Title: The Day of Judgment

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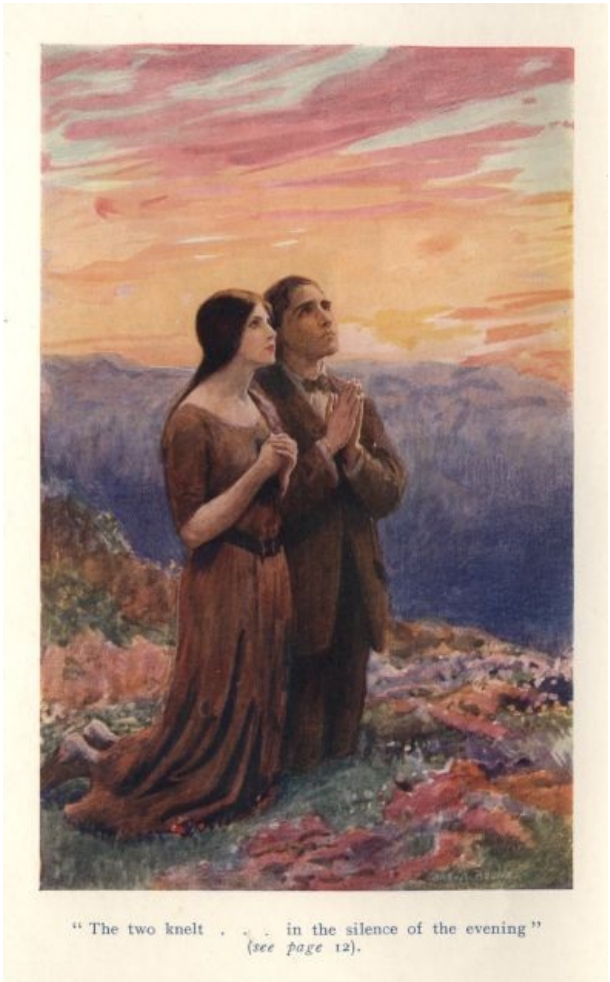
Release date: May 13, 2008 [eBook #25463]
Most recently updated: January 2, 2009

Language: English

E-text prepared by Al Haines



" The two knelt . . . in the silence of the evening " (*see page* 12).

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The Day of Judgment

By

JOSEPH HOCKING

With Frontispiece by
CHARLES B. BUCHEL

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1915

DEDICATION

To T. HARTLEY ROBERTS, Esq., J.P.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am dedicating this book to you, partly because when you read it in MS. you told me you liked it better than any story I have ever written; but more because, although words are at best utterly inadequate, I want to tell you that one of the things I value most in life is your friendship.

JOSEPH HOCKING.

PRIOR'S CORNER,
TOTTERIDGE.

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THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

PROLOGUE

Three young men sat in an old inn not far from the borderline which divides England from Scotland. They were out on a holiday, and for more than two weeks had been tramping northward. Beginning at the Windermere Lakes, they had been roaming amidst the wild mountainous scenery which is the pride and joy of all lovers of beauty who dwell in that district. For two of them the holiday had practically come to an end, and now, smoking their pipes after dinner in the old inn, they were reviewing their experiences.

"I envy you, Douglas," said one whose holiday was practically finished. "We have to get back to work but you have yet nearly three weeks before getting into harness again. It must be glorious, too, this going into Scotland."

"Yes," said the other, "and somehow Scotland is different from England. I believe, if I knew nothing about the geography of the district, that directly I put my foot on Scottish soil I should know it. Everything is different there: the outlook on life, the customs, the laws and the prevailing sentiments of the people. Why, we cannot be far from Gretna Green now—think of the scenes which took place around here a few years ago!"

"Have the laws changed much in relation to marriage?" asked the first speaker. "You are studying for the Bar, Douglas, you ought to know."

The young man who had not yet spoken was different from the others. He was cast in a more intellectual mould, and, although bronzed by the sun and wind of the Cumberland Hills, his demeanour suggested the student.

"I really don't know much about Scottish laws," he replied, "they are so different from those of England. It is wonderful how people living so close together could have framed laws so entirely dissimilar. Of course, marriage laws have been a curious business both in England and Scotland. Before Lord Hardwicke's Act the marriage arrangements in England were very peculiar, but with that Act things took a different course. In Scotland, however, I believe they remained pretty nearly the same as before. As a matter of fact, marriage in Scotland is very difficult to define."

"In what way?"

"Well, I believe, even now, a marriage is valid even although there are no witnesses, no minister, no religious ceremony, and no formula whatever."

"But, my dear fellow," said one of the others, "that is surely impossible."

"I think not," replied the young man called Douglas. "I was talking with an old Scotch lawyer only a few months ago, and he was telling me that even yet Scotch marriages are about as loose as they can possibly be. He explained to me that Scotch marriage is a contract constituted by custom alone, and although generally of a well-attested nature, a marriage may be completed by a solemn and deliberate consent of the parties to take each other for husband and wife, and that such a marriage is absolutely binding. No writing or witnesses are necessary. He also explained to me that a marriage could be legally constituted in Scotland by a *promise* to marry followed by the parties living together for a few hours. By the way, I wonder whether in this old inn there is an encyclopaedia of some sort. Yes, here is one; evidently it has not been opened for years. Here we are, 'Marriage,' yes, 'Scotch Marriage':

> "A marriage will also be constituted by declarations made by the man and the woman that they presently do take each other for husband and wife. These declarations may be emitted on any day, at any time, and without the presence of witnesses, and either by writing or orally, or by signs of any nature which is clearly an expression of intention. Such a marriage is as effective to all intents and purposes as a public marriage. The children of it would be legitimate, and the parties to it would have all the rights in the property of each other given by the law of Scotland to husband and wife."

"But if there are no documents, how can anything be proved?"

"I cannot say," replied Douglas, "but there it is. Of course, at Gretna Green, which, as you say, is not far away, the blacksmith used to witness marriages, although his presence was unnecessary. Old stories have it that the contracting parties jumped a broomstick or a pair of tongs, or something of that sort, but whether there were any signatures I really do not know. Anyhow, the law in Scotland, as I have been informed, is that if a man and a girl agree to take each other as husband and wife, a marriage is legally performed, and is as binding as if it took place in Westminster Abbey and was performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury."

There was silence for a few minutes, then one exclaimed, "I wonder we do not hear more of divorces and marriage difficulties in Scottish law courts."

"Oh, these Scotch are canny people and wonderfully logical. They seem to regard present arrangements as inevitable, and act upon them. After all, what is marriage when one comes to think about it? It is really the promise of the man and the woman to take each other as husband and wife. All the rest, Church services and legal documents, are mere attestations to the fact. Marriage, true marriage, is simply a matter for the parties in question who have determined upon union."

"Evidently you are not a High Churchman," remarked one of the others.

From this the conversation drifted on to other matters, and presently dwindled down to mere snatches, freely punctuated by yawns. Then the young men, having finished their pipes, retired to rest.

Two days later, Douglas Graham found himself alone. He had made arrangements to pay a visit to a house near the borders of Scotland. He was of Scotch descent on his father's side, while his mother's family had always lived in the South of England. For that matter the Grahams had lived in the South for three generations, so that, while he was greatly interested in Scotland, he always called himself an Englishman. The characteristics of both countries were clearly expressed in both his mind and character. The Scotch side of him was intellectual, practical, with, perhaps, a suggestion of hardness; but to counteract this, he had inherited the gentleness and the softer elements which appertain to the Southern peoples. He was only just three and twenty; he had taken a good degree at Oxford, and then set himself to qualify for the Bar. His personal appearance likewise indicated a mixture of races—tall and well-knit, he suggested a strong and determined nature; on the other hand, there was something almost effeminate in the regularity of his features, and his lips were somewhat sensuous. A passing stranger would be immediately attracted by him. Blue eyes, brown hair, and well-formed features, together with a sunny and kind-hearted disposition, had made him a popular man. While very ambitious, he also possessed a happy disposition which made him the best of companions. He was now on his way to visit a distant relative on his father's side, and looked forward with exceeding interest to spending the last weeks of his holiday in an old Scottish stone mansion, situated among the wild hills.

As a lover of beauty, he could not help being charmed by the scenery through which he passed: the purple heather, which was now in its glory, made the wild moorlands wondrous for their beauty, while the valleys through which the rushing streams passed simply enchanted him.

Presently he came to a lonely valley in a district which seemed almost entirely uninhabited. Not a soul was in sight, and scarcely a sound disturbed the silence. On each side of him, great heather-covered hills sloped up to the sky, while at his feet a stream coiled its way down the valley. Tramping along the narrow road which skirted the stream, he presently saw some cattle rushing wildly around,

and he judged by the cries he heard that someone was greatly distressed. It was not long before he saw what this meant. A young girl was trying to keep some cattle together, but they, being in a turbulent mood, refused to go the way she wished. Vainly she went hither and thither, seeking to guide them into a path which led over the hills. For two or three minutes Douglas Graham watched her, and then, seeing her dilemma, went up to her.

She was evidently a Scotch peasant girl, as indicated by the clothes she wore and by her hard, toilworn hands. Nevertheless, at first sight of her Douglas was attracted, and for good reason—the face of the girl, once seen, was not soon forgotten. During the time he had been in Scotland it had seemed to him that the Scotch women were hard-featured, uninteresting, and altogether unlovely; but this girl was different. There was something of the savage in her, and yet she possessed a charm which fascinated the young man. Her black hair hung in curling and tangled tresses over her shoulders; her eyes were almost as black as her hair and shone brightly. A kind of gipsy beauty she possessed, and her eyes, her sensitive mouth, her square chin spoke of a nature out of the ordinary.

"If you will tell me what you wish," he said, "I will help you."

She looked at him with a start of surprise, and for a moment he thought she shrank from him. She seemed as shy as a young colt, and was apparently frightened at his sudden appearance. As she looked at him, however, her confidence came back. He was different from the raw Scottish youths to whom she was accustomed. His pleasant smile and laughing eyes reassured her. "I am trying to take the kine home," she said, "but I think the witches have got hold of them. I never saw them like this before." She spoke with a strong Scotch accent, and was evidently what she seemed, either a servant at a farmhouse or, perhaps, the daughter of some small tenant farmer who lived in the district.

"We'll see if we can't destroy the witches' power," laughed Douglas, and set to work to gather the cattle. It took some little time, but the feat was accomplished at last. Then the two walked side by side, driving the beasts before them.

The romance in the young man's nature was aroused. There, amidst the wild moorland scenery and in the light of the setting sun, it was vastly pleasant to be walking beside this young creature, so instinct with life.

"Is your home far away?" he asked.

"It must be more than two miles," she replied.

"And do you know the house called 'Highlands'?"

"It will be where Mr. Graham lives, I expect."

"Yes," he said.

"Then it will be only a mile beyond my father's farm," was her reply.

"Oh, that is capital!" laughed Graham. "I shall get there before dark, and be able to help you with the cattle at the same time."

"But you are not the son at 'Highlands,'" she said, looking at him curiously.

"Oh, no," he replied. "The Grahams are distant relatives of mine, that is all. There is just a little Scotch in me, that is why I love Scotland so. Of course, you love Scotland too?"

A far-away look came into her eyes. "I don't know," she said.

"Not know if you love your own country?" And he laughed as he spoke.

"I am not sure that it is my own country," was her reply. "You see——" And then she stopped. "It will be nothing to you," she added after a minute, and for some time they walked along together in silence.

"It must be just lovely to live amid such surroundings as these; still, I should find it lonely sometimes," he ventured at length.

"You would, if—if—" And then the girl looked at him curiously. "But I expect you'll not be understanding what I mean," she added.

Again they walked on in silence, Douglas longing to ask her what she meant, and yet shrinking from taking what he felt might be a liberty, for there was something about the girl that kept him from speaking freely. Dressed like a peasant as she was, he instinctively felt that here was no ordinary farmer's drudge. She had uttered nothing beyond commonplaces, but the look in her eyes, the tremor of her lips suggested romance and mystery and poetry.

"You see," she said a minute later, as if talking to herself, "I have no mother. I never saw her; at least, I cannot remember ever seeing her, and she was not Scotch."

"No?" said Douglas. "Then we have something in common: my people on my father's side were Scotch, but all my mother's people belong to the South."

"And mine, too," said the girl. "But what can it be to you?" And again she seemed to be thinking of something far away.

"Do you know," said the young man, "you are the first person I have spoken to since morning? I have been on the tramp all the day. I had my lunch by the side of a stream, and I have kept away from every house. I wanted to be alone. I expect that is why I want you to tell me why you don't seem happy."

Again the girl looked at him curiously. "I think I should go mad sometimes," she said, "if I did not think my dead mother was near me. I do not mean when I am out here alone on the moors, but it's home that makes it so hard."

"Tell me," said the young fellow. It did not seem to him as though he were talking to a stranger at all. The girl did not belong to his class, and evidently her associations and education removed her far from him, yet he had an instinctive sympathy with her. After all, I suppose every young fellow is attracted by a young pretty face, wild, longing eyes, and beautiful features suggestive of romance and poetry and unsatisfied yearnings.

"You see," said the girl, "my father was a fisherman. Years ago, when he was a young man, he sailed down the West of England, and his boat harboured at a little Cornish village called St. Ives. There he met my mother, and I have heard him say that she had Spanish blood in her veins. Anyhow, they fell in love with each other and got married.

"I suppose her father and mother were very angry, and so he took her away from St. Ives altogether, and came back here to Scotland. Just at that time his father died, and left our farm to him. So my father gave up fishing, and brought mother here, but I had not been born long before mother died, so you see I never knew her. My father did not remain unmarried long: the second time he married a Scotswoman, and I hate the Scotch."

"Why?" asked Graham.

"Oh, well, my father says that the Cornish people are wild and imaginative, and my stepmother hasn't any imagination. Years ago I used to read Burns's poems and Sir Walter Scott's stories, but mother took the books from me. She says a farmer's daughter has no time for poetry and romance, but I love it all the same. That is why I am only happy when I am out on the moors alone."

A few minutes later a lonely farmhouse appeared to view. It was little more than a cottage, and Graham judged that the farm consisted of only about fifty acres of stony and barren land.

"Good night," she said presently, "and thank you for helping me with the kine."

"Perhaps I shall be seeing you again," said the young man. "I am sure I shall come round this way in the hope that you may be visible." And he laughed almost nervously as he spoke. The girl had appealed to him. She seemed to him like a flower in the wilderness, and aroused all the romance of his nature.

She shook her head. "No," she said, "you will never see me again."

"At least you will tell me your name?" said Graham; "why, do you know, we have been nearly an hour together? I am called Douglas Graham."

"And my name is Jean Lindsay," she said, looking at him shyly; "not that it matters much, for if you are staying with the Grahams you will be a gentleman."

"And do you go to fetch the cattle home every night?" he asked eagerly; but she did not answer him. A hard-featured woman came up to the farmyard gate as he spoke, while Jean silently, and with an almost sullen look on her face, drove the cattle into the yard. He lifted his cap and passed on.

"Who is yon?" asked the woman in a harsh, strident voice.

"I do not know," replied the girl; "he helped me with the cattle, that is all."

Douglas Graham climbed the hill which lay between him and his relative's house with a strange feeling at his heart. Somehow life seemed different, and the picture of this black-eyed girl remained with him. "I should like to see her again," he said, as presently he came up to the gates which led to the house; "yes, and I will, too!"

During the next two days he made no attempt to see Jean Lindsay. He found among his relatives at "Highlands" several young people, who not only gave him a warm welcome, but entirely claimed his companionship, and amidst the entertainments provided he almost forgot the meeting on the moors. The third day, however, found him wandering away by himself towards the lonely farmhouse. Had he tried to analyse his feelings, he would have told himself that Jean Lindsay was only a chance acquaintance, who was vastly interesting, but nothing more. But he could not altogether drive her picture from his mind; the black, speaking eyes, the strange longings which were revealed in the girl's half-uttered sentences, filled his mind with unaccustomed thoughts. That was why he found himself near the farmhouse, wondering whether he should see her again. But he found no one there: the place might have been forsaken. Wandering down the valley, however, he thought he heard someone

sobbing, and quickly discovered Jean Lindsay sitting by a brook, crying as though her heart would break.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

For a moment the girl gave no reply. She seemed to resent his presence, to be angry that he should have seen her in this frame of mind.

"I am sure you must be in trouble," he went on; "tell me about it."

"She struck me," was her almost sullen reply.

"Struck you! Who?"

"My stepmother," she replied, "and I will not stand it, I will run away; besides——" And then she stopped suddenly.

A little later her passion seemed to have subsided, and she was able to speak more freely. For more than an hour they talked, and when they parted she told him that on the following day she had to go to a village some four miles distant.

That evening, at "Highlands," Douglas Graham was not an interesting companion. The young people joked him about his solemn appearance, and wondered why he looked so troubled.

"Anyone would think you were crossed in love, Douglas," said one. "Tell us all about it now; has she run away with her father's coachman, or has she jilted you for a handsomer man?"

But while Douglas replied to their good-tempered raillery in laughing tones, it was easy to see that his mind was far away. For hours he lay in bed that night without being able to sleep. The picture of the dark-eyed sobbing girl remained with him, and all sorts of longings filled his heart. It seemed as though the Scotch side of his nature was altogether repressed. He was no longer cautious and calculating, his mind and heart were full of the half savage beauty of the young girl of the moors.

The next day he left his friends at "Highlands" without any excuse whatever, and again wandered away alone. Near the village Jean Lindsay had mentioned he saw her returning with a basket on her arm, and again he entered into eager conversation with her. He forgot the foolishness of his action, forgot the wrong he was doing to the girl by filling her mind with thoughts about himself—for he could see that she was attracted by him. To her he seemed some knight-errant like those she had read about in the stories which her stepmother had forbidden her to read. His mode of speech, his appearance, his sunny laugh, all made her realise that there was a world hitherto unknown to her, but which she now longed to enter.

This meeting led to others, until Douglas's friends began to wonder why he so often desired to leave them and wander away alone. A few days before the time when his visit to "Highlands" was to come to an end he found Jean strangely perturbed. She was overwhelmed by some great emotion, but she would not speak to him concerning it. At length, however, with much hesitation, she confessed to him that she was troubled greatly. "I have to be married," she said.

"Married, Jean!" he cried; "to whom—why?"

"To Willie Fearn," was her reply. "Father told me so last night."

"But why? Do you love him?" he asked.

"Nay, I hate him," was the reply, "especially since——" And then she ceased speaking, her face becoming crimson. "Father says I shall never get such a good chance again," she went on presently. "He has the best farm hereabouts, and could give me a good home, and my stepmother, she wants to get rid of me—but I hate him, I hate him!"

"Then you will not marry him?" said Douglas.

"What can I do?" replied the girl; "for more than a year they have been trying to persuade me, and father owes him money, too, and Willie says he will forgive him ever paying if I will marry him." And the girl burst out sobbing.

Douglas was young and romantic. The Scotch side of his nature told him that the resolution born in his mind was utterly mad, but this was utterly destroyed by feelings of pity, and what to him was greater than pity—a wild passion for the girl at his side. So, not thinking of what his determination might mean, nor dreaming of what the future had in store for him, he told Jean that she must never think of marrying the farmer.

"But how can I help it?" she asked. "They never let me rest, and, while I hate him, how can I dare disobey my father and my mother? Besides, when the minister came to tea at our house last week, he spoke of it as a thing settled, and said that Willie would soon be made an elder of the kirk. He thought it would be a grand thing for me, I suppose, to be an elder's wife—but how can I—how can I?"

I need not describe at length what followed. The young fellow casting caution to the winds, mapped out his plan, and before parting they arranged to meet again the next day.

On his way back to "Highlands" the conversation which took place between himself and his companions came back to him. He remembered what he had read in the old Encyclopaedia about Scotch marriages, and it possessed him strongly. He believed himself to be in love with this peasant girl. To him she was a creature apart from all the rest of the world—young, romantic, beautiful with a kind of beauty he had never seen in any other. He felt he could not live his life apart from her. He wanted to take her away from this barren farm among the hills and make her life happy. And yet the madness of his thought appealed to him too. How could he make her his wife? How could he introduce her to his friends? Beautiful she might be, but was it not the beauty of a savage? The Poles lay between her and the women into whose society he would be cast in coming days. He was very ambitious for his own future. He dreamed of becoming a popular barrister, of winning fame and renown, of gaining a name throughout the country as a brilliant lawyer and a pleader of eloquence and power. Like every other young law student he had read of famous lawyers who had risen from obscurity to renown, from poverty to wealth. His career at the University had assured him that he had more than average abilities, while his speeches at the Oxford Union had been received with so much applause that he knew he had the gift of public speech in no ordinary degree. What then should hinder him from attaining to high position in the world he had chosen as his sphere? But all this seemed as nothing in comparison with the mad passion which had been aroused in his heart by this beauteous being of the moors. What was law, what was fame, what were riches in comparison with the joy which her presence gave him? Besides, it did not seem to him that the marriage he had in his mind was the same as that in the English churches. It might be legal, but there was something unreal, unstable about it, and who need know? A Scotch marriage! It appealed to him almost as a joke, while at the same time he knew it would satisfy this young girl's conscience. It would make her his wife. And so, although he had many doubts, he made his plans.

All through the night he lay thinking. He wished he had some of his law books with him, so that he could study the matter carefully, for he was strangely ignorant. No minister, no church, no documents, no witnesses—simply taking each other by the hand and declaring that he took her as his wife. It seemed so easy, and surely, surely——

He was not a bad young fellow, this Douglas Graham. Some spoke of him as a kind of dual personality, strong and weak at the same time—but he had never been known to do anything dishonourable, and his career at Oxford had been an unblemished one. To an extent he was cast in a religious mould, and was susceptible to religious influences. He had indeed been a communicant at a Presbyterian church, and thus, while determined to carve out for himself a great career, he always dreamed of acting honourably and conscientiously, and he would do so now, only—— And then he thought out the whole matter again. Yes, it did seem different from a marriage in an English church, but it would satisfy Jean, and it would be a real marriage.

Two days later he left the "Highlands," to walk to Carlisle, he said, and take the train from there. So, packing in his knapsack the absolute necessities of life, he took his departure from his relatives. He did not tell them what he had in his mind—did not give a hint that that afternoon he was to meet Jean Lindsay alone on the moors. He tried to appear calm, but his mind was full of the plans he had made, full of what Jean would say when he met her. Just as he was leaving "Highlands" a servant brought him a letter, but he was too excited to read it; he simply put it in his pocket with the thought that it could wait, and then, bidding his relatives farewell, he started on his walk.

Two hours later Jean and he were walking side by side away from her father's farm. "You are sure it is all right, Douglas?"

"Yes, sure."

"And you love me?"

"I love you more than my own life," he said, and into the girl's eyes came a look of infinite trust and infinite joy. She had no qualms about the Scotch marriage. She had heard of them again and again, and they were mere commonplaces to her. It did seem strange, walking away with him alone, but she had given him her heart's love, and she had a perfection of trust in him.

It was a strange experience, and Douglas Graham felt awed, as presently they took each other by the hand, and he said, "Jean Lindsay, I do here take you as my wife, and, God helping me, I will be a good and faithful husband to you."

The girl's eyes burned brightly with joy as she heard the words.

"Douglas Graham," she said, "I, Jean Lindsay, do take you as my husband, and, God helping me, I will love you and obey you and be faithful to you till death."

The sun was just setting, and the whole of the Western sky was ablaze with glory. The hills, heather-covered, were enveloped in a purple haze. The evening was windless; not a sound was heard; not a bird chirped; and no one was near. He kissed the girl fondly.

"There, Jean," he said, "I kiss you as my wife."

The girl sobbed for joy.

"I never knew what happiness meant before," she said; "but, but——"

"What?" he asked eagerly.

"Must there not be a word of prayer?" she said, and her voice shook with emotion.

The two knelt down by the roadside, and in the silence of the evening they asked fervently for God's blessing on their union.

When night came, they found themselves in the inn across the border where Douglas had parted from his companions, and then he remembered the letter which the servant had given him at "Highlands" just before he parted from the family. He had read only a few lines when he started and changed colour.

"What is it, Douglas?" asked the girl.

"It is all right," he said, but his voice was hoarse and troubled.

The following morning Douglas Graham parted from his newly-made wife at a railway station some distance from the inn.

"You are sure you must go?" she asked, and her voice was trembling.

"I simply must, Jean!" he replied. "But do not be afraid. I will be back in a few days. You can tell your father everything. In a month from now you shall be publicly proclaimed as my wife."

"I don't like letting you go!" sobbed the girl.

"I would give anything if I could stay, but I simply dare not—my whole future depends upon my going!"

The train swept into the station.

"Good-bye, Douglas, my husband!" she said. "You'll soon be back?"

"Good-bye, Jean, my wife! May God bless you! Yes, I'll soon be back."

CHAPTER I

A LEGACY OF HATE

Their meeting-place was on the Altarnun Moors, eight miles from the town of Bodmin, perhaps as many from the rugged peaks—the highest peaks in Cornwall—Router and Brown Willy. Almost as far as the eye could reach was bare moorland. A white streak, the road which ran between Altarnun and Bodmin, was the most striking thing seen. On either side of the road were only bare, uncultivated, uninteresting moors; and yet, perhaps, I do the district injustice. Here and there was a rugged tor, and again a few fields taken in from the moorland by some enterprising labourer who wanted to earn a living by farming. Near this road, too, is the famous Dozmary Pool, known to all those who love folk-lore and are acquainted with the legends of the most Western county in England—a dismal piece of water, black as ink, and, so the old stories have it, bottomless. It was here that Tregellas, of Cornish myth, was set by the Devil to scoop out its water by means of a limpet-shell. Here, too, in old times, coaches were robbed and dark deeds done. At the time of which I am writing, however, it was simply one of the most unattractive and bleak districts in what is otherwise perhaps the most beautiful county in England. The woman had walked all the way from Launceston, a distance of not less than a dozen miles. The youth had come from Bodmin, and he had covered nearly the same length of road. The afternoon was drawing to a close as they met. It was a November day, and darkness would be upon them by five o'clock. No one was near, for since the days of stage-coaches the traffic on this road has been small. Occasionally a farmer's cart passes along, or again a vehicle of more ornamental description, used by those who wish to travel either to Bodmin or to Launceston. There is no railway station within ten miles of that drear region, and it seemed a fitting meeting-place for the couple who came there that day. The woman was perhaps thirty-five years of age, and suggested the fact that in her girlhood she must have been strangely beautiful. Even yet there were times when one would have spoken of her as one possessing more than ordinary attraction. That was when her eyes became soft, and her features relaxed into a smile, but these times were very rare. As she trudged along the dreary road her face was set and stern, her lips were compressed, her eyes hard and relentless. As she passed through Five Lanes and asked for a cup of tea at a cottage there, the villagers remarked upon her and wondered who she was. "She might be a witch," said one.

"No, too young for that," said another.

"But where can she be goin'? She is a straanger in thaise paarts."

"Up to no good, I reckon."

But the woman gave no confidences. Evidently her purpose was clear before her mind, and after she had obtained her cup of tea she stepped forward with the same resolution in her eyes, turning neither to the right nor to the left. She seemed as little impressed by the suggestion of beauty contained in the valley where the old Altarnun Church stands, as she was by the bleak moors on to which she presently entered. She might be looking into her own soul rather than on the vast sweep of hill and dale which presently stretched out before her. Now and then she muttered like one talking to herself, but she never faltered on her way. She seemed to know no weariness. Firmly and resolutely she went her way, her mind evidently set upon some grim purpose. It was two o'clock when she left Five Lanes, and considerably past three when she saw a dark object in the road in front of her. "It must be he," she said to herself, and her lips quivered and her eyes shone with a new light. As they drew nearer she quickened her footsteps.

