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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FFOLLIOTS OF REDMARLEY ***

E-text prepared by Al Haines

THE FFOLLIOTS OF REDMARLEY

by

L. ALLEN HARKER

JOHN MURRAY

TO

MABEL VIOLET JEANS.

For that dread "move" you saw me through,
For all the things you found to do.
For china washed and pictures hung—
And oh, those books, the hours among!
For merry heart that goes all day,
For jest that turns work into play,
For all the dust and dusters shared,
For that dear self you never spared:
And most of all, that all of it
Was light with laughter, spiced with wit—

Take, dear, my love, and with it take
The little book you helped to make.

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THE FOLLIOS OF REDMARLEY

CHAPTER I

ELOQUENT

"Father, what d'you think we'd better call him?" Mrs Gallup asked, when the baby was a week old; "have you thought of a name?"

"I've *fixed* on a name," her husband replied, triumphantly. "The child shall be called Eloquent."

"Eloquent," Mrs Gallup repeated, dubiously. "That's a queer name, isn't it? 'Tisn't a name at all, not really."

"It's going to be my son's name, anyhow," Mr Gallup retorted, positively. "I've thought the matter out, most careful I've considered it, and that's the name my son's got to be called . . . Eloquent Gallup he'll be, and a very good name too."

"But why Eloquent?" Mrs Gallup persisted. "How d'you know as he'll *be* eloquent? an' if he isn't, that name'll make him a laughing-stock. Suppose he was to grow up one of them say-nothing-to-nobody sort of chaps, always looking down his nose, and afraid to say 'Bo' to a goose: what's he to *do* with such a name?"

"There's no fear my son will grow up a-say-nothing-to-nobody sort of chap," said Mr Gallup, boastfully. "I'll take care of that. Now you listen to me, mother. You know the proverb 'Give a dog a bad name'—"

"I never said it was a bad name," Mrs Gallup pleaded.

"I should think you didn't—but look here, if it's true of a bad name, mustn't it be equally true of a good one? Why, it's argument, it's logic, that is. Call a boy Eloquent and ten to one he'll *be* eloquent, don't you see?"

"But what d'you want him to be eloquent for?" Mrs Gallup enquired almost tearfully. "What good will it do him—precious lamb?"

"There's others to be thought of as well as 'im," Mr Gallup remarked, mysteriously.

"Who? More children?" asked Mrs Gallup. "I don't see as he'd need to be eloquent just to mind his little brother or sister."

"Ellen Gallup, you listen to me. That babe lying there on your knee with a red face all puckered up is going to sway the multitude." Mrs Gallup gasped, and clutched her baby closer. "He's going to be one of those whose voice shall ring clarion-like"—here Mr Gallup unconsciously raised his own, and the baby stirred uneasily—"over"—he paused for a simile—he had been going to say "land and sea," but it didn't finish the sentence to his liking, "far and wide," he concluded, rather lamely.

Mrs Gallup made no remark, so he continued: "Eloquent Gallup shall be a politician. Some day he'll stand for parlyment, *and he'll get in*, and when he's there he'll speak up and he'll speak out for the rights of his fellow men, and he'll proclaim their wrongs."

And there and then, as if in vindication of his father's belief in him, the baby began to roar so lustily that further converse was impossible.

A week later, the baby was baptized Eloquent Abel Gallup. Abel was a concession to his mother's

qualms. It was his father's name, and by her it was looked upon as a loophole of escape for her son, should Eloquent prove a misnomer.

"After all," she reflected, "if the poor chap shouldn't have the gift of the gab, Abel's a good everyday workin' name, and he can drop the E if it suits 'im. 'Tain't always them as has most to say does most, that's certain; and why his father's so set on him being one of those chaps forever standing on platforms and haranguing passes me. I never see no good come of an election yet, an' I've seen plenty of harm: what with drinkin' and quarrellin', and standin' for hours at street corners argifyin'. Politics is all very well in their place, but let it be a small place, says I, and let 'em keep there."

Abel Gallup was fifty years old and his wife over forty when they married; staid, home-loving people both. Abel's business was that of "a General Outfitter," and "The Golden Anchor" that was hung over the entrance to the shop presided over the fortunes of a sound, going concern. Only ready-made clothes were sold, only ready money was accepted. They were well-to-do, and living simply above their shop in the main street of Marlehouse were able to save largely.

Abel Gallup, however, was not merely a keen man of business and successful tradesman. He was, in addition, an idealist and a dreamer of dreams; but so shrewd and level-headed was he, that he kept the two things quite apart. His business was never neglected, and he returned to it all the fresher, inasmuch as in his off times his mind was ardently concerned with other things.

He was a self-educated, self-made man, who had started as shop-boy and risen to be proprietor. He had always been interested in politics, and in their study had found the relaxation that others sought in art, music, literature, or less intellectual pursuits. He was proud of his liking for politics, counting it for much righteousness that he should be able to find such joy in what he considered so useful and important a matter. In fact, he had a habit of saying, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," with the comfortable reflection that such temporal prosperity as had been added to him was probably a reward for his abstention from all frivolous pleasures. He had no particular desire to rise in the world, himself. When he married, comparatively late in life, it was a woman of his own class, a comely, sensible, "comfortable" woman, who would order his house well, and see to it that there was "no waste."

She did all this; but she did infinitely more. She gave him a son, and in that son all his hopes and dreams, his secret humilities and unconscious vanities, his political devotions and antipathies were all brought together and focussed in one great determination that this son of his should have all that he had been denied; that in this son every one of his own inarticulate aspirations should find a voice.

He was a Congregationalist and a prominent member of this sect, the chief dissenting body in Marlehouse. He read little poetry and no fiction, but he was widely read in and thoroughly conversant with all the political events and controversies of both his own generation and of the one before it. A political meeting was to him what a public-house is to the habitual drunkard; he could not pass it. He never spoke in public himself, but he longed to do so with a longing that was intense as it was hopeless. He knew his limitations, and was quite conscious that his English was not that of the platform.

Little Eloquent could never remember when he first began to hear the names that were afterwards to be the most familiar household words to him. Two names, two personalities ever stood out in memory as an integral part of his child-life—those of William Ewart Gladstone and John Bright.

These were his father's idols.

They glowed, fixed planets in the political firmament, stable, unquenchable, a lamp to the feet of the faithful. Each shining with a steady radiance that the divergence in their views on many points could neither confuse nor obscure.

The square, dogged, fighting face of the man of peace; the serene, scholarly, aquiline features of the great Liberal leader were familiar to the little boy as the face of his own father.

That John Bright died when Eloquent was about six made no difference in his influence. There were two likenesses of him in the sitting-room, and under one of these the words were inscribed: "Be just and fear not"; and Eloquent, who was brought up to look upon justice as the first of political virtues, used to wonder wistfully whether such fearlessness could be achieved by one whose face at present showed none of those characteristics of force, strength, and pugnacity manifested in the portraits of the great commoner. But he found comfort in the reflection that "Dada," mirror of all the virtues, was yet quite mild and almost insignificant in appearance; a small, stout, dapper, very clean-looking little tradesman, with trim white whiskers, a bald head, and a round, rosy face, wherein shrewd, blue eyes twinkled cheerfully.

No, dada bore not the slightest resemblance either to Mr Gladstone or Mr Bright, and yet, Eloquent

reflected, "what a man he was!" Dada was the chief factor in Eloquent's little world—law-giver, lover, and friend.

It is probable that his childhood would have been more normal and less politically precocious had his mother lived. But she died when he was four years old, a fortnight after the birth of a little sister who lived but a few hours.

Abel Gallup's sister came to keep house for them, and luckily, she, like his wife, was sensible and kindly, but she stood in great awe of her brother and never dreamt of criticising his conduct. Now his wife had never spared him her caustic, common-sense comments. Politics, especially where they might have affected the well-being of the child, were strictly kept in their proper place, and naturally she considered that, in the upbringing of a very small boy, that place should be remote almost to invisibility.

With her death all this was altered. Abel Gallup was very lonely, and turned to his little son for comfort. The child was biddable, loving, and gentle, and "to please his dada" had ever been held before him as his highest honour and duty.

Before he could read he could repeat long portions from the various speeches his father particularly admired; he learned by heart easily and had a retentive memory, and his father had only to say over a sentence two or three times when the child was word perfect. It gave Abel Gallup the most exquisite delight to stand his little son between his knees and hear the stirring, sonorous sentences rolled out in the high, child voice; and even in those early days he used to impress upon Eloquent that when he was grown-up he "would have to speak different to dada."

And little Eloquent, not realising that his father referred merely to accent and general grammar, would puzzle for hours wondering how such men as Mr Gladstone or John Bright would express their common wants. In what lofty terms, for instance, would Mr Gladstone inform his aunt, if he had an aunt, that his collar was frayed at the back and was scratching his neck. This, Eloquent felt, was quite a likely contingency, "seeing as he wore 'em so high." And how, he wondered, would Mr John Bright intimate delicately to the authorities who ruled his home that he hoped there would be pork for dinner on Sunday and plenty of crackling. He felt certain that Mr Bright would be sympathetic in the matter of crackling; he didn't know why, but he was sure of it. Equally convinced was he that the great statesman would express his desire in impressive and rhetorical language. He repeated "bits" from the speeches that he knew, to see if he could fasten on a chance phrase here and there that could be introduced into the common conversations of life; but they never did fit, and he was fain to express his small wants in the plain language of the folk about him.

Another name floated vague and nebulous among the impressions of very early childhood: that of one Herbert Spencer; and this was curious, for Abel Gallup was what he would himself have described as "a sincere Believer." Nevertheless, he was immensely attracted by the philosopher's *Study of Sociology*, and little Eloquent was made to learn and repeat many long bits from that dispassionate work. There was no portrait of Mr Herbert Spencer hanging upon the walls; he was not a living force, a real presence, like Mr Gladstone or Mr Bright; he spake not with the words of "a great soul greatly stirred"; yet there was something in his polished and logical sentences that gave Eloquent a doubtless quite erroneous sense of his personality, and of a certain aloofness in his attitude. He never called into council the "bits" from Mr Herbert Spencer in order to find majestic language in which to express the ordinary wants of life.

Eloquent was taken to his first political meeting when he was six years old, and he fell asleep before he had been there half an hour. His father put his arm round the child, rested the heavy little head against his shoulder and let him sleep in peace. Not even the cheering woke him, and his father carried him home, still sleeping. Perhaps Abel believed that in some mysterious manner the child absorbed the opinions of the speakers through the pores. He was not in the least annoyed with the little boy for falling asleep, nor did his tender years prevent a repetition of the experiment a few months later. This time Eloquent kept awake for nearly an hour. He was dreadfully bored, but at the same time felt very elated and important. He was the only little boy in the hall.

Abel Gallup was never tired of impressing upon Eloquent that "the people had the power, and the people had the votes to send you to parlyment or keep you out. Don't you be misled, my boy, by them as would wish you to try to please the gentry by and bye. The gentry's few and the people's many. I don't say a word against the gentry, mind, they're all right in their proper place, and very pleasant they be, some of them, but when the time comes for you to stand, just you remember that even hereabout there's hundreds of little houses for one manshun, and in every one of those little houses there's a vote, and you can have it if you go the right way about. When you're *in*, Eloquent, then you can hob-a-nob with the gentry if it so pleases you; but *till* you're in, remember it's the working man as can make or mar you."

Eloquent's aunt, Miss Gallup, had for many years "kept" the post-office and general shop in the village of Redmarley; but when her brother asked her to come and look after his home and his motherless child, she did not hesitate. She resigned her position of post-mistress, sold the good-will of her shop, and went to live in Marlehouse at "The Sign of the Golden Anchor."

She did not lose her interest in Redmarley, however; she had many friends there, and it was one of the treats of little Eloquent's childhood to drive there with his aunt "in a shay," to spend the afternoon in the woods, and have tea afterwards either with the housekeeper at the "Manshun" or in one of the cottages in the village.

In those days, only one old gentleman lived at the "Manshun." He "kept himself very much to himself," so aunt said, and Eloquent never saw him except from an upper window in the Golden Anchor, when he happened to drive through Marlehouse.

Neither did the little boy ever see much of the interior of the "Manshun" itself, except the housekeeper's room, which was down a passage just inside the back entrance.

It was during these visits to the housekeeper at Redmarley that it first dawned upon Eloquent that there could be two opinions as to the absolute righteousness of the Liberal Cause. Moreover, he found out that his aunt's political views were not on all fours with those of his father. This last discovery was quite a shock to him, and there was worse in store. For while he sat in solemn silence devouring bread and jam at the housekeeper's well-spread table, with his own ears he heard her dare to speak of the Grand Old Man as "that there Gladstone," and the butler, an imposing gentleman in black, actually described him as "a snake in the grass."

"It's curious, Miss Gallup," the butler said, thoughtfully, "that your brother should be that side in politics, and him so well-to-do and all. If he'd been in the boot trade now, I could have understood it—there's something in the smell of leather that breeds Radicals like a bad drain breeds fever; but clothes now, and lining and neck-ties and hosiery, you'd think they'd have a softening effect on a man. Dissenter, too, he is, isn't he?"

"My brother's altogether out of the common run," Miss Gallup remarked, rather huffily. She might deplore his politics herself—when she was some distance away from him—but no one else should presume to find fault. "He may be mistaken in his views—I think he is mistaken—but that don't alter the fact that he's a very successful man: a solid man, well thought of in Marlehouse, I can tell you."

"Dada says," Eloquent broke in, "that he's successful *because* of his views."

"Well, to be sure," exclaimed the housekeeper in astonishment, "who'd have thought the child could understand."

"The child," groaned Miss Gallup, "hears nothing but politics all day long—it turns me cold sometimes, it does really."

CHAPTER II

ONE OF THEM

When Eloquent was six years old his visits to the "Manshun" at Redmarley ceased.

Old Mr Ffolliot died, and his nephew, Mr Hilary, reigned in his stead. The butler and the housekeeper, handsomely pensioned, left the village. The staff of servants was much reduced, and at first Mr Hilary Ffolliot only came down to Redmarley for two or three days at a time. Then he married and came to live there altogether.

Eloquent had liked going to Redmarley. The place attracted him, and the people were kind, even if they were wrong-headed as to politics. One day he asked his aunt when they would go again.

"I don't fancy we shall go much now," she replied; "most of my friends have left. It's all different now up at the 'Manshun,' with a young missus and a new housekeeper; though they seem pleased enough about it in the village; a well-spoken, nice-looking young lady they says she is, but I shan't go there no

more. They don't know me and I don't know them, and there we'll have to leave it."

And there it was left.

Redmarley would probably have faded altogether from Eloquent's mind, but for something that occurred to give it a new interest in his eyes.

The summer that he was seven, he was sent to the Grammar School. He came home every day directly after morning lessons, for he was as yet considered too small to take part in the games which were at that time but slightly supervised.

One day he returned to find a victoria and pair standing at the shop door, coachman on the box, footman standing on the pavement. This was unusual. Such an equipage must, he felt, belong to some member of the dangerously seductive "upper classes" his dada warned him against so often. The class that some day would *want* him. The class he was to keep at arm's length till he was safely "in."

The shop door was open, and Eloquent looked in. Dada, himself, was serving a customer; moreover, he was looking particularly brisk and pleased.

Eloquent crept into the shop cautiously. None noticed him. The four shopmen were serving other customers, and they all happened to be at the counter on the right-hand side.

It was a long shop with two counters that stretched its entire length, and was rather dark and close as a rule, but to-day there was bright sunshine outside. It shone through the big plate-glass windows, the glass door stood open, and somehow the shop looked gay. Dada had the left-hand counter all to himself.

Eloquent had never before seen anyone in the least like this customer, who, with slender hands, sat turning over little ready-made suits, boy's suits, and feeling the stuff to see if it were strong; she had taken off one of her long white gloves, and it lay beside the suits.

Eloquent gazed and gazed, and edged up the side of the counter towards her. Had he possessed eyes for anybody else he would have observed that the four assistants were staring also, and that his father, even, seemed very much absorbed by this particular purchaser.

And, after all, why?

She was just a tall, quite young woman, very simply dressed in white.

But she was beautiful.

Not pretty; beautiful in a large, luminous, quite intelligible way.

It was all there, the gracious sovereignty of feature, colouring, above all, expression—that governs men.

Little Eloquent knew it and came edging up the shop, drawn irresistibly as by some powerful magnetic force.

The young shopmen knew it, and neglected their patrons as much as they dared to stare at her.

Mr Gallup knew it, and stood rubbing his hands and thoroughly enjoying the good moment.

Those other customers knew it, and although the inattention of the young shopmen annoyed them, they sat well sideways in their chairs that they, too, might take a peep at the lady without rudely turning round.

The only person in the shop who appeared to know nothing about it was the lady herself. She bent her lovely head over the little suits and pondered, murmuring:

"I do wish I knew which they'd like best, a Norfolk jacket, or a jacket and waistcoat. Can you remember which you liked best?" she asked, suddenly lifting large, earnest eyes to Mr Gallup's flushed and cheerful countenance.

"Really, madam," said Mr Gallup, rather taken aback at the very personal turn the subject had taken, "I shouldn't think it matters in the least. Both are equally suitable."

At that moment, the lady caught sight of Eloquent edging, edging up the side of the counter, ever nearer to this astonishing vision.

"Here's somebody who can tell us," she exclaimed. "I'll explain to him. . . . I'm buying suits for three

little boys—Sunday suits, for church and Sunday school, you know—I want them plain and serviceable so that by and bye they won't look funny for school—*you* know; well, would they like coats and waistcoats, or a Norfolk—which do you think?"

"Coats and waistcoats," said Eloquent promptly, his eyes still glued to her face.

"Why?" asked the lady.

"Because you can take off your coat, and *then* you're in your shirt-sleeves."

"But aren't you in your shirt-sleeves when you take off a Norfolk?"

"No," said Eloquent, "*then* you're in your shirt."

The lady laughed. Mr Gallup laughed. The assistants, who had not heard, for Eloquent spoke very low, sniggered sympathetically, and the other customers frowned.

"That settles it," said the lady, "and I'm very much obliged to you. I'll have the three little grey suits with coats and waistcoats. Poor little chaps, their mother died just a fortnight ago, and they've nothing tidy."

"My mother's dead," Eloquent announced abruptly.

The lady's eyes had been so soft, her face so tender and full of pity as she said, "poor little chaps," he felt a sudden spasm of jealousy. He wanted her to look at him like that.

He did not see his father's start, nor the momentary pained contraction of his cheerful features.

Eloquent's eyes were fixed on the lady's face, and sure enough he got what he wanted.

"I'm so sorry," she said simply, and she looked it; she had turned her kind eyes full upon him, eyes wide apart and grey and limpid.

He edged still nearer to her; so near that he stood upon her white dress with his dusty little boots, and still he stared unblinkingly.

The young lady looked puzzled. Why did the child regard her so fixedly? She suddenly awoke to the fact that everyone in the shop was looking at her. Even Mr Gallup, on the other side of the counter, seemed suddenly stricken by inertia, and instead of putting up the little suits in paper, was staring at the pair of them.

Then Eloquent was moved to explain.

"I've never seen anybody look like you before," he said gravely, "and I like watching you."

"Thank you," said the lady, and she patted his cheek.

She laughed.

Mr Gallup laughed, and came back to the affairs of the Golden Anchor, busying himself in tying up her parcel, while he explained that Eloquent was his only child.

Eloquent did not laugh, for she was going away.

Dada carried the parcel to the shop door and gave it to the footman. He put it in the carriage, and held out a thin silken cloak for the lady, which she put on. He covered her knees with a linen dust rug, and smiling and bowing she drove away.

Eloquent turned back into the shop with his father.

It seemed to have got very dark and gloomy again.

"Dada," he asked, "who is that lady?"

"That," said Mr Gallup, loudly and with no little pride, "is Mrs Ffolliot of Redmarley, the bride."

The customers were all listening, the four assistants were all listening.

Mr Gallup held out his hand to Eloquent, and together they went through the shop and upstairs into the sitting-room, that looked out upon the market-place.

"Dada, is she one of the Classes?" Eloquent inquired, nervously.

"I believe you, my boy," Mr Gallup responded jocosely, "very much so, she is; a regular out and outer."

His father went away chuckling, but Eloquent was much depressed.

He went and stood over against one of the portraits of John Bright and looked at him for help.

"Be just and fear not," said that statesman.

"All very well," thought Eloquent, "she didn't pat *your* cheek."

He went and sought counsel of Mr Gladstone, a youngish Mr Gladstone in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester: "At last, my friends, I have come amongst you . . . unmuzzled," said the legend underneath his portrait.

But Eloquent felt that this was just what he was not. He felt very muzzled indeed. All sorts of vague thoughts went surging through his brain that could find no expression in words.

"I do believe," he said desperately, "if she was to give the whisperingest little call, I'd be obliged to go . . . and so would you," he continued, shaking his head at Mr Gladstone, "you'd do just the same."

He felt that, in some inexplicable, subtly mysterious fashion, there was a kind of affinity between Mr Gladstone and Mrs Ffolliot.

Mr Gladstone would understand, and not be too hard upon him.

In the years that followed, he saw Mrs Ffolliot from time to time from the window or in the street, but never again did he come so close to her as to touch her.

Never did he see her, however, without that strange thrill of enthusiastic admiration; that dumb, inarticulate sense of having seen something entirely satisfying and delightful; satisfying for the moment only: he paid dearly for his brief joy in after hours of curious depression and an aching sense of emptiness and loss. She was so far away.

Sometimes she was driving with her husband, and little Eloquent wondered after they had passed what manner of man it could be who had the right to sit by her whenever he liked. He never had time to notice Mr Ffolliot, till one day he saw him in the carriage alone, and scrutinised him sternly. Long afterwards he read how some admirer of Lord Hartington had said that what he liked most about him was his "You-be-damnedness." The phrase, Eloquent felt, exactly described Mr Ffolliot; aloof, detached, a fastidious, fine gentleman to his finger tips, entirely careless as to what the common people thought of him; not willingly conscious, unless rudely reminded of their existence, that there were any common people: such, Eloquent felt sure, was Mr Ffolliot's mental attitude, and he hated him.

Mr Ffolliot wore a monocle, and just at that time a new figure loomed large on the little boy's political horizon—a figure held up before him not for admiration, but reprobation—as a turncoat, an apostate, a real and menacing danger to the Cause dada had most at heart; the well-known effigy of Mr Joseph Chamberlain. He always appeared with monocle and orchid. In his expression, judged by the illustrated papers, there was something of that same "you-be-damnedness" he disliked so much in Mr Ffolliot. Eloquent lumped them together in his mind, and hated Mr Ffolliot as ardently as he worshipped his wife; and to no one at all did he ever say a word about either of them.

He rose rapidly in the school, and when he was nine years old had reached a form with boys much older than himself, boys old enough to write essays; and Eloquent wrote essays too; essays which were cruder and quainter than those of his companions. One day the subject given—rather an abstruse theme for boys to tackle—was Beauty. Eloquent wrote as follows:

"Beauty is tall and has a pleasant sounding voice, and you want to come as near as you can. You want to look at her all the time because you don't see it often. Beauty is most pretty to look at and you don't seem to see anyone else when it's there. She smells nice, a wafty smell like tobacco plants not pipes in the evening. When beauty looks at you you feel glad and funny and she smiles at you and looks with her eyes. She is different to aunts and people's wives. Taller and quite a different shape. Beauty is different.—E. A. Gallup, class IIIb."

He was twelve years old when they left Marlehouse. His father had bought a larger business in a busy commercial town, where there was a grammar school famous throughout the Midlands.

There Eloquent was educated until he was seventeen, when he, too, went into the outfitting business.

He attended lectures and the science school in his free time, and belonged to two or three debating clubs. He was in great request at the smaller political gatherings as a speaker, and with constant practice bade fair to justify his name.

He occasionally went to Marlehouse, generally on political business, but never to Redmarley. Nevertheless, stray items of Redmarley news reached him through his aunt, who still kept up her friendship with some of the village folk there.

From her he learned that there were a lot of young Ffolliots; that they were wild and "mishtiful," unmanageable and generally troublesome; that Mrs Ffolliot was still immensely popular and her husband hardly known after all these years; that, owing, it was supposed, to their increasing family, they did not entertain much, and that the "Manshun" itself looked much as it had always looked.

Eloquent made no comment on these revelations, but he treasured them in his heart. Some day he intended to go back to Redmarley. He never forgot Mrs Ffolliot, or the impression she had made upon him the first time he saw her.

When Eloquent was four-and-twenty Abel Gallup died. He then learned that his father was a much wealthier man than anyone had supposed. Miss Gallup was left an annuity of a hundred a year. The rest of the very considerable property (some seventy thousand pounds) was left to Eloquent, but with the proviso that until he was elected a member of Parliament he could not touch more than three hundred a year, though he was to be allowed two thousand pounds for his election expenses whenever, and as often as he chose to stand, until he was elected; as long as the money lasted. Once he was in Parliament the property was his absolutely, to dispose of as he thought fit.

It was proof of Abel Gallup's entire trust in his son, that there was not one word in the will that in any way whatsoever expressed even a hope as to the legatee's political convictions.

Miss Gallup went back to Redmarley. Eloquent sold the outfitting business, and went to London to study parliamentary business from the stranger's gallery.

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER OF THEM

A young man was walking through Redmarley woods towards Redmarley village, and from time to time he gazed sorrowfully at his boots. There had been a lot of rain that winter, and now on this, the third Sunday in December, the pathway was covered with mud, which, when it was not sticky, was extremely slippery.

The young man walked rather slowly, twirling a smart cane as he went, and presently he burst into speech—more accurately—a speech.

"What, gentlemen," he demanded, loudly and rhetorically, "but no—I will not call you gentlemen; here to-night, I note it with pride and gladness, there are but few who can claim that courtesy title. I who speak, and most of you who do me the honour to listen, can lay claim to no prouder appellation than that of MEN. What then, fellow-men, I ask you, what *is* the House of Lords? What purpose does it serve except to delay all beneficent legislation, to waste the country's time and to nullify the best efforts. . . . Confound . . ."

He slipped, he staggered, his hat went one way, his stick another, and he sat down violently and with a splash in a particularly large puddle. And at that instant he was suddenly beset by a dog—a curiously long-legged fox-terrier—who came bouncing round him with short rushes and sharp barks. He had reached a part of the woods where the paths cross. Fir trees were very thick just there, and footsteps made hardly any sound in the soft mud.

A tall girl came quickly round the corner, calling "Parker!" and pulled up short as she beheld the stranger seated ingloriously in the puddle. But it was only for a moment; she hastened towards him, rebuking the dog as she came: "Be quiet, Parker, how rude of you, come off now, come to heel"—then, as he of the puddle, apparently paralysed by his undignified position, made no effort to arise, on reaching him she held out her hands, saying; "I wouldn't *sit* there if I were you, it's so awfully wet. Shall I pull you up? Dig your heels in, that's it. I say, you are in a mess!"

He was.

The leggy fox-terrier ceased to bark. Instead, he thrust an inquisitive nose into the stranger's bowler hat and sniffed dubiously.

The girl was strong and had pulled with a will.

"I am much obliged to you," the young man remarked stiffly, at the same time regarding his rescuer with a suspicious and inimical eye, to see if she were laughing at him.

She did nothing of the kind. Her candid gaze merely expressed dismay, subtly mingled with commiseration. "I don't see how we're to clean you," she said; "only scraping would do it—a trowel's best, but, then, I don't suppose you've got one about you."

The young man tried to look down his back, always a difficult feat.

"You're simply covered with mud from head to foot," she continued. "The only thing I can think of for you to do is to come to the stables, and I'll get Heaven to clean you . . . unless, perhaps," she added, doubtfully, "you were coming to the house."

"If you will kindly direct me to the village," he said, "I have to pay a call there, and no doubt my friends will assist me to remove some of this mud."

"But you can't go calling like that," she expostulated; "you'd far better come to the stables first. Heaven's so used to us, he'd clean you up in no time; besides, by far the quickest way to the village is down our drive. There's no right-of-way through these woods; didn't you see the boards?"

"Whenever," he spoke with deliberate emphasis, "I see a board to the effect that trespassers will be prosecuted, I make a point of walking over that land as a protest."

"Dear me," she said. "It must take you sadly out of your way sometimes. Where have you come from to-day?"

"From Marlehouse."

"Then you'd have saved yourself at least a mile and a half, and your trousers all that mud, if you'd stuck to the road; it's ever such a long way round to come by the woods."

"I prefer the woods."

There was such superior finality in his tone, that the girl was apparently crushed. She started to walk, he followed; she waited for him, and they tramped along side by side in silence; he, covertly taking stock of his companion; she, gazing straight ahead as though for the moment she had forgotten his existence.

A tall girl, evidently between sixteen and seventeen, for her hair was not "done up," but tied together at the back with a large bow, whence it streamed long and thick and wavy to her waist: abundant light brown hair, with just enough red in it to give it life and warmth.

His appraising eye took in the fact at once that all her clothes were old, shabby, and exceedingly well cut. Her hat was a shapeless soft felt with no trimming, save a rather ragged cord, and she wore it turned down all round. It had once been brown, but was now a mixture of soft faded tints like certain lichens growing on a roof. Her covert coat, rather too big, and quite nondescript in colour, washed by the rains of many winters, revealed in flowing lines the dim grace of the broad, yet slender shoulders beneath.

Her exceedingly short skirt was almost as weather-beaten as the coat, but it swung evenly with every step and there was no sagging at the back.

Last of all, his eyes dropped to her boots: wide welted, heavy brown boots; regular country boots; but here again was the charm of graceful line, and he knew instinctively that the feet they encased were slender and shapely and unspoiled.

He raised his eyes again to the serenely unconscious profile presented to his view: a very finished profile with nothing smudgy or uncertain about it. The little nose was high-bridged and decided, the red lips full and shut closely together, the upper short and deeply cleft in the centre.

He was just thinking that, in spite of his muddy hat, he would rather like her to look at him again, when she turned her large gaze upon him with the question:

"Were you preaching just before you fell down?"

He flushed hotly. "Certainly not—did it sound like . . . that?"

"Well, I wasn't sure. I thought if you were a curate trying a sermon you'd have said 'brethren,' but 'fellow men' would do, you know; and then I heard something about the 'house of the Lord,' and I was sure you must be a sucking parson; but when I came up I wasn't so sure. What were you saying over, if it wasn't a sermon?"

"It was stupid of me . . . but I do a good deal of public speaking, and I never dreamt anyone was within miles . . ."

"Oh, a speech, was it? Where are you going to speak it?"

"I shall probably address a meeting in Marlehouse to-morrow night."

"Why?"

"Because I've been asked to do so."

"Will it be in the paper on Saturday?"

"Probably."

"How grand; do tell me your name, then I can look for your speech. I'd love to read it and see if you begin with the bit I heard about fellow men and the house of the Lord."

"The House of Lords," he corrected.

"Oh," said the girl. "Them! It's them you're against. I was afraid you objected to churches."

"I don't care much for churches, either," he observed, gloomily. "Do you?"

"I've really never thought about it," she confessed. "One's supposed to like them . . . they're good things, surely?"

"Institutions must be judged by their actual utility; their adaptability to present needs. Traditional benefits can no longer be accepted as a reason for the support of any particular cause."

"I think," she said, "that the mud on your clothes is drying. It will probably brush off quite nicely."

Had he ever read *Alice in Wonderland* he might have remembered what preceded the Caucus Race. But he never had, so he merely thought that she was singularly frivolous and irrelevant.

"You haven't told me your name," she continued, "so that I can look for that speech. We're nearly home, and I'll hand you over to Heaven so that he can make you tidy for your call."

"My name is E. A. Gallup," he replied, shortly.

"Up or op?" she asked.

"Up," he replied, wishing to heaven it weren't.

"Mine's M. B. Ffolliot, two 'fs' and two 'ls'. We live here, you know."

"I guessed you were a Miss Ffolliot. In fact, I may say I knew it."

"Everyone knows us about here," she said sadly. "That's the worst of it. You can never get out of anything you've done."

E. A. Gallup looked surprised, but as she was again gazing into space she did not observe him.

"Whenever hay's trampled, or pheasants startled, or gates left open, or pigs chased, or turkeys furious, they always say, 'It's them varmints of young Ffolliots.'"

"Do you know," he said, and his grave face suddenly broke into a most boyish grin, "I believe even I have heard something of the kind."

"If you live anywhere within six miles of Redmarley you'll hear little else, and it isn't always us . . . though it is generally. This stupid gate's locked. We'll have to get over. It's easiest to do it like this."

"This" was to go back a few paces, run forward, put her hands on the top and vault the gate as a boy

vaults a "gym" horse. E. A. Gallup did not attempt to follow suit. He climbed over, clumsily enough, dropping his stick on the wrong side. When he had recovered it, he raised his muddy hat with a sweep. "I see we are in a road of some sort, perhaps you will kindly direct me to the village, and I will not trouble . . . er . . . Mr Heaven—"

"But much the nearest way to the village is down our front drive. And we pass the stables to go to it."

"I couldn't think of intruding in your drive. Have the goodness to direct me."

"But the woods are ours just as much as the drive; where's the difference? In fact, we'd *rather* have people walk in the drive because of the pheasants."

"There *is* a difference, though it may not be apparent to you . . . if I follow this road, do I come to the village?"

"Don't be silly," she said shortly. "If you prefer to be all over mud there's no more to be said, but I can't direct you any more than I've done. If you want to get to the village you must go down our drive, unless you go wandering another mile and a half out of your way. It's quite a short drive; only you must come by the stables to get to it. *Are you coming?*"

"I'm afraid I seem ungrateful," he began.

"You do rather," she interrupted.

"I assure you I am not. I appreciate your kindness, but I cannot see why I should trouble . . ."

"Oh, Heaven's used to it; *he* wouldn't mind, but it's evident you would, so come along. It will be dark before long, and I'll get into no end of a row if I'm out alone, and father meets me when I get in. Not a soul will see you, please hurry."

She led him across a deserted stableyard, and round the back of the house through a wide-walked formal garden, where Christmas roses shone star white in the herbacious border, where yew trees were clipped into fantastic shapes, and tall grey statues looked like ghosts in the gathering dusk, till they reached the sweep of gravelled drive in front of the house. Wide lawns sloped steeply to the banks of the Marle, which flowed through the grounds. The red December sun was reflected in a myriad flames in the many mullioned windows of the Manor. As the girl had promised, not a soul was in sight, and it was very still.

"There, Mr Gallup," she announced, cheerfully, "follow the drive and you'll find the village outside the gates. Good-bye! I must go in by the side door with these boots." And before he could do more than lift his hat while he murmured inarticulate thanks, she had walked swiftly away and vanished round the angle of the house.

For a moment he stood quite still, looking at the beautiful old Jacobean manor-house so warmly red in the sunset. Then he, too, turned and walked quickly down the winding drive, and as he went he murmured softly: "So that's what they're like . . . curious anomaly . . . curious anomaly."

The girl entered the house by the side door, changed her muddy boots and hung up her coat and hat in a little room devoted to boot boxes and pegs, and ran upstairs to the schoolroom. Her elder brother, Grantly, who lounged smoking in the deep window-seat, swung his feet to the floor with a plump, and sat facing her as she came in, saying sternly:

"Mary, who on earth was that man you were with? Where did you pick him up?"

Mary laughed. "I literally picked him up from the very wettest part of the wood, where all the firs are, you know. He was sitting mournfully in a young pond, apparently quite incapable of getting up by himself, and very much afraid of Parker, who was barking furiously."

"Showed his sense; but what was that chap doing there, and who is he?"

"He was trespassing, of course; makes a point of it, he says, but he'd evidently lost his way, so I put him right. I thought if he and the pater met there'd be words. He isn't at all a meek young man, and talks like that *Course of Reading* Miss Glover loves so."

"If he talked so much, he must have told you something about himself."

"Not much; his name is E. A. Gallup, and he was going to pay a call in Redmarley."

"What's he like? I only saw his back, and deucedly disreputable it was. He looked as if he had been rolling drunk."

Mary laughed again. "I shouldn't think *he* ever got drunk," she said; "he's far too solemn. In appearance, he's rather like a very respectable young milkman, fresh-coloured, you know, and sort of blunt everywhere, but he speaks—if you can imagine a cross between a very superior curate and the pater—that's what he speaks like, except that there's just an echo of an accent—not bad, you know, but there."

Grantly took the pipe out of his mouth and pulled the lobe of his ear meditatively.

"Gallup," he repeated. "Gallup, I've heard something about that name quite lately. Surely, if you walked with him right from the Forty Firs and talked all the time, you must have found out something more?"

"He's going to make a speech at Marlehouse to-morrow night; he was spouting away like anything just before he fell down. That's what made Parker bark so."

"I've got it," cried Grantly. "He's the Liberal candidate, that's what he is. He's standing against poor old Brooke of Medenham, and they say he'll get in, too—young brute."

"Is he a Labour member?"

"No, Liberal, they couldn't run a Labour member at Marlehouse; not enough cash in the constituency . . . tell you who he is, son of old Gallup that kept the ready-made clothes shop in the market-place—'Golden Anchor' or something, they called it. Mother used to buy suits there for the kids in the village for Easter, jolly decent suits they were, too."

"And does he keep on the 'Golden Anchor'?"

"I don't think so, but I don't know. Jolly good cheek marching through our woods, as if they belonged to him. Wish I'd met him."

"My dear chap, we're the last people in the world who can say anything to people for marching through other people's property, you especially. Why, nine-tenths of the bad rows, ever since any of us could walk, have been about that sort of thing."

"Good old Mary, that Radical chap's converted you. What else did he say? Come on; get it off your chest."

At that moment, the door was opened by an elderly man-servant, who announced: "The master wishes to speak to you, Miss Mary."

"Oh, Botticelli! Cimabue! Burne Jones!" Mary ejaculated. "The pater must have been looking out of the window, too. What *bad* luck."

"I wouldn't mention having *touched* the chap in your interview with the pater," Grantly called after her.

As Eloquent neared the Manor gates—those great gates famous throughout the country for the gryphons on their posts and their wonderful fairy-like iron tracery—a little boy came out from amongst the tall chestnuts in the avenue. His face was dirty and his sailor-suit much the worse for wear, but his outstanding, high-bridged little nose and broad, confident smile proclaimed him one of the family. He stood right in the stranger's path, exclaiming:

"Hullo! had a scrap with the keeper?"

His tone proclaimed a purely friendly curiosity. "Certainly not," Eloquent answered, coldly. "I had the misfortune to slip and fall."

"Why ever didn't they clean you up a bit at the house?" the little boy asked.

"Your sister was kind enough to suggest it——"

"Which sister?"

"Miss——" he hardly liked to say "M. B.," and paused.

"Big or little? There's only two."

"Rather big, I should say."

"Oh, that's Mary—did she bump into you?"

Eloquent looked hopelessly puzzled, and the boy hastened to add:

"She's a bit of a gawk, you know, and awfully strong. I thought she might have charged into you and knocked you over . . . she wouldn't mean to do it . . ."

"I must be going," said Eloquent, "good-evening," and he hastened on his way.

"Sorry you couldn't stop to tea," the small boy called after him hospitably. "I'm Ger, so you'll know me again when you see me."

The child stood for a minute looking after the stranger in the hope that he would turn his head, and nod or wave to him in friendly farewell, but he did neither. Ger gave a little sigh, and trotted up the drive towards home.

Outside the gates Eloquent paused and looked back at them. Brought from Verona generations ago, they were a perfect example of a perfect period. Richly decorative, various in design, light and flowing in form, the delicate curves broke into actual leafage, sweeping and free as nature's own. The Ffolliots were proud of their gates.

He gazed at them admiringly, and then, like Ger, he sighed.

"Why," he muttered, "why should they have had all this always? I wonder if it's the constant passing through gates like this that helps to make them what they are."

CHAPTER IV

REFLECTION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Eloquent found that M. B. Ffolliot had not deceived him as to the nearness of the village. A few yards to the left, over the bridge, and the long, irregular street lay in front of him; the river on one side; the houses, various in size and shape, but alike in one respect, that the most modern of them was over two hundred years old. He knew that his aunt's house was at the very end of the street and furthest from the bridge, and that Redmarley village was nearly a mile in length. Yet he did not hurry. He walked very slowly in the middle of the muddy road, resolved to marshal and tabulate his impressions as was his orderly wont.

But in this instance his impressions refused to conform to either process, and remained mutinously chaotic.

He found that, in thinking of Mary, he unconsciously called her "that girl," whereas such maidens as he hitherto had encountered were always "young ladies." He didn't know many "young ladies," but those he did know he there and then called into review and compared with Mary Ffolliot.

They were all of them much better dressed, he was certain of that. But he was equally assured that not one of them would have forborne to laugh at his plight, as he sat abject and ridiculous in the very largest puddle in Redmarley woods.

She had not laughed.

And would any one of these well-dressed young ladies (Eloquent took into account that it was Sunday) have held out helping hands to a total stranger with such absolute simplicity, so entirely as a matter of course? not as a young woman to a young man, but as one fellow-creature to another who had, literally, in this instance, fallen upon evil times.

How tall she was, and how strong.

