about one's poverty—though not so bad as talking about one's wealth—is only one degree better; and that perfect gentle-people would refer neither to the one nor to the other."

"I see." Elisabeth's tone was subdued.

"I once knew a woman," continued Miss Farrington, "who, by that accident of wealth, which is of no interest to anybody but the possessor, was enabled to keep a butler and two footmen; but in speaking of her household to a friend, who was less richly endowed with worldly goods than herself, she referred to these three functionaries as 'my parlourmaid,' for fear of appearing to be conscious of her own superiority in this respect. Now this woman, though kind-hearted, was distinctly vulgar."

"But you have always taught me that it is good manners to keep out of sight any point on which you have the advantage over the people you are talking to," Elisabeth persisted. "You have told me hundreds of times that I must never show off my knowledge after other people have displayed their ignorance; and that I must not even be obtrusively polite after they have been obviously rude. Those are your very words, Cousin Maria: you see I can give chapter and verse."

"And I meant what I said, my dear. Wider knowledge and higher breeding are signs of actual superiority, and therefore should never be flaunted. The vulgarity in the woman I am speaking about lay in imagining that there is any superiority in having more money than another person: there is not. To hide the difference proved that she

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thought there was a difference, and this proved that her standpoint was an essentially plebeian one. There was no difference at all, save one of convenience; the same sort of difference there is between people who have hot water laid on all over their houses and those who have to carry it upstairs. And who would be so trivial and commonplace as to talk about that?"

Elisabeth, seeing that her cousin was in the right, wisely changed the subject. "The Bishop of Merchester is preaching at St. Peter's Church, in Silverhampton, on St. Peter's Day, and I have asked Alan Tremaine to drive me over in his dog-cart to hear him." Although she had strayed from the old paths of dogma and doctrine, Elisabeth could not eradicate the inborn Methodist nature which hungers and thirsts after righteousness as set forth in sermons.

"I should like to hear him too, my dear," said Miss Farrington, who also had been born a Methodist.

"Then will you come? In that case we can have our own carriage, and I needn't bother Alan," said Elisabeth, with disappointment written in capital letters all over her expressive face.

"On which day is it, and at what hour?"

"To-morrow evening at half-past six," replied the girl, knowing that this was the hour of the evening sacrifice at East Lane Chapel, and trusting to the power of habit and early association to avert the addition of that third which would render two no longer any company for each other.

Her trust was not misplaced. "It is our weekevening service, my dear, with the prayer-meeting after. Did you forget?"

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Elisabeth endeavoured to simulate the sudden awakening of a dormant memory. "So it is!"

"I see no reason why you should not go into Silverhampton to hear the Bishop," said Miss Farrington kindly. "I like young people to learn the faith once delivered to the saints, from all sorts and conditions of teachers; but I shall feel it my duty to be in my accustomed place."

So it came to pass, one never-to-be-forgotten summer afternoon, that Alan Tremaine drove Elisabeth Farrington into Silverhampton to hear the Bishop of Merchester preach.

As soon as she was safely tucked up in the dog-cart, with no way of escape, Elisabeth saw a look in Alan's eyes which told her that he meant to make love to her; so with that old, old feminine instinct, which made the prehistoric woman take to her heels when the prehistoric man began to run after her, this daughter of the nineteenth century took refuge in an armour of flippancy, which is the best shield yet invented for resisting Cupid's darts.

It was a glorious afternoon—one of those afternoons which advertise to all the world how excellent was the lotus-eaters' method of dividing time; and although the woods had exchanged the fresh variety of spring for the dark green sameness of summer, the fields were gay with haymakers, and the world still seemed full of joyous and abundant life.

"Let's go the country way," Elisabeth had said at starting; "and then we can come back by the town." So the two drove by Badgering Woods, and across the wide common; and as they went they saw and felt that the world was very good. Elisabeth was highly sensitive to the influences of nature, and, left to herself, would have leaned toward sentiment on such an afternoon as this; but she had seen that look in Alan's eyes, and that was enough for her.

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"Do you know," began Tremaine, getting to work, "that I have been doing nothing lately but thinking about you? And I have come to the conclusion that what appeals so much to me is your strength. The sweetness which attracts some men has no charm for me; I am one of the men who above all things admire and reverence a strong woman, though I know that the sweet and clinging woman is to some the ideal of feminine perfection. But different men, of course, admire different types."

"Exactly; there is a Latin proverb, something about tots and sentences, which

embodies that idea," suggested Elisabeth, with a nervous, girlish laugh.

Alan did not smile; he made it a rule never to encourage flippancy in women.

"It is hardly kind of you to laugh at me when I am speaking seriously," he said, "and it would serve you right if I turned my horse's head round and refused to let you hear your Bishop. But I will not punish you this time; I will heap coals of fire on your head by driving on."

"Oh! don't begin heaping coals of fire on people's head, Mr. Tremaine; it is a dangerous habit, and those who indulge in it always get their fingers burned in the end—just as they do when they play with edged tools, or do something (I forget what) with their own petard."

There was a moment's silence, and then Alan said—

"It makes me very unhappy when you are in a mood like this; I do not understand it, and it seems to raise up an impassable barrier between us."

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"Please don't be unhappy about a little thing like that; wait till you break a front tooth, or lose your collar-stud, or have some other real trouble to cry over. But now you are making a trouble out of nothing, and I have no patience with people who make troubles out of nothing; it seems to me like getting one's boots spoiled by a watering-cart when it is dry weather; and that is a thing which makes me most frightfully angry."

"Do many things make you angry, I wonder?"

"Some things and some people."

"Tell me what sort of people make a woman of your type angry."

Elisabeth fell into the trap; she could never resist the opportunity of discussing herself from an outside point of view. If Alan had said *you*, she would have snubbed him at once; but the well-chosen words, *a woman of your type*, completely carried her away. She was not an egotist; she was only intensely interested in herself as the single specimen of humanity which she was able to study exhaustively.

"I think the people who make me angry are the unresponsive people," she replied thoughtfully; "the people who do not put their minds into the same key as mine when I am talking to them. Don't you know the sort? When you discuss a thing from one standpoint they persist in discussing it from another; and as soon as you try to see it from their point of view, they fly off to a third. It isn't so much that they differ from you—that you would not mind; there is a certain harmony in difference which is more effective than its unison of perfect agreement—but they sing the same tune in another key, and the discords are excruciating. Then the people who argue make me angry; those who argue about trifles, I mean."

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"Ah! All you women are alike in that; you love discussion, and hate argument. The cause of which is that you decide things by instinct rather than by reason, and that therefore—although you know you are right—you can not possibly prove it."

"Then," Elisabeth continued, "I get very angry with the people who will bother about non-essentials; who, when you have got hold of the vital centre of a question, stray off to side issues. They are first-cousins of the people who talk in different keys."

"I should have said they were the same."

"Well, perhaps they are; I believe you are right. Christopher Thornley is one of that sort; when you are discussing one side of a thing with him, you'll find him playing bo-peep with you round the other; and you never can get him into the right mood at the right time. He makes me simply furious sometimes. Do you know, I think if I were a dog I should often bite Christopher? He makes me angry in a biting kind of way."

Alan smiled faintly at this; jokes at Christopher's expense were naturally more humorous than jokes at his own. "And what other sorts of people make you angry?" he asked.

"I'm afraid the people who make me angriest of all are the people who won't do what I tell them. They really madden me." And Elisabeth began to laugh. "I've got a horribly strong will, you see, and if people go against it, I want them to be sent to the dentist's

every morning, and to the photographer's every afternoon, for the rest of their lives. Now Christopher is one of the worst of those; I can't make him do what I want just because I want it; he always wishes to know why I want it, and that is so silly and tiresome of him, because nine times out of ten I don't know myself."

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"Very trying!"

"Christopher certainly has the knack of making me angrier than anybody else I ever met," said Elisabeth thoughtfully. "I wonder why it is? I suppose it must be because I have known him for so long. I can't see any other reason. I am generally such an easy-going, good-tempered girl; but when Christopher begins to argue and dictate and contradict, the Furies simply aren't in it with me."

"The excellent Thornley certainly has his limitations."

Elisabeth's eyes flashed. She did not mind finding fault with Christopher herself; in fact, she found such fault-finding absolutely necessary to her well-being; but she resented any attempt on the part of another to usurp this, her peculiar prerogative. "He is very good, all the same," she said, "and extremely clever; and he is my greatest friend."

But Alan was bored by Christopher as a subject of conversation, so he changed him for Elisabeth's self. "How loyal you are!" he exclaimed with admiration; "it is indeed a patent of nobility to be counted among your friends."

The girl, having just been guilty of disloyalty, was naturally delighted at this compliment. "You always understand and appreciate me," she said gratefully, unconscious of the fact that it was Alan's lack of understanding and appreciation which had aroused her gratitude just then. Perfect comprehension—untempered by perfect love—would be a terrible thing; mercifully for us poor mortals it does not exist.

Alan went on: "Because I possess this patent of nobility, I am going to presume upon my privileges and ask you to help me in my life-work; and my life-work, as you know, is to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and to carry to some extent the burdens which they are bound to bear."

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Elisabeth looked up at him, her face full of interest; no appeal to her pity was ever made in vain. If people expected her to admire them, they were frequently disappointed; if they wished her to fear them, their wish was absolutely denied; but if they only wanted her to be sorry for them, they were abundantly satisfied, sympathy being the keynote of her character. She was too fastidious often to admire; she was too strong ever to fear; but her tenderness was unflinching toward those who had once appealed to her pity, and whose weakness had for once allowed itself to rest upon her strength. Therefore Alan's desire to help the poor, and to make them happier, struck the dominant chord in her nature; but unfortunately when she raised her eyes, full of sympathetic sympathy, to his, she encountered that look in the latter which had frightened her at the beginning of the excursion; so she again clothed herself in her garment of flippancy, and hardened her heart as the nether millstone. In blissful unconsciousness Alan continued—

"Society is just now passing through a transition stage. The interests of capital and labour are at war with each other; the rich and the poor are as two armies made ready for battle, and the question is, What can we do to bridge over the gulf between the classes, and to induce them each to work for, instead of against, the other? It is these transition stages which have proved the most difficult epochs in the world's history."

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"I hate transition stages and revolutions, they are so unsettling. It seems to me they are just like the day when your room is cleaned; and that is the most uncomfortable day in the whole week. Don't you know it? You go upstairs in the accustomed way, fearing nothing; but when you open the door you find the air dark with dust and the floor with tea-leaves, and nothing looking as it ought to look. Prone on its face on the bed, covered with a winding-sheet, lies your overthrown looking-glass; and underneath it, in a shapeless mass, are huddled together all the things that you hold dearest upon earth. You thrust in your hand to get something that you want, and it is a pure chance whether your Bible or your button-hook rises to the surface. And it seems to me that transition periods are just like that."

"How volatile you are! One minute you are so serious and the next so frivolous that I fail to follow you. I often think that you must have some foreign blood in your veins,



you are so utterly different from the typical, stolid, shy, self-conscious English-woman."

"I hope you don't think I was made in Germany, like cheap china and imitation Astrakhan."

"Heaven forbid! The Germans are more stolid and serious than the English. But you must have a Celtic ancestor in you somewhere. Haven't you?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, my great-grandmother was a Manxwoman; but we are ashamed to talk much about her, because it sounds as if she'd had no tail."

"Then you must have inherited your temperament from her. But now I want to talk to you seriously about doing something for the men who work in the coal-pits, and who—more even than the rest of their class—are shut out from the joy and beauty of the world. Their lives not only are made hideous, but are also shortened, by the nature of their toil. Do you know what the average life of a miner is?"

"Of course I do: twenty-one years."

Alan frowned; he disapproved of jokes even more than of creeds, and understood them equally. "Miss Farrington, you are not behaving fairly to me. You know what I mean well enough, but you wilfully misunderstand my words for the sake of laughing at them. But I will make you listen, all the same. I want to know if you will help me in my work by becoming my wife; and I think that even you can not help answering that question seriously."

The laughter vanished from Elisabeth's face, as if it had been wiped out with a sponge. "Oh! I—I don't know," she murmured lamely.

"Then you must find out. To me it seems that you are the one woman in all the world who was made for me. Your personality attracted me the first moment that I met you; and our subsequent companionship has proved that our minds habitually run in the same grooves, and that we naturally look at things from the same standpoint. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes."

"The only serious difference between us seemed to be the difference of faith. You had been trained in the doctrines of one of the strictest sects, while I had outgrown all dogmas and thrown aside all recognised forms of religion. So strong were my feelings on this point, that I would not have married any woman who still clung to the worn-out and (by me) disused traditions; but I fancy that I have succeeded in converting you to my views, and that our ideas upon religion are now practically identical. Is not that so?"

Elisabeth thought for a moment. "Yes," she answered slowly; "you have taught me that Christianity, like all the other old religions, has had its day; and that the world is now ready for a new dispensation."

"Exactly; and for a dispensation which shall unite the pure ethics of the Christian to the joyous vitality of the Greek, eliminating alike the melancholy of the one and the sensualism of the other. You agree with me in this, do you not?"

"You know that I do."

"I am glad, because—as I said before—I could not bear to marry any woman who did not see eye to eye with me on these vital matters. I love you very dearly, Elisabeth, and it would be a great grief to me if any question of opinion or conviction came between us; yet I do not believe that two people could possibly be happy together—however much they might love each other—if they were not one with each other on subjects such as these."

Elisabeth was silent; she was too much excited to speak. Her heart was thumping like the great hammer at the Osierfield, and she was trembling all over. So she held her peace as they drove up the principal street of Silverhampton and across the King's Square to the lych-gate of St. Peter's Church; but Alan, looking into the tell-tale face he knew so well, was quite content.

Yet as she sat beside Alan in St. Peter's Church that summer evening, and thought upon what she had just done, a great sadness filled Elisabeth's soul. The sun shone

brightly through the western window, and wrote mystic messages upon the gray stone walls; but the lights of the east window shone pale and cold in the distant apse, where the Figure of the Crucified gleamed white upon a foundation of emerald. And as she looked at the Figure, which the world has wept over and worshipped for nineteen centuries, she realized that this was the Symbol of all that she was giving up and leaving behind her—the Sign of that religion of love and sorrow which men call Christianity. She felt that wisdom must be justified of her children, and not least of her, Elisabeth Farringdon; nevertheless, she mourned for the myth which had once made life seem fair, and death even fairer. Although she had outgrown her belief in it, its beauty had still power to touch her heart, if not to convince her intellect; and she sighed as she recalled all that it had once meant, and how it had appeared to be the one satisfactory solution to the problems which weary and perplex mankind. Now she must face all the problems over again in the grim twilight of dawning science, with no longer a Star of Bethlehem to show where the answer might be found; and her spirit quailed at the pitiless prospect. She had never understood before how much that Symbol of eternal love and vicarious suffering had been to her, nor how puzzling would be the path through the wilderness if there were no Crucifix at life's cross-roads to show the traveller which way to go; and her heart grew heavier as she took part in the sacred office of Evensong, and thought how beautiful it all would be if only it were true. She longed to be a little child again—a child to whom the things which are not seen are as the things which are seen, and the things which are not as the things which are; and she could have cried with homesickness when she remembered how firmly she had once believed that the shadow which hung over the Osierfield was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, to testify that God was still watching over His people, as in the days of old. Now she knew that the pillar was only the smoke and the flame of human industries; and the knowledge brought a load of sadness, as it seemed to typify that there was no longer any help for the world but in itself.

When the Bishop ascended the pulpit, Elisabeth recalled her wandering thoughts and set herself to listen. No one who possesses a drop of Nonconformist blood can ever succeed in not listening to a sermon, even if it be a poor one; and the Bishop of Merchester was one of the finest preachers of his day. His text was, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee"; and he endeavoured to set forth how it is only God who can teach men about God, and how flesh and blood can never show us the Christ until He chooses to reveal Himself. At first Elisabeth listened only with her mind, expecting an intellectual treat and nothing more; but as he went on, and showed how the Call comes in strange places and at strange times, and how when it comes there is no resisting it, her heart began to burn within her; and she recognised the preacher, not only as a man of divers gifts and great powers, but as the ambassador of Christ sent direct to her soul. Then slowly her eyes were opened, and she knew that the Figure in the east window was no Sign of an imaginary renunciation, no Symbol of a worn-out creed, but the portrait of a living Person, Whose Voice was calling her, and Whose Love was constraining her, and Whose Power was enfolding her and would not let her go. With the certainty that is too absolute for proof, she knew in Whom she now believed; and she knew, further, that it was not her own mind nor the preacher's words that had suddenly shown her the truth—flesh and blood had not revealed it to her, but Christ Himself.

When the service was over, Elisabeth came out into the sunlight with a strange, new, exultant feeling, such as she had never felt before. She stood in the old churchyard, waiting for Alan to bring round the dog-cart, and watching the sun set beyond the distant hills; and she was conscious—how she could not explain—that the sunset was different from any other sunset that she had ever seen. She had always loved nature with an intense love; but now there seemed a richer gold in the parting sunbeams—a sweeter mystery behind the far-off hills—because of that Figure in the east window. It was as if she saw again a land which she had always loved, and now learned for the first time that it belonged to some one who was dear to her; a new sense of ownership mingled with the old delight, and gave an added interest to the smallest detail.

Then she and Alan turned their backs to the sunset, and drove along the bleak high-road toward Sedgemoor, where the reflection of the blast-furnaces—that weird aurora borealis of the Black Country—was already beginning to pulsate against the darkening sky. And here again Elisabeth realized that for her the old things had passed away, and all things had become new. She felt that her childish dream was true, and that the

crimson light was indeed a pillar of fire showing that the Lord was in the midst of His people; but she went further now than she had gone in her day-dreams, and knew that all the lights and shadows of life are but pillars of cloud and of fire, forthtelling the same truth to all who have seeing eyes and understanding hearts.

Suddenly the silence was broken by Alan. "I have been thinking about you during the service, and building all sorts of castles in the air which you and I are going to inhabit together. But we must not let the old faiths hamper us, Elisabeth; if we do, our powers will be impaired by prejudices, and our usefulness will be limited by traditions."

"I have something to say to you," Elisabeth replied, and her eyes shone like stars in the twilight; "you won't understand it, but I must say it all the same. In church to-night, for the first time in my life, I heard God speaking to me; and I found out that religion is no string of dogmas, but just His calling us by name."

Tremaine looked at her pityingly. "You are overtired and overwrought by the heat, and the excitement of the sermon has been too much for you. But you will be all right again to-morrow, never fear."

"I knew you wouldn't understand, and I can't explain it to you; but it has suddenly all become quite clear to me—all the things that I have puzzled over since I was a little child; and I know now that religion is not our attitude toward God, but His attitude toward us."

"Why, Elisabeth, you are saying over again all the old formulas that you and I have refuted so often."

"I know I am; but I never really believed in them till now. I can't argue with you, Alan—I'm not clever enough—and besides, the best things in the world can never be proved by argument. But I want you to understand that the Power which you call Christianity is stronger than human wills, or human strength, or even human love; and now that it has once laid hold upon me, it will never let me go."

Alan's face grew pale with anger. "I see; your old associations have been too strong for you."

"It isn't my old associations, or my early training, or anything belonging to me. It isn't me at all. It is just His Voice calling me. Can't you understand, Alan? It is not I who am doing it all—it is He."

There was a short silence, and then Tremaine said—

"But I thought you loved me?"

"I thought so too, but perhaps I was wrong; I don't know. All I know is that this new feeling is stronger than any feeling I ever had before; and that I can not give up my religion, whatever it may cost me."

"I will not marry a woman who believes in the old faith."

"And I will not marry a man who does not."

Alan's voice grew hard. "I don't believe you ever loved me," he complained.

"I don't know. I thought I did; but perhaps I knew as little about love as you know about religion. Perhaps I shall find a real love some day which will be as different from my friendship for you as this new knowledge is different from the religion that Cousin Maria taught me. I'm very sorry, but I can never marry you now."

"You would have given up your religion fast enough if you had really cared for me," sneered Tremaine.

Elisabeth pondered for a moment, with the old contraction of her eyebrows. "I don't think so, because, as I told you before, it isn't really my doing at all. It isn't that I won't give up my religion—it is my religion that won't give up me. Supposing that a blind man wanted to marry me on condition that I would believe, as he did, that the world is dark: I couldn't believe it, however much I loved him. You can't not know what you have once known, and you can't not have seen what you have seen, however much you may wish to do so, or however much other people may wish it."

"You are a regular woman, in spite of all your cleverness, and I was a fool to imagine

that you would prove more intelligent in the long run than the rest of your conventional and superstitious sex."

"Please forgive me for hurting you," besought Elisabeth.

"It is not only that you have hurt me, but I am so disappointed in you; you seemed so different from other women, and now I find the difference was merely a surface one."

"I am so sorry," Elisabeth still pleaded.

Tremaine laughed bitterly. "You are disappointed in yourself, I should imagine. You posed as being so broad and modern and enlightened, and yet you have found worn-out dogmas and hackneyed creeds too strong for you."

Elisabeth smiled to herself. "No; but I have found the Christ," she answered softly.

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## CHAPTER IX

### FELICIA FINDS HAPPINESS

Give me that peak of cloud which fills  
The sunset with its gorgeous form,  
Instead of these familiar hills  
That shield me from the storm.

After having been weighed in Elisabeth's balance and found wanting, Alan Tremaine went abroad for a season, and Sedgemoor knew him no more until the following spring. During that time Elisabeth possessed her soul and grew into a true woman—a woman with no smallness or meanness in her nature, but with certain feminine weaknesses which made her all the more lovable to those people who understood her, and all the more incongruous and irritating to those who did not. Christopher, too, rested in an oasis of happiness just then. He was an adept in the study of Elisabeth, and he knew perfectly well what had passed between her and Alan, although she flattered herself that she had kept him completely in the dark on the subject. But Christopher was always ready to dance to Elisabeth's piping, except when it happened to be on red-hot iron; even then he tried to obey her bidding, and it was hardly his fault if he failed.

Christopher Thornley was one of those people whose temperament and surroundings are at war with each other. Such people are not few in this world, though they themselves are frequently quite unaware of the fact; nevertheless, there is always an element of tragedy in their lot. By nature he was romantic and passionate and chivalrous, endowed with an enthusiastic admiration for beauty and an ardent longing for all forms of joyousness; and he had been trained in a school of thought where all merely human joys and attractions are counted as unimportant if not sinful, and where wisdom and righteousness are held to be the two only ends of life. Perhaps in a former existence—or in the person of some remote ancestor—Christopher had been a knightly and devoted cavalier, ready to lay down his life for Church and king, and in the meantime spending his days in writing odes to his mistress's eyebrow; and now he had been born into a strict Puritan atmosphere, where principles rather than persons commanded men's loyalty, and where romance was held to be a temptation of the flesh if not a snare of the devil. He possessed a great capacity for happiness, and for enjoyment of all kinds; consequently the dull routine of business was more distasteful to him than to a man of coarser fibre and less fastidious tastes. Christopher was one of the people who are specially fitted by nature to appreciate to the full all the refinements and accessories of wealth and culture; therefore his position at the Osierfield was more trying to him than it would have been to nine men out of every ten.

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When spring came back again, Alan Tremaine came with it to the Moat House; and at the same time Felicia Herbert arrived on a visit to the Willows. Alan had enough of the woman in his nature to decide that—Elisabeth not being meant for him—Elisabeth was not worth the having; but, although she had not filled his life so completely as to make it unendurable without her, she had occupied his thoughts sufficiently to make feminine society and sympathy thenceforth a necessity of his being. So it came to pass

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that when he met Felicia and saw that she was fair, he straightway elected her to the office which Elisabeth had created and then declined to fill; and because human nature—and especially young human nature—is stronger even than early training or old associations, Felicia fell in love with him in return, in spite of (possibly because of) her former violent prejudice against him. To expect a person to be a monster and then to find he is a man, has very much the same effect as expecting a person to be a man and finding him a fairy prince; we accord him our admiration for being so much better than our fancy painted him, and we crave his forgiveness for having allowed it to paint him in such false colours. Then we long to make some reparation to him for our unjust judgment; and—if we happen to be women—this reparation frequently takes the form of ordering his dinner for the rest of his dining days, and of giving him the right to pay our dressmakers' bills until such time as we cease to be troubled with them.

Consequently that particular year the spring seemed to have come specially for the benefit of Alan and Felicia. For them the woods were carpeted with daffodils, and the meadows were decked in living green; for them the mountains and hills broke forth into singing, and the trees of the field clapped their hands. Most men and women have known one spring-time such as this in their lives, whereof all the other spring-times were but images and types; and, maybe, even that one spring-time was but an image and a type of the great New Year's Day which shall be Time's to-morrow.

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But while these two were wandering together in fairyland, Elisabeth felt distinctly left out in the cold. Felicia was her friend—Alan had been her lover; and now they had drifted off into a strange new country, and had shut the door in her face. There was no place for her in this fairyland of theirs; they did not want her any longer; and although she was too large-hearted for petty jealousies, she could not stifle that pang of soreness with which most of us are acquainted, when our fellow-travellers slip off by pairs into Eden, and leave us to walk alone upon the dusty highway.

Elisabeth could no more help flirting than some people can help stammering. It was a pity, no doubt; but it would have been absurd to blame her for it. She had not the slightest intention of breaking anybody's heart; she did not take herself seriously enough to imagine such a contingency possible; but the desire to charm was so strong within her that she could not resist it; and she took as much trouble to win the admiration of women as of men. Therefore, Alan and Felicia having done with her, for the time being, she turned her attention to Christopher; and although he fully comprehended the cause, he none the less enjoyed the effect. He cherished no illusions concerning Elisabeth, for the which he was perhaps to be pitied; since from love which is founded upon an illusion, there may be an awakening; but for love which sees its objects as they are, and still goes on loving them, there is no conceivable cure either in this world or the world to come.

"I'm not jealous by nature, and I think it is horrid to be dog-in-the-mangerish," she remarked to him one sunny afternoon, when Alan and Felicia had gone off together to Badgering Woods and left her all alone, until Christopher happened to drop in about tea-time. He had a way of appearing upon the scene when Elisabeth needed him, and of effacing himself when she did not. He also had a way of smoothing down all the little faults and trials and difficulties which beset her path, and of making for her the rough places plain. "But I can't help feeling it is rather dull when a man who has been in love with you suddenly begins to be in love with another girl."

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"I can imagine that the situation has its drawbacks."

"Not that there is any reason why he shouldn't, when you haven't been in love with him yourself."

"Not the slightest. Even I, whom you consider an epitome of all that is stiff-necked and strait-laced, can see no harm in that. It seems to me a thing that a man might do on a Sunday afternoon without in any way jeopardizing his claim to universal respect."

"Still it is dull for the woman; you must see that."

"I saw it the moment I came in; nevertheless I am not prepared to state that the dulness of the woman is a consummation so devoutly to be prayed against. And, besides, it isn't at all dull for the other woman—the new woman—you know."

"And of course the other woman has to be considered."

"I suppose she has," Christopher replied; "but I can't for the life of me see why," he

added under his breath.

"Let's go into the garden," Elisabeth said, rising from her chair; "nobody is in but me, and it is so stuffy to stay in the house now we have finished tea. Cousin Maria is busy succouring the poor, and——"

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"And Miss Herbert is equally busy consoling the rich. Is that it?"

"That is about what it comes to."

So they went into the garden where they had played as children, and sat down upon the rustic seat where they had sat together scores of times; and Elisabeth thought about the great mystery of love, and Christopher thought about the length of Elisabeth's eyelashes.

"Do you think that Alan is in love with Felicia?" the girl asked at last.

"Appearances favour the supposition," replied Christopher.

"You once said he wasn't capable of loving any woman."

"I know I did; but that didn't in the least mean that he wasn't capable of loving Miss Herbert."

"She is very attractive; even you like her better than you like me," Elisabeth remarked, looking at him through the very eyelashes about which he was thinking. "I wonder at it, but nevertheless you do."

"One never can explain these things. At least I never can, though you seem to possess strange gifts of divination. I remember that you once expounded to me that either affinity or infinity was at the root of these matters—I forget which."

"She is certainly good-looking," Elisabeth went on.

"She is; her dearest friend couldn't deny that."

"And she has sweet manners."

"Distinctly sweet. She is the sort of girl that people call restful."

"And a lovely temper."

Christopher still refused to be drawn. "So I conclude. I have never ruffled it—nor tried to ruffle it—nor even desired to ruffle it."

"Do you like ruffling people's tempers?"

"Some people's tempers, extremely."

"What sort of people's?"

"I don't know. I never schedule people into 'sorts,' as you do. The people I care about can not be counted by 'sorts': there is one made of each, and then the mould is broken."

"You do like Felicia better than me, don't you?" Elisabeth asked, after a moment's silence.

"So you say, and as you are a specialist in these matters I think it wise to take your statements on faith without attempting to dispute them."

"Chris, you are a goose!"

"I know that—far better than you do." And Christopher sighed.

"But I like you all the same."

"That is highly satisfactory."

"I believe I always liked you better than Alan," Elisabeth continued, "only his way of talking about things dazzled me somehow. But after a time I found out that he always said more than he meant, while you always mean more than you say."

"Oh! Tremaine isn't half a bad fellow: his talk is, as you say, a little high-flown; but he takes himself in more than he takes in other people, and he really means well."

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Christopher could afford to be magnanimous toward Alan, now that Elisabeth was the reverse.

"I remember that day at Pembruge Castle, while he was talking to me about the troubles of the poor you were rowing Johnnie Stubbs about on the mere. That was just the difference between you and him."

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"Oh! there wasn't much in that," replied Christopher; "if you had been kind to me that day, and had let me talk to you, I am afraid that poor Johnnie Stubbs would have had to remain on dry land. I merely took the advice of the great man who said, 'If you can not do what you like, do good.' But I'd rather have done what I liked, all the same."

"That is just like you, Chris! You never own up to your good points."

"Yes, I do; but I don't own up to my good points that exist solely in your imagination."

"You reckon up your virtues just as Cousin Maria reckons up her luggage on a journey; she always says she has so many packages, and so many that don't count. And your virtues seem to be added up in the same style."

Christopher was too shy to enjoy talking about himself; nevertheless, he was immensely pleased when Elisabeth was pleased with him. "Let us wander back to our muttens," he said, "which, being interpreted, means Miss Herbert and Tremaine. What sort of people are the Herberts, by the way? Is Mrs. Herbert a lady?"

Elisabeth thought for a moment. "She is the sort of person who pronounces the 't' in often."

"I know exactly; I believe 'genteel' is the most correct adjective for that type. Is she good-looking?"

"Very; she was the pencil sketch for Felicia."

"About how old?"

"It is difficult to tell. She is one of the women who are sixty in the sun and thirty in the shade, like the thermometer in spring. I should think she is really an easy five-and-forty, accelerated by limited means and an exacting conscience. She is always bothering about sins and draughts and things of that kind. I believe she thinks that everything you do will either make your soul too hot or your body too cold."

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"You are severe on the excellent lady."

"I try not to be, because I think she is really good in her way; but her religion is such a dreadfully fussy kind of religion it makes me angry. It seems to caricature the whole thing. She appears to think that Christianity is a sort of menu of moral fancy-dishes, which one is bound to swallow in a certain prescribed order."

"Poor dear woman!"

"When people like Mrs. Herbert talk about religion," Elisabeth went on, "it is as bad as reducing the number of the fixed stars to pounds, shillings, and pence; just as it is when people talk about love who know nothing at all about it."

Christopher manfully repressed a smile. "Still, I have known quite intelligent persons do that. They make mistakes, I admit, but they don't know that they do; and so their ignorance is of the brand which the poet describes as bliss."

"People who have never been in love should never talk about it," Elisabeth sagely remarked.

"But, on the other hand, those who have been, as a rule, can't; so who is to conduct authorized conversations on this most interesting and instructive subject?"

"The people who have been through it, and so know all about it," replied Elisabeth.

"Allow me to point out that your wisdom for once is at fault. In the first place, I doubt if the man who is suffering from a specific disease is the suitable person to read a paper on the same before the College of Surgeons; and, in the second, I should say—for the sake of argument—that the man who has been through eternity and come out whole at the other end, knows as much about what eternity really means as—well, as

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you do. But tell me more about Mrs. Herbert and her peculiarities."

"She is always bothering about what she calls the 'correct thing.' She has no peace in her life on account of her anxiety as to the etiquette of this world and the next—first to know it and then to be guided by it. I am sure that she wishes that the Bible had been written on the principle of that dreadful little book called Don't, which gives you a list of the solecisms you should avoid; she would have understood it so much better than the present system."

"But you would call Miss Herbert a lady, wouldn't you?" Christopher asked.

"Oh, yes; a perfect lady. She is even well-bred when she talks about her love affairs; and if a woman is a lady when she talks about her love affairs, she will be a lady in any circumstances. It is the most crucial test out."

"Yes; I should have called Miss Herbert a perfect lady myself."

"That is the effect of Fox How; it always turned out ladies, whatever else it failed in."

"But I thought you maintained that it failed in nothing!"

"No more it did; but I threw that in as a sop to what's-his-name, because you are so horribly argumentative."

Christopher was amused. Elisabeth was a perfect *chef* in the preparing of such sops, as he was well aware; and although he laughed at himself for doing it (knowing that her present graciousness to him merely meant that she was dull, and wanted somebody to play with, and he was better than nobody), he made these sops the principal articles of his heart's diet, and cared for no other fare.

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"What is Mr. Herbert like?" he inquired.

"Oh! he is a good man in his way, but a back-boneless, sweet-syrupy kind of a Christian; one of the sort that seems to regard the Almighty as a blindly indulgent and easily-hoodwinked Father, and Satan himself as nothing worse than a rather crusty old bachelor uncle. You know the type."

"Perfectly; they always drawl, and use the adjective 'dear' in and out of season. I quite think that among themselves they talk of 'the dear devil.' And yet 'dear' is really quite a nice word, if only people like that hadn't spoiled it."

"You shouldn't let people spoil things for you in that way. That is one of your greatest faults, Christopher; whenever you have seen a funny side to anything you never see any other. You have too much humour and too little tenderness; that's what's the matter with you."

"Permit me to tender you a sincere vote of thanks for your exhaustive and gratuitous spiritual diagnosis. To cure my faults is my duty—to discover them, your delight."

"Well, I'm right; and you'll find it out some day, although you make fun of me now."

"I say, how will Mrs. Herbert fit in Tremaine's religious views—or rather absence of religious views—with her code of the next world's etiquette?" asked Christopher, wisely changing the subject.

"Oh! she'll simply decline to see them. Although, as I told you, she is driven about entirely by her conscience, it is a well-harnessed conscience and always wears blinkers. It shies a good deal at gnats, I own; but it can run in double-harness with a camel, if worldly considerations render such a course desirable. It is like a horse we once had, which always shied violently at every puddle, but went past a steamroller without turning a hair."

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"By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue," quoted Christopher.