"My boy!" she said; "what will he say—what will he do? But he must know, for his own sake and for mine. He must know that his mother is an honest woman and tried to do right."

The day was dark and drear. Clouds hung heavily in the sky and the moorland was wrapt in a fine mist so peculiar to that district. The roads were heavy, and one could hear the silt crush beneath her feet as she walked.

A little later the two met, and the relationship was evident at the first glance. They were mother and son. The youth was about seventeen years of age, tall and muscular. He wore the dress of a mechanic, and there was in his appearance a suggestion of capability and of resolute resolve. Strangely handsome he was, and yet no one seemed attracted by him. During his journey from Bodmin a labourer would pass the time of day, but he seemed to take no notice. And once the driver of a farmer's cart offered to give him a lift, but he only shook his head and trudged on. There was an eager questioning look in his eyes, and he seemed to be wondering greatly as to the result of his journey. Two days before he had received a letter, urging him to come to a certain spot on Altarnun Moors, and promising him that he should hear of things concerning which he had long been anxious to know. The letter had no signature, but the address given was "Lancroft, near Launceston." Who the writer of the letter was the youth had not the slightest idea, but he never thought of refusing the request made. Almost ever since he could remember he had wondered concerning his father and mother, and now he felt sure that the time of revelation was come.

Presently the two met, and each looked steadily into the other's face, as if wondering who the other might be.

"You received a letter two days ago?" said the woman.

"Yes," was his reply.

"I wrote it." Simple as the words were, they were uttered with a sob.

He saw that she was under very strong emotion, and noted the yearning look in her eyes.

"You have wondered all your life who your father and mother are?" and the woman controlled her voice with difficulty. "I know you have. You want to know all about them, don't you?"

"I shouldn't have come here if I hadn't!" was his reply.

"I'm your mother!" said the woman.

He looked at her curiously. He had been thinking, ever since they had met, whether this might not be so; nevertheless the news came to him as a kind of shock. A woman with sad eyes and an expression of unsatisfied yearning in her face; yet handsome withal.

"Do you not believe it?" she asked. "My boy! my boy! I'm your mother, and, if I have kept silent about it, it has been for love of you!"

And she held out her hands towards him.

It seemed as though something touched his heart, as though his whole being thrilled with a recognition of the truth, and, in a way he could not understand, a great love for this lonely woman sprang suddenly into his heart.

"Yes, I believe you are my mother."

"I have come to tell you everything, Paul," she said. "It's a sad story, but I believe you'll understand."

"Yes," he replied, "I shall understand!"

The woman looked at him, still with the same expression of tender yearning in her eyes.

"It's a hard question to ask," she said, "but can you feel towards me as a laddie should feel to his mother?"

"Yes," he replied, "I do."

"Then call me 'Mother,' and kiss me!" she cried passionately.

"Mother!" he said, and held her close to him.

A few minutes later she began to tell him the things which for years he had been longing to know, and concerning which gossip had been rife.

"I want to know, mother," he said, "who my father is, where I was born, and why the truth has been so long kept from me."

"Born," she said, and her face became hard; "you were born in a workhouse, and your father would call himself a gentleman, and we were married in Scotland!"

A bright light came into the youth's eyes at the last part of the sentence. "But is my father alive?" he asked eagerly.

"I do not know," she replied; "I think he must be. I feel sure he is, but I cannot tell. Listen. I was reared in Scotland, not far beyond the English border. My name was Jean Lindsay. My father had been a fisherman as a young man, but came to Cornwall for his wife, and soon after he brought her to Scotland and I was born, she died. He had a farm in Scotland, and there I lived with my stepmother and stepbrothers and sisters, who made life a misery for me until I was eighteen, and then one day I met a gentleman. Oh, my lad, it was no wonder I loved him; he was different from all the lads I had met in those parts, young, handsome, laughter-loving, just the man to captivate a lassie's heart. He married me, Scottish fashion, and on the day we were wed he told me he had received a letter which urged him to go back to his home at once. We were married secretly, my boy, because I was afraid for my father and stepmother to know. They wanted me to wed a young farmer, and would have forced me to do so but for him, and I could not—how could I when I loved him and he loved me? And I believed in him too; he was all the world to me. No one knew but he and me. But when we were married and he came to the inn, he told the landlady I was his wife."

The boy nodded. "And the letter, mother?" he said, "the letter, what of that?"

"It urged him to go to his home," she replied. "You must remember, my boy, that I was young and ignorant. I knew nothing of the ways of the world, nothing of men, but I loved him devotedly. He was my king, my life! When he had read the letter, he said he must leave the following morning, and urged me to go back to my home and wait until he could come and fetch me. I was to tell them, he said, that we were married, and that thus I was free from the attentions of Willie Fearn, the farmer they wanted me to wed."

The youth did not seem to understand her, but looked at her with wild wonder in his eyes, trying to comprehend the story she was telling. It seemed utterly unreal to him. He wondered whether she fully realised what she was saying.

"Yes, mother," he said at length, "go on."

"What could I do but obey him?" she said. "I had promised before God that I would, and I did. I went back to my father—he had wondered where I had gone—and told him I had wedded a young Englishman named Douglas Graham. I think my father thought that all was right, for, while he spoke harsh words to me, he seemed presently to settle down to the conviction that my husband would soon come to me, and that I should be a lady. But my stepmother said awful things. I will not tell you what! Even now her words cut me like a knife."

"Well," said the youth, "and what then?"

"Day after day I waited for a letter from him," she replied. "At first I hadn't a doubt; he had promised me and I believed him. But when one month had gone, and then two, I grew desperate."

"And he never wrote to you at all?" asked the youth.

"At the end of three months," she replied, "I got a letter."

"Yes"—and his voice was eager—"what did he say?"

"Here it is," she replied, and she passed him a crumpled piece of paper. The envelope was stamped with a London post-mark, but the paper within had no address of any sort. It simply contained the words:

> "DEAR JEAN,—It cannot be helped now, and of course we were never really married. It was only a joke.—DOUGLAS."

"And that was all?" said the youth.

"That was all, God helping me, that was all."

"And you have heard nothing from him since?"

"Never a word since the morning he bid me good-bye at the station, and told me to go back to my father, saying he would write to me at once, and come to me soon. No, I have never seen nor heard of him since."

The eyes of the youth became red with anger. His hands clenched and unclenched themselves passionately, but he did not speak. It seemed as if he could not. Then an oath escaped him, and his voice was hoarse.

"But, mother," he cried presently, "tell me more. There must be more than this. What about this marriage? Were there no witnesses? Have you no marriage lines?"

"Things are different in Scotland, my boy," was her answer. "There many people just take each other as man and wife, and that is all, and the marriage is legal. Do you know"—and her voice trembled with passion—"that on the afternoon when he took me as his wife we knelt down by the roadside, and he prayed with me that God would help us to be true man and wife to each other?"

"But, but——" he cried, and he was trembling with emotion, "and he treated you like that?"

The woman did not reply, but looked away across the moors with a hard, stony stare.

"My mother, my poor, poor mother!" He seemed incapable of saying more, and for two or three minutes there was a silence between them.

"And then, mother?" he went on presently.

"Months later," she went on, "I was driven from home. I had no friends, no relatives, no one to whom I could go, and I thought I should go mad!"

"And what did you do?" he asked.

"There seemed to me only one thing I could do," she said. "I could not stay near my old home, I was ashamed—besides, my father and stepmother drove me away with a curse. They said I had disgraced the name of Lindsay. I always hated Scotland, and as my heart turned to my mother's home, I determined I would go to Cornwall. I had just three pounds, and with that I commenced my journey."

"You came by train?" he asked.

"No, I walked. I wanted to hoard my money. You see it was very little."

"You walked all the way to Cornwall from Scotland?"

"Every step," she said. "It was winter time, too, and it often rained, but somehow I felt as though Cornwall would give me a home, a welcome. It took me weeks to do it, but I got there at last. Often I slept in a farmer's barn; more than once I walked all through the night." And into her eyes came a far-away look, while her lips quivered as if with pain.

"And did you find a home and welcome?" he asked.

She shook her head. "How could I? I went straight to St. Ives, but everyone had forgotten my mother, and her people were dead. You see, I looked like a vagrant, my clothes were weather-stained, my boots were worn out, I had no money, and no one wanted me. More than once I thought I should have died of starvation."

"And what did you do?" he asked.

"I did not know what to do. I went from place to place. Here and there I got a day's work, but I never begged. I would rather have died than have done that."

A kind of grim satisfaction settled in the youth's face as he heard this, but it was easy to see that the pain which lay in his mother's heart also passed into his. He was not pleasant to look at at that moment, and if murder can ever be seen in a man's eyes, it could be seen in his at that moment.

"Well, mother?" he said at length, "and what afterwards?"

"I began to tramp northward again," she said. "I hoped that surely, surely, someone would help me. And then one day I fell down by the roadside. It was spring time now but terribly cold, and I thought, 'Now I shall die, and all will be over.' I think I went to sleep, because I knew nothing of what happened. A great darkness fell upon everything, and then, when I woke again, I found myself in a workhouse. I knew it was a workhouse by the clothes the people wore and by the way they talked; but I did not care much—I had got beyond that." She hesitated, like one who did not know how to continue her story. Her teeth became set, her lips quivered, her eyes were hard. "Oh, my boy, my boy!" she said, "I could not help it, I thought I did what was right!"

The youth took hold of her hand almost awkwardly. He wanted to try and comfort her, but knew not how. Perhaps the affectionate action, even although accompanied by no words, was the best thing he could have done to ease her aching heart. She laid her head upon his chest as though she were tired.

And then she sobbed convulsively. "There you were born, my boy."

"They always called me a workhouse brat," he said; "but never mind, mother, never mind; what then?"

"They never thought I would live, I suppose," she replied. "For weeks I lay between life and death. I believe I should have died, but presently I came to know that you were alive, and that you were a great, strong, handsome boy. But you are not like him, thank God! He had blue eyes and light hair, but your eyes are black, your hair is black, and you are like me. They christened you in the workhouse, unknown to me. The chaplain gave you a name. If I had had the choosing of it, I should have called you Ishmael or Esau, but they called you Paul. They wanted me to tell them my surname, but I would not—I could not—so they called you Stepaside, the name of the little hamlet where I fell down, as I thought, to die."

"Well, I know everything after that," he replied.

"Very nearly," was her answer. "You were brought up in the workhouse, while I, as soon as I was strong enough, had to go away into service. On the whole, I suppose, they did as well as one could expect for you. They gave you good schooling, and taught you a trade, and now you are beginning to earn your own living."

"Yes, mother," he replied. "I have got a job as a blacksmith in the Pencarrow Mines. Soon I shall be getting a pound a week, and later on you must come and live with me."

She shook her head. "No, Paul. While I am not with you, people will not insult you. Now that you are away from the place where you were born and reared, no one knows your history. No one knows that you were born in a workhouse and that your mother does not know where your father is."

"But you were married, mother?"

"Yes," she cried eagerly, "and that is why I have told you everything to-day. When you were seventeen, I said to myself, 'Directly I can get to him we will meet, and I will tell him, tell him with my own lips.' Paul, that man has covered your mother with black shame. If he is alive you must find him. The day he wrote me that letter he killed all the love I had for him. The last feeling I had, when I lay down and thought I was going to die on the roadside, was a feeling of hatred for him. When I first saw you, although my heart went out to you with a great love, I hated your father. For seventeen long years I have hated him, and I hate him still."

She looked like a savage, and there was a snarl in her voice as she spoke. "But for him, but for him ——" And then she stopped. "Paul, find him out, wherever he is. Find him out!"

The passion which burned in the mother's eyes passed into those of the youth. She need not have told him what was in her heart. Paul Stepaside hated his father from that day.

"Yes, I will," he said grimly. "I will find him. An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth; disgrace for disgrace; misery for misery. Mother, all you have suffered he shall suffer, and a thousand times more. Wherever he is, whatever he is, I will find him." His eyes turned away towards the dreary moors. Router and Brown Willy stood like grim sentinels watching over the scene. A slight wind had arisen, which soughed its way across the great silent spaces, dispelling the mists. The black tors in the near distance became visible again; frogs croaked in the marshes near by.

"But tell me more, mother. I know nothing yet. Who is he? What is he? Tell me all you know of him."

"There is little I can tell," said the mother. "He told me his name was Douglas Graham. I believe that to be true. I found out that from the people at 'Highlands,' the big house close by my father's farm."

"Ah, they can tell us," he cried.

"Nay," replied the mother. "They only had the house for a short time, and then left. They are gone, I know not whither, and I, fool that I was, was too ignorant to find out in those days more about him. But he was called Douglas Graham, there is no doubt about that."

"And is that all?"

"Only this," replied the mother, "he is a lawyer—what they call an English barrister. I have heard that books are kept, containing a list of such people. I expect they'll be in London; but these barrister men go around the country, some of them. Anyhow, that is for you to find out."

He nodded his head. "Yes, I will find out," he said; "but the thing will be difficult, mother. I see what you mean now, and why you cannot live with me. I must go to London, or to one of the other big places where I can find out the truth about such things. Oh, I shall know, and I will not spare him. Don't be afraid, mother, you shall be avenged for all he's done to you."

A kind of evil joy flashed from the woman's eyes. "Yes, Paul," she said presently, "and you are clever, you were the cleverest lad in the workhouse school. I found out that. You were always ahead with your lessons, and you are quick with your brains and you are strong. But remember, he is clever and strong too, and he has much book-learning, and he knows all about the law, English law especially.

You must be able to meet him on equal terms. You must learn, my boy—you must know everything. You need not fear for me. I have a place now where I can live comfortably; but remember, I shall never be happy until either he sets me and you right before the world, or I have made him suffer all I have suffered and all you have suffered."

For half an hour more they stood talking, he asking questions, she answering and explaining. Night had fallen now, but the moon had risen and made darkness impossible. The mists had cleared away, too, and patches of blue were to be seen in the sky. Here and there a star peeped out.

"Good night, Paul," she said at length. "You will write me often, won't you? Remember, you are the only thing I love on earth."

"You know what I will do," he replied. "Good night, mother."

For a few seconds he held her like a man might hold the maid he loved, and then, turning, he walked slowly back towards Bodmin, from which town he intended to take the train to the place where he lived. Mile after mile he walked, seeming to take no notice of his surroundings. It might be day, it might be night; it might be summer, it might be winter, for all he cared. The iron had entered his soul, the poison of hatred had filled his heart. He loved his mother with a kind of savage, passionate love, but the man who was his father he hated, and on him he swore to be revenged. "That is my work in life," he said to himself; "that is the purpose for which I shall live, and I will do it—yes, I will do it."

CHAPTER II

PAUL BEGINS HIS WORK

In some senses Paul Stepaside had suffered but little because of his being a pauper. His education was quite equal to that of the lads who had gone to the elementary school in the district. He had passed what was called the sixth standard, and although this meant very little more than a knowledge of the three "r's," he was considered by the workhouse schoolmaster as his cleverest pupil. After leaving school at the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to a local blacksmith, with whom it was arranged he should remain for four years. John Tresidder, the blacksmith, however, died two years after Paul's apprenticeship, and so at sixteen, with his trade half learned, he found himself homeless and friendless. But that did not trouble him much. He knew, or, at least, he thought he knew, practically all that Tresidder could teach him, and he was eager to start life on his own account. During the two years he had been an apprentice, moreover, he had attended a night-school, and had studied subjects which were beyond the range of the curriculum in the ordinary day-schools. He had some knowledge of geometry, and had mastered the first book of Euclid. He also knew a little of history, and the schoolmaster, having some acquaintance with chemistry, and finding Paul an apt pupil, had given him some lessons in that science. Being a strong, healthy lad, he had no difficulty in finding work in the blacksmith's shop at the Pencarrow Mines, where he was called an Improver. He had been working here for a year, and, as he had told his mother, his wages had just been raised to one pound a week.

Paul was not popular among his companions. The Cornish people are extremely proud, and have a proper scorn for those who have been reared on charity. Moreover, a shadow rested upon his name, and he was often insulted as a consequence. Epithets were constantly hurled at him, which aroused black rage in the boy's heart. Being of an exceedingly sensitive disposition, he resented the things that were said even while he made no reply; many, as they caught the flash of his eyes, realised something of the passion that lay smouldering in his heart. Still, he was respected as a well-behaved, although uncompanionable lad. Like all other youths in the district, he attended the Methodist chapel, and seemed to listen attentively to the teachings enunciated there, but no apparent impression was made upon him. Revival services were frequently held, but no one could induce Paul to find his way to the penitent form. Many looked upon him as an unbeliever. On more than one occasion the evangelist, who was appointed to the St. Mabyn circuit, had tried to get into conversation with him, but found his task extremely difficult. Paul would listen in silence, but would make no response whatever to the minister's eager questionings.

On his return to St. Mabyn, after his meeting with his mother on the Altarnun Moors, he seemed more grim and taciturn than ever. Silently he went to his work, and silently he continued the whole day, paying but little heed to the gibes of the miners, and never laughing at their elementary jokes. During his evenings he read eagerly concerning life in the big towns, of the means of education there, and of opportunities for obtaining knowledge, but he said nothing about it to the cottagers with whom he lived. He never uttered a word concerning what his mother had told him. The secret lay deep in his heart, and his purposes must be made known to none.

In truth, a new passion had entered his heart: a greater bitterness than he had yet known completely possessed him. Hitherto, while he had resented the insults which had been heaped upon him by those who sneered at the place of his birth and upbringing, he never seemed to think of himself as hardly treated; now he pondered deeply over the black shadow that lay upon his life. What had he done that he should be treated so? Why should he be homeless and friendless while other lads were

situated so differently? What was the good of the minister talking about a kind Providence and the love of God? He remembered the previous Sunday evening sermon on the "Duty of forgiving one's enemies." What did the preacher know about it? He called to mind the look on his mother's face, the agony of her voice; he realised the bitter years she had spent in silence and misery, and remembered who was responsible for it all. Thus Paul became a kind of atheist. He was not yet old enough to think deeply about it, but incipient unbelief was in the boy's mind and heart. It darkened his thoughts and gave a sombre hue to life. In any case he was not going to trouble about religion. He remembered the vow he had made after he had left his mother, and he determined that nothing should stop him from carrying out his purposes.

As chance would have it, too, events seemed to shape his course quickly. A few weeks after his journey to Altarnun Moors, a young fellow who was commonly called Jacker, a kind of half-gipsy lad who worked at the mines, and who was looked upon as the champion boxer in that district, made a dead set on Paul. Jacker had often sought his friendship, and Paul had as often repulsed his advances. Jacker's own parentage lay under a cloud, and he felt angry that Paul, whom he regarded as in a like predicament, should refuse to be friendly with him. One evening, therefore, when Paul seemed less inclined than ever to be sociable, Jacker determined to have it out with him. He was passing through what is called the Church Town, when a number of youths, among whom Jacker was conspicuous, asked him to go into the public house. Paul refused. On being asked his reason for his refusal, he replied that he was on his way to the night-school. A few minutes later there was an uproar. Things were said about Paul's parentage that roused the young fellow beyond the pitch of endurance. "I have borne with you a long time," he said, "but, remember, if you say that again you shall pay for it."

"Iss, and I be willing to pay for it!" cried Jacker, who was eager for a fight. The youths had often accused him of being afraid of Paul, and Jacker, true to his nature, wanted to prove his superiority to any youth in the district. A little later the group of lads had adjourned to a field, and Paul and Jacker appeared as combatants. The result of it was that Paul, in a mad passion, nearly killed his opponent, and was that same evening apprehended by the police as drunk and disorderly. He was taken to the nearest lock-up, and detained there until the next sittings of the magistrate. The landlord at the inn, being Jacker's friend, had appeared as a witness on his behalf, and had declared that Jacker was always a quiet, well-behaved youth, while Paul was a surly villain, with whom it was impossible for quiet lads to live in peace. Of course the truth presently came out, and, while Paul suffered no imprisonment, he had to pay a fine for what had taken place, and was bound over to keep the peace.

This incident, although seemingly unimportant, bore fruit in Paul's life. It determined him to leave the neighbourhood at once. But where should he go? He hated Cornwall, hated the Pencarrow Mines, and longed to get away where he could begin what he regarded as his life's work. As it happened, a man, whose father had left Cornwall several years before, paid a visit to St. Mabyn, and declared that there was always good work for men in Lancashire. When Paul heard of it he made his way to this man. "Peter Wadge," he said, "you have come from Lancashire, I am told?"

Wadge admitted that he had.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Brunford," replied Wadge; "and Brunford is the place for a chap like you. No questions will be asked about you there, and the wage is double what it is here!"

"You see," continued Wadge, "the working man has a chance in Lancashire, and we stand no nonsense with the masters."

Paul looked at him questioningly.

"You don't believe me?" said Wadge. "Why, think. Lately, owing to the change in the price of cotton, the manufacturers were making money hand over fist. Well, what did the weavers do? They just went to them and demanded more wages. The manufacturers refused; they were having a big harvest, and did not mean to allow the weavers to have a share in it. But you see we are organised there, and a meeting of the Weavers' Union was called, and the next thing was that they all went on strike. Of course the manufacturers could do nothing without them, and so there was an increase of wage right away. That's the way we deal with them up there. Why, I knew a chap who was sacked because one of the manufacturer's sons didn't like him. Do you think we stood it? Not we! We sent a deputation to the master, and told him that unless the chap were taken back we should all 'come out.'"

"And was he taken back?" asked Paul.

"I should think he was," was the reply. "Why, we working people are somebody up there. We have our representatives on the town council and on the board of guardians. Down here it is the parson and squire that do everything; up there we are alive, and there's a chance for a chap who's got brains. Why, a fellow like you up in Brunford, with your education and gifts, could be a big man in a few years."

Paul thought quietly for a few minutes. There was something in what Wadge said that appealed to him. He longed to put his finger on the pulse of the great busy life of the world, but he remembered the object for which he lived. He longed to get on, but only for that purpose, and he remembered that the man whom he had determined to punish was educated and had a high position.

"And are there any chances," he asked, "for a poor man to be educated? I mean to be educated in the higher things—to learn law and government and that sort of thing?"

"Chances? I should think there are!" replied Wadge. "Why, think of our Mechanics' Institute. We have more than a thousand students there. They all come of an evening, after work, and they pay next to nothing for their lessons; but I've known lots of them who have got on so well that they have been able to go to Owens College at Manchester—even taken degrees. And there is no end to the possibilities for the chap who has taken a degree."

Paul had only a vague idea of what this might mean, but he knew it meant something of importance, and his heart beat quickly at the thought of it. Still, the idea of Lancashire did not appeal to him. He felt sure that Douglas Graham would be in London, and, after all, London was the great heart of things. It was there all these big men went, and it was there, he felt sure, his work lay. Nevertheless, he went on asking Wadge many questions about life in the big towns of Lancashire, and more and more became enamoured by the thought of going there.

"Look here," continued Wadge presently, "I have got a copy of the *Brunford Mercury* where I am staying, and I'll lend it you. You can see then what's going on."

A few hours later Paul was perusing the journal he had been promised. At first he was disappointed. After all, there did not seem to be anything much more attractive going on in Brunford than in Cornwall. The *West Briton* was, as far as he could see, a more interesting paper. Presently, however, his heart gave a leap. He saw that a law case of some sort had been going on in Manchester, and as the counsel for one of the parties, he saw the name of "G. D. Graham." At first he could scarcely believe his own eyes. He did not realise that there might be hundreds of Grahams, many of whom might be barristers. With his small parochial ideas, there could be only one Graham who could occupy such a position—and Manchester was only a few miles from Brunford. Of course all the barristers could not live in London. There must be many all over the country, and Graham lived there. A strange feeling filled his heart; he felt sure he had found his father, the man who had wronged his mother, who had blighted her life. Again the picture of her as he saw her last flashed back to his mind, the care-worn, tired, sad-looking woman whom he loved as his mother; and she was going back to servitude, to misery, and all this because of the man who had deceived her, ruined her life. He had taken her as his wife, and then written her that cruel, insulting letter, and left her to the scorn and mercilessness of a hard world. And he would see him. If he lived in Manchester he would be employed for other cases. It would be easy to find out all about them, and he could go there and watch. He realised that he could do nothing while he was ignorant. Perhaps this G. D. Graham was a great man by now, and he would deny all knowledge of what he had done; therefore he must find out, he must prepare himself, and he could only do that through getting a knowledge of the world, a knowledge of law, a knowledge of men.

This decided him. He remembered what Wadge had said about the Mechanics' Institute, and about working-lad students belonging to Owens College and obtaining University degrees. Of course that must mean knowledge, and knowledge was power. So much he had learnt, at all events, at the night-school where he had attended.

He counted up his money, of which he had been very saving, and determined to leave Cornwall at once, and shortly after Christmas he found himself in the train bearing him northward. He had never been out of Cornwall before, and his heart beat high with hope. New scenes, new experiences, new modes of life and thought, a new world—and he was going to enter it! It was on a Monday morning that he started on his journey, and it was dark when he left the little village of St. Mabyn, carrying in his hand a portmanteau which contained all his earthly possessions. It was several miles to the nearest railway station, but that did not trouble him at all. Young and strong as he was, a five-mile walk was nothing, and he found it no hardship to get up in the cold, dark morning in order to catch the first train, northward. He did not arrive in Manchester until late that night, and then found that the last train for Brunford had left some time before he came. Like all lads country-reared, he had heard about the dangers of big towns, of thieves, of midnight murder—and Manchester frightened him. He could not understand it at all, and in his ignorance and fear he shrunk from asking questions.

"You'll go to some pub., I suppose?" said a porter who had told him about the last train to Brunford.

"I don't know," said Paul.

"But you must, man. You can't stay out all night. It's cold, too. Will you have a cab?"

"I don't know where to go," said Paul. "Can you tell me of a respectable place?"

But before the porter could answer, someone else claimed his attention, and Paul was left alone. He took his bag and looked around, then, seeing the notice, "Left Luggage Office," he acted upon impulse, and left his portmanteau there, after which he went out into the streets. He had missed the connection at Bristol, and, the later train having been delayed, it was now past ten o'clock. He had bought some sandwiches on his way, so he did not feel hungry. But he was terribly depressed and lonely. The traffic of the city was subsiding somewhat, but still the rush and roar of the great northern metropolis stunned and bewildered him. Presently he came to the Town Hall, which stood in a great square not far from the station. Around him were trams, cabs, and a hurrying multitude of people. This was life—life in a great city! It was utterly different from what he had expected; and it was bitterly cold. A damp fog hung over the city, the air was depressing, and the streets were black with slimy mud. Still, the thought that more than half a million of people were around him was wonderful to him. He was in the heart of the manufacturing North, where poor friendless boys had risen to position and power. That Town Hall stood for something—stood for the government of this great metropolis. It seemed to him that London could be nothing compared with this, and in his ignorance he felt as though Manchester

were the centre of the world. He wandered on and on, passing through St. Anne's Square until he came to Market Street. Here all was a blaze of light, even although the crowd had largely departed. It was all fascinating, bewildering. He felt strangely afraid, and he did not know what to do. A tram stopped just in front of him, and he noticed the words, "Rusholme, Oxford Road." And, again acting on impulse, he entered the tram. A few minutes later the conductor came to him.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

Paul had not the slightest idea, and looked at him in a kind of dazed way.