Again (he blushed at the recollection) he seemed to feel the clasp of those muscular young hands in the worn tan-coloured gloves, gloves loose at the wrists, that did not button but were drawn on. He had noticed her leather gloves as she held out her hands to him, and knew that in the language of the trade they were "rather costly to start with, but lasted for ever."

They did not stock goods of that class in the particular branch of the outfitting trade that he knew best. People wouldn't pay the price. And he found himself saying over and over again, "wouldn't pay the price," and it was of the girl he was thinking, not of her gloves.

How eager she had been that he should come and be brushed; "I've no objection," Eloquent reflected, "to being under an obligation to her, but I'm hanged if I'd be beholden to Ffolliot for anything." Somehow it gave him infinite satisfaction to think of Mary's father in that familiar fashion. He, to put up boards about trespassers in the woods!

Who was he?

Eloquent ignored the fact that they were the same boards that had been there in old Mr Ffolliot's time, and badly needed repainting.

That little boy, too, who first appeared to suspect him of poaching, and then expressed sorrow that he would not stay to tea. What an extraordinary family they seemed to be!

The girl had actually owned to being constantly suspected of all sorts of damage, and not always wrongfully either. He was devoured by curiosity as to what forms her lawlessness could take.

"A bit of a gawk" her young brother had called her. How dared he?

"Goddess," thought Eloquent, was much more appropriate than gawk. He had no very clear conception of a goddess, but vaguely pictured a woman fair and simple and superb and young—not quite so young as Mary Ffolliot. It was only during the last year or two that he had read any poetry, and he was never quite sure whether he liked it or not. It was upsetting stuff he considered, vaguely disquieting and suggestive. Yet there were times when it came in useful. It said things for a chap that he couldn't say for himself. It expressed the inexpressible . . . in words. It synthesised and formulated fantastic and illusive experiences.

His youthful facility in learning "bits" of prose by heart had not deserted him, and he found verse even easier to remember; in fact, sometimes certain stanzas would recur with irritating persistency when he didn't want them at all; and in thinking of this, to him, new type of girl, there flowed into his mind the lines:

"Walking in maiden wise,
Modest and kind and fair,
The freshness of spring in her eyes
And the fulness of spring in her hair."

Gawk, indeed! that little boy ought to have his head smacked.

And having come to a definite condition at last, he found he had reached his aunt's house. The lamp was lit in the parlour and the blind was down, for it was already quite dark. He had taken twenty-five minutes to walk from Mr Ffolliot's gates to his aunt's house.

Miss Gallup, plump, ruddy, and garrulous, very like her brother Abel with her round pink face and twinkling eyes, was greatly delighted to see him.

"You've come to your old aunt first thing, Eloquent," she cried triumphantly, "which is no more than I expected, though none the less gratifying, and you nearly a member and all. How things do come to pass, to be sure. I wish as your poor father had lived to see this day, and you going into parlyment with the best of 'em."

"Don't say 'going in,' aunt," Eloquent expostulated. "It's quite on the cards that they won't elect me. Personally, I think they would have done better to put up a stronger candidate. Marlehouse is always looked upon as a safe Tory seat; you know Mr Brooke has been member for a long time, and was unopposed at the last election."

"An' never opens his mouth in London from one year's end to the other, sits and sleeps, so I've heard, and leaves the rest to do all the talking and bills and that. My dear boy, don't tell me! Marlehouse folk's got too much sense to give the go-by to one as can talk and was born amongst 'em, and they all know you."

"But, Aunt Susan, I thought you were ever such a Tory. What has become of all your political convictions, if you want me to get in?"

Miss Gallup laughed. "Precious little chance; I had of *'aving* any convictions all the years I kept house

for your dear father; an' a pretty aunt I'd be if I could go against you now. Politics is all very well, but flesh and blood's a deal more, an' a woman wouldn't be half a woman if she didn't stand by her own. It don't seem to matter much which side's in. There'll be plenty to find fault with 'em whichever it is, and anyway from all I can hear just now you're on the winnin' side, so 'vote for Gallup,' says I, an' get someone as'll speak up for you—and not sit mumchance for all the world like a stuckey image night after night. Your bag come by the carrier all right yesterday. And now you must want your tea after that long walk—but, good gracious me, boy, have you met with an accident, or what, that you're all over with mud like that? You aren't hurted, are you?"

Eloquent again explained his mishap, but he said nothing about Mary Ffolliot. His aunt took him to the back-door and brushed him vigorously, then they both sat down to tea in her exceedingly cosy sitting-room.

"Do you like being back here again after all these years, Aunt Susan?" asked Eloquent. "I suppose everything has changed very much since you lived here before."

"Not so much as you'd think; and then the *place* is the same, and as one grows older that counts for a lot. When one's young, one's all for change and gallivantin', but once you're up in years 'tis the old things you cares for most; 'an when I heard as the house I was born in was empty I just had to come back. Redmarley village don't change, because no one can build. Mr Ffolliot sees to that; not one rood of land will he sell, and the old houses looks just the same as when I was a little girl. Your father he left Redmarley when he was fourteen, and went 'prentice to the 'Golden Anchor,' an' he never cared for the village like me. I hardly knew him when I was young, he being twelve years older than me, and him coming home but seldom."

"It must make a good deal of difference having a family at . . . the Manor," said Eloquent, with studied carelessness. He had nearly said "the Manshun," after the fashion of the villagers.

"Of course it do. There's changes there, if you like."

"I suppose you sometimes see . . . the young people?"

"See them? I should just think we do, *and* hear them and hear *about* them from morning to night. There never was more mixable children than the young Ffolliots."

"How many are there?" Eloquent tried to keep his voice cool and uninterested, but he felt as he used to feel when he was a child in "hiding games," when some one told him he was "getting warm."

"Well, there's Mr Grantly, he's the eldest; he's going to be an officer in the army like his grandpa; he's gone apprentice to some shop."

"What?" asked Eloquent, in astonishment.

"I thought it a bit queer myself, but Miss Mary herself did say it. 'Grantly's gone to the shop,' she said, 'to learn to be a soldier'; and I said, 'Well, the gentry's got more sense than I thought for, if they gives 'em a trade as well.' And Miss Mary she said again, he'd gone to a shop right enough, and went off laughing."

"But that's impossible," said Eloquent. "He must have gone either to Sandhurst or Woolwich; there's nowhere else he could go."

"She never mentioned neither of those names. 'Shop,' she said . . . you needn't look at me like that, Eloquent . . . I'm positive."

"You were telling me how many children there were," Eloquent remarked pacifically, "Grantly, the eldest son, and then . . . ?"

"I'm getting warm," his mind kept saying.

"Then Miss Mary, just a year younger, very like her mother she is . . . in looks, but she hasn't got the gumption of Mrs Ffolliot. That'll come, perhaps . . . later. A bit of a tomboy she's bin, but she's settling down."

"I suppose she is nearly grown up?"

"Between seventeen and eighteen, she'll be, but not done up her hair yet—that's Mr Ffolliot's doin's; he's full of fads as an egg's full o' meat. Then there's the twins, Uz and Buz they calls 'em. They're at Rugby School, they are, but they'll be home for the holidays almost directly. I can't say I'm partial to scripture names myself, and only last time he was here I asked Mr Grantly what they called them that

for, when there was so many prettier names in our language, and he said, quite solemn like, 'Uz his first-born and Buz his brother, that's why, you see.' And I said, 'but they're twins, sir'; and he said, 'but Uz was born five minutes before Buz, so it's quite correct,' and went off laughing. They're always laughing at something, those children."

"Then are there just the four?" asked Eloquent, who knew perfectly well there were more.

"Oh, bless you, no; there's Master Ger; now I call him the pick of the bunch, the most conformable little chap and full of sense: he'll talk to you like one of yourselves; he's everybody's friend, is Master Ger. Miss Kitten's the youngest, and a nice handful she is. She and Master Ger does everything together, and they do say as she's the only one as don't care two pins for her papa; nothing cows her, she'd sauce the king himself if she got the chance."

"From what you say, I gather that they seem to do pretty much as they like," Eloquent remarked primly.

"Outside they do, but in the house they say those poor children's hushed up something dreadful. Mr Ffolliot's a regular old Betty, he never ought to have had one child, let alone six. He's always reading and writing and studying and sitting with his nose in a book, and then he complains of nerves. I'd nerve him if I was his wife—but she's all for peace, poor lady, and I suppose she makes the best of a bad job."

"Is she unhappy?" Eloquent demanded, with real solicitude.

"If she is, she don't show it, anyhow. She goes her way, and he goes his, and her way's crowded with the children, and there it is."

"Are you thinking of going to church, Aunt Susan?"

Miss Gallup looked surprised.

"Well, no, not if you don't want to come. I generally go, but I'm more than willing to stop with you."

"But I'd like to go," Eloquent asserted, and got very red in the face as he did so. "I don't think I've ever been in the church here."

"Well, there's no chapel as you could go to if you was ever so minded. Old Mr Molyneux mayn't be so active as some, but there's never been no dissent since he was vicar, and that's forty years last Michaelmas."

"What about my father?" Eloquent suggested.

"Your dear father got his dissenting opinions and his politics in Marlehouse, not here."

"Then I'm afraid I shan't get many votes from this village," said Eloquent, but he said it cheerfully, as though he didn't care.

"That's for you to see to," Miss Gallup said significantly; "there's no tellin' what a persuasive tongue mayn't do."

As Eloquent walked through the darkness with his aunt, he heard her cheerful voice go rippling on as in a dream. He had no idea what she talked about, his whole mind was concentrated in the question: "Will she be there?"

CHAPTER V

THE IMPRESSIONS ARE INTENSIFIED

The service at Redmarley Church was "medium high." It boasted an organist and a surpliced choir, and the choir intoned the responses. "The old Vicar," as Mr Molyneux liked to be called, was musical, and saw to it that the Sunday services were melodiously and well rendered. Very rarely was there a week-day service. The villagers would have regarded them in the light of a dangerous innovation; yet, notwithstanding the lack of daily services, the church stood open from sunrise to sunset always, and though very few people ever entered it during the week, they would have been most indignant had it

ever been shut.

The church was too big for the village: it was built early in the fourteenth century when the Manor House was a monastery, and at a time when Redmarley was the religious centre for half a dozen outlying villages that now had churches of their own. Therefore, it was never full, and even if every soul in the village had made a point of going to divine service at the same time, it would still have appeared but sparsely attended.

Miss Gallup's seat, with a red cushion and red footstools and everything handsome about it, was about half-way up the aisle on the left.

On the right, one behind the other, were two long oaken pews next the chancel steps belonging to the Manor House. In the one, there were three young women, obviously servants; the front one was empty.

Eloquent began to wish he had not come.

People bustled and creaked and pattered up the aisle after their several fashions. The organist started the voluntary, and the choir came in.

The congregation stood up, when suddenly his aunt gave Eloquent's elbow a jerk, and whispered: "There's Mr Grantly and Miss Mary."

As if he didn't know!

Just the same leisurely, unconscious, strolling walk that got over the ground so much more quickly than one would have thought.

She had changed her clothes and looked, he noted it with positive relief, much more Sundayish. In fact, her costume (Eloquent used this dreadful word) now compared quite favourably with those of the other young ladies of his acquaintance. Not that she in the least resembled them. Not a bit. Her things were ever so much plainer, but Eloquent's eagle eye, trained to acute observation by his long service in the outfitting line, grasped at once that plain as was the dark blue coat and skirt, it was uncommonly well made. She wore blue fox furs, too, hat and stole and muff all matching, and her hair was tied twice with dark blue ribbon, at the nape of the neck and about half-way down.

Yes, M. B. Ffolliot was very tidy indeed. Behind her followed a youth ridiculously like her in feature, but he was half a head taller. He walked with quick, short steps, and had a very flat back and square shoulders. His appearance, even allowing for the high seriousness of an outfitter's point of view, was eminently satisfactory. There was no fleck or speck of fluff or dust or mud about *his* clothes. He was, Eloquent decided grimly, a "knut" of the nuttiest flavour; from the top of his exceedingly smooth head to his admirable grey spats and well-shaped boots, a thoroughly well-dressed young man.

"Shop, indeed!" thought Eloquent. "He's never seen the wrong side of a counter in his life."

"Rend your hearts and not your garments," so the Vicar adjured the congregation in his agreeable monotone, and the service began.

Eloquent could see Mary's back between the heads of two maids: her hair shone burnished and bright in the lamplight. Just before the psalms she turned and whispered to her brother, and he caught a glimpse of her profile for the space of three seconds.

When the psalms ended, the "knut" came out into the aisle, mounted the steps leading to the lectern, and started to read the first lesson.

"Woe to thee that spoilest and thou wast not spoiled," Grantly Ffolliot began in a voice of thunder. The congregation lifted startled heads, and looked considerably surprised. Grantly was nervous. He read very fast, and so loud that Mary was moved to cover her ears with her hands; and Eloquent saw her and sympathised.

Now here was a matter in which he could give young Ffolliot points and a beating. He longed passionately to stand up at that brass bird and read the Bible to the people of Redmarley; to one person in particular. He knew exactly the pitch of voice necessary to fill a building of that size.

"He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from the holding of bribes. . . ."

How curiously applicable certain of Isaiah's exhortations are to the present day, thought Eloquent. . . . The "knut" had somewhat subdued his voice, and even he could not spoil the music and the majesty of the words, "a place of broad rivers and streams wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall

gallant ship pass thereby." Two more verses, and the first lesson was ended, and Grantly Ffolliot, flushed but supremely thankful, made his way back to his seat.

Eloquent registered a vow.

The vicar himself read the second lesson, and the meditations of the assembled worshippers were undisturbed.

The vicar always preached for exactly ten minutes. He took an old-fashioned hour-glass up into the pulpit with him, and when it ran out he concluded his discourse. Redmarley folk highly approved this ritual. When stray parsons came to preach, especially if they were dignitaries of the church, a body could never tell what they might be at, and the suspense was wearing. Why, the Dean of Garchester had been known to keep on for half an hour.

The Redmarley worshippers rarely slept. It wasn't worth while. Instead, they kept a wary eye upon the hour-glass. They trusted to their vicar's honour, and he rarely failed them. As the last grains of sand ran out he turned to the east, and most people were back home and sitting down to supper by eight o'clock.

Miss Gallup never hurried out of church. She thought it unseemly. Therefore, it came to pass that Eloquent was still standing in his place as Mary Ffolliot and her brother came down the aisle. Mary looked him full in the face as she passed, and smiled frankly at him with friendly recognition.

The "knut" had gone on ahead.

Eloquent gave no answering smile. For one thing, he had never for one moment expected her to take the slightest notice of him, and the fact that she had done so raised a perfect tumult of unexpected and inexplicable emotion.

The hot blood rushed to his face, and there was a singing in his ears. He turned right round and stared down the aisle at her retreating form, and was only roused to a sense of mundane things by a violent poke in the small of his back, and his aunt's voice buzzing in an irritated whisper: "Go on, my boy, do you want to stop here all night?"

"Mr Grantly read very nice, didn't he?"

Miss Gallup remarked complacently, as they were walking home.

"To tell you the truth, Aunt Susan, I thought he read very badly: he bellowed so, and was absolutely wanting in expression."

"Poor young gentleman," Miss Gallup said tolerantly. "Last time he read, back in summer it was, he did read so soft like, no one could hear a word he said, and I know they all went on at him something dreadful, so this time I suppose he thought as they *should* hear him."

"Do you think," Eloquent asked diffidently, "that Mr Molyneux would like me to read the lessons some Sunday when I'm down here?"

Miss Gallup stopped short.

"Well, now," she exclaimed, "to think of you suggestin' that, an' I was just wonderin' at that very minute whether if I was to ask you—you'd snap my head off, you being chapel and all."

Eloquent longed to say that he was not so wrapped up in chapel as all that, but long habits of self-restraint stood him in good stead. Where possible votes were concerned it did not do to speak the thought of the moment, so he merely remarked indifferently that he'd be "pleased to be of any assistance."

"Of course," Miss Gallup continued, as she walked on, "there's no knowing whether, with the election coming on and all, the vicar might think it quite suitable, though he's generally glad to get any one to read as will."

"Surely," Eloquent said severely, "he does not carry his political views into his religious life, to the extent of boycotting those who do not agree with him."

"It's his church," Miss Gallup rejoined stoutly; "no one can read in it without 'tis his wish."

"My dear aunt, you surely don't imagine that I want to read the lessons at Redmarley except as a matter of kindness . . . assistance to Mr Molyneux. What other reason can I have?"

"Well," said Miss Gallup, shrewdly, "it might be that you wanted to show how well you could do it . . ." she paused.

Eloquent blushed in the darkness.

"And with an election coming on, you never know what motives folks has," she continued. "But it's my belief Mr Molyneux'd be pleased as Punch. He's all for friendliness, he is. I know who wouldn't be pleased, though——"

"Who is that?" asked Eloquent, as his aunt had stopped, evidently waiting to be questioned.

"Why, Mr Ffolliot; he don't take much part in politics, but he thinks Redmarley belongs to him, and he'd be mighty astonished if you was to get up and read in the parish church, and him not been told anything about it."

"I shall certainly call on Mr Molyneux tomorrow," said Eloquent.

CHAPTER VI

THE SQUIRE

Hilary Ffolliot, squire of Redmarley in the county of Garsetshire, did not appreciate the blessings heaped upon him by providence in the shape of so numerous a family, and from their very earliest years manifested a strong determination that no child of his should be spoilt through any injudicious slackening of discipline.

His rules and regulations were as the sands of the sea for number, and as they all tended in the same direction, namely, to the effacement of his lively and ubiquitous offspring, it is hardly surprising that such a large and healthy family found it difficult, not to say impossible, to attain to his ideal of the whole duty of children. And although a desire not to transgress his code regarding silence and decorum in such parts of the house as were within ear-shot of his study was strong in the children, knowing how swift and sure was the retribution overtaking such offenders—yet, however willing the spirit, the flesh was weak, and succumbed to temptations to jump whole flights of stairs, to slide down bannisters, arriving with a sounding thump at the bottom, and occasionally to bang the schoolroom door in the faces of the pursuing brethren.

Thus it was that strangers ringing the front-door bell at the Manor House were, on being admitted, faced by large cards on the opposite wall bearing such devices as, "Be sure you shut the door quietly," "Do not speak loudly," "Go round to the back if possible." And it is told of one timid guest, that on reading the aforesaid directions (which, by the way, were only supposed to apply to the children) he incontinently fled before the astonished butler could stop him; and, as directed, meekly rang the back-door bell, some five minutes afterwards.

Mr Ffolliot suffered from nerves. He was by temperament quite unfitted to be either a country squire or the father of a large family. Above all, was he singularly unable to bear with equanimity the strain upon his income such a large family entailed. He liked his comforts about him, he was by nature of a contemplative and aesthetically studious turn, and saw no good reason why his learned leisure should suffer interruption, or his delicate susceptibilities be ruffled by such incongruities as the loud voices and inharmonious movements of a set of thoughtless children.

The village was small and well-to-do, his duties as a landowner sat lightly upon him, and he was very awe-inspiring, didactic, and distant in his dealings with the surrounding neighbours. He had a fine taste in old prints and old port, and every spring his health necessitated a somewhat lengthened stay in an "oasis" which he had "discovered," so he said, in the south of France, where he communed with nature, and manifested a nice appreciation of the artistic efforts of his host's most excellent cook.

In fact, the matter of intercourse with outsiders was largely left to the discretion of his wife; and whoever had much to do with Mrs Ffolliot (and most people wanted as much as they could get) spent a good deal of time in the society of the children. And to the children—what was she not to those children?

For them "mother" signified everything that was kind, and gay, and gracious, and above all, understanding. Other people might be stupid, and attaint with evil intention accidents, which while

certainly unfortunate in their results, were wholly unpremeditated, but mother always gave the offender the benefit of the doubt, and not infrequently by her charms of person and persuasive arts of conversation, so effectually turned away the wrath of the injured one (generally a farmer), that no hint of the escapade reached Mr Ffolliot's ears.

For the fact is that being somewhat tightly kept at home, the young Ffolliots were more than something of a nuisance when they went abroad; and as several of them generally were abroad, in their train did mischief and destruction follow.

For three hundred years there had been Ffolliots at Redmarley; of the last three owners two were married and childless, and the one immediately preceding Mr Hilary Ffolliot was a bachelor. But the fact that the Manor had not for over a hundred years descended from father to son, in no way affected the love each reigning Ffolliot felt for it.

There was something about Redmarley that seized the imagination and the affection of the dwellers there. The little grey stone village that lay so lovingly along the banks of the Marle was so enduring, so valorous in its sturdy indifference to time; in the way its gabled cottages under their overhanging eaves faced summer sun and winter rains, and instead of crumbling away seemed but to stand the firmer and more dignified in their cheery eld.

The Ffolliots were good landlords. No leaking roofs or defective walls were complained of at Redmarley. Never was Ffolliot yet who had not realised the unique quality of the village, and done his best to maintain it. It never grew, rarely was a house to let, and the jerry builder was an unknown evil. It was a healthy village, too, set high in the clean Cotswold air. Big farms surrounded it, the nearest railway line was three miles off, and the nearest station almost seven.

Of course there was poverty and a good deal of rheumatism among the older inhabitants, but on the whole the periodic outbursts of industrial discontent and unrest that convulsed other parts of England seemed to pass Redmarley by.

Had the Manor stood empty or the vicar been a poor man with a large family, doubtless things would have been uncomfortable enough to stir the villagers out of their habitual philosophic acceptance of the "rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate" as an inevitable and immutable law. But they couldn't actively dislike either squire or parson, and although the agricultural labourer is slow of speech he is not lacking in shrewdness, and those at Redmarley realised that things would be much worse than they were if Squire and Parson were suddenly eliminated.

Hilary Ffolliot liked the rôle of landed proprietor in the abstract. He would not have let the Manor and lived elsewhere for the world. He went regularly to church on Sunday morning, though it bored him extremely, because, like Major Pendennis, he thought that "when a gentleman is *sur ses terres* he must give an example to the country people." Had he been starving he would not have sold a single rood of Redmarley land to assuage his hunger. Similarly he would himself have done without a great many things rather than let any of his people go hungry. But it was only because they were *his* people, part of the state and circumstance of Redmarley. He didn't care for them a bit as individuals. Any intercourse with the peasantry was irksome to him. Dialect afflicted him. He had nothing to say to them, and they were stricken dumb in his awe-inspiring presence. He was well content to have few personal dealings with those, who, in his own mind, he thought of as his "retainers." He left everything of that sort to his wife.

It was the same with the children. He looked upon them as a concession to Marjory's liking for that sort of thing: and by "that sort of thing" he meant his wife's enthusiastic interest in her fellow-creatures.

To be sure he was pleased that there should be no question as to a direct heir . . . but . . . six of them was really rather a nuisance. Children were like peasantry, inclined to be awkward and uncouth, crude in thought and word and deed; apt to be sticky unless fresh from the hands of nurse; in summer nearly always hot, frequently dirty, and certainly always noisy, with, moreover, a distinct leaning towards low company and a plainly manifest discomfort in his own.

He was proud of them because they were Ffolliots, and because they were tall and straight and handsome (how wisely he had chosen their mother!), and he supposed that some day, when they became more civilised, he would be able to take some pleasure in their society. Even the two eldest, Grantly and Mary, wearied him. He could never seem to find any topic of mutual interest, except Redmarley itself, and then they always introduced irrelevant matter relating to the inhabitants that he had no desire to hear.

Had Marjory, his wife, grown plain and anxious during her twenty years of married life, it is probable

she would have bored him too. But she kept her hold upon him because she was not only the most beautiful woman he knew, but she satisfied his artistic sensibilities all round. She was full of individuality and quick-witted decision. Long ago she had made up her mind that it was quite impossible to alter him, but she was equally assured as to her perfect right to differ from him in every possible way. He quite fell in with this view of the situation; so long as he was allowed unchallenged to be as stiff and stand-off and unapproachable as he pleased, he was well content that she should be extraordinarily sympathetic, gracious, and gay. It pleased him that the "retainers" should adore her and come to her in their troubles and difficulties; that she should be constantly surrounded by her children; that she should be in great request at every social gathering in the county.

Did it happen that his need of her clashed with the children's, and that just then she considered theirs was the stronger claim, he was annoyed; but apart from that he approved of her devotion to them. Somebody must look after the children; and it was not in his line.

So many things were not in his line.

One day, early in their married life, with unusual want of tact, Marjory had asked him what his line was.

The question surprised and distressed him, it was so difficult to answer. However, the retort courteous came easily to Mr Ffolliot, and raising her hand to his lips, he replied, "To provide a sufficiently beautiful setting for you, my dear, that is my *métier* at present." And Marjory, who had spent a long, hot morning in superintending the removal of books, busts, and pictures to the room that, for the future, was to be his study, the room that till then had been her drawing-room, felt an unregenerate desire to slap him with the hand he had just kissed.

Mr Ffolliot believed that he could best develop the ultimate highest that was in him if his surroundings were entirely harmonious. Therefore had he selected the sunniest, largest room on the entrance floor for his own study. It had a lovely view of the river.

The oak wainscotting and shelves were removed there piece by piece from the old library at the back, which faced north and had rather an uninteresting outlook towards the woods. This rather gloomy chamber he caused to be newly panelled with wood enamelled white, and presented it to his wife for her own use with a "God bless you, my darling, I hope you may have many happy hours here."

Her drawing-room was the only room in Redmarley that Marjory Ffolliot thoroughly disliked, and she never sat there if she could help it.

On that Sunday afternoon when Eloquent thought fit to visit his aunt, Mr Ffolliot had left his writing-table and was standing in one of the great windows that he might look out and, with the delicate appreciation of the connoisseur, savour the crimson beauties of the winter sunset.

As he gazed he mentally applauded the pageant of colour provided for his enjoyment, and then he perceived two figures standing not fifty yards from his window.

One he recognised at once as his daughter, and for a moment he included her in his beatitude at the prospect presented to his view. Yes; Mary was undoubtedly pleasing to the eye, she was growing very like his wife, and for that resemblance, like the Ancient Mariner, "he blessed her unaware."

But when he became fully cognisant of the other figure, his feeling wholly changed. He screwed his eyeglass firmly into his eye and glared at the couple.

Who on earth was this muddy, rather plebeian-looking person with whom Mary was conversing on apparently friendly and familiar terms? He suddenly realised with an irritated sense of rapidly approaching complications that Mary was nearly grown up.

In another minute the young man was walking down the drive alone, and his daughter had vanished.

He gave her time to take off her boots, then he sent for her.

He sat down at his writing-table and awaited her, feeling intensely annoyed.

How dared that mud-bespattered young man speak to her?

How could Mary be so wanting in dignity as to reply?

What was Marjory about to allow it?

Those children had far too much latitude.

He was in that frame of mind which, during the middle ages, resulted in the immurement of such disturbing daughters in the topmost turrets of their fathers' castles.

Mary came in, shut the door softly, and waited just inside it to say nervously:

"You sent for me, father?"

"Come here," said Mr Ffolliot.

Mary crossed the big room and stood at the other side of the knee-hole table facing him.

"I sent for you," Mr Ffolliot began slowly, and paused. Angry as he was, he found a moment in which to feel satisfaction at her pure colouring . . . "to make enquiries" he continued, "as to your late companion. Who is that exceedingly muddy person with whom you were talking in the front drive a few minutes ago?"

Yes; her colouring was certainly admirable. A good healthy blush sweeping over the white forehead till it reached the pretty growth of hair round the temples and dying away as rapidly as it had arisen, was quite a forgivable weakness in a young girl.

"I believe," said Mary cautiously, "that he is Mr Gallup, the new Liberal candidate."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, father. He told me his name, but it was Grantly who thought he was that one."

"And may I ask what reason Mr Gallup had for imparting his name to you—did no one introduce him?"

"No, father."

"Well, how did the man come to speak to you?" Mr Ffolliot demanded, irritably. "You must see that the matter requires explanation."

"He was lost," Mary said mournfully, "and so I showed him the way."

"Lost," Mr Ffolliot repeated scornfully; "lost in Redmarley!"

"No, father, in the wood."

"And what was he doing in our woods, pray?"

"He had tried to come by a short-cut and got muddled and he fell down, and I couldn't pass by without speaking, could I . . . he might have broken his leg or something."

"What were you doing in the woods alone? I have told you repeatedly that I will not have you scouring the country by yourself. You have plenty of brothers, let one of them accompany you."

"I wasn't exactly alone," Mary pleaded; "Parker was with me."

"Mary," Mr Ffolliot said solemnly, "has it ever occurred to you that you are very nearly eighteen years old?"

"Yes, father."

"Well, that being the case, don't you think that decorum in your conduct, more dignity and formality in your manner are a concession you owe to your family. You know as well as I do that a young girl in your position does not converse haphazard with any stranger that she happens to find prone in the woods. It's not done, Mary, and what is more, *I* will not have it. This impertinent young counter-jumper probably was only too ready to seize upon any excuse to address you. You should have given him the information he asked and walked on."

"But we were going the same way," Mary objected; "it seemed so snobby to walk on, besides . . ." again that glorious blush, "he didn't speak to me first, I spoke to him."

Mr Ffolliot sighed. "Remember," he said solemnly, "that should you see him again you do not know that young man. . . ."

Silence on the part of Mary. Deep thought on the brow of Mr Ffolliot.

"To-morrow," he said at last, "you may do up your hair."

"Oh, father, mayn't I do it up to-night before church. I should love to, do let me."

"No, my child, to-morrow is more suitable."

Mary did not ask why. None of the children except the Kitten ever questioned any of Mr Ffolliot's decisions . . . to him.

"Have you done with me, father?" Mary asked. "I think it must be tea-time."

"Yes, Mary, you may go, but remember, nothing of this sort must ever occur again; it has distressed and annoyed me."

"I'm sorry, father, I didn't think . . ."

"You never do," said Mr Ffolliot, "that is what I complain of."

Thus it came about that Mr Ffolliot was himself directly responsible for the friendly smile which greeted Eloquent as Mary passed him in the aisle of Redmarley church that evening.

She had not been allowed to put up her hair that evening. She was not a grown-up lady yet.

Therefore would she grin at whomsoever she pleased.

CHAPTER VII

THE KITTEN

The Kitten was born on a Whitsunday morning about eight o'clock. Mr Ffolliot went himself to announce the news to Ger, who was sitting in his high chair eating bread and milk at nursery breakfast. Ger was all alone with Thirza, the under-nurse, and he was thunderstruck to see his father at such an unusual hour, above all, in such an unusual place as his nursery.

"Ger," said Mr Ffolliot, quite genially for him, "you've got a new little sister."

Ger regarded his father solemnly with large, mournful eyes, then said aggrievedly, "Well, *I* can't help it."

Mr Ffolliot laughed. "You don't seem overjoyed," he remarked.

"Are you sorry, father?" Ger asked anxiously.

"Sorry," Mr Ffolliot repeated, "of course not; why should you think I'm sorry?"

"Well, you see," said Ger, "it makes another of us."

Mr Ffolliot ignored this remark. He moved towards the door. At the door he paused; "You may," he said graciously, "go and see your little sister in an hour or two; mother said so."

As the door was closed behind him, Thirza sat down again with a sort of gasp. "Whatever did you mean, my dear, talking to Squire like that?" she demanded shrilly.

"Like what?" asked Ger.

"Sayin' as it wasn't your fault, and seemin' so down about it all. Why, you ought to be glad there's a dear little new baby, and you such an affectionate child an' all."

"It makes another of us," Ger persisted, and Thirza gave him up as an enigma.

In due time he went to the dressing-room off the big spare bedroom, and there sat the kind, comfortable lady he knew as "mother's nurse" (Ger had not seen her as often as the others, but still she came from time to time "just to see how they were all getting on," and he liked her). There she sat on a small rocking-chair with a bundle on her knee.

"Come, my darling, and see your little sister," she cried cheerfully.

Ger advanced. She opened the head flannel and displayed a small, dark head, and a red, puckered countenance.

"When will she be able to see?" asked Ger.

As if in answer the baby opened a pair of large dark eyes and stared fixedly at the round, earnest face bent above her.

"See, bless you!" mother's nurse exclaimed, "see! why, she isn't a kitten. She can see right enough. Look how she's taking you in. She has stared about from the minute she was born, as if she'd been here before and was looking round to see that things were all the same. She's the living image of Squire."

"I think she's rather like a kitten," Ger persisted, "but I'm glad she can see. I think she likes me rather."

And that was how the Kitten got her name.

She was not a Grantly. She was all Ffolliot, and she was the only one of the children absolutely fearless in the presence of her father.

Small and dark and delicately made, with quick-sighted falcon-coloured eyes that nothing escaped. Unlike her big, healthy brethren, she was never in the slightest degree shy or clumsy, and she cared not a single groat for anyone or anything in the whole wide world so long as she got her own way. And this, being a member of the Ffolliot family, she did not get nearly as often as she would have liked. But she understood her father as did none of the others, and she could "get round him" in a fashion that filled those others with astonished admiration.

She also considerably astonished Mr Ffolliot, for from the very first she was familiar, and familiarity on the part of his children he neither encouraged nor desired. Moreover, she was ubiquitous and elusive. No army of nurses could restrain the Kitten in her peregrinations. She could speak distinctly, run, and run fast, when she was little over a year old, and she possessed a singularly enquiring mind. She was demonstrative but not affectionate; she was enchanting, and stony-hearted was the creature who could resist her. She liked an audience, and she loved to "tell" things. To this end she would sit on your knee and lay one small but determined hand upon your cheek to turn your face towards her, so that she could make sure you were attending. She kept the small hand there, soft and light, a fairy-like caress, unless your attention wandered. If this happened, a sharp little pinch quickly diverted your thoughts into the proper channel. As she pinched you, the Kitten dropped her eyes so that you noticed how long and black were her eyelashes. Then, having punished you, she raised her eyes to yours with so seraphic an expression that you thought of "large-eyed cherubim" and entirely forgot that she had pinched you at all, unless next day as you looked in the glass you happened to notice a little blue mark on your cheek. The Kitten could pinch hard.

She was Ger's greatest joy and his unceasing anxiety. From the very first he had constituted himself her guide, philosopher . . . and slave. Yet the dictatorial little lady found out very early in the day, that in certain things she had to conform to her indulgent brother's standards, the family standards; and though she might be all Ffolliot in certain matters, the Grantly ethics were too strong for her. That Ger should love her, that he should be always kind and protective and unselfish she took as a matter of course; but she wanted him to admire her too, and ready as he was to oblige her in most things, she found that here he was strangely firm. If she told tales or complained of people, or persisted in tiresome teasing when asked politely to desist, Ger withdrew the light of his countenance, and the Kitten was uncomfortable.

To tell tales, or complain, or try to get another into trouble for any reason whatsoever was forbidden. The others had each in their turn accepted this doctrine as they accepted day and night, the sun and moon and stars. The Kitten had to be taught these things, and Ger it was who saw to it that she learned them.

There was a law in the family that if any member of it, after enduring for a space a certain line of conduct from another, said, "*Please* stop it," that person had to stop, or nemesis, by no means leaden-footed, overtook the offender. It took quite a long time to get it into the Kitten's head that it was a law.

She had an extraordinarily loud and piercing cry when she was angry—a cry that penetrated to the sacred study itself, no matter where she might be in the house.

One day when she was about three years old she was so naughty, so disobedient, so entirely unmanageable at nursery tea, that Nana, the long-suffering, fairly lost her temper. The Kitten placed the final stone on a pillar of wrongdoing by drawing patterns on the tablecloth with a long line of golden syrup dropped from a blob she had secured on her small finger, and Nana gave the chubby hand

belonging to the finger a good hard smack. The Kitten opened her mouth and gave vent to a yell almost demoniacal in its volume and intensity.

Mr Ffolliot, reading the *Quarterly Review* in dignified seclusion, heard it in his study, was convinced that his youngest child was being tortured by the others, and hastened hot-foot to the nursery.

Ger had his fingers in his ears. Nana, flushed and angry, stirred her tea pretending that she didn't hear; Thirza murmured pacific and wholly useless nothings. At her father's sudden and wholly unexpected appearance, accompanied as it was by the swift uprising of both the nurses, the Kitten stopped her clamorous vociferation, and with bunches of tears still hanging on her lashes smiled radiantly at the Squire, announcing with a wave of her sticky little hand.

"At's fahver."

"What," Mr Ffolliot demanded angrily, "what in heaven's name has been done to that child to make her shriek like that? What happened?"

"Miss Kitten, sir," Nana said slowly, "has not been very good at tea this afternoon."

"But what made her shriek like that?" Mr Ffolliot continued—"a more alarming cry I never heard."

"She smacked me," said the Kitten, glowering at Nana, "she 'urted me"; and at that moment she met Ger's eyes.

The Kitten turned very red.

"Who smacked you?" asked Mr Ffolliot unwisely.

Ger stared at the Kitten, and the Kitten wriggled in her chair.

"Say what *you* did," muttered Ger, still holding his small sister in compelling gaze.

Nana smiled. She had started with Grantly, and knew the family.

"Fahver," said the Kitten in her most seductive tones, "take me," and she held out her arms.

Mr Ffolliot succumbed. He went round to his youngest daughter and lifted her out of her high chair, only to put her down with exceeding haste a moment later.

"The child is all over some horrible sticky substance," he cried, irritably.

"At was it," said the Kitten.

Mr Ffolliot fled to wash his hands and change his coat. Nana and Thirza sat down again. Ger shook his head at his small sister. "You *are* a rotter," he said, sadly.

The Kitten began to cry again, but this time she cried quite softly, and Nana, in spite of the libations of golden syrup, took her upon her knee to comfort her.

Every evening the children went down to the hall to play with their mother, and when their grandparents were there things were more than usually festive. Ganpie never seemed to mind how many children swarmed over him—in fact, he rather seemed to like it; and Grannie assuredly knew more entrancing games than anyone else in the world.

One Christmas Eve, just after tea, the whole family, including Mr Ffolliot, were gathered in the hall. Fusby had just taken the tray, the General was sitting by the fire with Ger on his knee, the Kitten sat on the opposite side of the hearth on her father's, while the rest of the young people indulged in surreptitious "ragging." Uz and Buz, by some mischance, charged into a heavy oaken post crowned by a large palm, with such force that they knocked it over, and the big flower-pot missed their grandfather and Ger by a hair's breadth.

When the universal consternation had subsided, the scattered earth been swept up, and the twins had been suitably reprimanded, the Kitten scrambled down from her father's knee, and trotted across to her grandmother, was duly taken up, and with small insistant hand turned her Grannie's face towards her.

"Which would you rather?" she asked in her high clear voice, "that Ganpie had been killed or Ger?"

Mrs Grantly shuddered—"Baby, don't suggest such dreadful things," she exclaimed.

"But which would you rather?" the Kitten persisted. "You're all saying 'another inch and it would have killed one of zem'—which one would you rather?"

But Mrs Grantly flatly refused to state her preference, and the Kitten was clearly disappointed.

That night she added an additional clause to her prayers: "Thank you, God dear, for not letting the flower-pot kill Ganpie or Ger, and I'm sure Grannie's very much obliged too."

At her prayers the Kitten always knelt bolt upright with her hands tightly clasped under her chin, her nightgown draped in graceful folds about her—a most reverent and saintly little figure, except that she had from the very first firmly refused to shut her eyes.

She was fond of adding a sort of P.S. to her regular prayers, and enjoyed its effect upon her mother, who made a point of, herself, attending the orisons of her two youngest children. One evening when Mrs Ffolliot had been reading her a rather pathetic story of a motherless child, the Kitten added this petition, "Please, God, take care of all the little girls wiv no mummies."

Mrs Ffolliot was touched and related the story afterwards to Uz and Buz, who grinned sceptically.

Next night, when the Kitten had been very naughty, and Mrs Ffolliot had punished her, she repeated her prayers with the greatest unction, and when she reached the usual postscript, fixed her eyes sternly on her mother's face as she prayed fervently, "And please, dear God, take great care of the poor little girls what *have* got mummies."

A mystically minded friend of Mrs Ffolliot's had talked a good deal of guardian angels to Ger and the Kitten. Ger welcomed the belief with enthusiasm. It appealed at once to his friendly nature, and the thought of an angel, "a dear and great angel," all for himself, specially concerned about him, and there always, though invisible save to the eye of faith, was a most pleasing conception.

Not that it would have pleased Ger unless he had been assured that everyone else had one too. And he forthwith constructed a theory that when people got tired of doing nothing in heaven they came back again and looked after folks down here.

His views of the angel's actual attributes would much have astonished his mother's friend had he expressed them. But Ger said nothing, and quietly constructed an angel after his own heart, who was in point of fact an angelic sort of soldier servant, never in the way, but always there and helpful if wanted.

He could not conceive of any servant who was not also a friend, and having received much kindness from soldiers in the ranks he fixed upon that type as the most agreeable for a guardian angel. And although he greatly admired the two framed pictures of angels the lady had given them to hang in the nursery—Guercino's Angel and Carpaccio's "Tobias and the angels"—his own particular angel was quite differently clad, and was called "Spinks" after a horse gunner he had dearly loved, who was now in India.