"I don't want to be too severe, but Mrs. Herbert does make me so mad. When people put religious things in a horrid light, it makes you feel as if they were telling unkind and untrue tales about your dearest friends."

"What does the good woman say that makes 'my lady Tongue' so furious?"

"Well, she is always saying one must give up this and give up that, and deny one's



self here and deny one's self there, for the sake of religion; and I don't believe that religion means that sort of giving up at all. Of course, God is pleased when we do what He wishes us to do, because He knows it is the best for us; but I don't believe He wants us to do things when we hate doing them, just to please Him."

"Perhaps not. Still, if one does a thing one doesn't like doing, to please another person, one often ends by enjoying the doing of the thing. And even if one never enjoys it, the thing has still to be done."

"Well, if you were awfully fond of anybody, should you want them to spend their time with you, and do what you were doing, when you knew all the time that they didn't like being with you, but were dying to be with some one else?"

"Certainly not." Christopher might not know much about theology, but he knew exactly how people felt when they were, as Elisabeth said, "awfully fond of anybody."

"Of course you wouldn't," the girl went on; "you would wish the person you loved to be happy with you, and to want to be with you as much as you wanted to be with them; and if they didn't really care to be with you, you wouldn't thank them for unselfishness in the matter. So if an ordinary man like you doesn't care for mere unselfishness from the people you are really fond of, do you think that what isn't good enough for you is good enough for God?"

"No. But I still might want the people I was fond of to be unselfish, not for my own sake but for theirs. The more one loves a person, the more one wishes that person to be worthy of love; and though we don't love people because they are perfect, we want them to be perfect because we love them, don't you see?"

"You aren't a very good instance, Chris, because, you see, you are rather a reserved, cold-hearted person, and not at all affectionate; but still you are fond of people in your own way."

"Yes; I am fond of one or two people—but in my own way, as you say," Christopher replied quietly.

"And even you understand that forced and artificial devotion isn't worth having."

"Yes; even I understand as much as that."

"So you will see that unselfishness and renunciation and things of that sort are only second-best things after all, and that there is nothing of the kind between people who really love each other, because their two wills are merged in one, and each finds his own happiness in the happiness of the other. And I don't believe that God wants us to give up our wills to His in a 'Thy way not mine' kind of way; I believe He wants the same mind to be in us that was in Christ Jesus, so that He and we shall be wishing for the same things."

"Wise Elisabeth, I believe that you are right."

"And you'll see how right I am, when you really care very much for somebody yourself. I don't mean in the jolly, comfortable way in which you care for Mr. Smallwood and Cousin Maria and me. That's a very nice friendly sort of caring, I admit, and keeps the world warm and homelike, just as having a fire in the room keeps the room warm and homelike; but it doesn't teach one much."

Christopher smiled sadly. "Doesn't it? I should have thought that it taught one a good deal."

"Oh! but not as much as a lovely romantic attachment would teach one—not as much as Alan and Felicia are teaching each other now."

"Don't you think so?"

"Of course I don't. Why, you've never taught me anything, Chris, though we've always been fond of each other in the comfortable, easy fashion."

"Then the fault has been in me, for you have taught me a great many things, Elisabeth."

"Because I've taken the trouble to do so. But the worst of it is that by the time I've taught you anything, I have changed my mind about it myself, and find I've been

teaching you all wrong. And it is a bother to begin to unteach you."

"I wonder why. I don't think I should find it at all a bother to unteach you certain things."

"And it is a greater bother still to teach you all over again, and teach you different." Elisabeth added, without attending to the last remark.

"Thank you, I think I won't trespass on your forbearance to that extent. Some lessons are so hard to master that life would be unbearable if one had to learn them twice over." Christopher spoke somewhat bitterly.

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Elisabeth attended then. "What a funny thing to say! But I know what it is—you've got a headache; I can see it in your face, and that makes you take things so contrariwise."

"Possibly."

"Poor old boy! Does it hurt?"

"Pretty considerably."

"And have you had it long?"

"Yes," replied Christopher with truth, and he added to himself, "ever since I can remember, and it isn't in my head at all."

Elisabeth stroked his sleeve affectionately. "I am so sorry."

Christopher winced; it was when Elisabeth was affectionate that he found his enforced silence most hard to bear. How he could have made her love him if he had tried, he thought; and how could he find the heart to make her love him as long as he and she were alike dependent upon Miss Farringdon's bounty, and they had neither anything of their own? He rejoiced that Alan Tremaine had failed to win her love; but he scorned him as a fool for not having succeeded in doing so when he had the chance. Had Christopher been master of the Moat House he felt he would have managed things differently; for the most modest of men cherish a profound contempt for the man who can not succeed in making a woman love him when he sets about it.

"By Jove!" he said to himself, looking into the gray eyes that were so full of sympathy just then, "what an ass the man was to talk to such a woman as this about art and philosophy and high-falutin' of that sort! If I had only the means to make her happy, I would talk to her about herself and me until she was tired of the subject—and that wouldn't be this side Doomsday. And she thinks that I am cold-hearted!" But what he said to Elisabeth was, "There isn't much the matter with my head—nothing for you to worry about, I can assure you. Let us talk about something more interesting than my unworthy self—Tremaine, for instance."

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"I used to believe in Alan," Elisabeth confessed; "but I don't so much now. I wonder if that is because he has left off making love to me, or because I have seen that his ideas are so much in advance of his actions."

"He never did make love to me, so I always had an inkling of the truth that his sentiments were a little over his own head. As a matter of fact, I believe I mentioned this conviction to you more than once; but you invariably treated it with the scorn that it doubtless deserved."

"And yet you were right. It seems to me that you are always right, Chris."

"No—not always; but more often than you are, perhaps," replied Christopher, in rather a husky voice, but with a very kindly smile. "I am older, you see, for one thing; and I have had a harder time of it for another, and some of the idealism has been knocked out of me."

"But the nice thing about you is that though you always know when I am wrong or foolish, you never seem to despise me for it."

Despise her? Christopher laughed at the word; and yet women were supposed to have such keen perceptions.

"I don't care whether you are wise or foolish," he said, "as long as you are you. That is all that matters to me."

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"And you really think I am nice?"

"I don't see how you could well be nicer."

"Oh! you don't know what I could do if I tried. You underrate my powers; you always did. But you are a very restful person, Chris; when my mind gets tired with worrying over things and trying to understand them, I find it a perfect holiday to talk to you. You seem to take things as they are."

"Well, I have to, you see; and what must be must."

"Simple natures like yours are very soothing to complex natures like mine. When I've lived my life and worn myself out with trying to get the utmost I can out of everything, I shall spend the first three thousand years of eternity sitting quite still upon a fixed star without speaking, with my legs dangling into space, and looking at you. It will be such a nice rest, before beginning life over again."

"Say two thousand years; you'd never be able to sit still without speaking for more than two thousand years at the outside. By that time you'd have pulled yourself together, and be wanting to set about teaching the angels a thing or two. I know your ways."

"I should enjoy that," laughed Elisabeth.

"So would the angels, if they were anything like me."

Elisabeth laughed again, and looked through the trees to the fields beyond. Friends were much more comfortable than lovers, she said to herself; Alan in his palmiest days had never been half so soothing to her as Christopher was now. She wondered why poets and people of that kind made so much of love and so little of friendship, since the latter was obviously the more lasting and satisfactory of the two. Somehow the mere presence of Christopher had quite cured the sore feeling that Alan and Felicia had left behind them when they started for their walk without even asking her to go with them; and she was once more sure of the fact that she was necessary to somebody—a certainty without which Elisabeth could not live. So her imagination took heart of grace again, and began drawing plans for extensive castles in Spain, and arranging social campaigns wherein she herself should be crowned with triumph. She decided that half the delight of winning life's prizes and meeting its fairy princes would be the telling Christopher all about them afterward; for her belief in his exhaustless sympathy was boundless.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said, after she had been silent for some moments.

"I was looking at Mrs. Bateson feeding her fowls," said Elisabeth evasively; "and, I say, have you ever noticed that hens are just like tea-pots, and cocks like coffee-pots? Look at them now! It seems as if an army of breakfast services had suddenly come to life *à la Galatea*, and were pouring libations at Mrs. Bateson's feet."

"It does look rather like that, I admit. But here are Miss Herbert and Tremaine returning from their walk; let's go and meet them."

And Elisabeth went to meet the lovers with no longer any little cobwebs of jealousy hiding in the dark corners of her heart, Christopher's hand having swept them all away; he had a wonderful power of exterminating the little foxes which would otherwise have spoiled Elisabeth's vines; and again she said to herself how much better a thing was friendship than love, since Alan had always expected her to be interested in his concerns, while Christopher, on the contrary, was always interested in hers.

It was not long after this that Elisabeth was told by Felicia of the latter's engagement to Alan Tremaine; and Elisabeth was amazed at the rapidity with which Felicia had assimilated her lover's views on all subjects. Elisabeth had expected that her friend would finally sacrifice her opinions on the altar of her feelings; she was already old enough to be prepared for that; but she had anticipated a fierce warfare in the soul of Felicia between the directly opposing principles of this young lady's mother and lover. To Elisabeth's surprise, this civil war never took place. Felicia accepted Alan's doubts as unquestioningly as she had formerly accepted Mrs. Herbert's beliefs; and as she loved the former more devotedly than she had ever loved the latter, she was more devout and fervid in her agnosticism than she had ever been in her faith.

She had believed, because her mother ordered her to believe; she doubted, because Alan desired her to doubt; her belief and unbelief being equally the outcome of her affections rather than of her convictions.

Mrs. Herbert likewise looked leniently upon Alan's want of orthodoxy, and at this Elisabeth was not surprised. Possibly there are not many of us who do not—in the private and confidential depths of our evil hearts—regard earth in the hand as worth more than heaven in the bush, so to speak; at any rate, Felicia's mother was not one of the bright exceptions; and—from a purely commercial point of view—a saving faith does not go so far as a spending income, and it is no use pretending that it does. So Mrs. Herbert smiled upon her daughter's engagement; but compromised with that accommodating conscience of hers by always speaking of her prospective son-in-law as "poor Alan," just as if she really believed, as she professed she did, that the death of the body and the death of the soul are conditions equally to be deplored.

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"You see, my dear," she said to Elisabeth, who came to stay at Wood Glen for Felicia's marriage, which took place in the early summer, "it is such a comfort to Mr. Herbert and myself to know that our dear child is so comfortably provided for. And then—although I can not altogether countenance his opinions—poor Alan has such a good heart."

Elisabeth, remembering that she had once been fascinated by the master of the Moat House, was merciful. "He is an extremely interesting man to talk to," she said; "he has thought out so many things."

"He has, my love. And if we are tempted to rebuke him too severely for his non-acceptance of revealed truth, we must remember that he was deprived comparatively early in life of both his parents, and so ought rather to be pitied than blamed," agreed Mrs. Herbert, who would cheerfully have poured out all the vials of the Book of Revelation upon any impecunious doubter who had dared to add the mortal sin of poverty to the venial one of unbelief.

"And he is really very philanthropic," Elisabeth continued; "he has done no end of things for the work-people at the Osierfield. It is a pity that his faith is second-rate, considering that his works are first-class."

"Ah! my dear, we must judge not, lest in turn we too should be judged. Who are we, that we should say who is or who is not of the elect? It is often those who seem to be the farthest from the kingdom that are in truth the nearest to it." Mrs. Herbert had dismissed a kitchen-maid, only the week before, for declining to attend her Bible-class, and walking out with a young man instead.

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"Still, I am sorry that Alan has all those queer views," Elisabeth persisted; "he really would be a splendid sort of person if he were only a Christian; and it seems such a pity that—with all his learning—he hasn't learned the one thing that really matters."

"My love, I am ashamed to find you so censorious; it is a sad fault, especially in the young. I would advise you to turn to the thirteenth of First Corinthians, and see for yourself how excellent a gift is charity—the greatest of all, according to our dear Saint Paul."

Elisabeth sighed. She had long ago become acquainted with Mrs. Herbert's custom of keeping religion as a thing apart, and of treating it from an "in-another-department-if-you-please" point of view; and she felt that Tremaine's open agnosticism was almost better—and certainly more sincere—than this.

But Mrs. Herbert was utterly unconscious of any secret fault on her own part, and continued to purr contentedly to herself. "Felicia, dear child! will certainly take an excellent position. She will be in county society, the very thing which I have always desired for her; and she will enter it, not on sufferance, but as one of themselves. I can not tell you what a pleasure it is to Mr. Herbert and myself to think of our beloved daughter as a regular county lady; it quite makes up for all the little self-denials that we suffered in order to give her a good education and to render her fit to take her place in society. I shouldn't be surprised if she were even presented at Court." And the mother's cup of happiness ran over at the mere thought of such honour and glory.

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Felicia, too, was radiantly happy. In the first place, she was very much in love; in the second, her world was praising her for doing well to herself. "I can not think how a clever man like Alan ever fell in love with such a stupid creature as me," she said to

Elisabeth, not long before the wedding.

"Can't you? Well, I can. I don't wonder at any man's falling in love with you, darling, you are so dear and pretty and altogether adorable."

"But then Alan is so different from other men."

Elisabeth was too well-mannered to smile at this; but she made a note of it to report to Christopher afterward. She knew that he would understand how funny it was.

"I am simply amazed at my own happiness," Felicia continued; "and I am so dreadfully afraid that he will be disappointed in me when he gets to know me better, and will find out that I am not half good enough for him—which I am not."

"What nonsense! Why, there isn't a man living that would really be good enough for you, Felicia."

"Elisabeth! When I hear Alan talking, I wonder how he can put up with silly little me at all. You see, I never was clever—not even as clever as you are; and you, of course, aren't a millionth part as clever as Alan. And then he has such grand thoughts, too; he is always wanting to help other people, and to make them happier. I feel that as long as I live I never can be half grateful enough to him for the honour he has done me in wanting me for his wife."

Elisabeth shrugged her shoulders; the honours that have been within our reach are never quite so wonderful as those that have not.

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So Alan and Felicia were married with much rejoicing and ringing of bells; and Elisabeth found it very pleasant to have her old schoolfellow settled at the Moat House. In fact so thoroughly did she throw herself into the interests of Felicia's new home, that she ceased to feel her need of Christopher, and consequently neglected him somewhat. It was only when others failed her that he was at a premium; when she found she could do without him, she did. As for him, he loyally refrained from blaming Elisabeth, even in his heart, and cursed Fate instead; which really was unfair of him, considering that in this matter Elisabeth, and not Fate, was entirely to blame. But Christopher was always ready to find excuses for Elisabeth, whatever she might do; and this, it must be confessed, required no mean order of ingenuity just then. Elisabeth was as yet young enough to think lightly of the gifts that were bestowed upon her freely and with no trouble on her part, such as bread and air and sunshine and the like; it was reserved for her to learn later that the things one takes for granted are the best thing life has to offer.

It must also be remembered, for her justification, that Christopher had never told her that he loved her "more than reason"; and it is difficult for women to believe that any man loves them until he has told them so, just as it is difficult for them to believe that a train is going direct to the place appointed to it in Bradshaw, until they have been verbally assured upon the point by two guards, six porters, and a newspaper boy. Nevertheless, Elisabeth's ignorance—though perhaps excusable, considering her sex—was anything but bliss to poor Christopher, and her good-natured carelessness hurt him none the less for her not knowing that it hurt him.

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When Felicia had been married about three months her mother came to stay with her at the Moat House; and Elisabeth smiled to herself—and to Christopher—as she pictured the worthy woman's delight in her daughter's new surroundings.

"She'll extol all Felicia's belongings as exhaustively as if she were the Benedicite," Elisabeth said, "and she'll enumerate them as carefully as if she were sending them to the wash. You'll find there won't be a single one omitted—not even the second footman or the soft-water cistern. Mrs. Herbert is one who battens on details, and she never spares her hearers a single item."

"It is distinctly naughty of you," Christopher replied, with the smile that was always ready for Elisabeth's feeblest sallies, "to draw the good soul out for the express purpose of laughing at her. I am ashamed of you, Miss Farringdon."

"Draw her out, my dear boy! You don't know what you are talking about. The most elementary knowledge of Mrs. Herbert would teach you that she requires nothing in the shape of drawing out. You have but to mention the word 'dinner,' and the secret sins of her cook are retailed to you in chronological order; you have but to whisper the

word 'clothes,' and the iniquities of her dressmaker's bill are laid bare before your eyes. Should the conversation glance upon Mr. Herbert, his complete biography becomes your own possession; and should the passing thought of childhood appear above her mental horizon, she tells you all about her own children as graphically as if she were editing a new edition of *The Pillars of the House*. And yet you talk of drawing her out! I am afraid you have no perceptions, Christopher."

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"Possibly not; everybody doesn't have perceptions. I am frequently struck with clever people's lack of them."

"Well, I'm off," replied Elisabeth, whipping up her pony, "to hear Mrs. Herbert's outpourings on Felicia's happiness; when I come back I expect I shall be able to write another poem on 'How does the water come down at Lodore'—with a difference."

And Christopher—who had met her in the High Street—smiled after the retreating figure in sheer delight at her. How fresh and bright and spontaneous she was, he thought, and how charmingly ignorant of the things which she prided herself upon understanding so profoundly! He laughed aloud as he recalled how very wise Elisabeth considered herself. And then he wondered if life would teach her to be less sure of her own buoyant strength, and less certain of her ultimate success in everything she undertook; and, if it did, he felt that he should have an ugly account to settle with life. He was willing for Fate to knock him about as much and as hardly as she pleased, provided she would let Elisabeth alone, and allow the girl to go on believing in herself and enjoying herself as she was so abundantly capable of doing. By this time Christopher was enough of a philosopher to think that it did not really matter much in the long run whether he were happy or unhappy; but he was not yet able to regard the thought of Elisabeth's unhappiness as anything but a catastrophe of the most insupportable magnitude; which showed that he had not yet sufficient philosophy to go round.

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When Elisabeth arrived at the Moat House she found Mrs. Herbert alone, Felicia having gone out driving with her husband; and, to Elisabeth's surprise, there was no sign of the jubilation which she had anticipated. On the contrary, Mrs. Herbert was subdued and tired-looking.

"I am so glad to see you, my dear," she said, kissing Elisabeth; "it is lonely in this big house all by myself."

"It is always rather lonely to be in state," Elisabeth replied, returning her salute. "I wonder if kings find it lonely all by themselves in pleasures and palaces. I expect they do, but they put up with the loneliness for the sake of the stateliness; and you could hardly find a statelier house than this to be lonely in, if you tried."

"Yes; it is a beautiful place," agreed Mrs. Herbert listlessly.

Elisabeth wondered what was wrong, but she did not ask; she knew that Mrs. Herbert would confide in her very soon. People very rarely were reserved with Elisabeth; she was often amazed at the rapidity with which they opened their inmost hearts to her. Probably this accounted in some measure for her slowness in understanding Christopher, who had made it a point of honour not to open his inmost heart to her.

"Don't the woods look lovely?" she said cheerfully, pretending not to notice anything. "I can't help seeing that the trees are beautiful with their gilt leaves, but it goes against my principles to own it, because I do so hate the autumn. I wish we could change our four seasons for two springs and two summers. I am so happy in the summer, and still happier in the spring looking forward to it; but I am wretched in the winter because I am cold, and still wretcheder in the autumn thinking that I'm going to be even colder."

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"Yes; the woods are pretty—very pretty indeed."

"I am so glad you have come while the leaves are still on. I wanted you to see Felicia's home at its very best; and, at its best, it is a home that any woman might be proud of."

Mrs. Herbert's lip trembled. "It is indeed a most beautiful home, and I am sure Felicia has everything to make her happy."

"And she is happy, Mrs. Herbert; I don't think I ever saw anybody so perfectly happy as Felicia is now. I'm afraid I could never be quite as satisfied with any impossible ideal of a husband as she is with Alan; I should want to quarrel with him just for the fun of the thing, and to find out his faults for the pleasure of correcting them. A man as faultless as Alan—I mean as faultless as Felicia considers Alan—would bore me; but he suits her down to the ground."

But even then Mrs. Herbert did not smile; instead of that her light blue eyes filled with tears. "Oh! my dear," she said, with a sob in her voice, "Felicia is ashamed of me."

For all her high spirits, Elisabeth generally recognised tragedy when she met it face to face; and she knew that she was meeting it now. So she spoke very gently—

"My dear Mrs. Herbert, whatever do you mean? I am sure you are not very strong, and so your nerves are out of joint, and make you imagine things."

"No, my love; it is no imagination on my part. I only wish it were. Who can know Felicia as well as her mother knows her—her mother who has worshipped her and toiled for her ever since she was a little baby? And I, who can read her through and through, feel that she is ashamed of me." And the tears overflowed, and rolled down Mrs. Herbert's faded cheeks.

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Elisabeth's heart swelled with an immense pity, for her quick insight told her that Mrs. Herbert was not mistaken; but all she said was—

"I think you are making mountains out of molehills. Lots of girls lose their heads a bit when first they are married, and seem to regard marriage as a special invention and prerogative of their own, which entitles them to give themselves air *ad libitum*; but they soon grow out of it."

Mrs. Herbert shook her head sorrowfully; her tongue was loosed and she spoke plain. "Oh! it isn't like that with Felicia; I should think nothing of that. I remember when first I was married I thought that no unmarried woman knew anything, and that no married woman knew anything but myself; but, as you say, I soon grew out of that. Why, I was quite ready, after I had been married a couple of months, to teach my dear mother all about housekeeping; and finely she laughed at me for it. But Felicia doesn't trouble to teach me anything; she thinks it isn't worth while."

"Oh! I can not believe that Felicia is like that. You must be mistaken."

"Mistaken in my own child, whom I carried in my arms as a little baby? No, my dear; there are some things about which mothers can never be mistaken, God help them! Do you think I did not understand when the carriage came round to-day to take her and Alan to return Lady Patchingham's visit, and Felicia said, 'Mamma won't go with us to-day, Alan dear, because the wind is in the east, and it always gives her a cold to drive in an open carriage when the wind is in the east'? Oh! I saw plain enough that she didn't want me to go with them to Lady Patchingham's; but I only thanked her and said I would rather stay indoors, as it would be safer for me. When they had started I went out and looked at the weather-cock for myself; it pointed southwest." And the big tears rolled down faster than ever.

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Elisabeth did not know what to say; so she wisely said nothing, but took Mrs. Herbert's hand in hers and stroked it.

"Perhaps, my dear, I did wrong in allowing Felicia to marry a man who is not a true believer, and this is my punishment."

"Oh! no, no, Mrs. Herbert; I don't believe that God ever punishes for the sake of punishing. He has to train us, and the training hurts sometimes; but when it does, I think He minds even more than we do."

"Well, my love, I can not say; it is not for us to inquire into the counsels of the Almighty. But I did it for the best; I did, indeed. I did so want Felicia to be happy."

"I am sure you did."

"You see, all my life I had taken an inferior position socially, and the iron of it had entered into my soul. I daresay it was sinful of me, but I used to mind so dreadfully when my husband and I were always asked to second-rate parties, and introduced to second-rate people; and I longed and prayed that my darling Felicia should be spared

the misery and the humiliation which I had had to undergo. You won't understand it, Elisabeth. People in a good position never do; but to be alternately snubbed and patronized all one's life, as I have been, makes social intercourse one long-drawn-out agony to a sensitive woman. So I prayed—how I prayed!—that my beautiful daughter should never suffer as I have done."

Elisabeth's eyes filled with tears; and Mrs. Herbert, encouraged by her unspoken sympathy, proceeded—

"Grand people are so cruel, my dear. I daresay they don't mean to be; but they are. And though I had borne it for myself, I felt I could not bear it for Felicia. I thought it would kill me to see fine ladies overlook her as they had so often overlooked me. So when Alan wanted to marry her, and make her into a fine lady herself, I was overwhelmed with joy; and I felt I no longer minded what I had gone through, now that I knew no one would ever dare to be rude to my beautiful daughter. Now I see I was wrong to set earthly blessings before spiritual ones; but I think you understand how I felt, Elisabeth."

"Yes, I understand; and God understands too."

"Then don't you think He is punishing me, my dear?"

"No; I think He is training Felicia—and perhaps you too, dear Mrs. Herbert."

"Oh! I wish I could think so. But you don't know what Felicia has been to her father and me. She was such a beautiful baby that the people in the street used to stop the nurse to ask whose child she was; and when she grew older she never gave us a moment's trouble or anxiety. Then we pinched and pared in order to be able to afford to send her to Fox How; and when her education was finished there wasn't a more perfect lady in the land than our Felicia. Oh! I was proud of her, I can tell you. And now she is ashamed of me, her own mother! I can not help seeing that this is God's punishment to me for letting her marry an unbeliever." And Mrs. Herbert covered her face with her hands and burst out into bitter sobs.

Elisabeth took the weeping form into her strong young arms. "My poor dear, you are doing Him an injustice, you are, indeed. I am sure He minds even more than you do that Felicia is still so ignorant and foolish, and He is training her in His own way. But He isn't doing it to punish you, dear; believe me, He isn't. Why, even the ordinary human beings who are fond of us want to cure our faults and not to punish them," she continued, as the memory of Christopher's unflinching patience with her suddenly came into her mind, and she recalled how often she had hurt him, and how readily he had always forgiven her; "they are sorry when we do wrong, but they are even sorrier when we suffer for it. And do you think God loves us less than they do, and is quicker to punish and slower to forgive?"

So does the love of the brother whom we have seen help us in some measure to understand the love of the God Whom we have not seen; for which we owe the brother eternal thanks.

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## CHAPTER X

### CHANGES

Why did you take all I said for certain  
When I so gleefully threw the glove?  
Couldn't you see that I made a curtain  
Out of my laughter to hide my love?

"My dear," said Miss Farrington, when Elisabeth came down one morning to breakfast, "there is sad news to-day."

Miss Farrington was never late in a morning. She regarded early rising as a virtue on a par with faith and charity; while to appear at the breakfast-table after the breakfast itself had already appeared thereon was, in her eyes, as the sin of witchcraft.



"What is the matter?" asked Elisabeth, somewhat breathlessly. She had run downstairs at full speed in order to enter the dining-room before the dishes, completing her toilet as she fled; and she had only beaten the bacon by a neck.

"Richard Smallwood has had a paralytic stroke. Christopher sent up word the first thing this morning."

"Oh! I am so sorry. Mr. Smallwood is such a dear old man, and used to be so kind to Christopher and me when we were little."

"I am very sorry, too, Elisabeth. I have known Richard Smallwood all my life, and he was a valued friend of my dear father's, as well as being his right hand in all matters of business. Both my father and uncle thought very highly of Richard's opinion, and considered that they owed much of their commercial success to his advice and assistance."

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"Poor Christopher! I wonder if he will mind much?"

"Of course he will mind, my dear. What a strange child you are, and what peculiar things you say! Mr. Smallwood is Christopher's only living relative, and when anything happens to him Christopher will be entirely alone in the world. It is sad for any one to be quite alone; and especially for young people, who have a natural craving for companionship and sympathy." Miss Farringdon sighed. She had spent most of her life in the wilderness and on the mountain-tops, and she knew how cold was the climate and how dreary the prospect there.

Elisabeth's eyes filled with tears, and her heart swelled with a strange new feeling she had never felt before. For the first time in her life Christopher (unconsciously on his part) made a direct appeal to her pity, and her heart responded to the appeal. His perspective, from her point of view, was suddenly changed; he was no longer the kindly, easy-going comrade with whom she had laughed and quarrelled and made it up again ever since she could remember, and with whom she was on a footing of such familiar intimacy; instead, he had become a man standing in the shadow of a great sorrow, whose solitary grief commanded her respect and at the same time claimed her tenderness. All through breakfast, and the prayers which followed, Elisabeth's thoughts ran on this new Christopher, who was so much more interesting and yet so much farther off than the old one. She wondered how he would look and what he would say when next she saw him; and she longed to see him again, and yet felt frightened at the thought of doing so. At prayers that morning Miss Farringdon read the lament of David over Saul and Jonathan; and while the words of undying pathos sounded in her ears, Elisabeth wondered whether Christopher would mourn as David did if his uncle were to die, and whether he would let her comfort him.

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When prayers were over, Miss Farringdon bade Elisabeth accompany her to Mr. Smallwood's; and all the way there the girl's heart was beating so fast that it almost choked her, with mingled fear of and tenderness for this new Christopher who had taken the place of her old playmate. As they sat waiting for him in the oak-panelled dining-room, a fresh wave of pity swept over Elisabeth as she realized for the first time—though she had sat there over and over again—what a cheerless home this was in which to spend one's childhood and youth, and how pluckily Christopher had always made the best of things, and had never confessed—even to her—what a dreary lot was his. Then he came downstairs; and as she heard his familiar footstep crossing the hall her heart beat faster than ever, and there was a mist before her eyes; but when he entered the room and shook hands, first with Miss Farringdon and then with her, she was quite surprised to see that he looked very much as he always looked, only his face was pale and his eyes heavy for want of sleep; and his smile was as kind as ever as it lighted upon her.

"It is very good of you to come to me so quickly," he said, addressing Miss Farringdon but looking at Elisabeth.

"Not at all, Christopher," replied Miss Maria; "those who have friends must show themselves friendly, and your uncle has certainly proved himself of the sort that sticketh closer than a brother. No son could have done more for my father—no brother could have done more for me—than he has done; and therefore his affliction is my affliction, and his loss is my loss."

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"You are very kind." And Christopher's voice shook a little.

Elisabeth did not speak. She was struggling with a feeling of uncontrollable shyness which completely tied her usually fluent tongue.

"Is he very ill?" Miss Farringdon asked.

"Yes," Christopher replied, "I'm afraid it's a bad job altogether. The doctor thinks he will last only a few days; but if he lives he will never regain the use of his speech or of his brain; and I don't know that life under such conditions is a boon to be desired."

"I do not think it is. Yet we poor mortals long to keep our beloved ones with us, even though it is but the semblance of their former selves that remain."

Christopher did not answer. There suddenly rushed over him the memory of all that his uncle had been to him, and of how that uncle still treated him as a little child; and with it came the consciousness that, when his uncle was gone, nobody would ever treat him as a little child any more. Life is somewhat dreary when the time comes for us to be grown-up to everybody; so Christopher looked (and did not see) out of the window, instead of speaking.

"Of course," Miss Farringdon continued, "you will take his place, should he be—as I fear is inevitable—unable to resume work at the Osierfield; and I have such a high opinion of you, Christopher, that I have no doubt you will do your uncle's work as well as he has done it, and there could not be higher praise. Nevertheless, it saddens me to know that another of the old landmarks has been swept away, and that now I only am left of what used to be the Osierfield forty years ago. The work may be done as well by the new hands and brains as by the old ones; but after one has crossed the summit of the mountain and begun to go downhill, it is sorry work exchanging old lamps for new. The new lamps may give brighter light, perchance; but their light is too strong for tired old eyes; and we grow homesick for the things to which we are accustomed." And Miss Farringdon took off her spectacles and wiped them.

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There was silence for a few seconds, while Christopher manfully struggled with his feelings and Miss Maria decorously gave vent to hers. Christopher was vexed with himself for so nearly breaking down before Elisabeth, and throwing the shadow of his sorrow across the sunshine of her path. He did not know that the mother-heart in her was yearning over him with a tenderness almost too powerful to be resisted, and that his weakness was constraining her as his strength had never done. He was rather surprised that she did not speak to him; but with the patient simplicity of a strong man he accepted her behaviour without questioning it. Her mere presence in the room somehow changed everything, and made him feel that no world which contained Elisabeth could ever be an entirely sorrowful world. Of course he knew nothing about the new Christopher which had suddenly arisen above Elisabeth's horizon; he was far too masculine to understand that his own pathos could be pathetic, or his own suffering dramatic. It is only women—or men who have much of the woman in their composition—who can say:

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"Here I and sorrow sit,  
This is my throne; let kings come bow to it."

The thoroughly manly man is incapable of seeing the picturesque effect of his own misery.

So Christopher pulled himself together and tried to talk of trivial things; and Miss Farringdon, having walked through the dark valley herself, knew the comfort of the commonplace therein, and fell in with his mood, discussing nurses and remedies and domestic arrangements and the like. Elisabeth, however, was distinctly disappointed in Christopher, because he could bring himself down to dwell upon these trifling matters when the Angel of Death had crossed the lintel of his doorway only last night, and was still hovering round with overshadowing wings. It was just like him, she said to herself, to give his attention to surface details, and to miss the deeper thing. She had yet to learn that it was because he felt so much, and not because he felt so little, that Christopher found it hard to utter the inmost thoughts of his heart.

But when Miss Farringdon had made every possible arrangement for Mr. Smallwood's comfort, and they rose to leave, Elisabeth's heart smote her for her passing impatience; so she lingered behind after her cousin had left the room, and, slipping her hand into Christopher's, she whispered—

"Chris, dear, I'm so dreadfully sorry!"

It was a poor little speech for the usually eloquent Elisabeth to make; in cold blood she herself would have been ashamed of it; but Christopher was quite content. For a second he forgot that he had decided not to let Elisabeth know that he loved her until he was in a position to marry her, and he very nearly took her in his strong arms and kissed her there and then; but before he had time to do this, his good angel (or perhaps his bad one, for it is often difficult to ascertain how one's two guardian spirits divide their work) reminded him that it was his duty to leave Elisabeth free to live her own life, unhampered by the knowledge of a love which might possibly find no fulfilment in this world where money is considered the one thing needful; so he merely returned the pressure of her hand, and said in a queer, strained sort of voice—

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"Thanks awfully, dear. It isn't half so rough on a fellow when he knows you are sorry." And Elisabeth also was content.

Contrary to the doctor's expectations, Richard Smallwood did not die: he had lost all power of thought or speech, and never regained them, but lived on for years a living corpse; and the burden of his illness lay heavily on Christopher's young shoulders. Life was specially dark to poor Christopher just then. His uncle's utter break-down effectually closed the door on all chances of escape from the drudgery of the Osierfield to a higher and wider sphere; for, until now, he had continued to hope against hope that he might induce that uncle to start him in some other walk of life, where the winning of Elisabeth would enter into the region of practical politics. But now all chance of this was over; Richard Smallwood was beyond the reach of the entreaties and arguments which hitherto he had so firmly resisted. There was nothing left for Christopher to do but to step into his uncle's shoes, and try to make the best of his life as general manager of the Osierfield, handicapped still further by the charge of that uncle, which made it impossible for him to dream of bringing home a wife to the big old house in the High Street.

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There was only one drop of sweetness in the bitterness of his cup—one ray of light in the darkness of his outlook; and that was the consciousness that he could still go on seeing and loving and serving Elisabeth, although he might never be able to tell her he was doing so. He hoped that she would understand; but here he was too sanguine; Elisabeth was as yet incapable of comprehending any emotion until she had seen it reduced to a prescription.

So Christopher lived on in the gloomy house, and looked after his uncle as tenderly as a mother looks after a sick child. To all intents and purposes Richard was a child again; he could not speak or think, but he still loved his nephew, the only one of his own flesh and blood; and he smiled like a child every time that Christopher came into his room, and cried like a child ever; time that Christopher went away.