"Where do you want to get out?" went on the conductor. "We only go as far as the tramway shed at Rusholme. Do you want to go as far as that, or where?"

"I don't know," said Paul. "Where do we pass?"

"Why, we go up Oxford Road, and pass Owens College."

"That's it," cried Paul eagerly; "I want to get out at Owens College."

The conductor eyed him curiously, but he was a man of large experience, and took very little notice of the vagaries of his passengers.

"Here you are," he said at length, as the tram stopped. "This is Owens College."

Paul got out, and the tram went on. He looked at the great building like one spell-bound. He had heard, in a vague sort of way, that this was the head-quarters of the Victoria University. He did not know much as to what this meant, but it appealed to him, captivated him. It was the centre of learning —knowledge. Here men taught the knowledge that meant power, progress, achievement. It was not quite so foggy here as in the heart of the city, and the moon did its best to pierce the clouds, and in its pale light Paul could see something of the proportions of this great centre of learning. He wandered around it, and noted what he supposed were the various departments of education. He almost forgot where he was; he did not heed the lapse of time. This was Owens College! It seemed to him the heart of the universe, the centre of the world of knowledge, and he would go there some day, he would learn things; and before his eyes flashed a vision of a brilliant future. What others had done he could do. It meant work; but what of that? He loved it. It meant suffering; but then he had never known anything else.

Presently he found himself in Oxford Road again, and then, like one in a dream, he tramped back to the centre of the city. He had been travelling from early morning, but he felt no weariness. Manchester was the city of dreams. By the time he had got back to Market Street again the streets were deserted, save for a few late stragglers. The trams had ceased running, the theatres had emptied themselves while he had been away, and only an occasional vehicle passed him. All through the night he wandered through the dark, murky streets, and as he did so the mystery of it all, the wonder of it all, filled his heart. Yes, he was in a new world, and in this new world were new thoughts, new modes of life. In after-years Paul recalled the experiences of that night; it seemed to him that it marked a new era in his life. Especially did he feel this as again and again he came to the Town Hall. The place had a strong attraction for him, because it was here he believed that the G. D. Graham of whom he had read had defended the man who, as it appeared to him, was guilty of a crime. More than one policeman noticed him as he stood there looking at its lofty towers and listening for the deep tones of the bell which told of the passing time. But no one molested him; he was respectably dressed, and did not appear to be a suspicious character. Strange to say, the squalor, the misery, the poverty did not impress him: it was the size, the wondrousness, and the vast avenues of life, which the city suggested, that appealed to his mind.

Early in the morning he found himself at the Central Station again, where, having obtained his bag, he made his way towards Victoria Station and caught the early train for Brunford.

By the time he had reached Haslingden the grey light of morning revealed the dreary scenes through which he passed. He wished he had stayed in Manchester. The district through which he passed seemed nothing but a procession of dreary houses, built apparently without thought of order or architecture. He saw stunted men and pale-faced girls with shawls over their heads as if on their way to their work. He heard the clatter of their iron-ringed clogs on the hard paving-stones. Here was a new life indeed, but there was no romance. It was all sordid, grimy. Still he must go on, and presently, when the porter shouted the word, "Brunford," he got out of the train feeling that his new life had really commenced.

CHAPTER III

PAUL IS SENT TO PRISON

The next few years of Paul Stepaside's life must be described somewhat briefly, although they were

not without importance. They were the formative period of the young man's history and naturally shaped his whole future. Habits of thought were formed, and the tendencies of his boyhood were hardened and fashioned by the circumstances which surrounded him. Consequently, the passing from youth to manhood, with all its shaping, moulding forces, is doubtless the most vital in the life of any man. Nevertheless there is not much to say about them, as only a few outstanding events happened to him. The development of his character went on, but that development was silent and almost unnoticed by those with whom he came into contact. Still, there were certain things of which cognisance must be taken, because not only did they affect his future but they formed a part of the chain of events which led to the tragic issues which presently evolved.

His first few days in Brunford were not happy ones. The life of a busy manufacturing town was utterly different from that of St. Mabyn. The long rows of ugly houses, the black, slimy streets, the smoke-begrimed atmosphere, the roar of machinery, and the life of the operatives, all made him feel that here was a new world indeed! It seemed to him harsh, sordid, ugly, and more than once he longed for the clear skies, the green fields, and the quiet restfulness of his old Cornish home. Nevertheless it had its compensations. He was at the heart of a great, busy, manufacturing centre, and the life there could not help but be educational in the highest degree. He had no difficulty in finding work. A loom manufacturer took him on for a few days to give him a trial, and then, finding that Paul was skilful with his blacksmithing tools, he engaged him as one of his permanent hands. He obtained lodgings near the centre of the town, with an old couple who took quite an interest in him. They were Methodists, and, learning that Paul was acquainted with a minister who had formerly been in the Brunford circuit, felt quite at home with him. This led, moreover, to his being visited by the minister of Hanover Chapel, who took a great interest in him, notwithstanding Paul's unconcealed contempt for anything like religious influences. The legacy which his mother had left him seemed to close up all those avenues of life and thought. His programme was clearly marked out, and in order to carry it through, everything must become subservient to it. His trade, the earning of wages, were merely means to an end, and that end he constantly kept before his eyes. First he must become educated; he must have knowledge—knowledge sufficient to enable him to fulfil the purpose which was born in his mind on the night he met his mother on the Altarnun Moors. If he could satisfy his ambitions, so much the better; but he determined that nothing should stand in the way of his carrying out the grim resolution which was the great purpose for which he lived.

He had not been in Brunford many months when he saw in the *Manchester Guardian* an account of a trial which was being conducted in that city, and noticed that the leading counsel was G. D. Graham, the name which had determined him to come to Brunford. He had made up his mind that this man was his father. He knew he had very insufficient data on which to go; nevertheless, it became a sort of fixed idea with him. But he determined to make sure, and so, obtaining leave from his work, he started one morning to Manchester, in order to be present at the trial which was attracting some notice in the county. It was with a grim sort of feeling in his heart that he entered the Manchester Law Courts and climbed the steps leading to the room wherein the trial was being held.

"I shall know him," he said to himself, "know him among a thousand!"

He did not seem to consider that this visit would lead to anything; he only wanted to see the man who had blackened his mother's life. The justice chamber was very full as he entered it, and he could not help being impressed by the scene before him. The judge, with his legal robes and his formidable-looking wig, sitting grave and stern on his seat of eminence; the eager faces of the barristers; the watchful eyes of the solicitors; the important look on the faces of the twelve jurymen who sat huddled in a kind of square box; the anxious face of the man who stood in the witness-box giving evidence; all appealed to the young fellow's imagination, and caused his pulses to throb violently. So great was the impression made upon him that for the moment he almost forgot the purpose for which he came. This was life indeed, and the work of making looms appeared to him as a kind of sordid drudgery. The ambitions which had lain smouldering in his heart for a long time sprang into flame again, and he determined that, while he saw no chance of his being a judge, or even like one of the barristers who sat around the table beneath the judge's bench, he at least could become prominent in the great busy life of the world. The case itself, too, cast a kind of spell upon him; he listened eagerly to the questions that were being asked, and as he caught the meaning of the things for which these men were fighting, the picture of his mother's sorrows became less real and less vital. But this was not for long. Presently one of the counsel rose to address the jury, and there was a kind of flutter among the spectators as he did so.

"Yon's Graham," he heard a man say by his side, and then the purport of his coming to Manchester laid hold of him.

"Which is Graham?" he asked of the man.

"Yon man who has just got on his feet," was the reply. "He's a rare 'un, is Graham. I wouldn't like 'im to cross-examine me! You'll see, he'll tear t'other chap's case all to flitters!"

Paul turned his eyes towards the barrister in question, and then, he could not tell why, but his heart became like lead. This was not the man he had come to see. It was true he could not see the colour of his hair, because It was hidden by his barrister's wig, but the face was different from any he had ever seen in his dreams. The eyes were dark and piercing, the features were almost classical. No, this was not the man who had robbed his mother of her youth and of her beauty. After this he took only an academical interest in the proceedings. He still remained interested in the case, but only as a case; and the man Graham was only a name to him. This fact altered his outlook for a time. Hitherto he had

fancied he knew where he might find the man whom he called his enemy, but now he did not know; and, as a consequence, everything became different. Not that he troubled much. He never meant to try to do anything until he was ready. Somehow he knew that when he set himself to struggle against the man he hated, the battle would be long and hard; therefore he must be prepared; and he was not ready yet—he had only just begun. That was why he did not trouble to find him. When the time came he would surely have no difficulty in discovering his whereabouts. Still, the visit to Manchester was not without its effects. He saw a new vision of life, and that vision made him discontented with being a mere operative. He would not, in the future, be one who was led—he would be a leader.

When he returned to Brunford, therefore, he worked harder than ever. He took classes at the Mechanics' Institute, and spent all his spare time in study. By the time he was twenty Paul Stepaside could have matriculated at the London University; but he never thought of doing so. After all, what was passing examinations? It was a mere knowledge of certain specified subjects, and he felt that these would not enable him to perform the great work which he had set himself to do.

Paul was naturally greatly influenced by the life of the town in which he lived. Brunford was a huge manufacturing centre, and was typical of its class. The minds of the people were keenly alive, especially to those questions which, as they believed, affected their welfare. All sorts of socialistic schemes were discussed eagerly, and before long Paul was keenly interested in them. He found that the town was a very Mecca of revolutionary thoughts concerning the accepted order of things. There were many who were of the "down-with-everything" order. They did not believe in kings or governments, and although their anarchism was of a mild order, there were some who proclaimed it with such enthusiasm that Paul for a time was influenced by it. Others there were who did not believe in private ownership of property, and advocated that everything should be taken over by the State. There were also several atheistic societies in the town, and before long Paul found himself standing at street corners listening to orators who proclaimed that there was no God, that man had no soul, that there was no future life, and that Christianity was a great organised fraud. In opposition to this, on the other hand, there were many who held the wildest opinions about religion. Every conceivable sect seemed to be represented in the town. Seventh-Day Adventists, Spiritualists, Theosophists, Christadelphians, and innumerable others, claimed to have the exclusive possession of the Truth.

For a time he was influenced by all these contradictory views, but presently his strong common sense asserted itself, and he began to laugh at the fallacies which first of all fascinated him. Nevertheless the life of Brunford influenced him greatly, and his whole intellectual outlook was coloured by what he saw and heard. As a working man he naturally allied himself with the working classes, even although he did not share many of their views, and by the time he was a little over one-and-twenty he began to be regarded as a leader. He became an adept in public speaking too, and the announcement that he was to be present at a meeting was almost sure to draw a crowd. He ceased attending any place of worship, and indeed the incipient atheism of his earlier years seemed to settle into a kind of general unbelief in anything spiritual or supernatural.

One evening the minister of the Hanover Chapel called at the house in which he was lodging, and, seeing him deeply engrossed in his books, complimented him upon his studious habits. "I hear you are becoming quite a scholar, Mr. Stepaside," he said.

Paul shook his head.

"Why, but it's becoming well known in the town," persisted the minister. "I noticed that you took a lot of prizes on prize-giving day in the Mechanics' Institute, and all sorts of complimentary things were said about you in the papers. I am sorry, however, that I've not seen you at chapel lately."

Paul remained silent.

"You've not forgotten the advice which the wise man gave in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, I hope?" said the minister.

"What advice?" asked Paul.

"'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,'" replied the minister. "I hope you have not forgotten that."

"Where is He—what is He?" asked Paul. "Who can tell?"

"Why," asked the minister, "do you not believe that there is a God in the heavens—a God Who is at once our Father and our Judge?"

"I see little signs of either," he replied. "It is easier to believe in the Devil than to believe in God! All we know is that we are here, and we have to fight our battles and do our work."

"But do you mean to say," asked the minister, "that you feel no responsibility towards God?"

"Look here, sir," replied Paul, "this world in which we live is not a very big affair, and it's one of millions upon millions of other worlds. Now I put it to you: What do you think the God Who made all this—if there is a God at all—Who made all these millions of worlds swirling through space, cares about little insects like you and me, who just crawl upon the face of this tiny globe. Still, as I said, we have our life to live and our work to do, and we must act according to the instincts of our being."

"But if the instincts of your being lead you to do something wrong?" said the minister.

"What is right, and what is wrong?" asked Paul. "All I know is that I have my own plans of life. I have my programme marked out, and I mean to carry the programme through."

The minister did not quite understand what he meant. "But what about your relations with your fellow-men, my young friend?" he asked.

"What of them?" asked Paul. "I was reading the other day the life of Napoleon, who said that if a million men stood between him and the objects he desired to obtain he would sacrifice those million men."

The minister, a simple-minded man, who thought but little outside the narrow groove in which he worked, was somewhat aghast at this statement.

"And do you mean to say that is your sentiment?" he said.

For the moment the spirit of mischief entered Paul's heart. It seemed pleasant to him to shock this godly man and to make him feel that he had no sympathy with the conventional morality he preached.

"It seems to me," said Paul, "that, if there is a God, He helps those who help themselves. The battle is to the strong, and the race to the swift. If you do not win, somebody else does. Well, I don't mean to be beaten in the battle, and if there is someone who stands in my way of getting to the goal I desire to reach, that someone has got to be swept out of the way."

One event we must mention which was destined to have a marked influence on Paul's life. It need not be described at length, but it is necessary that it be referred to briefly. A certain manufacturer had a son some few years older than Paul. This manufacturer was named Wilson. He was one of the largest employers in the town, and his son Ned was looked upon as one who would one day be one of the most important men in Brunford. He was a fellow of some intelligence, and, while essentially of the manufacturing class, he had, perhaps owing to his education, ambitions to be associated with the older families of the county. He was strongly opposed to the democratic feeling which prevailed among the working classes, and, on more than one occasion strongly resented the expression of certain opinions by his father's employees. When Paul was about twenty years of age a quarrel sprang up between him and young Ned Wilson. Paul, burning with enthusiasm for the class whose fortunes he had espoused, spoke at a public gathering, and exposed the ill-treatment of one of Wilson's employees. Wilson appeared at the gathering and denied the statement which Paul made, and hurled many offensive epithets at him. It was a sordid affair altogether, and the matter would not have been mentioned but for its influence on Paul's after-life. The result of the quarrel was that Paul was discharged from the position he had held ever since he came to Brunford, and was, as a consequence, for some time out of work. Moreover, lying stories were set afloat, which, while they did not harm him greatly, caused him to feel bitterly towards the man who had maligned him.

When Paul had been in Brunford about five years a strike took place which convulsed the whole town. Like many another of these manufacturing disturbances, the cause seemed trivial in the extreme. Nevertheless, it spread from mill to mill, and from trade to trade, in such a way that practically the whole of the operatives had ceased working. As all the world knows by this time, the unions of the North of England are so closely connected as to form them into one homogeneous body. In this case, two people, a man and his wife, became at cross purposes with what was called the tackler. This tackler, or foreman, had insisted upon something which to the man and his wife was utterly unfair. Eventually they were discharged, and on their appeal to the secretary of the union to which they belonged, the whole case was taken up seriously and discussed with a great deal of warmth. The employer in question supported his foreman and refused to take the couple back. Thereupon the union threatened to call out all their members if they were not reinstated. This led to a pitched battle between the operatives and the employers. The masters naturally supported their own class, while the operatives, feeling that their position was endangered, stood to their guns. As a consequence, therefore, the trade of the whole town was in a state of stagnation. The employers declared that they refused to be dictated to by the people to whom they paid wages; and the operatives, feeling that their liberties and rights were in danger, would concede nothing to them. As is ordinary in such cases, a great deal of unruly behaviour was witnessed, the public-houses reaped a rich harvest, and acts of violence became general. In this case, a number of youths, utterly foolish and irresponsible, conceived a plot to "pay out," as they call it, the employers, and, in order to carry it out, held secret meetings, the purport of which, unknown to them, gradually leaked out. Into this plot Paul found himself drawn, but instead of encouraging the youths in their design, he did his best to dissuade them. This, as may be imagined, did not please them. To those who have studied the history of strikes in the northern manufacturing towns, it is well known that nothing appeals to a certain element of the population more strongly than acts of violence, and Paul found that his well-meant efforts met with great disfavour. Still, a kind of loyalty held him to them, even while he refused to participate in what they proposed to do. One night a number of these lads found their way to a certain mill, with the intention of destroying some new machinery that Mr. Wilson, who has already been mentioned, had lately bought at great cost. When Paul heard of it he also hastened thither, in order to do his best to put an end to the mischief. As I have said, the designs of these lads had leaked out, and, as a consequence, the owner of the mill was prepared. A number of policemen had ambushed themselves, together with some of the foremen. The result was that when the lads were making their way towards this machinery they were stopped, and an endeavour was made to make them prisoners. This led to a pitched battle between the youths on one side and the representatives of the employers on the other, and Paul, in spite of himself, was found on

the side of the youths. In the struggle which followed two policemen and one of the foremen were badly injured, while several of the lads bore marks which they would carry to their graves.

That same night Paul found himself, with nearly all the others, in Brunford police-station, in order to await his trial. The case was regarded so seriously that bail was not allowed; and therefore Paul, with the others, had to remain in durance vile until the case could be publicly tried.

During the time he lay in prison he felt himself deeply humiliated and vastly ashamed. He called himself a fool for having been led into such a false position. While sympathising with the attitude which the operatives, as a whole, had taken, he utterly disapproved of the foolish plot into which he had been drawn, and yet here he was, not only regarded as equally culpable with the rest, but as a kind of leader; he, who had always prided himself upon his respectability, and upon appealing to the intelligence of the people instead of to brute force, was guilty of mixing himself up in this vulgar squabble which had led to such an ignominious end. The disgrace of it, too, was hard to bear; keenly sensitive as he was, and with an abhorrence of anything like brawls of any sort, he felt as though he was dragged through mire. Of course the unions took up their case and promised to defend them. They had a large amount of money at their disposal in the union funds, and they promised that the best legal advice obtainable should be employed in their behalf. As I have said, feeling ran very high in the town, and the magistrates before whom the case was brought in the first instance, being in the main manufacturers, and therefore strongly prejudiced in favour of their class, were not likely to regard the action of Paul and of others from a favourable standpoint. They accordingly committed the accused for trial at the Quarter Sessions in Manchester. The secretary of one of the unions visited Paul before the trial.

"It's a serious business, Stepaside," he said, "and I am afraid it will go hard with you!"

"But no one was seriously hurt," said Paul.

"I doan't know so much about that," replied the secretary. "One of th' bobbies has been i' bed ever since. Wilson's tackler is said to be i' queer street. His head was bashed in, and one of his arms broken. I tell thee, it was a bad thing for us all. You see it's turned public opinion agin us, and we weavers are lost when that's the case. Still, we mun fight it out."

"I don't want to back out from anything," said Paul; "but, as a matter of fact, I did my best to keep the chaps from going up to Wilson's mill."

"That may be," replied the secretary, "but the general opinion is that thou wert the leader of th' gang, and we shall have rare hard job to get thee off, whatever happens to the rest. Still, we think none the worse of thee, lad, and if thou hast got to go to quod, thou shalt have a rare big home-coming when thou comes out. We'll have bands of music and a big feed, and all that sort of thing."

"Who have you got to defend us?" said Paul.

"Eh, well, we have got Sutcliffe, our own lawyer, and he's briefed Robson, the barrister."

"Is Robson a good man?" asked Paul.

"Good! why he's got off more of our chaps than any other man. Still, it looks black, because the case is clear agin us. There is no doubt the chaps were up to mischief, they got into Wilson's mill, and there'll be some turncoats in the town who'll say as 'ow they knaw that they meant to break the machinery. Then there's the two bobbies and Wilson's tackler, all of them i' bed, and the doctor'll be there to give evidence. There's no getting out of that."

When he had gone, Paul thought over the whole case very seriously. What part should he play? He knew he could bring witnesses to prove that he had done his best to dissuade the lads from their act of violence, but, by so doing, should he be playing the game? He wanted to be loyal to his companions, even while he was innocent of willingly acting with them. It was rather a delicate point. If he failed to speak he would be regarded as a kind of ringleader of the gang. If, on the other hand, he told the truth, and brought witnesses to attest to what he had to say, he would be looked upon as a kind of sneak.

When the day of trial came, therefore, he was not in an enviable frame of mind. He knew that hundreds of eyes would be upon him, and that he would have a very undesirable publicity. Only a few weeks before the strike he had been spoken of as a possible candidate for the town council, and he, young as he was, had rejoiced in the thought. He had pictured himself speaking at public meetings and receiving the votes of the townspeople; he saw himself, too, elected at the head of the poll, and having a seat in the council chamber among the most prominent men in the town. But now his publicity would be of an entirely different nature. He was spoken of as the leader of a gang of roughs who attempted to break up machinery, and who had half-killed three men who represented peace and order. Still, he set his teeth together and thought of his plan of action.

"I suppose Wilson will be well represented," he said to the secretary of the union, to whom he had spoken before.

"Ay, he's got Bolitho for th' senior and Jordan for th' junior."

"Bolitho!" said Paul, "I never heard of him."

"Where have you lived?" asked the secretary. "'E's the smartest chap in the Northern Circuit, and

there's many as ses he's makin' several thousand a year. I have 'eard as 'ow Wilson 'ad a 'ard job to get him, 'e's that thronged with work, and when they 'ad got him, he said as 'ow it meant six months more to every one of you."

"What sort of a chap is he?" asked Paul.

"Eh, one of those smooth-spoken fellows. You think when he's cross-examining you 'e's on your side, and all the time 'e's worming out the most damning things against you. He's a kind of oily voice, too, and he makes people believe in him, whether they will or no. You must be careful about that, for directly he comes to address the jury he takes the meanest advantages of what he has dragged out of the witnesses."

Presently Paul found himself and the others in the same room wherein he had watched the trial of some months before. He thought of the G. D. Graham about whom he had such strange fancies, and remembered the shock he had received when he discovered that he was altogether mistaken. He little thought then that he would be here to-day as a dangerous character, and as one who had committed a grave offence against the public weal. Presently he was able to take note of his surroundings. The lofty chamber; the solemn-looking magistrates; the barristers at their benches; the jury in their box; the prisoners standing sullen and defiant, yet wondering how they would acquit themselves in the trial; and as many of the public as could gain admission into the room, eager, and wondering what the upshot would be.

Evidently the case was going to be a long one. The counsel for the prosecution opened it with a long and vigorous speech. He described the history of the strike, told of the excitable condition of the people, and related how difficult it had been for the police to keep order in the town. After this he went on, with more or less accuracy, to tell of the plot of the prisoners who had been brought there that day, and of the charges that were brought against them.

"Is that Mr. Bolitho?" asked Paul of the secretary of the union, who was allowed to stand near him.

"Nay," was the reply, "yon's Jordan, the junior. Bolitho's not here yet. I wish summat would happen to him on the way. I tell yo' I'm feared of him. This chap is but a beginner, so to speak—a sort of John the Baptist, that prepares the way for t'other; but Bolitho's a fair terror and no mistake."

Somehow the name had a familiar sound with it.

"Bolitho, Bolitho, why it's a Cornish name!" said Paul. "I've heard it many a time down in St. Mabyn. Perhaps when he knows I am a Cornishman—that is, if he is Cornish, too—he may not be so hard on me."

Still, this was only a passing thought, and he steeled his heart against the worst. When the case had dragged on for some time, Paul noticed that there was a flutter in the court. A man he had not hitherto seen came in and took his place beside the junior counsel for the prosecution. He heard a whisper go round the court, "There's Bolitho." And Paul's eyes were drawn to him as if by magic. There was something in the face that held his attention, fascinated him. He found his heart beating faster than was its wont and his muscles contracting as if he were about to meet an enemy. For the moment he forgot the reason why he was brought there, so keenly intent was he on examining the face of the barrister who had just come in. And yet it was not a face to be feared. It was somewhat florid, and certainly pleasant to look upon. His eyes were blue and had a somewhat dreamy expression in them, while the features suggested gentleness rather than harshness. A handsome man was this Mr. Bolitho, a man who looked as though he might have many friends. The counsel all round smiled at him, while the magistrate nodded benignly. He seemed to create an air of pleasantness. He relieved the somewhat sordid atmosphere which pervaded the chamber. How much time he had given to the case it was impossible to say, but, certainly, when he rose to cross-examine, he seemed to know every detail of it.

Presently the examination came to an end, and Mr. Bolitho rose to address the jury for the prosecution. In a way which Paul could not quite comprehend, and yet which seemed perfectly reasonable as he did it, he laid the whole blame for the trouble at Paul's door. It was his that had been the master mind. It was he who was guilty of inciting these ignorant, thoughtless youths to the act which had ended almost fatally for three men. He dragged in the quarrel which Paul had had with the son of Mr. Wilson, the owner of the mill, and insinuated that it was a matter of personal revenge which had inspired him to commit this outrage. In a few minutes it seemed to Paul that there was no blacker criminal in England than himself. This man Bolitho had created a new atmosphere in the court; his suave, almost smiling, features had changed. When he was examining he pretended to be kind and assumed a confidential and almost friendly manner. In this way he had wormed statements out of men which Paul knew to be diametrically opposed to the truth—he had even obtained the admission, from some of the youths whom he had tried to dissuade from their deed of violence, that he, Paul, had incited them rather than otherwise.

And now, in addressing the jury, this Mr. Bolitho had laid special emphasis upon it. Paul was perfectly sure that the man did not believe all he said, but he wanted to make a case, and he had fastened upon himself as the chief culprit.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Bolitho, "I wish you to pay special attention to this man, young in years, apparently respectable, well educated, especially for his class, and intelligent beyond the ordinary; but I want to point out to you that he is of that class of which agitators are made, and, as such, he is a

danger to the community. In the eyes of the law all these men are equally guilty, all of them were engaged in this wild, lawless deed, which has ended almost fatally for three men, two of them trustworthy officers of the law, and one a respected townsman of Brunford, and a man holding a position of trust under his employer. But think, gentlemen—these other youths were simply led by this stronger personality of Paul Stepaside. He, inspired by personal enmity towards Mr. Wilson, determined to be revenged on him for some fancied wrong done to him years before, has taken the opportunity to perpetrate this awful outrage. It is true he has not definitely said so, but he has insinuated that he tried to dissuade the others from taking part in this crime. But can such a thing be believed? The others were never capable of this plot, and, without a leader, would never have thought of participating in it. On several occasions, too, since he has been in Brunford he has made public speeches. Extracts from those speeches I will now read to you."

On this, Mr. Bolitho read certain statements which Paul was reported to have made—statements from which it would appear that he hated the class of employers who were prosecuting him that day.

"I am urging these things, gentlemen," continued Mr. Bolitho, "because I wish the guilt to be fastened where it ought to be fastened. It has been clearly proved that all these men were guilty of the charges of which they are accused, but surely it should be borne in mind that more guilt should be attached to the leader and the inspirer of these outrageous deeds than to those thoughtless and almost irresponsible fellows who were led like sheep to the slaughter."

Paul listened like one bewildered, and presently his heart became filled with black rage. He realised now the meaning of what the secretary of the union had said to him. He could not understand why it was that this clever counsel had tried to make him a scapegoat for all the rest; but now he saw it was really so. The others, who were really guilty of a thing which he himself condemned, were made to appear as almost innocent, while he, who had done his best to dissuade them from their mad act, was condemned as one who had acted like a devil. Once, during Mr. Bolitho's speech, Paul lost control over himself. "Liar!" he exclaimed. And his voice rang out above that of the counsel. A wave of excitement swept over the crowd. The judge looked at him with stern eyes, but before he had time to speak Paul persisted, "I say he is a liar, my lord. He has said things that are not true. He has twisted things out of their true meaning. He has made inferences appear like facts!"