The Kitten, far less impressionable, and extremely cautious, was pleased with the idea when it was first mooted, and discussed the question exhaustively with Ger, deciding that her angel had large wings like the one with the child in the picture.

"Does it stay with me in the night-nursery all night?" she enquired.

"'He,' not 'it,'" Ger corrected; "but perhaps yours is a 'she.'"

"I won't have a she," the Kitten said decidedly, for even at four years old she had already learnt that her own sex had small patience with her vagaries.

"You'll have to have what's sent you," Ger said solemnly.

"I won't have a lady angel, so there," said the Kitten, "I'll have a man angel."

"I daresay they'll let you," Ger said soothingly. "A great, big, kind man with wings like you said."

"Has yours got wings?" the Kitten demanded.

"I don't think so," said Ger, "he's not that sort; but," he added proudly, "he's got spurs."

"Will it stay in the nursery *all* night?" the Kitten asked again rather nervously.

"Of course that's what he's for, to take care of you, so that you'll feel quite safe and happy."

"Oh," said the Kitten, and her voice betrayed the fact that she found this statement far from reassuring.

She said nothing to her mother, and Mrs Ffolliot heard her say her prayers as usual, kissed her, blessed her, and tucked her in. No sooner, however, had Mrs Ffolliot gone down the passage than the most vigorous yells brought her back to the night-nursery, while both Nana and Thirza hastened there also.

The Kitten was sitting up in bed, wide-eyed and apparently more indignant than frightened.

"Take it away," she exclaimed; "open the window and let it out."

"Let what out?" asked the bewildered Mrs Ffolliot.

"The angel," sobbed the Kitten, "I don't want it, I heard its wings rustling and it disturbed me drefffully—I don't want it, open the window wide."

"The window is open at the top," said Mrs Ffolliot; "but why do you want to get rid of an angel? Surely that's a lovely thing to have in the room."

"No," said the Kitten firmly, "I don't like it, and I don't want it. I don't want no angel I haven't seen. I don't like people in my room when I go to sleep."

Nana and Thirza had melted away, only too thankful not to be called upon to arbitrate in the angel question. Mrs Ffolliot and her small daughter stared at each other in the flickering firelight.

"I'm sure," said Mrs Ffolliot, trying hard to steady her voice, "that no self-respecting angel would stay for a minute with a little girl that didn't want him. You may be certain of that."

"A she might," the Kitten suggested suspiciously.

"No angel would," Mrs Ffolliot said decidedly.

"Do you think," the Kitten asked anxiously, "that there's enough room at the top for it to squeegee froo? I can't *bear* those wings rustling."

Mrs Ffolliot switched on the light. "You can see for yourself."

"Thank you, mummy dear, I'll be much happier by myself, really," and the Kitten lay down quite contentedly.

CHAPTER VIII

GENTLEMAN GER

It was the 22nd of December, the younger Ffolliots were gathered in the schoolroom, and Ger was in disgrace.

The twins were back from school, and that afternoon they had unbent sufficiently to take part in a representation of "Sherlock Holmes" in the hall. The whole family, with the exception of the Kitten, had seen the play in the Artillery Theatre at Woolwich during their last visit to grandfather.

It is a play that not only admits of, but necessitates, varied and loud noises.

Everything ought to have gone without a hitch, for earlier in the afternoon Mr Ffolliot had departed in the carriage to take the chair at a lecture in Marlehouse; and a little later Grantly had driven his mother to the station in the dogcart to meet a guest.

Unfortunately the lecture on Carpaccio at the Literary Institute was of unusually short duration, and Mr Ffolliot returned tired and rather cross, just as Ger was enacting the hansom cab accident at the foot of the staircase, by beating a deafening tattoo on the Kitten's bath with a hair-brush.

The twins and the Kitten (who had proved a wrapt and appreciative audience) melted away with Boojum-like stealth the moment the hall door was opened; but Ger, absorbed in the entrancing din he was making, noticed nothing, and his father had to shake him by the shoulders before he would stop.

"I suppose," Ger remarked thoughtfully, "that we must look upon father as a cross."

"He certainly *is* jolly cross," Uz murmured. "He should hear the row we kick up at school when we've won a match, and nobody says a syllable."

"But I mean," Ger persisted, wriggling about on his seat as though the problem tormented him, "that if father were as nice as mother we'd be too happy, and it wouldn't be good for us; like the people in Fairy stories, you know, when they're too well off, misfortunes come."

"I don't think," Buz said dryly, "that we have any cause to dread misfortunes on that score. But cheer up, Ger, it'll soon be time for the pater to go abroad, and then nobody will get jawed for six long weeks."

"I shouldn't mind the jawings so much or the punishments," said Ger, after a minute's pause, "if it wasn't for mother. She minds so, she never seems to get used to it. I'm glad she was out this afternoon—though we did want her to see the play—but whatever will she say when I can't go down to meet Reggie with the rest of you? And what'll *he* think?"

Ger's voice broke. Punishment had followed hard on the heels of the crime, and banishment to the schoolroom for the rest of the evening was Ger's lot. Had Mr Ffolliot belonged to a previous generation he would probably, when angry, have whacked his sons and whacked them hard. They would infinitely have preferred it. But his fastidious taste revolted from the idea of corporal punishment, and his ingenuity in devising peculiarly disagreeable penalties in expiation of their various offences, was the cause of much tribulation to his indignant offspring.

"Here *is* mother!" cried Buz, "and she's got Reggie. Come down and see him you others, but for heaven's sake, come quietly."

The Reggie in question was a young Sapper just then stationed at Chatham, and a "very favourite cousin."

The Ffolliot children were in the somewhat unusual position of having no uncles and aunts, and no cousins of their own, for the sad reason that both their parents were "onlies." Therefore did they right this omission on the part of providence in their own fashion, by adopting as uncles, aunts, and cousins all pleasant guests.

Reggie wasn't even a second cousin; but his people being mostly in India, he had for many years spent nearly all his holidays, and later on his leave, at Redmarley, and he was very popular with the whole family. Even Mr Ffolliot unbent to a dignified urbanity in his presence. He approved of Reggie, who had passed seventh into Woolwich and first into the Sappers, and Grantly always thanked his lucky stars that he was destined for Field Artillery, and was not expected to follow in Reggie's footsteps in the matter of marks.

Ger worshipped Reggie, and it was with a heart full of bitterness, and eyes charged with hot tears that blurred the firelight into long bands of crimson, that he leant against the schoolroom table, alone, while the others all trooped off on tiptoe into the hall to give rapturous though whispered greeting to their guest.

Reggie did not whisper though; the warning cards had no sort of effect upon him, and the forlorn little figure drooping against the table sprang erect and shook the big drops from his cheeks as he heard his cousin's jolly voice "Where's my friend Ger?"—a murmured explanation—then, "O *bad* luck! I'll go to him—No don't come with me—not for two minutes."

How Ger blessed him for that forethought! To be found in disgrace was bad enough; but to be seen in tears, and by his whole family! . . .

Hastily scraping his cheeks with a corner of his dilapidated Norfolk jacket—if you have ever tried to do this you'll know that it is more or less of a test of suppleness—he went slowly to the door, and in another minute was lifted high into the air and shaken violently by a slight, rather plain young man, who bore with the utmost meekness a passionate embrace highly detrimental to his immaculate collar: and the best of it all was, that he was quite unconscious of the fact that Ger had not met him with the others, nor seemed aware of anything unusual beyond the pleasantness of once more sitting in the big slippery leather-covered arm-chair beside the schoolroom fire, while the rest of the family, having given him exactly the two minutes' start he had demanded, came flocking back to sit all over him and shout their news in an excited chorus.

Next morning, while his father was out in the village, Ger ensconced himself in one of the deep-seated windows of the study, as a quiet haven wherein he might wrestle in solitude with the perfect and

pluperfect of the verb *esse*, which he had promised his mother he would repeat to her that morning.

Their governess had gone home for the holidays, but Ger was so backward that his father insisted that he must do a short lesson (with Mrs Ffolliot) every morning. Ger could not read. It was extraordinary how difficult he found it, and how dull it appeared to him, this art that seemed to come by nature to other people; which, once mastered, appeared capable of giving so much pleasure.

It puzzled Ger extremely.

Mrs Ffolliot had, herself, instructed all her sons in the rudiments of the Latin Grammar, and very well and thoroughly she did it, but so pleasantly, that in their minds the declensions and the conjugations were ever vaguely associated with the scent of violets. The reason for this being, that the instructed one invariably squeezed as close as possible to his teacher, and as there were violets at Redmarley nearly all the year round, Mrs Ffolliot always wore a bunch tucked into her waistband.

It was characteristic of the trust the squire had in his wife's training that he had not the slightest objection to the children using the library when he, himself, was not there to be disturbed, being quite certain that as they had promised her not to touch his writing table, the promise would be faithfully kept. Besides, like all true book-lovers, he was generous in the matter of his books, and provided the children treated them with due care and respect, had no objection to their taking them out of the shelves and reading them.

For a long time there was no sound in the room but an occasional whispered, "*fui, fuisti, fuit.*" Presently Grantly and Mary came in to discuss a fancy-dress dance to which they were bidden that evening at a neighbour's; then, in rushed Reggie in coat and hat with a newly arrived parcel in his hand. Ger had seen the railway van come up the drive, but as he had promised his mother not to move until he had mastered his verb, he did not make his presence known to anyone.

Reggie went over to Mr Ffolliot's desk, and seeing a shilling lying on the table seized it and fled from the room. Three minutes later Ger saw him bowling down the drive in the dog-cart, then Mr Ffolliot returned, and Ger, feeling tolerably certain of the "perfect and pluperfect and future perfect," went slowly upstairs to his mother to repeat it.

All went on peacefully and quietly in the schoolroom for the next half hour, when suddenly Grantly and Mary whirled into the room in a state of such excited indignation as took their mother quite five minutes to discover what all the fuss was about. When at last they had been induced to tell their story separately, and not in a chorus almost oratorio-like in its confusion, Mrs Ffolliot discovered to her dismay that they were accused of meddling with a shilling which their father had placed on the book-club collecting card, ready for the collector when she should call.

When she *did* call the shilling was gone, and as Grantly and Mary were known to have been in the study, the squire came to the conclusion that one of them must have knocked against his table and brushed it off, and he gave it out that "unless they found it, and thus repaired the mischief and annoyance their carelessness had caused, he would not allow them to go to the dance that evening!"

He never suspected that any member of his family would take the shilling, but he was ready to believe all things of their clumsiness. In vain did Grantly and Mary protest that they had never been near his desk; the squire might have been Sherlock Holmes himself, so certain was he as to the exactitude of his deductions.

"The card has been pushed from where it was originally placed to the extreme edge of the table; the shilling must have been knocked off, and had doubtless rolled under some article of furniture; let them see to it that it was found; they might hunt there and then if they liked, as he would not require the room for half an hour."

The consciousness of their innocence in no way sustained Grantly and Mary under the appalling prospect of losing the party. They had of course hunted frantically everywhere, but naturally had found no trace of the shilling.

Ger sat quite still during the recital of their wrong's, his face growing paler and paler, and his honest grey eyes wider and wider in the horror of his knowledge. For he knew who had taken the shilling, and he knew also that it was his plain duty to right his innocent brother and sister. But at what a cost! He could not tell of Reggie, and yet it was so unlike Reggie for it was . . . even to himself Ger hardly liked to confess what it was—and he had gone off in such a hurry! To Ger, a shilling seemed a very large sum, his own greatest wealth, amassed after many weeks of hoarding, had once reached five pence halfpenny, nearly all in farthings; and he even found himself conjecturing the sort of monetary difficulty into which Reggie had fallen, and from which a shilling might extricate him. He knew there were such things as "debts," and that the army was "very expensive," for he had heard his grandfather say so. Like

many extremely upright people Ger was gentle in his judgments of others. Himself of the most crystalline honesty, he could yet conceive of circumstances wherein a like probity might be hard for somebody else: at all costs poor Reggie must be screened, but it was equally clear to him that his brother and sister must not lose the pleasure long looked-forward-to as the opening joy of the holidays.

Now there was about Ger a certain loyalty and considerateness in his dealings with others, that had earned for him the *sobriquet* of "Gentleman Ger." He was very proud of the title, and his mother, whom he adored, had done all in her power to foster the feeling of *noblesse oblige*; so Ger felt that here and now a circumstance had arisen which would try what stuff he was made of. The excited talk raged round him like a storm, but after the first he heard none of it. He slipped quietly off his chair, and unnoticed by the group round his mother, left the room and crept down the back staircase. All doubt and questioning was at an end. His duty seemed quite clear to him: he would take the blame of that shilling, Mary and Grantly would go to their party, and Reggie . . . Reggie would not be back till quite late, when he, too, was going to the fancy-dress dance. Reggie need never know anything about it.

By this time he had reached the study door, and stood with his hand upon the handle. And as he waited, screwing his courage to the sticking point, there came into his mind the words of a psalm that he had learned by heart only last Sunday to repeat to his mother. He learned it more easily than usual because he liked it; when she read it to him he found he could remember it, and now, just as a dark room is transiently illumined by the falling together of the fire in sudden flame, there came into Ger's mind the words, "He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not." He turned the handle and went in.

The squire was sitting in his big armchair in front of the fire reading *Marius the Epicurean*, and trying to compose his nerves, which still vibrated unpleasantly after all the fuss about the shilling. He had even quoted to himself somewhat testily something about "fugitive things not good to treasure"; but whether he referred to the nimbly disappearing shilling, or to the protestations of Grantly and Mary, was not clear. He generally solaced himself with Pater when perturbed, and he had nearly persuaded himself that he was once more nearly attuned to "perfect tone, fresh and serenely disposed of the Roman Gentleman," when Ger opened the door, and walked over towards him without shutting it—an unpardonable offence at any time.

"Gervais," exclaimed the squire, and his tone was the reverse of serene, "Why are you not in the schoolroom? What on earth do you want?"

Ger went back and shut the door carefully and quietly, and once more crossed the room till he stood directly in front of his father. The squire noted with a little pang of compunction how pale the child was. "What is it?" he said more gently.

"Father, I've come about that shilling. I took it."

"*You* took it," exclaimed the squire in amazement. "Why?"

Here was a poser. Ger was so absolutely unused to lying that he was quite unprepared for any such question as this, so he was silent.

"Why did you take it?" angrily reiterated his father. "And what have you done with it? Answer at once. You know perfectly well that it is a most shocking breach of good manners to ignore a question in this fashion."

"I took it," repeated Ger stupidly, his large grey eyes looking into space beyond his father.

"So I hear," said the squire, growing more and more annoyed. "But why did you take it? and where have you put it?"

"I can't tell you, father," said Ger firmly, and this time he met his father's eyes unflinchingly. To himself he said, "I won't tell more'n *one* lie for mother's sake."

The squire was dumfounded by this obstinacy. It was unheard of—absolutely without parallel in his domestic annals—that one of his children should actually flout him! yes! actually flout him with such an answer as this.

"Go and stand over there in that corner," he thundered, "and you shan't move until you can answer my questions, if you stand there for the rest of the day. If you children have nothing else, I am determined that you shall have good manners."

* * * * *

It was nearly five o'clock, and Ger still stood in the same corner of the study watching the last streak

of red fade from the chill January sky. There was no sound in the room save only the soft "plop" of a cinder as it fell on to the tiled hearth. The fire had burned low, and he was very cold. Never in all his life had he gone without his dinner before, and although he was no longer hungry, everything seemed, as he said afterwards, "funny and misty."

The squire had fulfilled his threat. After sending the culprit away to wash his tear-stained face and hands, and to procure a clean handkerchief, he bade him return to stand in the same corner till he should arrive at a proper sense of the respect due to a parent. He had locked the door upon Ger when he went to lunch, and forbade any member of the family, including his wife, to hold any sort of communication with the culprit. Parker the fox-terrier, however, did not obey the squire, and remained in the study with Ger regardless of the fact that the servants' dinner bell had rung, which was also the signal for his own. And to Parker Ger confided the whole story, and very puzzled and unhappy it made him, for he ran between Ger and the door snuffing and whining till the squire came back and turned him out, when he remained upon the mat outside uneasily barking at intervals.

Mrs Ffolliot was almost beside herself with grief and consternation. It was such an inexplicable piece of obstinacy on Ger's part, and he was not usually obstinate.

Grantly and Mary, while relieved that they would still have the opportunity of wearing the dresses which had been the object of so much thought, were really concerned about Ger; it seemed so senseless of him, "why couldn't he say why he wanted the beastly shilling and have done with it?"

The squire himself was very seriously disturbed. He had stormed and raged, he had argued, he had even spoken very kindly and eloquently on the subject of dishonesty, and the necessity there was for full confession before forgiveness could be obtained (this last appeal sorely trying Ger's fortitude), but all to no avail. As the needle points ever to the north, so all the squire's exhortations ended with the same question, to be met with the same answer, growing fainter in tone as the hours wore on, but no less firm in substance. "I can't tell you, father."

Mr Ffolliot could no longer bear the little white-faced figure standing so silently in the corner of the room. He went forth and walked about the garden. He really was a much tried man just then. Only last night Buz, lying in wait for Reggie as he came to bed, had concealed himself in an angle of the staircase, and when his cousin, as he thought, reached his hiding-place, pounced out upon him, blowing out his lighted candle, and exclaiming in a sepulchral voice, "Out, out, damned candle!" (Buz was doing *Macbeth* at school and had a genius for inept, and generally inaccurate quotation)—then flew up the dark staircase two steps at a time fully expecting hot pursuit, but none came. Dead silence, followed by explosive bursts of smothered laughter from Reggie and Grantly who had followed the squire upstairs. It did not comfort Mr Ffolliot at the present moment to reflect that Buz had had to write out the whole scene in which the "germ," as his father called it, of his misquotation occurred. At present his mind was full of Ger, and ever and anon like the refrain of a song, there thrust into his thoughts a sentence he had been reading when the little boy had interrupted him that morning, "and towards such a full and complete life, a life of various yet select sensation, the most direct and effective auxiliary must be, in a word, insight." "Could it be possible?" he asked himself, "that he was in some way lacking in this quality?"

He turned somewhat hastily and went back into the house. Once more Ger heard the key turn in the lock, and his father came in, followed by Fusby, bearing tea upon a tray.

The front door banged, and Ger's heart positively hammered against his ribs, for no one but Reggie ever dared to bang the Manor House front door. In another minute he had come in, and was standing on the hearth-rug beside Mr Ffolliot, bringing with him a savour of frosty freshness into the warm, still room.

"I got through sooner than I expected," said Reggie, in his big cheery voice, "and caught the two twenty-five, so I walked out. I've been to the stables to tell Heaven he needn't drive in for me after all. O tea! That's good,—where's Aunt Marjory? By the way, uncle, I owe you a shilling. A parcel came for me just as I was starting, and there was a shilling to pay on it. I had no change and was in a tearing hurry, so I took one I saw lying on your desk—hope it was all right."

There was a little soft thud in the far corner of the room, as Ger fell forward on his face, worn out by his long watch, and the rapture of this immense relief.

When things grew clear again the room was full of light and he was lying in his mother's arms. Reggie was kneeling beside him trying to force something in a spoon between his lips, something that melted, so Ger said, "like a shop in Woolwich" and tasted very queer and hot.

"Lap it up, old chap," whispered Reggie, and Ger wondered why he seemed to have lost his voice.

"There now, that's all right. You'll be as fit as possible directly," and Reggie scrambled up from his knees and bolted from the room.

Ger sat up and looked at his father who was standing beside him. The lamp shone full on the squire's face, and he, too, like Reggie, seemed to have got a cold in his eyes; but in spite of this peculiarity, there was that in their expression which told Ger that everything was all right again, and that in this instance absolution without confession had been fully and freely granted.

So Ger, from the safe shelter of his mother's arms, explained, "I couldn't tell more'n one lie because of mother, you know, and I thought he wanted it for debts or something. Is those sangwidges anchovy or jam, do you think?"

CHAPTER IX

THE DANCE

Reggie Peel was not quite sure whether he liked Mary with her hair up or not. The putting up of the hair necessitated a readjustment of his whole conception of her, and . . . he was very conservative.

With Mary the tom-boy child, with Mary the long-legged flapper and good chum, he was affectionately at his ease. He had petted and tormented her by turns, ever since as a boy of ten he had first seen her, a baby a year old, in his Aunt Marjory's arms. Throughout her turbulent but very cheerful childhood he had been her firm, if patronising, friend. Then as she developed into what Ger had described to Eloquent as "a bit of a gawk," he became more than ever her friend and champion. "Uncle Hilary was so beastly down on Mary;" and Mary, though she did knock things over and say quite extraordinarily stupid things on occasion, was "such a good old sort."

He had never considered the question of her appearance till this Christmas. He supposed she was good-looking—all the Ffolliots were good-looking—but it really didn't matter much one way or another. She was part of Redmarley, and Redmarley as a whole counted for a good deal in Reginald Peel's life. He, too, had fallen under its mysterious charm. The manor-house mothered him, and the little Cotswold village cradled him in kindly keeping arms. His own mother had died when he was seven, his father married again a couple of years later; but, as Mr Peel was in the Indian Forest Department, and Reggie's young stepmother a faithful and devoted wife, he saw little of either of them, except on their somewhat infrequent leaves when they paid so many visits and had to see so many people, that he never really got to know either them or his half-brother and sister.

The love of Redmarley had grown with his growth till it became part of him; so far he had looked upon Mary as merely one of the many pleasant circumstances that went to the making of Redmarley. Now, somehow, she seemed to have detached herself from the general design and to have taken the centre of the picture. He was not sure that he approved of such prominence.

She startled him that first evening when, with the others, she met him in the hall. She was unexpected, she was different, and he hated that anything at Redmarley should be different.

"Mary's grown up since yesterday," Uz remarked ironically, "she's like you when you first managed to pull your moustache."

Of course Reggie suitably chastised Uz for his cheek, but all the same there was a difference.

To be sure she still wore her skirts well above her ankles, but nowadays quite elderly ladies wore short skirts, so that in no way accentuated her youth; and after all was she so very young?

Mary would be eighteen on Valentine's day.

Arrayed in Elizabethan doublet and hose for Lady Campion's dance, Reggie stood before his looking-glass and grinned at himself sardonically.

"Ugly devil," he called himself, and then wondered how Mary would look as Phyllida the ideal milkmaid.

Ugly he might be, but his type was not unsuited to the period he had chosen. A smallish head, wide across the brows, well-shaped and poised, with straight, smooth hair that grew far back on the temples

and would recede even further as the years went on; humorous bright grey eyes, not large, but set wide apart under slightly marked eyebrows; a pugnacious, rather sharply-pointed nose with a ripple in it. Reggie declared that his nose had really meant well, but changed its mind half way down. His mouth under the fair moustache was not in the least beautiful, but it was trustworthy, neither weak nor sensual, and the chin was square and dogged. His face looked long with the pointed beard he had stuck on with such care, and above the wide white ruff, might well have belonged to some gentleman adventurer who followed the fortunes of Raleigh or Drake. For in spite of its insignificant irregularity of feature there was alert resolve in its expression; a curious light-hearted fixity of purpose that was arresting.

Reggie had never been popular or distinguished at Wellington; yet those masters who knew most about boys always prophecied that "he would make his mark."

It was the same at the "Shop"; although he never rose above a corporal, there were those among the instructors who foretold great things of his future. His pass-out place was a surprise to everyone, himself most of all. He was reserved and did not make friends easily; he got on quite pleasantly with such men as he was thrown with; but he was not a *persona grata* in his profession. He got through such a thundering lot of work with such apparent ease.

"A decent chap, but a terrible beggar to swat," was the general verdict upon Reginald Peel.

To Mrs Ffolliot and the children he showed a side of his character that was rigidly concealed from outsiders, the truth being that as a little boy he had been very hungry for affection. The Redmarley folk loved him, and his very sincere affection for them was leavened by such passionate gratitude as they never dreamed of.

His face grew very gentle as he gazed unseeingly into the glass. He was thinking of loyal little Ger.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck the quarter. He blew out the candles on his dressing-table and fled.

Few gongs or dinner bells were sounded at the Manor House. Mr Ffolliot disliked loud noises. As he ran down the wide shallow staircase into the hall he saw that Mary was standing in the very centre of it, while her father slowly revolved round her in appreciative criticism, quoting the while:—

"The ladies of St James's!
They're painted to the eyes;
Their white it stays for ever,
Their red it never dies;
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
Her colour comes and goes;
It trembles to a lily,—
It warms to a rose—"

This was strictly true, for Mary flushed and paled under her father's gaze, standing there tall and slender in russet gown and white bodice, a milking stool under her arm. She wore "buckled shoon" and a white sunbonnet, and was as fair a maid as a man could see between Christmases.

She was surprised that her father should express his approval thus graciously, but she was not uplifted. It was Mr Ffolliot's way. He had been detestable all day, and now he was going to be charming. His compliments counted for little with Mary. Yesterday he had told her she moved like a Flanders mare, and hurt her feelings very much. Her dress was made in the house and cost about half the price of her shoes and stockings, but Mary was not greatly concerned about her dress. She wanted to go to the dance, to dance all night and see other people.

Mrs Ffolliot, looking tired and pale, was sitting with Ger on an oak settle by the hearth. Ger had been allowed to stay up till dinner time to see his family dressed. The twins were sitting on the floor in front of the fire. Reggie paused on the staircase four steps up, and behind him came Grantly in smock frock (borrowed from the oldest labourer in Redmarley) and neat gaiters as the typical Georgian "farmer's boy" to match Mary's milk-maid.

"Aren't you coming, Aunt Marjory?" Reggie asked. "I thought you were to appear as one of the Ladies of St James's as a foil for Mary."

Mrs Ffolliot shook her head. "I did think of it, but I've got a bad headache. Mary doesn't really need me as a chaperon, it's only a boy and girl dance; besides, you and Grantly can look after her."

Mr Ffolliot went and sat down on the settle beside his wife. "You're much better at home," he said tenderly, "you'd only get tired out sitting up so late."

Grantly and Mary exchanged glances. They knew well enough that Mrs Ffolliot had decided at the last moment that she had better stay at home to look after the twins, who were certain, if left to their own devices, to get into mischief during her absence.

"That rumpus with Ger upset her awfully," Mary whispered to Reggie as they went into dinner, "and she won't risk anything fresh. It is a shame, for she'd have loved it, and she always looks so ripping."

The three young people left directly after dinner. Grantly stopped the carriage at an old Ephraim Teakle's cottage in the village, and they all went in to let him have a look at them, for it was his smock, a marvel of elaborate stitching, that Grantly was wearing.

Ephraim was eighty-seven years old and usually went to bed very early, but to-night he sat up a full hour to see "them childer," as he called the Ffolliots. He was very deaf, but had the excellent sight of a generation that had never learned to read. He stood up as the young people came in, and joined in the chorus of "laws," of "did you evers," indulged in by his granddaughter and her family.

"'Er wouldn' go far seekin' sarvice at mop, not Miss Mary wouldn't," he said; "an' as for you, Master Grantly, you be the very moral of me when I did work for Farmer Gayner over to Winson. Maids did look just like that when I wer a young chap—pretty as pins, they was."

But Mrs Rouse, his granddaughter, thought "Mr Peel did look far an' away the best, something out o' the common 'e were, like what a body sees in the theatre over to Marlehouse . . . but there, I suppose 'tis dressin' up for the likes o' Master Grantly, an' I must say laundry-maid, she done up grandfather's smock something beautiful."

Abinghall, Sir George Champion's place, was just outside Marlehouse town. The house, large and square and comfortable, was built by the first baronet early in the nineteenth century. The Champions always did things well, and "the boy and girl dance" had grown very considerably since its first inception. Indeed, had Mrs Ffolliot realised what proportions it had assumed since she received the friendly informal invitation some five weeks before, she would have risked the recklessness of the twins, and made a point of chaperoning Mary herself.

For the last three generations the Champions had been strong Liberals, therefore it was quite natural that with an election due in a fortnight there should be bidden to the dance many who were not included in Lady Champion's rather exclusive visiting list.

It is extraordinary how levelling an election is, especially at Christmas time, when peace and goodwill are acknowledged to be the prevailing and suitable sentiments.

Even the large drawing-room at Abinghall wouldn't hold the dancers, so a floor and a huge tent had been imported from London, and joined to the house by a covered way. A famous Viennese band played on a stage at one end, and around the sides were raised red baize seats for those who wanted to watch the dancing. Lady Champion received her guests at the door of the large drawing-room; she caught Mary by the arm and held her to whisper rapidly, "I don't know half the people, Mary, do help me, and if you see anyone looking neglected, say a kind word, and get partners, like a dear. I depended on your mother, and now she has failed me."

Naturally the Liberal candidate was bidden to the dance, and Eloquent arrayed in the likeness of one of Cromwell's soldiers, a dress he had worn in a pageant last summer, was standing exactly opposite the entrance to the tent, when at the second dance on the programme Phyllida and the Farmer's Boy came in, and with the greatest good-will in the world proceeded to Boston with all the latest and dreadful variations of that singularly unbeautiful dance. Grantly had imported the very newest thing from Woolwich, Mary was an apt pupil, and the two of them made a point always of dancing the first dance together wherever they were. They were singularly well-matched, and tonight their height, their quaint dress, their remarkable good looks and their, to Marlehouse eyes, extraordinary evolutions, made them immediately conspicuous.

Eloquent, stiff, solemn, and uncomfortable in his wide-leaved hat and flapping collar, watched the smock-frock and russet gown as they bobbed and glided, and twirled and crouched in the mazes of that mysterious dance, and the moment they stopped, shouldered his way through the usual throng of pierrots, flower-girls, Juliets, Carmens, Sikhs, and Chinamen to Lady Champion, who was standing in the entrance quite near the milk-maid who was already surrounded by would-be partners.

"Lady Champion, will you present me to Miss Ffolliot," Eloquent asked in a stand-and-deliver sort of voice, the result of the tremendous effort it had been to approach her at all.

She looked rather surprised, but long apprenticeship to politics had taught her that you must bear all things for the sake of your party, so she smiled graciously on the stiff, rosy-faced Cromwellian, and duly made the presentation.

"May I," Eloquent asked, with quite awful solemnity, "have the pleasure of a dance?"

"I've got twelve or fourteen and an extra, but I can't promise to dance any one of them if other people are sitting out, because I've promised Lady Champion to help see to people. I'll give you one if you'll promise to dance it with someone else—if necessary—"

Eloquent looked blue. "Isn't that rather hard?" he asked meekly.

"Everyone's in the same box," Mary said shortly, "and you, of all people, ought simply to dance till your feet drop off. Let me see your card—What? no dances at all down? Oh, that's absurd—come with me." And before poor Eloquent could protest he found himself being whisked from one young lady to another, and his card was full all except twelve, fourteen, and the second extra—which he rigidly reserved.

"There," said Mary, smiling upon him graciously, "that's well over. I've been most careful; you are dancing with just about an equal number of Liberal and Tory young ladies, and you ought to take at least five mamas into supper; don't forget; look pleased and eager, and be careful what you say to the pretty girl in pink, she's a niece of our present member."

Here a partner claimed Mary, and Eloquent, feeling much as the White King must have felt when Alice lifted him from the hearth to the table (he certainly felt dusted), went to seek one Miss Jessie Bond whose name figured opposite the number on his programme that was just displayed on the bandstand.

He really worked hard. He danced carefully and laboriously—he had had lessons during his last year in London—and entirely without any pleasure. So far, he had fulfilled Mary's instructions to the very letter, except in the matter of looking "pleased and eager." His round, fresh-coloured face maintained its habitual expression of rather prim gravity. The Liberal young ladies, while gratified that he should have danced with them, thought him distinctly dull, the Tory young ladies declared him an insufferable oaf; but Phyllida the tall milk-maid, when she came across him in the dance, nodded and smiled at him in kindly approval. He noticed that she danced several times with the plain young man in the Elizabethan ruff, and that they seemed very good friends.

At last number twelve showed on the bandstand. Eloquent was not very clear as to whether Mary had given him this dance or not, but he went to her to claim it. It came just before the supper dances.

"Yes, this is our dance," said Mary, "shall we one-step for a change?"

"It seems to me," said Eloquent mournfully, "that one does nothing but change all the time. Now this is a waltz, how can you one-step to a waltz?"

"Poor man," Mary remarked pityingly. "It *is* muddling if you're not used to it. Let us waltz then, that will be a change."

Once round the room they went, and Eloquent felt that never before had he realised the true delight of dancing. He was very careful, very accurate, and his partner set herself to imitate exactly his archaic style of dancing, so that they were a model of deportment to the whole room. But it was only for a brief space that this poetry of motion was vouchsafed to him.

Mary stopped.

"Do you see," she asked, "that old lady near the band. She has been sitting there quite alone all the evening and she must be dying for something to eat. Don't you think you'd better take her to have some refreshment?"

"No," said Eloquent decidedly, "not just now. I've been dancing with all sorts of people with whom I didn't in the least desire to dance solely because you said I ought, and now I'm dancing with you and I'm not going to give it up. May we go on again?"

Again they waltzed solemnly round. Again Eloquent felt the thrill that always accompanies a perfect achievement. Again Mary stopped.

"That old lady is really very much on my conscience," she said; "if you won't take her in to have some supper, I must get Reggie, he'd do it."

"But why now?" Eloquent pleaded. "If, as you say, she has sat there all night, a few minutes more or less can make no difference—why should we spoil our dance by worrying about her? Do you know her?"

"I don't think I know her," Mary said vaguely, "but I have an idea she has something to do with coal. She's probably one of your constituents, and I think it's rather unkind of you to be so uninterested; besides, what does it matter whether one knows her or not, she's here to enjoy herself, it's our business to see that she does it. . . ."

"Why our business?" In a flash Eloquent saw he had made a mistake. Mary looked genuinely surprised this time.

"Why, don't you think in any sort of gathering it's everybody's business . . . if you see anyone lonely . . . left out . . . one tries. . . ."

"I've been lonely and left out at dozens of parties in London, where I didn't know a soul, and I never discovered that anyone was in the least concerned about me. At all events no one ever tried to ameliorate my lot."

"But you're a man, you know. . . ."

"A man can feel just as out of it as a woman. It's worse for him in fact, for it's nobody's business to look after him."

Eloquent spoke bitterly.

"But surely since you, yourself, have suffered, you ought to be the more sympathetic with that stout lady——"

"I will go, since you wish it; but I don't know her and she may think it impertinent. . . ."

"I'll come too," said Mary. "I don't know her but I can introduce you . . . we'll both go."

The lady in question was stout and rubicund, with smooth, tightly-braided brown hair, worn very flat and close to the head, and bright observant black eyes. She wore a high black satin dress, and had apparently been poured into it, so tight was it, so absolutely moulded to her form. A double gold chain was arranged over her ample bosom, and many bracelets decorated her fat wrists. She was quite alone on the raised red seat. For the last two hours Mary had noticed her sitting there, and that no one, apparently, ever spoke to, or came to sit by her.

There she remained placidly watching the dancers, her plump ungloved hands folded in her lap. She appeared rather cold for she wore no wrap, and what with draughts and the breeze created by the dancers, the tent was a chilly place to sit in.

Mary mounted the red baize step and sat down beside the solitary one.

"Don't you think it's time you had something to eat?" she shouted . . . they were *so* near the band, which at that moment was braying the waltz song from the "Quaker Girl." The old lady beamed, but shook her head:

"I'm very well where I am, my dear, I can see nicely and I'm glad I came."

"But you can come back," Mary persisted. "This gentleman"—indicating Eloquent—"will take you to have some supper, and then he'll bring you back again just here if you like. . . . May I introduce Mr Gallup? Mrs . . . I fear I don't know your name. . . ."

Eloquent stood below bowing stiffly, and offered his arm. The lady stood up, chuckled, winked cheerfully at Mary, and stepped down on to the floor.

"Well, since you *are* so obliging," she said, and took the proffered arm. "You don't know me, Mr Gallup," she continued, "but you will do before the election's over. Don't look so down in the mouth, I shan't keep you long, just a snack's all I want, and to stamp my feet a bit, which they're uncommonly cold, and then you can go back to the sweet pretty thing that fetched you to do the civil—oh, I saw it all! what a pity she's the other side, isn't it? what a canvasser she'd make with that smile . . . well, well, there's many a pretty Tory lady married a Radical before this *and* changed her politics, so don't you lose heart . . . soup, yes, I'd fancy some soup . . . well, what a sight to be sure . . . and how do you feel things are going in the constituency? . . ."

But Eloquent had no need to answer. His charge kept up a continual flow of conversation, only punctuated by mouthfuls of food. When at last he took her back to the seat near the band, Mary had

gone to supper and was nowhere to be seen.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mr Gallup," said the lady, "though you wouldn't have done it if you hadn't been forced. Now let an old woman give you a bit of advice. . . . *Look* willin' whether you are or not."

Poor Eloquent felt very much as though she had boxed his ears. A few minutes later he saw that the Elizabethan gentleman and Mary were seated on either side of his recent partner and were apparently well amused.

How did they do it?

And presently when Reggie Peel and Mary passed him in the Boston he heard Peel say, "Quite the most amusing person here to-night. I shall sit out the next two dances with her, I'm tired."

"I was tired too, that's why . . ." they went out of earshot, and he never caught the end of the sentence.

Eloquent danced no more with Mary, nor did he sit out at all with the indomitable old lady, who, bright-eyed and vigilant, still watched from her post near the band. The end was really near, and he stood against the wall gloomily regarding Mary as she flew about in the arms—very closely in the arms as ruled by the new dancing—of a young barrister. He was staying with the Campions and had, all the previous week, been helping heartily in the Liberal cause. He had come down from London especially to do so, but during Christmas week there was a truce on both sides, and he remained to enjoy himself.

Just then Eloquent hated him. He hated all these people who seemed to find it so easy to be amusing and amused. Yet he stayed till the very last dance watching Phyllida, the milkmaid, with intense disapproval, as, her sun-bonnet hanging round her neck, she tore through the Post Horn Gallop with that detestable barrister. He decided that the manners of the upper classes, if easy and pleasant, were certainly much too free.

It was a fine clear night and he walked to his rooms in Marlehouse. He felt that he had not been a social success. He was much more at home on the platform than in the ball-room, yet he was shrewd enough to see that his lack of adaptability stood in his way politically.

How could he learn these things?

And as if in answer to his question, there suddenly sounded in his ears the fat chuckling voice of the black satin lady:

"Well, well, there's many a pretty Tory lady married a Radical before this, *and* changed her politics, so don't you lose heart."

CHAPTER X

"THE GANPIES"

"Father's mother," living alone far away in the Forest of Dean, rarely came to Redmarley, and the children never went to visit her. A frail old lady to whom one was never presented save tidily clad and fresh from the hands of nurse for a few moments, with injunctions still ringing in one's ears as to the necessity for a quiet and decorous demeanour.

This was grandmother, a shadow rather than a reality.

The Ganpies were something very different. The name, an abbreviation for grandparents, was invented by Grantly when he was two years old, and long usage had turned it into a term of endearment. People who knew them well could never think of General and Mrs Grantly apart, each was the complement of the other; and for the Ffolliot children they represented a dual fount of fun and laughter, understanding and affection. They were the medium through which one beheld the never-ending pageant unrolled before the entranced eyes of such happy children as happened to "belong" gloriously to one "commanding the R.A. Woolwich." And intercourse with the Ganpies was largely leavened by concrete joys in the shape of presents, pantomimes, tips, and all things dear to the heart of youth all the world over.

Such were the Ganpies. Nothing shadowy about them. They were a glorious reality; beloved, familiar, frequent.

They were still comparatively young people when their daughter married, and Mrs Grantly was a grandmother at forty-one. They would have liked a large family themselves, but seeing that Providence had only seen fit to bestow on them one child, they looked upon the six grandchildren as an attempt to make amends.

Mrs Grantly's one quarrel with Marjory Ffolliot was on the score of what she called her "niggardliness and greed," in refusing to hand over entirely one of the six to their grandparents.

It is true that the large house on the edge of Woolwich Common was seldom without one or two of the Ffolliot children. Mr Ffolliot was most accommodating, and was more than ready to accept the General's constant invitations to his offspring; but in spite of these concessions Mrs Grantly was never wholly satisfied, and it was something of a grievance with her that Marjory was so firm in her refusal to "give away" any one of the six.

Casual observers would have said that Mrs Grantly was by far the stronger character of the two, but people who knew General Grantly well, realised that his daughter had her full share of his quiet strength and determination. Mrs Ffolliot, like her father, was easy-going, gentle, and tolerant; it was only when you came "up against" either of them that you realised the solid rock beneath the soft exterior.

Now there was nothing hidden about Mrs Grantly. She appeared exactly what she was. Everything about her was definite and decided, though she was various and unexpected as our British weather. She was an extraordinary mixture of whimsicality and common sense, of heroic courage and craven timidity, of violence and tenderness, of impulsiveness and caution. In very truth a delightful bundle of paradox. Quick-witted and impatient, she had yet infinite toleration for the simpleton, and could on occasion suffer fools with a gladness quite unshared by her much gentler daughter or her husband. But the snob, the sycophant, and, above all, the humbug met with short shrift at her hands, and the insincere person hated her heartily. She spoke her mind with the utmost freedom on every possible occasion, and as she had plenty of brains and considerable shrewdness her remarks were generally illuminating.