Elisabeth was very sorry for Christopher at first, and very tender toward him; but after a time the coldness, which he felt it his duty to show toward her in the changed state of affairs, had its natural effect, and she decided that it was foolish to waste her sympathy upon any one who obviously needed and valued it so little. Moreover, she had not forgotten that strange, new feeling which disturbed her heart the morning after Mr. Smallwood was taken ill; and she experienced, half unconsciously, a thoroughly feminine resentment against the man who had called into being such an emotion, and then apparently had found no use for it. So Elisabeth in her heart of hearts was at war with Christopher—that slumbering, smouldering sort of warfare which is ready to break out into fire and battle at the slightest provocation; and this state of affairs did not tend to make life any the easier for him. He felt he could have cheerfully borne it all if only Elisabeth had been kind and had understood; but Elisabeth did not understand him in the least, and was consequently unkind—far more unkind than she, in her careless, light-hearted philosophy, dreamed of.

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She, too, had her disappointments to bear just then. The artist-soul in her had grown up, and was crying out for expression; and she vainly prayed her cousin to let her go to the Slade School, and there learn to develop the power that was in her. But Miss Farrington belonged to the generation which regarded art purely as a recreation—such as fancy-work, croquet, and the like—and she considered that young women should be trained for the more serious things of life; by which she meant the ordering of suitable dinners for the rich and the manufacturing of seemly garments for the poor. So Elisabeth had to endure the agony which none but an artist can know—the

agony of being dumb when one has an angel-whispered secret to tell forth—of being bound hand and foot when one has a God-sent message to write upon the wall.

Now and then Miss Maria took her young cousin up to town for a few weeks, and thus Elisabeth came to have a bowing acquaintanceship with London; but of London as an ever-fascinating, never-wearying friend she knew nothing. There are people who tell us that "London is delightful in the season," and that "the country is very pretty in the summer," and we smile at them as a man would smile at those who said that his mother was "a pleasant person," or his heart's dearest "a charming girl." Those who know London and the country, as London and the country deserve to be known, do not talk in this way, for they have learned that there is no end to the wonder or the interest or the mystery of either.

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The year following Richard Smallwood's break-down, a new interest came into Elisabeth's life. A son and heir was born at the Moat House; and Elisabeth was one of the women who are predestined to the worship of babies. Very tightly did the tiny fingers twine themselves round her somewhat empty heart; for Elisabeth was meant to love much, and at present her supply of the article was greatly in excess of the demand made upon it. So she poured the surplus—which no one else seemed to need—upon the innocent head of Felicia's baby; and she found that the baby never misjudged her nor disappointed her, as older people seemed so apt to do. One of her most devout fellow-worshippers was Mrs. Herbert, who derived comfort from the fact that little Willie was not ashamed of her as little Willie's mother was; so—like many a disappointed woman before them—both Mrs. Herbert and Elisabeth discovered the healing power which lies in the touch of a baby's hand. Felicia loved the child, too, in her way; but she was of the type of woman to whom the husband is always dearer than the children. But Alan's cup was filled to overflowing, and he loved his son as he loved his own soul.

One of Christopher's expedients for hiding the meditations of his heart from Elisabeth's curious eyes was the discussion with her of what people call "general subjects"; and this tried her temper to the utmost. She regarded it as a sign of superficiality to talk of superficial things; and she hardly ever went in to dinner with a man without arriving at the discussion of abstract love and the second *entrée* simultaneously. It had never yet dawned upon her that as a rule it is because one has not experienced a feeling that one is able to describe it; she reasoned in the contrary direction, and came to the conclusion that those persons have no hearts at all whose sleeves are unadorned with the same. Therefore it was intolerable to her when Christopher—who had played with her as a child, and had once very nearly made her grow up into a woman—talked to her about the contents of the newspapers.

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"I never look at the papers," she answered crossly one day, in reply to some unexceptionable and uninteresting comment of his upon such history as was just then in the raw material; "I hate them."

"Why do you hate them?" Christopher was surprised at her vehemence.

"Because there is cholera in the South of France, and I never look at the papers when there is cholera about, it frightens me so." Elisabeth had all the pity of a thoroughly healthy person for the suffering that could not touch her, and the unreasoning terror of a thoroughly healthy person for the suffering which could.

"But there is nothing to frighten you in that," said Christopher, in his most comforting tone; "France is such a beastly dirty hole that they are bound to have diseases going on there, such as could never trouble clean, local-boarded, old England. And then it's so far away, too. I'd never worry about that, if I were you."

"Wouldn't you?" Elisabeth was at war with him, but she was not insensible to the consolation he never failed to afford her when things went wrong.

"Good gracious, no! England is so well looked after, with county councils and such, that even if an epidemic came here they'd stamp it out like one o'clock. Don't frighten yourself with bogeys, Elisabeth, there's a good girl!"

"I feel just the same about newspapers now that I used to feel about Lalla Rookh," said Elisabeth confidentially.

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Christopher was puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't see quite the connection, but I have no doubt it is there, like Mrs. Wilfer's petticoat."

"In Cousin Maria's copy of Lalla Rookh there is a most awful picture of the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan; and when I was little I went nearly mad with terror of that picture. I used to go and look at it when nobody was about, and it frightened me more and more every time."

"Why on earth didn't you tell me about it?"

"I don't know. I felt I wouldn't tell anybody for worlds, but must keep it a ghastly secret. Sometimes I used to hide the book, and try to forget where I'd hidden it. But I never could forget, and in the end I always went and found it, and peeped at the picture and nearly died of terror. The mere outside of the book had a horrible fascination for me. I used to look at it all the time I was in the drawing-room, and then pretend I wasn't looking at it; yet if the housemaid had moved it an inch in dusting the table where it lay, I always knew."

"Poor little silly child! If only you'd have told me, I'd have asked Miss Farringdon to put it away where you couldn't get at it."

"But I couldn't have told you, Chris—I couldn't have told anybody. There seemed to be some terrible bond between that dreadful book and me which I was bound to keep secret. Of course it doesn't frighten me any longer, though I shall always hate it; but the newspapers frighten me just in the same way when there are horrible things in them."

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"Why, Betty, I am ashamed of you! And such a clever girl as you, too, to be taken in by the romancing of penny-a-liners! They always make the worst of things in newspapers in order to sell them."

"Oh! then you think things aren't as bad as newspapers say?"

"Nothing like; but they must write something for people to read, and the more sensational it is the better people like it."

Elisabeth was comforted; and she never knew that Christopher did not leave the house that day without asking Miss Farringdon if, for a few weeks, the daily paper might be delivered at the works and sent up to the Willows afterward, as he wanted to see the trade-reports the first thing in the morning. This was done; and sometimes Christopher remembered to send the papers on to the house, and sometimes he did not. On these latter occasions Miss Farringdon severely reproved him, and told him that he would never be as capable a man as his uncle had been, if he did not endeavour to cultivate his memory; whereat Chris was inwardly tickled, but was outwardly very penitent and apologetic, promising to try to be less forgetful in future. And he kept his word; for not once—while the epidemic in the South of France lasted—did he forget to send the newspaper up to the Willows when there was anything in it calculated to alarm the most timid reader.

"Cousin Maria," said Elisabeth, a few days after this, "I hear that Coulson's circus is coming to Burlingham, and I want to go and see it."

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Miss Farringdon looked up over the tops of her gold-rimmed spectacles. "Do you, my dear? Well, I see no reason why you should not. I have been brought up to disapprove of theatres, and I always shall disapprove of them; but I confess I have never seen any harm in going to a circus."

It is always interesting to note where people draw the line between right and wrong in dealing with forms of amusement; and it is doubtful whether two separate lines are ever quite identical in their curves.

"Christopher could take me," Elisabeth continued; "and if he couldn't, I'm sure Alan would."

"I should prefer you to go with Christopher, my dear; he is more thoughtful and dependable than Alan Tremaine. I always feel perfectly happy about you when you have Christopher to take care of you."

Elisabeth laughed her cousin to scorn. She did not want anybody to take care of her, she thought; she was perfectly able to take care of herself. But Miss Farringdon belonged to a time when single women of forty were supposed to require careful supervision; and Elisabeth was but four-and-twenty.

Christopher, when consulted, fell into the arrangement with alacrity; and it was arranged for him to take Elisabeth over to Burlingham on the one day that Coulson's circus was on exhibition there. Elisabeth looked forward to the treat like a child; for she was by nature extremely fond of pleasure, and by circumstance little accustomed to it.

Great then was her disappointment when the morning of the day arrived, to receive a short note from Christopher saying that he was extremely sorry to inconvenience her, but that his business engagements made it impossible for him to take her to Burlingham that day; and adding various apologies and hopes that she would not be too angry with him. She had so few treats that her disappointment at losing one was really acute for the moment; but what hurt her far more than the disappointment was the consciousness that Chris had obeyed the calls of business rather than her behest—had thought less of her pleasure than of the claims of the Osierfield. All Elisabeth's pride (or was it her vanity?) rose up in arms at the slight which Christopher had thus put upon her; and she felt angrier with him than she had ever felt with anybody in her life before. She began to pour out the vials of her wrath in the presence of Miss Farringdon; but that good lady was so much pleased to find a young man who cared more for business than for pleasure, or even for a young woman, that she accorded Elisabeth but scant sympathy. So Elisabeth possessed her wounded soul in extreme impatience, until such time as the offender himself should appear upon the scene, ready to receive those vials which had been specially prepared for his destruction.

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He duly appeared about tea-time, and found Elisabeth consuming the smoke of her anger in the garden.

"I hope you are not very angry with me," he began in a humble tone, sitting down beside her on the old rustic seat; "but I found myself obliged to disappoint you as soon as I got to the works this morning; and I am sure you know me well enough to understand that it wasn't my fault, and that I couldn't help myself."

"I don't know you well enough for anything of the kind," replied Elisabeth, flashing a pair of very bright eyes upon his discomfited face; "but I know you well enough to understand that you are just a mass of selfishness and horridness, and that you care for nothing but just what interests and pleases yourself."

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Christopher was startled. "Elisabeth, you don't mean that; you know you don't."

"Yes; I do. I mean that I have always hated you, and that I hate you more than ever to-day. It was just like you to care more for the business than you did for me, and never to mind about my disappointment as long as that nasty old ironworks was satisfied. I tell you I hate you, and I hate the works, and I hate everything connected with you."

Christopher looked utterly astonished. He had no idea, he said to himself, that Elisabeth cared so much about going to Coulson's circus; and he could not see anything in the frustration of a day's excursion to account for such a storm of indignation as this. He did not realize that it was the rage of a monarch whose kingdom was in a state of rebellion, and whose dominion seemed in danger of slipping away altogether. Elisabeth might not understand Christopher; but Christopher was not always guiltless of misunderstanding Elisabeth.

"And it was just like you," Elisabeth went on, "not to let me know till the last minute, when it was too late for anything to be done. If you had only had the consideration—I may say the mere civility—to send word last night that your royal highness could not be bothered with me and my affairs to-day, I could have arranged with Alan Tremain to take me. He is always able to turn his attention for a time from his own pleasure to other people's."

"But I thought I told you that it was not until I got to the works this morning that I discovered it would be impossible for me to take you to Burlingham to-day."

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"Then you ought to have found it out sooner."

"Hang it all! I really can not find out things before they occur. Clever as I am, I am not quite clever enough for that. If I were, I should soon make my own fortune by telling other people theirs."

But Elisabeth was too angry to be flippant. "The fact is you care for nothing but

yourself and your horrid old business. I always told you how it would be."

"You did. For whatever faults you may have to blame yourself, over-indulgence toward mine will never be one of them. You can make your conscience quite clear on that score." Christopher was as determined to treat the quarrel lightly as Elisabeth was to deal with it on serious grounds.

"You have grown into a regular, commonplace, money-grubbing, business man, with no thoughts for anything higher than making iron and money and vulgar things like that."

"And making you angry—that is a source of distinct pleasure to me. You have no idea how charming you are when you are—well, for the sake of euphony we will say slightly ruffled, Miss Elisabeth Farringdon."

Elisabeth stamped her foot. "I wish to goodness you'd be serious sometimes! Frivolity is positively loathsome in a man."

"Then I repent it in dust and ashes, and shall rely upon your more sedate and serious mind to correct this tendency in me. Besides, as you generally blame me for erring in the opposite direction, it is a relief to find you smiting me on the other cheek as a change. It keeps up my mental circulation better."

"You are both too frivolous and too serious."

Christopher was unwise enough to laugh. "My dear child, I seem to make what is called 'a corner' in vices; but even I can not reconcile the conflicting ones."

Then Elisabeth's anger settled down into the quiet stage. "If you think it gentlemanly to disappoint a lady and then insult her, pray go on doing so; I can only say that I don't."

"What on earth do you mean, Elisabeth? Do you really believe that I meant to vex you?" The laughter had entirely died out of Christopher's face, and his voice was hoarse.

"I don't know what you meant, and I am afraid I don't much mind. All I know is that you did disappoint me and did insult me, and that is enough for me. The purity of your motives is not my concern; I merely resent the impertinence of your behaviour."

Christopher rose from his seat; he was serious enough now. "You are unjust to me, Elisabeth, but I can not and will not attempt to justify myself. Good afternoon."

For a second the misery on his face penetrated the thunder-clouds of Elisabeth's indignation. "Won't you have some tea before you go?" she asked. It seemed brutal—even to her outraged feelings—to send so old a friend empty away.

Christopher's smile was very bitter as he answered. "No, thank you. I am afraid, after the things you have said to me, I should hardly be able graciously to accept hospitality at your hands; and rather than accept it ungraciously, I will not accept it at all." And he turned on his heel and left her.

As she watched his retreating figure, one spasm of remorse shot through Elisabeth's heart; but it was speedily stifled by the recollection that, for the first time in her life, Christopher had failed her, and had shown her plainly that there were, in his eyes, more important matters than Miss Elisabeth Farringdon and her whims and fancies. And what woman, worthy of the name, could extend mercy to a man who had openly displayed so flagrant a want of taste and discernment as this? Certainly not Elisabeth, nor any other fashioned after her pattern. She felt that she had as much right to be angry as had the prophet, when Almighty Wisdom saw fit to save the great city in which he was not particularly interested, and to destroy the gourd in which he was. And so, probably, she had.

For several days after this she kept clear of Christopher, nursing her anger in her heart; and he was so hurt and sore from the lashing which her tongue had given him, that he felt no inclination to come within the radius of that tongue's bitterness again.

But one day, when Elisabeth was sitting on the floor of the Moat House drawing-room, playing with the baby and discussing new gowns with Felicia between times, Alan came in and remarked—

"It was wise of you to give up your excursion to Coulson's circus last week, Elisabeth; as it has turned out it was chiefly a scare, and the case was greatly exaggerated; but it might have made you feel uncomfortable if you had gone. I suppose you saw the notice of the outbreak in that morning's paper, and so gave it up at the last moment."

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Elisabeth ceased from her free translation of the baby's gurglings and her laudable endeavours suitably to reply to the same, and gave her whole attention to the baby's father. "I don't know what you mean. What scare and what outbreak are you talking about?"

"Didn't you see," replied Alan, "that there was an outbreak of cholera at Coulson's circus, and a frightful scare all through Burlingham in consequence? Of course the newspapers greatly exaggerated the danger, and so increased the scare; and I don't know that I blame them for that. I am not sure that the sensational way in which the press announces possible dangers to the community is not a safeguard for the community at large. To be alive to a danger is nine times out of ten to avoid a danger; and it is far better to be more frightened than hurt than to be more hurt than frightened—certainly for communities if not for individuals."

"But tell me about it. I never saw any account in the papers; and I'm glad I didn't, for it would have frightened me out of my wits."

"It broke out among a troupe of acrobats who had just come straight from the South of France, and evidently brought the infection with them. They were at once isolated, and such prompt and efficient measures were taken to prevent the spread of the disease, that there have been no more cases, either in the circus or in the town. Now, I should imagine, all danger of its spreading is practically over; but, of course, it made everybody in the neighbourhood, and everybody who had been to the circus, very nervous and uncomfortable for a few days. The local authorities, however, omitted no possible precaution which should assist them in stamping out the epidemic, should those few cases have started an epidemic—which was, of course, possible, though hardly likely."

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And then Alan proceeded to expound his views on the matter of sanitary authorities in general and of those of Burlingham in particular, to which Felicia listened with absorbing attention and Elisabeth did not listen at all.

Soon after this she took her leave; and all along the homeward walk through Badgering Woods she was conscious of feeling ashamed of herself—a very rare sensation with Elisabeth, and by no means an agreeable one. She was by nature so self-reliant and so irresponsible that she seldom regretted anything that she had done; if she had acted wisely, all was well; and if she had not acted wisely, it was over and done with, and what was the use of bothering any more about it? This was her usual point of view, and it proved as a rule a most comfortable one. But now she could not fail to see that she had been in the wrong—hopelessly and flagrantly in the wrong—and that she had behaved abominably to Christopher into the bargain. She had to climb down, as other ruling powers have had to climb down before now; and the act of climbing down is neither a becoming nor an exhilarating form of exercise to ruling powers. But at the back of her humble contrition there was a feeling of gladness in the knowledge that Christopher had not really failed her after all, and that her kingdom was still her own as it had been in her childish days; and there was also a nobler feeling of higher joy in the consciousness that—quite apart from his attitude toward her—Christopher was still the Christopher that she had always in her inmost soul believed him to be; that she was not wrong in the idea she had formed of him long ago. It is very human to be glad on our own account when people are as fond of us as we expected them to be; but it is divine to be glad, solely for their sakes, when they act up to their own ideals, quite apart from us. And there was a touch of divinity in Elisabeth's gladness just then, though the rest of her was extremely human—and feminine at that.

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On her way home she encountered Caleb Bateson going back to work after dinner, and she told him to ask Mr. Thornley to come up to the Willows that afternoon, as she wanted to see him. She preferred to send a verbal message, as by so doing she postponed for a few hours that climbing-down process which she so much disliked; although it is frequently easier to climb down by means of one's pen than by means of one's tongue.



Christopher felt no pleasure in receiving her message. He was not angry with her, although he marvelled at the unreasonableness and injustice of a sex that thinks more of a day's pleasure than a life's devotion; he did not know that it was over the life's devotion and not the day's pleasure that Elisabeth had fought so hard that day; but his encounter with her had strangely tired him, and taken the zest out of his life, and he had no appetite for any more of such disastrous and inglorious warfare.

But he obeyed her mandate all the same, having learned the important political lesson that the fact of a Government's being in the wrong is no excuse for not obeying the orders of that Government; and he waited for her in the drawing-room at the Willows, looking out toward the sunset and wondering how hard upon him Elisabeth was going to be. And his thoughts were so full of her that he did not hear her come into the room until she clasped both her hands round his arm and looked up into his gloomy face, saying—

"Oh! Chris, I'm so dreadfully ashamed of myself."

The clouds were dispelled at once, and Christopher smiled as he had not smiled for a week. "Never mind," he said, patting the hands that were on his arm; "it's all right."

But Elisabeth, having set out upon the descent, was prepared to climb down handsomely. "It isn't all right; it's all wrong. I was simply fiendish to you, and I shall never forgive myself—never."

"Oh, yes; you will. And for goodness' sake don't worry over it. I'm glad you have found out that I wasn't quite the selfish brute that I seemed; and that's the end of the matter."

"Dear me! no; it isn't. It is only the beginning. I want to tell you how dreadfully sorry I am, and to ask you to forgive me."

"I've nothing to forgive."

"Yes, you have; lots." And Elisabeth was nearer the mark than Christopher.

"I haven't. Of course you were angry with me when I seemed so disagreeable and unkind; any girl would have been," replied Chris, forgetting how very unreasonable her anger had seemed only five minutes ago. But five minutes can make such a difference—sometimes.

Elisabeth cheerfully caught at this straw of comfort; she was always ready to take a lenient view of her own shortcomings. If Christopher had been wise he would not have encouraged such leniency; but who is wise and in love at the same time?

"Of course it did seem rather unkind of you," she admitted; "you see, I thought you had thrown me over just for the sake of some tiresome business arrangement, and that you didn't care about me and my disappointment a bit."

A little quiver crept into Christopher's voice. "I think you might have known me better than that."

"Yes, I might; in fact, I ought to have done," agreed Elisabeth with some truth. "But why didn't you tell me the real reason?"

"Because I thought it might worry and frighten you. Not that there really was anything to be frightened about," Christopher hastened to add; "but you might have imagined things, and been upset; you have such a tremendous imagination, you know."

"I'm afraid I have; and it sometimes imagines vain things at your expense, Chris dear."

"How did you find me out?" Chris asked.

"Alan told me about the cholera scare at Burlingham, and I guessed the rest."

"Then Alan was an ass. What business had he to go frightening you, I should like to know, with a lot of fiction that is just trumped up to sell the papers?"

"But, Chris, I want you to understand how sorry I am that I was so vile to you. I really was vile, wasn't I?" Elisabeth was the type of woman for whom the confessional will always have its fascinations.

"You were distinctly down on me, I must confess; but you needn't worry about that now."

"And you quite forgive me?"

"As I said before, I've nothing to forgive. You were perfectly right to be annoyed with a man who appeared to be so careless and inconsiderate; but I'm glad you've found out that I wasn't quite as selfish as you thought."

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Elisabeth stroked his coat sleeve affectionately. "You are not selfish at all, Chris; you're simply the nicest, thoughtfulest, most unselfish person in the world; and I'm utterly wretched because I was so unkind to you."

"Don't be wretched, there's a dear! Your wretchedness is the one thing I can't and won't stand; so please leave off at once."

To Christopher remorse for wrong done would always be an agony; he had yet to learn that to some temperaments, whereof Elisabeth's was one, it partook of the nature of a luxury—the sort of luxury which tempts one to pay half a guinea to be allowed to swell up one's eyes and redden one's nose over imaginary woes in a London theatre.

"Did you mind very much when I was so cross?" Elisabeth asked thoughtfully.

Christopher was torn between a loyal wish to do homage to his idol and a laudable desire to save that idol pain. "Of course I minded pretty considerably; but why bother about that now?"

"Because it interests me immensely. I often think that your only fault is that you don't mind things enough; and so, naturally, I want to find out how great your minding capacity is."

"I see. Your powers of scientific research are indeed remarkable; but did it never strike you that even vivisection might be carried too far—too far for the comfort of the vivisected, I mean; not for the enjoyment of the vivisector?"

"It is awfully good for people to feel things," persisted Elisabeth.

"Is it? Well, I suppose it is good—in fact, necessary—for some poor beggars to have their arms or legs cut off; but you can't expect me to be consumed with envy of the same?"

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"Please tell me how much you minded," Elisabeth coaxed.

"I can't tell you; and I wouldn't if I could. If I were a rabbit that had been cut into living pieces to satisfy the scientific yearnings of a learned professor, do you think I would leave behind me—for my executors to publish and make large fortunes thereby—confidential letters and private diaries accurately describing all the tortures I had endured, for the recreation of the reading public in general and the said professor in particular? Not I."

"I should. I should leave a full, true, and particular account of all that I had suffered, and exactly how much it hurt. It would interest the professor most tremendously."

Christopher shook his head. "Oh, dear! no; it wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I should have knocked his brains out long before that for having dared to hurt you at all."

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## CHAPTER XI

### MISS FARRINGTON'S WILL

Time speeds on his relentless track,  
And, though we beg on bended knees,  
No prophet's hand for us puts back

During the following winter Miss Farrington gave unmistakable signs of that process known as "breaking-up." She had fought a good fight for many years, and the time was fast coming for her to lay down her arms and receive her reward. Elisabeth, with her usual light-heartedness, did not see the Shadow stealing nearer day by day; but Christopher was more accustomed to shadows than she was—his path had lain chiefly among them—and he knew what was coming, and longed passionately and in vain to shield Elisabeth from the inevitable. He had played the part of Providence to her in one matter: he had stood between her and himself, and had prevented her from drinking of that mingled cup of sweetness and bitterness which men call Love, thinking that she would be a happier woman if she left untasted the only form of the beverage which he was able to offer her. And possibly he was right; that she would be also a better woman in consequence, was quite another and more doubtful side of the question. But now the part of Elisabeth's Providence was no longer cast for Christopher to play; he might prevent Love with his sorrows from coming nigh her dwelling, but Death defied his protecting arm. It was good for Elisabeth to be afflicted, although Christopher would willingly have died to save her a moment's pain; and it is a blessed thing for us after all that Perfect Wisdom and Almighty Power are one.

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As usual Elisabeth was so busy straining her eyes after the ideal that the real escaped her notice; and it was therefore a great shock to her when her Cousin Maria went to sleep one night in a land whose stones are of iron, and awoke next morning in a country whose pavements are of gold. For a time the girl was completely stunned by the blow; and during that period Christopher was very good to her. Afterward—when he and she had drifted far apart—Elisabeth sometimes recalled Christopher's sheltering care during the first dark days of her loneliness; and she never did so without remembering the words, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem"; they seemed to express all that he was to her just then.

When Maria Farrington's will was read, it was found that she had left to her cousin and adopted daughter, Elisabeth, an annuity of five hundred a year; also the income from the Osierfield and the Willows until such time as the real owner of these estates should be found. The rest of her property—together with the Osierfield and the Willows—she bequeathed upon trust for the eldest living son, if any, of her late cousin George Farrington; and she appointed Richard Smallwood and his nephew to be her trustees and executors. The trustees were required to ascertain whether George Farrington had left any son, and whether that son was still alive; but if, at the expiration of ten years from the death of the testator, no such son could be discovered, the whole of Miss Farrington's estate was to become the absolute property of Elisabeth. As since the making of this will Richard had lost his faculties, the whole responsibility of finding the lost heir and of looking after the temporary heiress devolved upon Christopher's shoulders.

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"And how is Mr. Bateson to-day?" asked Mrs. Hankey of Mr. Bateson's better-half, one Sunday morning not long after Miss Farrington's death.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hankey, he is but middling, I'm sorry to say—very middling—very middling, indeed."

"That's a bad hearing. But I'm not surprised; I felt sure as something was wrong when I didn't see him in chapel this morning. I says to myself, when the first hymn was given out and him not there, 'Eh, dear!' I says, 'I'm afraid there's trouble in store for Mrs. Bateson.' It seemed so strange to see you all alone in the pew, that for a minute or two it quite gave me the creeps. What's amiss with him?"

"Rheumatism in the legs. He could hardly get out of bed this morning he was so stiff."

"Eh, dear! that's a bad thing—and particularly at his time of life. I lost a beautiful hen only yesterday from rheumatism in the legs; one of the best sitters I ever had. You remember her?—the speckled one that I got from Teteigh, four years ago come Michaelmas. But that's the way in this world; the most missed are the first taken."

"I wonder if that's Miss Elisabeth there," said Mrs. Bateson, catching sight of a dark-robed figure in the distance. "I notice she's taken to go to church regular now Miss Farrington isn't here to look after her. How true it is, 'When the cat's away the mice will play!'" Worship according to the methods of that branch of the Church Militant

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established in these kingdoms was regarded by Mrs. Bateson as a form of recreation—harmless, undoubtedly, but still recreation.

Mrs. Hankey shook her head. "No—that isn't her; she can't be out of church yet. They don't go in till eleven." And she shook her head disapprovingly.

"Eleven's too late, to my thinking," agreed Mrs. Bateson.

"So it is; you never spoke a truer word, Mrs. Bateson. Half-past ten is the Lord's time—or so it used to be when I was a girl."

"And a very good time too! Gives you the chance of getting home and seeing to the dinner properly after chapel. At least, that is to say, if the minister leaves off when he's finished, which is more than you can say of all of them; if he doesn't, there's a bit of a scrimmage to get the dinner cooked in time even now, unless you go out before the last hymn. And I never hold with that somehow; it seems like skimping the Lord's material, as you may say."

"So it does. It looks as if the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches had choked the good seed in a body's heart."

"In which case it looks what it is not," said Mrs. Bateson; "for nine times out of ten it means nothing worse than wanting to cook the potatoes, so as the master sha'n't have no cause for grumbling, and to boil the rice so as it sha'n't swell in the children's insides. But that's the way with things; folks never turn out to be as bad as you thought they were when you get to know their whys and their wherefores; and many a poor soul as is put down as worldly is really only anxious to make things pleasant for the master and the children."

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"Miss Elisabeth's mourning is handsome, I don't deny," said Mrs. Hankey, reverting to a more interesting subject than false judgments in the abstract; "but she don't look well in it—those pale folks never do justice to good mourning, in my opinion. It seems almost a pity to waste it on them."

"Oh! I don't hold with you there. I think I never saw anybody look more genteel than Miss Elisabeth does now, bless her! And the jet trimming on her Sunday frock is something beautiful."

"Eh! there's nothing like a bit of jet for setting off crape and bringing the full meaning out of it, as you may say," replied Mrs. Hankey, in mollified tones. "I don't think as you can do full justice to crape till you put some jet again' it. It's wonderful how a bit of good mourning helps folks to bear their sorrows; and for sure they want it in a world so full of care as this."

"They do; there's no doubt about that. But I can't help wishing as Miss Elisabeth had got some bugles on that best dress of hers; there's nothing quite comes up to bugles, to my mind."

"There ain't; they give such a finish, as one may say, being so rich-looking. But for my part I think Miss Elisabeth has been a bit short with the crape, considering that Miss Farrington was father and mother and what-not to her. Now supposing she'd had a crape mantle with handsome bugle fringe for Sundays; that's what I should have called paying proper respect to the departed; instead of a short jacket with ordinary braid on it, that you might wear for a great-uncle as hadn't left you a penny."

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"Well, Mrs. Hankey, folks may do what they like with their own, and it's not for such as us to sit in judgment on our betters; but I don't think as Miss Farrington's will gave her any claim to a crape mantle with a bugle fringe; I don't indeed."

"Well, to be sure, but you do speak strong on the subject!"

"And I feel strong, too," replied Mrs. Bateson, waxing more indignant. "There's dear Miss Elisabeth has been like an own daughter to Miss Farrington ever since she was a baby, and yet Miss Farrington leaves her fortune over Miss Elisabeth's head to some good-for-nothing young man that nobody knows for certain ever was born. I've no patience with such ways!"

"It does seem a bit hard on Miss Elisabeth, I must admit, her being Miss Farrington's adopted child. But, as I've said before, there's nothing like a will for making a thorough to-do."

"It's having been engaged to Mr. George all them years ago that set her up to it. It's wonderful how folks often turn to their old lovers when it comes to will time."

Mrs. Hankey looked incredulous. "Well, that beats me, I'm fain to confess. I know if the Lord had seen fit to stop me from keeping company with Hankey, not a brass farthing would he ever have had from me. I'd sooner have left my savings to charity."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Hankey; it always seems so lonely to leave money to charity, as if you was nothing better than a foundling. But how did you enjoy the sermon this morning?"

"I thought that part about the punishment of the wicked was something beautiful. But, to tell you the truth, I've lost all pleasure in Mr. Sneyd's discourses since I heard as he wished to introduce the reading of the Commandments into East Lane Chapel. What's the good of fine preaching, if a minister's private life isn't up to his sermon, I should like to know?"

Mrs. Bateson, however, had broad views on some matters. "I don't see much harm in reading the Commandments," she said.

Mrs. Hankey looked shocked at her friend's laxity. "It is the thin end of the wedge, Mrs. Bateson, and you ought to know it. Mark my words, it's forms and ceremonies such as this that tempts our young folks away from the chapels to the churches, like Miss Elisabeth and Master Christopher there. They didn't read no Commandments in our chapel as long as Miss Farrington was alive; I should have liked to see the minister as would have dared to suggest such a thing. She wouldn't stand Ritualism, poor Miss Farrington wouldn't."

"Here we are at home," said Mrs. Bateson, stopping at her own door; "I must go in and see how the master's getting on."

"And I hope you'll find him better, Mrs. Bateson, I only hope so; but you never know how things are going to turn out when folks begin to sicken—especially at Mr. Bateson's age. And he hasn't been looking himself for a long time. I says to Hankey only a few weeks ago, 'Hankey,' says I, 'it seems to me as if the Lord was thinking on Mr. Bateson; I hope I may be mistaken, but that's how it appears to me.' And so it did."

On the afternoon of that very Sunday Christopher took Elisabeth for a walk in Badgering Woods. The winter was departing, and a faint pink flush on the bare trees heralded the coming of spring; and Elisabeth, being made of material which is warranted not to fret for long, began to feel that life was not altogether dark, and that it was just possible she might—at the end of many years—actually enjoy things again. Further, Christopher suited her perfectly—how perfectly she did not know as yet—and she spent much time with him just then.

Those of us who have ever guessed the acrostics in a weekly paper, have learned that sometimes we find a solution to one of the lights, and say, "This will do, if nothing better turns up before post-time on Monday"; and at other times we chance upon an answer which we know at once, without further research, to be indisputably the right one. It is so with other things than acrostics: there are friends whom we feel will do very well for us if nobody—or until somebody—better turns up; and there are others whom we know to be just the right people for the particular needs of our souls at that time. They are the right answers to the questions which have been perplexing us—the correct solutions to the problems over which we have been puzzling our brains. So it was with Elisabeth: Christopher was the correct answer to life's current acrostic; and as long as she was with Christopher she was content.

"Don't you get very tired of people who have never found the fourth dimension?" she asked him, as they sat upon a stile in Badgering Woods.

"What do you mean by the fourth dimension? There are length and breadth and thickness, and what comes next?"

Christopher was pleased to find Elisabeth facing life's abstract problems again; it proved that she was no longer overpowered by its concrete ones.

"I don't know what its name is," she replied, looking dreamily through the leafless trees; "perhaps eternity would do as well as any other. But I mean the dimension which comes after length and breadth and thickness, and beyond them, and all round

them, and which makes them seem quite different, and much less important."

"I think I know what you are driving at. You mean a new way of looking at things and of measuring them—a way which makes things which ordinary people call small, large; and things which ordinary people call large, small."

"Yes. People who have never been in the fourth dimension bore me, do you know? I daresay it would bore squares to talk to straight lines, and cubes to talk to squares; there would be so many things the one would understand and the other wouldn't. The line wouldn't know what the square meant by the word *across*, and the square wouldn't know what the cube meant by the word *above*; and in the same way the three-dimension people don't know what we are talking about when we use such words as *religion* and *art* and *love*."

"They think we are talking about going regularly to church, and supporting picture-galleries, and making brilliant matches," suggested Christopher.

"Yes; that's exactly what they do think; and it makes talking to them so difficult, and so dull."

"When you use the word *happiness* they imagine you are referring to an income of four or five thousand a year; and by *success* they mean the permission to stand in the backwater of a fashionable London evening party, looking at the mighty and noble, and pretending afterward that they have spoken to the same."

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"They don't speak our language or think our thoughts," Elisabeth said; "and the music of their whole lives is of a different order from that of the lives of the fourth-dimension people."