He was unable to proceed further after this, owing to the action of the presiding magistrate—indeed it was a wonder that he had been allowed to say so much—but the intensity of his voice for the moment startled this grave man, and this caused him to allow what under ordinary circumstances would never have been possible.

As may be imagined, Mr. Bolitho made the most of this interruption. For some reason or other, he seemed to have taken a personal dislike to the young man before him, and now he used the interruption to emphasise what he had hitherto said.

"I ask you, gentlemen," he insisted, "to consider the evidence of these men"—and from the way he spoke it might seem as though he were acting as counsel for the others—"and then think of who is likely to be really guilty. These youths are just ordinary, ignorant, irresponsible fellows, waiting to be led, but incapable of leading—without education, and with no more than ordinary intelligence. But here is this Stepaside, regarded as a leader among a certain class in the town, an agitator, a dangerous man."

And so on, until at length his speech came to a close, and all felt that, whatever might happen to the others, the jury would regard Paul as the one who was responsible for what had taken place, and who, if either of the three injured men should die, would be regarded as guilty of not only outrage, but perhaps of manslaughter. Presently the judge summed up the case, and then waited while the jury left their box to consider their verdict.

By this time Paul was almost careless as to results. He felt perfectly sure that the punishment meted out to him would not be a light one; but he did not care. He was past that. His mind and heart were filled with rage against the man who had blackened his name. He fell to studying him while he waited, and again he was fascinated. While he had addressed the jury his eyes had shone with apparently righteous indignation; he was eager, almost passionate, in his denunciation of crime. But now it might seem as though his interest in the matter had gone. He chatted and laughed with the other barristers, and accepted their congratulations upon his speech. As Paul listened, too, he heard him accept an invitation to go with one of them to dinner that night, and afterwards accompany them to a place of amusement. And this was the man who had so ruthlessly, so cruelly, and so untruthfully defamed his own character.

Presently the jurymen returned, and the court awaited their verdict. A little later Paul knew that the others were committed to one month's imprisonment, while he himself was condemned to six months' hard labour. The young man's face never moved a muscle. He stood perfectly rigid, perfectly silent, as the judge pronounced the sentence, and then, when all was over, he turned towards the barristers' table, and his eyes met those of the man who, he knew, was practically responsible for the extreme punishment meted out to him. Mr. Bolitho smiled, and then, turning, left the court, while a policeman laid hold of Paul's arm and led him away to his cell.

CHAPTER IV

PAUL MEETS MARY BOLITHO

There is no need to describe at length Paul's experiences during the time he was imprisoned in Strangeways Gaol. The moral effect of prison life is rather harmful than good. In Paul Stepaside's case, at all events, it was so. He knew his punishment was unjust, he knew he was guiltless of the crime which had been attributed to him; knew, too, that for some purpose which he could not understand a case was made out against him which had no foundation in fact. These things alone would have had a tendency to embitter his heart and to make him rail at the so-called justice of the land. But when we add to this the fact that he was of a proud, sensitive nature, that he shrank from the unenviable notoriety to which he had been exposed, and that he writhed under the things that had been said about him, it can be easily seen that his whole nature rose up in revolt. Everything in the gaol aroused his antagonism, and made him bitter and revengeful. The daily routine, the constant surveillance of the warders, the thousand indignities to which he was subjected, made him, even while he said nothing, grind his teeth with passion and swear to be revenged in his own time.

One thing, however, interested him during his stay there: it was his study of the Book of Job, and he read through this old Eastern poem which fascinated him. At first he was prejudiced against it because it was in the Bible, but the majesty of the poem charmed him, overwhelmed him. He had read the plays of Shakespeare; he had closely studied what many consider to be the great dramatist's masterpiece, but "Macbeth" seemed to him poor and small compared with the Book of Job. The picture of Satan going to and fro on the earth, the story of Job's calamities, of his sorrows, and of the dire extremity in which he found himself, appealed to him and fascinated him. Yes, it was fine. The old Eastern poet had seen into the very heart of life. He had enabled Job to answer tellingly, brilliantly, these three wise fools who poured out their platitudes. In spite of himself, too, he was influenced by the conclusion of the poem. It was not only poetically just, but there was something in it that comforted him, that gave him hope in spite of himself, Was there, after all, he wondered, a God Who spoke out of the whirlwind, Who laughed at men's little theories, and worked His own will? It would be splendid if it were so. The idea possessed him; God behind all, in all, through all, the God Who made and controlled all the swirling worlds, and yet, in His infinite compassion, cared for every living creature that moved. Yes, it was stupendous; and if it were true, then—— But, again, he brooded over his wrongs, and his heart became closed and bitter.

And so the days passed by and lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into months, and at last Paul found himself free again. It was ten o'clock in the morning when he was set at liberty, and he realised that during the time he had been in prison the winter had passed away. It was early in November when he had been committed, and now it was the beginning of May. And so Lancashire was looking at its best. The sun, even through the smoke-begrimed atmosphere, was shining almost brightly, and the twitter of birds welcomed him as he left the prison a free man. To his surprise, he found outside the prison gates a number of men awaiting him, who, on his appearance, raised a shout of welcome. Paul had hoped to have escaped without notice. As we have said, he was keenly sensitive to the disgrace which he had suffered, and hated the thought that questioning eyes would be upon him. Therefore, when he saw that the crowd of men who had come from Brunford to give him a welcome had also attracted a number of people in the district, he was almost angry at their coming, and yet he could not help feeling grateful. After all, it showed a kind spirit, and he appreciated their presence accordingly.

"Come on, lad," said one of the men. "We'll just have a drink and then we'll catch the train for Brunford. We've ordered a rare dinner for thee at 'The Black Cow,' and to-night there's goin' to be a meeting in the Primitive Methodist schoolroom in honour of thy return."

"Is the strike all over?" asked Paul.

"Ay, the strike's all over. The matter's been patched up, and we are making fair brass i' Brunford now."

"And what has become of the other chaps?" asked Paul.

"You mean the chaps as wur tried with thee? Two on 'em are still i' Brunford; the rest have gone to Canada. We've summat to tell thee about that."

"What?" asked Paul.

"Weel, you see, they confessed as 'ow 'twere not thee who set 'em on to smashing Wilson's machinery, but that thou didst thy best to stop them, so, I tell thee this, thou art a sort of hero i' Brunford now. It's all over th' place that thou art a sort of martyr, and that thou suffered in their stead, instead of letting on and proving, as thou couldst easily prove, that thou wert agin their plan. Thou just kept quiet, so that they might get off easy, even though thou wert kept longer in quod thysen. The papers have had articles about it, too, and the affair has been called 'A Miscarriage of Justice.'"

"The people think I'm not disgraced, then?" said Paul, and there was a flash of eagerness in his eyes.

"Disgraced! Nay, it's all t'other way, and I can tell thee this, that many think that Wilson and his

son Ned are disgraced for setting on Bolitho to make it hard for thee."

"Did they do this?" asked Paul.

"Ay, they did an' all. From what we can hear, Bolitho had special instructions to let t'other chaps down easy. It was not hard to do this, because thou art a chap with eddication and brains, and art a bit of a leader, while t'others were nowt but ninnies. Anyhow, the truth's out at last, and nobody i' Brunford will look upon thee as disgraced."

In spite of himself Paul could not help being pleased, and he no longer resented the presence of the people who had gathered round the prison gates and who had listened eagerly to what had been said. Rather there was a feeling of triumph in his heart as cheer after cheer was raised. He was thought of as one who fought the battles of the working people, and he had suffered as a consequence No one looked on him as one disgraced, but rather as one who had suffered for their cause.

Nevertheless the marks of the prison were still upon his heart. No man could spend six months in Strangeways Gaol as he had spent them, and suffer as he had suffered, without being influenced thereby. The iron had entered his soul, and even kindly words and hearty cheers could not remove from him the fact that he had been treated unjustly, and that his character had been blackened.

When the train arrived in Brunford, another crowd, far larger than that which met him at Manchester, had gathered at the station, and there was quite a triumphal march down the Liverpool Road towards the town hall. Arrived there, Paul could not help noticing a number of the councillors leaving the steps of this great civic building, and among others he noticed both Mr. Wilson and his son, who were responsible for his imprisonment.

"Sitha, Ned Wilson," shouted one of the men. "This is the chap that thou set on Bolitho to persecute, and this is the chap that thou told lees about."

The two men laughed uneasily and passed up the road without comment. Evidently the tables were turned on them. As for the others, they spoke to Paul kindly. There was no ill-will remaining because of the strike, the relations between master and men in these manufacturing districts being sometimes almost confidential. In many cases they belong to the same social order, even although the one is rich and the other comparatively poor. Many of the manufacturers, who were now employers of labour, were themselves operatives twenty or thirty years before, and had worked side by side with those whom they now employed. As a consequence, it was the order of the day for a weaver to call his employer by his Christian name; indeed, many would think it beneath their dignity to call an employer "Mister." On one occasion the son of a large employer of labour in Brunford was sitting in his father's office when one of the operatives entered. He wanted to find his employer's groom, so he said to his young master, "Arthur, canst thou tell me where Mester Smith is?"

Paul quickly found that he lost no prestige whatever on account of his incarceration in Strangeways Gaol. On every hand he was met with kindness, and to his delight he found the place where he had been working still kept open for him. The day passed away amidst expressions of goodwill on every hand, and Paul, wellnigh worn out with the excitement of the last few hours, was about to return to his lodgings, when an event happened which altered the course of his life.

He was walking down the main street of the town, when, remembering that he needed to do some shopping, he dropped in at a hosier's place of business, the owner of which met him with great heartiness.

"Ay, Paul, lad," he said, "I'm delighted to see you. Mr. Whitman and I were just talking about you." And he turned, as he spoke, to an old, pale-faced, kindly man who stood by his side. Old William Whitman was the town missionary for Brunford, and was beloved by everybody.

"Ay," assented the old man, "and we've been praying for thee too, lad. I'm afraid your cross has been hard to bear, but, never mind, the sun will shine again now."

"It will, too," assented the hosier. "We think none the worse of thee, lad, for what thou hast undergone, and 'appen thou wilt find that this strange working of Providence 'll be oal for thy good."

"I don't see much of Providence in it," said Paul, "except that it makes me realise how kind the people here are. There seems a great deal more of the Devil than of God."

At that moment the shopkeeper's attention was drawn away from him by the coming of another customer, leaving him and the town missionary together.

"Nay, but you mustn't say that, Paul lad," said the missionary. "Happen in a few months you will get over all these things."

"I shall never get over it," said Paul. "For six months I have been wearing prison clothes; I have been sleeping in a cold, dark cell; my name has been taken away from me, and I have simply been known by a number, and I have been looked upon not as a man, but as a beast. There's not much to make one think of God in all that, Mr. Whitman!"

"Ay, it's been hard on thee," replied the old man, "and there's many a one in Brunford who thinks something should have been done for thee. I suppose Ned Wilson felt very bitter towards you, and

when he was instructing the counsel, he made him believe that you were the ringleader. There's more than one who have said that Bolitho was very unfair. However, the Lord will make everything right."

"I shall never believe that the Lord has made everything right until Bolitho and Wilson have suffered as I have suffered," replied Paul bitterly. "If I could see Bolitho in prison clothes; if he were known by a number; if he had to tramp the prison yard among the scum of the earth, as I have; if he had to lie in a cold cell with the darkness of hell in his heart, as I have, then I could believe in Providence perhaps. But when I remember that I was regarded as a beast and not as a man, while he was drinking wine and faring sumptuously, there did not seem much justice in the world."

Hearing a rustle by his side as he spoke, Paul turned and saw that the customer who had been talking with the shopkeeper was looking straight at him, and his heart beat violently as the eyes of the two met. It was a young girl he saw, not more than twenty years of age, and, as far as he knew, she was a stranger to the town. He had never seen her before, and she appeared different from the young women with whom he had happened to meet. He noticed, too, as their eyes met, that hers were full of horror. She seemed to regard him as she might regard a snarling dog. He saw her lips quiver, and he thought for a moment that she was about to speak to him. The intensity of her gaze made him almost beside himself, and then, acting on the impulse of the moment, and speaking with the freedom so common to the Lancashire operative class, he went on: "Yes, miss, and I mean it too. You, by the look of you, belong to that class, but, remember, the time will come when men like Bolitho will be paid for what they have done. But, there!" And he laughed. "I suppose he had to speak to his brief, and, justice or no justice, he had to do what his employer told him to do. 'Ten pounds more for every extra month you get him,' would be Wilson's cry, and Bolitho would be anxious to get the ten pounds."

The girl's eyes shone with a fierce anger, and then, without a word, walked away.

"I say, Paul," said the shopkeeper, "that's not the way to treat my customers!"

Paul looked ashamed of himself. "I know, I know, Mr. Sutcliffe, it was mean of me," he said, "and I know I ought to apologise to her. But if you had seen the look on her face, and had suffered what I have suffered, you'd have spoken too. Why, she might think I was an adder. But there, I dare say she knew who I was, and that I had just come out of prison."

"As you know, I'm all on your side, Paul," said the shopkeeper, "but I cannot afford to have my customers driven away."

"Nay, I know," said Paul; "and if she doesn't come back and pay for the things that are on the counter there, I'll take them myself and pay for them. But there, I must be going." And, having got the things he came to buy, he left the shop, little realising the influence the interview would have upon his future.

He had barely gained the street when a man, whom he had known almost ever since he had come to Brunford, met him. "Ay, Paul," he said. "I have just been to your lodgings, and I want to see you particular."

Paul's heart was still embittered with the scene through which he had passed, and he met the man rather coldly. "Is it anything particular?" he said.

"Yes, I think so," replied the man.

"Because if it isn't," said Paul, "I don't want to talk about it. I've had a hard day, and I'm pretty well worn out."

"That's so," replied the other, "and we'll say nothing more about it if you don't feel like talking, but I thought as 'ow you might look upon it as good news."

"Forgive me, Preston," he said, recognising the man's kindly tone. "I know I spoke like a brute, but my nerves are all on edge, and while everybody is very kind to me, I'm easily upset. What is it, old man?"

"I can't tell you here," replied Preston. "It'll take me an hour, anyhow."

"Is it so important as that?" said Paul, with a questioning look in his eyes.

"Ay, I think so," replied the other.

George Preston was a teacher in the Hanover Sunday-school, and was some two years older than Paul. He had more than average intelligence, and had been known for years as a hard-working, saving fellow. They had met at the Mechanics' Institute, where they had gone for classes, and, while they had gone their different ways, mutual respect existed between them.

"I expect Mrs. Dixon will have got my little room all ready," said Paul, "so we shall be able to have a chat without interruption." And the two threaded their way along the busy street towards Paul's lodgings. Never did Paul realise how much he was liked until that evening. It happened to be market day, and the streets were crowded with people. Not only had the townspeople gathered together in the centre of Brunford, but many had come in from a distance, and thus to a casual visitor it might seem as though a fair were being held. Every minute or so he was stopped by someone who came up to

congratulate him on his return, and to bid him welcome.

"Never fear, Paul lad," it was said to him again and again. "You shall noan suffer for this, and 'appen Wilson and that lot will noan be the happier for what they have done to thee. Art short of money, lad? If a sovereign 'll be of any use to thee, thou can have it."

And from the ring of sincerity in their voices Paul knew that every word was meant. For I should like to say here that, although the Lancashire operative is rough, and sometimes a little coarse, there are no kinder people on earth than those who live in the great manufacturing centres of the North. In the main they are loyal to a man, and as true as steel. Brunford is by no means an ideal place to live in; indeed, from November to April its atmospheric conditions are horrible beyond words. It rains nearly all the time, and, the air being smoke-begrimed, the streets are covered with black, slimy mud, offensive both to sight and to smell. The very conditions, too, under which the people live must have a tendency to coarsen and to destroy artistic feelings. The artisans know practically nothing about the gardens common to the South-country peasant. Houses are often built back to back, or only divided by a small paved yard, the front door is nearly always right on to the street, and, even in cases where some strip of garden is obtained, the flowers, which are the pride of the South-country people, simply come up hideous and black with grime.

The writer of these lines once lived in a manufacturing town in the North, and, there being a strip of garden to his house, he asked the gardener to plant for him some white hyacinth bulbs, hyacinths being one of his favourite flowers. When the spring came, the hyacinths appeared, but alas! they were not white, but as black as the soot which is belched forth from a hundred chimneys.

So moved was Paul by the kindness which was manifested, that a great sob came into his throat, and his heart became full of love towards the people. He longed, as he had never longed before, to work for them, to live for them; and before his mind came a vision of what the future might have in store. He knew what their life was, understood thoroughly the hard conditions under which they laboured. Yes, he would make some return for all this goodwill, and for the love which they evidently bore to him. He would live for them! He would work night and day for the betterment of their conditions! He would make Brunford a town to rejoice in! He would remove the wrongs under which the people suffered, and bring music and gladness into their lives! How he was to do this he did not know; indeed, it seemed impossible for him to commence as yet, but the time would come, and when that time came he would not spare himself. He did not forget what he had regarded as the chief purpose of his existence—that, at all costs, must be performed—but he must not live wholly for that; he must live for the people who loved him, and whom, in spite of everything, he loved.

"Well, Preston," he said, "what is it?" when at length they reached his lodgings, and were sitting alone in the little room which the old couple had allotted to him.

"I was thinking," said Preston, "of what you mean to do in the future."

"I don't think I shall go to work to-morrow," said Paul. "I shall need one day's holiday to get things straightened out a bit, but, as you know, my place is kept open for me."

"Have you any brass?" asked Preston abruptly.

"Not much," said Paul; "but I've saved a few pounds." And then, with a laugh, "It's cost me nothing to live during the winter, you know. All the same, I've had to work hard for the black bread and skilly."

"Come, now," said Preston, "let's say no more about that. I know you had a bad time, but you know by this time that no one in Brunford thinks the worse of you because of it, and no one thinks the better of Wilson. And it's not Christian to cherish black thoughts about them, or about Bolitho either. As you say, he was paid for his job, and he did it. How much money have you saved?"

"Two hundred pounds," said Paul.

"So much?" said the other in a tone of surprise. "Ay, I did not think you had done as well as that!"

"Well, you see," replied Paul, "I have had good wages and I've lived hard. I have spent nothing on luxuries. I have had no holidays."

"It must have cost you something for these," said Preston, looking at the well-filled bookcases on the wall.

"Oh, I forgot them," said Paul. "Yes. But, then, you see, I needed most of them, and books are my one extravagance. But why did you ask?"

"I want to propose a partnership," said Preston.

"Yes," said Paul. "In what?"

"In a weaving shed."

"A weaving shed? That's not my trade!"

"No, I know; but what you don't know about weaving isn't worth knowing. Although you started in Brunford as a loom-maker, you've picked up all there is to know about manufacturing. And you're a bit

of a scientist, too. Well, I don't know so much about that part of it, but I do know about the buying and selling. I've not been a salesman with Robinson's for nothing, and I worked in the mills as a boy. You've got two hundred pounds, you say; so have I, and a bit more. It's enough for us to start on, lad. We can hire a shed, and we can hire power, and we can hire looms, and we can buy cotton."

Paul looked at him in astonishment. "But, man alive, Preston, four hundred pounds is not enough."

"Four hundred pounds is enough," replied the other. "And we can make the thing go; we will make it go, too. And I want to tell you this, too: I've a promise of a good backer."

"Who?" asked Paul.

"Well, to-day, as you know, your home-coming has been the talk of the town, and Ben Bierly was talking with me about you. As you know, he's a teacher at Hanover Sunday-school, and a few years agone he was a poor man himself, while now he's one of the biggest manufacturers in Brunford. Well, Paul, he sympathised with you, and he admires you too, and he told me that if you were willing to go into partnership with me he'd back us. He believes in you, and he believes in me, and if we want a thousand pounds, we can have it."

"You're surely not serious, Preston?"

"Ay, but I am. I mean every word of it, and I know this, too: cotton can be bought at great advantage just now, and trade's good. What do you think of it?"

"I have had no time to think yet," said Paul. "Give me till to-morrow night and let me look round a bit. But tell me this, what shed can we hire?"

"There's a shed at the back of St. James's Street," replied Preston. "I was looking at it only to-day. It'll suit us down to the ground, and we can get it cheap."

For an hour or more they talked, Paul asking keen, searching questions, which could only have been thought of by one who had thoroughly mastered the mysteries of cotton-weaving. Afterwards he went to bed, and thought long on the experiences of the day.

The next morning the town presented a new aspect. It no longer looked *en fête*, as on the previous evening. On every hand halt-consumed coals and strange smelling steams were being emitted from a hundred factories. The streets were empty save for heavy lorries and tramcars. Presently, at twelve o'clock, the mills would belch forth thousands of pale-faced operatives, who for long hours had been standing at the looms, but who, at present, were immured in those great noisome, prison-like buildings which form the main features of the town.

Paul made several visits that morning, and presently found his way to the empty weaving shed of which Preston had spoken the previous evening. After some difficulty he had an interview with its owner. Preston had told him that Fletcher was anxious to let this shed. It had been on his hands for several months, and no one seemed to want it. To his surprise, therefore, Fletcher met him coolly. "Well, they've let you out?" he said to Paul.

"Evidently, or I should not be here," laughed Paul.

"Well, be careful not to get up to your larks again!" said the other, and his tones were almost surly.

Paul took notice of this gibe, but as soon as he thought wise brought the conversation round to the object of his visit.

"I don't know that it's to let," replied Fletcher.

"No?" queried Paul. "Then I must have been misinformed."

"It wur to let," said Fletcher, "and I don't say it isn't now, but I'm noan sure."

"Why, George Preston told me yesterday that you had practically given him the refusal of it."

"Ay, practically, but that noan settles the business. I've had another offer since then."

"May I ask who has made the offer?" asked Paul.

"Thou may ask, but I don't say I shall tell. However, 'appen ow of the biggest manufacturers in the town 'll have it."

"A big manufacturer wouldn't look at it," said Paul. "It's only fit for a man in a small way of business."

Fletcher looked at him and laughed. "Good-morning," he said. "'Appen I can go into it further to-morrow, but not now." And then he turned on his heel and left Paul thinking.

Before the day was out Paul heard that young Edward Wilson, the son of the man who had prosecuted him, had hired the shed for a warehouse, although there seemed no reason at all why he should do so.

"This settles me," said Paul to Preston that night. "It's evident that Wilson has got his knife into me, and he, hearing what you had in your mind, determined to make it impossible. But, never mind," and Paul's somewhat prominent jaws became rigid and stern. "I don't know that I was so keen about manufacturing before, but I'd like to fight Wilson, and he shall see that I'm not easily beaten. But we must go quiet, Preston, and we'll have to be careful. There's not the slightest doubt about it that Wilson thinks he owes me a grudge for what happened nearly three years ago. But for that I shouldn't have had six months at Strangeways. Still, I'm not a chicken, neither are you."

And then the two young men talked long and seriously concerning other alternatives.

A week later the final step was taken, and Paul and Preston had signed a contract to hire a larger weaving shed than they had intended, and arrangements were pushed forward to start work immediately. Indeed, Paul's mind was so filled with the project he had in hand that almost everything else was forgotten. Two matters, however, must be mentioned. The one was a letter from his mother, to whom he had written, giving an account not only of his experiences in prison and of his home-coming, but also of the venture that he was making. "If I succeed, mother," he said, "you must come to Brunford to live. And I mean to succeed. In twelve months from now I am going to be a well-to-do man. I've learnt pretty much all there is to know about manufacturing, and I've a good partner. And I mean to get on. But don't think I've forgotten the real purpose for which I came to the North. I have not found out much about my father yet, although I've tried, tried hard. I can't understand it either. I've got hold of law books containing lists of the names of the barristers in England, and while there are a good many Grahams, none of them seem to tally with the descriptions you gave me. However, once let me get on with manufacturing and I shall have more time. I mean to go up to your father's farm and ask questions there, and you need not fear. I've got the name in Brunford for carrying out the thing I start upon, and I've promised you. But, as I said, as soon as I get on, you must come to Brunford to live with me, and then we can work together."

To this his mother had replied that she could never be a burden to him. "You don't want a woman worrying you, Paul," she had said. "I'm well enough off down here. You want to be free and unfettered. At the proper time I'll come to you, but not yet, and don't trouble about me."

Paul brooded long over this letter. He pictured her hard, lonely life away down in Cornwall, a few miles from Launceston, where she earned her living as a servant. On several occasions he had sent her money, but each time she had returned it, and it made him sad to think of what she must be suffering. He remembered his promise to her, and his resolution, dark and grim as it was, remained one of the most powerful factors in his life. "I wish she would come and live with me," he reflected. "I think I could bring some brightness into her life, and yet, perhaps, it's just as well she is not here with me. She would have broken her heart during the trial; but I'll not forget—no, I'll not forget."

A fortnight after his return from Manchester he was walking with Preston to a village some distance from; Brunford, where they had arranged to inspect some machinery. By this time he had practically forgotten the meeting with the girl to whom he had spoken so rudely in John Sutcliffe's shop. But this afternoon, even while his mind ought to have been filled with the work he had in hand, his mind turned to her. He remembered the look of anger in her eyes, and the scorn which shone from them as she gazed on him. He wondered who she was, and why she should seem so deeply moved by what he had said.

In order to reach the village of Northcroft, the place towards which they wended, they had to cross some fields, and George Preston and he had scarcely climbed the stile when, coming towards them, they saw two girls. Evidently they were coming from a large house in the near distance, and were walking towards Brunford. Paul saw in a moment that they were not of the operative class. They were well-dressed, and it was plainly to be seen that they were strongly differentiated from those women whom it was his lot to meet. He had barely gone half-way across the field, when he stood still and gazed at one of them like a man spell-bound. He recognised her as the girl whom he had met in Sutcliffe's shop. Scarcely knowing what he did, he stood still in the path, thus making it impossible for them to pass him. Preston, evidently deep in his calculations about the looms he proposed to buy, had for the moment forgotten Paul's presence and had left him behind.

"Will you kindly stand aside?"

Paul recognised the speaker. It was the daughter of Edward Wilson, but he paid no heed to her, he was gazing intently at the other, and he saw the colour mount to her cheeks as their eyes met. He had taken but little notice of her when he had first seen her. He recognised that she belonged to a class entirely different from his own, but he remembered little else beyond the anger which she evidently felt towards him. That she had resented his words was evident, but to that he had attached but little importance; now, however, all was different. He could not understand how or why—she had not only crossed the pathway of his life, but she had entered his life. She seemed to arouse within him all sorts of unthought-of possibilities. His ideas of the world became different. She made him think of the poetry and of the romance of life, even although she still looked upon him with scorn, if not with anger. The morning had been rainy, and the long grass on either side of the pathway was as wet as a pond, but he did not move aside that she might pass by, in spite of what her companion had said. Neither did he speak, but stood looking at her. She was utterly different from Emily Wilson, whom he had often seen; indeed, the poles seemed to lie between them. Miss Wilson was tall and largely made, and, in spite of the fact that her dressmaker was an artist, seemed to look poor and shabby beside the stranger. This girl was almost diminutive, and yet she carried herself like a queen. He could not have described a single feature, and yet he knew he would never forget her face. It made him think of the fields around

St. Mabyn. It caused him to remember the love song of the birds, the music of a streamlet, as it murmured its way down a valley near his old home. It suggested the countryside, far removed from the smoke and grime of that northern town, a countryside that was peaceful, sweet and beautiful.