The villagers at Redmarley adored her, for, from her very first visit she made her presence felt.

It had long been the custom at Redmarley for the ladies in the village and neighbourhood to meet once a week during the earlier winter months to make garments for presentation to the poor at Christmas, and the first meeting since the Manor House possessed a mistress took place there under Mrs Ffolliot's somewhat timid presidency. It coincided with Mrs Grantly's first visit since her daughter's marriage, and she expressed her willingness to help.

At Mrs Ffolliot's suggestion it had already been arranged that a blouse instead of a flannel petticoat should this year be given to the younger women. The other ladies had fallen in graciously with the idea (they were inclined to enthuse over the "sweet young bride"), and according to custom one Miss Tibbits, a spinster of large leisure and masterful ways, had undertaken to procure the necessary material. For years donors and recipients alike had meekly suffered her domination. She chose the material, settled what garments should be made and in what style, and who should receive them when made.

On the afternoon in question Miss Tibbits duly descended from her brougham, bearing a parcel containing the material for the blouses which Mrs Grantly volunteered to cut out. Miss Tibbits undid the parcel and displayed the contents to the nine ladies assembled round the dining-room table.

Mrs Grantly was seen to regard it with marked disapproval, and hers was an expressive countenance.

"May I ask," she began in the honeyed, "society" tone that in her own family was recognised as the sure precursor of battle, "why the poor should be dressed in dusters?"

The eight ladies concentrated their gaze upon the roll of material which certainly did bear a strong resemblance to the bundles offered by drapers at sale times as "strong, useful, and much reduced."

"It is the usual thing," Miss Tibbits replied shortly, "we have to consider utility, not ornament."

Mrs Grantly stretched across the table, swiftly seized the material, gathered it up under her chin, and with a dramatic gesture stood up so that it fell draped about her.

"Look at me!" she exclaimed. "If I had to wear clothes made of stuff like this, I should go straight to

the Devil!"

And at that very moment, just as she proclaimed in a loud voice the downward path she would tread if clad in the material Miss Tibbits had selected, the door was opened, and Mr Molyneux was announced.

The ladies gasped (except Marjory Ffolliot, who had dissolved into helpless laughter at the sight of her large and portly parent draped in yards of double-width red and brown check), but Mrs Grantly was no whit abashed.

"Look at me, Mr Molyneux," she cried. "Can you conceive any self-respecting young woman ever taking any pleasure in a garment made of *this*?"

"A garment," the vicar repeated in wonderment, "is it for a garment?"

"Yes, and not an undergarment either," Mrs Grantly retorted. "Now you are here, you shall tell us plainly . . . are the things we are to make supposed to give any pleasure to the poor creatures or not."

"I should say so most assuredly," the vicar replied, his eyes twinkling with fun. "What other purpose could you have?"

Miss Tibbits cleared her throat. "I have always understood," she said primly, "that the sewing club was instituted to make useful garments for deserving persons, who were, perhaps, so much occupied by family cares that they had little time available for needle-work."

"That is," said the vicar solemnly, "the laudable object of the sewing club."

"But I don't suppose," Mrs Grantly remarked briskly, still standing draped in the obnoxious material, "that there is any bye-law to the effect that the garments should be of an odious and humiliating description."

"Of course not," the ladies chorussed, smiling. They were beginning, all but Miss Tibbits, who was furious, to enjoy Mrs Grantly.

"Then let us," Mrs Grantly's voice suddenly became soft and seductive, and she flung the folds of material from her, "give them something pretty. They don't have much, poor things, and it's just as easy to make them pretty as ugly. Ladies, I've been to a good many sewing meetings in my life, and I always fight for the same thing, a present should be just a little bit different—don't you think—not hard and hideous and ordinary. . . ."

"That material is bought and paid for," Miss Tibbits interrupted, "it must be used."

"It shall be used," cried Mrs Grantly, "I'll buy it, and I'll make it into dusters for which purpose it was obviously intended, and every woman in Redmarley shall have two for Christmas as an extra. A good strong duster never comes amiss."

"Perhaps," Miss Tibbits said coldly, "you will undertake to procure the material."

"Certainly," said Mrs Grantly, "but I'll buy it in blouse lengths, and every one different. Why should a whole village wear the same thing as though it was a reformatory?"

It appeared that the vicar had called with his list of the "deserving poor." In five minutes Mrs Grantly had detached each person, and made a note of her age and circumstances. She had only been in the village a week, and she already knew every soul in it.

She whirled off the vicar in a gale of enthusiasm, nobody else got a word in edgewise. Finally she departed with him into the hall, and saw him out at the front door, and her last whispered words were characteristic:

"You've let that Tibbits woman bully you for twenty years, now I'm going to bully you for a bit instead, and between us we'll give those poor dears a bit of cheer this Christmas."

From that moment the vicar was Mrs Grantly's slave.

Nobody knew how the affair leaked out, but the whole thing was known in the village before a week had passed, with the result that fifteen women visited the vicar, one after the other, and after much circumlocution intimated that "If so be as 'e would be so kind, they'd be glad if 'e'd 'int to the ladies as they 'adn't nearly wore out last Christmas petticoat, and, if it were true wot they'd 'eard as they was talkin' of givin' summat different, might Mrs Mustoe, Gegg, Uzzel, or Radway, etc., have anything they did choose to make as warn't a petticoat."

There was a slump in petticoats.

In despair he went to Mrs Grantly, and she undertook to see the matter through.

"It's absurd," Mrs Grantly remarked to her daughter, "in a little place like this where one knows all the people, and exactly what they're like, to make things all the same size. Fancy me trying to get into a blouse that would fit that skinny Miss Tibbits! A little common sense is what's needed in this sewing society, and, Marjory, my dear, I'm going to do my best to supply it."

* * * * *

Throughout the years that followed, Mrs Grantly continued to supply common sense to the inhabitants of Redmarley. She found places for young servants, both in her own household and those of her friends, till gradually there were many links between the village and "Orse and Field and Garrison."

More than one Redmarley damsel married a gunner "on the strength." Had the intending bridegroom been anything else, Mrs Grantly would herself have forbidden the banns!

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS AT REDMARLEY

That year Christmas Day fell on a Sunday, and on the Saturday afternoon Eloquent drove out from Marlehouse to Redmarley to spend the week-end with his aunt. She was out when he arrived, and he went straight to the vicarage, asked for the vicar, and was shown into the study, where Mr Molyneaux sat smoking by the fire in a deep-seated high-backed chair.

Even as he entered the room, Eloquent was conscious of the pleasurable thrill that things beautiful and harmonious never failed to evoke. The windows faced west; the red sun, just sinking behind Redmarley Woods, shone in on and was reflected from walls covered from floor to ceiling with books; books bound for the most part in mellow brown and yellow calf, that seemed to give forth an amber light as from sun-warmed turning beeches.

The vicar had discarded his clerical coat, and wore a shabby grey-green Norfolk jacket frayed at the cuffs; nevertheless, Eloquent sincerely admired him as he rose to give courteous greeting to his guest.

The old vicar was stout and bald, and the grey hair that fringed his head was decidedly ruffled. A long face, with high, narrow forehead and pointed beard, cheeks heavy and creased, straight nose, with strongly marked, sensitive nostrils. The mouth, full-lipped and shutting firmly under the grey moustache, cut straight across the upper lip; the eyes, rather prominent blue eyes, had once been bold and merry, and were still keen. A fine old face, deeply lined and sorrowful, bearing upon it the impress of great possibilities that had remained—possibilities. He was somehow in keeping with his room, this warm, untidy, comfortable room that smelt of tobacco and old leather, where there was such a curious jumble of things artistic and sporting: a few pictures and bas-reliefs, nearly all of the pre-Renaissance Italian School, a big stuffed trout in a glass case, a fox's brush and mask, an old faded cricket cap; and over the carved mantelshelf, the portrait of a Georgian beauty in powder and patches, whose oval face, heavy-lidded eyes, and straight features were not unlike the vicar's own.

There was in the vicar's manner the welcoming quality that puts the shyest person at his ease. He was secretly much surprised that young Gallup should call upon him; but no hint of this appeared in his manner, and Eloquent found no difficulty in stating the object of his visit with business-like directness.

"I came to ask you," he remarked with his usual stiff solemnity, "if you would care for me to read the lessons at morning service to-morrow. . . . I do not read badly. . . . I have studied elocution."

The humorous lines round the old vicar's eyes deepened, but he answered with equal gravity, "That is very good of you, and I gratefully accept your kind offer. General Grantly has promised to read the first lesson, but I shall be glad if you will read the second. Will you do both at the afternoon service? There's no evensong on Christmas Day."

This was rather more than Eloquent had bargained for, but . . . she might come to the afternoon service as well. "I shall be most happy," he said meekly, "to do anything I can to assist."

The vicar rang for tea, but Eloquent arose hastily, saying he had promised to have tea with his aunt. He had no desire to prolong the interview with this urbane old gentleman now that its object was achieved. Mr Molyneux saw him to the front door and watched him for a moment as he bustled down the drive. "So that," he said to himself, as he went back to the warm study, "is our future member . . . for everyone says he will get in. Why does he want to read the lessons, I wonder? It will certainly do him no good with his dissenting constituents, and it is they who will get him in—what can his object be?"

The Ffolliot family formed quite a procession as they marched up the aisle on Christmas morning. General and Mrs Grantly were there; Reggie, Mr and Mrs Ffolliot, and the six young Ffolliots. They overflowed into the seat behind, and the Kitten, whom nothing ever awed or subdued, was heard to remark that since she couldn't sit with Willets, the keeper, who always had "such instasting things in his pottets," she'd sit "between the Ganpies." Reggie, Mary, and her four brothers filled the second seat: Mary sat at the far end, and Ger nearest the aisle, that he might gaze entrancedly at his grandfather while he read the lesson. Reggie came next to Ger, and Grantly separated Uz and Buz, so that Eloquent only caught an occasional glimpse of Mary's extremely flat back between the heads of other worshippers.

"Oh come, all ye faithful!" the choir sang lustily as it started in procession round the church, and the faithful responded vigorously. The Kitten pranced on her hassock, and always started the new verse before everyone else in the clearest of pure trebles. The Ffolliot boys shouted, and for once Mr Ffolliot forebore to frown on them. No woman with a houseful of children can remain quite unmoved on Christmas morning during that singularly jubilant invocation, and Mrs Grantly and Margery Ffolliot ceased to sing, for their eyes were full of tears. Mr Ffolliot fixed his monocle more firmly, and bent forward to look at the Kitten, and to catch her little pipe above the shouts of her brothers behind.

The Kitten sang words of her own composition during the Psalms, her grandparents both singing loudly themselves in their efforts not to hear her, for the Kitten's improvisations were enough to upset the gravity of a bench of bishops.

The General read the first lesson in a brisk and business-like monotone, and when he had finished his grandsons applauded noiselessly under the book-board.

The Kitten was very much to the fore during "Praise him and magnify him for ever," and then came the second lesson.

Eloquent walked up the aisle and took his stand at the lectern with the utmost unconcern. Shy and awkward he might be in ordinary social intercourse, but whenever it was a matter of standing up before his fellow-creatures and haranguing them, his self-consciousness dropped from him like a discarded garment, and he instantly acquired a mental poise and serene self-confidence wholly lacking at other times.

The second lesson on Christmas morning contains the plainest possible statement of a few great facts, and Eloquent proclaimed them in a singularly melodious voice with just exactly the emphatic simplicity they demanded.

The perfect sincerity of great literature is always impressive. All over the church heads were turned in the direction of the lectern, and when the short lesson ended the Kitten demanded in a quite audible voice, "Why did he stop so soon for?"

Eloquent looked at Mary as he passed down the aisle to his place, half-hoping she might meet his glance with the frank confident smile he found so disturbing and delicious. But her eyes were bent upon her prayer-book and she appeared quite unconscious that someone had just been reading the Bible exceptionally well.

He felt chilled and disappointed. "It is quite possible," he reflected bitterly, "that in this out-of-the-way old church they don't know good reading from bad."

There is no sermon at Redmarley on Christmas morning, and people who have been at the early service get out soon after twelve o'clock. Eloquent waited in the churchyard and watched the young Ffolliots and Reggie Peel come out. Mary saw him and nodded cheerfully, but she did not, as he felt might have been expected, come up to him and exclaim, "How beautifully you read!"

No one did.

Such of the congregation as had already been to early service hurried home to look after the dinner; or, as in the case of the young Ffolliots, to deposit prayer-books and take violent exercise until lunch time.

In the afternoon Eloquent read the lessons to a very meagre assembly. The Manor House seats were empty and his enthusiastic desire to be of assistance to the vicar cooled considerably. His aunt during dinner announced with the utmost frankness that wild horses would not drag her to church "of an afternoon"; she "liked her forty winks peaceable." She, however, further informed him that "he read very nice"; but as she had said the same thing of Grantly Ffolliot's performance, her nephew could not feel uplifted by her praise.

The vicar poured a little balm on his wounded spirit by hastening after him as he walked slowly and gloomily homewards, to thank him with warm urbanity for his kind help, but he made no remark upon his reading. They parted at the vicarage gate, and Eloquent pursued his way alone.

He felt restless and curiously disappointed. Everything was exactly as it had been before, and somehow he had expected it to be different.

So far he had encountered no special desire on the part of the "upper classes" to cultivate him. He was quite shrewd enough to perceive that those he had met—the Campions at Marlehouse and the few who had offered him hospitality in London—had done so purely on political grounds.

Only one, so far, had shown any kindness to him, the shy, wistfully self-conscious young man, hungry for sympathy and comprehension. Only one, Mary Ffolliot, had seemed to recognise in him other possibilities than those of party: but had she?

Anyway, here was he in the same village with her not a mile away, and yet a gulf stretched between them apparently impassable as a river in flood to a boatless man who could not swim.

That evening Miss Gallup decided that her nephew did not possess much general conversation.

CHAPTER XII

MISS ELSMARIA BUTTERMISH

The twins were not in the least alike, either in disposition or appearance, but they were inseparable. They were known to their large circle of friends and still more numerous censors as "Uz" and "Buz," but their real names were Lionel and Hilary, a fact they rigidly suppressed at all times.

Buz was tall for his age, slender and fair, with regular, Grantly features, and eyes like his mother's. Uz was short and chubby, tirelessly mischievous, and of an optimistic cheerfulness that neither misfortune nor misunderstanding could diminish. Buz was the reading Ffolliot, imaginative, and easily swayed by what he read; and his was the fertile brain that created and suggested all manner of wrongdoing to his twin. Just then the mania of both was for impersonation. "To dress up," and if possible to mislead their fellow-creatures as to their identity, was their chief aim in life. Here, the "prettiness" that in his proper person Buz deplored and abhorred came in useful. He made a charming girl, his histrionic power was considerable, and on both accounts he was much in demand at school theatricals; moreover, his voice had not yet broken, and when he desired to do so he could speak with lady-like softness and precision.

"Who's the chap that read the second lesson?" he asked Ger, who proudly walked between the twins on their way from church. Ger adored the twins.

"He's the muddy young man who came last Sunday," Ger answered promptly. Proud to be able to afford information, he continued, "His aunt's our nice Miss Gallup, and he's going to get in at the Election, nurse says."

"Oh, is he?" cried Uz, whose political views were the result of strong conviction unbiassed by reflection. "We'll see about that."

"I feel," Buz murmured dreamily, "that it is my duty to find out that young man's views on Female Suffrage. The women in this district appear to me sadly indifferent as to this important question. It's doubtful if any of them will tackle him. Now I'm well up in it just now, owing to that rotten debate last term."

"When that long-winded woman jawed for nearly an hour, d'you mean?" asked Uz "Exactly. I never dreamt she would come in useful, but you never know."

"Shall you call?" Uz gurgled delightedly. "Where'll you get the clothes? Mary's would be too big, besides everyone about here knows 'em, they're so old, and she'd never lend you anything decent."

"I shouldn't ask her if I really wanted them; but in this instance I scorn the mouldy garments of Sister Mary."

"Whose'll you get?" Uz asked curiously.

"My son," Buz rejoined, "I shall be like the king's daughter in the Psalms. Never you fear for my appearance. As our dear French prose book would remark: 'The grandmother of the young man so attractive has a maid French, of the heart excellent, and of the habits most chic.'"

"You mean Adèle will lend them?"

"You bet. She says I speak her tongue to the marvel, is it not?"

On Boxing-Day Eloquent called upon as many of the vote-possessing inhabitants of Redmarley as could be got in before his aunt's early dinner. He found but few at home, for on that morning there is always a meet in the market-place at Marlehouse, and the male portion of the inhabitants is sporting both by inclination and tradition. He found the wives, however, and on the whole they were gracious to him. His visit pleased, for the then member, Mr Brooke, had not been near Redmarley for years, and left the whole constituency to his agent, who was nearly as slack as the member for Marlehouse himself.

Eloquent, who had by no means made up his mind as to Female Suffrage, was much relieved that not a single woman in Redmarley had so much as breathed its name. His inclinations led him to follow where Mr Asquith led, but his long training in the doctrines of expediency gave him pause. He decided that he could not yet range himself alongside of the anti-suffrage party. As his old father was wont to remark cautiously, "You must see where you are first," and as yet Eloquent had not clearly discovered his whereabouts.

He ate his cold turkey with an excellent appetite, feeling that he had spent a useful if arduous morning. The give-and-take of ordinary conversation was always a difficult matter for Eloquent, but on this occasion he related his experiences to his aunt, and was quite talkative; so that, to a certain extent, she revised her unfavourable impression as to his conversational powers, and became more hopeful for his success in the Election. His gloom and taciturnity on Christmas Day had filled her with forebodings.

In the afternoon he devoted himself to his correspondence. His aunt gave up the parlour to him and went out to see her friends, while he sat in stately solitude at a table covered with papers plainly parliamentary in kind.

For about an hour he worked on undisturbed. Presently he heard the front gate creak, and looking up beheld a bicycle, a lady's bicycle, propped against the garden wall. Someone rapped loudly at the front door, and whoever it was had hard knuckles, for there was no knocker.

Presently Em'ly-Alice, Miss Gallup's little maid, appeared holding a card between her finger and thumb, and announced—"A young lady come to see you, please, sir."

For one mad moment Eloquent thought it might perhaps be Mary with some message for his aunt, but the card disillusioned him. It was a very shiny card, and on it was written in ink in round, very distinct writing—

"Miss Elsmaria Buttermish."

He had barely time to take this in before Miss Buttermish herself appeared.

"I'm glad to have found you at home, Mr Gallup," she announced easily; "I come on behalf of our beloved leaders to obtain a clear statement of your views as to 'Votes for Women,' for on those views a great deal depends. Kindly state them as clearly and concisely as you can."

Miss Buttermish drew up a chair to the table, sat down and produced a note-book and pencil; while Eloquent, speechless with astonishment and dismay, stood on the other side of it holding the shiny visiting-card in his hand.

Miss Buttermish tapped with her pencil on the table and regarded him enquiringly.

Apparently quite young, she was also distinctly pleasing to the eye. She wore an exceedingly well cut, heavily braided black coat and skirt, the latter of the tightest and skimpiest type of a skimpy period. Her hat was of the extinguisher order, entirely concealing her hair, except that just in the front a few

soft curls were vaguely visible upon her forehead. A very handsome elderly-looking black fox stole threw up the whiteness of her rounded chin in strong relief, and her eyes looked large and mysterious through the meshes of her most becoming veil. Eloquent was conscious of a certain familiarity in her appearance. He was certain that he had seen her before somewhere, and couldn't recall either time or place.

"I'm waiting, Mr Gallup," she remarked pleasantly. "You must have made up your mind one way or other upon this important question, and it will save both my time and your own if you state your views—may I say, as briefly as possible."

Eloquent gasped . . . "I fear," he said, "that I have by no means made up my mind with any sort of finality—it is such a large question. . . . I have not yet had time to go into it as thoroughly as I could wish. . . . There is so much to be said on both sides."

"There," Miss Buttermish interrupted, "you are mistaken; there is *nothing* to be said for the '*antis*.' Their arguments are positively . . . footling."

"I cannot," Eloquent said stiffly, "agree with you."

"Sit down, Mr Gallup," Miss Buttermish said kindly, at the same time getting up and seating herself afresh on a corner of the sofa. "We've got to thresh this matter out, and you've got to make up your mind whether you are for or against us. You are young, and I think that you hardly realise the forces that will be arrayed against *you* if you join hands with Mr Asquith on this question."

Miss Buttermish sat up very stiff and straight on the end of the sofa, and Eloquent, still standing with the table between them, felt rather like a naughty boy in the presence of an accusing governess. The allusion to his youth rankled. He did not sit down, but stood where he was, staring darkly at his guest. After a very perceptible pause he said:

"It is impossible for me to give you a definite opinion . . ."

"It's not an *opinion* I want," Miss Buttermish interrupted scornfully, "it's a definite guarantee. Otherwise, young man, you may make up your mind to incessant interruption and . . . to various other annoyances which I need not enumerate. We don't care a bent pin whether you are a Liberal or a Tory or a red-hot Socialist, so long as you are sound on the Suffrage question. If you are in favour of 'Votes for Women,' then we'll help you; if not . . . I advise you to put up your shutters."

Eloquent flushed angrily and, strangely enough, so did Miss Buttermish at the same moment. In fact, no sooner had she spoken the last sentence than she looked extremely hot and uncomfortable.

"I see no use," he said coldly, "in prolonging this interview. I cannot give you the guarantee you wish for. It is not my custom to make up my mind upon any question of political importance without considerable research and much thought. Intimidation would never turn me from my course if, after such investigation, I should decide against your cause. Nor would any annoyance your party may inflict upon me now, affect my support of your cause should I, ultimately, come to believe in its justice."

Miss Buttermish rose. "Mr Gallup," she said solemnly, "there is at present a very wide-spread discontent among us. Till we get the vote we shall manifest that discontent, and I warn you that the lives of members of Parliament and candidates who are not avowedly on our side will be made"—here Miss Buttermish swallowed hastily . . . "most unpleasant. Those that are not for us are against us, and . . . we are very much up against them. I am sorry we should part in anger . . ."

"Pardon me," Eloquent interrupted, "there is no anger on my side. I respect your opinions even though as yet I may not wholly share them."

Miss Buttermish shook her head. "I'm really sorry for you," she murmured; "you are young, and you little know what you are letting yourself in for."

Eloquent opened the parlour door for her with stiff politeness, and she passed out with bent head and shoulders that trembled under the heavy fur. Surely this militant young person was not going to cry!

He followed her in some anxiety down to the garden gate, held it open for her to pass through, which she did in absolute silence, and he waited to watch her mount her bicycle.

This she did in a very curious fashion. She started to run with it, leapt lightly on one pedal, and then, to Eloquent's amazement, essayed to throw her other leg over like a boy.

The lady's skirt was tight, the Redmarley roads were extremely muddy, the unexpected jerk caused the bicycle to skid, and lady and bicycle came down sideways with considerable violence.

"Damn!" exclaimed Miss Buttermish.

"Oh, those modern girls!" thought the shocked Eloquent as he ran forward to assist. He pulled the bicycle off Miss Buttermish, and stood it against the wall. She sat up, her hat very much on one side.

"Do you know," she said rather huskily, "I do believe I've broken my confounded arm."

She held out her left hand to Eloquent, who pulled her to her feet. Her right arm hung helpless, and even through her bespattered veil he could see that she was very white.

"Pray come in and rest for a little," he said concernedly, "and we can see what has happened."

"I'm sure it's broken, I heard the beastly thing snap——" the girl stumbled blindly, Eloquent caught her in his arms, and saw that she had fainted from pain.

He carried her into the house and laid her on the horsehair sofa, put a cushion under her arm, and seizing the large scissors that his orderly aunt kept hanging on a hook at the side of the fire, cut her jacket carefully along the seam from wrist to shoulder. She wore a very mannish, coloured flannel shirt. This sleeve, too, he cut, and disclosed a thin arm, extremely brown nearly to the elbow, and very fair and white above, but the elbow was distorted and discoloured; a bad break, Eloquent decided, with mischief at the joint as well probably. He had studied first-aid at classes, and he shook his head. It did not occur to him to call the little servant to assist him. With his head turned shyly away he removed the young lady's hat and loosened her heavy furs. Then he flew for water and a sponge, thinking the while of her curious Christian name "Elsmaria." She looked pathetically young and helpless lying there. Eloquent forgot her militancy and her shocking language in his sorrow over her pain. As he knelt down by the sofa to sponge her face he started so violently that he upset a great deal of the water he had brought.

It was already growing dark, but even in the dim light as he looked closely at Miss Buttermish without her hat, her likeness to Mary Ffolliot was striking. She wore her hair cropped close. "Could she have been in prison?" thought Eloquent, remembering how light she was when he carried her in.

With hands that trembled somewhat he pushed the wet curly hair back from the forehead so like Mary's. There were the same wide brow, the same white eyelids with the sweeping arch and thick dark lashes, the delicate high-bridged nose and well-cut, kindly mouth; the same pure oval in the line of cheek and chin.

Certainly an extraordinary resemblance. She must at least be a cousin; and, in spite of his sincere commiseration of the young lady's suffering, he felt a jubilant thrill in the reflection that this accident must bring him into further contact with the Ffolliots.

There was no brandy in the house, for both he and his aunt were total abstainers, so he fetched a glass of water and held it to the young lady's lips as she opened her eyes. She drank eagerly, looked searchingly at him, then she glanced down at her bare arm and the cut sleeve. The colour flooded her face, and with real horror in her voice she exclaimed, "You've never gone and *cut* that jacket!"

"I had to. Your arm ought to be set at once, and goodness knows where the doctor may be to-day. You'd best be taken to Marlehouse Infirmary, I think; it's a bad break."

"But it's her best coat, quite new," Miss Buttermish persisted fretfully, "quite new; you'd no business to go and cut it. I promised to take such care of it."

"I'm very sorry," Eloquent replied meekly; "but it really was necessary that your arm should be seen to at once, and I dared not jerk it about."

"Can it be mended, do you think, so that it won't show?" There was real concern in her voice.

"I'm sure of it," he answered, much astonished at this fuss about a coat at such a moment; "I cut it carefully along the seam."

"I say," exclaimed Miss Buttermish, "I must get out of this"—and she prepared to swing her feet off the sofa—rather big feet, he noted, in stout golfing shoes. Forcibly he held her legs down.

"Please don't," he implored. "You must not jar that arm any more than can be helped. Shall I go up to the Manor House and get them to send a conveyance for you?—you really mustn't think of walking, and I don't know where else we could get one to-day."

Miss Buttermish closed her eyes and frowned heavily. Then in a faint voice—

"How do you know I'm from the Manor House?"

"Well, for one thing, you're very like . . . the family."

"*All* of them?" she asked anxiously.

"You are very like certain members of the family I have seen," he said cautiously. "May I go? I'll send the servant to sit with you——"

Miss Buttermish clutched at him violently with her left hand, exclaiming, "No, no—don't send anybody yet; I must get out of this beastly skirt before anyone comes. . . . Look here, you're a very decent chap and I'm sorry I rotted you—will you play the game when you go home and hide these beastly clothes before anyone comes? The blessed thing hooks at the side, see; it's coming undone now; if you'll just give a pull I can wriggle out without getting up. . . . Oh, confound . . . I'm Buz, you know, I dressed up on purpose to rot you . . . but if you *could* not mention it . . ."

Her head fell back and she nearly fainted again from pain. Eloquent divested her of her skirt, and with it the last remnant of Miss Buttermish disappeared—a slim slip of a boy in running shorts, with bare knees, and a gym-belt lay prone on the sofa, very pale and shivering.

In absolute silence Eloquent folded the skirt and the coat, and laying hat and furs on the top, placed them in a neat heap on a chair in the corner.

He went to his bedroom, fetched the eiderdown off his own bed and covered the boy with it. As he was tucking in the eiderdown at the side Buz put out a cold left hand and held him by the coat sleeve, saying curiously—"Are you in an awful bait? are you going to be really stuffy about it?"

Eloquent looked straight into the quizzical grey eyes that held his. The boy's voice belied the eyes, for it was anxious.

"Of course not," he said quite seriously, "I'm only too sorry your trick should have had such a disastrous conclusion. Who shall I ask for up at the house, and what shall I do with the things?"

"Oh take them with you—could you? Give 'em to Fusby, and tell him to put them in their rooms—the furs are granny's. He'll do it and never say a word; decent old chap, Fusby. I say, I'm awfully sorry to be such a nuisance. I'm certain I could walk home if you'll let me."

"That you certainly must not do, I'll go at once. Here's the hand-bell. I'll tell the maid that she is to come if you ring. I expect my aunt will be in directly—I'll be as quick as I can—cheer up."

Eloquent bustled about putting the remains of Miss Buttermish tidily into his suit-case while the grey eyes followed his movements with amused interest.

"I'm most awfully obliged," said Buz in a very low voice; "I do feel such an ass lying here."

There was a murmur of voices in the passage. The front door was closed with quiet decorum and the little sitting-room grew darker. Two big tears rolled over and Buz sniffed helplessly, for his handkerchief was in the pocket of the jacket lately worn with such gay impudence by Miss Elsmaria Buttermish.

CHAPTER XIII

THE THIN END

Eloquent rode the bicycle left outside by Miss Buttermish, rode carefully, bearing the suit-case in his left hand. The village was quite deserted and he reached the great gates of the Manor House unchallenged. The gates stood open and he entered the dark shadowy drive without having encountered a living soul. Lights gleamed from the lower windows of the house, but the porch was in darkness. He rang loudly, and Fusby, the old manservant, switched on the light as he opened the door and revealed a square, oak-panelled room and the warning cards. The inner door leading to the hall was closed, but the sound of cheerful voices reached Eloquent.

Fusby stood expectant, and in spite of his imperturbable and almost benedictory manner he looked mildly surprised.

"Is Mrs Ffolliot at home?" Eloquent asked rather breathlessly.

"She is, sir," Fusby answered, but in a tone that subtly conveyed the unspoken "to some people," fixing his eyes the while on the suitcase.

"Do you think she could speak to me here?" Eloquent continued humbly.

"I think not, sir; the mistress at present is dispensing tea to the fam'ly. She does not as a rule see people at the door. Can I take a message?"

"I fear I must disturb her," said Eloquent, conscious all the time that Fusby's mild gaze was concentrated on the suit-case. "One of her sons"—for the life of him he couldn't remember the boy's ridiculous name—"has broken his arm."

"Master Buz, sir?" asked Fusby, quite unmoved by the intelligence; "it's generally 'im."

"Yes, Master Buz, and he asked me to give you this. . . . It's some things of his. I'll send for the suit-case—put it out of the way somewhere—he was dressed up . . . these are the clothes——"

"He will 'ave 'is frolic," Fusby murmured indulgently; "a very light-'earted young gentleman he is—step this way, please, sir."

Fusby opened a door behind him, and announced in the voice of one issuing an edict, "Mr Gallup."

There seemed to Eloquent crowds of people in the hall, mostly gathered about a round table near the fire. He discerned Mrs Ffolliot in the very act of "dispensing tea" and General Grantly standing on the hearthrug warming his coat tails. Mary, too, he saw give a cup of tea into her grandfather's hands, and he was conscious of the presence of Mrs Grantly seated on an oaken settle at the other side of the fire from Mrs Ffolliot. These four were clear to him as he came into the hall. There was a fire of logs in the open fireplace and a good many lights, and Eloquent, coming out of the soft darkness of that winter afternoon, felt dazzled and intolerably hot.

The four people he saw first suddenly seemed to recede to an immeasurable distance, and he became conscious of others whom he could not focus. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and he was conscious that at his entrance dead silence had fallen upon the group by the fire. Then Mrs Ffolliot rose and held out a kind fair hand to him, and said something that he could not hear. Somehow he reached the succouring hand and clung to it like a drowning man, mumbling the while, "Sorry to intrude upon you, but one of your sons"—again the name eluded him—"has broken his arm, and he's in my aunt's cottage."

"Look at Ganpie's tea!" exclaimed a shrill clear voice, and the Kitten diverted attention from Eloquent to the General, who was calmly pouring the tea from his newly filled cup upon the bear-skin hearthrug, as he gazed fixedly at this bringer of ill-tidings.

Eloquent could never remember clearly what happened between the dual announcement of the accident and the spilling of the General's tea, till the moment when he found himself sitting on the settle beside Mrs Grantly with a cup of tea of his own, which Mary had poured out. Everyone else seemed to have melted away, Mrs Ffolliot to telephone to the doctor, the General to order his motor, the Kitten and Ger to the nursery, and the rest of the party to the four winds.

But he, Mrs Grantly, and Mary were still sitting at the fire, and Mary had asked him if he took sugar.

"Two lumps," he said.

"So do I," said Mary, and it seemed a most wonderful coincidence of kindred tastes.

In thinking it over afterwards it struck him that the whole family took the accident very coolly. There was no fuss, very little exclamation; and to Eloquent, sitting as a guest in that old hall where, as a small boy, he had sometimes peeped wonderingly, there came a curious feeling that either he had dreamt of this moment or that it had all happened aeons of ages ago, and that if it was a dream then Mary was in a dream too, that he had always wanted her, been conscious of her, only then she was an immense way off; vaguely beautiful and desirable, but set in a luminous haze of impossibilities, remote, apart as a star.

Now she was friendly and approachable, only a few yards away, looking across at him with frank kind eyes and the firelight shining on her bright hair.

The time seemed all too short till Mrs Ffolliot, dressed for driving, in a long fur coat, came back to tell them that the doctor was at a case five miles off, at a house where there was no telephone, and that

she had arranged to take Buz into the Marlehouse Infirmary to have the arm set there, and, if necessary, he must stay there till he could be moved. . . .

"Could they drive Mr Gallup back?"

So there was nothing for it but to accompany the General and Mrs Ffolliot.

Mr Ffolliot did not appear at all.

General Grantly went outside with the chauffeur, and Eloquent again experienced the queer dream-like sense of doing again something he had done already as he followed Mrs Ffolliot into the motor. He had never lost his awestruck admiration for her, and it never occurred to him to sit down at her side. He was about to put down one of the little seats and sit on that, when she said, "Oh, please, sit here, Mr Gallup," and he sank into the seat beside her, confused and tremulous. Mary and Mrs Grantly had come into the porch with them, and stood there now calling out all sorts of messages and questions. The inner door stood open, and the hall shone bright behind them.

The motor purred and slid swiftly down the drive.

Mrs Ffolliot switched off the light behind her head, and Eloquent became conscious of a soft pervading scent of violets. The twenty years that lay between her first visit to his father's shop and this wonderful new nearness seemed to him but as one short link in a chain of inevitable circumstances. Like a picture thrown on a screen he saw the little boy standing at her knee, the giggling shop assistants, and his father flushed and triumphant. And he knew that through all the years he had always been sure that such a moment as this would come, when he would sit beside her as an equal and a friend. . . . And here he was, sitting with her in her father's motor, sharing the same fur rug. What was she saying?

Something kind about the trouble he had taken . . . and the motor stopped at his aunt's gate.

* * * * *

Uz was in the midst of a large bite of plum-cake when Eloquent announced his errand. Uz hastily took another bite, and just as the Kitten drew attention to her grandfather's tea he quietly opened the door of the hall, shut it after him softly, did the same by the front door, and hatless, coatless, and in his pumps—for his boots were exceedingly dirty, and Nana had caught him and turned him back to change before tea—he started down the drive at a good swinging run. His wind was excellent, and he reached Miss Gallup's gate in about five minutes. Only once had he stopped, when the piece of cake he was carrying broke off short and dropped in the mud; he peered about for it during some four seconds, then gave it up and ran on.

The lamp was lit in Miss Gallup's sitting-room, but the blind was not pulled down. He looked in at the window and saw his brother lying on the sofa under the eiderdown, opened the front door—no one ever locks a door in Redmarley unless they go out, and then the key is always under the scraper—and walked in.

"Hullo," said Buz; "isn't this rotten?"

"Little man's just come, so I did a bunk. I didn't wait to hear his revelations about the lovely suffragette——"

"I don't believe he'll tell," Buz said; "he's not a bad little chap, he wasn't a bit shirty, helped me out of those beastly clothes and never said a word; took them with him too, so's they shouldn't be found here. I say, by the way, tell Adèle to get the jacket mended and I'll pay it whenever I can get any money. I'm frightfully sorry about that—he cut the sleeve right up to get my arm out. Who got the togs?"

"I don't know, he hadn't 'em when he came in——"

"Gave 'em to Fusby, I expect; he'll see they're properly distributed——"

"What happened, did you have a lark?"

"He rose like anything," Buz chuckled delightedly. "Chuck us your handkerchief, old chap, mine's in that coat—I'm only sorry for one thing."

"What's that?"

"I told him if he wouldn't declare for Votes for Women he'd better put up his shutters, and I know he thought I meant to rub it in about his father's shop—I didn't, it would have been beastly; but I'm certain

he thought so by the way he flushed up. He's a game little beggar, he wouldn't give in, or palaver or promise. . . . Hullo, here's two more of the family——"

The two more were Reggie Peel and Grantly. The Ffolliots were not demonstrative, but they always shared good-luck or ill, therefore Reggie and Grantly made a bee-line for Miss Gallup's cottage whenever they understood what had happened. They knew nothing of Miss Buttermish, and neither of the younger boys enlightened them.

Miss Gallup returned to find her parlour full of Ffolliots; and just after her came her nephew, accompanied by General Grantly and Mrs Ffolliot, who bore Buz away in the motor to Marlehouse wrapped in a blanket and with the broken arm in a sling.

When they had all gone—the motor towards Marlehouse, the three others to the Manor—Eloquent stood at the open gate for a minute or two and then went out, shutting it after him very softly, so that neither the three walking up the road, nor his aunt waiting at her open door, should hear. Then he, too, set off in the direction of Marlehouse. He had no intention whatever of walking there, but he could not face his aunt just then, nor bear the torrent of questions and comments that he knew would submerge him.

The last hour had been for him an epoch-making, a profound experience, and he wanted, as his aunt would have said, "to squeeze his orange dry."

A course of action intensely irritating to Miss Gallup, who awaited his return, after seeing the Ffolliots off, with the utmost impatience.

"Wherever could he have got to?"

Em'ly-Alice, however, was longing to be questioned, and Miss Gallup indulged her.

"How did the poor young gentleman break his arm?"

"Fell off 'is bike, 'e did, and it must 'ave bin but a minute or two after the young lady'd gone——"

"Young lady! What young lady?" Miss Gallup demanded sternly.

"A young lady as come to see Mr Gallup. Miss Buttermish was 'er name; I remember it most pertikler, because I thought what a funny name."

"Buttermish, Buttermish," Miss Gallup repeated; "where did she come from?"

"That I can't tell you, Miss; I was in the kitchen polishing the teapot for your tea when there comes a knock at the door, and when I opens it, there stood the young lady. 'Can I see Mr Gallup?' she says, and knowing he was in the parlour I as't her in. She didn't stop long and no sooner was she gone than I hears Mr Gallup runnin' upstairs an' in and out, and presently 'e called out, 'Master Ffolliot's broken 'is arm,' and went off in ever such an 'urry. I see 'im run down the garden, and 'e 'ad 'is portmanteau in 'is 'and——"

"Nonsense," Miss Gallup said crossly; "what would he be doing with a portmanteau?"

"That I can't say, mum, but 'e 'ad it, and when 'e'd gone I took the lamp in to the poor young gentleman wot was lyin' all 'uddled up on the sofa—'e said 'thank you' in a muffled voice that mournful, and I made up the fire and waited a minute but 'e didn't say no more, so I come away, an' in a few minutes the 'ouse seemed chock-full o' people. Where they come from passes me——"

"Well, get tea now, as quick as you can. I can't think where Mr Gallup can have got to."

Miss Gallup lit a candle and went straight upstairs to her nephew's room. His clothes were still in the drawers as she, herself, had arranged them—but the suit-case, the smart new leather suit-case, with E. A. G. in large black letters upon its lid, was gone.

Miss Gallup sank heavily on a chair. What could it mean?

She immediately connected the advent of the strange young lady and the disappearance of her nephew's suit-case.

She took off her bonnet and cloak and did not put them away, but left them lying on her bed; a sure sign of perturbation with Miss Gallup, who was the tidiest of mortals.

She sought Em'ly-Alice in the bright little kitchen. "What was the young lady like?" she asked.

"Oh a superior young person, Miss, all in black."

"Young, was she?" Miss Gallup remarked suspiciously.

"Yes, Miss, quite young, I should say—about my own age; I couldn't see 'er face very well, but she did talk like the gentry, very soft and distinct."

"Did Mr Gallup seem pleased to see her?"

"That I couldn't say, Miss, I'm sure. I left 'em together and come out and shut the door."

Miss Gallup went back to the parlour shaking her head.