"Distinctly so; all the difference between a Sonata of Beethoven and a song out of a pantomime."

"I haven't much patience with the three-dimension people; have you?" asked Elisabeth.

"No—I'm afraid not; but I've a good deal of pity for them. They miss so much. I always fancy that people who call pictures pretty and music sweet must have a dreary time of it all round. But we'd better be getting on, don't you think? It is rather chilly sitting out-of-doors, and I don't want you to catch cold. You don't feel cold, do you?" And Christopher's face grew quite anxious.

"Not at all."

"You don't seem to me to have enough furbelows and things round your neck to keep you warm," continued he; "let me tie it up tighter, somehow."

And while he turned up the fur collar of her coat and hooked the highest hook and eye, Elisabeth thought how nice it was to be petted and taken care of; and as she walked homeward by Christopher's side, she felt like a good little girl again. Even reigning monarchs now and then like to have their ermine tucked round them, and to be patted on their crowns by a protecting hand.

As the weeks rolled on and the spring drew nearer, Elisabeth gradually took up the thread of human interest again. Fortunately for her she was very busy with plans for the benefit of the work-people at the Osierfield. She started a dispensary; she opened an institute; she inaugurated courses of lectures and entertainments for keeping the young men out of the public-houses in the evenings; she gave to the Wesleyan Conference a House of Rest—a sweet little house, looking over the fields toward the sunset—where tired ministers might come and live at ease for a time to regain health and strength; and in Sedgehill Church she put up a beautiful east window to the memory of Maria Farringdon, and for a sign-post to all such pilgrims as were in need of one, as the east window in St. Peter's had once been a sign-post to herself showing her the way to Zion.

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In all these undertakings Christopher was her right hand; and while Elisabeth planned and paid for them, he carefully carried them out—the hardest part of the business, and the least effective one.

When Elisabeth had set afoot all these improvements for the benefit of her work-people, she turned her attention to the improving of herself; and she informed

Christopher that she had decided to go up to London, and fulfil the desire of her heart by studying art at the Slade School.

"But you can not live by yourself in London," Christopher objected; "you are all right here, because you have the Tremaines and other people to look after you; but in town you would be terribly lonely; and, besides, I don't approve of girls living in London by themselves."

"I sha'n't be by myself. There is a house where some of the Slade pupils live together, and I shall go there for every term, and come down here for the vacation. It will be just like going back to school again. I shall adore it!"

Christopher did not like the idea at all. "Are you sure you will be comfortable, and that they will take proper care of you?"

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"Of course they will. Grace Cobham will be there at the same time—an old schoolfellow to whom I used to be devoted at Fox How—and she and I will chum together. I haven't seen her for ages, as she has been scouring Europe with her family; but now she has settled down in England, and is going in for art."

Christopher still looked doubtful. "It would make me miserable to think that you weren't properly looked after and taken care of, Elisabeth."

"Well, I shall be. And if I'm not, I shall still have you to fall back upon."

"But you won't have me to fall back upon; that is just the point. If you would, I shouldn't worry about you so much; but it cuts me to the heart to leave you among strangers. Still, the Tremaines will be here, and I shall ask them to look after you; and I daresay they will do so all right, though not as efficiently as I should."

Elisabeth grew rather pale; that there would ever come a day when Christopher would not be there to fall back upon was a contingency which until now had never occurred to her. "Whatever are you talking about, Chris? Why sha'n't you be here when I go up to the Slade?"

"Because I am going to Australia."

"To Australia? What on earth for?" It seemed to Elisabeth as if the earth beneath her feet had suddenly decided to reverse its customary revolution, and to transpose its poles.

"To see if I can find George Farringdon's son, of course."

"I thought he had been advertised for in both English and Australian papers, and had failed to answer the advertisements."

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"So he has."

"Then why bother any more about him?" suggested Elisabeth.

"Because I must. If advertisement fails, I must see what personal search will do."

Elisabeth's lip trembled; she felt that a hemisphere uninhabited by Christopher would be a very dreary hemisphere indeed. "Oh! Chris dear, you needn't go yourself," she coaxed; "I simply can not spare you, and that's the long and the short of it."

Christopher hardened his heart. He had seen the quiver of Elisabeth's lip, and it had almost proved too strong for him. "Hang it all! I must go; there is nothing else to be done."

Elisabeth's eyes filled with tears. "Please don't, Chris. It is horrid of you to want to go and leave me when I'm so lonely and haven't got anybody in the world but you!"

"I don't want to go, Betty; I hate the mere idea of going. I'd give a thousand pounds, if I could, to stop away. But I can't see that I have any alternative. Miss Farringdon left it to me, as her trustee, to find her heir and give up the property to him; and, as a man of honour, I don't see how I can leave any stone unturned until I have fulfilled the charge which she laid upon me."

"Oh! Chris, don't go. I can't spare you." And Elisabeth stretched out two pleading hands toward him.

Christopher turned away from her. "I say, Betty, please don't cry," and his voice shook; "it makes it so much harder for me; and it is hard enough as it is—confoundedly hard!"

"Then why do it?"

"Because I must."

"I don't see that; it is pure Quixotism."

"I wish to goodness I could think that; but I can't. It appears to me a question about which there could not be two opinions."

The tears dried on Elisabeth's lashes. The old feeling of being at war with Christopher, which had laid dormant for so long, now woke up again in her heart, and inclined her to defy rather than to plead. If he cared for duty more than for her, he did not care for her much, she said to herself; and she was far too proud a woman ever to care for a man—even in the way of friendship—who obviously did not care for her. Still, she condescended to further argument.

"If you really liked me and were my friend," she said, "not only wouldn't you wish to go away and leave me, but you would want me to have the money, instead of rushing all over the world in order to give it to some tiresome young man you'd never heard of six months ago."

"Don't you understand that it is just because I like you and am your friend, that I can't bear you to profit by anything which has a shade of dishonour connected with it? If I cared for you less I should be less particular."

"That's nonsense! But your conscience and your sense of honour always were bugbears, Christopher, and always will be. They bored me as a child, and they bore me now."

Christopher winced; the nightmare of his life had been the terror of boring Elisabeth, for he was wise enough to know that a woman may love a man with whom she is angry, but never one by whom she is bored.

"It is just like you," Elisabeth continued, tossing her head, "to be so busy saving your own soul and laying up for yourself a nice little nest-egg in heaven, that you haven't time to consider other people and their interests and feelings."

"I think you do me an injustice," replied Christopher quietly. He was puzzled to find Elisabeth so bitter against him on a mere question of money, as she was usually a most unworldly young person; again he did not understand that she was not really fighting over the matter at issue, but over the fact that he had put something before his friendship for her. Once she had quarrelled with him because he seemed to think more of his business than of her; now she was quarrelling with him because he thought more of his duty than of her; for the truth that he could not have loved her so much had he not loved honour more, had not as yet been revealed to Elisabeth.

"I don't want to be money-grubbing," she went on, "or to cling on to things to which I have no right; though, of course, it will be rather poor fun for me to have to give up all this," and she waved her hand in a sweep, supposed to include the Willows and the Osierfield and all that appertained thereto, "and to drudge along at the rate of five hundred a year, with yesterday's dinner and last year's dress warmed up again to feed and clothe me. But I ask you to consider whether the work-people at the Osierfield aren't happier under my *régime*, than under the rule of some good-for-nothing young man, who will probably spend all his income upon himself, and go to the dogs as his father did before him."

Christopher was cut to the quick; Elisabeth had hit the nail on the head. After all, it was not his own interests that he felt bound to sacrifice to the claims of honour, but hers; and it was this consideration that made him feel the sacrifice almost beyond his power. He knew that it was his duty to do everything he could to fulfil the conditions of Miss Farrington's will; he also knew that he was compelled to do this at Elisabeth's expense and not at his own; and the twofold knowledge well-nigh broke his heart. His misery was augmented by his perception of how completely Elisabeth misunderstood him, and of how little of the truth all those years of silent devotion had conveyed to her mind; and his face was white with pain as he answered—



"There is no need for you to say such things as that to me, Elisabeth; you know as well as I do that I would give my life to save you from sorrow and to ensure your happiness; but I can not be guilty of a shabby trick even for this. Can't you see that the very fact that I care for you so much, makes it all the more impossible for me to do anything shady in your name?"

"Bosh!" rudely exclaimed Elisabeth.

"As for the work-people," he went on, ignoring her interruption, "of course no one will ever do as much for them as you are doing. But that isn't the question. The fact that one man would make a better use of money than another wouldn't justify me in robbing Peter to increase Paul's munificence. Now would it?"

"That's perfectly different. It is all right for you to go on advertising for that Farringdon man in agony columns, and I shouldn't be so silly as to make a fuss about giving up the money if he turned up. You know that well enough. But it does seem to me to be over-conscientious and hyper-disagreeable on your part to go off to Australia—just when I am so lonely and want you so much—in search of the man who is to turn me out of my kingdom and reign in my stead. I can't think how you can want to do such a thing!" Elisabeth was fighting desperately hard; the full power of her strong will was bent upon making Christopher do what she wished and stay with her in England; not only because she needed him, but because she felt that this was a Hastings or Waterloo between them, and that if she lost this battle, her ancient supremacy was gone forever.

"I don't want to go and do it, heaven knows! I hate and loathe doing anything which you don't wish me to do. But there is no question of wanting in the matter, as far as I can see. It is a simple question between right and wrong—between honour and dishonour—and so I really have no alternative."

"Then you have made up your mind to go out to Australia and turn up every stone in order to find this George Farringdon's son?"

"I don't see how I can help it."

"And you don't care what becomes of me?"

"More than I care for anything else in the world, Elisabeth. Need you ask?"

For one wild moment Christopher felt that he must tell Elisabeth how passionately he would woo her, should she lose her fortune; and how he would spend his life and his income in trying to make her happy, should George Farringdon's son be found and she cease to be one of the greatest heiresses in the Midlands. But he held himself back by the bitter knowledge of how cruelly appearances were against him. He had made up his mind to do the right thing at all costs; at least, he had not exactly made up his mind—he saw the straight path, and the possibility of taking any other never occurred to him. But if he succeeded in this hateful and (to a man of his type) inevitable quest, he would not only sacrifice Elisabeth's interests, he would also further his own by making it possible for him to ask her to marry him—a thing which he felt he could never do as long as she was one of the wealthiest women in Mershire, and he was only the manager of her works. Duty is never so difficult to certain men as when it wears the garb and carries with it the rewards of self-interest; others, on the contrary, find that a joint-stock company, composed of the Right and the Profitable, supplies its passengers with a most satisfactory permanent way whereby to travel through life. There is no doubt that these latter have by far the more comfortable journey; but whether they are equally contented when they have reached that journey's end, none of them have as yet returned to tell us.

"If somebody must go to Australia after that tiresome young man, why need it be you?" Elisabeth persisted. "Can't you send somebody else in your place?"

"I am afraid I couldn't trust anybody else to sift the matter as thoroughly as I should. I really must go, Betty. Please don't make it too hard for me."

"Do you mean you will still go, even though I beg you not?"

"I am afraid I must."

Elisabeth rose from her seat and drew herself up to her full height, as became a dethroned and offended queen. "Then that is the end of the matter as far as I am

concerned, and it is a waste of time to discuss it further; but I must confess that there is nothing in the world I hate so much as a prig," she said, as she swept out of the room.

It was her final shot, and it told. She could hardly have selected one more admirably calculated to wound, and it went straight through Christopher's heart. It was now obvious that she did not love him, and never could have loved him, he assured himself, or she would not have misjudged him so cruelly, or said such hard things to him. He did not realize that an angry woman says not what she thinks, but what she thinks will most hurt the man with whom she is angry. He also did not realize—what man does?—how difficult it is for any woman to believe that a man can care for her and disagree with her at the same time, even though the disagreement be upon a purely impersonal question. Naturally, when the question happens to be personal, the strain on feminine faith is still greater—in the majority of cases too great to be borne.

Thus Christopher and Elisabeth came to the parting of the ways. She said to herself, "He doesn't love me because he won't do what I want, regardless of his own ideas of duty." And he said to himself, "If I fail to do what I consider is my duty, I am unworthy—or, rather, more unworthy than I am in any case—to love her." Thus they moved along parallel lines; and parallel lines never meet—except in infinity.

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## CHAPTER XII

### "THE DAUGHTERS OF PHILIP"

In the market-place alone  
Stood the statue carved in stone,  
Watching children round her feet  
Playing marbles in the street:  
When she tried to join their play  
They in terror fled away.

Christopher went to Australia in search of George Farrington's son, and Elisabeth stayed in England and cherished bitter thoughts in her heart concerning him. That imagination of hers—which was always prone to lead her astray—bore most terribly false witness against Christopher just then. It portrayed him as a hard, self-righteous man, ready to sacrifice the rest of mankind to the Moloch of what he considered to be his own particular duty and spiritual welfare, and utterly indifferent as to how severe was the suffering entailed on the victims of this sacrifice. And, as Christopher was not at hand to refute the charges of Elisabeth's libellous fancy by his own tender and unselfish personality, the accuser took advantage of his absence to blacken him more and more.

It was all in a piece with the rest of his character, she said to herself; he had always been cold and hard and self-contained. When his house had been left unto him desolate by the stroke which changed his uncle from a wise and kindly companion into a helpless and peevish child, she had longed to help and comfort him with her sympathy; and he had thrown it back in her face. He was too proud and too superior to care for human affection, she supposed; and now he felt no hesitation in first forsaking her, and then reducing her to poverty, if only by so doing he could set himself still more firmly on the pedestal of his own virtue. So did Elisabeth's imagination traduce Christopher; and Elisabeth listened and believed.

At first she was haunted by memories of how good he had been to her when her cousin Maria died, and many a time before; and she used to dream about him at night with so much of the old trust and affection that it took all the day to stamp out the fragrance of tenderness which her dreams had left behind. But after a time these dreams and memories grew fewer and less distinct, and she persuaded herself that Christopher had never been the true and devoted friend she had once imagined him to be, but that the kind and affectionate Chris of olden days had been merely a creature of her own invention. There was no one to plead his cause for him, as he was far away, and appearances were on the side of his accuser; so he was tried in the court of Elisabeth's merciless young judgment, and sentenced to life-long banishment from the

circle of her interests and affections. She forgot how he had comforted her in the day of her adversity. If he had allowed her to comfort him, she would have remembered it forever; but he had not; and in this world men must be prepared to take the consequences of their own mistakes, even though those mistakes be made through excess of devotion to another person.

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In certain cases it may be necessary to pluck out the right eye and cut off the right hand; but there is no foundation for supposing that the operation will be any the less painful because of the righteous motive inducing it. And so Christopher Thornley learned by bitter experience, when, after many days, he returned from a fruitless search for the missing heir, to find the countenance of Elisabeth utterly changed toward him. She was quite civil to him—quite polite; she never attempted to argue or quarrel with him as she had done in the old days, and she listened patiently to all the details of his doings in Australia; but with gracious coldness she quietly put him outside the orbit of her life, and showed him plainly that he was now nothing more to her than her trustee and the general manager of her works.

It was hard on Christopher—cruelly hard; yet he had no alternative but to accept the position which Elisabeth, in the blindness of her heart, assigned to him. Sometimes he felt the burden of his lot was almost more than he could bear; not because of its heaviness, as he was a brave man and a patient one, but because of the utter absence of any joy in his life. Men and women can endure much sorrow if they have much joy as well; it is when sorrow comes and there is no love to lighten it, that the Hand of God lies heavy upon them; and It lay heavy upon Christopher's soul just then. Sometimes, when he felt weary unto death of the dreary routine of work and the still drearier routine of his uncle's sick-room, he recalled with a bitter smile how Elisabeth used to say that the gloom and smoke of the furnaces was really a pillar of cloud to show how God was watching over the people at the Osierfield as He watched over them in the wilderness. Because she had forgotten to be gracious to him, he concluded that God had forgotten to be gracious to him also—a not uncommon error of human wisdom; but though his heart was wounded and his days darkened by her injustice toward him, he never blamed her, even in his inmost thoughts. He was absolutely loyal to Elisabeth.

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One grim consolation he had—and that was the conviction that he had not won, and never could have won, Elisabeth's love; and that, therefore, poverty or riches were matters of no moment to him. Had he felt that temporal circumstances were the only bar between him and happiness, his position as her paid manager would have been unendurable; but now she had taught him that it was he himself, and not any difference in their respective social positions, which really stood between herself and him; and, that being so, nothing else had any power to hurt him. Wealth, unshared by Elisabeth, would have been no better than want, he said to himself; success, uncrowned by her, would have been equivalent to failure. When Christopher was in Australia he succeeded in tracing George Farrington as far as Broken Hill, and there he found poor George's grave. He learned that George had left a widow and one son, who had left the place immediately after George's death; but no one could give him any further information as to what had subsequently become of these two. And he was obliged at last to abandon the search and return to England, without discovering what had happened to the widow and child.

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Some years after his nephew's fruitless journey to Australia Richard Smallwood died; and though the old man had been nothing but a burden during the last few years of his life, Christopher missed him sorely when he was gone. It was something even to have a childish old man to love him, and smile at his coming; now there was nobody belonging to him, and he was utterly alone.

But the years which had proved so dark to Christopher had been full of brightness and interest to Elisabeth. She had fulfilled her intention of studying at the Slade School, and she had succeeded in her work beyond her wildest expectations. She was already recognised as an artist of no mean order. Now and then she came down to the Willows, bringing Grace Cobham with her; and the young women filled the house with company. Now and then they two went abroad together, and satisfied their souls with the beauty of the art of other lands. But principally they lived in London, for the passion to be near the centre of things had come upon Elisabeth; and when once that comes upon any one, London is the place in which to live. People wondered that Elisabeth did not marry, and blamed her behind her back for not making suitable hay

while it was as yet summer with her. But the artist-woman never marries for the sake of being married—or rather for the sake of not being unmarried—as so many of her more ordinary sisters do; her art supplies her with that necessary interest in life, without which most women become either invalids or shrews, and—unless she happens to meet the right man—she can manage very well without him.

George Farrington's son had never turned up, in spite of all the efforts to discover him; and by this time Elisabeth had settled down into the belief that the Willows and the Osierfield were permanently hers. She had long ago forgiven Christopher for setting her and her interests aside, and going off in search of the lost heir—at least she believed that she had; but there was always an undercurrent of bitterness in her thoughts of him, which proved that the wound he had then dealt her had left a scar.

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Several men had wanted to marry Elisabeth, but they had not succeeded in winning her. She enjoyed flirting with them, and she rejoiced in their admiration, but when they offered her their love she was frightened and ran away. Consequently the world called her cold; and as the years rolled on and no one touched her heart, she began to believe that the world was right.

"There are three great things in life," Grace Cobham said to her one day, "art and love and religion. They really are all part of the same thing, and none of them is perfected without the others. You have got two, Elisabeth; but you have somehow missed the third, and without it you will never attain to your highest possibilities. You are a good woman, and you are a true artist; but, until you fall in love, your religion and your art will both lack something, and will fall short of perfection."

"I'm afraid I'm not a falling-in-love sort of person," replied Elisabeth meekly; "I'm extremely sorry, but such is the case."

"It is a pity! But you may fall in love yet."

"It's too late, I fear. You see I am over thirty; and if I haven't done it by now, I expect I never shall do it. It is tiresome to have missed it, I admit; and especially as you think it would make me paint better pictures."

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"Well, I do. You paint so well now that it is a pity you don't paint still better. I do not believe that any artist does his or her best work until his or her nature is fully developed; and no woman's nature is fully developed until she has been in love."

"I have never been in love; I don't even know what it is like inside," said Elisabeth sadly; "and I dreadfully want to know, because—looked at from the outside—it seems interesting."

Grace gazed at her thoughtfully. "I wonder if it is that you are too cold to fall in love, or whether it only is that the right person hasn't appeared."

"I don't know. I wish I did. What do you think it feels like?"

"I know what it feels like—and that is like nothing else this side heaven."

"It seems funny to get worked up in that sort of way over an ordinary man—turning him into a revival-service or a national anthem, or something equally thrilling and inspiring! Still, I'd do it if I could, just from pure curiosity. I should really enjoy it. I've seen stupid girls light up like a turnip with a candle inside, simply because some plain young man did the inevitable, and came up into the drawing-room after dinner; and I've seen clever women go to pieces like a linen button at the wash, simply because some ignorant man did the inevitable, and preferred a more foolish and better-looking woman to themselves."

"Have you really never been in love, Elisabeth?"

Elisabeth pondered for a moment. "No; I've sometimes thought I was, but I've always known I wasn't."

"I wonder at that; because you really are affectionate."

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"That is quite true; but no one has ever seemed to want as much as I had to give," said Elisabeth, the smile dying out of her eyes; "I do so long to be necessary to somebody—to feel that it is in my power to make somebody perfectly happy; but nobody has ever asked enough of me."

"You could have made the men happy who wanted to marry you," suggested Grace.

"No; I could have made them comfortable, and that's not the same thing."

As Elisabeth sat alone in her own room that night, she thought about what Grace had said, and wondered if she were really too cold ever to experience that common yet wonderful miracle which turns earth into heaven for most people once in their lives. She had received much love and still more admiration in her time; but she had never been allowed to give what she had to give, and she was essentially of the type of woman to whom it is more blessed to give than to receive. She had never craved to be loved, as some women crave; she had only asked to be allowed to love as much as she was capable of loving, and the permission had been denied her. As she looked back over her past life, she saw that it had always been the same. She had given the adoration of her childhood to Anne Farrington, and Anne had not wanted it; she had given the devotion of her girlhood to Felicia, and Felicia had not wanted it; she had given the truest friendship of her womanhood to Christopher, and Christopher had not wanted it. As for the men who had loved her, she had known perfectly well that she was not essential to them; had she been, she would have married them; but they could be happy without her—and they were. For Grace she had the warmest sense of comradeship; but Grace's life was so full on its own account, that Elisabeth could only be one of many interests to her. Elisabeth was so strong and so tender, that she could have given much to any one to whom she was absolutely necessary; but she felt she could give of her best to no man who desired it only as a luxury—it was too good for that.

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"It seems rather a waste of force," she said to herself, with a whimsical smile. "I feel like Niagara, spending its strength on empty splashings, when it might be turning thousands of electric engines and lighting millions of electric lights, if only its power were turned in the right direction and properly stored. I could be so much to anybody who really needed me—I feel I could; but nobody seems to need me, so it's no use bothering. Anyway, I have my art, and that more than satisfies me; and I will spend my life in giving forth my strength to the world at large, in the shape of pictures which shall help the world to be better and happier. At least I hope so."

And with this reflection Elisabeth endeavoured to console herself for the non-appearance of that fairy prince, who, in her childish dreams, had always been wounded in the tournament of life, and had turned to her for comfort.

The years which had passed so drearily for Christopher, had cast their shadows also over the lives of Alan and Felicia Tremaine. When Willie was a baby, his nurse accidentally let him fall; and the injury he then received was so great that, as he grew older, he was never able to walk properly, but had to punt himself about with a little crutch. This was a terrible blow to Alan; and became all the greater as time went on, and Felicia had no other children to share his devotion. Felicia, too, felt it sorely; but she fretted more over the sorrow it was to her husband than on her own account.

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There was a great friendship between Willie and Elisabeth. Weakness of any kind always appealed to her, and he, poor child! was weak indeed. So when Elisabeth was at the Willows and Willie at the Moat House, the two spent much time together. He never wearied of hearing about the things that she had pretended when she was a little girl; and she never wearied of telling him about them.

"And so the people, who lived among the smoke and the furnaces, followed the pillar of cloud till it led them to the country on the other side of the hills," said Willie one day, as he and Elisabeth were sitting on the old rustic seat in the Willows' garden. "I remember; but tell me, what did they find in the country over there?" And he pointed with his thin little finger to the blue hills beyond the green valley.

"They found everything that they wanted," replied Elisabeth. "Not the things that other people thought would be good for them, you know; but just the dear, foolish, impossible things that they had wanted for themselves."

"And did the things make them happy?"

"Perfectly happy—much happier than the wise, desirable, sensible things could have made them."

"I suppose they could all walk without crutches," suggested Willie.

"Of course they could; and they could understand everything without being told."

"And the other people loved them very much, and were very kind to them, weren't they?"

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"Perhaps; but what made them so happy was that they loved the other people and were kind to them. As long as they lived here in the smoke and din and bustle, everybody was so busy looking after his own concerns that nobody could be bothered with their love. There wasn't room for it, or time for it. But in the country over the hills there was plenty of room and plenty of time; in fact, there wasn't any room or any time for anything else."

"What did they have to eat?" Willie asked.

"Everything that had been too rich for them when they were here."

Willie sighed. "It must have been a nice country," he said.

"It was, dear; the nicest country in the world. It was always summer there, too, and holiday time."

"Didn't they have any lessons to learn?"

"No; because they'd learned them all."

"Did they have roads and railways?" Willie made further inquiry.

"No; only narrow green lanes, which led straight into fairyland. And the longer you walked in them the less tired you were."

"Tell me a story about the country over there," said Willie, nestling up to Elisabeth; "and let there be a princess in it."

She put her strong arm round him and held him close. "Once upon a time," she began, "there was a princess, who lived among the smoke and the furnaces."

"Was she very beautiful?"

"No; but she happened to have a heart made of real gold. That was the only rare thing about her; otherwise she was quite a common princess."

"What did she do with the heart?" asked Willie.

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"She wanted to give it to somebody; but the strange thing was that nobody would have it. Several people asked her for it before they knew it was made of real gold; but when they found that out, they began to make excuses. One said that he'd no place in his house for such a first-class article; it would merely make the rest of the furniture look shabby, and he shouldn't refurnish in order to please anybody. Another said that he wasn't going to bother himself with looking after a real gold heart, when a silver-gilt one would serve his purpose just as well. And a third said that solid gold plate wasn't worth the trouble of cleaning and keeping in order, as it was sure to get scratched or bent in the process, the precious metals being too soft for everyday use."

"It is difficult not to scratch when you're cleaning plate," Willie observed. "I sometimes help Simpkins, and there's only one spoon that he'll let me clean, for fear I should scratch; and that's quite an old one that doesn't matter. So I have to clean it over and over again. But go on about the princess."

"Well, then she offered her gold heart to a woman who seemed lonely and desolate; but the woman only cared for the hearts of men, and threw back the princess's in her face. And then somebody advised her to set it up for auction, to go to the highest bidder, as that was generally considered the correct thing to do with regard to well-regulated women's hearts; but she didn't like that suggestion at all. At last the poor princess grew tired of offering her treasure to people who didn't want it, and so she locked it up out of sight; and then everybody said that she hadn't a heart at all, and what a disgrace it was for a young woman to be without one."

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"That wasn't fair!"

"Not at all fair; but people aren't always fair on this side of the hills, darling."

"But they are on the other?"

"Always; and they are never hard or cold or unsympathetic. So the princess decided to leave the smoke and the furnaces, and to go to the country on the other side of the hills. She travelled down into the valley and right through it, and then across the hills beyond, and never rested till she reached the country on the other side."

"And what did she find when she got there?"

Elisabeth's eyes grew dreamy. "She found a fairy prince standing on the very borders of that country, and he said to her, 'You've come at last; I've been such a long time waiting for you.' And the princess asked him, 'Do you happen to want such a thing as a heart of real gold?' 'I should just think I do,' said the prince; 'I've wanted it always, and I've never wanted anything else; but I was beginning to be afraid I was never going to get it.' 'And I was beginning to be afraid that I was never going to find anybody to give it to,' replied the princess. So she gave him her heart, and he took it; and then they looked into each other's eyes and smiled."

"Is that the end of the story?"

"No, dear; only the beginning."

"Then what happened in the end?"

"Nobody knows."

But Willie's youthful curiosity was far from being satisfied. "What was the fairy prince like to look at?" he inquired.

"I don't know, darling; I've often wondered."

And Willie had to be content with this uncertain state of affairs. So had Elisabeth.

For some time now she had been making small bonfires of the Thames; but the following spring Elisabeth set the river on fire in good earnest by her great Academy picture, *The Pillar of Cloud*. It was the picture of the year; and it supplied its creator with a copious draught of that nectar of the gods which men call fame.

It was a fine picture, strongly painted, and was a representation of the Black Country, with its mingled gloom and glare, and its pillar of smoke always hanging over it. In the foreground were figures of men and women and children, looking upward to the pillar of cloud; and, by the magic spell of the artist, Elisabeth had succeeded in depicting on their faces, for such who had eyes to see it, the peace of those who knew that God was with them in their journey through the wilderness. They were worn and weary and toil-worn, as they dwelt in the midst of the furnaces; but, through it all, they looked up to the overshadowing cloud and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed. In the far distance there was a glimpse of the sun setting behind a range of hills; and one felt, as one gazed at the picture and strove to understand its meaning, that the pillar of cloud was gradually leading the people nearer and nearer to the far-off hills and the land beyond the sunset; and that there they would find an abundant compensation for the suffering and poverty that had blighted their lives as they toiled here for their daily bread.

Even those who could not understand the underlying meaning of Elisabeth's picture, marvelled at the power and technical skill whereby she had brought the weird mystery of the Black Country into the heart of London, until one almost felt the breath of the furnaces as one gazed entranced at her canvas; and those who did understand the underlying meaning, marvelled still more that so young a woman should have learned so much of life's hidden mysteries—forgetting that art is no intellectual endowment, but a revelation from God Himself, and that the true artist does not learn but knows, because God has whispered to him.

There was another picture that made a sensation in that year's Academy; it was the work of an unknown artist, Cecil Farquhar by name, and was noted in the catalogue as *The Daughters of Philip*. It represented the "four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy" of Philip of Cæsarea; but it did not set them forth in the dress and attitude of inspired sibyls. Instead of this it showed them as they were in their own home, when the Spirit of the Lord was not upon them, but when they were ordinary girls, with ordinary girls' interests and joys and sorrows. One of them was braiding her magnificent black hair in front of a mirror; and another was eagerly perusing a letter with the love-light in her eyes; a third was weeping bitterly over a dead dove; and a

fourth—the youngest—was playing merrily with a monkey. It was a dazzling picture, brilliant with rich Eastern draperies and warm lights; and shallow spectators wondered what the artist meant by painting the prophetesses in such frivolous and worldly guise; but the initiated understood how he had fathomed the tragedy underlying the lives of most women who are set apart from their fellows by the gift of genius. When the Spirit is upon them they prophesy, by means of pictures or poems or stories or songs; and the world says, "These are not as other women; they command our admiration, but they do not crave our love: let us put them on the top of pinnacles for high days and holidays, and not trouble them with the petty details of everyday life."

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The world forgets that the gift of genius is a thing apart from the woman herself, and that these women at heart are very women, as entirely as their less gifted sisters are, and have the ordinary woman's longing for love and laughter, and for all the little things that make life happy. A pinnacle is a poor substitute for a hearthstone, from the feminine point of view; and laurel wreaths do not make half so satisfactory a journey's end as lovers' meetings. All of which it is difficult for a man to understand, since fame is more to him than it is to a woman, and love less; therefore the knowledge of this truth proved Cecil Farquhar to be a true artist; while the able manner in which he had set it forth showed him to be also a highly gifted one. And the world is always ready to acknowledge real merit when it sees it, and to do homage to the same.

The Daughters of Philip carried a special message to the heart of Elisabeth Farringdon. She had been placed on her pinnacle, and had already begun to find how cold was the atmosphere up there, and how much more human she was than people expected and allowed for her to be. She felt like a statue set up in the market-place, that hears the children piping and mourning, and longs to dance and weep with them; but they did not ask her to do either—did not want her to do either—and if she had come down from her pedestal and begged to be allowed to play with them or comfort them, they would only have been frightened and run away.

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But here at last was a man who understood what she was feeling; to whom she could tell her troubles, and who would know what she meant; and she made up her mind that before that season was over, she and the unknown artist, who had painted The Daughters of Philip, should be friends.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### CECIL FARQUHAR

And my people ask politely  
How a friend I know so slightly  
Can be more to me than others I have liked a year  
or so;  
But they've never heard the history  
Of our transmigration's mystery,  
And they've no idea I loved you those millenniums  
ago.

It was the night of the Academy *soirée* in the year of Elisabeth's triumph; she was being petted and *fêted* on all sides, and passed through the crowded rooms in a sort of royal progress, surrounded by an atmosphere of praise and adulation. Of course she liked it—what woman would not?—but she was conscious of a dull ache of sadness, at the back of all her joy, that there was no one to share her triumph with her; no one to whom she could say, "I care for all this, chiefly because it makes me stronger to help you and worthier to be loved by you;" no one who would be made happy by her whisper, "I have set the Thames ablaze in order to make warm your fireside."

It was as yet early in the evening when the President turned for a moment from his duties as "official receiver" to say to her, "Miss Farringdon, I want to present Farquhar to you. He is a rising man, and a very good fellow into the bargain, and I know he is most anxious to be introduced to you."

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And then the usual incantation was gone through, which constitutes an introduction in England—namely, the repetition of two names, whereof each person hears only his or her own (an item of information by no means new or in any way to be desired), while the name of the other contracting party remains shrouded in impenetrable mystery; and Elisabeth found herself face to face with the man whom she specially desired to meet.

Cecil Farquhar was a remarkably handsome man, nearer forty than thirty years of age. He was tall and graceful, with golden hair and the profile of a Greek statue; and, in addition to these palpable charms, he possessed the more subtle ones of a musical voice and a fascinating manner. He treated every woman, with whom he was brought into contact, as if she were a compound of a child and a queen; and he had a way of looking at her and speaking to her as if she were the one woman in the world for whom he had been waiting all his life. That women were taken in by this half-caressing, half-worshipping manner was not altogether their fault; perhaps it was not altogether his. Very attractive people fall into the habit of attracting, and are frequently unconscious of, and therefore irresponsible for, their success.

"It is so good of you to let me be presented to you," he said to Elisabeth, as they walked through the crowded rooms in search of a seat; "you don't know how I have longed for it ever since I first saw pictures of yours on these walls. And my longing was trebled when I saw your glorious Pillar of Cloud, and read all that it was meant to teach."

Elisabeth looked at him slyly through her long eyelashes. "How do you know what I meant to teach? Perhaps you read your own meanings into it, and not mine."

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Farquhar laughed, and Elisabeth thought he had the most beautiful teeth she had ever seen. "Perhaps so; but, do you know, Miss Farrington, I have a shrewd suspicion that my meanings and yours are the same."

"What meaning did you read into my picture?" asked Elisabeth, with the dictatorial air of a woman who is accustomed to be made much of and deferred to, as he found a seat for her in the vestibule, under a palm-tree.

"I read that there was only one answer to the weary problems of labour and capital, and masses and classes, and employers and employed, and all the other difficulties that beset and threaten any great manufacturing community; and that this answer is to be found to-day—as it was found by the Israelites of old—in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and all of which that pillar is a sign and a sacrament."

"Yes," replied Elisabeth, and her eyes shone like stars; "I meant all that. But how clever of you to have read it so correctly!"