"Will you kindly move aside?"

This time he realised what he was doing, and he stepped into the wet grass.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and then unconsciously he lifted his hat. He knew that the girl was thinking of their former meeting, thinking of his own rudeness, thinking, too perhaps, of the circumstances under which he had come back to Brunford. He walked on like a man in a dream. "I had just come out of prison," he said, "and I spoke to her like a clown. What must she think of me?" And then a feeling of bitterness came over his heart. "She's with that Wilson girl," he said, "and I know what they'll say."

But why should he care? What had he in common with this young girl, whose thoughts and feelings must be far removed from his own?

The Lancashire operatives pay little attention to caste or class distinction. With them one man is as good as another, even although they are greatly influenced by the fact of success and the amassing of money. But the inwardness of the word Aristocracy has little or no meaning to them; it is too elusive, too intangible. But at that moment Paul realised something of what it meant. This girl belonged to a class of which he knew nothing. She created an atmosphere utterly different from that breathed in a Lancashire manufacturing town. He could not put it into words, but he knew it was there, a refinement, a suggestion of thoughts to which he was a stranger. What was she doing there? She had nothing in common with that Wilson girl, even although the Wilsons were the wealthiest people in Brunford. And then there was something more, he knew not what, only somehow it made life different. It made him feel how small his world had been, what a little thing money-making was. It suggested a larger world, a higher life of which hitherto he had been ignorant.

When he reached the next stile he found George Preston waiting for him. "Been talking with Wilson's lass?" asked he with a laugh.

Paul shook his head. "Who's the other one?" he asked. "Is she not a stranger in these parts?"

"Don't you know?" asked Preston.

"No, I don't know."

"Why, she's Miss Bolitho. She's the daughter of the man who had so much to do in sending you to quod."

It seemed as though someone had struck him a blow. Unconsciously he had been weaving fancies around her, unconsciously, too, something had come into his life to which hitherto he had been a stranger. And now to hear that she was the daughter of the man whom he could not think of save as his enemy, almost made him reel! For a few minutes he walked on by Preston's side without speaking, while his companion, almost unconsciously realising that he was in no humour for speech, was likewise silent.

"I suppose," said Preston presently, "that Bolitho and Wilson got friendly through thy trial. Of course, Bolitho's a big man, and knows a lot of the big people in London, still, he's allowed his daughter to come visiting here, and I hear, too, that young Ned Wilson is sweet on her."

Paul did not speak. His mind was dazed, but he felt sure that, for weal or for woe, he and this girl would be associated in the future.

"Are you sure she's Bolitho's daughter?" he said to Preston a little later.

"Oh, yes, I'm quite sure. Bolitho was staying at Wilson's house while you were in prison. And it is said that the two families went away to Switzerland together just after Christmas. Besides, Ned Wilson won't be a bad catch. It is said that the firm is making fifty thousand a year, and Ned is the only son. But there, Paul, that's not for us to talk about. They're not in our world at all. We're just beginning, and we shall have hard work to get on. And we must be careful of Ned Wilson, too. But for him, as you know, we should have had Fletcher's weaving shed, and that would have saved us twenty pounds a year in rent."

"Yes," said Paul, and his lips were compressed as he spoke. "I fancy the time will come when Ned Wilson and I will have a lot of old scores to pay off, and I tell you what, Preston, when the time comes I'll not have the worst of it."

A year from that date two events took place which need recording. Preston and Paul had been going carefully through their books, and had been engaged in what might be termed a kind of stocktaking.

"We have had a great year, Paul," said Preston.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Paul.

"And I doubt if any two chaps, beginning as we did, have had such success as we have had."

"Perhaps not," said Paul, "but we've not had enough yet. I've got a scheme in my mind which I want to talk with you about, Preston."

"You're always full of schemes," replied the other.

"Yes but have they not turned out well?" was the answer.

"Ay, I know," was the reply. "But sometimes I've felt as though we have been walking on eggs. I never thought, twelve months ago, that I should have dared to launch out so! Why, man, think of our liabilities!"

"Yes," replied Paul, "but think of our success, too; think of our assets! As you say, we've had a big year, but we must have a bigger next year, and big years are not got by nibbling at things. We've got this place for three months longer. At the end of that time we must clear out."

"Clear out!"

"Ay, clear out. A hundred looms are no use to us now. We must multiply them by eight."

"Why, Paul, you must be mad!"

"No, I've gone into it all. Mind you, this is no speculation which I have in my mind. It may seem like it, but I have calculated everything to a nicety. I've made inquiries at the bank, and I know to a penny how we stand, and what the bank will back us for. And I've been making inquiries about Thorncliffe Mill."

Preston looked at Paul as though he had doubts about his sanity. "Thorncliffe Mill," he replied. "Why, it's one of the biggest places in Brunford!"

"I mean not only to have one of the biggest places, but the biggest place," said Paul. And although he did not mention the fact to Preston, he knew that his new-found ambition was associated with the meeting of Mr. Bolitho's daughter a year before.

The other event, which happened that day, was entirely different. He had moved into larger rooms, and his surroundings were now more congenial to his taste. It was evident, too, that Paul knew the value of a good tailor, so much so that more than one young manufacturer declared that he was the best-dressed man in Brunford. When Paul returned to his lodgings that night he found four men awaiting him. Wondering as to what their visit meant, he asked them to sit down, and then waited for them to state their business. One of these men was the secretary of the Weavers' Union, whom we have mentioned earlier in these pages, another was the chairman of the Working Men's League, a powerful political body in the town.

"Well, what is it?" asked Paul, noticing that they hesitated.

"You know, I suppose, that Mr. Carcliffe is resigning? He was returned to Parliament four years ago, but he's had enough of it, it seems."

"Yes, I heard about it," said Paul.

"Well, now's our chance," continued one of the men.

"You mean that you're going to return a working-man?" said Paul.

"Well, I don't know so much about that," was the reply. "But we want to return a man who understands us, who can voice our needs and who has sympathies with our struggles."

"And have you thought of anyone?"

"Ay," replied the other, "we have."

"Who?"

"His name is Paul Stepaside," was the reply. "We've had him in our minds for months. In fact, we've thought of him ever since he went to gaol, in Manchester, a year ago."

To say that Paul was surprised at this proposal is but to suggest the state of his feelings. For years he had had all sorts of romantic ideas as to what the future of his life was to be, and thoughts concerning a parliamentary career were not strange to him. Now, however, that an actual proposal had been made, he could scarcely believe his own ears. Ever since he had come to Brunford he had been interested in political questions, and had been a popular speaker, young as he was, on many political platforms. He remembered the vision he had on the day he came out of prison. He had determined to work and live for these people of Brunford, to ameliorate their woes, and to bring more sunshine into their lives. But to go into Parliament, to take his part in the legislation of the country; to stand face to face with men whose names he held almost in awe, was too wonderful to be true. Still, there were the facts: these men had come to him, telling him that Mr. Carcliffe, the present Member, had either resigned or was going to resign, and suggested to him that when an election came he should fight their

battle.

Well, why should he not do it? He was no longer a poor man. It is true his position in the financial world was far from being a safe one, but he had calculated concerning the future with great care, and he believed that in a few years' time his position would be secured. He believed in the cause these men stood for, too, and he could fight their battles wholeheartedly. Above and beyond all this, moreover, was something else which he scarcely dared to put into words. He had not seen the young girl who had so strangely affected him since their meeting in the fields, more than a year before, but the memory of that meeting remained with him. At the back of all his plans for the future was the thought of her, and although he did not know it, he had made up his mind to win her as his wife. The difficulties seemed almost insurmountable. She belonged to a class far removed from his own, and he knew by the look on her face that she regarded him with anger, if not with contempt. To her he was an agitator of the worst kind, one who had broken the laws of his country, and had outraged the feelings of her class. Through her own father's influence he had been sent to gaol as a criminal, and she would naturally stand by her father's position. Even without this stain upon his life, his case seemed hopeless: he was only a working-man who had "got on," while she was the daughter of a man who stood high in one of the most influential professions. He knew that the doors of the best houses in the land were open to prominent King's Counsels like Mr. Bolitho, while he was a nobody. And yet, with that dogged determination by which he had become known in Brunford, he had determined to overcome all difficulties, and to make her love him. He did not see how he was to do it, he did not know her address in London, he did not know how he could see her again; nevertheless, he held by his resolution. There was only one woman in the world to him, and that was one who despised him. Indeed, Paul Stepaside was not sure that he loved her at all. Sometimes he thought he hated her; nevertheless, she dominated his being, she was the goal of his hopes, and in everything he undertook her influence was felt.

Perhaps this was partly the reason why the proposal made to him had such a strong attraction. As a struggling cotton manufacturer he was a nobody, but as a young Member of Parliament he would have a position. The difficulties in the way of his advancement did not daunt him, and he felt sure he could make his name prominent among the legislators of the land.

"Did you say that Mr. Carcliffe had definitely resigned?" he asked.

"Well, he's told the committee that he wants to resign; we know that," was the reply. "And there's bound to be a general election in a few months, and he has declared definitely that he'll not stand again."

"Who is the man that the other party are going to nominate in his place?" he asked.

"We don't know yet," was the answer. "But we hear that a meeting is going to be held at Edward Wilson's in a few days. But never mind the other side, Paul; if you'll stand we'll send you to Parliament. We're not going to allow these fine-fingered gentry to have it all their own way. You're our man, and we'll stand by you, as you have stood by us."

Paul did not give them a definite answer that night. He wanted to think about it, he said. All the same, when he bade them "Good-night" his mind was practically made up, although he did not know it.

CHAPTER V

PAUL'S MADNESS

Howden Clough was a big house standing in its own grounds, some two miles from the town of Brunford. Considering the vicinity, it was a very handsome place of residence. The house itself was of grey stone, and occupied a commanding position. Having been built some two hundred years before, by an old county magnate, the grounds were well matured. Indeed, Mr. Edward Wilson was envied by his fellow manufacturers for having obtained so desirable a place of residence. The very fact that he lived in a house which had been owned by the Greystones gave him a kind of position, and this, added to his being a rich man, and abundantly able to keep up the place he occupied, gave him a feeling of superiority.

Edward Wilson and his son were sitting together in the room which they called the library, although there were but few evidences of the name being deserved.

"Mr. Bolitho will be here in half an hour," said the father.

"Do you know if he is bringing Mary with him?" asked Ned.

"I am not sure," replied the father. "I have done my best for you, my lad."

"I mean to have her," said the young man. "I never really cared for a girl before, and I shall never care for another. Besides, why is the case hopeless?"

"I mean you shall have her," replied the father. "But you must remember, my lad, that these Bolithos belong to a very old family, and they don't look upon money as everything. We're not county people, and they are, although they visit us as friends. Still, I can buy up half the county people, and I've done my best to persuade him to bring Mary with him. When I was at Mr. Bolitho's house last, I inquired if she had any matrimonial engagement, but as far as I could gather she's still fancy free, so let's hope for the best, Ned."

"What time does the meeting commence?" asked the son.

"Not until nine o'clock," was the reply. "We shall have plenty of time for a smoke and a chat after dinner before those fellows come."

A little later there was a sound of wheels upon the drive. Both father and son rushed to the door, and to their delight they found not only Mr. Bolitho but his daughter as well.

"This is splendid!" cried Mr. Wilson senior. "I was afraid Miss Bolitho would not be able to come. Ah, Emily, here's your friend. We are glad to see you. I am afraid you'll think that Lancashire people are a little rough, but we yield to none in the warmth of our welcome."

Although this speech seemed correct enough, young Edward Wilson felt rather uneasy. He wondered whether those of Mr. Bolitho's class would have met him in a similar way. In spite of the fact that he declared himself deeply in love with the young lady who had now gone upstairs with his sister, he did not feel comfortable in her presence. There seemed to be always an invisible barrier between them. Still, she was there, and he meant to make the most of his opportunities; and if the plans which had been made bore fruit, he trusted that he would see a great deal of her in the future.

The party that sat round the dinner table was gay, but no reference was made to the ostensible object of Mr. Bolitho's visit. When nine o'clock came, however, it was evident that there were several new-comers, and presently the two Wilsons led the way to the library, while Mr. Bolitho followed with a half-interested, half-bored look on his face. He shook hands with a number of men who had gathered in the room. Evidently they were nearly all opulent, keen-minded, successful men, but he could not help feeling pleased at the deference which each of them paid to him. Even as they did, he realised that he was not of their class. After all, a wealthy cotton manufacturer occupies a different position from that of an eminent barrister who belongs to an old county family.

They quickly made known their business. "The truth of it is, Mr. Bolitho," said the leading spokesman, "Mr. Carcliffe is resigning, and we want someone to fight our battles. The socialistic and labour element has become very strong, and unless we are strongly led, our side will be beaten. And so we have come to the conclusion that if you will say 'Yes,' you are our best man."

It was a roughly spoken speech, but Mr. Bolitho understood perfectly, and the proposal appealed to him strongly. He had long encouraged political aspirations, and here was his opportunity. To be the Member of the important borough of Brunford, which lay at the heart of the manufacturing district, promised all sorts of scope for his ambition. Owing to his success at the Bar he had a large income, and more than one had suggested to him that if he entered Parliament he would be a most eligible candidate for the post of either Solicitor- or Attorney-General, while even higher things might be within his grasp in the future. As it was, he discussed the various pros and cons with considerable eagerness and cordiality. As far as he could see, there was every probability of success. The present Member had been elected by a clear thousand majority, and he had sufficient faith in himself to believe that he could not only maintain that majority but increase it.

"By the way," he said at length, "have the other side selected their man?"

"Well, yes and no," was the reply. "From what we hear they have not fastened upon a party man, but they have approached young Paul Stepaside."

Mr. Bolitho gave a look of astonishment. "What!" he cried. "Stepaside! the fellow who a year or two ago——" And then he stopped.

"Yes," was the reply.

"But he hasn't been long out of prison."

"No," was the rejoinder. "But he's a remarkable chap, is Stepaside, and there have been all sorts of foolish notions in the town so that he's become very popular."

"I suppose these working-men's unions will pay his expenses, then?" said Mr. Bolitho.

"I am not so sure of that," replied the chairman of the association. "You see, Stepaside started manufacturing a little more than a year ago, and he's been phenomenally successful. His partner is a very able chap, too, and they know their business. So that I fancy Stepaside will be able to pay his own expenses."

"And has he the confidence of the people?"

"He's the confidence of a certain class," was the reply, "and he would be a strong candidate."

Mr. Bolitho looked thoughtful. "This is very awkward!" he said.

"You don't mean to say," said the chairman, "that this fact will alter your decision?"

"No," he replied slowly. "I don't quite say that, but it puts a new face on the question. You see, it will be awkward for me to oppose a man in politics whom, less than two years ago, I practically sent to gaol. Still, it gives a certain piquancy to the situation. Does he know much about politics, by the way?"

"No, I don't think he does," replied the chairman of the association. "And that's where our strength will lie. He's just an agitator, just a clever speaker who can appeal to men's passions, but when he's faced with facts he will be nowhere."

There was a short silence after this. It was evident that some present did not agree with what had been said, but no one spoke a word. All seemed to be afraid lest Mr. Bolitho would fail them at this juncture, and they looked upon him as the man most likely to lead them to victory.

After they were gone Mr. Bolitho talked long and gravely with Mr. Wilson.

"I tell you," said the manufacturer, "if you fail us now, Mr. Bolitho, your conduct will be misinterpreted."

Mr. Bolitho looked at the other questioningly.

"The truth of it is," went on Mr. Wilson, "a great many foolish things have gone abroad since Stepaside's trial, and the belief is that he wasn't treated fairly. The chaps who got off easily confessed, after their imprisonment, that Stepaside had tried to dissuade them from doing what they did, and so he has been looked upon as a kind of martyr. Many have blamed us for this, and now if you refuse to fight him—well, they'll say you are afraid."

"Afraid!"

"Yes, afraid. They'll say you're afraid to face a public audience, to stand up in a public fight."

Mr. Bolitho gazed steadily on the carpet for a few seconds, and then relit his cigar, which had gone out.

"That settles it, Wilson," he said. "That settles it. I will quickly let the people of Brunford know whether I am afraid or not. You can tell your chairman that I accept."

The manufacturer caught the other man's hand with delight. "By goom," he said, lapsing into the Lancashire dialect, "that's the ticket."

"You can tell him, too," went on the barrister, and his eyes flashed as he spoke, "that I'll fight this for all I'm worth. We'll leave no stone unturned, Wilson, and I'm inclined to think at the end of this election that your man Stepaside will be no longer regarded as a hero."

The following Saturday *The Brunford Times* announced the fact that Mr. Bolitho, K.C., had accepted a hearty invitation to stand as their candidate for the next election, and a leading article was devoted to him, declaring that, if they had sought all over England, a worthier candidate could not have been found.

Paul had no knowledge of the true facts of the case until he saw *The Brunford Times* on the Saturday morning. He was returning from his mill when he heard a boy shouting in the street, "Bolitho accepted for Brunford," and, buying the paper, he read the news eagerly.

"Thou looks as though thou had lost a thousand pounds, Paul," said a voice.

"Nay," replied Paul. "I've not lost a thousand pounds." And he noticed that the man to whom he spoke was the chairman of the league who had visited him some time before.

"Well, what's the matter that you look so glum?" said the other.

"I've come to a serious conclusion," replied the young man between his set teeth.

"And what's your conclusion?"

"I'm going to be Member for Brunford," he replied, and walked on without another word.

"Ay, and he will, too," said the other, as he watched Paul's retreating figure. "The chap as licks Paul Stepaside will have to be a bigger man than any lawyer that ever lived!"

The consequence of this meeting in the street was that, before the day was over, all the town knew that Paul Stepaside, who had been doubtful so long as to whether he would fight the people's battle, had now made up his mind, and that he would oppose the man who had been instrumental in sending him to prison nearly two years before!

"You remember him, Mary," said Emily Wilson. "You remember the man who stopped us in the path last summer?"

"Yes, I remember him," said the girl quietly. "He struck me as a dangerous kind of man."

"He's thought to be very good-looking," said the other. "He came to Brunford a few years ago, a nobody, and now there's no man so much talked about."

"But do you think he'll succeed?" asked the girl.

"There's no telling," replied Miss Wilson. "You see, here in Brunford the working people form the great bulk of the population, and they are very determined; when they have set their minds on a thing they stop at nothing in order to obtain it. Besides, among a certain class, your father is not very much liked."

"No, I understand that," replied the other quietly. "But, of course, they must understand that, as a barrister, my father was obliged to do what he did."

"Well, you know, these working people have all sorts of foolish notions."

"I should like to hear him speak," said Mary Bolitho. "I wonder if I should be noticed if I went to one of his meetings."

"I expect not," replied the other. "But still, no meetings will be held for a little time yet. When the election comes we shall have great doings here."

At that minute they were joined by young Edward Wilson.

"We were just talking about Paul Stepaside," said his sister. "And I was saying that the people are very strongly attached to him."

"Oh, I don't fear," replied Wilson.

"Why, you said only yesterday that you greatly doubted what the result would be," replied his sister.

"Yes, but I've been thinking it all over since then," replied Wilson, "and I can see how we can beat him."

"How?" asked the two girls eagerly.

"Well, there are two things," he replied. "One of them depends upon you, Miss Bolitho."

"Upon me!" replied the girl. "How? What do you mean?"

"You really wish your father to beat this fellow?"

"Of course I do!" replied the girl. "I should be horribly ashamed if my father did not get in by a big majority."

"Well, then," said Wilson, "it can be done. You see, Stepaside's chances all depend upon the working people. Of course, we have a good many of them on our side, but he has more on his. Now I know what these factory hands are, and although they profess to be very democratic, there's no Englishman that ever lived but who is a snob at heart. If you, Miss Bolitho, will make a house-to-house visitation, you can win enough votes to put your father in, whatever the other side does."

"But that would mean my staying in the town for months!" said the girl.

"It would mean your spending a great deal of time here," said Wilson, who thought he was very clever, "but what of that? We shall always be delighted to see you at Howden Clough, and I am sure Emily, here, would be only too glad to help you."

"Why, indeed I would, Mary," replied the girl, "and, after all, it would be great fun!"

Mary Bolitho looked across at the great town which lay in the valley beneath her. She saw the hundreds of chimneys belching out black, half-consumed coals, she saw the long lines of uninteresting cottages, in which these toilers of the North lived, and she thought of the work that Wilson's suggestion would entail. She did not know why, but she had taken a strong dislike to Paul Stepaside. Perhaps it was because she remembered his words in the shop in Brunford. Perhaps because he had roused some personal antipathy. Anyhow, in her heart of hearts was the longing to see him beaten. And yet she was afraid. She did not like the idea of spending so much time at Howden Clough. She was too clear-sighted to be blind to Wilson's intentions, and she felt sure as to what his hopes were.

"What's the other thing you have in your mind, Mr. Wilson?" she said presently.

"The other thing is personal," was the reply. "After all, who is Paul Stepaside? Who is his father? Who is his mother? Who are his people? We Lancashire people may profess to be very democratic, but we've got a lot of pride in us. I have heard—well, I won't tell you what I've heard, but I'll manage that!"

A few weeks later the contest between Paul Stepaside and Mr. Bolitho commenced in the Brunford district. There were no immediate signs that an election would take place, but each knew that they must be ready when the time came. Mr. Bolitho held crowded meetings in various parts of the constituency, and, according to newspaper reports, was enthusiastically received. This, however, was

to be expected. There were fifteen thousand voters on the lists, and Mr. Carcliffe, whom Mr. Bolitho sought to succeed, had at the last election obtained over a thousand majority. Paul also addressed several meetings, which were largely attended, and his supporters spoke to him very confidently about the result. But Paul was not satisfied; he could not help noticing that a subtle change was coming over the town. His experiences of a year ago, and the tremendous enthusiasm which they had raised on his behalf were practically forgotten. His imprisonment was a thing of the past, and the share which Mr. Bolitho had taken in it was no longer very seriously considered. Paul was not long in attributing this change to its real cause. For one thing, he was being constantly met with rumours about his birth. He knew that the artisans of the North, while professing advanced democratic views, were nevertheless influenced by such things. More than once he had been asked what his father did, where he lived, where his mother and father were married, and where he had been born? And presently, when it was rumoured that he had been born in a workhouse, Paul could not help feeling that a subtle force was at work. In addition to this, too, he heard that Mr. Bolitho's daughter had been visiting among the poorer streets in the town, and that on every hand she had been winning golden opinions. It seemed to him from what he had heard that there was a kind of witchcraft in her presence, and that many who had been among his great admirers, and promised supporters, now seemed to think that the other side had a great deal to say. Paul quickly discovered, too, that this girl was no ordinary canvasser. She had been able to meet the working-class politician on his own grounds, and to answer him very effectively. Everyone who has taken part in a political contest knows the influence which a young, educated, intelligent and beautiful girl can wield, and she had gone into the people's cottages and talked, not only with the women, but with the men. She had caught, too, the rough humour of the district, and had acquainted herself with the peculiar needs and desires of the people who worked in the North. More quick-witted and better informed than they, she had apparently been able to answer Paul's arguments, and had, therefore, left them in doubt.

This, too, seemed apparent to Paul. The questions asked concerning his parentage and birthplace synchronised with the advent of this girl. Never once had he met her, and yet he was constantly hearing of the converts that she was making. As may be imagined, his heart grew bitter at the thought of it, even while he grimly determined that he would win this battle. It is true that the election seemed months away, but the ground seemed slipping from under his feet, and his chances, in spite of what his supporters told him, appeared to grow less each day.

Paul called to mind the time he had met her, in the field close by Howden Clough. He remembered, too, the wild vow he made. This girl, the daughter of the author of his disgrace, one who evidently regarded him with contempt and anger, nevertheless filled his horizon. He knew that the feelings he bore towards her, feelings which no one but himself ever dreamed of, seemed to be madness, while the election that loomed ahead, and on which he had built such great hopes, seemed to divide them rather than to bring them together. If he were beaten in the fight, she would look upon him with more contempt than ever.

This feeling caused his speeches to be somewhat bitter in their tones, and, as a consequence, did not advance his interests—indeed, he felt as though his own supporters were growing half-hearted, if not indifferent, and he attributed it all to the persistent work of Mary Bolitho. Moreover, there were constant rumours about her being engaged to young Ned Wilson—and Ned Wilson, as he knew, was his enemy.

One evening, it was toward the end of September, Paul was walking in some fields beyond Howden Clough. He had been reflecting that he had as yet done nothing towards carrying out the purpose for which he had come North. He remembered that the work his mother had given him to do remained undone.

"I promised her I would go to Scotland," he reflected, "and I've not done it. I've become so wrapped up in this business that I've almost forgotten mother. She still has that cloud of disgrace hanging over her head, while I've been thinking of my own advancement and my own desires. Besides, even if I were to win, I should never be able to speak to her until this matter is cleared up. Of course, she has heard everything, and she will look upon me as——" And then Paul set his teeth together and his eyes flashed with anger.

These thoughts had scarcely passed through his mind when his heart gave a sudden leap. Coming towards him was the girl of whom he had been thinking, and she was alone! Evidently she was on another visit to the Wilsons'; no doubt, too, she was carrying out her purpose of winning voters from him. Almost without thinking he determined to speak to her.

There was no definite thought in his mind, but it seemed to him as though he must speak to her and set himself right with her. He felt it was his right to do so, and that it was her duty to hear.

He lifted his hat on her approach. "I beg your pardon, Miss Bolitho," he said, "but may I presume on your kindness a little?"

The girl looked at him in astonishment. Perhaps she was a little angry too, for the footpath on which he met her was in a somewhat lonely district.

"I know I'm very rude in stopping you in this way," went on Paul, as though he divined her feelings, "and I would not have done so had not the reason seemed to me sufficient. Besides"—and there was a touch of anger in his voice—"it seems to me that it would not only be generous on your part if you would, but just."

As he spoke she could not help reflecting on the change that had come over him since he first spoke to her on the night following his release from prison. Then he was rude, almost truculent; now, even while he seemed angry, his demeanour suggested a refinement of feeling which did not manifest itself then.

"Of course, you know who I am," he went on. "I am Paul Stepaside, and I am your father's opponent in this political contest."

"Is it about the election that you wish to speak to me?" she asked.

"Yes, and no," replied Paul. "Perhaps the contest may be called the occasion of my asking you to speak with me, but the reason lies deeper. I am sure you do not wish to be unjust?"

"I think," she replied, "if you wish to say anything about the election, that you had better seek an interview with my father. He will be in Brunford to-morrow."

"It's not to your father that I wish to speak," he replied.

"I am altogether at a loss," said Mary Bolitho, "to know what there can be that you wish to discuss with me."

He could not mistake the tones in which she spoke. He knew, instinctively, that she did not regard him as belonging to her own class. Her every word suggested to him that he was to her an outsider, one to whom she could speak only as an inferior. A thousand things which he thought he wanted to say to her had altogether escaped him, and for a few seconds he stood dumb and confused.

"Of course, it is about this election, in a way," he stammered presently. "I—I—you see, it means a great deal to me——" And then he ceased speaking again. Somehow the words would not come.

He saw the smile of contempt which passed over her face, and he thought he understood the meaning of it. Perhaps it was the best thing that could have happened to him, for now his anger was aroused, and he saw his way clearly.