"There's a lot of them will be after him now 'e's stood for Parliament," she reflected grimly; "but I did *not* think they'd have the face to track him to his aunt's house. She's hanging about the lanes for him now I'll warrant. Miss Buttermish indeed!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE ELECTION

Eloquent had taken a small furnished house in Marlehouse, and was installed there with a housekeeper and manservant for the fortnight preceding the election. The Moonstone, chief, and in fact only, hotel in the town, was "blue," and although the proprietor would have been glad enough to secure Eloquent's custom, it was felt better "for all parties" that he should make his headquarters elsewhere. He worked hard and unceasingly, his agent was equally tireless, and it was only at the last that Mr Brooke's supporters awoke to the fact that if he was to represent Marlehouse again no stone should be left unturned. But it was too late: Mr Brooke, elderly, amiable, and lethargic, was quite incapable of either directing or controlling his more ardent supporters, and their efforts on his behalf were singularly devoid of tact. The Tory and Unionist ladies were grievous offenders in this respect. They started a house-to-house canvass in the town, and those possessed of carriages or motors parcelled out the surrounding villages and "did" them, their methods being the reverse of conciliatory. Indeed, had Mr Brooke in the smallest degree realised how these zealous supporters were injuring his cause, his smiling optimism would have been sadly shaken.

The day after the accident Eloquent called at Marlehouse Infirmary to ask for Buz, and was informed that the arm had been set successfully, that it was a bad break, but that the Rontgen rays had been used, and it was going on satisfactorily.

He wondered if he ought to send flowers or fruit to the invalid, but a vivid recollection of the look in Buz's eyes as he watched him pack his suit-case decided him that any such manifestation of sympathy would be unsuitable. He then, although he was so rushed that he could hardly overtake his engagements, hired a motor to drive out to the Manor House, and so hurried the chauffeur that they fell straightway into a police trap and were "warned."

He asked for Mrs Ffolliot, and Fusby blandly informed him that she was in Marlehouse with Master Buz.

"Is Miss Ffolliot at home?" Eloquent asked boldly.

"Miss Ffolliot is out huntin' with the young gentlemen," Fusby remarked stiffly.

So Eloquent was fain to get into his motor again, and quite forgot to look in on his aunt on the way back.

The night before the election there was a Liberal meeting in the Town Hall, and a certain section of the Tory party, a youthful and irresponsible section it must be confessed, had arranged to attend the meeting, and if possible bring it to nought. The ringleader in this scheme was a young man named Rabbich, whose people some years before had bought a large property in a village about four miles from Redmarley.

Mr Rabbich, senr., was an extremely wealthy man with many irons in the fire, a man so busy that he found little time to look after either his property or his family, and though he, himself, was generally

declared to be a "very decent sort" with no nonsense or "side" about him, and of a praiseworthy liberality in the matter of subscriptions, his wife and children did not find equal favour either in the eyes of the villagers or those of his neighbours.

Mrs Rabbich was a foolish woman whose fetich was society with a big "S," and she idolised her only son, a rather vacuous youth who had just managed to scrape into Sandhurst.

On the night before the election then, young Rabbich gave a dinner at the Moonstone to some twenty youths of his own age, and Grantly Ffolliot was of the party. Grantly did not like young Rabbich, and as a rule steered clear of him in the hunting-field and elsewhere, though civil enough if actually brought into contact with him. But though Grantly did not like young Rabbich, he dearly loved any form of "rag," and as party feeling ran very high just then, the chance of disturbing the last Liberal meeting before the election was far too entrancing to be missed. He obtained his father's permission to go to the dinner (Mr Ffolliot was never difficult when his sons asked for permission to go from home), told his mother he would be late, obtained the key of the side door from Fusby, and quite unintentionally left his family under the impression that he was dining at the Rabbich's.

Mine host of the Moonstone provided an excellent dinner, and young Rabbich kept calling for more champagne, so that it was a very hilarious and somewhat unsteady party that presently, in a solid phalanx, got wedged in at the very back of the Town Hall, which was filled to overflowing. Twenty noisy young men in evening clothes, and all together, made a fairly conspicuous feature in the meeting, and the crowd, which was almost wholly Liberal in its sympathies, guessed they were out for trouble.

During the first couple of speeches, which were short and introductory, they were fairly quiet, only indulging in occasional derisive comments. When Eloquent arose to address the meeting he was greeted by such a storm of cheering from his supporters, as quite drowned the hisses and cat-calls of the "knuts" at the back of the hall.

But when he started to speak, their interruptions were incessant, irrelevant, and in the case of young Rabbich, offensive.

Eloquent, who was long-sighted, clearly perceived Grantly Ffolliot, flushed, with ruffled hair and gesticulating arms, in the group at the back of the hall. Young Rabbich, whose father had made the greater part of his money in butter and bacon, kept urging Eloquent to "go back to the shop," inquired the present price of socks and pyjamas, and whether the clothes he wore just then were made in Germany?

Eloquent saw Grantly Ffolliot frown and say something to his companion as young Rabbich continued his questions, and then quite suddenly the whole of that end of the hall was in a turmoil, and one by one the interrupters were hauled from their seats and forcibly ejected from the meeting, in spite of desperate resistance on their part. After that, peace was restored, and Eloquent continued his speech amidst the greatest enthusiasm.

His supporters cheered him to his house, and then departed to parade the town, while their band played "Hearts of Oak," the chosen war-song of the "Yallows." Meanwhile the Rabbich party had returned to the Moonstone to compare their bruises and to get more drinks, and then they sallied forth again to join a "Blue" procession, headed by a band that played "Bonnie Dundee," which is the battle-cry of the Blues.

The rival bands met, the rival processions met and locked, and there was a regular shindy. Eloquent, very tired and rather depressed, as a man usually is on the eve of any great struggle, heard the distant tumult and the shouting, and thought he had better go out and see what was afoot.

He had hardly got outside his own front door, which was in a little-frequented street not far from the police-station, when he saw two policemen on either side of a hatless, dishevelled, and unsteady youth, who held one of them affectionately by the arm while the other held him.

Another glance and he perceived that the hatless one was Grantly Ffolliot.

"Hullo!" cried Eloquent, "what's to do here?"

"Gentleman very disorderly, sir, throwing stones at windows of your committee-room, fighting and brawling, and resisted violently—so we're taking him to the station."

"He seems quiet enough now," Eloquent suggested.

Grantly smiled at him sleepily. "Good chaps, policemen," he murmured; "fine beefy chaps."

"Look here," said Eloquent, "I'd much prefer you didn't charge him. His people are well known; it will only create ill-feeling. I'll look after him if you leave him with me."

The policemen looked at one another. . . . "Of course," said the one to whom Grantly clung so lovingly, "we couldn't swear as it was him who threw the stones, though he was among them as did."

"He's only a boy," Eloquent continued, "and he's drunk . . . it would be a pity to make a public example of him . . . just now—don't you think?—If you could oblige me in this . . . I'm very anxious that the election should be fought with as little ill-feeling as possible."

Something changed hands.

"What about the other young gentlemen, sir?" asked the younger policeman.

"With the other young gentlemen," Eloquent said ruthlessly, "you can deal exactly as you please, but if it can be managed don't charge any of them."

With difficulty policeman number one detached himself from Grantly's embrace and handed him over to Eloquent.

"Good-bye, old chap," Grantly called fondly as his late prop departed, "when I'm as heavy as you, you won't cop me so easy—eh, what?"

Eloquent took the boy firmly by the arm and led him in. His steps were uncertain and his speech was thick, but he was quite biddable, and brimming over with loving kindness for all the world.

Eloquent took him into the sitting-room and placed him in a large arm-chair. Grantly pushed his hair off his forehead and gazed about the room in rather bewildered fashion, at the round table strewn with papers, at the tray with a glass of milk and plate of sandwiches standing on the bare little sideboard, at his pale, fagged host, who stood on the hearthrug looking down at him.

As he met Eloquent's stern gaze he smiled sweetly at him, and he was so like Mary when he smiled that Eloquent turned his eyes away in very shame. It seemed sacrilege even to think of her in connection with anything so degraded and disgusting as Grantly's state appeared to him at that moment. His Nonconformist conscience awoke and fairly shouted at him that he should have interfered to prevent the just retribution that had overtaken this miserable misguided boy . . . but he was her brother; he was the son of that gracious lady who was set as a fixed star in the firmament of his admirations; he could not hold back when there was a chance of saving him from this disgrace. For to be charged with being "drunk and disorderly" in the Police Court appeared to Eloquent just then as the lowest depths of ignominy.

"Now what in the world," he asked presently, "am I to do with you? You can't go home in that state."

"Bed, my dear chap, bed's what I'm for, . . . so sleepy, can hardly hold up my head . . . any shake-down'll do—"

Grantly's head fell back against the chair, and he closed his eyes in proof of his somnolence.

"All right," said Eloquent, "you come with me."

With some difficulty he got Grantly upstairs and into his own room. Before the meeting he had told the servants they need not sit up for him; his own was the only other bed made up in the house. Grantly lay down upon it, muddy boots and all, and turned sideways with a sigh of satisfaction; but just before he settled off he opened his eyes and said warningly:

"I say, if I was you I wouldn't go about with young Rabbich—he's a wrong 'un—you may take it from me, he really is—he'll do you no good—Don't you be seen about with him."

"Thank you," Eloquent said dryly, "I will follow your advice."

"That's right," Grantly murmured, "never be 'bove taking advice."

And in another minute he was fast asleep. Eloquent covered him with a railway rug, thinking grimly the while that it seemed to have become his mission in life to cover up prostrated Ffolliots.

He went downstairs, made up the fire, and lay down on the hard sofa in his dining-room, and slept an intermittent feverish sleep, in which dreadful visions of Mary between two policemen, mingled with the declaration of the poll, which proclaimed Mr Brooke to have been elected member for Marlehouse by an enormous majority.

At six o'clock he got up. In half an hour his servants would be stirring, and Grantly must be got out of the house before they appeared.

He went to the kitchen, got a little teapot and cups, and made some tea. Then he went to rouse Grantly.

This was difficult, as he couldn't raise his voice very much because of the servants, and Grantly was sleeping heavily. At last, by a series of shakes and soft punches, he succeeded in making him open his eyes. Eloquent had already turned up the gas, and the room was full of light.

There is a theory extant that a man shows his real character when he is suddenly aroused out of sleep. That if he is naturally surly, he will be surly then; if he is of an amiable disposition, he is good-natured then.

Grantly sat up with a start and swung his feet off the bed. "Mr Gallup," he said very gently, "I can't exactly remember what I'm doing here, but I do apologise."

"That's all right," Eloquent said awkwardly. "I thought perhaps you'd like to get home before the servants were about, and it's six o'clock. Come and have a cup of tea."

"May I wash my face?" Grantly asked meekly.

This accomplished, he went downstairs and drank the cup of tea Eloquent had provided for him. His host lent him a bicycle and speeded him on his way. At the door Grantly paused to say in a mumbling voice: "I don't know, sir, why you've been so awfully decent to me, but will you remember this? that if ever I can do anything for you, it would be very generous of you to tell me—will you remember this?"

"I will remember," said Eloquent.

As Grantly rode away Eloquent was filled with self-reproach, for he had not said one word either of warning or rebuke, and he had been brought up to believe in the value of "the word in season."

Grantly pedalled as hard as he could through the dark deserted roads, and though his head was racking and he felt, as he put it, "like nothing on earth," he covered the five miles between Marlehouse and Redmarley in under half an hour. He went round to the side door and felt for the key, as he hoped to slip in without meeting any of the servants who were, he saw by stray lights, just astir.

That key was nowhere to be found.

He tried every pocket in his overcoat, his tail coat, his white waistcoat, his trousers, all in vain. That key was gone; lost!

There was nothing for it but to try Mary's window. Parker slept in her room, but Parker would never bark at any member of the family. All the bedroom windows at Redmarley were lattice, and Mary's, at the back of the house on the first floor, stood open about a foot.

"Parker," Grantly called softly, "Parker, old chap, rouse her up and ask her to let me in."

An old wistaria grew under the window with thick knotted stems. Grantly climbed up this, and although it was very dark he was aware of something dimly white at the window. Parker, much longer in the leg than any well-bred fox-terrier has a right to be, was standing on his hind legs thrusting his head out in silent welcome.

"Go and rouse her up, old chap," Grantly whispered. "I want her to open the window wide enough for me to get through."

All the windows at the Manor House, open or shut, had patent catches that it was impossible to undo from the outside.

He heard Parker jump on Mary's bed and probably lick her face, then a sleepy "What is it, old dog, what's the matter?" and a soft movement as Mary raised herself on her elbow and switched on the light.

"Mary," in a penetrating whisper, "let me in, I've lost that confounded key."

In a moment Mary was over at the window, undid the catches, and Grantly scrambled through.

"Grantly!" Mary exclaimed. "What on earth is the matter? You look awful."

Grantly caught sight of himself in her long glass and agreed with her.

He was covered with mud from head to foot, his overcoat was torn, his white tie was gone, his beautiful smooth hair, with the neat ripple at the temples, stood on end in ragged locks; in fact he was as unlike the "Knut" of ordinary life as he could well be.

"Get into bed, Mary," he said, "you'll catch cold . . ."

Mary, looking very tall in her straight white nightgown, turned slowly and got into bed. "Now tell me," she said.

Grantly went and sat at the end of her bed and Parker joined him, cuddling up against him and trying to lick his face. It mattered nothing to Parker that he was ragged and dirty and disreputable; nothing that he might have committed any crime in the rogues' calendar. He was one of the family, he was home, he had evidently been in trouble, he needed comfort, therefore Parker made much of him. Grantly felt this and was vaguely cheered.

"Now," said Mary again, and switched off the light; "you can have the eiderdown if you're cold."

"Well, if you must know," said Grantly, "we went to the Radical meeting and got chucked out."

"Who went? I thought you were dining with the Rabbiches."

"Not *the* Rabbiches, *a* Rabbich, and an insufferable bounder at that; but he gave us a jolly good dinner, champagne flowed."

"And you got drunk? Oh, Grantly!"

"Well, no; I shouldn't describe it thus crudely—like the Irishman, I prefer to say 'having drink taken.'"

"Well, 'having drink taken'—then?"

"After we were chucked out for interrupting (it *was* a rag) we went back to the Moonstone."

"To the Moonstone," Mary repeated; "why there?"

"Because we dined there, my dear. Young Rabbich gave the feast; it was all arranged beforehand. We meant to spoil that meeting, but we began too soon, and they were too strong for us, and . . . he's an ass, and shouted out all sorts of things he shouldn't—we deserved what we got."

"And then?"

"I'm not very clear what happened then, except that there was the most tremendous shindy in the street, and fur was flying like anything, and the next I know was two bobbies had got me, and your friend Gallup squared them and took me home and put me to bed . . . and here I am."

"Mr Gallup," Mary repeated incredulously; "you've been to bed in his house?"

"You've got it, my sister; lay on his bed just as I am . . . and he woke me at six and sent me home on his bicycle."

"But why—why should he have interfered? I should have thought he'd have been *glad* for you to be taken up, interrupting his meeting and being on the other side . . . and everything."

"Well, anyway, that's what he did, and whatever his motives may have been it was jolly decent of him . . . and . . ." here Grantly lowered his voice to the faintest mumble, "he never said a word of reproof or exhortation . . . I tell you he behaved like a gentleman. What's to be done?"

"Nothing," said Mary decidedly. "You've played the fool, and by the mercy of Providence you've got off uncommonly cheap. It would worry mother horribly if she knew, and as for father . . . well you know what *he* thinks of people who can't carry their liquor like gentlemen, and grandfather too . . . and . . . oh, Grantly—father's not going South till the very end of January; he decided to-night that as the weather was so mild he'd wait till then. So it would *never* do if it was to come out, your life would be unbearable, all of our lives; he'd say it was the Grantly strain coming out—you know how he blames every bit of bad in us on mother's people."

"I know," groaned Grantly, "I know."

"Well, anyway," Mary said in quite a different tone, "there's one thing we've got to remember, and that is we must be uncommonly civil to that young man if we happen to meet him—he's put us under an obligation."

"I know . . . I know, that's what I feel, and I shall never have an easy minute till I've done something

for him . . . and I don't see anything I can do with the pater like he is and all. Isn't it a *beastly* state of things?"

In the darkness Mary leant forward and stroked the tousled head bent down over Parker.

"Poor old boy," she said softly, "poor old boy," and Parker licked something that tasted salt off the end of his nose.

When Grantly left his sister's room Parker went with him.

* * * * *

Eloquent's housekeeper found the missing key under his bed, and he sent it out to the Manor House that morning, addressed to Grantly, in a sealed envelope by special messenger.

In the evening the poll was declared in Marlehouse, and the Liberal candidate was elected by a majority of three hundred and forty-nine votes.

CHAPTER XV

OF THINGS IN GENERAL

The result of the election was no surprise to the defeated party. The honest among them acknowledged that they deserved to be beaten, and they felt no personal rancour against Eloquent.

If Marlehouse was unfortunate enough to be represented by a Radical, they preferred that the Radical should be a Marlehouse man and not some "carpet-bagger" imported from South Wales. Eloquent's bearing, both during the contest and afterwards, was acknowledged to be modest and "suitable." If he was lacking in geniality and address, he was, at all events, neither bumptious nor servile. His lenity towards the youths who had done their best to break up his meeting and wreck his committee rooms had leaked out, and gained for him, if not friends, at least toleration among several leading Conservatives who had been his bitterest opponents.

Mary, Grantly, and Buz Ffolliot all felt a sneaking satisfaction that he *had* got in. A satisfaction they in no wise dared to express, for Mr Ffolliot was really much upset at the result of the election; feeling it something of a personal insult that one so closely associated with a ready-made clothes' shop, a shop in his own nearest town, should represent him in Parliament. Mr Ffolliot would have preferred the "carpet-bagger."

Mary, who cared as little as she knew about politics, was pleased. Because Eloquent had been "decent" to Grantly, she was glad he had got what he wanted, though why he should ardently desire that particular thing she did not attempt to understand. Grantly was sincerely grateful to Eloquent for getting him out of what would undoubtedly have been a most colossal row, had any hint of his conduct at Marlehouse on the eve of the election reached his father's ears.

Neither Grantly nor Mary knew anything of the Miss Buttermish episode. For Buz, since the accident, was basking in the sympathy of his family, and had no intention of diverting the stream of favours that flowed over him by any revelations they might not wholly approve. Buz, therefore, had his own reasons, unshared by anyone but Uz (who was silent as the grave in all that concerned his twin), for gratitude to Eloquent. Grantly and Buz unconsciously shared a rather unwilling admiration for the little, common-looking man who could do a good turn and hold his tongue, evidently expecting neither recognition nor remembrance. For Eloquent expected neither, and yet he could not forget the real earnestness of Grantly Ffolliot's parting words.

Could such a foolish youth be trusted to mean what he said? or was it only the surface courtesy that seemed to come so easily to the "classes" Eloquent still regarded with mistrust and suspicion?

He longed to test Grantly Ffolliot.

An opportunity came sooner than he expected. Parliament did not meet till the end of the month, and although he went to London a good deal on varied business, he kept on the little house in his native town, wrote liberal cheques for all the charities, opened a Baptist bazaar, and generally did his duty according to his lights and the instructions of his agent.

In the third week of January he was asked to "kick off" at a "soccer" match to be held in Marlehouse. This was rather an event, as two important teams from a distance were for some reason or other to play there. The Marlehouse folk played "Rugger" as a rule, but this match was regarded in the light of a curiosity; people would come in from miles round, and hordes of mechanics would flock over from Garchester, the county town. It was considered quite a big sporting event, and his agent informed Eloquent that a great honour had been done him.

Eloquent appeared duly impressed and accepted the invitation.

Then it occurred to him that never in his life had he seen a football match of any kind.

Games were not compulsory at the Grammar School, and Eloquent had no natural inclination to play them. When a little boy he had generally gone for a walk with his father or his aunt on a half-holiday. As he grew older he either attended extra classes at the science school or read for himself notable books bearing upon the political history of the last fifty years. Games had no place in his scheme of existence. His father, most certainly, had never played games and had no desire that Eloquent should do so; as for going to watch other people play them—such a proceeding would have been dismissed by the elder Mr Gallup as "foolhardy nonsense." Serious-minded men had no time for such frivolity.

Nevertheless it became increasingly evident to Eloquent that a large number of his constituents—whether they actually took part in what he persisted in calling "these pastimes" or not—were very keenly interested in watching others do so, and Eloquent was consumed by anxiety as to how he was to discover what it was he was expected to do.

There were plenty of his political supporters who were not only able but would have been most willing to solve his difficulty, but he dreaded the inevitable confession of his ignorance. They would be kind enough, he was sure of that, but would they make game of his ignorance afterwards? Would they *talk*?

He was pretty sure they would.

Eloquent hated talk. Grantly and Buz Ffolliot had each recognised and admired that quality in him, and it is possible that he had vaguely discerned a kindred reticence in these feather-brained boys.

He distrusted all his political allies in Marlehouse in this matter of the kick-off.

Why then should Grantly Ffolliot occur to him as a person able and likely to help him in this dilemma?

He was pretty sure that Grantly played football. Soldiers did these things, and Grantly was going to be a soldier. A soldier, in Eloquent's mind, epitomised all that was useless, idle, luxurious, and destructive. Mr Gallup and his friends had disapproved of the Transvaal War; our reverses did not affect them personally, for they had no friends at the front, and our long-deferred victories left them cold. The flame of Eloquent's enthusiasm was fanned at school, only to be quenched at home by the wet blanket of his father's disapproval. Sturdy Miss Gallup snapped at them both, and knitted helmets and mittens and sent socks and handkerchiefs and cocoa to the Redmarley men in South Africa; and her brother gave her the socks and handkerchiefs out of stock, but under protest.

Eloquent knew no soldiers, either officers or in the ranks. He had been taught to look upon the private as almost always drawn from the less reputable of the working classes, and although he acknowledged that officers might, some of them, be hard-working and intelligent, he was inclined to regard them with suspicion.

Suppose he did ask Grantly Ffolliot about this ridiculous kick-off, and Grantly went about making fun of him afterwards?

"Then I shall know," he said to himself. All the same it appeared to him that Grantly Ffolliot was the only possible person *to* ask.

It came about quite easily. One morning he was coming down the steps of the bank in Marlehouse and saw Grantly on horseback waiting at the curb till someone should turn up to hold his horse while he went in. He had ridden in to cash a cheque for his mother. The main street was very empty and no available loafer was to be seen.

As Grantly caught sight of Eloquent descending the steps he smiled his charming smile. "Hullo, I've never seen you since the election. Heartiest grats," the boy called cheerily. Eloquent went up to him and held out his hand. He looked up and down the street, no one was within earshot. "I've a favour to ask you, Mr Ffolliot," he said in a low tone, "but you must promise to refuse at once if you have any objection."

Grantly leant down to him, smiling more broadly than ever. "That's awfully decent of you," he said, and he meant it.

Again Eloquent cast an anxious look up and down the street. "They've asked me to kick-off at the match on Saturday, and . . . you'll think me extraordinarily ignorant . . . I've no idea what one does. Can I learn in the time?"

Eloquent's always rosy face was almost purple with the effort he had made.

Grantly, on the contrary, appeared quite unmoved. He fixed his eyes on his horse's left ear and said easily: "It's the simplest thing in the world. All we want is a field and a ball, and we've got both at home. At least . . . not a soccer ball—but I don't think that matters. When will you come?"

"When may I come?"

"Meet me this afternoon in the field next but one behind the church. There's never anyone there, and we'll fix it up."

"All right," said Eloquent. "Many thanks . . . I suppose you think it very absurd?" he added nervously.

This time Grantly did not look at Mafeking's left ear, he looked straight into Eloquent's uplifted eyes, saying slowly:

"I don't see that I'm called upon to think anything about it. You've done another kind thing in asking me. Why should you think I don't see it?"

And in spite of himself Eloquent mumbled, "I beg your pardon."

"This afternoon then, at three-thirty sharp—good-day."

A loafer hurried up at this moment and Grantly swung off his horse and ran up the steps into the bank.

Eloquent looked after the graceful figure in the well-cut riding clothes and sighed—

"If I'd been like himself he'd have asked me to hold his horse while he went in, but things being as they are, he wouldn't," he reflected bitterly.

Only one belonging to a large family knows how difficult it is to do anything by one's self.

That afternoon it seemed to Grantly that each member of the Manor House party wanted him for something, and he offended every one of them by ungraciously refusing to accompany each one in turn.

His mother and Mary were driving into Marlehouse and wanted him to come and hold the horse while they went into the different shops, but he excused himself on the score of his morning's errand, and Uz was told off for the duty, greatly to his disgust. Reggie asked Grantly to ride with him, but Grantly complained of fatigue, and Reggie, who knew perfectly well that the excuse was invalid, called him a slacker and started forth huffily alone, mentally animadverting on the "edge" displayed by the new type of cadet.

Nearly ten years' service gave Reggie the right to talk regretfully of the stern school he had been brought up in.

Ger, on the previous day, had been sent to his grandparents at Woolwich "by command"; and the Kitten was going with Thirza to a children's party. She was therefore made to lie down for an hour after lunch—so she was disposed of. There remained only Buz, and Buz was on the prowl seeking someone to amuse him. His arm was still in a sling and he expected sympathy. He shadowed Grantly till nearly half-past three, when that gentleman appeared in the back passage clad in sweater and shorts, with a Rugger ball under his arm.

"Hullo," cried Buz, "where are you off to?"

"I'm going to practise drop-kicks . . . by myself," Grantly answered grumpily.

"Why can't I come? I could kick even if I can't use this beastly arm."

"No, it's too cold for you to stand about."

"Bosh; I can wrap myself in a railway rug if it comes to that."

"It needn't come to that. You go for a sharp walk or else take a book and amuse yourself. I must be off."

"Well you *are* a selfish curmudgeon," Buz exclaimed in real astonishment. "Why this sudden passion for solitude?"

Grantly banged the door in Buz's face, regardless of the warning cards, and set off to run. Buz opened the door and looked after him, noted the direction, nodded his head thrice and nipped upstairs to Grantly's room, where he abstracted his field-glasses from their case hanging on a peg behind the door. He hung them round his neck by the short black strap, tied a sweater over his shoulders, and went out by the side door in quite a different direction from that taken by his brother.

* * * * *

Oblivious of the surgeon's strict injunctions that he was on no account to run or risk a fall of any kind, holding the glasses with his free hand so that they shouldn't drag on his neck, directly he was clear of the house he broke into the swinging steady trot that had won him the half-mile under fifteen in the last school sports; climbed two gates and jumped a ditch, finally arriving at the top of a small hill, the very highest point on the Manor property. From this eminence he surveyed the country round, and speedily, without the aid of the field-glasses, discerned his brother kicking a football well into the centre of the field, while the Liberal member for Marlehouse ran after it and tried somewhat feebly to kick it back.

"Well I'm jiggered!" Buz exclaimed in breathless astonishment; "so he knows him too. Whatever are they playing at?"

He fixed the field-glasses, watching intently, then dropped them and rubbed his eyes, took them up again and gazed fixedly, and so absorbed was he that he positively leapt into the air when he heard his father's voice close beside him asking mildly, "What are you watching so intently, Hilary?"

The lovely winter afternoon had tempted Mr Ffolliot out. Usually Mrs Ffolliot accompanied him on his rare walks, but this afternoon he only decided to go out after she had left for Marlehouse. Like Buz, he sought the highest point of his estate, in his case that he might complacently survey its many acres.

Buz dropped the glasses so that they hung by their strap and swung round, facing his father with his back to the distant figures with the football, seized the glasses again and gazed into the copse, exclaiming eagerly, "A fox, sir; perhaps you could see him if you're quick," pulled the strap over his head, gave the glasses a dextrous twist, entirely destroying their focus, and handed them to his father, who fiddled about for some time before he could see anything at all.

"A fox," Mr Ffolliot repeated, "in the copse. We had better go and warn Willets to look out for his ducks and chickens."

"I don't suppose he'll stay, sir, but perhaps it would be as well. Shall I take the glasses, father, they're rather heavy?"

But Mr Ffolliot had got them focussed and was leisurely surveying the distant scene; gradually turning so that in another moment he would bear directly on the field where Grantly and Eloquent were now to be seen standing in earnest conversation.

"There he is," shouted the mendacious Buz, seizing his father by the arm so violently that he almost knocked him down, "over there towards the house; don't you see him? a big dog fox with a splendid brush——"

Imperceptibly Buz had propelled his father down the slope on the side farthest from his brother.

"My dear Hilary," Mr Ffolliot exclaimed, straightening his hat, which had become disarranged in the violence of his son's impact, "one would think no one had ever seen a fox before; why be so excited about it?"

"But didn't you see him, sir?" Buz persisted. "There he goes close by the garden wall; oh, do look."

Mr Ffolliot looked for all he was worth. He twiddled the glasses and put them out of focus, but naturally he failed to behold the mythical fox which was the product of his offspring's fertile brain.

They were at the bottom of the slope now, and Buz gave a sigh of relief.

"I thought I saw two youths in the five-acre field," Mr Ffolliot remarked presently; "what were they doing?"

"Practising footer, I fancy," Buz said easily, thankful that at last he could safely speak the truth.

"Ah," said Mr Ffolliot, "it is extraordinary what a lot of time the working classes seem able to spend upon games nowadays. Still, I'm always glad they should play rather than merely watch. It is that watching and not doing that saps the moral as well as the physical strength of the nation."

"It's Thursday, you see, father—early closing," Buz suggested.

"Well, well, I'm glad they should have their game. Shall we stroll round and have a look at them?"

"Oh I wouldn't, if I were you, father, they'd stop directly. These village chaps are always so shy. It would spoil their afternoon."

"Would it?" Mr Ffolliot asked dubiously; "would it? I should have thought they would have found encouragement in the fact that their Squire took an interest in their sports."

"I don't think so," Buz said decidedly; "they hate to be looked at when they're practising."

"Very well, very well, if you think so," Mr Ffolliot said with surprising meekness; "we'll go and see Willets instead, and tell him about that fox."

"I don't think I'd bother him, the fox is miles away by now."

"Well, where shall we go?" Mr Ffolliot demanded testily; "I've come out to walk with you, and you do nothing but object to every direction I propose."

"Let us," said Buz, praying for inspiration, "let us go straight on till we come to a cleaner bit."

Mr Ffolliot looked ruefully at his boots. "It is wet," he remarked, "mind you don't slip with that arm of yours."

"Shall I take the glasses, father?" Buz asked politely.

"Yes, do, though I'm not sure that I wholly approve of Grantly lending these expensive glasses to you younger ones. I must speak to him about it."

Buz sighed heavily.

* * * * *

Just once more did Eloquent see Mary before Parliament met. It was in a shop in Marlehouse the day after he had received his lesson in kicking off, and he was buying ties. Eloquent was critical about ties, he had by long apprenticeship penetrated to the true inwardness of their importance, and this afternoon he was very difficult to please. Many boxes were laid upon the counter before him, the counter was strewn with "neckwear," and yet he had only found one to his liking. While the assistant was away seeking others from distant shelves, Eloquent busied himself in arranging the scattered ties carefully in their proper boxes. For him it was a perfectly natural thing to do, but he happened to look into the mirror that faced the counter, and in it he beheld Mary Ffolliot seated at the counter behind him, and she was watching him with fascinated interest. Buz was with her and they were buying socks. Eloquent's deft hands dropped to his sides and he turned furiously red. For no one knew better than he that it is not usual for a customer to arrange goods in a shop.

The young lady in the mirror had discreetly turned her head away, the assistant came back, Eloquent bought two ties without having the least idea what they were like, and then he heard a voice behind him saying, "How do you do, Mr Gallup—we've not seen you since the election to congratulate you," and Mary was standing at his side holding out her hand.

He shook hands with Mary, he shook hands with Buz, he mumbled something incoherent, and they were gone.

The Liberal member for Marlehouse rushed from the shop in an opposite direction without taking or paying for his ties, and the astute assistant packed them up, having added three that Eloquent did not buy, for the good of the trade.

CHAPTER XVI

MAINLY ABOUT REGINALD PEEL

The holidays had started badly, there was no doubt about that. All the young Ffolliots were agreed about it. First Buz broke his arm on Boxing-day. That was upsetting in itself, and Buz, as an invalid, was a terrible nuisance. Then the Ganpies had to return to Woolwich much sooner than they had expected: another matter for gloom and woe. And finally came the crushing intelligence that Mr Ffolliot did not intend to start for his oasis till the beginning of February, after the twins had gone back to school and Grantly to the Shop. And this was considered the very limit. Fate had done its worst.

No party: no relaxation of the rules as to absence of noise and presence of perfect regularity and punctuality at meals: no cheerful gathering together of neighbouring families for all sorts of junkettings; in fact, none of the usual features of the last fortnight of the Christmas holidays. And yet, in looking back afterwards, the young Ffolliots, with, perhaps, the exception of the unfortunate Buz, would have confessed that on the whole they had had rather a good time. Mary, in particular, would have owned frankly, had she been asked, that she had never enjoyed a holiday more.

For one thing, the big boys had been "so nice to her," and by "the big boys" she meant Grantly and Reggie Peel.

She and Grantly had always been great allies. When they were little they did everything together, for the three and a half years that separated Mary from the twins seemed, till they should all get into the twenties, an immeasurable distance. But Grantly hitherto had been no more polite and considerate than the average brother. He was both critical and plain-spoken, and poor Mary had suffered many things at his hands . . . till this holiday; and it never occurred to her that this agreeable change in Grantly's attitude might be due to some alteration in herself rather than in him.

Mary was far too interested in life with a big "L" to waste any time upon self-analysis or introspection. Neither she nor Grantly had ever referred to the night of young Rabbich's dinner at the Moonstone, but since that night she had been distinctly conscious of a slightly more respectful quality in his manner towards her. The tendency was indefinable, illusive, but it was there, and simple-minded Mary only reflected gratefully that Grantly was "growing up awfully nice."

Regarding Reggie Peel, however, she did venture to think that she must be rather more attractive than she used to be; and complacently attributed his new gentleness to the fact that she had put up her hair since she last saw him.

Gentleness was by no means one of Reggie's chief characteristics. He was ruthless where his own ends were concerned, tirelessly hard working, amusing, and of a caustic tongue: a cheerful pessimist who expected the very least of his fellow-creatures, until such time as they had given some proof that he might expect more. Yet there were a favoured few, a very few, whom he took for granted thankfully, and Mary had long known that her mother was one of those few. Lately she had realised with a startled thrill of gratification that she, too, had stepped out of the rank and file to take her place among those chosen ones, for Reggie had confided to her a secret that none of the others, not even her mother, knew.

Among the many serious periodicals of strictly Imperial tone that Mr Ffolliot read, was one that from time to time indulged its readers with exceptionally well-written short stories. Quite recently a couple of these stories had dealt with military subjects, and were signed "Ubique." The stories were striking, strong, and evidently from the pen of one who knew his ground. Mr Ffolliot admired them, and graciously drew the attention of his family to them. One had appeared in the January number, and Mrs Ffolliot and Mary fell foul of it because it was too painful. They thought it pitiless, even savage, in its inexorable disregard of the individual and deification of the Cause. Grantly, of course, upheld the writer. The male of the species prides itself on inhumanity in youth. Mr Ffolliot approved the story from the artistic standpoint, and the General defended it on the score of its absolute truth. Reggie, quite contrary to custom, gave no opinion at all till he was asked by Mary, one day when they were riding together.

As she expected, he defended the writer's stern realism. But what she did not expect was that he seemed to make a personal matter of it, almost imploring her to see eye to eye with him, which she wholly failed to do.

"I think he must be a terribly hard man, that 'Ubique,'" she said at last, "with no toleration or compassion. He talks as though incompetence were an unpardonable crime."

"So it is; if you undertake a job you ought to see that you're fit to carry it out."

"You can't always be sure. . . . You may do your best and . . . fail."

"I grant you some people's best is a very poor best, but in this case the man let a flabby humanitarianism take the place of his judgment, and he caused far more misery in the end. Can't you see that?"

"All the same," Mary said decidedly, "I wouldn't like to fall into the hands of that man, the Ubique man I mean, not the failure. He must be a cold-blooded wretch, or he couldn't write such things. It makes me shudder."

And Mary shivered as she spoke.

"He must be a beast," she added.

They were walking their horses along the turf at the side of the road skirting the woods. Reggie pulled up and Mary stopped also a little in front.

"Got a stone?" she asked carelessly.

Reggie did not answer or dismount, and she turned in her saddle to look at him, to meet his crooked, whimsical smile. Suddenly he dropped his reins and beat his breast, exclaiming melodramatically: "And Nathan said unto David, 'Thou art the man.'"

"What on earth do you mean?" Mary asked, bewildered. "What man? do you mean you'd behave like the man in the story, or you wouldn't, or . . . Oh, Reggie, you don't mean to say you wrote it yourself?"

"You have spoken."

"You must be awfully clever!" Mary ejaculated with awe-struck admiration.

"My cleverness will not be of much comfort to me if you persist in your wrong-headed opinion that the man who wrote that story is a beast."

"Oh, that's different. I know you, you see, and you're not a beast. You aren't really like that."

"But I am. That's the real me. It is truly; the real, deep-down me, the me that's worth anything."

"No," said Mary, shaking her head, "I don't believe it; you *have* some consideration for other people."

"Not in that sense; if there was anything, any big thing, I had to put through—no one should stand in my way. And it's the same with anything I want very much. I go straight for it, and it matters nothing to me who gets knocked down on the route . . . and so you'll find," Reggie added very low.

They were looking each other straight in the face, Mary a little breathless and wondering: "And so you'll find," Reggie repeated a little louder, and there was a look in his eyes that caused Mary to drop hers, and she rode on.

Reggie caught her up.

"Are you sorry, Mary?" he asked gently.

"About what?"

"Well . . . about everything. The story, and my ferocious mental attitude, and all the rest of it."

He laid his hand on her horse's neck, and leaned forward to look in her face. They were riding very close together, and Mary was too near the hedge to put more distance between them.

"I can't be sorry you write so well," she said slowly, "it is very exciting—is the news for publication or not?"

"I'd be grateful if you'd say nothing as yet—you see I've only done these two, and what's a couple of short stories? Besides, it's not really my job, only it's amusing, and one can rub it in that way, and reach a larger class than by the strictly military article—no one knows anything about it except the editor of *The Point of View*—and you—I'd rather you didn't mention it, if you don't mind."

"Of course I shan't mention it, but I shall look out for 'Ubique' with much greater interest."

"And still think him a beast?"

"That depends on what he writes."

"I'm not so much concerned about what you think of Ubique as that you should remember that I mean what I say."

"You say a good many absurd things."

"Yes, but this is not absurd—when I want a thing very much . . ."

"Oh, you needn't say all that again. Be a silent, strong man like the heroes in Seton Merriman, they're much the best kind."

"I'm not particularly silent, but I flatter myself that . . ."

"It's a shame to crawl over this lovely grass—come on and have a canter," said Mary.

That night Reggie Peel sat long by his bedroom fire. The bedroom fire was a concession to his acknowledged grown-upness. The young Ffolliots were allowed no bedroom fires. Only when suffering from bad colds or in the very severest weather was a fire granted to any child out of the nursery. But Reggie, almost a captain now, was popular with the servants, especially with the stern Sophia, head-housemaid, and she decreed that he had reached the status of a visitor, and must, therefore, have a fire in his bedroom at night. He sat before it now, swinging the poker which had just stirred it to a cheerful blaze. He had carefully switched off the light, for they were very economical of the electric light at Redmarley. It had cost such a lot to put in.

Five years ago he and General Grantly between them had supervised its installation, and the instruction of the head-gardener in the management of the dynamo-room; each going up and down, as often as they could get away, to share the discomfort with Mrs Ffolliot, and look after the men. Mrs Grantly was, for once, almost satisfied, for she had carried off all the available children. Mr Ffolliot had decreed that the work should be done while he was in the South of France, and expressed a strong desire that all should be in order before his return; and it was finished, for he stayed away seven weeks.

And Reggie sat remembering all this, five years ago; and how just before the children were sent to their grandmother Mary used to want to sit on his knee, and how he would thrust her off with insulting remarks as to her weight and her personal appearance generally.

She was a good deal heavier now, he reflected, and yet—

Reggie had come to the parting of the ways, and had decided which he would follow.

Like most ambitious young men he had, so far, taken as his motto a couplet, which, through over-usage, has become a platitude—

"High hopes faint on a warm hearth-stone,
He travels the fastest who travels alone."

Reggie had accepted this as an incontrovertible truth impossible to dispute; but then he had never until lately felt the smallest desire to travel through life accompanied by any one person. He had fallen in and out of love as often as was wholesome or possible for so hard-working a young man, and always looked upon the experience as an agreeable relaxation, as it undoubtedly is. But never for one moment did he allow such evanescent attachments to turn him a hair's breadth out of his course. Now something had happened to him, and he knew that for the future the platitude had become a lie, and that the only incentive either to high hopes or their fulfilment lay in the prospect of a hearth-stone shared by the girl who a few hours ago declared that she "would not like to fall into that man's hands."