"I do not ask if you understood what my picture meant. I know you did; for it was to you, and women such as you, that I was speaking."

"Yes; I understood it well enough," replied Elisabeth sadly.

"I knew you would."

"Poor little daughters of Philip! How much happier they would have felt if they had been just the same as all the other commonplace Jewish maidens, and had lived ordinary women's lives!"

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"But how much happier they made other people by their great gift of interpreting to a tired world the hidden things of God!" replied Cecil, his face aglow with emotion. "You must never forget that, you women of genius, with your power of making men better and women brighter by the messages you bring to them! And isn't it a grander thing to help and comfort the whole world, than to love, honour, and obey one particular man?"

"I am not sure. I used to think so, but I'm beginning to have my doubts about it. One comforts the whole world in a slipshod, sketchy kind of way; but one could do the particular man thoroughly!"

"And then find he wasn't worth the doing, in all probability," added Cecil.

"Perhaps." And Elisabeth smiled.

"It is delightful to be really talking to you," exclaimed Cecil; "so delightful that I can hardly believe it is true! I have so longed to meet you, because—ever since I first saw your pictures—I always knew you would understand."

"And I knew you would understand, too, as soon as I saw *The Daughters of Philip*," replied Elisabeth; and her voice was very soft.

"I think we must have known each other in a former existence," Cecil continued; "because I do not feel a bit as if I were being introduced to a stranger, but as if I were meeting an old friend. I have so much to tell you about all that has happened to me since you and I played together in the shadow of the Sphinx, or worshipped together in the temple at Philæ; and you will be interested in it all, won't you?"

"Of course I shall. I shall want to know how many centuries ago you first learned what women's hearts and minds were made of, and who taught you."

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"You taught me, dear lady, one day when we were plucking flowers together at the foot of Olympus. Don't you remember it? You ought, as it can't be more than two or three thousand years ago."

"And you've never forgotten it?"

"Never; and never shall. If I had, I shouldn't have been an artist. It is the men who remember how they lived and loved and suffered during their former incarnations, that paint pictures and carve statues and sing songs; and the men who forget everything but this present world, that make fortunes and eat dinners and govern states."

"And what about the women?"

"Ah! the women who forget, set their hearts upon the attainment of a fine house and large establishment, with a husband thrown in as a makeweight; if they succeed, the world calls them happy. While the women who remember, wait patiently for the man who was one with them at the beginning of the centuries, and never take any other man in his place; if they find him, they are so happy that the world is incapable of understanding how happy they are; and if they don't find him in this life, they know they will in another, and they are quite content."

"You really are very interesting," remarked Elisabeth graciously.

"Only because you understand me; most women would think me stupid to a degree if I talked to them in this way. But you are interesting to everybody, even to the stupid people. Tell me about yourself. Are you really as strong-willed and regal as the world says you are?"

"I don't know," replied Elisabeth; "I fancy it depends a good deal upon whom I am talking to. I find as a rule it is a good plan to let a weak man think you are obedient, and a strong man think you are wilful, if you want men to find you interesting."

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"And aren't you strong-minded enough to be indifferent to the fact as to whether men find you interesting or the reverse?"

"Oh, dear, no! I am a very old-fashioned person, and I am proud of it. I'd even rather be an old woman than a New Woman, if I were driven to be one or the other. I'm not a bit modern, or *fin-de-siècle*; I still believe in God and Man, and all the other comfortable and antiquated beliefs."

"How nice of you! But I knew you would, though the world in general does not give you credit for anything in the shape of warmth or tenderness; it adores you, you know, but as a sort of glorious Snow-Queen, such as Kay and Gerda ran after in dear Hans Andersen."

"I am quite aware of that, and I am afraid I don't much care; though it seems a pity to have a thing and not to get the credit for it. I sympathize with those women who have such lovely hair that nobody believes that it was grown on the premises; my heart is similarly misjudged."

"Lord Stonebridge was talking to me about you and your pictures the other day, and he said you would be an ideal woman if only you had a heart."

Elisabeth shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Then you can tell him that I think he

would be an ideal man if only he had a head; but you can't expect one person to possess all the virtues or all the organs; now can you?"

"I suppose not."

"Oh! do look at that woman in white muslin and forget-me-nots, with the kittenish manner," exclaimed Elisabeth; "I can't stand kittens of over fifty, can you? I have made all my friends promise that if ever they see the faintest signs of approaching kittenness in me, as I advance in years, they will have recourse without delay to the stable-bucket, which is the natural end of kittens."

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"Still, women should make the world think them young as long as possible."

"But when we are kittenish we don't make the world think we are young; we only make it think that we think we are young, which is quite a different thing."

"I see," said Cecil, possessing himself of Elisabeth's fan. "Let me fan you. I am afraid you find it rather hot here, but I doubt if we could get a seat anywhere else if once we resigned this one."

"We should have to be contented with the Chiltern Hundreds, I'm afraid. Besides, I am not a bit hot; it is never too warm for me. The thing I hate most in the world is cold; it is the one thing that makes it impossible for me to talk, and I'm miserable when I'm not talking. I mean to read a paper before the Royal Society some day, to prove that the bacillus of conversation can not germinate in a temperature of less than sixty degrees."

"I hate being cold, too. How much alike we are!"

"I loathe going to gorgeous parties in cold houses," continued Elisabeth, "and having priceless dinners in fireless rooms. On such occasions I always feel inclined to say to my hostess, as the poor do, 'Please, ma'am, may I have a coal-ticket instead of a soup-ticket, if I mayn't have both?'"

"You are a fine lady and I am a struggling artist, so I want you to tell me who some of these people are," Cecil begged; "I hardly know anybody, and I expect there is nobody here that you don't know; so please point out to me some of the great of the earth. First, can you tell me who that man is over there, talking to the lady in blue? He has such a sad, kind face."

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"Oh! that is Lord Wrexham—a charming man and a bachelor. He was jilted a long time ago by Mrs. Paul Seaton—Miss Carnaby she was then—and people say he has never got over it. It is she that he is talking to now."

"How very interesting! Yes; I like his face, and I am sure he has suffered. It is strange how women invariably behave worst to the best men! I'm not sure that I admire her. She is very stylish and perfectly dressed, but I don't think I should have broken my heart over her if I had been my Lord Wrexham."

"He was perfectly devoted to her, I believe; and she really is attractive when you talk to her, she is so very brilliant and amusing."

"She looks brilliant, and a little hard," was Cecil Farquhar's comment.

"I don't think she is really hard, for she adores her husband, and devotes all her time and all her talents to helping him politically. He is Postmaster-General, you know; and is bound to get still higher office some day."

"Have they any children?"

"No; only politics."

"What is he like? I have never seen him."

"He is an interesting man, and an extremely able one. I should think that as a husband he would be too self-opinionated for my taste; but he and his wife seem to suit each other down to the ground. Some women like self-opinionated men."

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"I suppose they do."

"And after all," Elisabeth went on, "if one goes in for a distinguished husband, one must pay the price for the article. It is absurd to shoot big game, and then expect to

carry it home in a market-basket."

"Still it annoys you when men say the same of you, and suggest that an ordinary lump of sugar would have sweetened Antony's vinegar more successfully than did Cleopatra's pearl. Your conversation and my art have exhausted themselves to prove that this masculine imagination is a delusion and a snare; yet the principle must be the same in both cases."

"Not at all; woman's greatness is of her life a thing apart: 'tis man's whole existence."

"Do you think so?" asked Cecil, with that tender look of his which expressed so much and meant so little. "You don't know how cold a man feels when his heart is empty."

"Paul Seaton nearly wrecked his career at the outset by writing a very foolish and indiscreet book called *Shams and Shadows*; it was just a toss-up whether he would ever get over it; but he did, and now people have pretty nearly forgotten it," continued Elisabeth, who had never heard the truth concerning Isabel Carnaby.

"Who is that fat, merry woman coming in now?"

"That is Lady Silverhampton; and the man she is laughing with is Lord Robert Thistlethorn. That lovely girl on the other side of him is his wife. Isn't she exquisite?"

"She is indeed—a most beautiful creature. Now if Lord Wrexham had broken his heart over her, I could have understood and almost commended him."

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"Well, but he didn't, you see. There is nothing more remarkable than the sort of woman that breaks men's hearts—except the sort of men that break women's."

"I fancy that the breakableness is in the nature of the heart itself, and not of the iconoclast," said Cecil.

Elisabeth looked up quickly. "Oh! I don't. I think that the person who breaks the heart of another person must have an immense capacity for commanding love."

"Not at all; the person whose heart is broken has an immense capacity for feeling love. Take your Lord Wrexham, for instance: it was not because Miss Carnaby was strong, but because he was strong, that his heart was broken in the encounter between them. You can see that in their faces."

"I don't agree with you. It was because she was more lovable than loving—at least, as far as he was concerned—that the catastrophe happened. A less vivid personality would have been more easily forgotten; but if once you begin to care badly for any one with a strong personality you're done for."

"You are very modern, in spite of your assertion to the contrary, and therefore very subjective. It would never occur to you to look at anything from the objective point of view; yet at least five times out of ten it is the correct one."

"You mean that I am too self-willed and domineering?" laughed Elisabeth.

"I mean that it is beside the mark to expect a reigning queen to understand how to canvass for votes at a general election."

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"But you do think me too autocratic, don't you? You must, because everybody does," Elisabeth persisted, with engaging candour.

"I think you are the most charming woman I ever met in my life," replied Cecil; and at the moment, and for at least five minutes afterward, he really believed what he said.

"Thank you; but you think me too fond of dominating other people, all the same."

"Don't say that; I could not think any evil of you, and it hurts me to hear you even suggest that I could. But perhaps it surprises me that so large-hearted a woman as yourself should invariably look at things from the subjective point of view, as I am sure you do."

"Right again, Mr. Farquhar; you really are very clever at reading people."

Cecil corrected her. "At reading you, you mean; you are not 'people,' if you please. But tell me the truth: when you look at yourself from the outside (which I know you

are fond of doing, as I am fond of doing), doesn't it surprise you to see as gifted a woman as you must know you are, so much more prone to measure your influence upon your surroundings than their influence upon you; and, measuring, to allow for it?"

"Nothing that a woman does ever surprises me; and that the woman happens to be one's self is a mere matter of detail."

"That is a quibble, dear lady. Please answer my question."

Elisabeth drew her eyebrows together with a puzzled expression. "I don't think it does surprise me, because my influence on my surroundings is greater than their influence on me. You, too, are a creator; and you must know the almost god-like joy of making something out of nothing, and seeing that it is good. It seems to me that when once you have tasted that joy, you can never again doubt that you yourself are stronger than anything outside you; and that, as the Apostle said, 'all things are yours.'"

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"Yes; I understand that. But there is still a step further—namely, when you become conscious that, strong as you are, there is something stronger than yourself; and that is another person's influence upon you."

"I have never felt that," said Elisabeth simply.

"Have you never known what it is to find your own individuality swallowed up in other persons' individuality, and your own personality merged in theirs, until—without the slightest conscious unselfishness on your part—you cease to have a will of your own?"

"No; and I don't want to know it. I can understand wishing to share one's own principalities and powers with another person; but I can't understand being willing to share another person's principalities and powers."

"In short," said Cecil, "you feel that you could love sufficiently to give, but not sufficiently to receive; you would stamp your image and superscription with pleasure upon another person's heart; but you would allow no man to stamp his image and superscription upon yours."

"I suppose that is so," replied Elisabeth gravely; "but I never put it as clearly to myself as that before. Yes," she went on after a moment's pause; "I could never care enough for any man to give up my own will to his; I should always want to bend his to mine, and the more I liked him the more I should want it. He could have all my powers and possessions, and be welcome to them; but my will must always be my own; that is a kingdom I would share with no one."

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"Ah! you are treating the question subjectively, as usual. Did it never occur to you that you might have no say in the matter; that a man might compel you, by force of his own charm or power or love for you, to give up your will to his, whether you would or no?"

Elisabeth looked him full in the face with clear, grave eyes. "No; and I hope I may never meet such a man as long as I live. I have always been so strong, and so proud of my strength, and so sure of myself, that I could never forgive any one for being stronger than I, and wresting my dominion from me."

"Dear lady, you are a genius, and you have climbed to the summit of the giddy pinnacle which men call success; but for all that, you are still 'an unlesson'd girl.' Believe me, the strong man armed will come some day, and you will lower your flag and rejoice in the lowering."

"You don't understand me, after all," said Elisabeth reproachfully.

Cecil's smile was very pleasant. "Don't I? Yet it was I who painted *The Daughters of Philip*."

There was a moment's constrained silence; and then Elisabeth broke the tension by saying lightly—

"Look! there's Lady Silverhampton coming back again. Isn't it a pity she is so stout? I do hope I shall never be stout, for flesh is a most difficult thing to live down."

"You are right; there are few things in the world worse than stoutness."

"I only know two: sin and boiled cabbage."

"And crochet-antimacassars," added Cecil; "you're forgetting crochet-antimacassars. I speak feelingly, because my present lodgings are white with them; and they stick to my coat like leeches, and follow me whithersoever I go. I am never alone from them."

"If I were as stout as Lady Silverhampton," said Elisabeth thoughtfully, "I should either cut myself up into building lots, or else let myself out into market gardens: I should never go about whole; should you?"

"Certainly not; I would rather publish myself in sections, as dictionaries and encyclopædias do!"

"Lady Silverhampton presented me," remarked Elisabeth, "so I always feel a sort of god-daughterly respect for her, which enhances the pleasure of abusing her."

"What does it feel like to go to Court? Does it frighten you?"

"Oh, dear! no. It would do, I daresay, if you were in plain clothes; but trains and feathers make fine birds—with all the manners and habits of fine birds. Peacocks couldn't hop about in gutters, and London sparrows couldn't strut across Kensington Gardens, however much they both desired it. So when a woman, in addition to her ordinary best clothes, is attended by twenty-four yards of good satin which ought to be feeding the poor, nothing really abashes her."

"I suppose she feels like a queen."

"Well, to tell the truth, with her train over her arm and her tulle lappets hanging down her back, she feels like a widow carrying a waterproof; but she thinks she looks like a duchess, and that is a very supporting thought."

"Tell me, who is that beautiful woman with the tall soldierly man, coming in now?" said Farquhar.

"Oh! those are the Le Mesuriers of Greystone; isn't she divine? And she has the two loveliest little boys you ever saw or imagined. I'm longing to paint them."

"She is strikingly handsome."

"There is a very strange story about her and her twin sister, which I'll tell you some day."

"You shall; but you must tell me all about yourself first, and how you have come to know so much and learn so little."

Elisabeth looked round at him quickly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the depth of your intuition is only surpassed by the shallowness of your experience."

"You are very rude!" And Elisabeth drew up her head rather haughtily.

"Forgive me; I didn't mean to be; but I was overcome by the wonder of how complex you are—how wise on the one side, and how foolish upon the other; but experience is merely human and very attainable, while intuition is divine and given to few. And I was overcome by another thought; may I tell you what that was?"

"Yes; of course you may."

"You won't be angry?"

"No."

"You will remember how we played together as children round the temple of Philæ, and let my prehistoric memories of you be my excuse?"

"Yes."

"I was overcome by the thought of how glorious it would be to teach you all the things you don't know, and how delightful it would be to see you learn them."

"Let us go into the next room," said Elisabeth, rising from her seat; "I see Lady

Silverhampton nodding to me, and I must go and speak to her."

Cecil Farquhar bent his six-foot-one down to her five-foot-five. "Are you angry with me?" he whispered.

"I don't know; I think I am."

"But you will let me come and see you, so that you may forgive me, won't you?"

"You don't deserve it."

"Of course I don't; I shouldn't want it if I did. The things we deserve are as unpleasant as our doctor's prescriptions. Please let me come—because we knew each other all those centuries ago, and I haven't forgotten you."

"Very well, then. You'll find my address in the Red Book, and I'm always at home on Sunday afternoons."

As Elisabeth was whirled away into a vortex of gay and well-dressed people, Farquhar watched her for a moment. "She is an attractive woman," he said to himself, "though she is not as good-looking as I expected. But there's charm about her, and breeding; and they say she has an enormous fortune. She is certainly worth cultivating."

Farquhar cultivated the distinguished Miss Farrington assiduously, and the friendship between them grew apace. Each had a certain attraction for the other; and, in addition, they enjoyed that wonderful freemasonry which exists among all followers of the same craft, and welds these together in a bond almost as strong as the bond of relationship. The artist in Farquhar was of far finer fibre than the man, as is sometimes the case with complex natures; so that one side of him gave expression to thoughts which the other side of him was incapable of comprehending. He did not consciously pretend that he was better than he was, and he really believed the truths which he preached; but when the gods serve their nectar in earthen vessels, the vessels are apt to get more credit than they deserve, and the gods less.

To Elisabeth, Cecil was extremely interesting; and she understood—better than most women would have done—the difference between himself and his art, and how the one must not be measured by the other. The artist attracted her greatly; she had so much sympathy with his ways of looking at life and of interpreting truth; as for the man, she had as yet come to no definite conclusion in her mind concerning him; it was not easy for mankind to fascinate Elisabeth Farrington.

"I have come to see my mother-confessor," he said to her one Sunday afternoon, when he dropped in to find her alone, Grace Cobham having gone out to tea. "I have been behaving horribly all the week, and I want you to absolve me and help me to be better and nicer."

Elisabeth was the last woman to despise flattery of this sort; an appeal for help of any kind never found her indifferent.

"What have you been doing?" she asked gently.

"It isn't so much what I have been doing as what I have been feeling. I found myself actually liking Lady Silverhampton, simply because she is a countess; and I was positively rude to a man I know, called Edgar Ford, because he lives at the East End and dresses badly. What a falling-off since the days when you and I worshipped the gods together at Philæ, and before money and rank and railways and bicycles came into fashion! Help me to be as I was then, dear friend."

"How can I?"

"By simply being yourself and letting me watch you. I always feel good and ideal and unworldly when I am near you. Don't you know how dreadful it is to wish to do one thing and to want to do another, and to be torn asunder between the two?"

Elisabeth shook her head. "No; I have never felt like that. I can understand wanting to do different things at different times of one's life, but I can not comprehend how one person can want to do two opposing things at the same time."

"Oh! I can. I can imagine doing a thing, and despising one's self at the time for doing it, and yet not being able to help doing it."

"I have heard other people say that, and I can't understand it."

"Yet you are so complex; I should have thought you would," said Farquhar.

"Yes, I am complex; but not at the same moment. I have two distinct natures, but the two are never on the stage at once. I don't in the least know what St. Paul meant when he said that the evil he would not that he did. I can quite understand doing the evil on Tuesday morning that I would not on Monday afternoon; but I could never do anything and disapprove of it at the same minute."

"That is because you are so good—and so cold."

"Am I?"

"Yes, dear Miss Farringdon; and so amiable. You never do things in a temper."

"But I do; I really have got a temper of my own, though nowadays people seem to find difficulty in believing it. I have frequently done things in a temper before now; but as long as the temper lasts I am pleased that I have done them, and feel that I do well to be angry. When the temper is over, I sometimes think differently; but not till then. As I have told you before, my will is so strong that it and I are never at loggerheads with each other; it always rules me completely."

Farquhar sighed. "I wish I were as strong as you are; but I am not. And do you mean to tell me that there is no worldly side to you, either; no side that hankers after fleshpots, even while the artist within you is being fed with manna from heaven?"

"No; I don't think there is," Elisabeth replied slowly. "I really do not like people any the better for having money and titles and things like that, and it is no use pretending that I do."

"I do. I wish I didn't, but I can't help it. It is only you who can help me to look at life from the ideal point of view—you whose feet are still wet with the dew of Olympus, and in whom the Greek spirit is as fresh as it was three thousand years ago."

"Oh! I'm not as perfect as all that; far from it! I don't despise people for not having rank or wealth, since rank and wealth don't happen to be the things that interest me. But there are things that do interest me—genius and wit and culture and charm, for instance—and I am quite as hard on the people who lack these gifts, as ever you are on the impecunious nobodies. I confess I am often ashamed of myself when I realize how frightfully I look down upon stupid men and dull women, and how utterly indifferent I am as to what becomes of them. So I really am as great a snob as you are, though I wear my snobbery—like my rue—with a difference."

"Not a snob, dear lady—never a snob! There never existed a woman with less snobbery in her composition than you have. That you are impatient of the dull and unattractive, I admit; but so you ought to be—your own wit and charm give you the right to despise them."

"But they don't; that's where you make a mistake. It is as unjust to look down on a man for not making a joke as for not making a fortune. Though it isn't so much the people who don't make jokes that irritate me, as the people who make poor ones. Don't you know the sort?—would-be wits who quote a remark out of a bound Punch, and think they have been brilliant; and who tell an anecdote crusted with antiquity, which men learned at their mother's knees, and say that it actually happened to a friend of theirs the week before last."

"Oh! they are indeed terrible," agreed Cecil; "they dabble in inverted commas as Italians dabble in garlic."

"I never know whether to laugh at their laboured jokes or not. Of course, it is pretty manners to do so, be the wit never so stale; but on the other hand it encourages them in their evil habits, and seems to me as doubtful a form of hospitality as offering a brandy-and-soda to a confirmed drunkard."

"Dear friend, let us never try to be funny!"

"Amen! And, above all things, let us flee from humorous recitations," added Elisabeth. "There are few things in the world more heart-rending than a humorous recitation—with action. As for me, it unmans me completely, and I quietly weep in a remote corner of the room until the carriage comes to take me home. Therefore, I



avoid such; as no woman's eyelashes will stand a long course of humorous recitation without being the worse for wear."

"It seems to me after all," Cecil remarked, "that the evil that you would not, that you do, like St. Paul and myself and sundry others, if you despise stupid people, and know that you oughtn't to despise them, at the same time."

"I know I oughtn't to despise them, but I never said I didn't want to despise them—that's just the difference. As a matter of fact, I enjoy despising them; that is where I am really so horrid. I hide it from them, because I hate hurting people's feelings; and I say 'How very interesting!' out of sheer good manners when they talk to me respectively about their cooks if they are women, and their digestions if they are men; but all the time I am inwardly lifting up my eyes, and patting myself on the back, and thanking heaven that I am not as they are, and generally out-Phariseeing the veriest Pharisee that ever breathed."

"It is wonderful how the word 'cook' will wake into animation the most phlegmatic of women!"

"If they are married," added Elisabeth; "not unless. I often think when I go up into the drawing-room at a dinner-party, I will just say the word 'cook' to find out which of the women are married and which single. I'm certain I should know at once, from the expression the magic word brought to their respective faces. It is only when you have a husband that you regard the cook as the ruling power in life for good or evil."

There was a pause while the footman brought in tea and Elisabeth poured it out; then Farquhar said suddenly—

"I feel a different man from the one that rang at your door-bell some twenty minutes ago. The worldliness has slipped from me like a cast-off shell; now I experience a democratic indifference to my Lady Silverhampton, and a brotherly affection for Mr. Edgar Ford. And this is all your doing!"

"I don't see how that can be," laughed Elisabeth; "seeing that Lady Silverhampton is a friend of mine, and I have never heard of Mr. Edgar Ford."

"But it is; it is your own unconscious influence upon me. Miss Farrington, you don't know what you have been and what you are to me! It is only since I knew you that I have realized how little all outer things really matter, and how much inner ones do; and how it is a question of no moment who a man is, compared with what a man is. And you will go on teaching me, won't you, and letting me sit at your feet, until the man in me is always what now the artist in me is sometimes?"

"I shall like to help you if I can; I am always longing to help people, and yet so few people ever seem to want my help." And Elisabeth's eyes grew sad.

"I want it—more than I want anything in the world," replied Cecil; and he really meant it, for the artist in him was uppermost just then.

"Then you shall have it."

"Thank you—thank you more than I can ever say."

After a moment's silence Elisabeth asked—

"Are you going to Lady Silverhampton's picnic on the river to-morrow?"

"Yes; I accepted because I thought I should be sure to meet you," replied Cecil, who would have accepted the invitation of a countess if it had been to meet his bitterest foe.

"Then your forethought will be rewarded, for I am going, too," Elisabeth said.

And then other callers were shown in, and the conversation was brought to an abrupt conclusion; but it left behind it a pleasant taste in the minds of both the principals.

## ON THE RIVER

For many a frivolous, festive year  
I followed the path that I felt I must;  
I failed to discover the road was drear,  
And rather than otherwise liked the dust.  
It led through a land that I knew of old,  
Frequented by friendly, familiar folk,  
Who bowed before Mammon, and heaped up gold,  
And lived like their neighbours, and loved their  
joke.

It was a lovely summer's day when Lady Silverhampton collected her forces at Paddington, conveyed them by rail as far as Reading, and then transported them from the train to her steam-launch on the river. The party consisted of Lady Silverhampton herself, Lord and Lady Robert Thistletown, Lord Stonebridge, Sir Wilfred Madderley (President of the Royal Academy), Cecil Farquhar, and Elisabeth.

"I'm afraid you'll be frightfully crowded," said the hostess, as they packed themselves into the dainty little launch; "but it can't be helped. I tried to charter a P. and O. steamer for the day; but they were all engaged, like cabs on the night of a county ball, don't you know? And then I tried to leave somebody out so as to make the party smaller, but there wasn't one of you that could have been spared, except Silverhampton; so I left him at home, and decided to let the rest of you be squeezed yet happy."

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"How dear of you!" exclaimed Lord Robert; "and I'll repay your kindness by writing a book called *How to be Happy though Squeezed*."

"The word *though* appears redundant in that connection," Sir Wilfred Madderley remarked.

"Ah! that's because you aren't what is called 'a lady's man,'" Lord Robert sighed. "I always was, especially before my unfortunate—oh! I beg your pardon, Violet, I forgot you were here; I mean, of course, my fortunate—marriage. I was always the sort of man that makes girls timidly clinging when they are sitting on a sofa beside you, and short-sighted when you are playing their accompaniments for them. I remember once a girl sat so awfully close to me on a sofa in mid-drawing-room, that I felt there wasn't really room for both of us; so—like the true hero that I am—I shouted 'Save the women and children,' and flung myself upon the tender mercies of the carpet, till I finally struggled to the fireplace."

"How silly you are, Bobby!" exclaimed his wife.

"Yes, darling; I know. I've always known it; but the world didn't find it out till I married you. Till then I was in hopes that the secret would die with me; but after that it was fruitless to attempt to conceal the fact any longer."

"We're all going to be silly to-day," said the hostess; "that's part of the treat."

"It won't be much of a treat to some of us," Lord Robert retorted. "I remember when I was a little chap going to have tea at the Mershire's; and when I wanted to gather some of their most ripping orchids, Lady M. said I might go into the garden and pick mignonette instead. 'Thank you,' I replied in my most dignified manner, 'I can pick mignonette at home; that's no change to me!' Now, that's the way with everything; it's no change to some people to pick mignonette."

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"Or to some to pick orchids," added Lord Stonebridge.

"Or to some to pick oakum." And Lord Bobby sighed again.

"Even Elisabeth isn't going to be clever to-day," continued Lady Silverhampton. "She promised me she wouldn't; didn't you, Elisabeth?"

Every one looked admiringly at the subject of this remark. Elisabeth Farrington was the fashion just then.

"She couldn't help being clever, however hard she tried," said the President.

"Couldn't I, though? Just you wait and see."

"If you succeed in not saying one clever thing during the whole of this picnic affair," Lord Bobby exclaimed, "I'll give you my photograph as a reward. I've got a new one, taken sideways, which is perfectly sweet. It has a profile like a Greek god—those really fine and antique statues, don't you know? whose noses have been wiped out by the ages. The British Museum teems with them, poor devils!"

"Thank you," said Elisabeth. "I shall prize it as an incontrovertible testimony to the fact that neither my tongue nor your nose are as sharp as tradition reports them to be."

Lord Bobby shook his finger warningly. "Be careful, be careful, or you'll never get that photograph. Remember that every word you say will be used against you, as the police are always warning me."

"I'm a little tired to-day," Lady Silverhampton said. "I was taken in to dinner by an intelligent man last night."

"Then how came he to do it?" Lord Robert wondered.

"Don't be rude, Bobby: it doesn't suit your style; and, besides, how could he help it?"

"Well enough. Whenever I go out to dinner I always say in an aside to my host, 'Not Lady Silverhampton; anything but that.' And the consequence is I never do go in to dinner with you. It isn't disagreeableness on my part; if I could I'd do it for your sake, and put my own inclination on one side; but I simply can't bear the intellectual strain. It's a marvel to me how poor Silverhampton stands it as well as he does."

"He is never exposed to it. You don't suppose I waste my own jokes on my own husband, do you? They are far too good for home consumption, like fish at the seaside. When fish has been up to London and returned, it is then sold at the place where it was caught. And that's the way with my jokes; when they have been all round London and come home to roost, I serve them up to Silverhampton as quite fresh."

"And he believes in their freshness? How sweet and confiding of him!"

"He never listens to them, so it is all the same to him whether they're fresh or not. That is why I confide so absolutely in Silverhampton; he never listens to a word I say, and never has done."

Lord Stonebridge amended this remark. "Except when you accepted him."

"Certainly not; because, as a matter of fact, I refused him; but he never listened, and so he married me. It is so restful to have a husband who never attends to what you say! It must be dreadfully wearing to have one who does, because then you'd never be able to tell him the truth. And the great charm of your having a home of your own appears to be that it is the one place where you can speak the truth."

Lord Bobby clapped his hands. "Whatever lies disturb the street, there must be truth at home," he ejaculated.

"Wiser not, even there," murmured Sir Wilfred Madderley, under his breath.

"But you have all interrupted me, and haven't listened to what I was telling you about my intelligent man; and if you eat my food you must listen to my stones—it's only fair."

"But if even your own husband doesn't think it necessary to listen to them," Lord Bobby objected, "why should we, who have never desired to be anything more than sisters to you?"

"Because he doesn't eat my food—I eat his; that makes all the difference, don't you see?"

"Then do you listen to his stories?"

"To every one of them every time they are told; and I know to an inch the exact place where to laugh. But I'm going on about my man. He was one of those instructive boring people, who will tell you the reason of things; and he explained to me that soldiers wear khaki and polar bears white, because if you are dressed in the same colour as the place where you are, it looks as if you weren't there. And it has since occurred to me that I should be a much wiser and happier woman if I always dressed

myself in the same colour as my drawing-room furniture. Then nobody would be able to find me even in my own house. Don't you think it is rather a neat idea?" And her ladyship looked round for the applause which she had learned to expect as her right.

"You are a marvellous woman!" cried Lord Stonebridge, while the others murmured their approval.

"I need never say 'Not at home'; callers would just come in and look round the drawing-room and go out again, without ever seeing that I was there at all. It really would be sweet!"

"It seems to me to be a theory which might be adapted with benefit to all sorts and conditions of men," said Elisabeth; "I think I shall take out a patent for designing invisible costumes for every possible occasion. I feel I could do it, and do it well."

"It is adopted to a great extent even now," Sir Wilfred remarked; "I believe that our generals wear scarlet so that they may not always be distinguishable from the red-tape of the War Office."

"And one must not forget," added Lord Bobby thoughtfully, "that the benches of the House of Commons are green."

"Now in church, of course, it would be just the other way," said Lady Silverhampton; "I should line my pew with the same stuff as my Sunday gown, so as to look as if I was there when I wasn't."

Lord Stonebridge began to argue. "But that wouldn't be the other way; it would be the same thing."

"How stupid and accurate you are, Stonebridge! If our pew were lined with gray chiffon like my Sunday frock, it couldn't be the same as if my Sunday frock was made of crimson carpet like our pew. How can things that are exactly opposite be the same? You can't prove that they are, except by algebra; and as nobody here knows any algebra, you can't prove it at all."

"Yes; I can. If I say you are like a person, it is the same thing as saying that that person is like you."

"Not at all. If you said that I was like Connie Esdaile, I should embrace you before the assembled company; and if you said she was like me, she'd never forgive you as long as she lived. It is through reasoning out things in this way that men make such idiotic mistakes."

"Isn't it funny," Elisabeth remarked, "that if you reason a thing out you're always wrong, and if you never reason about it at all you're always right?"

"Ah! but that is because you are a genius," murmured Cecil Farquhar.

Lady Silverhampton contradicted him. "Not at all; it's because she is a woman."

"Well, I'd rather be a woman than a genius any day," said Elisabeth; "it takes less keeping up."

"You are both," said Cecil.

"And I'm neither," added Lord Bobby; "so what's the state of the odds?"

"Let's invent more invisible costumes," cried Lady Silverhampton; "they interest me. Suggest another one, Elisabeth."

"I should design a special one for lovers in the country. Don't you know how you are always coming upon lovers in country lanes, and how hard they try to look as if they weren't there, and how badly they succeed? I should dress them entirely in green, faintly relieved by brown; and then they'd look as if they were only part of the hedges and stiles."

"How the lovers of the future will bless you!" exclaimed Lord Bobby. "I only regret that my love-making days are over before your patent costumes come out. I remember Sir Richard Esdaile once coming upon Violet and me when we were spooning in the shrubbery at Esdaile Court, and we tried in vain to efface ourselves and become as part of the scenery. You see, it is so difficult to look exactly like two laurel bushes, when one of you is dressed in pink muslin and the other in white flannel."

Lady Robert blushed becomingly. "Oh, Bobby, it wasn't pink muslin that day; it was blue cambric."

"That doesn't matter. There are as many laurel bushes made out of pink muslin as out of blue cambric, when you come to that. The difficulty of identifying one's self with one's environment (that's the correct expression, my dear) would be the same in either costume; but Miss Farrington is now going, once for all, to remove that difficulty."

"I came upon two young people in a lane not long ago," said Elisabeth, "and the minute they saw me they began to walk in the ditches, one on one side of the road and one on the other. Now if only they had worn my costumes, such a damp and uncomfortable mode of going about the country would have been unnecessary; besides, it was absurd in any case. If you were walking with your mother-in-law you wouldn't walk as far apart as that; you wouldn't be able to hear a word she said."

"Ah! my dear young friend, that wouldn't matter," Lord Bobby interposed, "nor in any way interfere with the pleasure of the walk. Really nice men never make a fuss about little things like that. If only their mothers-in-law are kind enough to go out walking with them, they don't a bit mind how far off they walk. It is in questions such as this that men are really so much more unselfish than women; because the mothers-in-law do mind—they like us to be near enough to hear what they say."

"Green frocks would be very nice for the girls, especially if they were fair," said Lady Robert thoughtfully; "but I think the men would look rather queer in green, don't you? As if they were actors."

"I'm afraid they would look a bit dissipated," Elisabeth assented; "like almonds-and-raisins by daylight. By the way, I know nothing that looks more dissipated than almonds-and-raisins by daylight."

"Except, perhaps, one coffee-cup in the drawing-room the morning after a dinner party," suggested Farquhar.