"No, no, Miss Bolitho. Do not think that I have come to whine to you, or to make complaints in any way—that is about the things you are thinking of. It's not that. I am prepared to fight my battle without seeking quarter in any direction—that is, any direction that is fair. I have never had a public-school education, but I think I know the meaning of the term, 'Playing the game.'"

She looked puzzled for a minute, and then he saw a flush mount her face.

"I am afraid I do not understand you!"

"The circumstances of my life have not made me an adept in talking with young ladies," said Paul. "Doubtless you think me rude and clownish, and perhaps you are right, but I hope I have nothing but true feelings at heart. You are fighting for your father in this election, Miss Bolitho, and I do not complain in the least. You hope he will win, and you are using every legitimate means to obtain votes for him—that is right, that is fair; but, Miss Bolitho, there is something which I regard very sacred: perhaps the most sacred thing in the world to me is the love of my mother, and the thought of her good name. I will not tell you how she has suffered for me, and how she loves me, but I hope you will believe me when I say that I regard anything which will blacken her name as the greatest insult that can be offered to myself. Have I made myself understood?"

The flush on the girl's face deepened; she knew what he meant.

"I do not mind what people say about me so much," said Paul. "I am able to defend myself, at least when I have fair play. There have been times when I have not been able to do so successfully, still time has been on my side, and justice has been done to me. But can you understand, Miss Bolitho, what a man feels, when, in order to win an election, his opponents have not been ashamed to heap shame upon one of the purest women and the best mothers that ever lived?"

"I am at a loss to know why you say this to me," retorted the girl.

"I do not complain," said Paul, "at least at this juncture, that your father was my enemy years ago. Although he had no foundation for it, he pleaded that I was a dangerous man, an agitator and a leader of a gang of knaves. Through him I spent six months in gaol among felons; I wore prison clothes; I was treated like a dog; I lay there one long, cold winter, night after night, in a damp cellar. This was through your father—not because he believed I was guilty, but because he wanted to make a case against me. I say I have never complained of this, never mentioned it once in this contest. I have tried to fight fairly, on broad general principles, but, Miss Bolitho, my mother's good name is sacred to me. Can you, as a woman, understand this?"

"I do not know why I should answer you," she said, and there was hauteur in her voice. "I cannot help understanding your accusation, and although I am utterly ignorant concerning it, I will say this: never, since I have taken any interest in this contest, have I mentioned your mother's name. Perhaps you do not believe me, and perhaps the reason is that you cannot understand?"

She spoke quietly and naturally, and yet her words stung Paul like whip-cord. Although she did not say so in so many words, he felt that she despised him, and again his anger was aroused.

"You deny, then, that you have——"

"There are certain things, Mr. Stepaside, that one cannot deny, not that they are true, but because it is impossible for one to take notice of them!"

"Forgive me," he said, almost humbly, "if I have believed what I have so often been told, but if there is one person about whom I am sensitive, it is my mother. I will not detain you any longer, Miss Bolitho. Perhaps it would have been better if I had not spoken to you at all. Do not think that I complain because you are fighting against me. You can do no other—besides, I am sure"—and here he spoke bitterly—"that your father and the Wilsons will have poisoned your mind against me!"

He saw an angry flash from her eyes.

"I am afraid you are wrong there, Mr. Stepaside, as far as I know there have been no reasons why I should think of you at all; as for enmity, such a thing would be impossible!"

His heart seemed like a great hot fire as he left her. He knew he had broken all conventions, and acted like a madman; he knew that whatever she had felt towards him before, her feelings towards him now must be of utter scorn and derision, and yet he would not recall one word he had spoken, even if he could. He was glad that he had said these wild, incoherent things to her. He had spoken to her, she had spoken to him. In the future she would think of him, not as a nonentity, not as someone who could be easily passed by, but as one whose life meant something. She would never be able to forget him. He knew it and rejoiced in it! She would be reminded of him by a thousand things in the days to come. She would never be indifferent about him again, and throughout the whole of the contest that was coming on she would regard him differently from the way in which she had thought of him before. Somehow, too, he felt less jealous of Ned Wilson. He had not spoken of this man, who was said to be his rival, but he was in the background of his thoughts all the time. For weeks the stories which the gossips had bandied had wounded him, but now he felt different. After their talk this girl would never think of Ned Wilson; she could not. He did not belong to her order of beings. He breathed a different atmosphere, he spoke a different language, lived in a different world.

The next day Paul started for Scotland, to try and discover the truth concerning which his mother had told him.

CHAPTER VI

PAUL GOES TO SCOTLAND

When Mary Bolitho returned to Howden Clough that evening she went straight to her own room. She wanted to be alone. Under ordinary circumstances she would have, girl-like, sought out her friend, Emily Wilson, and given her a full report of what had taken place, but her desire was for silence rather than for speech. In spite of her anger she felt that there was something sacred in what this young man had said to her. There could be no doubt that he felt strongly, and she knew, by the tones of his voice and the look in his eyes, that he was greatly moved. Of course, she felt indignant that he should dare to speak to her at all, and she wondered why she had resolved to say nothing to her father about their meeting. When all allowances had been made, he had been rude in the extreme. He had stopped her in a lonely part of the countryside, and had roughly commanded her to listen to him! And Mary Bolitho was a proud girl, and was not accustomed to being dictated to. All the same, she felt much interested in what he had said, and she found herself thinking of him again and again. There was something romantic, too, in his story which, in spite of its improbability, she could not help believing, and although she felt very angry with him, she sympathised with the feelings he had expressed. Months before she had been annoyed at the thought that her father should have been opposed by one who was little removed from the working classes. She remembered him as she had first seen him, at the shop in Market Street, pale, angry, and, as it seemed to her, coarse. He spoke as one of his own class, too, and he was rough and rude. But that view had become somewhat corrected, and she had to admit to herself that Paul Stepaside was no awkward, ignorant, ill-dressed clown. Indeed, for that matter, he had the advantage of most young men of her acquaintance. His coal-black eyes and hair, his pale face and stalwart figure, would be noticed anywhere. Besides, he was well-dressed, and although he knew but little of the ways of her world, she knew that he would never be passed without notice. Besides all this, there was a suggestion of strength in nearly every word he said, in every tone of his voice, and Mary Bolitho had a great admiration for strong men. Young Edward Wilson, whose pointed attentions she could not mistake, seemed but as a pigmy compared with him. Still, she felt angry, and she rejoiced in the thought that, on his own admission, she was helping towards his defeat.

Later in the evening, Paul Stepaside became the subject of a conversation at Howden Clough, but Mary said no word as to their meeting. Indeed, she was silent whenever his name was mentioned. On the following day, young Ned Wilson was much chagrined when she declared her intention of returning home. "Why, Miss Bolitho," he said, "you told me you had arranged to canvass Long Street this week, and that will take you at least three days. Yesterday I heard that you had converted at least a dozen people, and we cannot afford to lose you now. It is all over the town, too, that Stepaside is awfully mad

at your success. I think he hates you nearly as much as he hates your father."

"I don't feel like canvassing now," she replied. "And I'm anxious to get back home."

"But you will come again soon?" he urged. "The house seems like a tomb without you, and I don't know what I shall do if you go away!"

She was angered by his tones of proprietorship, and almost instinctively she compared him with the young fellow who had spoken so rudely to her the night before. Wilson was commonplace, unlettered; he had only the tastes of the ordinary common, money-making manufacturer, and for the first time a feeling amounting to revulsion came into her heart as she thought of the hopes which she knew he entertained.

That afternoon she left Brunford, in spite of the protests that were made, and found her way to London.

"Returned so soon, Mary?" said her father when she arrived. "I quite expected you to stay another week. I have heard about the success of your work in Brunford, and I imagined that you were going to win me a great many more votes before you returned. I had no idea that you would be such a valuable asset when I started this fight, and although I am awfully glad to have you back, we shall have to strain every nerve if we are to beat that fellow."

"Do you think you will beat him, father?" she asked.

"If we go on as we are doing, we shall," he replied. "I know he has a tremendous hold upon the town, and I know that a great deal of prejudice has been roused against me, but we must beat him, Mary; we must."

"Why, is there any special reason for this?" she asked, noting the tone of her father's voice.

"Of course, I want to win," was his reply. "I never like to engage in a fight without winning. I think that my success at the Bar has been mainly owing to the fact that I've always set out to win. Besides all that, I don't know how it is, but I've taken a personal dislike to that fellow. By the way, have you ever met him?"

"Yes," replied the girl.

"Of course, you've never spoken to him?"

To this she made no reply. She did not know why it was, but she felt she could not tell her father of their meeting in the fields behind Howden Clough.

"Well, I shall have to go up to Brunford myself in two or three weeks," continued Mr. Bolitho, "and, if you can, I hope you will go with me."

"Can we not stay at an hotel when we go again, father?" she asked.

"Why?" asked Mr. Bolitho, turning upon her quickly. "Have not the Wilsons always been kind to you? And do you not feel comfortable there? Besides, there is no hotel in Brunford that I care to stay at, and there's a sort of general understanding between Wilson and myself that we shall be his guests."

The girl was silent, and looked steadily on the floor.

"What is it, Mary? There's something wrong."

"Of course, I cannot be blind to young Wilson's attentions," she said, and her voice was hard as she spoke.

"Well, he's a decent fellow, and, on the whole, I like these Lancashire people. They may be a trifle rough, and, of course, the Wilsons belong to *nouveaux riches* class, but young Ned cannot help that; besides, say what we will, any girl might do worse than take Ned Wilson. I know, as a fact, that his father is making an enormous income, and Ned, being the only son, will be one of the richest men in Lancashire."

"He has the mind of a navvy and the tastes of a bookmaker." And her voice was almost bitter as she spoke.

Her father laughed uneasily. "That's all nonsense, Mary!" he said. "But, tell me really, what do you think my chances are? You know the town now better than I do. Do you think I shall beat Stepaside?"

"He's not a man to be easily beaten," was her reply. "I believe that, unless——"

"Yes, unless what?"

"Unless extreme means are used, he will win."

"I will not be beaten!" said Mr. Bolitho, and his eyes flashed as he spoke. "That fellow insulted me in the Manchester Law Courts, and I was glad when he got six months. Fellows of his order need to be taught a lesson, and he shall be taught, too."

"I don't think you understand him, father," she said. "He's one of those men who will never be beaten. He'll rise above every difficulty, and move every obstacle out of his way. I don't know why it is, but I don't feel comfortable about this contest, and I feel afraid of him."

"Afraid, Mary!"

"Yes," replied the girl. "I am afraid. I know I've no reason to be, but whenever I think of him I become angry, and yet I don't know why I should be angry. In a sense, he makes me admire him. He came to Brunford a few years ago utterly poor and unknown, and now he's become quite a personality. He's just one of those strong men that always wins his way. And he hates you, too, father."

And then, without any apparent reason, the girl left the room.

Meanwhile, Paul Stepaside was in a train that carried him northward. He was doing now what he had meant to have done long months before. He had constantly been making endeavours to discover the truth about the Douglas Graham of whom his mother had spoken, but he had done so without a plan, and in a kind of haphazard way, and this was not like Paul. He felt, too, as though he had a new motive in his life. Mary Bolitho had said nothing that seemingly accounted for this, and yet he knew that her words had determined his action. A feeling of pride which he had never known before possessed him. He wanted to go to this girl with a name as good as her own. Money, he knew he could get, yes, and position, too. During the last few months he had listened to several fairly prominent Members of Parliament. He had analysed their speeches and estimated their powers, and he was not afraid of them. He was as big a man as any of them; yes, bigger, stronger, and with more will power. No, he was not afraid that he could not win position, but with this black cloud hanging over him he felt as though he were paralysed. And so, when a local train left Carlisle towards the station nearest to his mother's old home, it was with a fixed determination that he would not leave Scotland until he had discovered all that could be known. Perhaps it might end in nothing, but he must find out.

It was with a curious feeling in his heart that he presently arrived at the little farmhouse where his mother was born and reared. In spite of the fact that he was a country lad, he had never realised the meaning of loneliness as he realised it now. No other house was near; the little farmhouse was the only building in sight. As far as the eye could reach, beyond the few acres of land which had been reclaimed from the moors, there seemed to him nothing but wild desolation. Hill rose upon hill, and while the scene was almost majestic, it made him understand how lonely his mother's life must have been. He stood for several minutes looking at the house before entering. He did not know whether his grandfather was living or not, and for the first time it struck him that he might have relatives living there, to whose existence he had previously been indifferent. The day was as still as death, and it seemed to him as though the place were uninhabited. Presently, however, he heard the sound of a human voice, and, turning, he saw a rough-looking lad driving some cattle before him. The lad eyed him strangely as he came up to the little farm buildings, and seemed to wonder why he should be there. The time was evening, an evening of late summer, and Paul remembered that it was in the late summer-time when Douglas Graham, his father, had first come into the district. He called to mind, too, that he had seen his mother as she was driving home the cattle from the moors. He watched the lad almost furtively, and he wondered why it was that he was afraid to speak. It seemed to him as though some mysterious power were brooding over this lonely dwelling and forbidding him to learn the secrets that lay within.

"Does Donald Lindsay live here?" he asked presently.

The lad looked at him for a few seconds before replying, and then, in his strong Scotch accent, replied, "Nay. He's dead."

"And Mrs. Lindsay, is she alive?"

"Ay," replied the lad. "She'll be inside. She's my mother."

Paul remembered his own mother's story about this hard Scotswoman's unkindness, and felt little disposed to go into the house; yet, for the sake of learning what he had come to learn, he determined to enter. The cottage, for it was little more than a cottage, was clean, but comfortless and bare of any adornment whatever. It might seem as though no woman entered this building, for there were no marks of a woman's handicraft, none of those little suggestions of the feminine presence.

"Mother!" shouted the youth. "There's someone wants you."

A minute later Paul heard a heavy step on the uncarpeted stairway, and a tall, angular, hard-featured woman, with cold blue eyes and scanty light hair, entered the room. She looked at him steadily, as if there was something in his face that she recognised.

"And what might ye be wantin'?" she asked presently. "Ye'll not be from these parts, I fancy."

"No," said Paul. "I came from England. I was born and reared in Cornwall. Years ago, a man named Donald Lindsay came there and married into my family. I was wanting to find out something about him."

He knew it was a clumsy explanation of his appearance there, but it was the best he could think of for the moment.

"What'll you be to Donald Lindsay?" asked the woman, as she scanned him closely. "He died two years since, and it's getting on for forty years ago since he was down South. He's told me about it many a time. You're in no way related to him, are you?"

And then, giving him a second glance, she went on:

"No, no, you're no Lindsay. Donald was blue-eyed and fair-haired, and you are black-eyed and black-haired."

"But did not Donald have a daughter?" asked Paul. "You see, I've heard he married a Cornish girl, and that they had a daughter. Did you know her? Did she ever live here?"

"What's that to you?" asked the woman. "You don't mean to say that there's any siller coming to her?"

"I don't say but what there is," replied Paul, seeing that this might be the key which might help to unlock the mystery of his mother's life.

"And are you a lawyer chap?"

"Do I look like a lawyer?" he asked with a laugh. He was wanting to get the woman into a communicative mood.

"You might be," she replied. "You're just one of those keen-eyed men of the lawyer class, but I ken nothing about her, except that she's dead."

"Who's dead?" asked Paul.

"Donald's lass, Jean," was the reply. "She that was born to his first wife. And a good thing, too!" she added vindictively.

"Why a good thing?" asked the young man.

"Better dead than disgraced," replied the woman in her hard Scotch fashion. And Paul understood the fear that his mother must have had of this woman whom her father had placed in authority over her. A pain shot through his heart, and he felt like answering the woman angrily. Ever since their meeting on the Altarnun Moors Paul had been keenly sensitive about his mother's good name, and resented any approach to light words concerning her.

"I am trying to find out all about her," he said presently. "And I would be very glad if you could give me any information concerning her childhood and girlhood up here."

"Why should I?" asked the woman. "It'll not be to my advantage."

"Please don't be so sure of that," replied Paul. He knew instinctively that she was avaricious by nature, and would be likely to do anything for gain.

"You wouldn't thank me for telling," she replied.

"If you promise to tell me all you know," said Paul, "I am empowered to give you five guineas."

"And it'll get me into no trouble?" she asked, with that suggestion of Scotch caution of which Paul had so often heard.

"No," replied he, "your name need never be mentioned; but I'm anxious to find out all I can concerning the childhood and girlhood of Jean Lindsay up to the time of her marriage."

"Her marriage!" said the woman scornfully. "Weel, it may be she was married, after all, and it may be I was hard on her, and it may be, too, it was because I thought Donald cared more for her than for my children. Anyhow, she never liked me, and I don't say that I liked her. She was a good lass as lasses go, although never tractable—always stubborn. An unnatural way she had with her, too: she always wanted to be out on the moors alone, and I used to tell Donald it would never come to any good. She might have married well. Willie Fearn, who owns a farm over the moors here, would have had her, and he's worth thousands of pounds now, is Willie. But she would have nothing to say to him. One day I saw a stranger coming up the path with her, one of these handsome Southerners, and they used to meet in secret, and I suppose he courted her. Anyhow, she ran away with him, or said she did, and then came back the next day telling us that she was married."

"Yes?" said Paul eagerly. He knew all this before, but it seemed to him as though he was getting nearer the truth that he longed to learn. "And did she stay with you long?"

"Not long," replied the woman. "You see——" And a look almost of shame came into her eyes. "Well, she stayed as long as she dared."

"And have you heard what has become of her since?" he asked.

"We've heard that she died. We've no proof of it, but we saw in the papers a few weeks afterwards that a girl was found dead, and from the description given of her we concluded that it was Jean."

"But did you not try and find out?" he asked. "Surely your husband would not be so callous towards his daughter?"

"My husband did what I told him," she said. "Besides, the girl had disgraced herself, and we did not want to be dragged into it. Mind, I'm not sure, after all, but what she was properly married, and it may be I did wrong. But there it is—she's dead."

"And did you hear anything more—have you ever heard anything more about this young Southerner?"

"Well, we are not so sure about that," replied the woman. "You see, I never saw him but once before the time Jean said he married her, and so I cannot swear to him anywhere. But some time after Jean left a man came here, and, in a roundabout way, he found out what we knew about her."

"And did you tell him she was dead?"

"I told him just what I've told you," replied the woman.

"And how did he take the news?" asked Paul.

"Oh, nothing particular," replied the woman. "He just went on talking about something else, but I believe that was a bit of make-up."

"Wasn't he a friend of the Grahams at a house called 'Highlands'?" asked Paul presently.

"I believe there were some people called Graham at the time. It is said that they came there for their summer holidays, but they left before we had guessed about Jean's trouble, and so we could never find out anything about them."

"What kind of a man was he—I mean the one who came asking questions?"

"Oh, a middle-aged man, perhaps forty or fifty. He had iron-grey whiskers, and he was bald, I remember."

"And he was the only one who ever came making inquiries?" asked Paul.

"Yes, the only one."

Paul's hopes were dashed to the ground again. Still, the man must have had some reason for coming North; no one would come all the way from England to make inquiries unless something of importance lay at the back of it.

"What kind of questions did he ask?" continued the young man.

"It is a good many years since," replied the woman, "and I am afraid I did not encourage him much. But as far as I can call to mind now, he asked how long since she had left, and whether anything had happened to her."

"And did you tell him"—and Paul's voice was almost hoarse as he spoke—"did you tell him of—of what you call her disgrace?"

"No," replied the woman harshly. "I am not one of that kind. Donald Lindsay's name is a good one, and I'm proud of it myself. Besides, I thought she was dead, and so—well, I said nothing."

"And that is all you can tell me?"

"That is all."

From the little farmstead Paul went to "Highlands," but his visit seemed in vain. The people who occupied the house had lived there for some twelve years, and they had bought it from an agent as a summer residence. They had heard that the previous owner lived in Edinburgh, but they were not sure. They only knew he was in the habit of letting the house during the summer months.

"Did you know the Grahams?" Paul asked.

"No. I've heard they lived in England, in London, in fact, but we knew nothing about them. I have been told that they were a large family, and came here during the three summer months, but that's twenty years ago now, and so nothing is known."

"And they have not been here during your time?" asked Paul.

"No," was the reply.

And this was all he learnt. He asked many questions, but the answers were all vague and tentative.

From "Highlands" he went to Willie Fearn's farm. He thought perhaps his mother's one-time admirer might be able to give him some information, but Willie Fearn was a dour Scotsman, who said he knew nothing. When Paul approached the subject of Willie's former relation to Jean Lindsay and his hopes of making her his wife, the Scotsman set his lips firmly together and refused to speak. He

admitted presently how he had heard "that the lass had gut into sore trouble, and then went away and died. But there's nae proof," he said, "there's nae proof. And it's a warning to Scotch lasses to have nothing to say to Southern strangers. And Jean was a good lass," he added confidentially, "and would have made a good saving wife for a sober man with a little siller. She had a grip of doctrine, too. She was well versed in the fundamentals and would have made a good elder's wife. But, ay, man, the tempter comes in many a form, and it behoves us all to be very careful."

So far, Paul's visit to his mother's old home had been entirely without result. As far as he could see, he could make not one step forward. Moreover, in spite of the looseness of thought concerning Scotch marriage, he saw that there was a doubt as to whether the wedding was legal or not. But he had not finished yet. He had from time to time read such books as came in his way bearing upon Scotch law, and in one of these was a definite statement that if a man and woman were known to take each other as husband and wife, this was proof that their marriage was legal. So, remembering his mother's words, he made his way towards the little inn where they had stayed on the night of their marriage. He took the road which she had told him of, and presently came to the spot where she and Douglas Graham had taken each other as man and wife. The woman must have described the scene with great accuracy, for he recognised it the moment he came to it. The patch of lonely pine trees, the little lake by which the road ran, the burn coming down the rocky valley, and the great wild moorlands stretching away northward. And they had stood within the shade of the pine trees while the setting sun sent its rays of light through the branches. He believed he recognised the spot on which they knelt when Douglas Graham prayed that their union might be blessed. A shiver passed through him as he stood there, and he called to mind the words they had spoken: "I, Douglas Graham, take thee, Jean Lindsay, to be my wife, and I promise to be faithful to thee as long as I live." In spite of sad memories, it seemed like holy ground, and however the marriage had appeared to the bridegroom, to him it was real and sacred.

It was late that night when he came to the inn near the Scottish border, but the innkeeper welcomed him eagerly. It had been a wet summer, and they had had but few visitors. Both the innkeeper and his wife, therefore, were glad to see Paul, and were hoping he would spend some days with them. Both of them were Scotch people, although they had lived for many years on the English side of the border.

"Have you kept this inn long?" asked Paul after supper.

"For more than thirty years," replied the man. "When we came here first it was very lonely, and there were few people who came. Just a stopping place it was for wagoners and that sort of people. But now, both English and Scotch people are realising that there's no lovelier part in the whole of the British Isles. That's why they come. You see, there's many associations around this neighbourhood too. Tammy Carlisle was born and reared not many miles from here. And then, as you know, Gretna Green is not very far away."

"But the days of Gretna Green are over?" suggested Paul.

"Ay," he replied. "But not altogether. We've had many a couple come to us directly after their marriage, and I believe that lots of them have just gone over the border for a Scotch marriage."

"By the way," asked Paul, "do you remember twenty-five years ago this very month that a young man brought his wife here? It was on the twenty-ninth of August. Think, now; do you remember it?"

"Ay, I think I do, but my wife has a better memory than I. Meg! Will you come here?"

The old lady was keenly interested in Paul's questions. "Why, of course, Angus. I've thought about them many a time since. He was fair and she was dark."

"That's it," said Paul eagerly. "That's it."

"She had black een, I remember," said the woman. "Een as black as sloes, and her hair was like the sheen of a raven's wing. And they did love each other, too, I could see that."

"And did they sign any register or anything of that sort?" said Paul. "Do you keep a register of your visitors?"

"Nay," said the woman. "We kept no register then, but we do now. People came and went then, and we thought not so much of it. All the same, they did write something."

"Both of them?" asked Paul.

"Ay, both of them. You see, I wasna so sure about them, and I wondered whether it was a runaway match. The lad introduced the lass as his wife, but they seemed mighty nervous, and the lad had been here a few weeks previously with some others, and I am sure he had nae thought of marrying then."

"Did you say he wrote his name and she wrote hers?" asked Paul eagerly.

"You seem mighty interested," said the woman. "One might think—— Ay, now I look at your face again, ye remind of the lass. Your eyes and hair are as black as hers, and ye have the same kind of face, too. It might be that she was your mother."

"Think for a moment that she is my mother," said Paul. "Let me see the writing in the book."

The woman went to the bookcase by her side and took down an encyclopaedia, and there, on the flyleaf, he saw the names, "Douglas Graham, Jean Graham, August 29th, 18—."

"And they left the next day, didn't they?" asked Paul.

"Ay, they left the next day, and they looked as though they were going to a funeral, both of them. I wondered if they had quarrelled or something, but they seemed so loving that that seemed impossible. But I've thought of them many a time since."

"Let me see," said Paul. "This is on the English side of the border, isn't it?"

"Ay," replied the woman. "It is the English side."

On leaving the next day Paul made his way to the nearest town of importance on the Scotch side, and was soon closeted with a lawyer.

"I am come to ask for information," said Paul.

The Scotsman looked at him keenly, and wondered how much he could charge him.

"Maybe you are in trouble?" he said.

"No," replied Paul; "I'm not in trouble. I only want information concerning a matter of Scotch law."

"And there's no man north of the Tweed that knows more about Scotch law." And the old lawyer stroked his chin thoughtfully. "But what phase of Scotch law are ye interested in?"

"Scotch marriage."

"Maybe you're thinking of getting wed? If ye are, take the advice of a man who has had to do with hundreds of weddings, and don't! If there's one thing for which I'm thankful to Providence, it is that I've always been strong enough to resist the lasses. Trouble came with the coming of a woman into the world, and they have been at the heart of nine-tenths of it ever since."

"No doubt your advice may be very wise," said Paul, "but it's not of that I'm thinking now. The question with me is what makes a Scotch marriage?"

"Nay, nay, man, don't try and sail as near to the rocks as ye can. If ye are going to wed, have the matter done publicly and openly."

"I'm not going to wed," said Paul. "But this is what I want to know: what is a Scotch marriage?"

"For the life of me, I can't tell you," he replied. "But ye have some case in your mind, I see. Tell it."

"Well, supposing a man and woman took each other as husband and wife according to the old ideas?"

"Ay, I follow," said the Scotsman. "No kirk, no minister, no witnesses, no anything?"

"Yes," said Paul. "Would they be married?"

"Ay, they would. But if one of them tried to back out, ye see, difficulties come in. In that case they would have to declare themselves before someone that they were married."

"Well, then," continued Paul, "suppose they went to an inn that night and the man called the woman his wife before the innkeeper and his wife?"

"Ah, then you have got something to go on," said the lawyer. "That certainly would clinch the nail. Ye're thinking of property, I expect?"

"There's another question I want to ask," said Paul, not noticing the query which the old Scotsman had interposed. "Supposing that directly they were married in Scotland they went to England, and the inn wherein the man called the woman his wife was in England. Would that make any difference?"

The old Scotsman scratched his head. "Ay, man," he said, "it might. But I'm no sure."

"Not even if both the man and the woman signed their names in a book that they were married?"

"I'm no sure," repeated the lawyer. "But I could find out for you, say, for a matter of five pounds, and I would let you know. But I would have to write to Edinburgh and, it may be, have to consult many documents."