Reggie was very modern. He built no altar to Mary in his heart nor did he set her image in a sacred shrine apart. He had no use for anyone in a shrine. He wanted a comrade, and he craved this particular comrade with all the intensity of a well-disciplined, entirely practical nature. He was not in the least conceited, but he knew that if he lived he would "get there," and the fact that he never had had, or ever would have, sixpence beyond the pay he earned did not deter him in his quest a single whit. Mary wouldn't have sixpence either. He knew the Redmarley rent-roll to a halfpenny. Mrs Ffolliot frankly talked over her affairs with him ever since he left Woolwich, and more than once his shrewd judgment unravelled some tangle which Mr Ffolliot's singularly unbusiness-like habits had created. He knew very well that were it not for General Grantly the boys could never have got the chance each was to get. That General Grantly was spending the money he would have left his daughter at his death in helping her children now when they needed it most. Mary and he were young and strong. They could rough it at first. Afterwards—he had no fears about that afterwards if Mary cared.

But would Mary care?

Reggie felt none of the qualms of a more sensitive man in making love to a very young girl who might certainly, both as regarded looks and social position, be expected to make an infinitely better marriage. He was assailed by no misgivings as to what might be thought of the man who made use of his position as almost a son of the house to make love to this girl hardly out of the schoolroom.

It was Mr Ffolliot's business to guard against such possibilities.

If, however, he might be called unscrupulous on that score, his sense of fairness was stronger than his delicacy; for where the latter proved no obstacle, the former decided him that it would not be playing the game to make open love to Mary till she had "been out a bit," and he laid down the poker with a smothered oath.

He had gone further than he intended that afternoon and he was sorry—but not very sorry. "There's no harm in letting her know I'm in the running," he reflected. "I hope it will sink in. Otherwise she might stick me down in the same row with Grantly and the twins, which is the last thing in the world I want."

He was glad he had told her about that story, even if it revealed him in an unfavourable light. "If she ever cares for me, and God help me if she doesn't—she must care for me as I really am, an ugly devil with some brains and a queer temper. I'll risk no disillusionment afterwards. She must see plenty of other chaps first—confound them; but if any one out of the lot shows signs of making a dart I'll cut in first, I won't wait another minute, I'm damned if I will."

And suddenly conscious that he had spoken aloud, Reggie undressed and went to bed, knowing full well that even though the hearth-stone should be eternally cold, and the high hopes flattened beyond all possible recognition, there yet remained to him something passing the love of women.

For Reggie was not without an altar and a secret shrine, though not even the figure of the woman he loved best would ever fill it. The sacred fire of his devotion burned with a steady flame that illumined his whole life, though not even to himself did he confess the vows he paid.

"One must choose one's own mystery: the great thing is to have one." And if prayer be the daily expression to the soul of the desire to do the right thing, then Reggie prayed without ceasing that he might do his WORK, and do it well. His profession was his God, and he served faithfully and with a single heart.

* * * * *

Mary had no fire to sit over, but all the same she dawdled throughout her undressing and, unlike Reggie, wasted the precious electric light. She had a great deal to think about, for Grantly and Reggie were not the only people to confide in Mary that holiday. The day before he left, General Grantly had taken her for a walk, sworn her to secrecy, and then had sprung upon her a most astounding project. No other than that he and Mrs Grantly should take her mother with them when they went to the South of France for March—their mother without any of them.

"She has never had a real holiday by herself since she was married," the General said, "and my idea is that she should come with us directly your father gets back. The boys will be at school—Grantly at the Shop. There will only be the two little ones and your father to consider, and you could look after them. I'd like to take you too, my dear, but I don't fancy your mother could be persuaded to leave your father unless there was someone to see to things for him."

"She'd never leave father alone," Mary said decidedly; "but she might, oh, she might go now I'm really grown up. I should love her to go. Don't you think"—Mary's voice was very wistful—"that she's been looking a little tired lately . . . not quite so beautiful . . . as usual?"

"Ah, you've noticed it too—that settles it—not a word, mind; if it's sprung upon her at a few days' notice it may come off. If she has time to think she'll discover insurmountable difficulties. Strategy, my dear, strategy must be our watchword."

"But father," Mary suggested dubiously, "who's going to manage him?"

"I think," the General said grimly, "I think we may safely leave your father in Grannie's hands. She has undertaken to square him, and, what she undertakes—I have never known her fail to put through."

"It will be most extraordinary to have mother go off for quite a long time by herself," Mary said thoughtfully.

"She won't be by herself, she'll be with *her* father and mother; has it never occurred to you as possible that sometimes we might like our daughter to ourselves?"

Mary turned an astonished face towards her grandfather, exclaiming emphatically,

"No, Ganpy, it certainly never has . . . before."

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAM-CORPS ANGEL

Grannie was writing letters. Grandfather had gone into London to the War Office, and it was only ten o'clock. Grannie was safe for an hour or two, for she was sending out notices about something, and that always took a long time.

Ger was rather at a loose end, but with the admirable spirit of the adventurous for making the best of things, he decided to go forth and see what he could see. No one was in the hall to question him as he went out, and he made straight for the common, where something exciting was always toward. He had forgotten to put on a coat, and the wind was cold, so he ran along with his hands in the pockets of his jacket. His cap was old, his suit, "a descended suit," was old, and his face, though it was still so early in the day, was far from clean.

For once the common was almost deserted; but far away in front of the "Shop" a thin line of khaki proclaimed the fact that some of the cadets were drilling.

Ger loved the Shop. He had been there on several occasions, accompanied by one or other of his grandparents, to see Grantly, and he knew that he must not go in alone, or his brother would, as he put it, "get in a bate." But there could be no objection to his standing at the gate and looking in at the parade ground. He knew the porter, a nice friendly chap who would not drive him away.

He turned off the common into the road that runs up past the Cadet Hospital. He knew the Cadet Hospital, for once he had gone there with Grannie to visit "a kind of cousin" who had broken his collar-bone in the riding-school. As he passed Ger looked in at the open door. A little crowd of rather poor-looking people stood in the entrance, among them a boy about his own age, with a great pad of cotton-wool fastened over his ear by a bandage.

A crowd of any sort had always an irresistible fascination for Ger. He skipped up the path and pushed in among the waiting people to the side of the boy with the tied-up head.

"Got a sore ear?" he murmured sympathetically.

"Wot's it to you wot I got?" was the discouraging reply.

"Well, I'm sorry, you know," said Ger with obvious sincerity.

The boy looked hard at him and grunted.

"What are you here for?" Ger whispered.

"The Myjor, 'e got to syringe it," the boy mumbled, but this time his tone was void of offence.

"Does it hurt?"

"E don't 'urt, not much, 'e is careful; 'e's downright afraid of urtin' ya'. . . An' if 'e does 'urt, it's becos 'e can't 'elp it, an' so," here he wagged his head impressively, "ya' just doesn't let on . . . see? Wots the matter wiv you?"

Here was a poser. Yet Ger was consumed by a desire to see this mysterious "myjor" who syringed ears and didn't hurt people. He had fallen upon an adventure, and he was going to see it out.

"I don't know exactly," he whispered mysteriously, "but I've got to see him."

"P'raps they've wrote about ya'," the bandaged boy suggested.

Ger thought this was unlikely, but let the suggestion pass unchallenged. He watched the various

people vanish into a room on the right, saw them come out again, heard the invariable "Next please" which heralded the seclusion of a new patient, till everybody had gone and come back and gone forth into the street again save only the bandaged boy and himself.

"You nip in w'en I comes out," the boy said encouragingly, "it's a bit lyte already, but 'e'll see ya' if yer slippy."

It seemed a long time to Ger as he waited. The little crowd of women and children had melted away. Men in blue cotton jackets passed to and fro across the hall, "Sister," in a curious headdress and scarlet cape, looking like a picture by Carpaccio, came out of another room, went up the staircase and vanished from view. No one spoke to him or asked his business, and Ger stood in a dark corner holding his cap in his hands and waiting.

At last the boy came back with a clean bandage and a big new pad of cotton-wool over the syringed ear.

"Urry up," he whispered as he passed. "I told 'im as there was one more."

Ger hurried.

Once inside that mysterious door he started violently, for a tall figure clad in a long white smock was standing near a sink brushing his nails. He wore a black band round his head, and on his forehead, attached to the band, was a round mirror. The very brightest mirror Ger had ever seen.

So this was the Myjor.

The uniform was quite new to Ger.

The eyes under the mirror were very blue, and for the rest this strangely clad tall man had a brown moustache and a pleasant voice as he turned, and drying his hands the while, said:

"Well, young shaver, what's the matter with you?"

In his eight years Ger had had but few aches and pains save such as followed naturally upon falls or fights, but he knew that if this interview was to be prolonged he must have something, so he hazarded an ailment.

"I've a muzzy feeling in my head sometimes, sir, a sort of ache, not bad, you know."

The Myjor looked very hard at Ger as he spoke—evidently the little boy's voice and accent were in some way unexpected.

He sat down and drew him forward close to his knees. The round mirror on his forehead flashed into Ger's eyes and he winced.

"Headache, eh?" said the Myjor cheerfully. "You don't look as though you ought to get headaches. Can you read?"

"No, sir, that's just what I can't do, and there's awful rows about it. I can't seem to read, I don't want to much, but I do try . . . I do really, but it's so muddly."

"How long have you been learning?"

"Years and years," said Ger mournfully. "They say Kitten 'll read before me, and she's only four."

"Um," said the Myjor, "that will never do. We can't have Kitten stealing a march on us that way. This must be seen into. By the way, what's your name?"

"Gervais Folaire Ffolliot," Ger answered solemnly, as though he were saying his catechism.

"Ffolliot . . . Ffolliot . . . where d'you live?"

"Redmarley . . . it's a long way from here."

"What are you doing here, then?"

"I'm stopping with grannie and grandfather."

"And who is grandfather?"

"General Grantly," Ger answered promptly, smiling broadly. He always felt that his grandfather was a

trump card anywhere, but in Woolwich most of all, "and he's got such a lot of medals, teeny ones, you know, like the big ones. I can read *them*," he added proudly. "I know them all. Grannie taught me."

"But why have you come to me? And why on earth do you come in among the wives and children of the Shop servants?"

"The door was open," Ger explained, "and I talked to the ear boy, and he said you were most awfully gentle and didn't hurt and hated if you had to—so I knew you were kind, and I'm awfully fond of kind people, so I wanted to see you—you're not cross, are you?" he asked anxiously.

"Um," again remarked the Myjor, and stared at Ger thoughtfully. "Well," he said at last, "since you are here, what is it you find so hard about reading?"

"It's so muddly," Ger complained, "nasty little letters and all so much alike."

"Exactly so," said the Myjor.

Then he drew down the blinds.

Ger's heart beat fast. Here was an adventure indeed, and when you were once well in for an adventure all sorts of queer things happened.

Unprecedented things happened to Ger, but he was never very clear afterwards as to what they were. So many things were "done to him" that he became quite confused. Lights flashed into eyes, lights so brilliant that they quite hurt. Curious spectacles with heavy frames and glasses that took in and out were placed upon his nose, and he was only allowed to use one eye at a time, the other being blotted out by a black disk in the spectacles. At last he looked through with both eyes together at letters on a card, letters that were blacker and clearer than any he had ever seen before . . . and the blinds were drawn up.

"Will you please tell me," Ger asked politely, "what is that curious uniform you wear? I don't seem to have seen it before, an' I've seen a great many."

The Myjor laughed. "It's my working kit; don't you like it?"

"Very much," said Ger, "I think you look like an angel."

"Really," said the Myjor. "I haven't met any, so I don't know."

"I haven't exactly met any," said Ger, "but I've seen portraits of two, and . . . I know a lot about them."

"Now, young man, you listen to me," said the Ram-Corps Angel. "Eyes are not my job really, but I'm glad you looked in to see me, for I'll send you to someone who'll put you right and you'll read long before the Kitten. She'll never catch you. Right away you'll go, she won't be in the same field. You'd better go back now, or Mrs Grantly will be wondering where you are—cheer up about that reading."

"Will I?" Ger asked breathlessly. "Shall I be able to get into the Shop? They pill you for eyes, you know."

"Your eyes will be all right by the time you're ready for the Shop. You see crooked just now, you know—and it wants correcting, that's all."

"What?" cried Ger despairingly. "Do I squint?"

"Bless you, no; the sight of your two eyes is different, that's all—when you get proper glasses you'll be right as rain. Lots of people have it . . . if you'd been a Board School you'd have been seen to long ago," he added, more to himself than to Ger.

Then Ger shook hands with the Ram-Corps Angel and walked rather slowly and thoughtfully across the common to grandfather's house though the wind was colder than ever. He forgot to look in at the Shop gate, but the parade ground was empty. The cadets had finished drilling. Ger had been so long in that darkened room.

He had lunch alone with his grannie, for grandfather was lunching at his club. There was no poking of the Ffolliot children into schoolrooms and nurseries for meals when they stayed with the ganpies. His face was clean and his hair very smooth, and he held back Mrs Granny's chair for her just as grandfather did. She stooped and kissed the fresh, friendly little face and told him he was a dear, which was most pleasant.

He was hungry and the roast mutton was very good, moreover he was going to the Zoo that afternoon

directly after lunch, grannie's French maid was to take him. They were to have a taxi from Charing Cross, and lunch passed pleasantly, enlivened by the discussion of this enchanting plan.

Presently he asked, apropos of nothing: "Do all the Ram-Corps officers look like angels?"

"Like angels!" Mrs Grantly repeated derisively. "Good gracious, no! Very plain indeed, some of them I've seen."

"The one at the Cadet Hospital does," Ger said positively, "like a great big angel and a dear."

"Who? Major Murray?" Mrs Grantly inquired, looking puzzled; "where have you seen him?"

But at this very moment someone came to tell Ger it was time to get ready, and in the fuss and excitement of seeing him off, his grannie forgot all about the Ram Corps and its angelic attributes.

It was her day. Guest after guest arrived, and she was pretty tired by the time she had given tea to some five and twenty people.

The General never came in at all till the last guest had gone. Then he sought his wife, and standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire he told her that Major Murray had been to see him, and had recounted Ger's visit of the morning, and the result of his investigations.

Mrs Grantly, which was unusual, never interrupted once.

"So you can understand," the General concluded, "I didn't feel like facing a lot of people."

"I shall write at once to Margie," Mrs Grantly cried breathlessly, "and tell her she is a fool."

"I wouldn't do that," the General said gently; "poor Margie, she has a good deal on her shoulders."

"All the same—do you remember that that unfortunate child has been punished—punished because he was considered idle and obstinate over his lessons . . . punished . . . little Ger—friendly, jolly little Ger . . . I can't bear it," and Mrs Grantly burst into tears.

The General looked very much as though he would like to cry too. "It's an unfortunate business," he said huskily, "but you see, none of us have ever had any eye trouble, and the other children have all such good sight . . . it never occurred to me . . . I must confess . . . of course it can be put right very easily; you're to take him to the oculist to-morrow; I've telephoned and made the appointment."

Mrs Grantly dried her eyes.

"We're all to blame," she exclaimed, "I'm just as much to blame as Margie . . . she'll be fearfully upset I don't know how to tell her."

"Tell you what," exclaimed the General, "I'll write to Ffolliot . . . I'll do it now, this instant, and the letter will catch the 7.30 post . . ."

At the door he paused and added more cheerfully, "I shall enjoy writing to Ffolliot."

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT FOLLOWED

As General Grantly had predicted, Mrs Ffolliot was very much upset when she heard about Ger's eyes, and was for rushing up to London herself, there and then to interview the oculist. But Mr Ffolliot dissuaded her. For one thing, he hated Redmarley without her even for a single night. For another, he considered such a journey a needless expense. This, however, he did not mention, but contented himself with the suggestion that it would seem a reflection upon Mrs Grantly's competence to do anything of the kind; and that consideration weighed heavily with his wife where the other would have been brushed aside as immaterial and irrelevant. "I can't understand it," the Squire remarked plaintively; "I did not know there had ever been any eye trouble in your family."

"There never has, so far as I know; but surely," and Mrs Ffolliot spoke with something less than her usual gentle deference, "we needn't seek far to find where Ger gets his."

"Do you mean that he inherits it from ME?"

"Well, my dear Larrie, surely *you've* got defective sight, else why the monocle?"

"But Ger isn't a bit like me. He is all Grantly. In character, I sometimes think he resembles your mother, he is so fond of society; in appearance he's very like the others, except the Kitten. Now, if the Kitten's sight had been astigmatic . . ."

"We must take care that she doesn't suffer from neglect like poor little Ger," Mrs Ffolliot interrupted rather bitterly. "I shall write at once to their house-master to have the twins' eyes tested. I'll run no more risks. We know Grantly's all right because he passed his medical so easily. Poor, poor little Ger."

"It certainly is most unfortunate," said Mr Ffolliot.

He was really concerned about Ger, but mingled with his concern was the feeling that the little boy had taken something of a liberty in developing that particular form of eye trouble. It seemed an unfilial reflection upon himself. Moreover, there was something in the General's letter plainly stating the bare facts that he did not exactly like. It was, he considered, "rather brusque." He started for the South, of France four days earlier than he had originally intended.

Ger was taken to the great oculist in London, who confirmed the "Myjor's" diagnosis of his case, and he was forthwith put into large round spectacles. When he got them, his appearance brought the tears to his grandmother's eyes—tears she rigidly repressed, for Ger was so enormously proud of them. The first afternoon he wore them he went with his grandfather to see Grantly playing in a football match at the Shop, and among those watching on the field he espied his friend "the Ram-Corps Angel." Ger knew him at once, although he wore no white garment, not even khaki, just a plain tweed suit like his grandfather's.

While the General was deep in conversation with the "Commy," Ger slipped away and sought his friend.

"Hullo," said the 'Myjor,' "so you've got 'em on."

"Yes, sir," said Ger, saluting solemnly, "and I'm very much obliged. It's lovely to see things so nice and clear. Please may I ask you something?"

The Major stepped back out of the crowd and Ger slipped a small hand confidingly into his. Ger had not been to school yet, so there were excuses for him.

"Do you think," he asked earnestly, "that if I'm very industr'us and don't turn out quite so stupid as they expected, that by-and-by I might get into the Ram Corps?"

Major Murray looked down very kindly at the anxious upturned face with the large round spectacles.

"But I thought the Shop was the goal of your ambition?"

"So it was, sir, at first. Then I gave it up because it seemed so difficult, and I talked it over with Willets, and he said *he'd* never had a great deal of book-learnin'—though he writes a beautiful hand, far better than father—and then I thought I'd be a gamekeeper."

"And what did Willets think?"

"Well, he didn't seem to be very sure—and now I come to think of it, I'm not very fond of killing things . . . so if there was just a chance . . ."

"I'd go into the Ram Corps if I were you," said Major Murray; "by the time you're ready, gamekeepers—if there are any—will have to pass exams, like all the other poor beggars. You bet your boots on that. Some Board of Forestry or other will start 'em, you see if they don't."

"Oh, well, if there's to be exams, that settles it. I certainly shan't be one," Ger said decidedly; "I've been thinking it over a lot—"

"Oh, you have, have you?"

"An' it seems to me . . ."

"Yes, it seems to you?"

"That pr'aps you get to know people better if you mend all their accidents and things. I'm awfully fond of people, they're so intrusting, I'd rather know about them than anything."

"What sort of people?"

"The men you know, and their wives and children; they're awfully nice, the ones I know—and if you see after them when they're ill and that, they're bound to be a bit fond of you, aren't they?"

Major Murray gave the cold little hand in his a squeeze. "It seems to me," he said, "that you're just the sort of chap we want. You stick to it."

"Is it *very* hard to get in?"

"Well, it isn't exactly easy, but it's dogged as does it, and if you start now—why, you've plenty of time."

"That's settled then," said Ger, "and when you're Medical Inspector-General or some big brass hat like the fat old gentleman who came to see Ganpy yesterday—you'll say a good word for me, won't you?"

"I will," Major Murray promised, "I most certainly will."

"You see," Ger continued, beaming through his spectacles, "if there's war I should be bound to go, they can't get on without the Ram Corps then, and I'd be doing things for people all day long. Oh, it would be grand."

"It strikes me," said Major Murray, more to himself than to Ger, "that you stand a fair chance of getting your heart's desire—more than most people."

"I'm very partikler about my nails now," said Ger. "I saw you scrubbing yours that day at the Cadet Hospital."

When he got home Mrs Ffolliot retired to her room and cried long and heartily, but Ger never knew it. His spectacles to him were a joy and a glory, and he confided to the Kitten that *his* guardian angel, Sergeant-Major Spinks, did sentry beside them every night so that they shouldn't get lost or broken.

"My angel's in prizzen," the Kitten announced dramatically.

"In prison!" exclaimed Ger, "whatever for?"

"For shooting turkeys," the Kitten replied, "an' he's all over chicken-spots."

"Why did he shoot turkeys for?"

"'Cause he wanted more feathers for his wings."

"But that wouldn't give him chicken-spots."

"No, *that* didn't—he got them at a pahty, like you did last Christmas."

"Poor chap," said Ger, "but I can't see why he stays in prison when he could fly away."

"They clipped his wings," the Kitten said importantly, "an' I'm glad; he can't come and bother me no more now."

"I hope Spinks won't go shooting fowls and things in his off-time," Ger said anxiously. "I must warn him."

"Pheasants wouldn't matter so much," the Kitten said leniently, "I asked Willets; but turkeys is orful."

"Not at all sporting to shoot turkeys," Ger agreed, "though they are so cross and gobbly."

In the middle of February Mrs Ffolliot fell a victim to influenza, and she was really very ill.

At first she would not allow anyone to tell her husband about it, but when she became too weak to write herself, Mary took it upon her to inform her father of her mother's state. The doctor insisted on sending a nurse, as three of the servants had also collapsed, and Mrs Grantly came down from Woolwich to see to things generally; though when she came, she acknowledged that Mary had done everything that could be done.

Mr Ffolliot curtailed his holiday by a week, and returned at the end of February, to find his wife convalescent, but thin and pale and weak as he had never before seen her during their married life.

He decided that he would take her for a fortnight to Bournemouth.

But Mrs Grantly had other views.

She, Mary, and Mr Ffolliot were sitting at breakfast the day after his return, when he suggested the Bournemouth plan with what Willets would have called his most "Emp'rish air."

Mrs Grantly looked across at Mary and the light of battle burned in her bright brown eyes.

"I don't think Bournemouth would be one bit of good for Margie," she said briskly, "you can't be sure of sunshine—it may be mild, but it's morally certain to rain half the time, and Margie needs cheerful surroundings—sunshine—and the doctor says . . . a complete change of scene and people."

"Where would you propose that I should take her?" Mr Ffolliot asked, fixing his monocle and staring steadily at his mother-in-law.

"To tell you the truth, Hilary, I don't propose that *you* should take her anywhere. What I propose is that her father and I should take her to Cannes with us a week to-day."

"To Cannes," Mr Ffolliot gasped, "in a week. I don't believe she could stand the journey."

"Oh yes, she could. Her father will see that she does it as comfortably as possible, and I shall take Adèle, who can look after both of us. We'll stay a night in Paris, and at Avignon if Margie shows signs of being very tired. You must understand that Margie will go as our guest."

Mr Ffolliot dropped his monocle and leant back in his chair. "It is most kind of you and the General," he said politely, "but I doubt very much if she can be persuaded to go."

"Oh she's going," Mrs Grantly said easily, while Mary, with scarlet cheeks, looked at her plate, knowing well that the subject had never been so much as touched upon to her mother. "You see, Hilary, she has had a good deal of Redmarley, and the children and you, during the last twenty years, and it will do her all the good in the world to get away from you all for a bit. Don't you agree with me, Mary?"

Mary lifted her downcast eyes and looked straight at her father. "The doctor says it's mother's only chance of getting really strong," she said boldly, "to get right away from all of us."

"You, my dear Hilary," Mrs Grantly continued in the honeyed tones her family had long ago learnt to recognise as the precursor of verbal castigation for somebody, "would not be the agreeable and well-informed person you are, did you not go away by yourself for a fairly long time during every year. I don't think you have missed once since Grantly was born. How often has Margie been away by herself, even for a couple of nights?"

"Margie has never expressed the slightest wish to go away," Mr Ffolliot said reproachfully. "I have often deplored her extreme devotion to her children."

"Somebody had to be devoted to her children," said Mrs Grantly.

Mr Ffolliot ignored this thrust, saying haughtily, "Since I understand that this has all been settled without consulting me, I cannot see that any good purpose can be served in further discussion of the arrangement now," and he rose preparatory to departure.

"Wait, Hilary," Mrs Grantly rose too. "I don't think you quite understand that the smallest objection on your part to Margie would at once render the whole project hopeless. What you've got to do is to smile broadly upon the scheme——"

Here Mary gasped, the "broad smile" of the Squire upon anything or anybody being beyond her powers of imagination.

"Otherwise," Mrs Grantly paused to frown at Mary, who softly vanished from the room, "you may have Margie on your hands as an invalid for several months, and I don't think you'd like that."

"But who," Mr Ffolliot demanded, "will look after things while she's away?"

"Why you and Mary, to be sure. My dear Hilary," Mrs Grantly said sweetly, "a change is good for all of us, and it will be wholesome for you to take the reins into your own hands for a bit. I confess I've often wondered how you could so meekly surrender the whole management of this big place to Margie. It's time you asserted yourself a little."

Mr Ffolliot stared gloomily at Mrs Grantly, who smiled at him in the friendliest fashion. "You see," she went on, "you are, if I may say so, a little unobservant, or you would perhaps have personally

investigated what made Ger, an otherwise quite normally intelligent child, so very stupid over his poor little lessons."

"I've always left everything of that sort to his mother."

"I know you have—but do you think it was quite fair? And for a long time Margie has been looking thin and fagged. Her father was most concerned about it at Christmas—but I never heard you remark upon it."

"She never complains," Mr Ffolliot said feebly.

"Complains," Mrs Grantly repeated scornfully. "We're not a complaining family. But I should have thought *you* with your strong love of the beautiful would at least have remarked how she has gone off in looks."

"She hasn't," said Mr Ffolliot with some heat.

"She looks her age, every day of it," Mrs Grantly persisted. "When we bring her back she'll look like Mary's sister!"

"How long do you propose to be away?"

"Oh, three weeks or a month; at the most a fortnight less than you have had every year for nineteen years."

Mr Ffolliot made no answer; he took out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette with hands that were not quite steady.

"You quite understand then, Hilary, that you are to put the whole weight of your authority into the scale that holds France for Margie?"

"I thought you said it was settled?"

"My dear man, you know what a goose she is; if she thought you hated it, nothing would induce her to go—you *must* consider her for once."

"I really must protest," Mr Ffolliot said stiffly, "against your gratuitous assumption that *I* care nothing for Margie's welfare."

"Not at all," Mrs Grantly said smoothly, "I only ask for a modest manifestation of your devotion, that's all."

"Shall I go to her now?" said Mr Ffolliot with the air of a lamb led to the slaughter.

"Certainly not—she'll probably be trying to get up lest you should want her for anything. *I'll* go and keep her in bed till luncheon. You may come and see her at eleven."

When Fusby came in for the breakfast tray, Mr Ffolliot was still standing on the hearth-rug immersed in thought.

CHAPTER XIX

MARY AND HER FATHER

In the lives of even the strongest and most competent among us, there will arise moments when decision of any kind has become impossible, and it is a real relief to have those about us who settle everything without asking whether we like it or not. Such times are almost always the result of physical debility, when the enfeebled body so reacts upon brain and spirit that no matter how vigorous the one or valorous the other, both seem atrophied.

It is at such times that we have cause to bless the doctor who is a strong man, and fears not to give orders or talk straight talk; and the relations who never so much as mention any plan till it has been decided, taking for granted we will approve the arrangements they have made.

We are generally acquiescent, for it is so blessed to drift passively in the wake of these determined

ones, till such time as, with returning physical strength, the will asserts itself once more.

Thus it fell out that Mrs Ffolliot was surprisingly submissive when she was told by the doctor, a plain-spoken country doctor, who did not mince his words, that she must seize the chance offered of going to the South of France with her parents, or he wouldn't answer for the consequences.

"You are," he said, "looking yellow and dowdy, and you are feeling blue and hysterical; if you don't go away at once you'll go on doing both for an interminable time."

Mrs Ffolliot laughed. "Then I suppose for the sake of the rest of the family I ought to go"—and she went.

If Mr Ffolliot did not take Mrs Grantly's advice and look after things himself, he certainly was forced to attend to a good many tiresome details in the management of things outside the Manor House than had ever fallen to his lot before. Mary saved him all she could, but Willets and Heaven and Fusby seemed to take a malicious delight in consulting him about trivial things that he found himself quite unable to decide one way or other.

At first he tried to put them off with "Ask Miss Mary," but Willets shook his head, smiled kindly, and said firmly, "Twouldn't be fair, sir, 'twouldn't really."

Ger and the Kitten had never seemed so tiresome and ubiquitous before, coming across his path at every turn; and Ger certainly nullified any uneasiness on the Squire's part regarding his eyes by practising, in and out of season, upon a discarded bugle. A bugle bought for him by one of his friends in the Royal 'Orse for the sum of three and ninepence. Ger had amassed three shillings of this sum, and the good-natured gunner never mentioned the extra ninepence.

Ger had a quick ear and could already pick out little tunes on the piano with one finger, though, so far, he had found musical notation as difficult as every other kind of reading.

But he took to the bugle like a duck to water, and on an evil day someone in Woolwich had taught him the peace call, "Come to the Cookhouse Door."

The inhabitants of Redmarley were summoned to the cook-house door from every part of the village, from the woods, from the riverside, and from the churchyard.

He played the bugle in the nursery and in the stableyard, he played it in the attics and outside the servants' hall when the servants' dinner was ready.

He was implored, threatened and punished, but all without avail, for Ger had tasted the joys of achievement. He had found what superior persons call "the expression of his essential ego," and just then his cosmos was all bugle.

Not even his good-natured desire to oblige people was proof against this overwhelming desire to call imaginary troops to feed together on every possible and impossible occasion. He did try to keep a good way from the house, or to choose moments in the house when he knew his father was out, but he made mistakes. He could not discover by applying his eye to the keyhole of the study door whether his father was in the room or not, and, as he remarked bitterly, "Father always sat so beastly still" it was impossible to hear.

He looked upon the Squire's objections as a cross, but the dread of his father's anger was nothing like so strong as his desire to play the bugle, and even the Squire perceived that short of taking the bugle away from him, which would have broken his heart, there was nothing for it but to frown and bear it—in moderation.

Mrs Grantly's very direct assault had made a small breach in the wall of Mr Ffolliot's complacency; and a fairly vivid recollection of the shilling episode inclined him to deal leniently with Ger while his mother was away. He rang the bell furiously for Fusby whenever the most distant strains of "Come to the Cook-house Door" smote upon his ears, and sent him post haste to stop that "infernal braying and bleating"; but beyond such unwelcome interruptions Ger tootled in peace.

Mary was lonely and the days seemed long; she saw no one but her father, the servants, the two children and Miss Glover, the meek little governess, who seemed to spend most of her time in hunting for Ger among outhouses and gardens, and was scorned by Nana in consequence.

When her mother was at home Mary was accustomed to wander about Redmarley unchallenged and unaccompanied save by the faithful Parker. But Mr Ffolliot took his duties as chaperon most seriously and expected that Mary should never stir beyond the gardens unless accompanied by Miss Glover. He even seemed suspicious as to her most innocent expeditions, and every morning at breakfast demanded

a minute time-table planning her day.

Mary didn't mind this. It was easy enough to say that after she had interviewed the cook (there was no housekeeper now at Redmarley) she would practise, or read French with Miss Glover; or go into Marlehouse accompanied by Miss Glover for a music lesson; or drive with Miss Glover and the children to Marlehouse to do the weekly shopping; or go with Miss Glover to the tailor to be fitted for a coat and skirt. All that was easy enough to reel off in answer to the Squire's inquiries. It was the afternoons that were difficult. She had been used to go into the village and visit her friends, Willets, Miss Gallup, the laundry-maid's mother, everybody there in fact, and now this seemed to be forbidden her unless Miss Glover went too, which spoiled everything.

Sometimes she walked with the Squire and tried to feel an intelligent interest in Ercole Ferrarese, whose work Mr Ffolliot greatly admired. In fact he was just then engaged on a somewhat lengthy monograph concerning both the man and his work.

Mary, in the hope of making herself a more congenial companion to her father, even went as far as to look up "Ercole" in Vasari's *Lives*. But Vasari was not particularly copious in details as to Ercole Ferrarese, and the particulars he did give which impressed Mary were just those most calculated to annoy her father. As, for instance, that "Ercole had an inordinate love of wine and was frequently intoxicated, in so much that his life was shortened by this habit."

The difficulties that may arise from such an inordinate affection had been brought home to her quite recently, and in one of their walks together after a somewhat prolonged silence she remarked to her father—

"It was a pity that poor Ercole drank so much, wasn't it?"

"Why seize upon a trifling matter of that sort when we are considering the man's work?" Mr Ffolliot asked angrily. "For heaven's sake, do not grow into one of those people who only perceive the obvious; whose only knowledge of Cromwell would be that he had a wart on his nose."

"I shouldn't say it was a very trifling matter seeing it killed him—drink I mean, not Cromwell's wart," Mary responded with more spirit than usual. "Vasari says so."

"It is quite possible that he does, but it is not a salient feature."

"A wart on the nose would be a very salient feature," Mary ventured.

"Exactly, that is what you would think and that is what I complain of. It is a strain that runs through the whole of you—except perhaps the Kitten—a dreadful narrowness of vision—don't tell me your sight is good—I'm only referring to your mental outlook. It is the fatal frivolous attitude of mind that always remembers the wholly irrelevant statement that the Earl of Warwick, the King-maker, was born when his mother was fourteen."

"Was he?" Mary exclaimed with deep interest; "how very young to have a baby."

Mr Ffolliot glared at her: "and nothing else," he continued, ignoring the interruption.

"Oh, but I do remember other things about Ercole besides being a drunkard," she protested; "he hated people watching him work, I can understand that, and he was awfully kind and faithful to his master."

"All quite useless and trifling in comparison with what I, myself, have told you of his work, which you evidently don't remember. It is a man's work that matters, not little peculiarities of temperament and character."

"I think," Mary said demurely, "that little peculiarities of temperament and character matter a good deal to the people who have to live with them."

"That is possible but quite unimportant. It is a man's intellect that is immortal, not his temperament."

Again a long silence till Mary said suddenly: "Mother has never written anything or painted anything or done anything very remarkable, and yet she seems to matter a great deal to a lot of people besides us. I never go outside the gates but people stop me and ask all sorts of questions about her. Surely character can matter too?"

Mr Ffolliot's scornful expression changed. He looked at his daughter with interest. "Do you know, Mary," he said quite amiably, "that sometimes I think you can't be quite as stupid as you make yourself appear."

That was on Friday. On Saturday Mary was in dire disgrace.

Nana had taken the children to a cinematograph show in Marlehouse. Miss Glover went with them in the bucket to visit a friend there. The Squire had affixed a paper to the outside of the study door saying that he was not to be disturbed till five o'clock, and it was a lovely afternoon. The sort of afternoon when late March holds all the promise of May, when early daffodils shine splendidly in sheltered corners, and late snowdrops in a country garden look quite large and solemn. When trodden grass has a sweet sharp smell, and all sorts of pretty things peep from the crannies of old Cotswold walls: those loose grey walls that are so infinitely various, so dear and friendly in their constant beautiful surprises.

Mary saw the nursery party go, and stood and waved to them till they were out of sight, when a faint and distant summons to the cook-house door proved that Ger had begun to play the instant the bucket had turned out of the gates.

Mary called Parker and went out.

Down the drive she went, through the great gates and over the bridge to Willets' cottage. Willets was out, but Mrs Willets was delighted to see her. Mrs Willets was a kind, comfortable person, who brewed excellent home-made wines which she loved to bestow upon her friends. Mary partook of a glass of ginger wine, very strong and very gingery, and having given the latest news of the mistress (she, herself, was "our young lady" now), received in return the mournful intelligence that Miss Gallup had had a touch of bronchitis, "reely downright bad she'd bin, and now she was about but weak as a kitten, and very low in her mind; if you'd the time just to call in and see 'er, I'm sure she'd take it very kind, with your ma away, and all."

So Mary hied her to Miss Gallup at the other end of Redmarley's one long lopsided street. Her progress was a slow one, for at every cottage gate she was stopped with exclamations: "Why we thought you was lost, or gone to furrin parts with the mistress; none on us seen you since Church last Sunday."

At last she reached "Two Ways," Miss Gallup's house, and Eloquent, of all people in the world, opened the door to her.

Mary merely thought "How nice of him to come and see his aunt," and remarked aloud:

"Ah, Mr Gallup, I'm glad to see you've come to look after the invalid, I've only just heard of her illness. May I come in? Will it tire her to see me?"

And Eloquent could find no words to greet her except, "Please step this way," and he was nevertheless painfully aware that exactly so would he have addressed her half a dozen years ago had he been leading her to the haberdashery department of the Golden Anchor.

Poor Eloquent was thrown off his mental balance altogether, for to him this was no ordinary meeting.

Picture the feelings of a young man who thinks he is opening the door to the baker and finds incarnate spring upon the threshold. Spring in weather-beaten, well-cut clothes, with a sweet, friendly voice and adorable, cordial smile.

There she was, sitting opposite Miss Gallup on one slippery horsehair "easy chair," while her hostess, much beshawled, cushioned and foot-stooled, sat on the other.

"My dear," Miss Gallup said confidentially, "Em'ly-Alice has gone to the surgery for my cough mixture and some embrocation, and she takes such a time. I'm certain she's loitering and gossiping, and she knows I like my cup of tea at four, and you here, and all; if it wasn't that my leg's seem to crumble up under me I'd go and get it myself."

"Dear Miss Gallup, don't be hard on Em'ly-Alice," Mary pleaded; "it's such a lovely afternoon I don't wonder she doesn't exactly hurry. As for tea, let me get you some tea——"

"I could," Eloquent interposed hastily, "I'm sure I could," and rose somewhat vaguely to go to the kitchen.

"Let us both get it," Mary cried gaily, "we'll be twice as quick."

And before Miss Gallup could protest they had gone to the kitchen and she could hear them laughing.

Mary was thoroughly enjoying herself. For three weeks she had poured out tea for her father solemnly at five o'clock and been snubbed for her pains.

Here were two people who liked her, who were glad to see her, who thought it kind of her to come.

No girl can be wholly unconscious of admiration; nor, when it is absolutely reverential, can she resent it, and Mary felt no displeasure in Eloquent's.

They could neither of them cut bread and butter. It was a plateful of queerly shaped bits that went in on the tray; but there was an egg for Miss Gallup, and the tea was excellent.

Miss Gallup began to feel more leniently disposed towards Em'ly-Alice. "She's done for me pretty well on the whole," she told Mary. "Doctor, he wanted me to have the parish nurse over to Marle Abbas, but I don't hold with those new-fangled young women."

"She's a dear," said Mary; "mother thinks all the world of her."

"May be, may be," Miss Gallup said dryly; "but when you come to my time of life you've your own opinion about draughts. And as for that constant bathin' and washin', I don't hold with it at all. A bed's a bed, I says, and not a bath, and if you're in bed you should stay there and keep warm, and not have all the clothes took off you to have your legs washed. How can your legs *get* dirty if you're tucked in with clean sheets, in a clean room, in a clean house. When I have a bath I like it comfortable, once a week, at night in front of the kitchen fire, and Em'ly-Alice safe in bed. No, my dear, I don't hold with these new-fangled notions, and Nurse Jones, she worries me to death. I 'ad 'er once, and I said, never again—whiskin' in and whiskin' out, and opening windows and washin' me all over, like I 'was a baby—most uncomfortable I call it."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck five, Mary jumped up. "I must fly," she exclaimed, "it's time for father's tea; I've been enjoying myself so much I forgot all about the time."

"You see Miss Mary as far as the gates," Miss Gallup said to her nephew. "Em'ly-Alice is in, I 'eard 'er pokin' the fire the wasteful way she has."

Mary did not want Eloquent, for she greatly desired to run, but he followed with such alacrity she had not the heart to forbid him. He walked beside her, or, more truly, he trotted beside her, through the village street, for Mary went at such a pace that Eloquent was almost breathless. He found time, however, to tell her that he had paired at the House on Friday, and took the week-end just to look after Miss Gallup, who had seemed rather low-spirited since her illness. They did the distance in record time, and outside the gates they found Mr Ffolliot waiting.

"I've been to see Miss Gallup, father, she has been ill, and I looked in to inquire. . . . I don't think you know Mr Gallup."

Mr Ffolliot bowed to Eloquent with a frigidity that plainly proved he had no desire to know him.

"I regret," Mr Ffolliot said in an impersonal voice, "that Miss Gallup has been ill. Do you know, Mary, that it is ten minutes past five?"

"Good evening, Miss Ffolliot," Eloquent said hastily; "it was most kind of you to call, and it did my aunt a great deal of good. Good-evening, Mr Ffolliot." He lifted his hat and turned away.