Elisabeth demurred. "No; the coffee-cup is sad rather than sinful. It is as much part and parcel of a bygone time, as the Coliseum or the ruins of Pompeii; and the respectability of the survival of the fittest is its own. But almonds-and-raisins are different; to a certain class of society they represent the embodiment of refinement and luxury and self-indulgence."

Sir Wilfred Madderley laughed softly to himself. "I know exactly what you mean."

"Well, I don't agree with Miss Farrington," Lord Bobby argued; "to my mind almonds-and-raisins are an emblem of respectability and moral worth, like chiffonniers and family albums and British matrons. No really bad man would feel at home with almonds-and-raisins, I'm certain; but I'd appoint as my trustee any man who could really enjoy them on a Sunday afternoon. Now take Kesterton, for instance; he's the type of man who would really appreciate them. My impression is that when his life comes to be written, it will be found that he took almonds-and-raisins in secret, as some men take absinthe and others opium."

"It is scandalous to reveal the secrets of the great in this manner," said Elisabeth, "and to lower our ideals of them!"

"Forgive me; but still you must always have faintly suspected Kesterton of respectability, even when you admired him most. All great men have their weaknesses; mine is melancholy and Lord K.'s respectability, and Shakespeare's was something quite as bad, but I can't recall just now what it was."

"And what is Lady K.'s?" asked the hostess.

"Belief in Kesterton, of course, which she carries to the verge of credulity, not to say superstition. Would you credit it? When he was at the Exchequer she believed in his Budgets; and when he was at the War Office she believed in his Intelligence Department; and now he is in the Lords she believes in his pedigree, culled fresh from the Herald's Office. Can faith go further?"

"A perfect woman nobly planned," murmured Elisabeth.

"Precisely," continued Bobby,

"To rule the man who rules the land,  
But yet a spirit still, and damp  
With something from a spirit-lamp—

or however the thing goes. I don't always quote quite accurately, you will perceive! I generally improve."

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"I'm not sure that Lady Kesterton does believe in the pedigree," and Elisabeth looked wise; "because she once went out of her way to assure me that she did."

Lord Bobby groaned. "I beseech you to be careful, Miss Farrington; you'll never get that photograph if you keep forgetting yourself like this!"

Elisabeth continued—

"If I were a man I should belong to the Herald's Office. It would be such fun to be called a 'Red Bonnet' or a 'Green Griffin,' or some other nice fairy-tale-ish name; and to make it one's business to unite divided families, and to restore to deserving persons their long-lost great-great-grandparents. Think of the unselfish joy one would feel in saying to a worthy grocer, 'Here is your great-great-grandmother; take her and be happy!' Or to a successful milliner, 'I have found your mislaid grandfather; be a mother to him for the rest of your life!' It would give one the most delicious, fairy-godmotherly sort of satisfaction!"

"It would," Sir Wilfred agreed. "One would feel one's self a philanthropist of the finest water."

"Thinking about almonds-and-raisins has made me feel hungry," exclaimed Lady Silverhampton. "Let us have lunch! And while the servants are laying the table, we had better get out of the boat and have a stroll. It would be more amusing."

So the party wandered about for a while in couples through fields bespangled with buttercups; and it happened—not unnaturally—that Cecil and Elisabeth found themselves together.

"You are very quiet to-day," she said; "how is that? You are generally such a chatty person, but to-day you out-silence the Sphinx."

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"You know the reason."

"No; I don't. To my mind there is no reason on earth strong enough to account for voluntary silence. So tell me."

"I am silent because I want to talk to you; and if I can't do that, I don't want to talk at all. But among all these grand people you seem so far away from me. Yesterday we were such close friends; but to-day I stretch out groping hands, and try in vain to touch you. Do you never dream that you seek for people for a long time and find them at last; and then, when you find them, you can not get near to them? Well, I feel just like that to-day with you."

Elisabeth was silent for a moment; her thoughts were far away from Cecil. "Yes, I know that dream well," she said slowly, "I have often had it; but I never knew that anybody had ever had it except me." And suddenly there came over her the memory of how, long years ago, she used to dream that dream nearly every night. It was at the time when she was first estranged from Christopher, and when the wound of his apparent indifference to her was still fresh. Over and over again she used to dream that she and Christopher were once more the friends that they had been, but with an added tenderness that their actual intercourse had never known. Which of us has not experienced that strange dream-tenderness—often for the most unlikely people—which hangs about us for days after the dream has vanished, and invests the objects of it with an interest which their living presence never aroused? In that old dream of Elisabeth's her affection for Christopher was so great that when he went away she followed after him, and sought him for a long time in vain; and when at last she found him he was no longer the same Christopher that he used to be, but there was an impassable barrier between them which she fruitlessly struggled to break through. The agony of the fruitless struggle always awakened her, so that she never knew what the end of the dream was going to be.

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It was years since Elisabeth had dreamed this dream—years since she had even remembered it—but Cecil's remark brought it all back to her, as the scent of certain

flowers brings back the memory of half-forgotten summer days; and once again she felt herself drawn to him by that bond of similarity which was so strong between them, and which is the most powerfully attractive force in the world—except, perhaps, the attractive force of contrast. It is the people who are the most like, and the most unlike, ourselves, that we love the best; to the others we are more or less indifferent.

"I think you are the most sympathetic person I ever met," she added. "You have what the Psalmist would call 'an understanding heart.'"

"I think it is only you whom I understand, Miss Farrington; and that only because you and I are so much alike."

"I should have thought you would have understood everybody, you have such quick perceptions and such keen sympathies." Elisabeth, for all her cleverness, had yet to learn to differentiate between the understanding heart and the understanding head. There is but little real similarity between the physician who makes an accurate diagnosis of one's condition, and the friend who suffers from the identical disease.

"No; I don't understand everybody. I don't understand all these fine people whom we are with to-day, for instance. They seem to me so utterly worldly and frivolous and irresponsible, that I haven't patience with them. I daresay they look down upon me for not having blood, and I know I look down upon them for not having brains."

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Elisabeth's eyes twinkled in spite of herself. She remembered how completely Cecil had been out of it in the conversation on the launch; and she wondered whether the King of Nineveh had ever invited Jonah to the state banquets. She inclined to the belief that he had not.

"But they have brains," was all she said.

Cecil was undeniably cross. "They talk a lot of nonsense," he retorted pettishly.

"Exactly. People without brains never talk nonsense; that is just where the difference comes in. If a man talks clever nonsense to me, I know that man isn't a fool; it is a sure test."

"There is nonsense and nonsense."

"And there are fools and fools." Elisabeth spoke severely; she was always merciless upon anything in the shape of humbug or snobbery. Maria Farrington's training had not been thrown away.

"I despise mere frivolity," said Cecil loftily.

"My dear Mr. Farquhar, there is a time for everything; and if you think that a lunch-party on the river in the middle of the season is a suitable occasion for discussing Lord Stonebridge's pecuniary difficulties, or solving Lady Silverhampton's religious doubts, I can only say that I don't." Elisabeth was irritated; she knew that Cecil was annoyed with her friends not because they could talk smart nonsense, but because he could not.

"Still, you can not deny that the upper classes are frivolous," Cecil persisted.

"But I do deny it. I don't think that they are a bit more frivolous than any other class, but I think they are a good deal more plucky. Each class has its own particular virtue, and the distinguishing one of the aristocracy seems to me to be pluck; therefore they make light of things which other classes of society would take seriously. It isn't that they don't feel their own sorrows and sicknesses, but they won't allow other people to feel them; which is, after all, only a form of good manners."

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But Cecil was still rather sulky. "I belong to the middle class and I am proud of it."

"So do I; but identifying one's self with one class doesn't consist in abusing all the others, any more than identifying one's self with one church consists in abusing all the others—though some people seem to think it does."

"These grand people may entertain you and be pleasant to you in their way, I don't deny; but they don't regard you as one of themselves unless you are one," persisted Cecil, with all the bitterness of a small nature.

Elisabeth smiled with all the sweetness of a large one. "And why should they? Sir

Wilfred and you and I are pleasant enough to them in our own way, but we don't regard any of them as one of ourselves unless he is one. They don't show it, and we don't show it: we are all too well-mannered; but we can not help knowing that they are not artists any more than they can help knowing that we are not aristocrats. Being conscious that certain people lack certain qualities which one happens to possess, is not the same thing as despising those people; and I always think it as absurd as it is customary to describe one's consciousness of one's own qualifications as self-respect, and other people's consciousness of theirs as pride and vanity."

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"Then aren't you ever afraid of being looked down upon?" asked Cecil, to whom any sense of social inferiority was as gall and wormwood.

Elisabeth gazed at him in amazement. "Good gracious, no! Such an idea never entered into my head. I don't look down upon other people for lacking my special gifts, so why should they look down upon me for lacking theirs? Of course they would look down upon me and make fun of me if I pretended to be one of them, and I should richly deserve it; just as we look down upon and make fun of Philistines who cover their walls with paper fans and then pretend that they are artists. Pretence is always vulgar and always ridiculous; but I know of nothing else that is either."

"How splendid you are!" exclaimed Cecil, to whose artistic sense fineness of any kind always appealed, even if it was too high for him to attain to it. "Therefore you will not despise me for being so inferior to you—you will only help me to grow more like you, won't you?"

And because Cecil possessed the indefinable gift which the world calls charm, Elisabeth straightway overlooked his shortcomings, and set herself to assist him in correcting them. Perhaps there are few things in life more unfair than the certain triumph of these individuals who have the knack of gaining the affection of their fellows; or more pathetic than the ultimate failure of those who lack this special attribute. The race may not be to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; but both race and battle are, nine times out of ten, to the man or the woman who has mastered the art of first compelling devotion and then retaining it. It was the possession of this gift on the part of King David, that made men go in jeopardy of their lives in order to satisfy his slightest whim; and it was because the prophet Elijah was a solitary soul, commanding the fear rather than the love of men, that after his great triumph he fled into the wilderness and requested for himself that he might die. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that to this lonely prophet it was granted to see visions of angels and to hear the still small Voice; and that, therefore, there are abundant compensations for those men and women who have not the knack of hearing and speaking the glib interchanges of affection, current among their more attractive fellows. There is infinite pathos in the thought of these solitary souls, yearning to hear and to speak words of loving greeting, and yet shut out—by some accident of mind or manner—from doing either the one or the other; but when their turn comes to see visions of angels and to hear the still small Voice, men need not pity them overmuch. When once we have seen Him as He is, it will matter but little to us whether we stood alone upon the mountain in the wind and the earthquake and the fire, while the Lord passed by; or whether He drew near and walked with us as we trod the busy ways of life, and was known of us, as we sat at meat, in breaking of bread.

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As Elisabeth looked at him with eyes full of sympathy, Cecil continued—

"I have had such a hard life, with no one to care for me; and the hardness of my lot has marred my character, and—through that—my art."

"Tell me about your life," Elisabeth said softly. "I seem to know so little of you and yet to know you so well."

"You shall read what back-numbers I have, but most of them have been lost, so that I have not read them myself. I really don't know who I am, as my father died when I was a baby, and my poor mother followed him in a few months, never having recovered from the shock of his death. I was born in Australia, at Broken Hill, and was an only child. As far as I can make out, my parents had no relations; or, if they had, they had quarrelled with them all. They were very poor; and when they died, leaving one wretched little brat behind them, some kind friends adopted the poor beggar and carried him off to a sheep-farm, where they brought him up among their own children."

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"Poor little lonely boy!"

"I was lonely—more lonely than you can imagine; for, kind as they were to me, I was naturally not as dear to them as their own children. I was an outsider; I have always been an outsider; so, perhaps, there is some excuse for that intense soreness on my part which you so much deprecate whenever this fact is once more brought home to me."

"I am sorry that I was so hard on you," said Elisabeth, in a very penitent voice; "but it is one of my worst faults that I am always being too hard on people. Will you forgive me?"

"Of course I will." And Elisabeth—also possessing charm—earned forgiveness as quickly as she had accorded it.

"Please tell me more," she pleaded.

"The other children were such a loud, noisy, happy-go-lucky pack, that they completely overpowered a delicate, sensitive boy. Moreover, I detested the life there—the roughness and unrefinement of it all." And Cecil's eyes filled with tears at the mere remembrance of his childish miseries.

"Did you stay with them till you grew up?"

"Yes; I was educated—after a fashion—with their own sons. But at last a red-letter day dawned for me. An English artist came to stay at the sheep-farm, and discovered that I also was among the prophets. He was a bachelor, and he took an uncommon fancy to me; it ended in his adopting me and bringing me to England, and making of me an artist like himself."

"Another point of similarity between us!" Elisabeth cried; "my parents died when I was a baby, and I also was adopted."

"I am so glad; all the sting seems to be taken out of things if I feel I share them with you."

"Then where is your adopted father now?"

"He died when I was five-and-twenty, Miss Farringdon; and left me barely enough to keep me from abject poverty, should I not be able to make a living by my brush."

"And you have never learned anything more about your parents?"

"Never; and now I expect I never shall. The friends who brought me up told me that they believed my father came from England, and had been connected with some business over here; but what the business was they did not know, nor why he left it. It is almost impossible to find out anything more, after this long lapse of time; it is over thirty years now since my parents died. And, besides, I very much doubt whether Farquhar was their real name at all."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because the name was carefully erased from the few possessions my poor father left behind him. So now I have let the matter drop," added Cecil, with a bitter laugh, "as it is sometimes a mistake to look up back-numbers in the colonies; they are not invariably pleasant reading."

Here conversation was interrupted by Lady Silverhampton's voice calling her friends to lunch; and Cecil and Elisabeth had to join the others.

"If any of you are tired of life," said her ladyship, as they sat down, "I wish you'd try some of this lobster mayonnaise that my new cook has made, and report on it. To me it looks the most promising prescription for death by torture."

"O bid me die, and I will dare  
E'en mayonnaise for thee,"

exclaimed Lord Bobby, manfully helping himself.

And then the talk flowed on as pleasantly and easily as the river, until it was time to land again and return to town. But for the rest of the day, and for many a day afterward, a certain uncomfortable suspicion haunted Elisabeth, which she could not

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## CHAPTER XV

### LITTLE WILLIE

He that beginneth may not end,  
And he that breaketh can not mend.

The summer which brought fame to Elisabeth, brought something better than fame to Willie Tremaine. All through the winter the child had grown visibly feebler and frailer, and the warmer weather seemed to bring additional weakness rather than strength. In vain did Alan try to persuade himself that Willie was no worse this year than he had been other years, and that he soon would be all right again. As a matter of fact, he soon was all right again; but not in the way which his father meant.

Caleb Bateson's wisdom had been justified. Through his passionate love for little Willie, Alan had drawn near to the kingdom of God; not as yet to the extent of formulating any specific creed or attaching himself to any special church—that was to come later; but he had learned, by the mystery of his own fatherhood, to stretch out groping hands toward the great Fatherhood that had called him into being; and by his own love for his suffering child to know something of the Love that passeth knowledge. Therefore Alan Tremaine was a better and wiser man than he had been in times past. A strong friendship had gradually grown up between himself and Christopher Thornley; and it was a friendship which was good for both of them. Though Christopher never talked about his religious beliefs, he lived them; and it is living epistles such as this which are best known and read of all thoughtful men, and which—far more than all the books and sermons ever written—are gradually converting the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Alan would have refuted—to his own satisfaction, if not to Christopher's—any arguments which the latter might have brought forward in favour of Christianity; but he could not refute the evidence of a life which could never have been lived but for that Other Life lived in Judæa nineteen centuries ago. Perhaps his friendship with Christopher did as much for Alan as his love for Willie in opening his eyes to the hidden things of God.

The intercourse with the Tremaines was, on the other hand, of great advantage to Christopher, as it afforded him the opportunity of meeting and mixing with men as clever and as cultivated as himself, which is not always easy for a lonely man in a provincial town who devotes his loneliness to intellectual pursuits. Christopher was fast becoming one of the most influential men in Mershire; and his able management of the Osierfield had raised those works to a greater height of prosperity than they had ever attained before, even in the days of William and John Farrington.

But now the shadows were darkening around Alan Tremaine, as day by day Willie gradually faded away. Felicia, too, at last awoke to the real state of the case, and, in her way, was almost as anxious as her husband.

During the spring-time, as Willie's life grew shorter with the lengthening days, the child's chiefest delight lay in visits from Christopher. For Elisabeth's sake Christopher had always felt an interest in little Willie. Had not her dear hands fondled the child, before they were too busy to do anything but weave spells to charm the whole world? And had not her warm heart enfolded him, before her success and her fame had chilled its fires? For the sake of the Elisabeth that used to be, Christopher would always be a friend to Willie; and he did not find it hard to love the child for his own sake, since Christopher had great powers of loving, and but little to expend them upon.

As Willie continually asked for Elisabeth, Felicia wrote and told her so; and the moment she found she was wanted, Elisabeth came down to the Willows for a week—though her fame and the London season were alike at their height—and went every day to see Willie at the Moat House. He loved to have her with him, because she

talked to him about things that his parents never mentioned to him; and as these things were drawing nearer to Willie day by day, his interest in them unconsciously increased. He and she had long talks together about the country on the other side of the hills, and what delightful times they would have when they reached it: how Willie would be able to walk as much as he liked, and Elisabeth would be able to love as much as she wanted, and life generally would turn out to be a success—a thing which it so rarely does on this side of the hills.

Christopher, as a rule, kept away from the Moat House when Elisabeth was there; he thought she did not wish to see him, and he was not the type of man to go where he imagined he was not wanted; but one afternoon they met there by accident, and Christopher inwardly blessed the Fate which made him do the very thing he had so studiously refrained from doing. He had been sitting with Tremaine, and she with Felicia and Willie; and they met in the hall on their way out.

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"Are you going my way?" asked Elisabeth graciously, when they had shaken hands. It was dull at Sedgehill after London, and the old flirting spirit woke up in her and made her want to flirt with Christopher again, in spite of all that had happened. With the born flirt—as with all born players of games—the game itself is of more importance than the personality of the other players; which sometimes leads to unfortunate mistakes on the part of those players who do not rightly understand the rules of the game.

"Yes, Miss Farrington, I am," said Christopher, who would have been going Elisabeth's way had that way led him straight to ruin. With him the personality of the player—in this case, at least—mattered infinitely more than any game she might choose to play. As long as he was talking to Elisabeth, he did not care a straw what they were talking about; which showed that he really was culpably indifferent to—if not absolutely ignorant of—the rules of the game.

"Then we might as well walk together." And Elisabeth drew on her long Suède gloves and leisurely opened her parasol, as they strolled down the drive after bidding farewell to the Tremaines.

Christopher was silent from excess of happiness. It was so wonderful to be walking by Elisabeth's side again, and listening to her voice, and watching the lights and shadows in those gray eyes of hers which sometimes were so nearly blue. But Elisabeth did not understand his silence; she translated it, as she would have translated silence on her own part, into either boredom or ill-temper, and she resented it accordingly.

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"You are very quiet this afternoon. Aren't you going to talk to me?" she said; and Christopher's quick ear caught the sound of the irritation in her voice, though he could not for the life of him imagine what he had done to bring it there; but it served to silence him still further.

"Yes—yes, of course I am," he said lamely; "what shall we talk about? I am afraid there is nothing interesting to tell you about the Osierfield, things are going on so regularly there, and so well."

How exactly like Christopher to begin to talk about business when she had given him the chance to talk about more interesting subjects—herself, for instance, Elisabeth thought; but he never had a mind above sordid details! She did not, of course, know that at that identical moment he was wondering whether her eyes were darker than they used to be, or whether he had forgotten their exact shade; he could hardly have forgotten their colour, he decided, as there had never been a day when he had not remembered them since he saw them last; so they must actually be growing darker.

"I'm glad of that," said Elisabeth coldly, in her most fine-ladylike manner.

"It was distinctly kind of you to find time to run down here, in the midst of your London life, to see Willie! He fretted after you sadly, and I am afraid the poor little fellow is not long for this world." And Christopher sighed.

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Elisabeth noted the sigh and approved of it. It was a comfort to find that the man had feelings of any sort, she said to herself, even though only for a child; that was better than being entirely immersed in self-interest and business affairs.

So they talked about Willie for a time, and the conversation ran more smoothly—

almost pleasantly.

Then they talked about books; and Elisabeth—who had grown into the habit of thinking that nobody outside London knew anything—was surprised to find that Christopher had read considerably more books than she had read, and had understood them far more thoroughly. But this part of the conversation was inclined to be stormy; since Christopher as a rule disliked the books that Elisabeth liked, and this she persisted in regarding as tantamount to disliking herself.

Whereupon she became defiant, and told stories of her life in London of which she knew Christopher would disapprove. There was nothing in the facts that he could possibly disapprove of, so she coloured them up until there was; and then, when she had succeeded in securing his disapproval, she was furious with him on account of it. Which was manifestly unfair, as Christopher in no way showed the regret which he could not refrain from experiencing, as he listened to Elisabeth making herself out so much more frivolous and heartless than she really was.

"This is the first time I have had an opportunity of congratulating you on your success," he said to her at last; "we are all very proud of it at Sedgehill; but, believe me, there is no one who rejoices in it a tithe as much as I do, if you will allow me to say so."

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Elisabeth was slightly mollified. She had been trying all the time, as she was so fond of trying years ago, to divert the conversation into more personal channels; and Christopher had been equally desirous of keeping it out of the same. But this sounded encouraging.

"Thank you so much," she answered; "it is very nice of you all to be pleased with me! I always adored being admired and praised, if you remember."

Christopher remembered well enough; but he was not going to tell this crushing fine lady how well he remembered. If he had not exposed his heart for Elisabeth to peck at in the old days, he certainly was not going to expose it now; then she would only have been scientifically interested—now she would probably be disdainfully amused.

"I suppose you saw my picture in this year's Academy," Elisabeth added.

"Saw it? I should think I did. I went up to town on purpose to see it, as I always do when you have pictures on view at any of the shows."

"And what did you think of it?"

Christopher was silent for a moment; then he said—

"Do you want me to say pretty things to you or to tell you the truth?"

"Why, the truth, of course," replied Elisabeth, who considered that the two things were synonymous—or at any rate ought to be.

"And you won't be angry with me, or think me impertinent?"

"Of course not," answered Elisabeth, who most certainly would; and Christopher—not having yet learned wisdom—believed her.

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"I thought it was a distinctly powerful picture—a distinctly remarkable picture—and if any one but you had painted it, I should have been delighted with it; but somehow I felt that it was not quite up to your mark—that you could do, and will do, better work."

For a second Elisabeth was dumbfounded with amazement and indignation. How dare this one man dispute the verdict of London? Then she said—

"In what way do you think the work could have been done better?"

"That is just what I can't tell you; I wish I could; but I'm not an artist, unfortunately. It seems to me that there are other people (not many, I admit, but still some) who could have painted that picture; while you are capable of doing work which no one else in the world could possibly do. Naturally I want to see you do your best, and am not satisfied when you do anything less."

Elisabeth tossed her head. "You are very hard to please, Mr. Thornley."

"I know I am, where your work is concerned; but that is because I have formed such

a high ideal of your powers. If I admired you less, I should admire your work more, don't you see?"

But Elisabeth did not see. She possessed the true artist-spirit which craves for appreciation of its offspring more than for appreciation of itself—a feeling which perhaps no one but an artist or a mother really understands. Christopher, being neither, did not understand it in the least, and erroneously concluded that adoration of the creator absolves one from the necessity of admiration of the thing created.

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"I shall never do a better piece of work than that," Elisabeth retorted, being imbued with the creative delusion that the latest creation is of necessity the finest creation. No artist could work at all if he did not believe that the work he was doing—or had just done—was the best piece of work he had ever done or ever should do. This is because his work, however good, always falls short of the ideal which inspired it; and, while he is yet working, he can not disentangle the ideal from the reality. He must be at a little distance from his work until he can do this properly; and Elisabeth was as yet under the influence of that creative glamour which made her see her latest picture as it should be rather than as it was.

"Oh, yes, you will; you will fulfil my ideal of you yet. I cherish no doubts on that score."

"I can't think what you see wrong in my picture," said Elisabeth somewhat pettishly.

"I don't see anything wrong in it. Good gracious! I must have expressed myself badly if I conveyed such an impression to you as that, and you would indeed be justified in writing me down an ass. I think it is a wonderfully clever picture—so clever that nobody but you could ever paint a cleverer one."

"Well, I certainly couldn't. You must have formed an exaggerated estimate of my artistic powers."

"I think not! You can, and will, paint a distinctly better picture some day."

"In what way better?"

"Ah! there you have me. But I will try to tell you what I mean, though I speak as a fool; and if I say anything very egregious, you must let my ignorance be my excuse, and pardon the clumsy expression of my intentions because they are so well meant. It doesn't seem to me to be enough for anybody to do good work; they must go further, and do the best possible work in their power. Nothing but one's best is really worth the doing; the cult of the second-best is always a degrading form of worship. Even though one man's second-best be intrinsically superior to the best work of his fellows, he has nevertheless no right to offer it to the world. He is guilty of an injustice both to himself and the world in so doing."

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"I don't agree with you. This is an age of results; and the world's business is with the actual value of the thing done, rather than with the capabilities of the man who did it."

"You are right in calling this an age of results, Miss Farringdon; but that is the age's weakness and not its strength. The moment men begin to judge by results, they judge unrighteous judgment. They confound the great man with the successful man; the saint with the famous preacher; the poet with the writer of popular music-hall songs."

"Then you think that we should all do our best, and not bother ourselves too much as to results?"

"I go further than that; I think that the mere consideration of results incapacitates us from doing our best work at all."

"I don't agree with you," repeated Elisabeth haughtily. But, nevertheless, she did.

"I daresay I am wrong; but you asked me for my candid opinion and I gave it to you. It is a poor compliment to flatter people—far too poor ever to be paid by me to you; and in this case the simple truth is a far greater compliment than any flattery could be. You can imagine what a high estimate I have formed of your powers, when so great a picture as *The Pillar of Cloud* fails to satisfy me."

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The talk about her picture brought to Elisabeth's mind the remembrance of that other picture which had been almost as popular as hers; and, with it, the remembrance of the man who had painted it.

"I suppose you have heard nothing more about George Farrington's son," she remarked, with apparent irrelevance. "I wonder if he will ever turn up?"

"Oh! I hardly think it is likely now; I have quite given up all ideas of his doing so," replied Christopher cheerfully.

"But supposing he did?"

"In that case I am afraid he would be bound to enter into his kingdom. But I really don't think you need worry any longer over that unpleasant contingency, Miss Farrington; it is too late in the day; if he were going to appear upon the scene at all, he would have appeared before now, I feel certain."

"You really think so?"

"Most assuredly I do. Besides, it will not be long before the limit of time mentioned by your cousin is reached; and then a score of George Farrington's sons could not turn you out of your rights."

For a moment Elisabeth thought she would tell Christopher about her suspicions as to the identity of Cecil Farquhar. But it was as yet merely a suspicion, and she knew by experience how ruthlessly Christopher pursued the line of duty whenever that line was pointed out to him; so she decided to hold her peace (and her property) a little longer. But she also knew that the influence of Christopher was even yet so strong upon her, that, when the time came, she should do the right thing in spite of herself and in defiance of her own desires. And this knowledge, strange to say, irritated her still further against the innocent and unconscious Christopher.

The walk from the Moat House to Sedgemoor was a failure as far as the re-establishment of friendly relations between Christopher and Elisabeth was concerned, for it left her with the impression that he was less appreciative of her and more wrapped up in himself and his own opinions than ever; while it conveyed to his mind the idea that her success had only served to widen the gulf between them, and that she was more indifferent to and independent of his friendship than she had ever been before.

Elisabeth went back to London, and Christopher to his work again, and little Willie drew nearer and nearer to the country on the other side of the hills; until one day it happened that the gate which leads into that country was left open by the angels, and Willie slipped through it and became strong and well. His parents were left outside the gate, weeping, and at first they refused to be comforted; but after a time Alan learned the lesson which Willie had been sent to teach him, and saw plain.

"Dear," he said to his wife at last, "I've got to begin life over again so as to go the way that Willie went. The little chap made me promise to meet him in the country over the hills, as he called it; and I've never broken a promise to Willie and I never will. It will be difficult for us, I know; but God will help us."

Felicia looked at him with sad, despairing eyes. "There is no God," she said; "you have often told me so."

"I know I have; that was because I was such a blind fool. But now I know that there is a God, and that you and I must serve Him together."

"How can we serve a myth?" Felicia persisted.

"He is no myth, Felicia. I lied to you when I told you that He was."

And then Felicia laughed; the first time that she had laughed since Willie's death, and it was not a pleasant laugh to hear. "Do you think you can play pitch-and-toss with a woman's soul in that way? Well, you can't. When I met you I believed in God as firmly as any girl believed; but you laughed me out of my faith, and proved to me what a string of lies and folly it all was; and then I believed in you as firmly as before I had believed in God, and I knew that Christianity was a fable."

Alan's face grew very white. "Good heavens! Felicia, did I do this?"

"Of course you did, and you must take the consequences of your own handiwork; it is too late to undo it now. Don't try to comfort me, even if you can drug yourself, with fairy-tales about meeting Willie again. I shall never see my little child again in this life,

and there is no other."

"You are wrong; believe me, you are wrong." And Alan's brow was damp with the anguish of his soul.

"It is only what you taught me. But because you took my faith away from me, it doesn't follow that you can give it back to me again; it has gone forever."

"Oh, Felicia, Felicia, may God and you and Willie forgive me, for I can never forgive myself!"

"I can not forgive you, because I have nothing to forgive; you did me no wrong in opening my eyes. And God can not forgive you, because there never was a God; so you did Him no wrong. And Willie can not forgive you, because there is no Willie now; so you did him no wrong."

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"My dearest, it can not all have gone from you forever; it will come back to you, and you will believe as I do."

Felicia shook her head. "Never; it is too late. You have taken away my Lord, and I know not where you have laid Him; and, however long I live, I shall never find Him again."

And she went out of the room in the patience of a great despair, and left her husband alone with his misery.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### THIS SIDE OF THE HILLS

On this side of the hills, alas!  
Unrest our spirit fills;  
For gold, men give us stones and brass—  
For asphodels, rank weeds and grass—  
For jewels, bits of coloured glass—  
On this side of the hills.

The end of July was approaching, and the season was drawing to a close. Cecil Farquhar and Elisabeth had seen each other frequently since they first met at the Academy *soirée*, and had fallen into the habit of being much together; consequently the thought of parting was pleasant to neither of them.

"How shall I manage to live without you?" asked Cecil one day, as they were walking across the Park together. "I shall fall from my ideals when I am away from your influence, and again become the grovelling worlding that I was before I met you."

"But you mustn't do anything of the kind. I am not the keeper of your conscience."

"But you are, and you must be. I feel a good man and a strong one when I am with you, and as if all things were possible to me; and now that I have once found you, I can not and will not let you go."

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"You will have to let me go, Mr. Farquhar; for I go down to the Willows at the end of the month, and mean to stay there for some time. I have enjoyed my success immensely; but it has tired me rather, and made me want to rest and be stupid again."

"But I can not spare you," persisted Cecil; and there was real feeling in his voice. Elisabeth represented so much to him—wealth and power and the development of his higher nature; and although, had she been a poor woman, he would possibly never have cherished any intention of marrying her, his wish to do so was not entirely sordid. There are so few wishes in the hearts of any of us which are entirely sordid or entirely ideal; yet we find it so difficult to allow for this in judging one another.

"Don't you understand," Farquhar went on, "all that you have been to me: how you have awakened the best that is in me, and taught me to be ashamed of the worst? And do you think that I shall now be content to let you slip quietly out of my life, and to be the shallow, selfish, worldly wretch I was before the Academy *soirée*? Not I."

Elisabeth was silent. She could not understand herself, and this want of comprehension on her part annoyed and disappointed her. At last all her girlish dreams had come true; here was the fairy prince for whom she had waited for so long—a prince of the kingdom she loved above all others, the kingdom of art; and he came to her in the spirit in which she had always longed for him to come—the spirit of failure and of loneliness, begging her to make up to him for all that he had hitherto missed in life. Yet—to her surprise—his appeal found her cold and unresponsive, as if he were calling out for help to another woman and not to her.

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Cecil went on: "Elisabeth, won't you be my wife, and so make me into the true artist which, with you to help me, I feel I am capable of becoming; but of which, without you, I shall always fall short? You could do anything with me—you know you could; you could make me into a great artist and a good man, but without you I can be neither. Surely you will not give me up now! You have opened to me the door of a paradise of which I never dreamed before, and now don't shut it in my face."

"I don't want to shut it in your face," replied Elisabeth gently; "surely you know me better than that. But I feel that you are expecting more of me than I can ever fulfil, and that some day you will be sadly disappointed in me."

"No, no; I never shall. It is not in you to disappoint anybody, you are so strong and good and true. Tell me the truth: don't you feel that I am as clay in your hands, and that you can do anything with me that you choose?"

Elisabeth looked him full in the face with her clear gray eyes. "I feel that I could do anything with you if only I loved you enough; but I also feel that I don't love you, and that therefore I can do nothing with you at all. I believe with you that a strong woman can be the making of a man she loves; but she must love him first, or else all her strength will be of no avail."

Farquhar's face fell. "I thought you did love me. You always seemed so glad when I came and sorry when I left; and you enjoyed talking to me, and we understood each other, and were happy together. Can you deny that?"

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"No; it is all true. I never enjoyed talking with anybody more than with you; and I certainly never in my life met any one who understood my ways of looking at things as thoroughly as you do, nor any one who entered so completely into all my moods. As a friend you are most satisfactory to me, as a comrade most delightful; but I can not help thinking that love is something more than that."

"But it isn't," cried Cecil eagerly; "that is just where lots of women make such a mistake. They wait and wait for love all their lives; and find out too late that they passed him by years ago, without recognising him, but called him by some wrong name, such as friendship and the like."

"I wonder if you are right."

"I am sure that I am. Women who are at all romantic, have such exaggerated ideas as to what love really is. Like the leper of old, they ask for some great thing to work the wonderful miracle upon their lives; and so they miss the simple way which would lead them to happiness."

Elisabeth felt troubled and perplexed. "I enjoy your society," she said, "and I adore your genius, and I pity your loneliness, and I long to help your weakness. Is this love, do you think?"

"Yes, yes; I am certain of it."

"I thought it would be different," said Elisabeth sadly; "I thought that when it did come it would transform the whole world, just as religion does, and that all things would become new. I thought it would turn out to be the thing that we are longing for when the beauty of nature makes us feel sad with a longing we know not for what. I thought it would change life's dusty paths into golden pavements, and earth's commonest bramble-bush into a magic briar-rose."

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"And it hasn't?"

"No; everything is just the same as it was before I met you. As far as I can see, there is no livelier emerald twinkling in the grass of the Park than there ever is at the end of July, and no purer sapphire melting into the Serpentine."



Cecil laughed lightly. "You are as absurdly romantic as a school-girl! Surely people of our age ought to know better than still to believe in fairyland; but, as I have told you before, you are dreadfully young for your age in some things."