Paul could not get beyond this, and when, at the end of three days, he returned to England, he felt that, although his visit to his mother's home and the scenes associated with their marriage were extremely interesting, he had made no real forward step. One statement of the old lawyer, however, remained in his memory, and he brooded over it during his journey back to Brunford: "If ye could find the man," said the old lawyer, "who took the lass to the inn on the English side of the border and declared her to be his wife and signed his name in the book, I think you would have such a hold on him, if ye faced him with these things, that he couldna get out of it. But beyond this I daurna go."

And so Paul felt he had moved forward in spite of himself. Somehow the marriage seemed more real, and he felt that he was nearer the day when the shame which had so long rested upon his mother's life would be lifted.

No sooner had he reached Brunford, however, than these thoughts were driven from his mind. Rumours were in the air that the Government was about to resign and that an election was imminent.

"Bolitho is coming to-morrow," said old Ezra Bradfield, the chairman of the Workmen's League. "And I hear he means to move heaven and earth to keep you out of Parliament."

"And I mean to get in," said Paul grimly.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT AND THE RESULT

A little later Brunford was wild with excitement. It is true the Government had not yet resigned, and as a consequence the General Election was not yet upon them, but all felt that there was a crisis in the political situation, and that the battle would be a very keen one indeed. Mr. Bolitho was spending all the time he possibly could in Brunford, while Mary Bolitho had resumed her work of canvassing the poorer streets. More than once Paul, in going round the town, had seen her, but she never looked toward him, and seemed to be utterly regardless of his presence. All the same, Paul felt sure she had seen him, and her presence, even although she had become the fixed star of his life, strengthened his determination to get the better of her father in this fight. So entirely did he devote himself to his political work that, in the main, he left business matters to his partner.

"Things are safe in your hands, Preston," he said, "and everything is going smoothly. Now I'm on this job I mean to win."

"I'd rather you'd stick to business, Paul," said Preston. "We're walking on slippery ground just now. You know we've made our money by a speciality, and it needs a lot of watching."

"Yes," said Paul. "It was because we decided to specialise that we've been so successful. We discovered our secret and we've made the most of it."

"Yes," urged the other, "but we've a lot of stuff in our warehouse just now; as you know, we've kept it because we believed that prices would go up. If the prices were to go down now, we should be ruined."

"But they won't go down," said Paul; "they can't. We've the monopoly of it. And when winter comes everybody will be buying it."

"I should feel safer," said Preston, "if you'd give more of your time to it. But there, I'll do my best, although I don't like the look on Ned Wilson's face."

"Ned Wilson's face!" said Paul. "What do you mean, lad?"

"I mean that yesterday he met me in the reading-room of the Mechanics' Institute and he just laughed. 'How goes the speciality, Preston?' he said. 'Is it a speciality? Are you the only people who manufacture it?' And I didn't know what to say, Paul, for I know he hates us like poison, while I believe he has a special grudge against you. We can't afford to play pranks, while Ned Wilson can."

But Paul paid little attention to this. He had now fully embarked on this political fight. The town had to be canvassed. Meetings had to be addressed. Committees had to be formed. In fact, he had to devote the whole of his time to the fight which had engrossed him completely.

The whole country was at that time agog with the expectation that the Government would resign and that an election would be immediately upon them, and Paul, being fully aware of this, had determined to leave nothing to chance. He had complete confidence in Preston's business capacity, and felt that everything was safe. Thus, when one day the news flashed along a thousand wires that the Government had resigned and that a General Election was upon them, he was glad he had given himself heart and soul to this political struggle. He did not know why it was, but it seemed to him that upon it depended everything. If he could win in this fight, he was sure, although it would alienate Mary Bolitho from him, it would also open up the way to their future meetings. It would enhance her respect for him. He believed he read her like a book. She was ambitious even as he was, and she would scorn the man who was easily beaten. He felt his chances had improved; at each meeting he addressed he became more confident and spoke with more effect. The inwardness of politics, too, possessed him more fully. During his spare hours he had been reading the lives of eminent politicians. He called to mind those words of Disraeli: "Read no history, nothing but biography, for that is life without theory." He had followed this advice, and in reading the life of great politicians had laid hold of the history of the century. Everything had been made vivid to him, especially the struggles of the working classes.

Moreover, in studying the lives of great men, he had grasped the principles on which they worked, and politics had become to him not a mere abstraction, not a matter of expediency, but something concrete, a great working philosophy. This fact had enriched his speeches, and thus it came about that when Mr. Bolitho read them, he discovered that he was fighting not with an ignoramus, but with a man with a powerful mind, a man who, given reasonable circumstances, would be bound to make himself felt.

Mr. Bolitho, too, realised the force of what his daughter had said to him; Paul was not a man to be easily beaten, and that, unless some extraordinary events took place, he, Mr. Bolitho, would not be able to gain the victory. He discussed this matter long and seriously with Mr. Wilson and his son Ned, and presently, when they were within a fortnight of the polling day, he began to look serious indeed. It is true Mary Bolitho had won many votes and had removed much of the personal prejudice that had been created against him; nevertheless, he saw that Paul had gripped the town in a way which he was unable to do, and because the young man had entered into the life and thoughts of the people, he was able to express their feelings in a way not possible to him.

"It would be the bitterest blow of my life if I failed," he said to young Ned Wilson and his father one night, on their return from one of their meetings. "I should never dare to put my foot in Brunford again, neither would Mary, if this young upstart got the better of us."

"Never fear!" said young Ned. "I'll promise you he shall not win this election, Mr. Bolitho."

A little later Mr. Wilson was called away to see someone, and Ned and Mr. Bolitho were left together.

"You speak with great certainty, Ned," said Mr. Bolitho, who had come to address the young manufacturer with great freedom.

"I do," replied Ned. "Mr. Bolitho, I'm a plain man, may I say something to you now?"

"Say what you will, my lad!"

"Well, then, I love your daughter, and I want to make her my wife. Will you let me have her?"

"I don't know Mary's feelings about the matter," said Mr. Bolitho.

"But supposing you win this election, will you do your best for me?" There was a kind of challenge in Ned's voice as he spoke.

"I'll promise not to oppose you, anyhow."

"No, that will not do," said Ned, and his voice became tremulous. "Look here, this is a tremendous business to me. I want you to understand that life, happiness, everything depends upon my being able to win Mary. With her I feel I could do great things. I could go into Parliament myself, ay, and make a name too. I'm not a fool, Mr. Bolitho. There are but few men who know more about Lancashire life than I do, I am intimately acquainted with every detail of Lancashire business, and although I ought not to say it, since I've been made a partner in our firm, I have more than doubled our income. I have a great deal of power, Mr. Bolitho, too, more than you think; I could cause you to lose this election, and I can make you win it."

"How?" asked the other. His voice was keen and sharp.

"I will not tell you how," replied Ned. "But I can make you win it. Perhaps there's not another man but myself that can. And you shall, too, if you'll promise to do your best for me with Mary. Is it a bargain?"

Mr. Bolitho did not speak. For the moment he was under great excitement. The fear that he would lose the seat had entered his heart, and, as he had more than once said, the desire to win in everything he undertook was a kind of passion with him. He would do a great deal, and give a great deal, to win this election, not because he thought it would add much either to his fame or to his position, but because the eagerness to be conqueror was almost like a disease.

"Come, now," repeated Ned. "Is it a bargain? If I win you this election, will you do your best for me with Mary. Of course, I don't ask you to force her—she's not a girl to be forced—but will you do your best? Mind you, I love her like my own life, and I'll devote every power I have to make her happy!"

"I'll say this," said Mr. Bolitho, still labouring under great excitement, "I'll not oppose you, and if I can make the way easy for you, I will—there!"

"Very well," cried Ned, with flashing eyes. "That's a bargain, then. You may regard the seat as safe!"

Within a week from that time there were strange rumours in Brunford. It was said that the financial position of Stepaside and Preston was not safe. They were only rumours at first, and people paid little attention to them, but they grew in volume, grew in directness of statement. Five days before the election Preston came to Paul with a white face. He looked as though he had spent a sleepless night. "Look here, Paul," he said. "You must give up this political business!"

"Give it up!" said Paul. "I cannot. We are only five days from polling, and I cannot spare a minute

for anything else."

"I tell you you must give it up!" cried Preston. "And even now you must come and give me two hours right away!"

Paul shook his head. "I've got to meet my committees, my canvassers. I wouldn't lose this fight now for a thousand pounds."

"It means more than the loss of a thousand pounds, it means the loss of everything!"

"Everything!"

"Yes, everything. Look here, Paul, you know we've kept ourselves hard, and we've overdrawn at the bank, because we felt sure our stuff was going up. Well, it hasn't gone up. There's been a sudden drop in it! Look here." And he showed him that morning's newspaper. Paul looked at his watch. "I must go to these committee meetings," he said.

"But you can't," urged Preston. "I am not strong enough to deal with these things. Only you can get us out of this hole, and I doubt whether it's not too late even now! There's something at the bottom of this, Paul, and you must go into it. There's an enemy in the camp somewhere. There's no reason why our stuff should go down, the demand for it is greater than ever, but somebody's underselling us. Why, it can't be manufactured at the price mentioned there." And he pointed to the paper.

"Very well," said Paul, "you go round to the committee-rooms and tell them I can't be there to-day."

He went towards his office with a great fear in his heart. Before the day was out he realised the truth of Preston's words. He found that, unknown to them, someone else had gained the secret of the special stuff that they had been manufacturing. That, unknown to them, a large amount of it had been placed upon the market, and placed upon it at such a price that even if they sold every piece they manufactured they would have to do so at a very great loss. Indeed, it seemed to him as though ruin stared him in the face! He hurried from Brunford to Manchester, then back again—he went from mill to mill, and had various interviews with the most important people in the town, and everywhere he was met with the same difficulty.

Still, he would not give up the political fight. More than money—honour, life were at stake, and he must carry the thing through.

Three days before the election every voter in the town received, not merely their usual election literature, but an anonymous circular. It made no statements, but asked a series of questions concerning the financial obligations of Messrs. Stepaside and Preston. It showed the most minute knowledge of all Paul's liabilities, of the work he had undertaken, of the position in which he stood. Before the day was out there was not a voter in Brunford but who had read and discussed the circular which had been sent. No libellous statement had been made, and yet a hundred things had been suggested—inability, carelessness, ignorance, fraud, chicanery had all been hinted at, and hinted at cleverly. And yet no word of libel had been used, only the sting of the circular lay in the tail, and it was contained in these words: "Stepaside is the man that controls Stepaside and Preston. Is he the man whom we can trust to represent Brunford?"

A meeting of the general committee was called next night. If anything could be done, it must be done quickly. No one knew who had issued this circular—the name of the printer was not there. It had come by post from London. Who had sent it no one could tell. But here was the fact—its contents were of the most damning nature. It hinted that Paul was on the verge of bankruptcy, and that he owed his position to wild speculation, if not to fraudulent dealings. Paul's face was pale when he met the committee. "I want to face this matter fairly, gentlemen," he said. "You know that it was under pressure that I consented to fight for the seat, and to represent your interests. I did so in good faith. I believed my business was on a sound basis; nevertheless, many things in the circular are true." He then went on to tell how he stood commercially. He described his position in terms with which his hearers were familiar, but which I need not try and reproduce here. Indeed, it will be well that I should not, because the matter is still discussed in the town of Brunford. But he had no difficulty in convincing all present that he had acted honourably, and that an enemy had been at work. Still, what was he to do? He could not deny the statements made, and it was, doubtless, a fact that he stood on the verge of ruin. His supporters, moreover, were mainly of the working class, and the rich men, the employers, were supporters of Mr. Bolitho. Besides, as was natural, the bank which had backed him was anxious concerning the whole matter.

"The question is," said Paul, "what do you wish me to do? Shall I resign, now at the eleventh hour? If I do, it will be a sign of weakness. It will be a confession that every word in this circular is true. It will proclaim the fact that I am afraid to face the future."

"Can'st a face the future, Paul?" asked one.

"I believe I can," he said, "and yet it is so uncertain that I feel I must place myself in your hands."

"And let t'other side beat us?" cried an old weaver. "Nay, nay, Paul. We mun fight to the end!"

This was unanimously agreed upon, but Paul knew that a deadly blow had been struck, struck by an unseen hand, and in such a way that he had no means of parrying it. He knew, too, that nothing was so

fickle as popular favour. A fortnight before, a week before, he felt sure of a clear thousand majority, but he knew that there were thousands in Brunford who would be influenced by what they had been discussing, and would as likely as not turn against him. Still, now that his committee had resolved to fight to the end, he determined he would not fail them, and during the next few days he threw himself into the fray with renewed ardour. He seemed to do ten men's work, and although the clouds hung heavily over his head, he roused his meetings to tremendous enthusiasm. At factory gates, at crossroads, in the market square and in the public halls, he proclaimed his views, and did his best to answer the thousand insulting queries which were constantly flung at him. But he fought as one who despaired. He knew he was fighting a losing battle, and even although there was ever a ring of defiance in his voice, there was never a note of victory.

At length the polling-day came, and he watched the course of events eagerly. Up to now he had never once come into personal contact with Mr. Bolitho. Perhaps he had studiously avoided meeting his opponent, and certainly Mr. Bolitho had not been anxious to meet him. They had passed each other in the streets, but neither had taken notice of the other, and Paul had never once made reference to the treatment he had received at the barrister's hands years before. Let this be said, too, as far as Mr. Bolitho was concerned, he had never, at any of his meetings, referred to the circular which had created such commotion. Whether he had kept silent as a matter of policy, or because he felt it would have been striking below the belt to do so, I cannot say, but certain it is that neither in public nor in private had he ever been known to pass any opinion on the crisis through which Paul was passing.

The polling booths closed at eight o'clock on the fourteenth of December, and then crowds moved towards the town hall, where the voting papers were to be counted. It had been announced that the figures would be known soon after eleven o'clock, and thousands of people waited outside the huge building, wondering as to the result of the day's voting. Of course, Paul and some of his supporters were in the counting chamber, and Paul noticed that Mr. Bolitho passed from table to table, talking eagerly with his friends. Evidently the voting was very close. The little heaps of voting papers were placed along the table, and it seemed as though neither had the advantage. More than once Paul was within a foot of his opponent, but neither spoke a word. It seemed as though something sealed their lips. There was something more than parties that divided them—something deeper, something personal, something that went down to the roots of life.

At length a hush came over the counting chamber. The last of the voting papers had been taken from the boxes, and the little piles of fifty were duly placed and counted. The mayor of the town was at his post, looking very pale and important. A half-sheet of paper was in his hand. "Gentlemen," he said, "I am now prepared to make known the results of the day's voting. It's been a very close fight, and there are less than two hundred votes in it." He did not know whether he was using the correct words or not. In fact he did not care. He was, perhaps, the most excited man in the room, not even excepting the two candidates. "It is as follows," he went on. "Bolitho——" He went no farther, for there was a great shout throughout the chamber. The employers looked at each other with gladness and satisfaction—their side had won! The working-men element looked grim and defiant.

"Silence!" proceeded the mayor. "Bolitho, 7,213; Stepaside, 7,080. It is my duty to declare that Mr. Bolitho is elected."

For the first time Mr. Bolitho turned towards Paul, and the young man noticed the look of triumph in his face. "You see, we've won!" he said. "In spite of everything, we've won!"

It was not the words so much, but the tone of his voice that maddened Paul. Throughout the day he had been in a state of intense excitement. It seemed to him as though his nerves were raw, and he knew that he was on the point of a breakdown. Bolitho's tones, therefore, maddened him, and he was almost beside himself. "Yes, you have won," he said. "But how?"

"How?" laughed the other, and he was ashamed of himself for speaking the words, but he, too, was strangely wrought upon. "How? By honour and fair play!"

"Gentlemen," said the mayor, "I must announce the numbers to the crowd outside. There are thousands of people who have been waiting for hours to know the results, and they will not go away until they hear them. Of course, too, they will expect a few words from Mr. Bolitho and Mr. Stepaside."

It took some minute or two to make the arrangements for this, and Paul, smarting under the sting of what his opponent had said, burst forth, "Honour and fair play! Was it honour and fair play to besmear my mother's name, to throw reflections upon my birth? Was it honour and fair play to speak of me as an atheist? Was it honour and fair play to send out a circular, unsigned and untraceable, which threw out innuendoes about my financial position? And, more than all, was it honour and fair play to seek to ruin me?"

"I never once referred to the circular!" replied Mr. Bolitho.

"You never condemned it!" cried the young man. "You allowed the poison to work, and took advantage of it! And more than that, you know as well as I that the whole thing was arranged for. In order to win this election, you stopped at nothing, even my ruin!"

Paul had barely ceased speaking when he saw that Mary Bolitho stood immediately behind her father and had heard all he said. He saw, too, that Mr. Bolitho's face had become pale as ashes, and he felt sure that his words had wounded him.

"I did nothing to ruin you," he said at length.

"But were glad when you heard of it!" replied the young man. "And you did not hesitate to drag in the religious business. That, at all events, you cannot deny!"

At this the older man's face cleared, except that the mocking smile remained on his lips.

"That, of course, was inevitable," he replied. "We had to deal with the question of education, of religious education. How could I keep, then, from dealing with personal matters? You believe in a mere secular education, and proclaim your views with no uncertain voice. I, who am convinced that a mere secular education would ruin the country, had to oppose you, and had to deal with your personal attitude to the whole matter. You cannot deny that! Have the courage of your convictions, man, and stand by them!" And Paul noted the taunt in his voice.

"I have!" he replied. "I deny nothing of what I have said, and your attitude has made me believe less in your religion than ever. Why"—and his voice became tense and bitter—"I'm willing to allow my religion to be tested by this election. I have not uttered one wrong word about you. I have done nothing to defame your character, in spite of what has passed. And yet you have sneered at my 'ignorant atheism and blatant unbelief.' Is that religion? Is that playing the game? You, who profess to be a gentleman! You, who have had all the advantages of education! You, who boast of playing the game, and not fouling the pitch! Even if you have not openly said these things, you have allowed your supporters to blacken my mother's name. You have used foul gossip as a weapon with which to fight. You have allowed a devilish circular to be sent out, and never condemned it. And you have been willing to benefit by the attempts to ruin me!"

Paul watched Mary Bolitho's face as he spoke, and he noted the vindictive anger in her eyes, he knew that he was alienating himself more completely from her by the words he used. But he did not care; he was past caring! The election was lost. He had failed in the fight. The woman he loved and hated at the same time scorned him more than ever—and ruin stared him in the face!

Mr. Bolitho shrugged his shoulders. He had been too long before the public to heed attacks of this sort. He had been hardened by many a fight in the law courts, and he knew how little such words might mean. Besides, he was naturally in a good humour. He had won the fight. He was Member for Brunford.

"Do not let us dwell on personalities, Mr. Stepaside!" he said. "After all, it's the principles of our party which have won. You have fought a good fight"—and his voice became very condescending as he spoke—"but truth and right were too strong for you, and the country is turning against you."

"Come, gentlemen," said the mayor. "We are all ready." And with that he stepped through the window on to the balcony above the entrance to the town hall, while the opponents and their supporters followed. The whole of the street outside the town hall was brilliantly lit by torches, and by the street lamps, so that the eager, upturned faces of the thousands who surged between the steps of Hanover Chapel and those of the town hall could be plainly seen. Directly they saw the mayor the people gave a great shout, and then a silence followed like the silence of death.

"Gentlemen," said the mayor, "I am here to announce the results of the election. They are as follows: Bolitho——-" At that word a roar from the people seemed to rend the heavens. With some it was a shout of victory, with others it was a cry of defeat and anger. It was easy to see the excitement on their faces. One could even tell what they were saying, so vivid was the light which fell upon them. "Bolitho's in, good!" "Stepaside is out, it's a shame!" "It's noan been a fair fight!" "We mun 'a' a petition!" "Nay, nay, it's no use now!" And so on. Only those close to the balcony heard the figures. The noise of the crowd made it impossible for the people standing near Hanover Chapel gates to bear a word which the chief magistrate had uttered.

Presently, however, a great hush came over the crowd again. The people saw Mr. Bolitho step forward, but only one sentence was heard, "Gentlemen," he said, "we have fought a good fight, and we have won it!" Of course, his supporters shouted wildly, but the cries of antagonism were stronger. Voices became more and more angry. It might seem as though a riot were possible.

Mr. Bolitho, however, continued his speech, which, although the people in the street could not hear, was plain to those who stood on the balcony. He thanked the people for supporting him. He remarked that he had come there a stranger, and was now their friend. He declared that his duty was no longer to a part but the whole of the voters, that he should recognise no difference between one section of the people and another. It was for him to represent the town as a whole, which he intended to do faithfully and loyally. He desired, also, to compliment his opponent on the spirit in which he had conducted his part of the battle, and for the straight fight which had been the consequence. He referred to a few of his most prominent supporters, and then, raising his voice so loudly that it reached to the extreme limits of the crowd, he said: "It may seem bad taste on my part to refer to one without whom I should never have won this election." At this even the most turbulent became silent again, they wanted to hear what he had to say. "I owe my victory," he said, "and you owe your victory, to my daughter, Mary." And placing his hand upon her shoulder, he drew her forward. "Here!" he cried, "is your real victor in the battle!"

There was great cheering at this, and even his bitterest opponents did not resent it. The light fell strongly upon the girl's face, and even Paul could not help reflecting how beautiful she looked. Her eyes were flashing with excitement, her lips wreathed with smiles. No wonder she had fascinated him,

no wonder, in spite of the fact that he hated her father, he almost worshipped her, even while he hated her.

"Speech, speech!" yelled the crowd. "Speech from Miss Mary Bolitho!"

She looked at her father, who nodded, and then the girl stepped forward, while every ear was strained so as not to miss a word she should say. It was a picture long to be remembered. Even to this day it is talked about in Brunford. She only spoke a few words, but her voice rang out clearly in the still air.

"I am glad I ever came to Brunford," she said. "I have learnt to love the people, and—thank you!"

That was all, but the laugh on her face, the laugh in her voice, her girlish presence, her winsome manner had done a great deal to soften the hardest heart. Indeed, many believed that she had kept thousands from angry words, and perhaps from angry deeds, by her presence.

"Ay, but oo is bonnie!" "No wonder her feyther is proud on her!" "A gradely lass and a'!" was heard everywhere. And then a silence fell upon the crowd again, which was followed by another mighty shout, louder than any which had yet been heard.

Paul Stepaside came forward, his face pale to the lips, his eyes burning like coals of fire. Black rage was in his heart, for he felt himself to be ignominiously beaten, and yet, with that stubborn persistency which characterised him, and a pride which rose above everything, he would not show it. "My good friends and comrades," he said, "we've been beaten this time, but we'll win yet. If you will have me, I mean to be Member for Brunford, in spite of everything. Mr. Bolitho has won this time, but it will not be for long. He and I will meet again, for I'm not one who gives up. For the moment I'm under a cloud, but only for a moment. The stars in their courses are on the side of those who are on the side of right. And we are on the right, and I've fought a straight battle. Yes, Mr. Bolitho and I will meet again—it may be under circumstances different from these, but we shall surely meet, and always to fight! He must not think, because he has gained this victory, that he will always be victorious. If I'm not your Member to-day, I will be to-morrow. And the time will come when he will not rejoice in the victory to-day as he has rejoiced in it to-night!"

Afterwards Paul was angry with himself that he had said this. He had meant to utter no vindictive word, and yet he knew that every sentence he uttered contained a threat, a threat which at that time seemed to him to have no meaning. He felt ashamed of himself, too, and it seemed to him on reflection that he had been churlish even almost to childishness. And yet the words came to him in spite of himself, and he had flung them out eagerly, almost triumphantly. Even Mr. Bolitho felt a shiver pass through his body as Paul spoke. His speech seemed to contain a kind of prophecy. There was something ominous about it. It seemed to tell of dark days to come, of tragedy—why, he could not understand, but so it was.

It was all over at length. The crowd broke up and wended their way towards their various homes. Mr. Bolitho went to the club, supported by his followers, while Paul also resorted to the gathering-place most frequently used by the class whose cause he had hoped to represent. For hours there was speechifying and loud talking. For hours words were bandied, explanations offered, and threats made. At length, however, silence reigned in the town; and Paul was about to find his way back to his lodgings, when his partner, George Preston, came to him, accompanied by a man whom they had employed to try and find out the secret cause of the ruin which stared them in the face.

"Paul," said Preston, "you've finished now. Can I go with you to your lodgings?"

"Yes," replied Paul. "What is it?"

"Something that will keep till we are alone," replied the young man laconically. "On the whole, I'm glad we didn't know two days ago what I know now. It's best as it is, Paul. I can see you are terribly disappointed at not getting in, but, for my part, I'm glad. After all, business, with me, is more than politics. You should have waited, lad, waited till our position was safe, before you started this fight. Still, you couldn't help it. It was not your fault that the election came on this year instead of next, and the chaps meant to have you."

"But tell me, what is it?" asked Paul. His mind had become so confused by the scenes of excitement through which he had passed that he could not realise the drift of his partner's words.

"No," replied the other sternly; "let's wait until we get to your lodgings. We must be alone. I tell you, if you knew what you'll know now, when you were speaking from the balcony, there would have been a row. But, never mind, it's best as it is."

They walked on through the narrow, comparatively deserted streets, until presently they arrived at a comfortable-looking house in the Liverpool Road, where Paul's rooms were now situated.

"Now, then, tell me," said the young man, when they were seated.

"Is everybody here gone to bed?" asked Standring, the man who had accompanied them, but who had not yet spoken.

"Hours since," replied Paul. "No election ever fought would keep them out of bed after eleven

o'clock."

"That's well." And he took out a bundle of papers from his pocket and laid them on the table.

"You don't expect me to read them to-night?" said Paul. "I tell you, I couldn't. My brain's too fagged."

"No," replied Standring, "they need not be read tonight, but I put them there in case you should want to refer to them. They are proofs of what I'm going to tell you." Paul noted that this young fellow's voice was set and stern; he realised that the matter he wished to discuss was serious. He was a pale-faced, quiet-looking young fellow, this Enoch Standring, not given to talking much, or to assert himself to any great degree. Up to a year before he had been a book-keeper in one of the mills, and Paul, recognising in him what others had failed to see, had given him a position of trust in his own employ. Directly the circular to which I have referred was sent out to the voters of Brunford, Paul had instructed him to discover what it meant and who was the man who was responsible for it. Enoch Standring had something of the sleuthhound in his nature. For three days and nights he had worked. Almost without sleep, and with but little food, he had laboured quietly, unobtrusively, never arousing suspicions, but always effectively. And now he was prepared to give the result of that work.

"You must cast your mind back a bit, Mr. Stepaside," he said, "and then ask yourself one thing. Is there anyone in Brunford who has a grudge against you?"

"Yes," said Paul. "It's known, is that grudge. It is well known that several years ago Ned Wilson and I had a quarrel which neither of us have forgotten."

"Yes," said Enoch, "and remember what's happened since. There was a riot, and you were dragged into it in spite of yourself."