Mr Ffolliot stood perfectly still and looked his daughter over. From the crown of her exceedingly old hat to her admirable boots he surveyed her leisurely.

"Don't you want your tea, father?" Mary asked nervously, "or have you had it?"

"I did want tea, at the proper hour, and I have not had it; but what I want much more than tea is an explanation of that young man's presence in your society."

"I told you, father, I went to see Miss Gallup, who has had bronchitis, and he had come down from London for the week-end to see her, and so he walked back with me."

"Did you know he was there?"

"Of course not," Mary flushed angrily, "I didn't know Miss Gallup had been ill till Mrs Willets told me. I haven't been outside the grounds for a fortnight except in the bucket, so I've heard no village news."

"And why did you take it upon yourself to go outside the grounds to-day without consulting me?"

"I was rather tired of the garden, father, and it was such a lovely day, and it seemed rather unkind never to go near any of the people when mother was away."

"None of these reasons—if one can call them reasons—throws the smallest light upon the fact that you have been parading the village with this fellow, Gallup. I have told you before, I don't wish to know him, I will not know him. His politics are abhorrent to me, and his antecedents. . . . Surely by this time

you know, Mary, that I do not choose my friends from among the shopkeepers in Marlehouse."

"I'm sorry, father, but this afternoon it really couldn't be helped. I couldn't be rude to the poor man when he came with me. He seemed to take it for granted he should; Miss Gallup suggested it. I daresay he didn't want to come at all. But they both meant it kindly—what could I do?"

"What you can do, and what you must do, is to obey my orders. I will not have you walk anywhere in company with that bounder——"

"He isn't a bounder, father. You're wrong there; whatever he may be he isn't that."

Mr Ffolliot turned slowly and entered the drive. Mary followed, and in silence they walked up to the house.

He looked at his tall daughter from time to time. She held her head very high and her expression was rebellious. She really was an extremely handsome girl, and, in spite of his intense annoyance, Mr Ffolliot felt gratification in this fact.

At the hall door he paused. "I must ask you to remember, Mary, that you are no longer a child, that your actions now can evoke both comment and criticism, and I must ask you to confine your friendships to your own class."

"I shall never be able to do that," Mary answered firmly; "I love the village people far too much."

"That is a wholly different matter, and you know very well that I have always been the first to rejoice in the very friendly relations between us and—er—my good tenants. This Gallup person is not one of them. There is not the smallest necessity to know him, and what's more, I decline to know him. Do you understand?"

"No, father, I don't. I can't promise to cut Mr Gallup or be rude to him if I happen to meet him; he has done nothing to deserve it. You don't ask us to cut that odious Rabbich boy, who *is* a bounder, if you like."

"I know nothing about the Rabbich boy, as you call him. If he is what you say, I should certainly advise you to drop his acquaintance; but I must and do insist that you shall not further cultivate the acquaintance of this young Gallup."

"He's going back to London to-morrow afternoon, father. What *is* there to worry about?"

Mr Ffolliot sighed. "I shall be glad," he exclaimed, "when your mother returns."

"So will everybody," said Mary.

CHAPTER XX

THE GRANTLY STRAIN

Easter, that year, fell in the second week of April, and both Grantly and the twins were home for it. Mrs Ffolliot was back too. The Riviera had done wonders for her, and she returned beautiful and gay, and immensely glad to have her children round her once more.

To celebrate Mrs Ffolliot's return, it was decided to give a dinner-party. Dinner-parties were rare occurrences at the Manor. The Squire allowed about two a year, and grumbled a good deal over each. If he would have left the whole thing to Mrs Ffolliot, she and everyone else would have enjoyed it; but he would interfere. Above all, he insisted on supervising the list of guests, and settling who was to go in with whom. This time they were to number fourteen in all, and as Grantly and Mary were to be of the party, that left ten people to be discussed.

It was arranged with comparative ease till about a week before the day fixed the bachelor intended for Mary broke his leg out hunting. Mary had been allowed a new dress for the occasion; it would be the first time she had been at a real party in her father's house, and to be left out would have been a cruel disappointment.

Bachelors in that neighbourhood, even elderly bachelors, who came up to the standard required by

Mr Ffolliot were few, and there was comparatively little time.

The four elder children, their father, and mother were sitting at lunch; they had reached the cheese stage. Fusby and his attendant maid had departed, and the question of a "man for Mary" occupied the attention of the family. When Mrs Ffolliot quite innocently discharged a bomb into their midst by exclaiming, "I've got it. Let's ask Mr Gallup. He's our member; he was very kind in coming to tell me about poor Buz's accident, very kind to him, too, I remember. It would be a friendly thing to do. The Campions are coming, they'd be pleased."

Had Mrs Ffolliot not been gazing straight at her husband, she might have noticed that three pairs of startled eyes looked up at the same moment, and then were bent sedulously on the table.

Uz alone curiously regarded his brethren. Mr Ffolliot paused in the very act of pouring himself out another glass of marsala and set the decanter on the table with a thump, the glass only half-full.

"Impossible," he said coldly, "absolutely out of the question."

"But why?" Mrs Ffolliot asked; "there's nothing against the young man, and it would be a friendly thing to do."

"That's why I won't have it done," Mr Ffolliot said decidedly. "It would give a false impression. He might be disposed to take liberties."

"Oh no, Larrie; why should you think anything of that sort? It seems to me such a pity people in the county shouldn't be friendly. The Campions speak most highly of him."

"My dear"—Mr Ffolliot spoke with evident self-restraint—"I do not care to ask my friends to meet Mr Gallup as an equal. How could you ask any lady of your own rank to go in to dinner with him? The thing is outrageous."

"I was going to send him in with Mary," Mrs Ffolliot said innocently. "We must get somebody, and I know he's in the neighbourhood, for I saw him to-day."

"If he were in Honolulu he would not be more impossible than he is at present," said the Squire irritably. "Don't discuss it any more, my dear, I beg of you. It is out of the question."

And Mr Ffolliot rose from the table and took refuge in his study.

"I'm sorry," Mrs Ffolliot sighed, "I should have liked to ask him," and then she suddenly awoke to the fact that her entire family looked perturbed and miserable to the last degree.

Grantly pushed back his chair. "May I go, mother," he said, "I've something I must say to father."

"Not now, Grantly," and Mrs Ffolliot laid a gentle detaining hand upon his arm as he passed, "not just when he's feeling annoyed—if there's anything you have to tell him let it wait—don't go and worry him now."

Grantly lifted his mother's hand off his arm very gently. "I must, mummy dear, it can't wait."

He looked rather pale but his eyes were steady, and she thought with a little thrill of pride how like his grandfather he was growing.

He went straight to the study. Mr Ffolliot was seated by the fire with *Gaston Latour* open in his hand.

Grantly shut the door, crossed to the fireplace and stood on the hearth-rug looking down at his father. "I've come to say, father, that I think we *ought* to ask Mr Gallup to dinner."

"*You* think we ought to . . ." the Squire paused in breathless astonishment.

"Yes, sir, I do. And I hope you'll think so too when you hear what I've got to say."

"Go on," said Mr Ffolliot, laying down his book. "Go on."

It wasn't very easy. Grantly swallowed something in his throat, and began rather huskily: "You see, sir, we're under an obligation to Gallup. We are really."

"*We* are under an obligation. What on earth do you mean?"

"Well I am, father, anyway. You remember the night before the election——?"

"I don't," the Squire interrupted, "why in the world should I——?"

"Well, sir, it was like this . . . I went to dinner with young Rabbich at the Moonstone, and I got drunk ——"

"You—got—drunk?" the pauses between each word were far more emphatic than the words themselves.

"Yes, sir, we all had more than was good for us, and we went to the Radical meeting and made an awful row, and got chucked out and——"

"Look here, Grantly, what has all this to do with young Gallup? It was idiotic of you to go to his meeting, and the conduct of a vulgar blockhead to get drunk; but in what way . . ."

"That's not all, sir; after the meeting the bands came into collision, and I got taken up."

"*You* got taken up?"

"Two policemen, sir, taking me to the station, and Mr Gallup got me out of it and gave me a bed in his house."

Mr Ffolliot sat forward in his chair. "You accepted his hospitality—you slept the night in his house?"

"If I hadn't I'd have slept the night in the lock-up, and it would have been in the papers."

"But why—why should he have intervened to protect you?"

"Do you think, sir"—Grantly's voice was very shy—"that it might be because we both come from the same place?"

"He doesn't belong to the village."

"In a way he does; there have been Gallups in Redmarley nearly as long as us."

Mr Ffolliot said nothing. He sat staring at his tall young son as if he were a new person.

Grantly fidgetted and flushed and paled under this steady contemplation, saying at last: "You do see what I mean, don't you, father?"

"I do."

"That we ought to do something friendly?"

"He has certainly, through your idiotic fault, contrived to put us under an obligation. Why, I cannot think, but the fact remains. I do not know anything that could have annoyed me more."

Grantly ventured to think that perhaps a paragraph in the police reports of the local newspaper might have tried the Squire even more severely, but he did not say so. He waited.

"Does your mother know of all this?"

"Oh no, father, it would make her so sorry. Must we tell her?"

"Your tenderness for her feelings in no way restrained you at the time; why this solicitude now?"

"I'd rather she knew than seem to go back on Gallup."

"You may go, Grantly, and leave me to digest this particularly disagreeable intelligence. I have long reconciled myself to your lack of intellectual ability, but I did not know that you indulged in such coarse pleasures."

"Father—did you never do anything of that kind when you were young?"

"Most truthfully I can answer that I never did. It would not have amused me in the least."

"It didn't *amuse* me," Grantly said ruefully; "I can't remember much about it."

"Go," said Mr Ffolliot, and Grantly went, looking rather like Parker with his tail between his legs.

Hardly had Mr Ffolliot realised the import of what Grantly had told him when the door was opened again and Buz came in.

Buz, too, made straight for the hearth-rug, and standing there faced his bewildered parent (these

sudden invasions were wholly without precedent), saying: "I've come to tell you, sir, that I think we *ought* to ask Mr Gallup to dinner."

Had Mr Ffolliot been a man of his hands he would have fallen upon Buz and boxed his ears there and then; as it was, he replied bitterly:

"I am not interested in your opinion, boy, on this or any other subject. Leave the room at once."

But Buz, to his father's amazement, stood his ground.

"You must hear me, father, else you can't understand."

"If you've come to say anything about Grantly you may spare yourself the pains, he has told me himself."

"About Grantly," Buz repeated stupidly, "why should I want to talk about Grantly?—it's about him and me I want to talk."

"Him and you?" Mr Ffolliot echoed desperately.

"Yes, I rotted him that night and he was awfully decent——"

"What night?"

"The night I broke my arm—they said at the Infirmary that if he hadn't been so careful of me it would have been much worse."

"You refer, I suppose, to Gallup?"

"Yes, father, and it really was decent of him, because I went dressed up as a suffragette and had no end of a rag; he might have been awfully shirty, and he wasn't—he never told a soul. Don't you think we ought to ask him?"

"Does your mother know about this?"

"Of course not, nobody knew except Uz and," Buz added truthfully, "Adèle."

"Leave me," said Mr Ffolliot feebly, "I've had about as much as I can bear this afternoon—Go."

"You do see, sir, that it makes a difference," pleaded the persistent Buz.

"Go," thundered the exasperated Squire.

"All right, father, I'm going, but you *do* see, don't you?" said Buz from the door.

CHAPTER XXI

A RETROSPECT AND A RESULT

Mr Ffolliot was really a much-trying man. Those interviews with Grantly and Buz caused his nerves to vibrate most unpleasantly.

So unhinged was he that for quite half an hour after Buz's departure he kept looking nervously at the door, fully expectant that it would open to admit Uz, primed with some fresh reason why Eloquent Gallup should be asked to dinner; and that he would be followed by Ger and the Kitten bent on a similar errand.

However, no one else invaded his privacy. The Manor House was very still; the only occasional sound being the soft swish of a curtain stirred by the breeze through the open window.

Mr Ffolliot neither read *Gaston Latour* nor did he write, though his monograph on Ercole Ferrarese was not yet completed.

Wrapped in thought he sat quite motionless in his deep chair, and the subject that engrossed him was

his own youth; comparing what he remembered of it with these queer, careless sons of his, who seemed born to trouble other people, Mr Ffolliot could not call to mind any occasion when he had been a nuisance to anybody. He honestly tried and wholly failed.

Such persons as have been nourished in early youth on Mr Thackeray's inimitable *The Rose and The Ring* will remember how at the christening of Prince Giglio, the Fairy Blackstick, who was his godmother, said, "My poor child, the best thing I can send you is a little misfortune!"

Now the Fairy Blackstick had evidently absented herself from Hilary Ffolliot's christening, for his youth was one long procession of brilliant successes. It is true that his father, an easy-going, amiable clergyman, died during his first term at Harrow, but that did not affect Hilary's material comfort in any way. It left his mother perfectly free to devote her entire attention to him.

He was a good-looking, averagely healthy boy, who carried all before him at preparatory school. Easily first in every class he entered, he was quite able to hold his own in all the usual games, and he left for Harrow in a blaze of glory, having obtained the most valuable classical scholarship.

Throughout his career at school he never failed to win any prize he tried for, and when he left, it was with scholarships that almost covered the expenses of his time at Cambridge. Moreover, he was head of his house and a member of the Eleven.

His mother, a gentle and unselfish lady, felt that she could not do enough to promote the comfort of so brilliant and satisfactory a son. Hilary's likes and dislikes in the matter of food, Hilary's preference for silk underwear, Hilary's love of art and music, were all matters of equal and supreme importance to Mrs Ffolliot, and in every way she fostered the strain of selfishness that exists even in the best of us.

At the university he did equally well. He took a brilliant degree, and then travelled for a year or so, devoting himself to the study of Italian art and architecture; and finally accepted (he never seemed to try for things like other people) a clerkship in the Foreign Office.

When he was eight and twenty his uncle died, and he inherited Redmarley.

His conduct had always been blameless. He shared the ordinary pleasures of upper-class young men without committing any of their follies. He was careful about money, and never got into debt. He accepted kindnesses as his right, and felt under no obligation to return them.

He could not be said ever to have worked hard, for all the work he had hitherto undertaken came so easily to him. He possessed a large circle of agreeable acquaintances, and no intimate friends.

He met Marjory Grantly in her second season, and for the first time in his life fell ardently and hopelessly in love.

Now was the chance for the Fairy Blackstick!

But she evidently took no interest in Hilary Ffolliot, for Marjory, instead of sending him about his business, and perhaps thus rendering him for a space the most miserable of men, fell in love with him, and they were married in three months.

The General, it is true, had misgivings, and remarked to Mrs Grantly that Ffolliot seemed too good to be true. But there was no disproving it; and Hilary was so much in love that for a while, for nearly a year, he thought more about Marjory's likes and dislikes than his own.

And Marjory's likes included such a vast number of other people.

But the chance, the hundred-to-one chance, of turning him into an ordinary human being—loving, suffering, understanding—was lost.

Once more in Life's Market he had got what he wanted at his own price, and with the cessation of competitive examinations all ambition seemed dead in him.

And what of Marjory?

Nobody, not even her father and mother who loved her so tenderly, ever knew what Marjory felt. She had chosen her lot. She would abide by it. No doubt she saw her husband as he was, but as time went on she realised how few chances he had had to be anything different. She was an only child herself. She, too, had adoring parents, but their adoration took a different form from the somewhat abject and wholly blind devotion of Hilary's mother. General and Mrs Grantly saw to it from the very first that they should love their daughter because she was lovable, and not only because she was theirs. They had troops of friends, and exercised a large hospitality that entailed a constant giving out of sympathy for

and interest in other people. That there was much suffering, and sadness, and sin in the world was never concealed from Marjory in her happy girlhood; that it had not touched her personally was never allowed to foster the belief that it did not exist. That there was also much happiness, and gaiety, and kindness was abundantly manifest in her own home, and every scope was given her for the development of the social instincts which were part of her charm. She went to her husband at twenty "handled and made," and twenty years of married life had only perfected the work.

As a girl she was perhaps intellectually intolerant. Stupid people annoyed her, and she possessed all youth's enthusiastic admiration for achievement, for people who did things, who had arrived. Hilary Ffolliot was a new type to her. His brilliant record impressed her. His cultivated taste and extraordinary versatility attracted her, and his evident admiration gratified her girlish vanity.

She was a proud woman, and if she had made a mistake she was not going to let it spoil her life. Only once did she come near showing her heart even to her mother. It was a year after the Kitten was born, when the General had just got the command at Woolwich, and Mrs Grantly once more came back to the assault—her constant plea that she should have Ger given over to her entirely.

"You really are, Margie, a greedy, grasping woman. Here are you with six children, four of them sons. And here am I with only one child, a miserable, measly girl, and you won't let me have even one of the boys."

The miserable, measly girl referred to laughed and knelt down at her mother's knee. "Dearest, you really get quite as much of the children as is good for you—or them——"

"You can't say I spoil them; I didn't spoil you, and you were only one."

"I'm sorry I couldn't be more," Mrs Ffolliot said contritely; "but you see, mother dear, it's like this, it's just because I was only one I want the children to have as much as possible of each other . . . while they are young . . . I want them to grow up . . ." Mrs Ffolliot sat down on the floor and leant her head against Mrs Grantly's knees so that her face was hidden. "I want them to realise what a lot of other people there are in the world, all with hopes and fears and likes and dislikes and joys and sorrows . . . and that each one of them is only a very little humble atom of a great whole—and that's what they can teach each other—I can't do it—you can't do it—but they can manage it amongst them."

Mrs Grantly did not answer; quick as she was in repartee, she had the much rarer gift of sympathetic silence. She laid a kind hand on her daughter's bent head and softly stroked it.

The clock struck four, and still Mr Ffolliot sat on in his chair with *Gaston Latour* unopened, held loosely in his long slender hands.

A dignified presence with every attribute that goes to make the scholar and the gentleman; though one who judged of character from external appearance might have misdoubted the thin straight lips, the rather pinched nostrils, the eyes too close together, and above all, the head—high and intellectual, but almost devoid of curve at the back. A clean-cut, ascetic, handsome face, as a rule calm and judicial in its dignified repose.

This afternoon, though, the Squire lacks his usual serene poise. His self-confidence has been shaken, and it is his young sons who have disturbed its delicately adjusted equilibrium.

He was puzzled.

It is a mistake to imagine that selfish and ungrateful people fail to recognise these qualities in others. Not only are they quick to perceive incipient signs of them, but they demand the constant exercise of their opposites in their fellow men.

Mr Ffolliot was puzzled.

Among the words he used most constantly, both on paper and in conversation, were "fine shades" and "fineness" in its most psychological sense. "Fineness" was a quality he was for ever belauding; a quality that he believed was only to be found in persons of complex character and unusually sensitive organisation.

And yet he grudgingly conceded that he had, that afternoon, been confronted by it in two of his own quite ordinary children.

What rankled, however, was that Buz, at all events, seemed doubtful whether he, the Squire, possessed it. The dubious and thrice-repeated "you do understand, don't you, father?" rang in his ears.

How was it that Buz, the shallow and mercurial, seemed to fear that what was so plain to him might

be hidden from his father?

Undesired and wholly irrelevant there flashed into his mind that walk with Mary, a short ten days ago, when he had reproached her with her limitations, her power to grasp only the obvious. And it was suddenly revealed to Mr Ffolliot that certain obligations were obvious to his children that were by no means equally clear to him.

Why was this?

As if in answer came his own phrase, used so often in contemptuous explanation of their more troublesome vagaries—"the Grantly Strain."

He was fair-minded and he admired courage. He in no way underrated the effort it must have been for Grantly and Buz to come and confess their peccadillos to him. And he knew very well that only because they felt someone else was involved had they summoned up courage to do so.

If their evil-doings were discovered, they did not lie, these noisy, blundering children of his; but they never showed the smallest desire to draw attention to their escapades.

His mind seemed incapable of concentration that afternoon, for now he began to wonder how it was that "the children" lately had managed to emerge from the noun of multitude and each had assumed a separate identity with marked and definite characteristics.

There was Mary . . .

Mr Ffolliot frowned. If it hadn't been for Mary he really would have been quite glad to ask young Gallup to dinner. But Mary complicated matters; for he had instantly divined what had struck none of the others, a connection between the Liberal member's amiability to his sons and the fact that those sons possessed a sister.

Presently Fusby came in to make up the fire. "Do you happen to know, Fusby, if your mistress is in the house and disengaged?"

"I saw the mistress as I came through the 'all, sir, sitting in a window reading a book. She was quite alone, sir."

"Ah," said Mr Ffolliot, "thank you, I will go to her."

As the door was closed behind his master, Fusby arose from brushing the hearth and shook his fist in that direction.

"Go, I should think you would go, you one-eyed old image you. Did you think I was going to fetch her to wait your pleasure?"

Mrs Ffolliot laid down her book as her husband came across the wide old hall. She made room for him on the window-seat beside her. She noticed that he was flushed and that his hair was almost shaggy.

"Have you got a headache, Larrie?" she asked in her kind voice. "I hope Grantly had nothing disturbing to relate."

"Yes, no," Mr Ffolliot replied vaguely; "I've been thinking things over, my dear, and I've come round to your opinion that perhaps it would be the right thing to ask young Gallup to dinner on the twenty-first. There will be the Champions and the Wards to keep him in countenance."

"I'm so glad you see it as I do," Mrs Ffolliot said gently, looking, however, much surprised. "After all, he may not come, you know."

"He'll come," and his wife wondered why the Squire laid such grim emphasis upon the words.

"By the way," Mr Ffolliot said in quite a new tone, "you were saying something the other day about your mother's very kind offer to have Mary for some weeks after the May drawing-room. I think it would be a good thing. You don't want the fag and expense of going up to town so soon after you've come home. Let her stay with her grandmother for a bit and go out—see that she has proper clothes—they will enjoy having the child, and she will see something of the world. Let her have her fling—don't hurry her."

"Why, Hilary, what a *volte-face*! When I spoke to you about it before I was ill you said it was out of the question . . ."

"My dear," said Mr Ffolliot testily, "only stupid people think that they must never change their minds. I have decided that it will be good for Mary to leave Redmarley for a bit. You must remember that I have been carefully observing her for the last few weeks. She will grow narrow and provincial if she never meets anyone except the Garsetshire people. Surely you must see that?"

"May I tell Mary? It's such fun when you're young to look forward to things."

"Certainly tell Mary, and let her go as soon as her grandmother will have her. She'd better get what clothes she wants in town."

"She can go up with Grantly when he goes back to the Shop. It *is* nice of you, Larrie."

"I suppose she must stay for this tiresome dinner? Why not let her go beforehand? It's always very easy to get an odd girl."

"That wouldn't do," Mrs Ffolliot said decidedly, "the child would be disappointed—besides I want her."

Mr Ffolliot sighed. "As you will, my dear," he said meekly, "but she'd better go directly it is over."

CHAPTER XXII

THE DREAM GOES ON

"Aunt Susan, will you give me a bed on Thursday night?"

Eloquent, who was spending the Easter recess at Marlehouse, had bicycled out to tea with Miss Gallup.

"You know as I'm always pleased to give you a bed any time. What do you want it then for? Are you coming to stop a bit?"

"Because," Eloquent took a deep breath and watched his aunt closely, "I'm dining at the Manor that night."

"Then," said Miss Gallup sharply, "you don't have a bed here."

"Why ever not?" and in his astonishment Eloquent dropped into the Garsetshire idiom he was usually so careful to avoid.

"Because," Miss Gallup was flushed and tremulous, "no one shall ever say I was as a drag on you."

"But, Aunt Susan, no one could say it, and if they did, what would it matter? and what in the world has that to do with giving me a bed?"

"My dear," said Miss Gallup, "I know my place if you don't. When you goes to dinner with Squire Ffolliot you must go properly from Marlehouse like anybody else—you must drive out, or hire a motor and put it up there, same as other people do, and go back again to your own house where you're known to be—it's in the paper. There's no sort of use draggin' *me* in. I always knew as you'd get there some day, and now you've got there and no one's pleaser than me. Do show me the invitation."

Eloquent took a note from his breast-pocket and handed it to his aunt, who put on her spectacles and read aloud, slowly and impressively:—

Dear Mr Gallup,—If you have no other engagement, will you come and dine with us on the twenty-first at eight o'clock. It will give us great pleasure if you can.—Yours sincerely,

MARGERY FFOLIOT.

"H'm, now that's not what I should have expected," Miss Gallup said in a disappointed tone. "I should have thought she'd 'a said, 'Mr and Mrs Ffolliot presents their compliments to Mr Gallup, and requests the pleasure of his company at a dinner-party'—I know there is a party, for Dorcas did tell Em'ly-Alice there was going to be one; only last night she was talking about it—it's downright blunt that note—I call

it—"

Eloquent laughed. "All the same I've accepted, and now do explain why I can't sleep here instead of trailing all the way back into Marlehouse at that time of night."

"If you can't *see*, why you must just take my word for it. You and me's in different walks of life, and it's my bounden duty to see as you don't bemean yourself. I'm always pleased to see you in a quiet way, but there's no use in strangers knowing we're relations."

"What nonsense," Eloquent exclaimed hotly, "I've only got one aunt in the world, and I'm very proud of her, so let there be an end of this foolishness."

Miss Gallup wiped her eyes. "In some ways, Eloquent," she said huskily, "with all your politics an' that, you're no better than a child."

"I'm hanged if I can see what you're driving at," Eloquent exclaimed in great irritation. "Once more, Aunt Susan, will you give me a bed on Thursday?"

"Don't ask me, my dear, don't ask me. It's for your good as I refuse. *I* can see the difference between us if you can't, and when you took on so with politics, and then your father left all that fortune so as you could leave the likes of the Golden Anchor, I said to myself, 'Now, Martha Gallup, don't you interfere. Don't you go intrudin' on your brother's child. If he sees fit to keep friendly it shows he's a good heart, but you keep your place.' . . . An' I've kep' it; never have I been near you in Marlehouse, as you know—Not but what you've as't me, and very pleased I was to be as't . . ."

"And very displeased I was that you would never come," Eloquent interrupted.

"I know my place," Miss Gallup persisted. "I don't mind the likes of the Ffolliots knowing we're related. . . . They're bound to know, and they're not proud, none of 'em exceptin' Squire, that is to say, and he wouldn't think it worth while to be proud to the likes of me. But I don't want to hang on and keep you down, and there's some as would think less of you for me bein' your aunt, so where's the use of flaunting an old-fashioned piece like me in their faces. . . . If you'll come out next day and tell me all about the party, I'd take it most kind of you, Eloquent, that I should."

"Why shouldn't I come here straight that night? I shouldn't have forgotten anything by then."

"No," Miss Gallup said firmly. "I'd much rather you didn't come to me from that 'ouse nor go there from me. You go back 'ome like a good boy. It isn't as if you couldn't afford a chaise to bring you."

Eloquent saw that she really meant what she said. He was puzzled and rather hurt, for it had never occurred to him that his aunt was anything but his aunt: a kindly garrulous old lady who had always been extremely good to him, whom it was his duty to cherish, who looked upon him in the light of a son.

He was a simple person and never realised that this simplicity and directness had a good deal to do with the undoubted cordiality of certain persons, who, apart from politics, were known to be very exclusive in the matter of their acquaintance; and that it was largely owing to the fact that he never showed the smallest false shame as to his origin, that members of his party who had at first consented to know him solely for political reasons, continued to know him when the Liberal Government was for a second time firmly established. They perceived his primness, were faintly amused by his immense earnestness, and they respected his sincerity.

The manner of his arrival on the fateful night was settled for him by Sir George Campion, who, meeting him in the street, offered him a seat in their motor. Eloquent never knew that Mrs Ffolliot had asked Sir George to do this, thinking that it would make things easier and pleasanter for the guest who was the one stranger to the assembled party.

On the night of the dinner Mary was dressed early and went to her mother's room to see if she could help her.

Mrs Ffolliot was standing before her long glass and Sophia was shaking out the train of her dress, a soft grey-blue dress full of purple shadows and silvery lights.

She turned and looked at her tall young daughter, critically, fondly, with the pride and fear and wonder a woman, above all a beautiful woman, feels as she realises that for her child everything is yet to come; the story all untold.

"You may go, Sophia," she said gently. "I think Miss Mary looks nice, don't you? It's her first real evening frock, you know."

Sophia looked from the one to the other and her severe face relaxed a little. "It fits most beautiful," she vouchsafed.

"Mother," Mary said when Sophia had gone, "I wanted to catch you just a minute—I've seen Mr Gallup since that night he came to tell us about Buz . . ."

"You've met?" Mrs Ffolliot exclaimed, "where? and why have you never told me?"

"It was while you were away. Miss Gallup had been ill and I went to ask for her and he was there, and he walked home with me . . ."

Mrs Ffolliot raised her eyebrows.

"Oh, you think it funny too? It couldn't be helped—old Miss Gallup seemed to think it was the proper thing and sent him—and father was waiting for me at the gate and was awfully cross. . . . Mother, how *did* you persuade him to let you ask Mr Gallup?"

Mrs Ffolliot turned to her dressing-table and began to collect fan and handkerchief. She looked in the glass and saw Mary behind her, eager, radiant, slim, upright, and gloriously young. She began to see why father was so awfully cross. There was more excuse than usual.

"Why don't you answer me, mother? didn't you hear what I said?"

"I heard, my darling. Father needed no persuasion. He simply changed his mind; but I can't think why you never told me you had met Mr Gallup already."

Mary blushed. The warm colour dyed forehead and neck and ears, and faded into the exceedingly white chest and shoulders, revealed to the world for the first time.

Mrs Ffolliot saw all this in the glass, wondered if she could have imagined it, and turned to face her daughter.

"Mother"—what honest eyes the child had, to be sure—"it wasn't the first time I'd spoken to him."

"Really, Mary, you are very mysterious——"

"I met him in the woods once before Christmas, and he was lost, and I showed him the way out, and father saw us . . . and was just as cross."

Mrs Ffolliot felt more in sympathy with her husband than usual. But all she said was, "Well, well, it's evident you don't need an introduction. I forgot you'd seen him when he called. I'm glad you told me in time to prevent it, or he would have thought it so odd—come, my child, we must go down."

"*You* aren't cross, are you, mother?" Mary asked wistfully.

"Cross!" Mrs Ffolliot repeated, "at your first party. What is there to be cross about? Yes, my child, that dress is quite charming—father was right, you can stand that dead white—but it's trying to some people—come."

The Champions called for Eloquent, and he found himself seated side by side with Sir George on one of the little seats, while Lady Champion and a pretty niece called Miss Bax sat opposite. Miss Bax was disposed to be friendly and conversational, but to Eloquent the fact that he was going to Redmarley was no ordinary occurrence, and he would infinitely have preferred to have driven out alone, or, better still, to have walked through the soft spring night from his aunt's house to the Manor, which still held something of the glamour that had surrounded it in his childhood.

For him it was still "the Manshun," immense, remote, peopled by inhabitants fine and strange, and far removed from ordinary life. A house whose interior common folk were, it is true, occasionally allowed to see, walking on tiptoe, speaking in whispers, led and instructed by an important rustling old lady who wore an imposing cap and a silk apron; a strange, silent house where none save servants ever seemed to come and go. He had not yet quite recovered from the shock it was to him to hear voices and laughter in that old panelled hall which he had known in childhood as so vast and shadowy. He liked to remember all this, and to feel that he was going there as *THEIR* guest, to be with *THEM* on intimate friendly terms. It was wonderful, incredible; it was part of the dream.

". . . don't you think so, Mr Gallup?" asked Miss Bax, and Eloquent woke with a start to realise that he had not heard a word his pretty neighbour was saying. He was thankful that the motor was dark and that the others could not notice how red he was.

"I beg your pardon," he said loudly, leaning forward, "I didn't catch what you said."

"Is the man deaf?" Miss Bax wondered, for the motor was a Rolls-Royce and singularly smooth and noiseless. "I was saying," she went on aloud, "that it will probably be my lot to go in to dinner with Grantly Ffolliot, and that cadets as a class are badly in need of snubbing; don't you agree with me?"

"I haven't met any except young Mr Ffolliot," Eloquent said primly, "and I must say he did not strike me as a particularly conceited young man."

"He isn't," Sir George broke in, "he's an exceedingly nice boy, they all are. Their mother has seen to that."

"Boys are so difficult to talk to," Miss Bax lamented; "their range is so limited, and my enthusiasm for football is so lukewarm."

"Try him on his profession," Lady Champion suggested.

"That would be worse. Cadets do nothing but tell you how hard they are worked, and what a fearful block there is in the special branch of the army they are going in for. Is young Ffolliot going to be a Sapper by any chance? for they're the worst of all—considering themselves, as they do, the brains of the army."

"I don't think so," said Sir George; "he's not clever enough. He's only got moderate ability and an uncommonly pretty seat on a horse. He'll get Field all right. But why are you so sure, my dear, that he'll be your fate? Why not Gallup here? and you could try and convert him to your views on the Suffrage question? He'd be some use, you know. He *has* a vote."

Again Eloquent blessed the darkness as he coloured hotly and brought his mind back to the present with a violent wrench. He knew he ought to say something, but what? He fervently hoped they would not assign him to this severe self-possessed young lady who thought cadets conceited and had political views. Heavens! she might be another Elsmaria Buttermish with no blessed transformation later on into something human and approachable.

"I'm afraid"—he heard Miss Bax talking as it were an immense way off as he floated away on the wings of his dream—"that my views would startle Mr Gallup."

The motor turned in at the drive gates, they had reached the door.

Eloquent was right in the middle of his dream.

He followed Lady Champion and Miss Bax across the hall and down a corridor to a room he had never been in when he was a child.

Fusby threw open a door and announced loudly, "Sir George and Lady Champion, Miss Bax, Mr Gallup."

They were the last of the guests.

For a little while he was less conscious of his dream. This light, bright room with white panelled walls and furniture covered with gay chintzes, soft blurred chintz in palest pinks and greens, with pictures in oval frames, and people, ordinary people that he had seen before, all talking and laughing together. This was not the Redmarley that he knew, grave and beautiful and old.

This was not the Redmarley of his dream. It came back to him as Mrs Ffolliot gave him her hand in welcome, presenting him to her husband and one or two other people. It left him as she turned away and Grantly came forward and greeted him. Grantly, tall and irreproachably well dressed, cheerful withal and quite at his ease.

Sir George had pulled Mary into the very middle of the room and held her at arm's length with laughing comments. How could men find the courage for that sort of thing? He heard him ask what she had done with her sash, and then Mrs Ffolliot said, "I think you know my daughter, Mr Gallup; will you take her in to dinner?"

And once more he was well in the middle of his dream, for he found himself in the corridor he knew, side by side with Mary, part of a procession moving towards the dining-room.

Her hand was on his arm, but the exquisite moment was a little marred by the discovery that she was quite an inch taller than he.

Eloquent had been to a good many public dinners; he had even dined with certain Cabinet Ministers, but always when there were only men. He had never yet dined with people of the Ffolliots' class in this intimate, friendly way, and he found everything a little different from what he expected. He had read

very little fiction, and such mental pictures as he had evolved were drawn from his inner consciousness. As always, he wondered how they contrived to be so gay, to talk such nonsense, and to laugh at it. Seated between Mary and witty Mrs Ward, whose husband was one of his ardent supporters in the county, he did his best to join in the general conversation, but he found it hard. Miss Bax, whose premonition regarding her fate was justified, seemed to have overcome her objection to cadets. She and Grantly were just opposite to him, and he noticed with regret that Grantly was drinking champagne. It would have been better, Eloquent thought, if the boy had abstained altogether after his experience at the election. Mary, too, drank champagne, but Eloquent condoned this weakness in her case, she drank so little. Everyone drank champagne except Sir George, who preferred whisky, and Eloquent himself, who drank Apollinaris.

"Do you suffer from rheumatism?" Mary asked innocently. "Do you think it would hurt you once in a way?"

"I am not in the least rheumatic," Eloquent protested, "but I have never tasted anything intoxicating."

"Then you don't know whether you'd like it or not. Why not try some and see?" Mary suggested hospitably.

Eloquent shook his head. "Better not," he said, "you don't know what effect it might have on me."

He ate whatever was put before him, wholly unaware of its nature, and in spite of Mary's efforts to keep the conversational ball rolling gaily, he was very silent.

The dream had got him again, for he knew this room with the dark oak panelling and great old portraits of departed Ffolliots, some of them with eyes that followed you. He knew the room, but as he knew it, the long narrow table, like the table in a refectory, was bare and polished and empty; or with a little cloth laid just at one end for old Mr Ffolliot.

What did they think of it now, these solemn pictured people?—this long, narrow strip of brilliant light and flowers and sparkling glass and silver, surrounded by well-dressed cheerful persons, all, apparently, laughing and talking at the same time.

They had reached dessert, and he was handing Mary a dish of sweets; she took four. "Do take some," she whispered, "take lots, and what you don't want give to me; you can put them in my bridge-bag under the table, I want them for the children. I promised Ger."

Bewildered, but only too happy to do anything she asked him, Eloquent helped himself largely.

"Now," Mary whispered, holding a little white satin bag open under the table, "and if they come round again, take some more."

"It was my grandfather began it," she explained; "he used always to save sweets for us when we stayed with him, and now it's a rule—if we dine downstairs—if there are any—there aren't always, you know—and Fusby's so stingy, if there are any left he takes them and locks them up in a box till next time. You watch Grantly, he's got some too, but he hasn't got anywhere to put them, like me. I must go round behind him when mother collects eyes, then I'll nip up to Ger, for he'll never go to sleep till I've been . . ."

"You see," she went on confidentially, "they will take them to Willets to-morrow. He loves good sweets and he never gets any unless they take them to him. They'll make a party of it, and Mrs Willets will give them each a weeny glass of ginger-wine. They'll have a lovely time—do you know Willets?"

"By sight, I think . . . he's your keeper, isn't he? From all I can hear to-night he seems a very remarkable person, everyone is talking about him."

"Oh, you ought to know him, he's the greatest dear in Redmarley. Everyone who knows us knows Willets, and dukes and people have tried to get him away, he's such a good sportsman, but he won't leave us. We love him so much we couldn't bear it. He couldn't either. He's been keeper here nearly twenty-three years. Before mother came he was here, and now there's all of us he'll never leave."

"Have you got enough? Won't they want some for themselves as well as Willets?"

"Thanks to you, I've got a splendid lot. One can't always ask people, you know, but I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Shall I demand some more in a loud voice? there are some at the end of the table," Eloquent murmured; "I'm very shy, but I can be bold in a good cause."

Mary looked at him in some surprise. "Would you really? Ah, it's too late, there's mother——"

Eloquent watched her with breathless interest as she "went round the longest way" and received new spoils from Grantly as she passed. How curious they were about their servants these people, where Fusby seemed to control the supplies and the children of the house secretly saved sweets for the keeper.

The men did not sit long over their wine, and it was to the hall they went and not to the white-panelled room that Eloquent unconsciously resented as an anachronism; and in the hall bridge-tables were set out.

This was a complication Eloquent had not foreseen. Among his father's friends cards were regarded as the Devil's Books, and he did not know the ace of spades from the knave of hearts.

Would they force him to play, he wondered. Would he cover himself with shame and ignominy? and what if he said it was against his principles to play for money?

He braced himself to be faithful to the traditions in which he had been trained, only to find that on his saying he never *had* played bridge no one expressed the smallest desire that he should do so.

In fact it seemed to him that three tables were arranged with almost indecent haste, cryptic remarks about "cutting in" were bandied about, and in less than five minutes he was sitting on the oak settle by the fire with Mrs Ffolliot, who talked to him so delightfully that the dream came back.

Here on the high-backed settle he found courage to tell her how clearly he remembered that first time he had seen her in his father's shop; and plainly she was touched and interested, and drew him on to speak of his queer lonely childhood and the ultimate goal that had been kept ever before his eyes.

He was very happy, and it seemed but a short time till somebody at one of the tables exclaimed "game and rub," and Mary came over to the settle saying, "Now, mother, you must take my place. I've been awfully lucky, I've won half a crown."

She sat down beside him on the settle asking, "Would you care to watch, or shall we just sit here and talk—which would you rather?"

What Eloquent wanted to do was to stare: to gaze and gaze at the gracious young figure sitting there in gleaming white flecked with splashes of rosy light from the dancing flames, but he could hardly say this.

"I'm afraid it would be of no use for me to watch; I have never played cards, and don't understand them in the least."

"You mean you don't know the suits?"

"What are suits?"

"This must be seen to," said Mary; "you don't smoke, you drink nothing festive, you don't know one card from another; you can't go through life like this. It's not fair. We won't waste another minute, I'll teach you the suits now."

She made him fetch a little table, she produced a pack of cards. She spread them out and she expounded. He was a quick study. By the time Mr Ffolliot came to take Mary's place he knew all the suits. By the time Mr Ffolliot had thoroughly confused him by a learned disquisition on the principles of bridge, Lady Champion's motor was announced, and he departed in her train.

"Surely Mr Gallup is a very absent-minded person," Miss Bax remarked to her aunt when they had deposited Eloquent at his door.