"I suppose I am. I still do believe in fairyland—at least I did until ten minutes ago."

"I assure you there is no such place."

"Not for anybody?"

"Not for anybody over twenty-one."

"I wish there was," said Elisabeth with a sigh. "I should have liked to believe it was there, even if I had never found it."

"Don't be silly, lady mine. You are so great and wise and clever that I can not bear to hear you say foolish things. And I want us to talk about how you are going to help me to be a great painter, and how we will sit together as gods, and create new worlds. There is nothing that I can not do with you to help me, Elisabeth. You must be good to me and hard upon me at the same time. You must never let me be content with anything short of my best, or willing to do second-rate work for the sake of money; you must keep the sacredness of art ever before my eyes, but you must also be very gentle to me when I am weary, and very tender to me when I am sad; you must encourage me when my spirit fails me, and comfort me when the world is harsh. All these things you can do, and you are the only woman who can. Promise me, Elisabeth, that you will."

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"I can not promise anything now. You must let me think it over for a time. I am so puzzled by it all. I thought that when the right man came and told a woman that he loved her, she would know at once that it was for him—and for him only—that she had been waiting all her life; and that she would never have another doubt upon the subject, but would feel convinced that it was settled for all time and eternity. And this is so different!"

Again Cecil laughed his light laugh. "I suppose girls sometimes feel like that when they are very young; but not women of your age, Elisabeth."

"Well, you must let me think about it. I can not make up my mind yet."

And for whole days and nights Elisabeth thought about it, and could come to no definite conclusion.

There was no doubt in her mind that she liked Cecil Farquhar infinitely better than she had liked any of the other men who had asked her to marry them; also that no one could possibly be more companionable to her than he was, or more sympathetic with and interested in her work—and this is no small thing to the man or woman who possesses the creative faculty. Then she was lonely in her greatness, and longed for companionship; and Cecil had touched her in her tenderest point by his constant appeals to her to help and comfort him. Nevertheless the fact remained that, though he interested her, he did not touch her heart; that remained a closed door to him. But supposing that her friends were right, and that she was too cold by nature ever to feel the ecstasies which transfigure life for some women, should she therefore shut herself out from ordinary domestic joys and interests? Because she was incapable of attaining to the ideal, must the commonplace pleasures of the real also be denied her? If the best was not for her, would it not be wise to accept the second-best, and extract as much happiness from it as possible? Moreover, she knew that Cecil was right when he said that she could make of him whatsoever she wished; and this was no slight temptation to a woman who loved power as much as Elisabeth loved it.

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There was also another consideration which had some weight with her; and that was the impression, gradually gaining strength in her mind, that Cecil Farquhar was George Farrington's son. She could take no steps in the way of proving this just then, as Christopher was away for his holiday somewhere in the Black Forest, and nothing could be done without him; but she intended, as soon as he returned, to tell him of her suspicion, and to set him to discover whether or not Cecil was indeed the lost heir. Although it never seriously occurred to Elisabeth to hold her peace upon this matter and so keep her fortune to herself, she was still human enough not altogether to despise a course of action which enabled her to be rich and righteous at the same time, and to go on with her old life at the Willows and her work among the people at the Osierfield, even after George Farrington's son had come into his own.

Although the balance of Elisabeth's judgment was upon the side of Cecil Farquhar and his suit, she could not altogether stifle—try as she might—her sense of disappointment at finding how grossly poets and such people had exaggerated the truth in their description of the feeling men call love. It was all so much less exalted and so much more commonplace than she had expected. She had long ago come to the conclusion—from comparisons between Christopher and the men who had wanted to marry her—that a man's friendship is a better thing than a man's love; but she had always clung to the belief that a woman's love would prove a better thing than a woman's friendship: yet now she herself was in love with Cecil—at least he said that she was, and she was inclined to agree with him—and she was bound to admit that, as an emotion, this fell far short of her old attachment to Cousin Anne or Christopher or even Felicia. But that was because now she was getting old, she supposed, and her heart had lost its early warmth and freshness; and she experienced a weary ache of regret that Cecil had not come across her path in those dear old days when she was still young enough to make a fairyland for herself, and to abide therein for ever.

"The things that come too late are almost as bad as the things that never come at all," she thought with a sigh; not knowing that there is no such word as "too late" in God's Vocabulary.

At the end of the week she had made up her mind to marry Cecil Farquhar. Women, after all, can not pick and choose what lives they shall lead; they can only take such goods as the gods choose to provide, and make the best of the same; and if they let the possible slip while they are waiting for the impossible, they have only themselves to blame that they extract no good at all out of life. So she wrote to Cecil, asking him to come and see her the following day; and then she sat down and wondered why women are allowed to see visions and to dream dreams, if the actual is to fall so far short of the imaginary. Brick walls and cobbled streets are all very well in their way; but they make but dreary dwelling-places for those who have promised themselves cities where the walls are of jasper and the pavements of gold. "If one is doomed to live always on this side of the hills, it is a waste of time to think too much about the life on the other side," Elisabeth reasoned with herself, "and I have wasted a lot of time in this way; but I can not help wondering why we are allowed to think such lovely thoughts, and to believe in such beautiful things, if our dreams are never to come true, but are only to spoil us for the realities of life. Now I must bury all my dear, silly, childish idols, as Jacob did; and I will not have any stone to mark the place, because I want to forget where it is."

Poor Elisabeth! The grave of what has been, may be kept green with tears; but the grave of what never could have been, is best forgotten. We may not hide away the dear old gnomes and pixies and fairies in consecrated ground—that is reserved for what has once existed, and so has the right to live again; but for what never existed we can find no sepulchre, for it came out of nothingness, and to nothingness must it return.

After Elisabeth had posted her letter to Cecil, and while she was still musing over the problem as to whether life's fulfilment must always fall short of its promise, the drawing-room door was thrown open and a visitor announced. Elisabeth was tired and depressed, and did not feel in the mood for keeping up her reputation for brilliancy; so it was with a sigh of weariness that she rose to receive Quenelda Carson, a struggling little artist whom she had known slightly for years. But her interest was immediately aroused when she saw that Quenelda's usually rosy face was white with anguish, and the girl's pretty eyes swollen with many tears.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Elisabeth, with that sound in her voice which made all weak things turn to her. "You are in trouble, and you must let me help you."

Quenelda broke out into bitter weeping. "Oh! give him back to me—give him back to me," she cried; "you can never love him as I do, you are too cold and proud and brilliant."

Elisabeth stood as if transfixed. "Whatever do you mean?"

"You have everything," Quenelda went on, in spite of the sobs which shook her slender frame; "you had money and position to begin with, and everybody thought well of you and admired you and made life easy for you. And then you came out of your world into ours, and carried away the prizes which we had been striving after for

years, and beat us on our own ground; but we weren't jealous of you—you know that we weren't; we were glad of your success, and proud of you, and we admired your genius as much as the outside world did, and never minded a bit that it was greater than ours. But even then you were not content—you must have everything, and leave us nothing, just to satisfy your pride. You are like the rich man who had everything, and yet took from the poor man his one ewe lamb; and I am sure that God—if there is a God—will punish you as He punished that rich man."

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Elisabeth turned rather pale; whatever had she done that any one dared to say such things to her as this? "I still don't understand you," she said.

"I never had anything nice in my life till I met him," the girl continued incoherently—"I had always been poor and pinched and wretched and second-rate; even my pictures were never first-rate, though I worked and worked all I knew to make them so. And then I met Cecil Farquhar, and I loved him, and everything became different, and I didn't mind being second-rate if only he would care for me. And he did; and I thought that I should always be as happy as I was then, and that nothing would ever be able to hurt me any more. Oh! I was so happy—so happy—and I was such a fool, I thought it would last forever! I worked hard and saved every penny that I could, and so did he; and we should have been married next year if you hadn't come and spoiled it all, and taken him away from me. And what is it to you now that you have got him? You are too proud and cold to love him, or anybody else, and he doesn't care for you a millionth part as much as he cares for me; yet just because you have money and fame he has left me for you. And I love him so—I love him so!" Here Quenelda's sobs choked her utterance, and her torrent of words was stopped by tears.

"Come and sit down beside me and tell me quietly what is the matter," said Elisabeth gently; "I can do nothing and understand nothing while you go on like this. But you are wrong in supposing that I took your lover from you purposely; I did not even know that he was a friend of yours. He ought to have told me."

"No, no; he couldn't tell you. Don't you see that the temptation was too strong for him? He cares so much for rank and money, and things like that, my poor Cecil! And all his life he has had to do without them. So when he met you, and realized that if he married you he would have all the things he wanted most in the world, he couldn't resist it. The fault was yours for tempting him, and letting him see that he could have you for the asking; you knew him well enough to see how weak he was, and what a hold worldly things had over him; and you ought to have allowed for this in dealing with him."

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A great wave of self-contempt swept over Elisabeth. She, who had prided herself upon the fact that no man was strong enough to win her love, to be accused of openly running after a man who did not care for her but only for her money! It was unendurable, and stung her to the quick! And yet, through all her indignation, she recognised the justice of her punishment. She had not done what Quenelda had reproached her for doing, it was true; but she had deliberately lowered her ideal: she had wearied of striving after the best, and had decided that the second-best should suffice her; and for this she was now being chastised. No men or women who wilfully turn away from the ideal which God has set before them, and make to themselves graven images of the things which they know to be unworthy, can escape the punishment which is sure, sooner or later, to follow their apostasy; and they do well to recognise this, ere they grow weary of waiting for the revelation from Sinai, and begin to build altars unto false gods. For now, as of old, the idols which they make are ground into powder, and strawed upon the water, and given them to drink; the cup has to be drained to the dregs, and it is exceeding bitter.

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"I still think he ought to have told me there was another woman," Elisabeth said.

"Not he. He knew well enough that your pride could not have endured the thought of another woman, and that that would have spoiled his chance with you forever. There always is another woman, you know; and you women, who are too proud to endure the thought of her, have to be deceived and blinded. And you have only yourselves to thank for it; if you were a little more human and a little more tender, there would be no necessity for deceiving you. Why, I should have loved him just the same if there had been a hundred other women, so he always told me the truth; but he lied to you, and it was your fault and not his that he was obliged to lie."

Elisabeth shuddered. It was to help such a man as this that she had been willing to sacrifice her youthful ideals and her girlish dreams. What a fool she had been!

"If you do not believe me, here is his letter," Quenelda went on; "I brought it on purpose for you to read, just to show you how little you are to him. If you had loved him as I love him, I would have let you keep him, because you could have given him so many of the things that he thinks most about. But you don't. You are one of the cold, hard women, who only care for people as long as they are good and do what you think they ought to do; Cecil never could do what anybody thought he ought to do for long, and then you would have despised him and grown tired of him. But I go on loving him just the same, whatever he does; and that's the sort of love that a man wants—at any rate, such a man as Cecil."

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Elisabeth held out her hand for the letter; she felt that speech was of no avail at such a crisis as this; and, as she read, every word burned itself into her soul, and hurt her pride to the quick.

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"DEAREST QUENELDA" (the letter ran, in the slightly affected handwriting which Elisabeth had learned to know so well, and to welcome with so much interest), "I have something to say to you which it cuts me to the heart to say, but which has to be said at all costs. We must break off our engagement at once; for the terrible truth has at last dawned upon me that we can never afford to marry each other, and that therefore it is only prolonging our agony to go on with it. You know me so well, dear little girl, that you will quite understand how the thought of life-long poverty has proved too much for me. I am not made of such coarse fibre as most men—those men who can face squalor and privation, and lack all the little accessories that make life endurable, without being any the worse for it. I am too refined, too highly strung, too sensitive, to enter upon such a weary struggle with circumstances as my marriage with a woman as poor as myself would entail; therefore, my darling Quenelda, much as I love you I feel it is my duty to renounce you; and as you grow older and wiser you will see that I am right.

"Since I can not marry you whom I love, I have put romance and sentiment forever out of my life; it is a bitter sacrifice for a man of my nature to make, but it must be done; and I have decided to enter upon a *mariage de convenance* with Miss Farrington, the Black Country heiress. Of course I do not love her as I love you, my sweet—what man could love a genius as he loves a beauty? And she is as cold as she is clever. But I feel respect for her moral characteristics, and interest in her mental ones; and, when youth and romance are over and done with, that is all one need ask in a wife. As for her fortune, it will keep me forever out of the reach of that poverty which has always so deleterious an effect upon natures such as mine; and, being thus set above those pecuniary anxieties which are the death of true art, I shall be able fully to develop the power that is in me, and to do the work that I feel myself called to do.

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"Good-bye, my sweetest. I can not write any more; my heart is breaking. How cruel it is that poverty should have power to separate forever such true lovers as you and I!

"Your heartbroken  
"CECIL."

Elisabeth gave back the letter to Quenelda. "Do you mean to tell me that you don't despise the man who sent this?" she asked.

"No; because I love him, you see. You never did."

"You are right there. I never loved him. I tried to love him, but I couldn't."

"I know you didn't. As I told you before, if you had loved him I would have given him up to you."

Elisabeth looked at the girl before her with wonder. What a strange thing this love was, which could make a woman forgive such a letter as that, and still cling to the man who wrote it! So there was such a place as fairyland after all, and poor little Quenelda had found it; while she, Elisabeth, had never so much as peeped through the gate. It had brought Quenelda much sorrow, it was true; but still it was good to have been there; and a chilly feeling crept across Elisabeth's heart as she realized how much she

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had missed in life.

"I think if one loved another person as much as that," she said to herself, "one would understand a little of how God feels about us." Aloud she said: "Dear, what do you want me to do? I will do anything in the world that you wish."

Quenelda seized Elisabeth's hand and kissed it. "How good you are! And I don't deserve it a bit, for I've been horrid to you and said vile things."

There was a vast pity in Elisabeth's eyes. "I did you a great wrong, poor child!" she said; "and I want to make every reparation in my power."

"But you didn't know you were doing me a great wrong."

"No; but I knew that I was acting below my own ideals, and nobody can do that without doing harm. Show me how I can give you help now? Shall I tell Cecil Farquhar that I know all?"

"Oh! no; please not. He would never forgive me for having spoiled his life, and taken away his chance of being rich." And Quenelda's tears flowed afresh.

Elisabeth put her strong arm round the girl's slim waist. "Don't cry, dear; I will make it all right. I will just tell him that I can't marry him because I don't love him; and he need never know that I have heard about you at all."

And Elisabeth continued to comfort Quenelda until the pale cheeks grew pink again, and half the girl's beauty came back; and she went away at last believing in Elisabeth's power of setting everything right again, as one believes in one's mother's power of setting everything right again when one is a child.

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After she had gone, Elisabeth sat down and calmly looked facts in the face; and the prospect was by no means an agreeable one. Of course there was no question now of marrying Cecil Farquhar; and in the midst of her confusion Elisabeth felt a distinct sense of relief that this at any rate was impossible. She could still go on believing in fairyland, even though she never found it; and it is always far better not to find a place than to find there is no such place at all. But she would have to give up the Willows and the Osierfield, and all the wealth and position that these had brought her; and this was a bitter draught to drink. Elisabeth felt no doubt in her own mind that Cecil was indeed George Farrington's son; she had guessed it when first he told her the story of his birth, and subsequent conversations with him had only served to confirm her in the belief; and it was this conviction which had influenced her to some extent in her decision to accept him. But now everything was changed. Cecil would rule at the Osierfield and Quenelda at the Willows instead of herself, and those dearly loved places would know her no more.

At this thought Elisabeth broke down. How she loved every stone of the Black Country, and how closely all her childish fancies and girlish dreams were bound up in it! Now the cloud of smoke would hang over Sedgemoor, and she would not be there to interpret its message; and the sun would set beyond the distant mountains, and she would no longer catch glimpses of the country over the hills. Even the rustic seat, where she and Christopher had sat so often, would be hers no longer; and he and she would never walk together in the woods as they had so often walked as children. And as she cried softly to herself, with no one to comfort her, the memory of Christopher swept over her, and with it all the old anger against him. He would be glad to see her dethroned at last, she supposed, as that was what he had striven for all those years ago; but, perhaps, when he saw a stranger reigning at the Willows and the Osierfield in her stead, he would be sorry to find the new government so much less beneficial to the work-people than the old one had been; for Elisabeth knew Cecil quite well enough to be aware that he would spend all his money on himself and his own pleasures; and she could not help indulging in an unholy hope that, whereas she had beaten Christopher with whips, her successor would beat him with scorpions. In fact she was almost glad, for the moment, that Farquhar was so unfit for the position to which he was now called, when she realized how sorely that unfitness would try Christopher.

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"It will serve him right for leaving me and going off after George Farrington's son," she said to herself, "to discover how little worth the finding George Farrington's son really was! Christopher is so self-centred, that a thing is never properly brought home to him until it affects himself; no other person can ever convince him that he is in the wrong. But this will affect himself; he will hate to serve under such a man as Cecil; I

know he will; because Cecil is just the type of person that Christopher has always looked down upon, for Christopher is a gentleman and Cecil is not. Perhaps when he finds out how inferior an iron-master Cecil is to me, Christopher will wish that he had liked me better and been kinder to me when he had a chance. I hope he will, and that it will make him miserable; for those hard, self-righteous people really deserve to be punished in the end." And Elisabeth derived so much comfort from the prospect of Christopher's coming trials, that she almost forgot her own.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### GEORGE FARRINGDON'S SON

I need thee, Love, in peace and strife;  
For, till Time's latest page be read,  
No other smile could light my life  
Instead.

And even in that happier place,  
Where pain is past and sorrow dead,  
I could not love an angel's face  
Instead.

That night Elisabeth wrote to Christopher Thornley, telling him that she believed she had found George Farringdon's son at last, and asking him to come up to London in order to facilitate the giving up of her kingdom into the hands of the rightful owner. And, in so doing, she was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction that Christopher should see for himself that she was not as mercenary as he had once imagined her to be, but that she was as ready as he had ever been to enable the king to enjoy his own again as soon as that king appeared upon the scene. To forsake the reigning queen in order to search for that king, was, of course, a different matter, and one about which Elisabeth declined to see eye to eye with her manager even now. Doubtless he had been in the right all through, and she in the wrong, as all honourable people could see for themselves; but when one happens to be the queen one's self, one's perspective is apt to become blurred and one's sense of abstract justice confused. It is so easy for all of us to judge righteous judgment concerning matters which in no way affect ourselves.

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Elisabeth was still angry with Christopher because she had deliberately made the worst of herself in his eyes. It was totally unjust—and entirely feminine—to lay the blame of this on his shoulders; as a matter of fact, he had had nothing at all to do with it. She had purposely chosen a path of life of which she knew he would disapprove, principally in order to annoy him; and then she had refused to forgive him for feeling the annoyance which she had gone out of her way to inflict. From the purely feminine standpoint her behaviour was thoroughly consistent; a man, however, might in his ignorance have accused her of inconsistency. But men know so little about some things!

The following afternoon Cecil Farquhar came to see Elisabeth, as she had bidden him; and she smiled grimly to herself as she realized the difference between what she had intended to say to him when she told him to come, and what she was actually going to say. As for him, he was full of hope. Evidently Elisabeth meant to marry him and make him into a rich man; and money was the thing he loved best in the world. Which of us would not be happy if we thought we were about to win the thing we loved best? And is it altogether our own fault if the thing we happen to love best be unworthy of love, or is it only our misfortune?

Because he was triumphant, Cecil looked handsomer than usual, for there are few things more becoming than happiness; and as he entered the room, radiant with that vitality which is so irresistibly attractive, Elisabeth recognised his charm without feeling it, just as one sees people speaking and gesticulating in the distance without hearing a word of what is said.

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"My dear lady, you are going to say *yes* to me; I know that you are; you would not have sent for me if you were not, for you are far too tender-hearted to enjoy seeing

pain which you are forced to give."

Elisabeth looked grave, and did not take his outstretched hand. "Will you sit down?" she said; "there is much that I want to talk over with you."

Cecil's face fell. In a superficial way he was wonderfully quick in interpreting moods and reading character; and he knew in a moment that, through some influence of which he was as yet in ignorance, such slight hold as he had once had upon Elisabeth had snapped and broken since he saw her last. "Surely you are not going to refuse to marry me and so spoil my life. Elisabeth, you can not be as cruel as this, after all that we have been to each other."

"I am going to refuse to marry you, but I am not going to spoil your life. Believe me, I am not. There are other things in the world besides love and marriage."

Cecil sank down into a seat, and his chin twitched. "Then you have played with me most abominably. The world was right when it called you a heartless flirt, and said that you were too cold to care for anything save pleasure and admiration. I thought I knew you better, more fool I! But the world was right and I was wrong."

"I don't think that we need discuss my character," said Elisabeth. She was very angry with herself that she had placed herself in such a position that any man dared to sit in judgment upon her; but even then she could not elevate Cecil into the object of her indignation.

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He went on like a querulous child. "It is desperately hard on me that you have treated me in this way! You might have snubbed me at once if you had wished to do so, and not have made me a laughing-stock in the eyes of the world. I made no secret of the fact that I intended to marry you; I talked about it to everybody; and now everybody will laugh at me for having been your dupe."

So he had boasted to his friends of the fortune he was going to annex, and had already openly plumed himself upon securing her money! Elisabeth understood perfectly, and was distinctly amused. She wondered if he would remember to remind her how she was going to elevate him by her influence, or if the loss of her money would make him forget even to simulate sorrow at the loss of herself.

"I don't know what I shall do," he continued, with tears of vexation in his eyes; "everybody is expecting our engagement to be announced, and I can not think what excuses I shall invent. A man looks such a fool when he has made too sure of a woman!"

"Doubtless. But that isn't the woman's fault altogether."

"Yes; it is. If the woman hadn't led him on, the man wouldn't have made sure of her. You have been unutterably cruel to me—unpardonably cruel; and I will never forgive you as long as I live."

Elisabeth winced at this—not at Cecil's refusal to forgive her, but at the thought that she had placed herself within the reach of his forgiveness. But she was not penitent—she was only annoyed. Penitence is the last experience that comes to strong-willed, light-hearted people, such as Elisabeth; they are so sure they are right at the time, and they so soon forget about it afterward, that they find no interval for remorse. Elisabeth was beginning to forgive herself for having fallen for a time from her high ideal, because she was already beginning to forget that she had so fallen; life had taught her many things, but she took it too easily even yet.

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"I have a story to tell you," she said; "a story that will interest you, if you will listen."

By this time Cecil's anger was settling down into sulkiness. "I have no alternative, I suppose."

Then Elisabeth told him, as briefly as she could, the story of George Farrington's son; and, as she spoke, she watched the sulkiness in his face give place to interest, and the interest to hope, and the hope to triumph, until the naughty child gradually grew once more into the similitude of a Greek god.

"You are right—I am sure you are right," he said when she had finished; "it all fits in—the date and place of my birth, my parents' poverty and friendlessness, and the mystery concerning them. Oh! you can not think what this means to me. To be forever

beyond the reach of poverty—to be able to do whatever I like for the rest of my life—to be counted among the great of the earth! It is wonderful—wonderful!" And he walked up and down the room in his excitement, while his voice shook with emotion.

"I shall have such a glorious time," he went on—"the most glorious time man ever had! Of course, I shall not live in that horrid Black Country—nobody could expect me to make such a sacrifice as that; but I shall spend my winters in Italy and my summers in Mayfair, and I shall forget that the world was ever cold and hard and cruel to me."

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Elisabeth watched him curiously. So he never even thought of her and of what she was giving up. That his gain was her loss was a matter of no moment to him—it did not enter into his calculations. She wondered if he even remembered Quenelda, and what this would mean to her; she thought not. And this was the man Elisabeth had once delighted to honour! She could have laughed aloud as she realized what a blind fool she had been. Were all men like this? she asked herself; for, if so, she was glad she was too cold to fall in love. It would be terrible indeed to lay down one's life at the feet of a creature such as this; it was bad enough to have to lay down one's fortune there!

Throughout the rest of the interview Cecil lived up to the estimate that Elisabeth had just formed of his character: he never once remembered her—never once forgot himself. She explained to him that Christopher Thornley was the man who would manage all the business part of the affair for him, and give up the papers, and establish his identity; and she promised to communicate with Cecil as soon as she received an answer to the letter she had written to Christopher informing the latter that she believed she had at last discovered George Farringdon's son.

Amidst all her sorrow at the anticipation of giving up her kingdom into the hands of so unfitting a ruler as Cecil, there lurked a pleasurable consciousness that at last Christopher would recognise her worth, when he found how inferior her successor was to herself. It was strange how this desire to compel the regard which she had voluntarily forfeited, had haunted Elisabeth for so many years. Christopher had offended her past all pardon, she said to herself; nevertheless it annoyed her to feel that the friendship, which she had taken from him for punitive purposes, was but a secondary consideration in his eyes after all. She had long ago succeeded in convincing herself that the grapes of his affection were too sour to be worth fretting after; but she still wanted to make him admire her in spite of himself, and to realize that Miss Elisabeth Farringdon of the Osierfield was a more important personage than he had considered her to be. Half the pleasure of her success as an artist had lain in the thought that this at last would convince Christopher of her right to be admired and obeyed; but she was never sure that it had actually done so. Through all her triumphal progress he had been the Mordecai at her gates. She did not often see him, it is true; but when she did, she was acutely conscious that his attitude toward her was different from the attitude of the rest of the world, and that—instead of offering her unlimited praise and adulation—he saw her weaknesses as clearly now she was a great lady as he had done when she was a little girl.

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And herein Elisabeth's intuition was not at fault; her failings were actually more patent to Christopher than to the world at large. But here her perception ended; and she did not see, further, that it was because Christopher had formed such a high ideal of her, that he minded so much when she fell short of it. She had not yet grasped the truth that whereas the more a woman loves a man the easier she finds it to forgive his faults, the more a man loves a woman the harder he finds it to overlook her shortcomings. A woman merely requires the man she loves to be true to her; while a man demands that the woman he loves shall be true to herself—or, rather, to that ideal of her which in his own mind he has set up and worshipped.

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Her consciousness of Christopher's disapproval of the easy-going, Bohemian fashion in which she had chosen to walk through life, made Elisabeth intensely angry; though she would have died rather than let him know it. How dared this one man show himself superior to her, when she had the world at her feet? It was insupportable! She said but little to him, and he said still less to her, and what they did say was usually limited to the affairs of the Osierfield; nevertheless Elisabeth persistently weighed herself in Christopher's balances, and measured herself according to Christopher's measures; and, as she did so, wrote *Teke!* opposite her own name. And for this she refused to forgive him. She assured herself that his balances were false, and his measures impossible, and his judgments hard in the extreme; and when she had done so, she began to try herself thereby again, and hated him afresh because she fell so far



short of them.

But now he was going to see her in a new light; if he declined to admire her in prosperity, he should be compelled to respect her in adversity; for she made up her mind she would bear her reverses like a Spartan, if only for the sake of proving to him that she was made of better material than he, in his calm superiority, had supposed. When he saw for himself how plucky she could be, and how little she really cared for outside things, he might at last discover that she was not as unworthy of his regard as he had once assumed, and might even want to be friends with her again; and then she would throw his friendship back again in his face, as he had once thrown hers, and teach him that it was possible even for self-righteous people to make mistakes which were past repairing. It would do him a world of good, Elisabeth thought, to find out—too late—that he had misjudged her, and that other people besides himself had virtues and excellences; and it comforted her, in the midst of her adversities, to contemplate the punishment which was being reserved for Christopher, when George Farringdon's son came into his own. And she never guessed—how could she?—that when at last George Farringdon's son did come into his own, there would be no Christopher Thornley serving under him at the Osierfield; and that the cup of remorse, which she was so busily preparing, was for her own drinking and not for Christopher's.

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Christopher's expected answer to her epistle was, however, not forthcoming. The following morning Elisabeth received a letter from one of the clerks at the Osierfield, informing her that Mr. Thornley returned from his tour in Germany a week ago; and that immediately on his return he was seized with a severe attack of pneumonia—the result of a neglected cold—and was now lying seriously ill at his house in Sedgehill. In order to complete the purchase of a piece of land for the enlargement of the works, which Mr. Thornley had arranged to buy before he went away, it was necessary (the clerk went on to say) to see the plans of the Osierfield; and these were locked up in the private safe at the manager's house, to which only Christopher and Elisabeth possessed keys. Therefore, as the manager was delirious and quite incapable of attending to business of any kind, the clerk begged Miss Farringdon to come down at once and take the plans out of the safe; as the negotiations could not be completed until this was done.

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For an instant the old instinct of tenderness toward any one who was weak or suffering welled up in Elisabeth's soul, and she longed to go to her old playmate and help and comfort him; but then came the remembrance of how once before, long ago, she had been ready to help and comfort Christopher, and he had wanted neither her help nor her comfort; so she hardened her heart against him, and proudly said to herself that if Christopher could do without her she could do without Christopher.

That summer's day was one which Elisabeth could never forget as long as she lived; it stood out from the rest of her life, and would so stand out forever. We all know such days as this—days which place a gulf, that can never be passed over, between their before and after. She travelled down to Sedgehill by a morning train; and her heart was heavy within her as she saw how beautiful the country looked in the summer sunshine, and realized that the home she loved was to be taken away from her and given to another. Somehow life had not brought her all that she had expected from it, and yet she did not see wherein she herself had been to blame. She had neither loved nor hoarded her money, but had used it for the good of others to the best of her knowledge; yet it was to be taken from her. She had not hidden her talent in a napkin, but had cultivated it to the height of her powers; yet her fame was cold and dreary to her, and her greatness turned to ashes in her hands. She had been ready to give love in full measure and running over to any one who needed it; yet her heart had asked in vain for something to fill it, and in spite of all its longings had been sent empty away. She had failed all along the line to get the best out of life; and yet she did not see how she could have acted differently. Surely it was Fate, and not herself, that was to blame for her failure.

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When she arrived at Sedgehill she drove straight to Christopher's house, and learned from the nurse who was attending him how serious his illness was—not so much on account of the violence of the cold which he had taken in Germany, as from the fact that his vitality was too feeble to resist it. But she could not guess—and there was no one to tell her—that his vitality had been lowered by her unkindness to him, and that it was she who had deliberately snapped the mainspring of Christopher's life. It was no use anybody's seeing him, the nurse said, as he was delirious and knew no one; but if

he regained consciousness, she would summon Miss Farrington at once.

Then Elisabeth went alone into the big, oak-panelled dining-room, with the crape masks before its windows, and opened the safe.

She could not find the plans at once, as she did not know exactly where to look for them; and as she was searching for them among various papers, she came upon a letter addressed to herself in Christopher's handwriting. She opened it with her usual carelessness, without perceiving that it bore the inscription "Not to be given to Miss Farrington until after my death"; and when she had begun to read it, she could not have left off to save her life—being a woman. And this was what she read:

"MY DARLING—for so I may call you at last, since you will not read this letter until after I am dead;

"There are two things that I want to tell you. *First*, that I love you, and always have loved you, and always shall love you to all eternity. But how could I say this to you, sweetheart, in the days when my love spelled poverty for us both? And how could I say it when you became one of the richest women in Mershire, and I only the paid manager of your works? Nevertheless I should have said it in time, when you had seen more of the world and were capable of choosing your own life for yourself, had I thought there was any chance of your caring for me; for no man has ever loved you as I have loved you, Elisabeth, nor ever will. You had a right to know what was yours, when you were old enough to decide what to do with it, and to take or leave it as you thought fit; and no one else had the right to decide this for you. But when you so misjudged me about my journey to Australia, I understood that it was I myself, and not my position, that stood between us; and that your nature and mine were so different, and our ideas so far apart, that it was not in my power to make you happy, though I would have died to do so. So I went out of your life, for fear I should spoil it; and I have kept out of your life ever since, because I know you are happier without me; for I do so want you to be happy, dear.

"There is one other thing I have to tell you: I am George Farrington's son. I shouldn't have bothered you with this, only I feel it is necessary—after I am gone—for you to know the truth, lest any impostor should turn up and take your property from you. Of course, as long as I am alive I can keep the secret, and yet take care that no one else comes forward in my place; and I have made a will leaving everything I possess to you. But when I am gone, you must hold the proofs of who was really the person who stood between you and the Farrington property. I never found it out until my uncle died; I believed, as everybody else believed, that the lost heir was somewhere in Australia. But on my uncle's death I found a confession from him—which is in this safe, along with my parents' marriage certificate and all the other proofs of my identity—saying how his sister told him on her death-bed that, when George Farrington ran away from home, he married her, and took her out with him to Australia. They had a hard life, and lost all their children except myself; and then my father died, leaving my poor mother almost penniless. She survived him only long enough to come back to England, and give her child into her brother's charge. My uncle went on to say that he kept my identity a secret, and called me by an assumed name, as he was afraid that Miss Farrington would send both him and me about our business if she knew the truth; as in those days she was very bitter against the man who had jilted her, and would have been still bitterer had she known he had thrown her over for the daughter of her father's manager. When Maria Farrington died and showed, by her will, that at last she had forgiven her old lover, my uncle's mind was completely gone; and it was not until after his death that I discovered the papers which put me in possession of the facts of the case.

"By that time I had learned, beyond all disputing, that I was too dull and stupid ever to win your love. I only cared for money that it might enable me to make you happy; and if you could be happier without me than with me, who was I that I should complain? At any rate, it was given to me to insure your happiness; and that was enough for me. And you said that I didn't care what became of you, as long as I laid up for myself a nice little nest-egg in heaven! Sweetheart, I think you did me an injustice. So be happy, my dearest, with the Willows and the Osierfield and all the dear old things which you and I have loved so well; and remember that you must never pity me. I wanted you to be happy more than I wanted anything else in the world, and no man is to be pitied who has succeeded in getting what he wanted most.

"Yours, my darling, for time and eternity,  
"CHRISTOPHER FARRINGTON."

Then at last Elisabeth's eyes were opened, and for the first time in her life she saw clearly. So Christopher had loved her all along; she knew the truth at last, and with it she also knew that she had always loved him; that throughout her life's story there never had been—never could be—any man but Christopher. Until he told her that he loved her, her love for him had been a fountain sealed; but at his word it became a well of living water, flooding her whole soul and turning the desert of her life into a garden.

At first she was overpowered with the joy of it; she was upheld by that strange feeling of exaltation which comes to all of us when we realize for a moment our immortality, and feel that even death itself is powerless to hurt us. Christopher was dying, but what did that signify? He loved her—that was the only thing that really mattered—and they would have the whole of eternity in which to tell their love. For the second time in her life she came face to face with the fact that there was a stronger Will than her own guiding and ruling her; that, in spite of all her power and ability and self-reliance, the best things in her life were not of herself but were from outside. As long ago in St. Peter's Church she had learned that religion was God's Voice calling to her, she now learned that love was Christopher's voice calling to her; and that her own strength and cleverness, of which she had been so proud, counted for less than nothing. To her who longed to give, was given; she who desired to love, was beloved; she who aspired to teach, had been taught. That strong will of hers, which had once been so dominant, had suddenly fallen down powerless; she no longer wanted to have her own way—she wanted to have Christopher's. Her warfare against him was at last accomplished. To the end of her days she knew she would go on weighing herself in his balances, and measuring herself according to his measures; but now she would do so willingly, choosing to be guided by his wisdom rather than her own, for she no more belonged to herself but to him. The feeling of unrest, which had oppressed her for so many years, now fell from her like a cast-off garment. Christopher was the answer to her life's problem, the fulfilment of her heart's desire; and although she might be obliged to go down again into the valley of the shadow, she could never forget that she had once stood upon the mountain-top and had beheld the glory of the promised land.

And she never remembered that now her fortune was secured to her, and that the Willows and the Osierfield would always be hers; even these were henceforth of no moment to her, save as monuments of Christopher's love.

So in the dingy dining-room, on that hot summer's afternoon, Elisabeth Farrington became a new creature. The old domineering arrogance passed away forever; and from its ashes there arose another Elisabeth, who out of weakness was made stronger than she had ever been in her strength—an Elisabeth who had attained to the victory of the vanquished, and who had tasted the triumph of defeat. But in all her exaltation she knew—though for the moment the knowledge could not hurt her—that her heart would be broken by Christopher's death. Through the long night of her ignorance and self-will and unsatisfied idealism she had wrestled with the angel that she might behold the Best, and had prayed that it might be granted unto her to see the Vision Beautiful. At last she had prevailed; and the day for which she had so longed was breaking, and transfiguring the common world with its marvellous light. But the angel-hand had touched her, and she no longer stood upright and self-reliant, but was bound to halt and walk lamely on her way until she stood by Christopher's side again.

This exalted mood did not last for long. As she sat in the gloomy room and watched the blazing sunshine forcing its way through the darkened windows, her eye suddenly fell upon two notches cut in the doorway, where she and Christopher had once measured themselves when they were children; and the familiar sight of these two little notches, made by Christopher's knife so long ago, awoke in her heart the purely human longing for him as the friend and comrade she had known and looked up to all her life. And with this longing came the terrible thought of how she had hurt and misunderstood and misjudged him, and of how it was now too late for her to make up to him in this life for all the happiness of which she had defrauded him in her careless pride. Then, for the first time since she was born, Elisabeth put her lips to the cup of remorse, and found it very bitter to the taste. She had been so full of plans for comforting mankind and helping the whole world; yet she had utterly failed toward the

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only person whom it had been in her power actually to help and comfort; and her heart echoed the wail of the most beautiful love-song ever written—"They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

As she was sitting, bowed down in utter anguish of spirit while the waves of remorse flooded her soul, the door opened and the nurse came in.

"Mr. Thornley is conscious now, and is asking for you, Miss Farrington," she said.

Elisabeth started up, her face aglow with new hope. It was so natural to her not to be cast down for long. "Oh! I am so glad. I want dreadfully to see him, I have so much to say to him. But I'll promise not to tire or excite him. Tell me, how long may I stay with him, Nurse, and how quiet must I be?"

The nurse smiled sadly. "It won't matter how long you stay or what you say, Miss Farrington; I don't think it is possible for anything to hurt or help him now; for I am afraid, whatever happens, he can not possibly recover."

As she went upstairs Elisabeth kept saying to herself, "I am going to see the real Christopher for the first time"; and she felt the old, shy fear of him that she had felt long ago when Richard Smallwood was stricken. But when she entered the room and saw the worn, white face on the pillow, with the kind smile she knew so well, she completely forgot her shyness, and only remembered that Christopher was in need of her, and that she would gladly give her life for his if she could.

"Kiss me, my darling," he said, holding out his arms; and she knew by the look in his eyes that every word of his letter was true. "I am too tired to pretend any more that I don't love you. And it can't matter now whether you know or not, it is so near the end."

Elisabeth put her strong arms round him, and kissed him as he asked. "Chris, dear," she whispered, "I want to tell you that I love you, and that I've always loved you, and that I always shall love you; but I've only just found it out."

Christopher was silent for a moment, and clasped her very close. But he was not so much surprised as he would have been had Elisabeth made such an astounding revelation to him in the days of his health. When one is drawing near to the solution of the Great Mystery, one loses the power of wondering at anything.

"How did you find it out, my dearest?" he asked at last.

"Through finding out that you loved me. It seems to me that my love was always lying in the bank at your account, but until you gave a cheque for it you couldn't get at it. And the cheque was my knowing that you cared for me."

"And how did you find that out, Betty?"

"I was rummaging in the safe just now for the plans of the Osierfield, and I came upon your letter."

"I didn't mean you to read that while I was alive; but, all the same, I think I am rather glad that you did."

"And I am glad, too. I wish I hadn't always been so horrid to you, Chris; but I believe I should have loved you all the time, if only you had given me the chance. Still, I was horrid—dreadfully horrid; and now it is too late to make it up to you." And Elisabeth's eyes filled with tears.

"Don't cry, my darling—please don't cry. And, besides, you have made it up to me by loving me now. I am glad you understand at last, Betty; I did so hope you would some day."

"And you forgive me for having been so vile?"

"There is nothing to forgive, sweetheart; it was my fault for not making you understand; but I did it for the best, though I seem to have made a mess of it."

"And you like me just the same as you did before I was unkind to you?"

"My dear, don't you know?"

"You see, Chris, I was wanting you to be nice to me all the time—nothing else satisfied me instead of you. And when you seemed not to like me any longer, but to

care for doing your duty more than for being with me, I got sore and angry, and decided to punish you for making a place for yourself in my heart and then refusing to fill it."

"Well, you did what you decided, as you generally do; there is no doubt of that. You were always very prone to administer justice and to maintain truth, Elisabeth, and you certainly never spared the rod as far as I was concerned."

"But now I see that I was wrong; I understand that it was because you cared so much for abstract right, that you were able to care so much for me; a lower nature would have given me a lower love; and if only we could go through it all again, I should want you to go to Australia after George Farrington's son."

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Christopher's thin fingers wandered over Elisabeth's hair; and as they did so he remembered, with tender amusement, how often he had comforted her on account of her dark locks. Now one or two gray hairs were beginning to show through the brown ones, and it struck him with a pang that he would no longer be here to comfort her on account of those; for he knew that Elisabeth was the type of woman who would require consolation on that score, and that he was the man who could effectually have administered it.

"I can see now," Elisabeth went on, "how much more important it is what a man is than what a man says, though I used to think that words were everything, and that people didn't feel what they didn't talk about. You used to disappoint me because you said so little; but, all the same, your character influenced me without my knowing it; and whatever good there is in me, comes from my having known you and seen you live up to your own ideals. People wonder that worldly things attract me so little, and that my successes haven't turned my head; so they would have done, probably, if I had never met you; but having once seen in you what the ideal life is, I couldn't help despising lower things, though I tried my hardest not to despise them. Nobody who had once been with you, and looked even for a minute at life through your eyes, could ever care again for anything that was mean or sordid or paltry. Darling, don't you understand that my knowing you made me better than I tried to be—better even than I wanted to be; and that all my life I shall be a truer woman because of you?"

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But by that time the stupendous effort which Christopher had made for Elisabeth's sake had exhausted itself, and he fell back upon his pillows, white to the lips, and too weak to say another word. Yet not even the great Shadow could cloud the love that shone in his eyes, as he looked at Elisabeth's eager face, and listened to the voice for which his soul had hungered so long. The sight of his weakness brought her down to earth again more effectually than any words could have done; and with an exceeding bitter cry she hid her face in her arms and sobbed aloud—

"Oh! my darling, my darling, come back to me; I love you so that I can not let you go. The angels can do quite well without you in heaven, but I can not do without you here. Oh! Chris, don't go away and leave me, just now that we've learned to understand one another. I'll be good all my life, and do everything that you tell me, if only you won't go away. My dearest, I love you so—I love you so; and I've nobody in the world but you."

Christopher made another great effort to take her in his arms and comfort her; but it was too much for him, and he fainted away.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILLS

Shall I e'er love thee less fondly than now, dear?  
Tell me if e'er my devotion can die?  
Never until thou shalt cease to be thou, dear;  
Never until I no longer am I.

Whether the doctors were right when they talked of the renewed desire to live producing fresh vitality, or whether the wise man knew best after all when he said that love is stronger than death, who can say? Anyway, the fact remained that Christopher

responded—as he had ever responded—to Elisabeth's cry for help, and came back from the very gates of the grave at her bidding. He had never failed her yet, and he did not fail her now.

The days of his recovery were wonderful days to Elisabeth. It was so strange and new to her to be doing another person's will, and thinking another person's thoughts, and seeing life through another person's eyes; it completely altered the perspective of everything. And there was nothing strained about it, which was a good thing, as Elisabeth was too light-hearted to stand any strain for long; the old comradeship still existed between them, giving breadth to a love which the new relationship had made so deep.

And it was very wonderful to Christopher, also, to find himself in the sunshine at last after so many years of shadowland. At first the light almost dazzled him, he was so unaccustomed to it; but as he gradually became used to the new feeling of being happy, his nature responded to the atmosphere of warmth and brightness, and opened as a flower in the sun. As it was strange to Elisabeth to find herself living and moving and having her being in another's personality, so it was strange to Christopher to find another's personality merged in his. He had lived so entirely for other people that it was a great change to find another person living entirely for him; and it was a change that was wholly beneficial. As his nature deepened Elisabeth's, so her nature expanded his; and each was the better for the influence of the other, as each was the complement of the other. So after a time Christopher grew almost as light-hearted as Elisabeth, while Elisabeth grew almost as tender-hearted as Christopher. For both of them the former things had passed away, and all things were made new.

It was beautiful weather, too, which helped to increase their happiness; that still, full, green weather, which sometimes comes in the late summer, satisfying men's souls with its peaceful perfectness; when the year is too old to be disturbed by the restless hope of spring, too young to be depressed by the chilling dread of autumn, and so just touches the fringe of that eternity which has no end neither any beginning. The fine weather hastened Christopher's recovery; and, as he gained strength, he and Elisabeth spent much time in the old garden, looking toward the Welsh mountains.

"So we have come to the country on the other side of the hills at last," she said to him, as they were watching one of the wonderful Mershire sunsets and drinking in its beauty. "I always knew it was there, but sometimes I gave up all hope of ever finding it for myself."

Christopher took her hand and began playing with the capable artist-fingers. "And is it as nice a country as you expected, sweetheart?"

"As nice as I expected? I should just think it is. I knew that in the country over the hills I should find all the beautiful things I had imagined as a child and all the lovely things I had longed for as a woman; and that, if only I could reach it, all the fairy-tales would come true. But now that I have reached it, I find that the fairy-tales fell far short of the reality, and that it is a million times nicer than I ever imagined anything could be."

"Darling, I am glad you are so happy. But it beats me how such a stupid fellow as I am can make you so."

"Well, you do, and that's all that matters. Nobody can tell how they do things; they only know that they can do them. I don't know how I can paint pictures any more than you know how you can turn smoky ironworks into the country over the hills. But we can, and do; which shows what clever people we are, in spite of ourselves."

"I think the cleverness lies with you in both cases—in your wonderful powers of imagination, my dear."

"Do you? Then that shows how little you know about it."

Christopher put his arm round her. "I always was stupid, you know; you have told me so with considerable frequency."

"Oh! so you were; but you were never worse than stupid."

"That's a good thing; for stupidity is a misfortune rather than a fault."

"Now I was worse than stupid—much worse," continued Elisabeth gravely; "but I

never was actually stupid."

"Weren't you? Don't be too sure of that. I don't wish to hurt your feelings, sweetheart, or to make envious rents in your panoply of wisdom; but, do you know, you struck me now and again as being a shade—we will not say stupid, but dense?"

"When I thought you didn't like me because you went to Australia, you mean?"

"That was one of the occasions when your acumen seemed to be slightly at fault. And there were others."

Elisabeth looked thoughtful. "I really did think you didn't like me then."

"Denseness, my dear Elisabeth—distinct denseness. It would be gross flattery to call it by any other name."

"But you never told me you liked me."

"If I had, and you had then thought I did not, you would have been suffering from deafness, not denseness. You are confusing terms."

"Well, then, I'll give in and say I was dense. But I was worse than that: I was positively horrid as well."

"Not horrid, Betty; you couldn't be horrid if you tried. Perhaps you were a little hard on me; but it's all over and done with now, and you needn't bother yourself any more about it."

"But I ought to bother about it if I intend to make a trustworthy step-ladder out of my dead selves to upper storeys."

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"A trustworthy fire-escape, you mean; but I won't have it. You sha'n't have any dead selves, my dear, because I shall insist on keeping them all alive by artificial respiration, or restoration from drowning, or something of that kind. Not one of them shall die with my permission; remember that. I'm much too fond of them."

"You silly boy! You'll never train me and discipline me properly if you go on in this way."

"Hang it all, Betty! Who wants to train and discipline you? Certainly not I. I am wise enough to let well—or rather perfection—alone."

Elisabeth nestled up to Christopher. "But I'm not perfection, Chris; you know that as well as I do."

"Probably I shouldn't love you so much if you were; so please don't reform, dear."

"And you like me just as I am?"

"Precisely. I should break my heart if you became in any way different from what you are now."

"But you mustn't break your heart; it belongs to me, and I won't have you smashing up my property."

"I gave it to you, it is true; but the copyright is still mine. The copyright of letters that I wrote to you is mine; and I believe the law of copyright is the same with regard to hearts as to letters."

"Well, anyhow, I've written my name all over it."

"I know you have; and it was very untidy of you, my dearest. Once would have been enough to show that it belonged to you; but you weren't content with that: you scribbled all over every available space, until there was no room left even for advertisements; and now nobody else will ever be able to write another name upon it as long as I live."

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"I'm glad of that; I wouldn't have anybody else's name upon it for anything. And I'm glad that you like me just as I am, and don't want me to be different."

"Heaven forbid!"

"But still I was horrid to you once, Chris, however you may try to gloss it over. My dear, my dear, I don't know how I ever could have been unkind to you; but I was."

"Never mind, sweetheart; it is ancient history now, and who bothers about ancient history? Did you ever meet anybody who fretted over the overthrow of Carthage, or made a trouble of the siege of Troy?"

"No," Elisabeth truthfully replied; "and I'm really nice to you now, whatever I may have been before. Don't you think I am?"

"I should just think you are, Betty; a thousand times nicer than I deserve, and I am becoming most horribly conceited in consequence."

"And, after all, I agree with the prophet Ezekiel that if people are nice at the end, it doesn't much matter how disagreeable they have been in the meantime. He doesn't put it quite in that way, but the sentiment is the same. I suit you down to the ground now, don't I, Chris?"

"You do, my darling; and up to the sky, and beyond." And Christopher drew her still closer to him and kissed her.

After a minute's silence Elisabeth whispered—

"When one is as divinely happy as this, isn't it difficult to realize that the earth will ever be earthy again, and the butter turnipy, and things like that? Yet they will be."

"But never quite as earthy or quite as turnipy as they were before; that's just the difference."

After playing for a few minutes with Christopher's watch-chain, Elisabeth suddenly remarked—

"You never really appreciated my pictures, Chris. You never did me justice as an artist, though you did me far more than justice as a woman. Why was that?"

"Didn't I? I'm sorry. Nevertheless, I'm not sure that you are right. I was always intensely interested in your pictures because they were yours, quite apart from their own undoubted merits."

"That was just it; you admired my pictures because they were painted by me, while you really ought to have admired me because I had painted the pictures."

A look of amusement stole over Christopher's face. "Then I fell short of your requirements, dear heart; for, as far as you and your works were concerned, I certainly never committed the sin of worshipping the creature rather than the creator."

"But there was a time when I wanted you to do so."

"As a matter of fact," said Christopher thoughtfully, "I don't believe a man who loves a woman can ever appreciate her genius properly, because love is greater than genius, and so the greater swallows up the less. In the eyes of the world, her genius is the one thing which places a woman of genius above her fellows, and the world worships it accordingly. But in the eyes of the man who loves her, she is already placed so far above her fellows that her genius makes no difference to her altitude. Thirty feet makes all the difference in the height of a weather-cock, but none at all in the distance between the earth and a fixed star."

"What a nice thing to say! I adore you when you say things like that."

Christopher continued: "You see, the man is interested in the woman's works of art simply because they are hers; just as he is interested in the rustle of her silk petticoat simply because it is hers. Possibly he is more interested in the latter, because men can paint pictures sometimes, and they can never rustle silk petticoats properly. You are right in thinking that the world adores you for the sake of your creations, while I adore your creations for the sake of you; but you must also remember that the world would cease to worship you if your genius began to decline, while I should love you just the same if you took to painting sign-posts and illustrating Christmas cards—even if you became an impressionist."

"What a dear boy you are! You really are the greatest comfort to me. I didn't always feel like this, but now you satisfy me completely, and fill up every crevice of my soul. There isn't a little space anywhere in my mind or heart or spirit that isn't simply bursting with you." And Elisabeth laughed a low laugh of perfect contentment.



"My darling, how I love you!" And Christopher also was content.

Then there was another silence, which Christopher broke at last by saying—

"What is the matter, Betty?"

"There isn't anything the matter. How should there be?"

"Oh, yes, there is. Do you think I have studied your face for over thirty years, my dear, without knowing every shade of difference in its expression? Have I said anything to vex you?"

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"No, no; how could I be vexed with you, Chris, when you are so good to me? I am horrid enough, goodness knows, but not horrid enough for that."

"Then what is it? Tell me, dear, and see if I can't help?"

Elisabeth sighed. "I was thinking that there is really no going back, however much we may pretend that there is. What we have done we have done, and what we have left undone we have left undone; and there is no blotting out the story of past years. We may write new stories, perhaps, and try to write better ones, but the old ones are written beyond altering, and must stand for ever. You have been divinely good to me, Chris, and you never remind me even by a look how I hurt you and misjudged you in the old days. But the fact remains that I did both; and nothing can ever alter that."

"Silly little child, it's all over and past now! I've forgotten it, and you must forget it too."

"I can't forget it; that's just the thing. I spoiled your life for the best ten years of it; and now, though I would give everything that I possess to restore those years to you, I can't restore them, or make them up to you for the loss of them. That's what hurts so dreadfully."

Christopher looked at her with a great pity shining in his eyes. He longed to save from all suffering the woman he loved; but he could not save her from the irrevocableness of her own actions, strive as he would; which was perhaps the best thing in the world for her, and for all of us. Human love would gladly shield us from the consequences of what we have done; but Divine Love knows better. What we have written, we have written on the page of life; and neither our own tears, nor the tears of those who love us better than we love ourselves, can blot it out. For the first time in her easy, self-confident career, Elisabeth Farringdon was brought face to face with this merciless truth; and she trembled before it. It was just because Christopher was so ready to forgive her, that she found it impossible to forgive herself.

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"I always belonged to you, you see, dear," Christopher said very gently, "and you had the right to do what you liked with your own. I had given you the right of my own free will."

"But you couldn't give me the right to do what was wrong. Nobody can do that. I did what was wrong, and now I must be punished for it."

"Not if I can help it, sweetheart. You shall never be punished for anything if I can bear the punishment for you."

"You can't help it, Chris; that's just the point. And I am being punished in the way that hurts most. All my life I thought of myself, and my own success, and how I was going to do this and that and the other, and be happy and clever and good. But suddenly everything has changed. I no longer care about being happy myself; I only want you to be happy; and yet I know that for ten long years I deliberately prevented you from being happy. Don't you see, dear, how terrible the punishment is? The thing I care for most in the whole world is your happiness; and the fact remains, and will always remain, that that was the thing which I destroyed with my own hands, because I was cruel and selfish and cold."

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"Still, I am happy enough now, Betty—happy enough to make up for all that went before."

"But I can never give you back those ten years," said Elisabeth, with a sob in her voice—"never as long as I live. Oh! Chris, I see now how horrid I was; though all the time I thought I was being so good, that I looked down upon the women who I considered had lower ideals than I had. I built myself an altar of stone, and offered up

your life upon it, and then commended myself when the incense rose up to heaven; and I never found out that the sacrifice was all yours, and that there was nothing of mine upon the altar at all."

"Never mind, darling; there isn't going to be a yours and mine any more, you know. All things are ours, and we are beginning a new life together."

Elisabeth put both arms round his neck and kissed him of her own accord. "My dearest," she whispered, "how can I ever love you enough for being so good to me?"

But while Christopher and Elisabeth were walking across enchanted ground, Cecil Farquhar was having a hard time. Elisabeth had written to tell him the actual facts of the case almost as soon as she knew them herself; and he could not forgive her for first raising his hopes and then dashing them to the ground. And there is no denying that he had somewhat against her; for she had twice played him this trick—first as regarded herself, and then as regarded her fortune. That she had not been altogether to blame—that she had deluded herself in both cases as effectually as she had deluded him—was no consolation as far as he was concerned; his egoism took no account of her motives—it only resented the results. Quenelda did all in her power to comfort him, but she found it uphill work. She gave him love in full measure; but, as it happened, money and not love was the thing he most wanted, and that was not hers to bestow. He still cared for her more than he cared for anybody (though not for anything) else in the world; it was not that he loved Cæsar less but Rome more, Cecil's being one of the natures to whom Rome would always appeal more powerfully than Cæsar. His life did consist in the things which he had; and, when these failed, nothing else could make up to him for them. Neither Christopher nor Elisabeth was capable of understanding how much mere money meant to Farquhar; they had no conception of how bitter was his disappointment on knowing that he was not, after all, the lost heir to the Farringdon property. And who would blame them for this? Does one blame a man, who takes a dirty bone away from a dog, for not entering into the dog's feelings on the matter? Nevertheless, that bone is to the dog what fame is to the poet and glory to the soldier. One can but enjoy and suffer according to one's nature.

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It happened, by an odd coincidence, that the mystery of Cecil's parentage was cleared up shortly after Elisabeth's false alarm on that score; and his paternal grandfather was discovered in the shape of a retired shopkeeper at Surbiton of the name of Biggs, who had been cursed with an unsatisfactory son. When in due time this worthy man was gathered to his fathers, he left a comfortable little fortune to his long-lost grandson; whereupon Cecil married Quenelda, and continued to make art his profession, while his recreation took the form of believing—and retailing his belief to anybody who had time and patience to listen to it—that the Farringdons of Sedgehill had, by foul means, ousted him from his rightful position, and that, but for their dishonesty, he would have been one of the richest men in Mershire. And this grievance—as is the way of grievances—never failed to be a source of unlimited pleasure and comfort to Cecil Farquhar.

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But in the meantime, when the shock of disappointment was still fresh, he wrote sundry scathing letters to Miss Elisabeth Farringdon, which she in turn showed to Christopher, rousing the fury of the latter thereby.

"He is a cad—a low cad!" exclaimed Christopher, after the perusal of one of these epistles; "and I should like to tell him what I think of him, and then kick him."

Elisabeth laughed; she always enjoyed making Christopher angry. "He wanted to marry me," she remarked, by way of adding fuel to the flames.

"Confounded impudence on his part!" muttered Christopher.

"But he left off when he found out that I hadn't got any money."

"Worse impudence, confound him!"

"Oh! I wish you could have seen him when I told him that the money was not really mine," continued Elisabeth, bubbling over with mirth at the recollection; "he cooled down so very quickly, and so rapidly turned his thoughts in another direction. Don't you know what it is to bite a gooseberry at the front door while it pops out at the back? Well, Cecil Farquhar's love-making was just like that. It really was a fine sight!"

"The brute!"

"Never mind about him, dear! I'm tired of him."

"But I do mind when people dare to be impertinent to you. I can't help minding," Christopher persisted.

"Then go on minding, if you want to, darling—only don't let us waste our time in talking about him. There's such a lot to talk about that is really important—why you said so-and-so, and how you felt when I said so-and-so, ten years ago; and how you feel about me to-day, and whether you like me as much this afternoon as you did this morning; and what colour my eyes are, and what colour you think my new frock should be; and heaps of really serious things like that."

"All right, Betty; where shall we begin?"

"We shall begin by making a plan. Do you know what you are going to do this afternoon?"

"Yes; whatever you tell me. I always do."

"Well, then, you are coming with me to have tea at Mrs. Bateson's, just as we used to do when we were little; and I have told her to invite Mrs. Hankey as well, to make it seem just the same as it used to be. By the way, is Mrs. Hankey as melancholy as ever, Chris?"

"Quite. Time doth not breathe on her fadeless gloom, I can assure you."

"Won't it be fun to pretend we are children again?" Elisabeth exclaimed.

"Great fun; and I don't think it will need much pretending, do you know?" replied Christopher, who saw deeper sometimes than Elisabeth did, and now realized that it was only when they two became as little children—he by ceasing to play Providence to her, and she by ceasing to play Providence to herself—that they had at last caught glimpses of the kingdom of heaven.

So they walked hand in hand to Caleb Bateson's cottage, as they had so often walked in far-off, childish days; and the cottage looked so exactly the same as it used to look, and Caleb and his wife and Mrs. Hankey were so little altered by the passage of time, that it seemed as if the shadow had indeed been put back ten degrees. And so, in a way, it was, by the new spring-time which had come to Christopher and Elisabeth. They were both among those beloved of the gods who are destined to die young—not in years but in spirit; her lover as well as herself was what Elisabeth called "a fourth-dimension person," and there is no growing old for fourth-dimension people; because it has already been given to them to behold the vision of the cloud-clad angel, who stands upon the sea and upon the earth and swears that there shall be time no longer. They see him in the far distances of the sunlit hills, in the mysteries of the unfathomed ocean, and their ears are opened to the message that he brings; for they know that in all beauty—be it of earth, or sea, or sky, or human souls—there is something indestructible, immortal, and that those who have once looked upon it shall never see death. Such of us as make our dwelling-place in the world of the three dimensions, grow weary of the sameness and the staleness of it all, and drearily echo the Preacher's *Vanitas vanitatum*; but such of us as have entered into the fourth dimension, and have caught glimpses of the ideal which is concealed in all reality, do not trouble ourselves over the flight of time, for we know we have eternity before us; and so we are content to wait patiently and joyfully, in sure and certain hope of that better thing which, without us, can not be made perfect.

It was with pride and pleasure that Mr. and Mrs. Bateson received their guests. The double announcement that Christopher was the lost heir of the Farringdons (for Elisabeth had insisted on his making this known), and that he was about to marry Elisabeth, had given great delight all through Sedgehill. The Osierfield people were proud of Elisabeth, but they had learned to love Christopher; they had heard of her glory from afar, but they had been eye-witnesses of the uprightness and unselfishness and nobility of his life; and, on the whole, he was more popular than she. Elisabeth was quite conscious of this; and—what was more—she was glad of it. She, who had so loved popularity and admiration, now wanted people to think more of Christopher than of her. Once she had gloried in the thought that George Farringdon's son would never fill her place in the hearts of the people of the Osierfield; now her greatest happiness lay in the fact that he filled it more completely than she could ever have done, and that at Sedgehill she would always be second to him.

"Deary me, but it's like old times to see Master Christopher and Miss Elisabeth having tea with us again," exclaimed Mrs. Bateson, after Caleb had asked a blessing; "and it seems but yesterday, Mrs. Hankey, that they were here talking over Mrs. Perkins's wedding—your niece Susan as was—with Master Christopher in knickers, and Miss Elisabeth's hair down."

Mrs. Hankey sighed her old sigh. "So it does, Mrs. Bateson—so it does; and yet Susan has just buried her ninth."

"And is she quite well?" asked Elisabeth cheerfully. "I remember all about her wedding, and how immensely interested I was."

"As well as you can expect, miss," replied Mrs. Hankey, "with eight children on earth and one in heaven, and a husband as plays the trombone of an evening. But that's the worst of marriage; you know what a man is when you marry him, but you haven't a notion what he'll be that time next year. He may take to drinking or music for all you know; and then where's your peace of mind?"

"You are not very encouraging," laughed Elisabeth, "considering that I am going to be married at once."

"Well, miss, where's the use of flattering with vain words, and crying peace where there is no peace, I should like to know? I can only say as I hope you'll be happy. Some are."

Here Christopher joined in. "You mustn't discourage Miss Farrington in that way, or else she'll be throwing me over; and then whatever will become of me?"

Mrs. Hankey at once tried to make the *amende honorable*; she would not have hurt Christopher's feelings for worlds, as she—in common with most of the people at Sedgehill—had had practical experience of his kindness in times of sorrow and anxiety. "Not she, sir; Miss Elisabeth's got too much sense to go throwing anybody over—and especially at her age, when she's hardly likely to get another beau in a hurry. Don't you go troubling your mind about that, Master Christopher. You won't throw over such a nice gentleman as him, will you, miss?"

"Certainly not; though hardly on the grounds which you mention."

"Well, miss, if you're set on marriage you're in luck to have got such a pleasant-spoken gentleman as Master Christopher—or I should say, Mr. Farrington, begging his pardon. Such a fine complexion as he's got, and never been married before, nor nothing. For my part I never thought you would get a husband—never; and I've often passed the remark to Mr. and Mrs. Bateson here. 'Mark my words,' I said, 'Miss Elisabeth Farrington will remain Elisabeth Farrington to the end of the chapter; she's too clever to take the fancy of the menfolk, and too pale. They want something pink and white and silly, men do.'"

"Some want one thing and some another," chimed in Mrs. Bateson, "and they know what they want, which is more than women-folks do. Why, bless you! girls 'll come telling you that they wouldn't marry so-and-so, not if he was to crown 'em; and the next thing you hear is that they are keeping company with him, and that no woman was ever so happy as them, and that the man is such a piece of perfection that the President of the Conference himself isn't fit to black his boots."

"You have hit upon a great mystery, Mrs. Bateson," remarked Christopher, "and one which has only of late been revealed to me. I used to think, in my masculine ignorance, that if a woman appeared to dislike a man, she would naturally refuse to marry him; but I am beginning to doubt if I was right."

Mrs. Bateson nodded significantly. "Wait till he asks her; that's what I say. It's wonderful what a difference the asking makes. Women think a sight more of a sparrow in the hand than a covey of partridges in the bush; and I don't blame them for it; it's but natural that they should."

"A poor thing but mine own," murmured Christopher.

"That's not the principle at all," Elisabeth contradicted him; "you've got hold of quite the wrong end of the stick this time."

"I always do, in order to give you the right one; as in handing you a knife I hold it by

the blade. You so thoroughly enjoy getting hold of the right end of a stick, Betty, that I wouldn't for worlds mar your pleasure by seizing it myself; and your delight reaches high-water-mark when, in addition, you see me fatuously clinging on to the ferrule."

"Never mind what women-folk say about women-folk, Miss Elisabeth," said Caleb Bateson kindly; "they're no judges. But my missis has the right of it when she says that a man knows what he wants, and in general sticks to it till he gets it. And if ever a man got what he wanted in this world, that man's our Mr. Christopher."

"You're right there, Bateson," agreed the master of the Osierfield; and his eyes grew very tender as they rested upon Elisabeth.

"And if he don't have no objection to cleverness and a pale complexion, who shall gainsay him?" added Mrs. Hankey. "If he's content, surely it ain't nobody's business to interfere; even though we may none of us, Miss Elisabeth included, be as young as we was ten years ago."

"And he is quite content, thank you," Christopher hastened to say.

"I think you were right about women not knowing their own minds," Elisabeth said to her hostess; "though I am bound to confess it is a little stupid of us. But I believe the root of it is in shyness, and in a sort of fear of the depth of our own feelings."

"I daresay you're right, miss; and, when all's said and done, I'd sooner hear a woman abusing a man she really likes, than see her throwing herself at the head of a man as don't want her. That's the uptake of all things, to my mind; I can't abide it." And Mrs. Bateson shook her head in violent disapproval.

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Mrs. Hankey now joined in. "I remember my sister Sarah, when she was a girl. There was a man wanted her ever so, and seemed as cut-up as never was when she said no. She didn't know what to do with him, he was that miserable; and yet she couldn't bring her mind to have him, because he'd red hair and seven in family, being a widower. So she prayed the Lord to comfort him and give him consolation. And sure enough the Lord did; for within a month from the time as Sarah refused him, he was engaged to Wilhelmina Gregg, our chapel-keeper's daughter. And then—would you believe it?—Sarah went quite touchy and offended, and couldn't enjoy her vittles, and wouldn't wear her best bonnet of a Sunday, and kept saying as the sons of men were lighter than vanity. Which I don't deny as they are, but that wasn't the occasion to mention it, Wilhelmina's marriage being more the answer to prayer, as you may say, than any extra foolishness on the man's part."

"I should greatly have admired your sister Sarah," said Christopher; "she was so delightfully feminine. And as for the red-headed swain, I have no patience with him. His fickleness was intolerable."

"Bless your heart, Master Christopher!" exclaimed Mrs. Bateson, "men are mostly like that. Why should they waste their time fretting after some young woman as hasn't got a civil word for them, when there are scores and scores as has?"

Christopher shook his head. "I can't pretend to say why; that is quite beyond me. I only know that some of them do."

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"But they are only the nice exceptions that prove the rule," said Elisabeth, as she and Christopher caught each other's eye.

"No; it is she who is the nice exception," he replied. "It is only in the case of exceptionally charming young women that such a thing ever occurs; or rather, I should say, in the case of an exceptionally charming young woman."

"My wedding dress will be sent home next week," said Elisabeth to the two matrons; "would you like to come and see it?"

"Indeed, that we should!" they replied simultaneously. Then Mrs. Bateson inquired: "And what is it made of, deary?"

"White satin."

Mrs. Hankey gazed critically at the bride-elect. "White satin is a bit young, it seems to me; and trying, too, to them as haven't much colour." Then cheering second thoughts inspired her. "Still, white's the proper thing for a bride, I don't deny; and I always say 'Do what's right and proper, and never mind looks.' The Lord doesn't look

on the outward appearance, as we all know; and it 'ud be a sight better for men if they didn't, like Master Christopher there; there'd be fewer unhappy marriages, mark my words. Of course, lavender isn't as trying to the complexion as pure white; no one can say as it is; but to my mind lavender always looks as if you've been married before; and it's no use for folks to look greater fools than they are, as I can see."

"Certainly not," Christopher agreed. "If there is any pretence at all, let it be in the opposite direction, and let us all try to appear wiser than we are!"

"And that's easy enough for some of us, such as Hankey, for instance," added Hankey's better half. "And there ain't as much wisdom to look at as you could put on the point of a knife even then."

So the women talked and the men listened—as is the way of men and women all the world over—until tea was finished and it was time for the guests to depart. They left amid a shower of heartfelt congratulations, and loving wishes for the future opening out before them. Just as Elisabeth passed through the doorway into the evening sunshine, which was flooding the whole land and turning even the smoke-clouds into windows of agate whereby men caught faint glimmerings of a dim glory as yet to be revealed, she turned and held out her hands once more to her friends. "It is very good to come back to you all, and to dwell among mine own people," she said, her voice thrilling with emotion; "and I am glad that Mrs. Hankey's prophecy has come true, and that Elisabeth Farrington will be Elisabeth Farrington to the end of the chapter."

## THE END

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