"I expect he's shy," said Lady Champion, who was sleepy and not particularly interested; "but wasn't Mary nice to him?—I do like that girl—she's so natural and unaffected."

"She always strikes me as being a mere child," said Miss Bax, "so very unformed; is she out yet, or is she still in the schoolroom?"

Sir George chuckled. "She's on her way out," he said, "and, I fancy, on her way to an uncommonly good time as well. That girl is a sight to make an old man young."

"She certainly is handsome," said Miss Bax.

Sir George chuckled again. "Unformed," he repeated, "there's some of us likes 'em like that."

Eloquent sat long in his orderly little dining-room where the glass of milk and tray of sandwiches awaited him on the sideboard. His head was in a whirl. She drank champagne. She gambled. She seemed to think it was perfectly natural and right to do these things. It probably was if she thought so. She . . .

Heavens! what an adorable wife she would be for a young Cabinet Minister.

CHAPTER XXIII

WILLETS

Had Eloquent ever taken the smallest interest in country pursuits he must have come across Willets, for in that part of the Cotswolds Willets was as well known as the Marle itself.

A small thick-set man with a hooky nose, and with bright, long-sighted brown eyes and strong, sensitive hands, wrists tempered and supple as a rapier, and a tongue that talked unceasingly and well.

Sporting people wondered why Willets, with his multifarious knowledge of wood and river craft, should stay at Redmarley: a comparatively small estate, whose owner was known to preserve only because it was a tradition to do so, and not because he cared in the least about the sport provided. Willets was wasted, they said, and it is possible that at one time Willets, himself, agreed with them.

He came originally of Redmarley folk, and his wife from a neighbouring village. He "got on" and became one of the favourite keepers on a ducal estate in the North, much liked both by the noble owner and his sporting friends; a steady, intelligent man with a real genius for the gentle craft. He could charm trout from water where, apparently, no trout existed; he could throw a fly with a skill and precision beautiful to behold, and he was well read in the literature of his pursuits. Much converse with gentlemen had softened the asperities of his Cotswold speech, he expressed himself well, wrote both a good hand and a good letter, and was very popular with those he served. Life looked exceedingly rosy for Willets—for he was happy in his marriage and a devoted father to his three little girls—when the hand of fate fell heavily upon him. There came a terribly severe winter in that part of Scotland, and one after another the little girls got bronchitis and died; the three in five months.

He and his wife could bear the place no longer, and came South. The Duke was really sorry to lose him, and took considerable trouble to find him something to do in the Cotswold country whence he came.

It happened that just then old Mr Ffolliot was looking for a keeper who would see after things in general at the Manor, and the fishing in particular; so Willets accepted the situation merely as a make-shift for a short time, till something worthier of his powers should turn up.

It was pleasant to be in the old county once more. There was help and healing in the kind grey houses and the smiling pastoral country. His wife was pleased to be near her people, and his work was of the lightest. But Willets was not yet forty, he had ambitions, and the wages were much smaller than what he had been getting. It would do, perhaps, for a year or two, and he knew that whenever he liked, his late master would be glad to have him back and would give him a post in the Yorkshire dales.

Old Mr Ffolliot died, and his nephew, Hilary, reigned in his stead. Willets announced to his wife that their time in Redmarley would be short.

The young Squire married and in the bride's train came General Grantly with all the patience and enthusiasm and friendly anecdotal powers of your true angler; and in his train came like-minded brother officers to whom, it must be conceded, Hilary Ffolliot was always ready to offer hospitality.

Things livened up a bit at Redmarley, and Willets decided to stay a little longer.

Margery Ffolliot liked the Willets and was passionately sorry for them about the little girls; but it was the Ffolliot children who wove about Willets an unbreakable charm, binding him to his native village.

One by one, with toddling steps and high, clear voices, they stormed the little house by the bridge and took its owners captive.

Saving only their mother, Willets had a good deal more to do with the upbringing of the young Ffolliots in their earliest years than anybody else. Singly and collectively, they adored him, tyrannised over him, copied him, learnt from him, and wasted his time with a prodigality a more sporting master than the Squire might have resented seriously.

Thus it fell out that offers came to Willets, good offers from places far more important than Redmarley, where there were possibilities both in the way of sport and of tips—there was a sad scarcity of tips at Redmarley—and yet he passed them by.

Sometimes his wife would be a little reproachful, pointing out that they were saving nothing and he was throwing away good money.

Willets had always some excellent reason for not leaving just then.

Redmarley had possibilities; it would be a nice place by the time Master Grantly was grown up and brought his friends. No one else would take quite the same interest in it that he did; he was proud of the children, and money wasn't everything, and so Willets stayed on.

With the arrival of the Kitten his subjugation was completed, and a seal was set upon the permanence of his relations with the Manor House. From the days when the Kitten in a white bonnet and woolly gaiters would struggle out of her nurse's arms to be taken by Willets, sitting on his knee and gazing at him with wine-coloured bright eyes not unlike his own, occasionally putting up a small hand encased in an absurd fingerless glove to turn his face that she might see it better, Willets was her infatuated and abject slave. When on these occasions he attempted to restore her to her nurse she would clutch him fiercely and scream, so that it ended in his carrying her up to the house and up the backstairs to the nursery, whence he only escaped by strategy.

No day passed without a visit from the Kitten and although he was not wholly blind to the defects in her character, he was sure she was the "pearliest, sauciest, cleverest little baggage in the British Isles."

Of course the fact that Eloquent had been asked to dine at the Manor House was much canvassed in the village. Miss Gallup trumpeted the matter abroad, and naturally it was discussed exhaustively by what Mr Ffolliot would have called his "retainers."

Willets was not sure that he approved. "I've no doubt," he said leniently to Mrs Willets as they were sitting at tea, "that he's a smart young chap and he's got on wonderfully, but I don't altogether trust that pushing kind myself, and he's that sort. Why, I saw him, with my own eyes, walk past this house with our Miss Mary as bold as brass. I'll warrant if Squire had seen him he'd have been put out."

"He was her partner at dinner last night," Fusby was saying, "and what's more," here Mrs Willets lowered her voice mysteriously, "he says as he looked at her that loving, he's sure he's after her."

"After your grandmother!" Willets said rudely, his hawk's eyes bright with anger. "As if Miss Mary would so much as look at him! Let him seek a mate in his own class."

"That's just what he won't do; Miss Gallup—she's that set-up and silly about him—says he must marry a lady, one who'll be able to help him now he's got so high up. I'm surprised, I own it, at Squire—but probably it was the Mistress, she's all for friendliness always. But I'll warrant they'd both be in a pretty takin' if they thought he was after Miss Mary."

"I tell you he's nothing of the kind," Willets shouted, thumping the table so violently that he hurt his hand. "It's scandalous to say such things, and so I'll tell Fusby the first time I see him—gossiping old silly."

"Now, William, it's no good going on against Fusby. He was as upset as you could be yourself, an' he only told me when he looked in this afternoon because he felt worried like. He wouldn't care a bit if it wasn't that she seems taken with 'im. He says he saw them whisperin' at dinner, and young Gallup he give something to Miss Mary under the table. Fusby *saw* them."

"I don't believe it," Willets said stoutly. "It's all some foolishness Fusby's gone and made up. I don't hold with such cackle, and I'm surprised at you, my dear, allowing him to say such things."

"How could I stop him? He was worried, I tell you. You talk to him about it yourself and see what he says."

"I'm not going to talk about Miss Mary to anyone, let alone Fusby. There's nothing but mischief happens when people begins talking about a young lady. I've seen it over and over again. If, which I can't believe, young Gallup's got the cheek to be after our Miss Mary, he'll be choked off, and pretty

quick too."

"Who's going to do the chokin'? He's in parlyment, he's got plenty money, there's nothing against him as I know of, and they've asked him to their house. Who's going to do the chokin?"

Mrs Willets paused, breathless and triumphant. She seemed to take a malicious delight in considering the possibility of such a courtship.

Willets looked at her steadily. "We shan't have far to seek," he said, "and that old fool Fusby's got a maggot in his head. Why, the fellow's gone to London; Parliament meets to-morrow, I saw it in the paper."

Mrs Willets nodded, as who should say "I could an' I would"—aloud she remarked, "And Miss Mary's going to London to her granpa for a long visit, beautiful new clothes she's gettin', and going to see the King and Queen and all, so they're certain to meet. It's quite like a story book."

Willets frowned. He had once spent two days in London. He realised what a big place it was, but he also remembered that during those two days he had met seven people he knew in other parts of the country.

CHAPTER XXIV

CROSS CURRENTS

Reggie kept his word as to not interfering with Mary till such time as she should have seen a little more of the world. How much of the world in general, and the male portion of it in particular, he was willing she should see, he could not make up his mind. Sometimes he thought a very little would sufficiently salve his conscience and make a definite course of action possible. Reggie was not one of those who feared his fate. He was always eager to put it to the touch. Inaction was abhorrent to him. To desire a thing and to do nothing to obtain it seemed to him sheer foolishness. Whether any amount of effort would get for him what he desired just now was on the knees of the gods. But it was the waiting that tried him far more than the uncertainty. He was not conceited. He was confident, ready to take risks and to accept responsibility, but that is quite another thing.

Just before her birthday he sent her a little necklet under cover to Mrs Ffolliot, asking that it might be put with Mary's other presents on her plate that morning. And she had written to thank him for it, but he did not answer the letter. He had always been by way of writing to her from time to time; letters, generally embellished with comic sketches and full of chaff and nonsense, which were shared by the family. Lately he had not felt in the mood to write such letters. He wanted to see her with an unceasing ache of longing intense and persistent; and if he wrote he wanted to write, not a love letter—Reggie did not fancy he'd be much of a hand at love letters—but something intimate and revealing that would certainly be unsuitable for "family reading."

Then he got two letters from Redmarley that seemed to him to need an answer.

These were the letters:—

REDMARLEY, *Tuesday*.

DEAR REGGIE,—We were all very excited to see it in the *Gazette* this morning, though of course we knew it was coming. The children took the *Times* down to Willets at tea-time, and Fusby was at special pains to ask mother after lunch if there was any chance of Captain Peel coming down soon. Is there? You won't find me here unless it's very soon, for I'm actually to be allowed to stay with grannie for quite a long time. After swearing that I should only go up for the drawing-room, and that it was nonsense to talk of my going out at all till mother could take me, the *pater* has suddenly veered round, and I am to go up to Woolwich on May-Day, and what's more, he is taking me up himself. At first I thought I was to go with Grantly when he went back to the Shop, but that wouldn't do seemingly, Grantly wasn't enough chaperon, so father's coming just for one night.

Last night we had a dinner-party and the Liberal member took me in. He is such an odd little man. Very, very good, I should think; very kind—not hard-hearted and ruthless like some people who write cruel stories about war—he is a nonconformist of sorts and doesn't do any of the usual things, so it's a

little difficult to talk to him, but mother managed it—to make him talk, I mean. I heard him murmuring away like anything while we were playing bridge. She likes him too. He has an odd way of looking at you as if you were a picture and not a person. Don't you think it's fun to be going to town on May-Day and to have proper dinner every night whether there are people or not. I hope there will be lots of people. Do come to Woolwich while I'm there, and mind you treat me with great respect.

When is the new story coming out? I wish they'd hurry up. It will be so exciting to hear people talk about it and to think I know who wrote it and they don't. Clara Bax came with the Champions last night—do you remember her? She is *very* pretty and so clever, understands all about politics and things like that. Fancy, she sells newspapers in the street for the Cause. She asked me if I'd help her, and I thought it would be great fun, but father—you know how he pounces—heard from the other end of the table, and though just a minute before he'd been ever so sympathetic with Miss Bax, at once interfered, and said I was much too ignorant to take any active part as yet, and Grantly frowned at me across the table. Would you buy a newspaper from me, I wonder?

When father pounces I always feel that I could almost marry an impossible person just to annoy him; but the worst of it is that I should have the impossible person always, and I might get rather tired of it. Why should Miss Bax steal a horse and father beam and pay her compliments, and yet if I so much as look over the fence he shoos me away with a pitch-fork.

I wonder if you will get out to India, as you wish? In a way I hope you won't, because you'd go out in the autumn, wouldn't you? and if you are stationed anywhere at home you could come sometimes for a few days' hunting; but of course if you want it very much I want you to have it.

This is a very long letter. Good-bye, Reggie, and heaps of grats. You a captain and me grown up: we are coming on.—Yours: affectionately,

MARY B. FFOLIOT.

P.S.—Some fiend in human shape sent Ger a little red book, trumpet, and bugle notes for the army, and he makes Miss Glover play them and then practises. There's one thing, it's a little change from the eternal "cook-house door," but it's very dreadful all the same.

BRIDGE HOUSE, REDMARLEY, *27th. April.*

DEAR SIR,—Excuse the liberty I take in writing to offer you my congratulations on the announcement in the paper yesterday. Master Ger and Miss Kitten came to tea with my wife, and the mistress, with her usual kindness, sent me the paper. When I first knew you, sir, you were very much the size Master Ger is now, and yet it seems but yesterday when I was teaching you to throw a fly just beyond the bridge here. I always look on you as one of our young gentlemen, for you've come amongst us so many years now and always been so free and pleasant, and I hope I may have the pleasure of going out with you often in the future, though Master Ger did say he'd heard that you were thinking of India. If that is so, I hope you'll make a point of coming down for a few days early in June, when the fly will be at its best. If this mild weather continues we ought to get some very sizeable fish.

It's funny to me to think how I've been here twenty-three years come Michaelmas, and when the present Squire came I never thought I should stop, he not being fond of sport. If I may say so, you, sir, had a good deal to do with me stopping on that first summer, me being very fond of children, and then when they came at the Manor House and the mistress always sent them down to be shown to us as soon as ever they went out, I began to feel I'd taken root here, and so I suppose I have.

Master Ger is becoming a first-rate performer on the bugle, he played for us yesterday, quite wonderful it was. My wife begs to join with me in respectful congratulations.—Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM WILLETS.

He wrote to Willets at once, promising to come down at the end of May for a week-end, even if he couldn't get more. He was frightfully busy, for he was one of the instructors at Chatham, and had many other irons in the fire as well. He waited till he knew Mary was in Woolwich and then he wrote to her:—

It was nice of you to send me such pretty grats, and I am truly appreciative. I also had the jolliest letter from old Willets. He promises good sport very shortly, and I shall make a point of turning up at Redmarley when the fly is on the water, if only for a couple of nights, for when Willets foretells "sizeable fish" you know you're in for a first-class thing. It will be queer to be at the Manor House and you away. Only once has that happened to me, the year you were at school, and now "all that's shuv

be'ind you" and you're out and dancing about. I shall certainly have urgent private affairs in Woolwich during the next month. Talk of respect! When was I ever anything but grovelling? And once I have gazed upon your portrait in train and feathers I shall be reduced to such a state of timidity you won't know me.

The other day I met your friend Clara Bax selling *Votes for Women* at the Panton Street corner of Leicester Square, and she hadn't at all a Hurrah face on. I greeted her and bought one of the beastly little papers, and went on my way. But something caused me to look back, and I beheld Miss Bax seemingly in difficulties with two young feller-me-lads, who evidently had no intention of going on. There was no policeman handy—besides, there's a coolness at present between members of the force and the fair militants—so I went back and dealt faithfully with Miss Bax's admirers, and they departed, I regret to say, blaspheming.

Miss Bax seemed rather shaken, the type was evidently new to her, and I suggested that she should quit her pitch for the moment and come and have lunch with me; so we went together to the *Petit Riche*, where we consumed an excellent omelette; and the bundle of papers, which I, Mary, had nobly carried through the streets of London, sat on a chair between us and did chaperon.

Personally, I see no reason why women should not have votes if they want 'em, but I see every reason why no woman, and above all no young woman, should sell papers anywhere, more especially in Leicester Square. I'd like to give the Panks, and the Peths, and the Hicemen a bit of my mind on the subject. The mere thought of you ever indulging in such unseemly vagaries fills me with horror unspeakable. Talk of the Squire! Pouncing and pitchforks wouldn't be in it with me, I can tell you, and yet Miss Bax isn't an orphan.

That very day I met a lugubrious procession of females, encased in large sandwich-boards proclaiming a meeting somewhere. They were dismally dodging the traffic, and looked about as dejected as they could look—ladies every one of them. I begin to think old England's no place for women when they're reduced to that sort of thing—what do you say to India for a change?

The story will be out next month, but you won't like it—too technical.

I hope young Grantly's doing some work. This term counts a lot, and he mustn't pass out low for the honour of the family.

My salaams to the General and Mrs Grantly, and to you—my remembrances. Do you, by the way, remember "our last ride together" in January? When shall we have another? Would the General let us ride in the park one day if I could get off?—Yours,

REGGIE.

P.S.—Why the kind and blameless member for Marlehouse? Has the Squire changed his politics? It's all very well for you to say the young man looked at you as if you were a picture. We've another name for that sort of sheep's eyes where I come from. He'd better not let me catch him at it.

Eloquent came to the conclusion that it is very difficult to pay court to a girl who belongs to what his father was wont to call "the classes." He wondered how they managed it. Such girls, it seemed to him, were never left alone for a minute. One's only chance was to see them at parties in a crowd, and if you did dine at their houses, there was always bridge directly after dinner, when conversation was restricted to "I double hearts," or "with you," or "No." He studied the rules of bridge industriously, for he found on inquiry that even Cabinet Ministers did not disdain it as a recreation. Therefore Dalton shared with blue-books the little table by his bed.

It's a far cry from Westminster to Woolwich, and in spite of indefatigable spade-work on his part, it was well on in the third week in May before he so much as caught a glimpse of Mary Ffolliot.

Then one morning he saw her in Bond Street with her grandmother. She was on the opposite side of the street rather ahead of him, but he knew that easy strolling walk, the flat back, and proud carriage of the head: that head with its burnished hair coiled smoothly under a bewitching hat. They stopped to look in at Asprey's window, and he dashed across the road in the full stream of traffic. Two indignant taxi-drivers swore, and he reached the curb breathless, but uninjured, just as they went into the shop.

He stood staring at the window, keeping at the same time a sharp look-out on the door.

What an age they were!

He had just decided that the only thing to do was to go in and buy something, when they came out.

Mary saw him at once, and his round face looked so wistful that she greeted him with quite unnecessary warmth. She recalled him to Mrs Grantly, who, remembering vaguely that he was a young man who had "risen from the ranks," was also more cordial than the occasion demanded.

He walked up Bond Street with them, piloted them across Piccadilly, and turned with them down Haymarket, so plainly delighted to see them, so nervous, so pathetically anxious to please, that Mrs Grantly's hospitable instincts, fatally easy to rouse where pity played a part, overcame her discretion. Her husband and her daughter used to declare that she had a perfect genius for encumbering herself with impossible people—and repenting afterwards. With dismay she realised that Eloquent had, apparently, attached himself to them. Short of cruelly wounding his feelings, she saw herself walking about London all day, accompanied by this painfully polite young man. It seemed impossible to call a taxi, and leave him desolate there on the pavement unless . . . Mrs Grantly's heart was hopelessly soft where animals were concerned, and just then Eloquent reminded her of nothing so much as an affectionate dog, allowed to frisk gaily to the front door, and cruelly shut in on the wrong side, as she said—

"We've got to meet my husband at the Stores, Mr Gallup, perhaps you'll kindly get us a taxi, as I'm rather tired."

His woebegone face was too much for her, and she added, "We're always at home on Sunday afternoons."

Mary rather wondered at her grannie.

The taxi drove away and Eloquent walked down Haymarket as though he were treading on air. To-day was Friday. Sunday, oh blessed day! was the day after to-morrow.

There were clovers nodding in her hat, a wide-brimmed fine straw hat that threw soft shadows over her blue eyes and turned them dark as the clear water underneath Redmarley Bridge. And he would see her again on Sunday.

That lady, that handsome portly lady, he had been afraid of her at first, she looked so large and imposing, but how kind she was! How wonderfully kind and hearty she had been. It was she who had invited him. "We are always at home on Sundays," she said. Surely that meant he might go more than once?

That night he made his maiden speech in the House.

* * * * *

Reggie went down to Redmarley at the beginning of June from Saturday afternoon till Sunday evening. The Squire had a bad cold and was confined to the house. His nerves vibrated, so did the tempers of other people, but Reggie did not care. He joined Willets at the river and fished till dinner-time. Directly after dinner he went out again and they had splendid sport till nearly ten. Willets walked with him back to the house, and Reggie had a curious feeling that Willets wanted to tell him something and couldn't come to the point. So strong was this feeling that as they parted he said, "I shan't go to bed yet, Willets. It's such a perfect night—may stroll down to the bridge, and if you're still up we might have a cigar together."

He went into the house, chatted a while to Mrs Ffoliot and the Squire, and when they went to bed let himself out very quietly and strolled down the drive and out of the great gates to the bridge. The perfect peace of the warm June night, the yellow moonlight on the quiet water, the wide-spanned bridge, the long straggling street of irregular gabled houses so kindly and so sheltering with their overhanging eaves, the dear familiar charm of it all seemed to grip Reggie by the throat and caused an unwonted smarting in his eyes.

The village was absolutely deserted save for one motionless figure sitting on the wall at the far end of the bridge.

"Hullo, Willets," Reggie called, "not in bed yet?"

"I'm always a bit wakeful when the fly's up, sir; the river seems to draw me, and I can't leave it."

"Have a cigar," said Reggie, and sat down beside him.

They smoked in silence for a few minutes till Willets said—

"Seen anything of Miss Mary up there, sir?"

"No, Willets, I haven't been able to get away for a minute till now, but I may manage to run down to Woolwich next week just to buck to the General about my catch. You'll have him down then post haste—I bet——"

"I suppose, sir," said Willets, with studied carelessness, "you never happened to come across the young man that's member for these parts?"

"What, young Gallup? I believe I saw him once. He's making quite a name for himself I hear, his maiden speech was in all the papers. By the way though, I *did* hear of him the other day in a letter I had from Miss Mary. They'd all been to dine at the House of Commons with him, and had no end of a time."

"Well I *am* damned!" said Willets.

He said it seriously, almost devoutly, and Reggie turned right round to stare at him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure, but I really was fairly flabbergasted."

He stood up sturdy and respectful in a patch of moonlight, and his keen brown eyes raked Reggie's as though they would read his very soul.

It wasn't an easy soul to read, and Reggie knew that Willets had something on his mind, so he waited.

"I beg your pardon, sir," Willets said again. He had never got over the feeling that Reggie was one of the young gentlemen, and that it behoved him to be careful of his language in front of him.

Reggie Peel laughed. "Look here, Willets," he said, "what's your objection? Why shouldn't they go to the House of Commons to dine with Gallup if it amuses them?"

"I don't know, sir, I'm sure, but I was took aback. An' in a small place like this it's certain to make talk. That old Miss Gallup, now, she'll be boasting everywhere that our Miss Mary went to dine with her nephew, just as she did when he went to a dinner party up at the house, and for us as *belongs* to the house—well, we don't relish it. I hope, sir," Willets went on in quite a different tone, "that you'll make it convenient to go up and see after Miss Mary?"

The hawk's eyes were fixed unwinkingly on Reggie's face, so lean and sallow and set; the moonlight accentuated the rather hollow cheeks. and cast black shadows round his eyes, which looked green and sinister.

Suddenly he smiled, and when Reggie smiled, his whole face altered.

"Out with it, Willets," he said, "what maggot have you got in your head now? You're worried about something; you may as well tell me. I'm safe as a church."

"I'd like to know, sir," Willets remarked in a detached impersonal tone, "what's your opinion of mixed marriages?"

"*What* sort of marriages?"

"Well marriages where one of the parties has had a different bringing up to the other. Now suppose, sir—do you know Miss Shipway—over to Marlehouse; her father's got that big shop top of the market-place full of bonnets and mantles and such—good-looking girl she is——"

"I'm afraid I don't know the lady, Willets; why?"

"Well, sir, it's this way. She'll have a tidy bit of money when old Shipway dies; her mother was cook at the Fleece, but they've got on. Well now, sir, suppose you was to go after Miss Shipway——"

Reggie's eyes twinkled. "It might be a most sensible proceeding on my part—a poor devil like me—if as you say she's a nice girl and will have a lot of money. Will you give me an introduction?"

"I'm not jokin', sir, nor taking the liberty to propose anything of the sort; it's only——"

"A hypothetical case?"

"That's it, sir. I mean suppose a gentleman like yourself was to marry a girl like her, do you think you'd be happy?"

"Surely it would all depend on whether they liked each other—and liked the same things——"

"Ah, sir, that's it. *Would* you like the same things, do you suppose?"

"Well, Willets, I don't see that you've any cause to worry. Unfortunately I don't know the young lady, so I can't see how I'm to get any forrader."

"Suppose, sir, a young *lady*, like what the Mistress was, should marry a man in quite a different rank from herself, do you think *they'd* be happy?"

"It depends," said Reggie, "what sort of a chap he was. People rise, you know."

"Well, suppose he did, would they happy?"

"I couldn't say, Willets, I'm sure. Is it any particular young lady you're worried about?"

Willets sat down on the wall. "In my time," he said slowly, "I've seen a good bit; and all I have seen, seems to me to show that it's safest for ladies and gentlemen to stick to their own class. But I thought I'd like to have your opinion, sir."

For five minutes they sat in silence, then Willets remarked, "And you think you'll be going up to town next week, sir?"

"I think so. I shall try anyway."

"Would you be so good, sir, as to say to General Grantly that he'd better not put off much longer if he wants the best of the fishing."

"I'll be sure and tell him, Willets. I suppose we must go to bed. Many thanks for the splendid sport. I have to get back to Chatham to-morrow, worse luck, and with the Sunday trains it takes a deuce of a time."

"Good-night, sir, I'm glad you managed to come, even though it was for but one night."

Reggie let himself in very quietly and went up to his room.

He lit his pipe and went to the window to smoke it.

The moonlight was so brilliant that he drew a letter from his pocket and read it easily:

"Dear Reggie," it ran, "yours was a lovely long letter. I'm glad you rescued poor Clara, and you needn't be afraid of me selling papers or carrying sandwich boards. I'm much too busy having a lovely time. Oh *never* have I had such a time, but I grieve to tell you that both Ganpy and I are very shocked at the behaviour of Grannie. She is having an outrageous flirtation with young Mr Gallup, our member. It's all very well for her to say she is forming him. She is undermining all his most cherished principles, and if his nonconformist constituents hear of his goings on I don't believe they'll ever have him again.

"She has taught him auction: he played with her last *Sunday* afternoon because it was too wet to be out in the garden. She has sent him to lots of plays: he came with us one night to the Chocolate Soldier; she talks politics to him by the hour and demolishes his pet theories. She tells him that he has, up to now, thought so many things wrong that he can't possibly have any sense of proportion, or properly discriminate what really matters and what doesn't; and she is so brisk and masterful and delightfully amusing—you know Grannie's way—that the poor young man doesn't know whether he's on his head or his heels, and simply follows blindly wherever that reckless woman leads. He gave a dinner for us in the House the other night and got Ganpy a seat in the Stranger's Gallery. He couldn't get us into the Ladies' Gallery because of the silly rule about only wives and sisters or near relations made since the suffragette fusses, but he showed us all about and it was simply fascinating. Of course Grannie met lots of members she knew, and we enjoyed ourselves awfully. We are going to tea on the Terrace next week. The dance at the Shop was ripping, and you needn't think I only danced with cadets. I danced with majors and colonels, and a beautiful captain in the Argyle and Sutherland, but I've come to the conclusion that the jolliest thing is to be Ganpy's wife on these occasions. You never saw such court as gets paid to Grannie. She never has a dull minute.

"Grantly went home on Sat. just for the night, and he says it's all too beautiful for words. Sometimes I feel wicked to be missing it, and I get homesick for mother and the children; but I do enjoy it all. When are you coming up to play about too? You stern, industrious young man."

Reggie folded the letter and put it back in his pocket.

"So that's what old Willets was driving at," he thought. He leaned out again to shake the ash out of his pipe. In the far east there was a pearly streak. "Daylight," he muttered, "—and by Jove I see it."

CHAPTER XXV

"MEN'S MEAL, FIRST CALL"

Mrs Grantly was interested in Eloquent. He was quite unlike any of the innumerable young men she had had to do with before. His simplicity and directness appealed to her; she admired his high seriousness even while she seemed to deride it, and though violently opposed to his party, she shared that party's belief in his political future.

The General shook his head; not over what he and Mary called "Grannie's infatuation for Mr Gallup," but over the possible results of this friendliness and intimacy to Mr Gallup. For the General saw precisely the same possibilities that Mr Ffolliot had seen, and didn't like what he saw one whit better than did the Squire.

Eloquent never saw Mary alone. Generally he was wholly taken possession of by Mrs Grantly, or such friends of hers as would be bothered with him. Yet his golden dream was with him continually, and in the dear oasis of his fancy he walked in an enchanted garden with Mary. In his waking moments, his sane practical moments, he would realise that it was sheer absurdity to imagine that she ever could care for him. He did not expect her to care, but—and here he drifted across the desert of plain possibilities into the merciful mirage of things hoped for—if she would condescend to let him serve her, he might take heart of grace.

He watched her carefully.

It did not seem to him that there was anybody else. There were crowds: crowds of dreadful, well-dressed, good-looking, cheerful men, who chaffed and laughed and quaffed any drinks that happened to be going; but he did not fear the enemy in battalions, and so far it appeared that her besiegers always attacked in companies.

Sometimes he was sure that she knew how he felt, and was trying in gentle, delicately pitiful ways to show him that it was of no use. Then again he would dismiss this thought as absurd and conceited. How should Mary know? How could she try to show him she didn't care when he had never shown her that he did? How could he show her?

It was this desire to show her, this hope of familiarising her with the idea that caused Eloquent to resort to every possible place where he might see her. He went down to Woolwich as often as decency would permit, which wasn't often. He inundated Mrs Grantly with invitations to the House, and he haunted the theatres, generally in vain, in the hope of seeing her at the play. He would often reflect bitterly how easy things were for the young shopman in these matters. He met his girl and took her for a walk, and no one thought any the worse of either of them. There was none of this nerve-racking, heartrending uncertainty, this difficulty of access, this sense of futility, in their relations.

Of the many mysterious attributes of the "classes," there was none to be so heartily deplored as their entire success in secluding their young women, while apparently they gave them every possible opportunity for amusement of all kinds.

* * * * *

Reggie went down to Woolwich once while Mary was with her grandparents, but it was not, from her point of view, a very satisfactory visit. Reggie was grumpy, and looked very tired and overworked. Moreover, Mary, though she could not have confessed it for the world, was just a trifle hurt that he never reminded her of that last ride together.

Just as he was leaving on the Sunday night, and they were all in the garden, he walked with her a little way down a winding path that hid them from the others, saying abruptly—

"Shall I let you know directly if they are going to send me to the Shiny?"

"Of course I should like to know, but . . . India is a long way off, Reggie, why do you want to go so far?"

"Because, my dear, it means work and promotion, and one's chance, and lots of things; one being quite decent pay. Besides, I like India, I shall be glad to go back, if . . ."

They had followed the path, and it led them out to the lawn again, where the others were standing. He didn't finish his sentence—

"Say you want me to get out there, Mary."

"Of course I want you to go if you really wish it."

"I'll let you know then. I shall know myself early in July, I fancy . . . perhaps I'll run down to Redmarley; you'll be back then?"

They joined the others; Reggie made his farewells and left.

Mary went and took her grandfather's arm, and made him walk round the garden with her. She developed an intelligent interest in geography, and made searching inquiries as to the healthiness of India generally.

It was comforting to walk arm and arm with grandfather. She didn't know why, but she felt a little frightened, a little homesick. How clearly one can see some people's faces when they are not there. What unusual eyes Reggie had, so green in some lights. He was looking dreadfully thin, poor boy, downright ill he looked, and yet everyone said he was very strong. No one else shook hands quite like Reggie: he had nice hands, strong and gentle; thin, but not hard and nubbly. Why is a summer night often so sad? Night-scented stock has a sad smell, though it is so sweet. He shouldn't work so hard. He was overdoing it. Surely if he went to India they'd give him some leave . . . it might be years before he came back. Three years he was away once.

Mary clasped both her hands over her grandfather's arm. "I do love you so, Ganpy," she said; "there's nobody like you in the world, no one at all."

The General smiled in the twilight, and pressed the arm in his against his side. He said nothing at all, yet Mary felt vaguely comforted.

In the beginning of July she went back to Redmarley, and everyone was very glad to see her again. One Saturday morning when the Squire and Mrs Ffolliot had started in the victoria to lunch with neighbours on the other side of Marlehouse, Mary called Parker and went to walk in the woods. It was a grey morning, warm and sunless and still. She wandered about quite aimlessly. She was restless and unsettled, and had a good deal to think over.

Just before she left Woolwich, Eloquent Gallup had called one afternoon when both the General and Mrs Grantly were out; but he asked boldly for Mary. She was at home, and he was shown into the cool, shady garden, where she was lying in a hammock reading a novel.

This was Eloquent's chance and he took it. He did not stay long. He left before tea, but during the time he did stay he contrived to let Mary see . . . what it must be confessed she had already suspected. He said nothing definite. He was immensely distant in his reverence, but a much humbler girl than Mary could hardly have mistaken his meaning. He was so pathetically diffident it was impossible to snub him, and she had no desire to snub him. Always she was immensely sorry for him—why, she did not know.

He was plain. He was insignificant. He was not a gentleman by birth, but he was—and Mary's standard was fairly high—so far as she could see, a thorough gentleman in feeling and in action. Moreover, he had ability, and an immense capacity for hard work, both of them qualities that appealed to Mary.

So she allowed herself to dally vaguely with the idea. It was very pleasant to be set in a shrine; to be worshipped; to be served in a prayerful attitude of adoration. To be able by a kind word, a kind glance, to raise a fellow creature to a dizzy height of happiness. How could anyone be unkind to that excellent little man? Suppose . . . this was a daring supposition, and Mary grew hot all over as she entertained it—suppose, in the dim and distant future, when Reggie . . . Reggie had never written after he went back to Chatham, nothing had happened then about India; but suppose he did go for years and years, and forgot her . . . perhaps he had never wanted to remember her in that particular way, and she had magnified quite little things that meant nothing at all. . . . Suppose she ultimately, years hence, could bring herself to marry Mr Gallup. How angry her father would be! But that was a prospective contingency that only amused Mary. He would be angry whoever she married. He would be exceedingly angry if she got engaged to . . . that young man at Chatham who was so taciturn and neglectful . . . who didn't seem to want to get engaged to anyone. Clara Bax said it would be dreadfully dull to marry anyone you'd known all your life. Would it? Clara Bax said it would be tiresome in the extreme to marry anybody. But about that Mary was not sure.

Westminster is certainly the nicest part of London; there are bits of it that remind one of Redmarley. It would be pleasant to be rich and important, and feel that you are helping to pull the wires that control destinies; helping to make history. Ah, that was what Reggie called it. He would do it. She was

sure of that; but Reggie's wife would have no hand in it.

With clear intuition she saw that of these two men, only one could be influenced by his wife in anything that concerned his work. Reggie's wife would be outside all that. Eloquent's wife, *if she were the right woman*, would share everything: and at that moment Parker began to bark, and Mary found that she had walked into a part of the wood called the Forty Firs, and that Eloquent Gallup was standing right on the very same spot, where seven months ago she had assisted him to rise from a puddle.

Parker didn't like Eloquent upright a bit better than he had liked Eloquent prone, and he made a great yapping and growling and bouncing and skirmishing around about the two of them, until he finally subsided into suspicious sniffing at Eloquent's ankles.

"Has Parliament risen then?" Mary asked, when she had soothed Parker to quiescence.

"No, Miss Ffolliot, I came down"—Eloquent's eyes were fixed hungrily on her face, and she noticed that his was nothing like so round as it used to be, and that he was very pale—"because I couldn't keep away."

Mary said nothing. There seemed nothing to say.

"Miss Ffolliot," Eloquent said again, "I think you must know why I have come down, what I feel about you, what I have felt about you since the first minute I saw you in this very place, when I was so ridiculous and you so beautiful and kind. I have travelled a good way since then, but I know that in caring for you as I do I am still ridiculous, and it is only because you are so beautiful and kind, although you are so far above me, that I dare to tell you what I feel . . . but I would like your leave to think about you. Somehow, without it, it seems an impertinence, and, God knows, no man ever felt more worship for a woman than I feel for you. Do you give me that leave?"

Mary was very much touched, very much shaken. Eloquent's power lay in his immense earnestness. She no longer saw him small and insignificant and common. She saw the soul of him, and recognised that it was a great soul. For one brief moment she wondered if she could . . .

Through the woods rang the notes of a bugle. Ger was playing "Come to the cook-house door." Mary's heart seemed to leap up and turn right over.

"Come to the cook-house door" is not by any means one of the most beautiful of the bugle sounds of the British Army. It is rather jerky at the best of times, and as performed by Ger it was wheezy as well. But for Mary just then it was a clear call to consciousness.

Pity and sympathy and admiration are not love: and Mary knew it, and in that moment she became a woman.

Eloquent had taken her hand, taken it with a respect and gentleness that affected her unspeakably. She gave a little sob. She did not try to draw it away. "Oh dear," she sighed, "I am so sorry, for it's all no use," and the tears ran down her cheeks.

Eloquent lifted her hand and kissed it.

"Don't cry, my dear," he said, "don't cry. I'm glad I've known you and loved you. . . ."

Again through the woods there rang that "first call" so dear to the heart of Ger.

"Good-bye, Mr Gallup, I mustn't stay . . . try to forgive me, and . . ."

"Forgive," Eloquent repeated scornfully, "what have I to forgive? *That* is for you."

Mary turned and walked swiftly away, and Eloquent watched her till she was out of sight.

Parker kept close at her side, but every now and then he jumped up and tried to lick her face. Parker knew all was not right with Mary and he was uneasy.

Mary knew full well that it was to no comfortable cook-house door that Ger had summoned her. That wheezy bugle called her to the outposts of the world; to a life of incessant acerbating change, where there was no certainty, no stability, no sweet home peace, or that proud fixity of tenure that is the heritage of those who own the land on which they live. She had no illusions. Not in vain had she lived with her grandmother at Woolwich and heard the lamentations of the officers' wives when plans were changed at the last moment, and the fair prospect of a few years at home was blotted out by the inexorable orders for foreign service. And the Sappers were worst of all, for except at a very few stations they hadn't even a mess, and there was not the friendly fellowship of "the Regiment" to count

upon.

The yard was quite deserted, for the men had gone to dinner. She paused at the gate and looked long and lovingly at the clustering chimneys, and lichened, grey-green roofs she loved: and as she looked a new sound broke the stillness. Three loud reports and then the touf-touf, spatter-dash-spatter-dash of a motor bicycle.

Mary opened the gate, went through, shut it behind her and leant against it, for her knees were as water.

The noise came on, it passed the house, turned into the back drive, came round, and someone in overalls, covered with dust from head to foot, swept into the deserted yard; saw Mary, pulled up short, and pushed the bike against a wall.

This dusty person tore off his goggles. It was Captain Reginald Peel, R.E., and he came across the yard towards her.

"Hullo, Mary," he said, "I told you I'd let you know whenever I heard. The A.A.G.'s a brick, I'm going to India. Marching orders came last night."

Mary's lips trembled and her voice died in her throat. Reggie took out a large silk handkerchief and mopped his dusty face.

He came on towards her and took both her hands.

"Mary," he said, "can you leave all this? Can you face it? Will you come with me and help me to build bridges and make roads and dig drains. . . . Will you come so that we can have the rest of our lives . . . together?"

They looked straight into one another's eyes.

"I will," said Mary, and she said it as solemnly as if she were repeating a response in the Marriage Service.

Reggie loosed one of her hands. Again he polished his face.

"I should like awfully to kiss you," he said, "but I'm so fearfully dusty—do you mind?"

"I think," said Mary, with a queer choky laugh, "that I'd rather like it."

And just at that moment Willets appeared at a gate leading from the garden. He didn't see them, and opened the gate, which squeaked abominably, came through and let it shut with a clang, but they, apparently, heard nothing.

Willets stood transfixed, for he saw the motor-bike and the dusty young man in overalls, and clasped close in the arms of the said dusty young man was Miss Mary!

Willets gave one quick glance, smote his hands softly together, and turned right round with his back to them. He leaned on the gate and gazed steadfastly into the distant garden. It was a squeaky gate, that gate. If he opened it, it might disturb them, and bless you, they were but young, and one is only young once.

So kindly Willets stared, with eyes that were not quite so keen as usual, at the bit of garden he could see; and there, delphiniums were blooming. The sun came out just at that moment, and they looked particularly blue and tall and splendid.

It seemed to Willets that he admired those delphiniums for hours and hours, but it was really only a few minutes till he heard a rather husky voice behind him saying, "It's all right, Willets, you may turn round and congratulate us."

And there they were both standing "as bold as brass" he said afterwards, and the delphiniums he had just been studying so closely were not as blue as Mary's eyes.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FFOLLLOTS OF REDMARLEY ***

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