"I know," said Paul. "But surely you don't mean——"

"I mean nothing," replied Standring. "I only ask you to bear it in mind. You were dragged into it in spite of yourself. Although you tried to dissuade the chaps who were engaged in it from doing anything rash, it seemed as though you were the ringleader. For that you were sent to Strangeways Gaol for six months. Who employed Bolitho for the prosecution? I needn't go into particulars about it; but that's one fact. Then there's something else. When you came out, you decided to start manufacturing, and you got the promise of a factory, with some looms and power, cheap. Then, without any reason, you were told you couldn't have it. Somebody else got it. Who got it? We know. I make no comment, but there it is. Presently the election came on, and nasty stories got to be afloat about your birth and parentage. It was whispered about that you were a come-by-chance child, and your mother was a bad woman. Who was responsible for that? We don't know, or, at least, we can't prove; but, put two and two together. In spite of everything you began to gain ground. People began to support you, and it looked very bad for the other side. You know that; everyone knows it. And then came this other affair. You didn't know that anyone else was manufacturing what you manufactured. You thought it was your secret; but the secret leaked out. I don't say who betrayed you, but there it is. But this I've found out: an old, disused mill was taken the other side of Manchester. Who took it? The name of the owner was kept quiet. It was said to be run by a little private company. That was some time ago now, and ever since that mill was taken there's been a kind of secret as to who owned it. But I've discovered this: they manufactured the same stuff that you manufacture. But they did not try to sell it. They kept piling it up in their warehouses. Can you see the meaning of this? It was kept quiet, mind; as quiet as death. Nobody seemed to know the stuff they were turning out. Then suddenly that stuff was pushed on the market at a price which left no margin for profits; nay, they offered it at a price less, far less, than you can manufacture it for. For months they had been piling it up in the warehouses, and they were able to flood the market. Now you know why the prices went down, and why you could not sell your stuff except at a ruinous loss!"

Paul listened to the young man with pale face and set features. He spoke no word, but it was easy to see that he grasped every detail which the young man mentioned. He saw the purport of his words too.

"I see," he said quietly. "And have you found out who the owner of that factory is?"

"Yes," replied Enoch Standring, "I have found out."

"Ned Wilson, of course," said Paul.

"Ay," replied the other laconically.

"And you have proofs?"

"Yes, I have proofs. They are all here docketed and numbered. I will go into them whenever you're ready. They are all there."

For a few seconds a silence fell upon them, and both Enoch Standring and George Preston watched Paul's face eagerly. They were wondering what he was thinking. Standring felt sure that he was planning some scheme of revenge.

"I'll be even with him for this!" said Paul presently.

Neither of them answered. They felt it was no use talking.

"But," continued Paul, "I can hardly see through it. Ned Wilson is a man capable of the riots trick. That's just the kind of thing he would do, but is he the man to lose money in order to satisfy his hatred?"

"Yes," said Standring, "the kind of hatred he has towards you. You see, he's a deeper chap than you think, is Ned Wilson. I've known him from a boy. He would carry a grudge for years. But he's been a chap who's always been noted for paying off old scores, and he's paid you off."

"You've not told me all yet, Standring," said Paul. "Ned Wilson had other motives than that of paying off an old score. I see—I see!" And he clenched his fists angrily. "Why didn't I see it before? Yes, that's it."

"What's it?" asked Preston.

"Never mind what it is; but I see it plainly. Yes, I understand, and he shall rue it."

For an hour they discussed the matter, and then, when presently the others had left him, Paul sat alone thinking. It seemed to him as though the day marked an epoch in his history. It was an end and it was a beginning. For hours he lay in his bed, sleepless. He was thinking of his plans for the future, thinking of the work he had to do.

The next morning he was up betimes. His mind was made up, for he saw his way clearly now. Knowing the enemy he had to fight, he selected the weapons that he must use, and he was no longer afraid. He went quietly to his mill, and for hours studied his position. After that he went to the bank and had a long talk with the manager. Then he paid a visit to an old manufacturer who had retired, and who had shown great friendliness towards him. After that his face cleared somewhat. The crisis was over, at least for a time. He would have six weeks in which to move, and in six weeks he believed that the complexion of everything would be changed.

"No," he said to himself, "it will not be ruin. I know my man. If I make no sign Ned Wilson is not the man who will continue to lose money for me. He thinks I'm ruined, and so he will take this opportunity of making his pile. He thinks he has a corner in this particular stuff. Well, he hasn't, and this will be my opportunity."

He was some little distance from Brunford as these thoughts passed through his mind. Old Abel Bowyer to whom he had gone, lived some three miles from the town and he was returning from his house now. Indeed he was entering the footpath where he had met Mary Bolitho long months before, and he had only gone a short distance when he saw her coming towards him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMING OF PAUL'S MOTHER

Mary Bolitho had returned to Howden Clough on the night of the election, her heart filled with conflicting emotions. Naturally, she had rejoiced in her father's election. No one had worked harder than she, and she felt that her father had not spoken untruthfully when he said that she had been largely responsible for his election. She had thrown herself eagerly into the work of gaining voters, and she knew she had been supremely successful. During the last three weeks a list of names had been given to her almost daily of those who seemed doubtful and undecided, and she had gone to them, and where others had failed she had secured their promises. She was naturally, therefore, elated at the result. The margin was so narrow that, but for her, both she and her father would have left the town feeling that the enemy had triumphed.

But she was not altogether satisfied. For one thing, she felt uncomfortable at the long stay she had been making at Howden Clough. Again and again she had spoken to her father, asking him to take rooms at an hotel, but Mr. Bolitho had persisted that it would offend the Wilsons deeply, and that he knew of no sufficient reason for acting upon her suggestion.

"What excuse can I give, Mary?" he said. "It was understood from the beginning that I was to make Howden Clough my home during our visits here. They have become personal friends of ours, and not only should we wound them by going to an hotel, but at this stage of the business we should cause a great deal of gossip."

Though yielding to her father's wishes, however, she was far from satisfied. It seemed to her that Ned Wilson looked on her with an air of proprietorship. He did not say this in so many words, but she couldn't help seeing what his thoughts and determinations were. Not that she disliked Ned—indeed, she had become more and more favourably impressed by him. He had more brains than she imagined, too, and had given evidence that, from the standpoint of business, he was thoroughly versed in the questions at issue. He had thrown himself with tremendous ardour into the fight, and had spared

himself in no way in order to win the election, and yet she was not satisfied. There seemed something at the back of everything which she could not understand. She had seen the circular referred to in the last chapter, and, in spite of the explanations which had been made, could not help feeling that the sending out of this same circular was unfair and even base. Everyone at Howden Clough professed ignorance concerning it, and there were many surmises as to who was responsible for it. The printer's name did not appear, and it was sent from London. That of itself looked to her very suspicious. But more than this, she could not understand Ned Wilson's behaviour. She had discussed with him who had been guilty of it, and while he, like the rest, professed to know nothing, he did not appear to be at all at ease.

"But is Mr. Stepaside on the brink of ruin, as is suggested here? And will he not be able to pay his debts?" she asked.

"Oh, I daresay it's true," cried Ned. "You see, the fellow is a bounder. He started manufacturing on practically nothing, not knowing very much about it. That's why he's got into this hole. You see, he's no conscience, and his ambition oversteps everything. You should have heard him last Sunday morning haranguing his followers, as I was coming home from church. You would realise, then, what kind of a fellow he is—just a blank, blatant atheist, and, as your father has always maintained, a man who has given up faith in religion is very doubtful as to his morals."

"Then, you mean he'll become a bankrupt?"

"Most likely," replied Ned. "And serve him right, too. He's only himself to blame. But what worries me is not that he will most likely be a bankrupt, but the sufferings of the people to whom he owes money."

Mary was naturally impressed by this conversation. While she regarded Paul Stepaside with a certain amount of admiration because of his strong personality and the position he had, in spite of difficulties, obtained in Brunford, she had a certain horror of his irreligion and his apparent vindictiveness. She recalled the words he had spoken to her on the two occasions on which they had met, words which revealed the passionate nature of the man. She was sorry she had spoken to him at all. She ought to have treated him with the scorn and contempt he deserved. After all, what had she to do with a Lancashire operative who, because he was possessed of a kind of vulgar aggressiveness, had become an employer of labour?

The scene in the chamber where the votes were counted, however, strengthened the uncomfortable feelings which had hitherto possessed her. He had openly accused her father of encouraging means which he regarded as disgraceful. He had declared that Mr. Bolitho had used these methods by which to destroy him. Of course, she could not help being offended, if not angry, at Paul Stepaside's demeanour and at his almost savage attack. She reflected that he was guilty of the conduct of a clown, and attributed it not only to his own savagery, but to the instincts of his class. And yet she was impressed by his strength. She almost admired him, as he savagely proclaimed the fact that he would yet be Member for Brunford. She felt his strength, too, and saw how he moved the multitude. Yes, in spite of everything, he was a strong man, and she loved strength. He had the instincts of a leader, and she admired men who could lead. And he was right, too—he was not crushed, although he was beaten, and he would fight again.

She was very silent at Howden Clough when they all returned from the gathering at the club. Everyone was jubilant except her, and although she was interested in all that was said, there was a strange feeling at her heart which she could not understand. She had a kind of fear, too, that Ned Wilson was on the point of making an avowal of his love, and for that reason she had determined that nothing should keep her from leaving Brunford on the morrow. Her father, however, had arranged to stay in the town until late in the afternoon, and she must perforce stay with him. But she determined to be alone, and that was why she found herself out in the fields at the back of Howden Clough when Paul was returning from his visit to old Abel Bowyer. She did not mean to speak to him, and yet she instinctively walked more slowly as he approached. In spite of herself, too, she found herself admiring him. He gave no suggestion of a beaten man. His step was firm and quick, and he walked almost like a victor.

Paul, scarcely knowing what he was doing, lifted his hat as he came close to her. "Miss Bolitho," he said, "will you convey a message to your father from me?"

She had meant to pass by without speaking, but the manner in which he addressed her made this impossible.

"If you wish to send a message to my father," she answered, "would it not be well for you to write to him? Good afternoon." And she moved as if to pass on.

"No," replied Paul quietly. "I want you to take a message direct from me, and doubtless he will tell Wilson. Please inform him that I have discovered the author of the circular which was sent broadcast during the election, and that I have proofs of the plot to ruin me. Doubtless he will be interested."

Without another word he passed on. A little later, Mary Bolitho left Brunford with her father. A fairly large crowd gathered at the Brunford station to see them off, and there were all sorts of shouting and congratulations; but Mary was very silent, and during the whole of the journey to Manchester she scarcely spoke a word. She said nothing of her meeting with Paul that day. It seemed to her that

something had closed her lips. She knew not why. One thing, however, gave her a feeling of gratification—she had made it impossible for Wilson to make his declaration of love. She knew she had only put it off for a time, and she dreaded the evil day.

Meanwhile, she was glad that he had not spoken to her, for Mary knew that if she accepted him, she would do so largely, if not altogether, at the wish of her father. For some reason or other Ned Wilson and he had become exceedingly friendly, and she believed, although her father had said nothing definite to her about it, that he favoured Ned's suit. And she loved her father with a great love, and would not, if she could help it, do anything to displease him. For Mary belonged to those who were held fast by old-fashioned views concerning the obedience due from children to their parents. In this respect she was a child of a past generation. She had a horror of anything like the modern woman movement, and did not claim that so-called emancipation by which they give up their superiority to men, in order to become their equals.

She determined, too, that she would go away on a long visit to a friend, giving as an excuse to her father that she was overwrought by the election and needed a rest. In this way she thought she would, for a time at all events, postpone the day of decision in relation to the suit which she knew Ned Wilson was longing to urge.

In a few days the excitement of the election had calmed down at Brunford. The jubilation of the victors spent itself, as did the disappointment of those who were vanquished. Bolitho was elected and Paul Stepaside didn't get in. And that, for the time being, was the end of it.

Meanwhile, Paul went on with his work silently, doggedly. His affairs were in a critical condition, and he needed all his energy and all his wits to put everything right. He no longer fought in the dark, however. He knew who and what had brought about the crisis which had faced him, and Paul was a man of many resources. For more than a month he had only been able to give half his mind to his business, and George Preston, while a trustworthy and reliable fellow, was not strong enough to face the problems which lay before them. Freed from the demands of the political contest, however, he threw his whole energies into the disentanglement of his affairs, and little by little he succeeded. The prices for the stuff which he had been manufacturing went up again, and although they had not reached the figures of a few months before, he was able to sell enough to help him to meet his most pressing creditors. In three months, matters had assumed their normal condition. Evidently Ned Wilson regarded him as no longer dangerous, and was not prepared to lose more money to bring about his revenge. In addition to this, Paul had worked in a way whereby Wilson had been deceived. Mind for mind, Wilson was no match for him. He was not so far-seeing, neither had he so broad a grasp of affairs. He had been able to gain an immediate advantage because of his large capital, and Paul knew that Wilson's father was too fond of money to consent to heavy and continuous losses. At the end of six months Paul's position was pretty well assured. In spite of everything he had overcome the evil circumstances, and, more than that, he had even used what seemed a disaster to the furtherance of his own ends.

All this time he had not been unmindful of the great quest of his life. He never forgot, even when the fight was at the highest, the loneliness of his mother's life and the shadow that rested upon her. Indeed he had, from the time of his returning from Scotland, made constant and continuous efforts to discover the man who had blackened her name. All his efforts, however, were unavailing. Every road seemed to be a cul-de-sac. Either Douglas Graham had given his mother a false name or else he had left the country, and thus made it impossible for him to find him; or he might be dead—it was quite possible. During the lapse of twenty-five years anything might happen. Still, he had a feeling that his father was alive, and he owed it to his mother, he owed it to himself, to penetrate the mystery. Why he should connect Mary Bolitho with all this he did not know; nevertheless, it was a fact that her face was never missing from the picture which he drew of the future. Somehow she was always connected with the efforts he was making. Often he dreamed of the time when he would be able to get her and say, "My name is as honourable as yours, as free from stain as yours. I have found my father." But the months went by and his search was unavailing, and the questions he was constantly asking were never answered.

He had never seen his mother since the day he left her on the Altarnun Moors. More than once he had suggested that she should come and live with him, but she had refused. Frequently, too, when writing to her, he had asked her whether he might come and see her, but she had persistently opposed this. "No, Paul," she said. "Your coming would only lead to questions. Here I am allowed to bury my secret in my own heart, and while my life is lonely enough, I can bear it until the day when justice is done to me."

At length, however, Paul could bear it no longer.

> "MOTHER (he wrote),—I am now what you would call a rich man. I have more money than I need to spend, and I cannot bear that you should be living away in that lonely farmhouse. You say you are treated more like a housekeeper than a servant, more like a member of the family than a stranger, but that's not enough for me. You are my mother, and, although I know little of you, I love you dearly. Besides, I am very lonely. I have but few friends, neither do I wish to make any, but I want you to come to me, mother. If you can keep house for that farmer, you can keep house for me. And I want to see you constantly. I want you by my side. I want you to be here to bid me 'Good-morning' when I go out to my work and welcome me when I come home at night. I want a home of my own, and I want my mother to be at the head of it. You must do this, mother. I have my eye now upon an old-fashioned

house just outside Brunford. It is hidden from the town, and was at one time, I suppose, owned by a sort of yeoman. It has a large garden, and there are old trees round it, and that, I can assure you, is something to be desired here, in a town where there are few gardens and where the trees grow with difficulty. It will give me joy to furnish this home for you, mother, and to make your life one of ease. Besides, I want your help. Ever since I came here, I've been trying to find the man of whom you spoke to me; I cannot call him 'Father,' even although he is. If you came, you could help me, and together we could think of means whereby the truth could be brought to light. Will you, mother? I know you say you are comfortable as you are, and that you don't wish to be a burden to me. You would not be a burden, but you would help me to bear mine, and so I don't ask you to come for your own sake, but for mine. I am your son, and I am lonely, and I need my mother."

Three days later he received his mother's reply:

"MY DEAR PAUL (she wrote),—I will come to you. Great fear is in my heart as I write this, but I can't resist you. You are my own flesh and blood, and although I have scarcely seen you from a child, you are the only thing I love. So, Paul, while I do not wish you to spend money for me, and while I shall be contented with a very little house, I will come as soon as ever you say you are ready for me."

A new interest came into Paul's life directly he had received this letter, and without hesitating a second he took the house he had mentioned. It was a wonder the place had been unoccupied for so long, because it was one of the best specimens of architecture in the neighbourhood. Perhaps the reason why it had not been taken was that it did not accord with the prevailing ideas in relation to houses. Of course, it was too large for an operative to think of taking, and as for the ordinary prosperous business man, he loved a more showy house, with plate-glass windows and high ceilings. This house had been built before Brunford became a manufacturing town, and was looked upon as utterly inconvenient and lacking in those characteristics which the prosperous Lancashire man loves. It was low ceiled; it looked somewhat dark. Its windows were stone-mullioned, and instead of great plate-glass windows it had small diamond-leaded lights. And so Paul was able to get it at a comparatively nominal rent, especially as the place was in shocking repair. In a few weeks, however, a transformation had been wrought. The building had been thoroughly overhauled, and by the wise expenditure of a comparatively small amount of money, modern conveniences had been installed. The old oak floors had been thoroughly cleaned, the walls distempered; the roof and windows repaired, and the sanitation made perfect. Paul took a wondrous delight in doing this. Each evening, when the day's work was over, he hastened to it, and rejoiced in the new beauties which the old place was constantly revealing. All the woodwork was of oak, and the old staircase, with its quaintly carved banisters and newels, the oak-panelled walls, which the last tenant had allowed to become dirty and damaged, appealed to his artistic nature. He loved the great oak beams which stretched across the ceilings, and rejoiced in the quaint nooks which were a characteristic of the old building. The furnishing, too, brought him constant pleasure. There happened to be a man in the town who dealt in antique furniture, and he also manufactured new furniture from old models. Why, Paul did not know, but since he had been in the habit of visiting wealthy men's residences, he had taken a great dislike to the bright, showy and costly, though very substantial, furniture which he saw. It had newness written everywhere, and utilitarianism and wealth seemed to be the great things to proclaim. But in this old dealer's warehouse he was able to resurrect things which had been bought from old manor houses, and which the Brunford people regarded as rubbish. These articles, when cleaned and repaired according to their original design, rejoiced him greatly. So that when, a few weeks after he had written to his mother, he saw them placed in his house, he felt for the first time that he had a home. One room especially attracted him—the room he meant to be sacred to his mother and to himself. Two-thirds of the wall space was covered with bookcases, while on the rest he hung some very good pictures. All these bookcases, as well as the chairs and writing-desk, made him think of the days of rest and comfort before Brunford became a scene of rush and turmoil. He pictured his mother seated by the fire, while he, after his day's work was over, would sit by her side with a pipe and a book. If he could not find his father, he could, at least, give his mother a home, and he vowed that he would make her happy. She was only a young woman even yet. It is true she looked careworn and sad when he had seen her on that day when she had told him her story, but he would smooth the lines from her face, and by his love and devotion would bring joy to her heart. He vowed, too, that Brunford should recall the words which had been uttered about her, and that the best people in the town should pay their respects to her. The time was now summer, and although it is hard to make a garden beautiful, even while two miles away from the grime and smoke of the town, he had done all that was possible in that direction.

"She will be here to-morrow night," he said to himself, as one evening he wandered from room to room. "This is her bedroom," he thought. "I hope she'll find everything comfortable. Yes, I believe she'll be happy here. It will ease her aching heart as I come to kiss her good-night, and my bedroom is close by, and she'll always know that I'm near. And then there is the kitchen, too. I must take care that everything is right there. I wonder whether she will like the servant I have got for her. At any rate, she will be able to set that right herself, if it is not right now, and I have money enough to give her every comfort. I was lucky to get such a dear old house, and she shall enjoy it; at least, I owe her that." And then, as her picture came before him as he had seen her that night when she had bidden him good-bye, the tears came into his eyes and his lips trembled. All the next day he was strangely excited, and George Preston declared that he had never known him so careless about business. "People are finely talking about your taking that house!" he said. "Some are saying you're going to get wed! Why have you

been so close about it? And what makes you spend all that brass?"

"My mother is coming to live with me," said Paul; "coming to-day."

"You don't mean it!" said the other. "Why, you looked as though you might be expecting your sweetheart!"

"I am," replied Paul with a laugh. And, indeed, he felt as though he were; for Paul was more happy than he had ever known himself to be before. The clouds somehow seemed to have lifted, and brightness came into his heart in spite of himself.

"She'll be very tired," he reflected, as that night he wended his way to the station. "She will have been travelling all day. She left Launceston early this morning, and it will have been a rush for her." So he was careful to engage a cab some time before the train was due, and then walked up and down the station with a fast-beating heart. Yes, life was becoming new to him in, a way that he could not understand. He felt less bitter towards the world, less bitter towards Mr. Bolitho, less angry at what had happened to him. The six months in Strangeways Gaol seemed but a horrible dream. The struggles of the past were far behind. He, while yet but a youth, had succeeded beyond all expectations, and, added to all this, his mother was coming to live with him; and for the first time in his life he would have a home!

No youth waiting for his sweetheart was ever more impatient than Paul. He was angry that the train was late, and wondered why the porters could be so indifferent about it. He had all sorts of fears, too, concerning his mother's welfare. Had she been able to catch the connection at Bristol and Manchester? Had some accident happened? Presently the signal fell, and a little later the train swept into the station. There were but few people present, because it was late, and it happened to be a wet day. Eagerly he looked at the carriage windows, and then suddenly he felt as though his heart were too great for his bosom. He saw a lonely, tired-looking woman step from the carriage and look expectantly round. "Mother!" he cried. "My dear, dear mother!" And then the sad-eyed, weary woman laid her head on his broad shoulder and sobbed for very joy.

A little later Paul and his mother were riding through the now silent streets of Brunford towards his new home. A strange feeling possessed his heart, for while he knew that the woman who sat by his side was his mother, she was a stranger to him. His heart had gone out to her with a great rush of pity and love when she first stepped from the train, but now that they were alone in the darkness it seemed as though his lips were sealed. He had nothing to say to her, and she, wellnigh overcome by her long, weary journey and her new experiences, seemed almost afraid. This was no wonder, for the situation was strange. She had left her boy at the workhouse when he was but an infant in arms. It had almost broken her heart to do this, but she felt that for Paul's sake it would be better for her to go away, better that he should not know of the sadness of his mother's life. And for seventeen years she had kept away from him. It is true she had made inquiries concerning his life at St. Mabyn, but very little more. Paul had grown up with the idea that he was fatherless and motherless, or even if that were not the case he knew nothing about either of them. Then, presently, when the time came for her to tell him the miserable story of the past, she had written asking him to meet her on the lonely moors, and after that she had gone away again in silence. So they were strangers to each other, even although the ties that bound them were so strong that only death could break them. The woman was almost startled when, stepping from the train, she saw the tall, well-dressed fellow rushing towards her. But her heart had claimed her son, and for the moment that was enough. Now, however, that they were alone in the cab, everything seemed in darkness again. She could not recall a feature of her boy's face. He might be an absolute stranger to her. Ere long the cab drew up to the door of a house, and when once ushered into bright and cheerful surroundings everything became changed. For the moment she did not pay any attention to the room, she looked only at him. She put her hands upon his shoulders and scanned his face, feature by feature. Her own face was a study as she did this. She seemed to be looking for something in him. She might be trying to read his heart. Her own eyes almost grew young again as she looked, and her lips were tremulous with a great emotion.

"My mother's a beautiful woman," said Paul to himself. "She looks terribly sad under the great sorrow in her life, but when she's happy, as I will make her happy, I shall be proud of her."

But for a time neither of them spoke. Each seemed to be trying to realise the situation, trying to understand that they were mother and son. At length the woman spoke.

"Thank God," she said. "You are nothing like him! You are my child—black hair, black eyes, dark-skinned, strong, resolute. No, you are nothing like him. You are my laddie, all mine! Kiss me again, my boy!"

Paul, nothing loth, enfolded her in his arms as a lover might his lass. "I have tried to make things nice for you, mother. How do you like the house?" he said at length.

She looked round the room and her eyes were full of wonder. "Why, Paul," she said, "this is a gentleman's house!"

"Of course," he said. "Come, let me show you the other rooms. And then the maid shall take you up to your own room. I am sure you must want something to eat badly."

He led her around the house, his heart full of pride. It was easy to see she was pleased, easy to see that she wondered at all the luxuries he had provided for her.

"Are you sure you ought to have done this, Paul?" she said at length.

"Why, mother?"

"Why, these things must have cost you such a lot of money. I don't need them. I have lived in poverty all my life, and you're making a lady of me!"

"Of course I am, mother!" And he laughed a glad laugh. "Of course I am! Everyone in the town shall respect and love you."

"And you've done all this for me?"

"All because I wanted to see you with me, mother. All because I wanted you to be happy. I've only you and you've only me. And don't fear about the money. In spite of everything I've been very successful, and I can afford all I've bought, aye, and more. I've only got one servant for you, mother, but, of course, you'll want others. Only I didn't know how to choose them, and I thought you might like to do it yourself."

"I want no servants, Paul!" she said. "I want to do everything for you with my own hands. I want to cook for you, and scrub for you, and wash for you, and live for you!"

"Yes, mother. But I don't wish to make you a slave, and so, whatever you say, you must have help to do all the hard work. I am going to make you very happy here. Do you like the house?"

"Like it!" she replied. "It's a paradise, my boy! Just a paradise!"

He called the servant to him, and told her to take his mother to her room, and then to have the evening meal ready.

A little later they sat in the dining-room, and for the first time Paul broke down. He was not an emotional man, nor one who gave way to weakness, but when he sat there in his own house with his mother by his side, and realised that they would be able to live together, that he would have a companion for the lonely evenings, and that he would be able to brighten his mother's life, the great deeps of his nature were aroused. It seemed to him as though something, which had been long dead in his being, had burst forth into life.

"I'm too happy to eat!" she said at length. "I will put away these things and then we can talk."

"Oh, no, mother," he said. "You're tired, and the maid is here for the purpose of doing that. Come into our little snuggery here." And he led the way into the room on which he had bestowed so much thought.

"Paul, my boy," she sobbed. "I'm proud of you, I'm proud of you! Aye, even although I cursed the day that you were born, and cursed God in the bitterness of my heart for the sorrow that came upon me, I'm proud of you! You are my own laddie! And now tell me everything, my lad!"

"No, mother, you're too tired and my story will take a long time!"

"No, I'm not tired," she said. "I feel as though I should never be tired again. It's all so wonderful—this beautiful home, given to me by my son! Oh, my lad, my lad!"

They sat down side by side, Paul holding his mother's hand in his. "To-morrow," he thought, "or as soon as she is well enough, I'll take her to Manchester, and she shall have the best clothes that money can buy! And when she's dressed as she ought to be, she will look young and handsome!"

And so, as they sat alone, he told the story of the past few years. Told of his struggles, of his fightings, and of his failures and successes, and how, little by little, he had obtained an education. Then he described the strike in the town, and the trial which ended in his imprisonment, and of his homecoming and his business life, and then of the election.

"But you'll win yet, Paul!" And her eyes flashed eagerly as she spoke. "My boy, you'll win yet!"

"Yes, I believe I shall win yet," he said. "Ay, I will, I must!"

"And what kind of a man is this Bolitho?" she asked. And Paul told her. He described the long duel he had had, and how up to the present Mr. Bolitho was the victor.

"And he's the Member of Parliament now?" said his mother.

"Yes," he replied. "He's Member of Parliament now."

"But never mind," was her reply. "It's coming, Paul. It's coming!" And then, looking straight into his eyes, she said, "You've not told me all yet, my lad."

"What can there be more to tell?" he said.

"Ay, Paul. I'm a woman, I'm a woman, and I know how laddies feel. There's a lass somewhere. Tell me about her. Nay, I'm not jealous. I know it must be so, it ought to be so, because each lad must have his lass. Only tell me about her!"

"It's a poor story, mother," he said. "And I think I hate my lassie as much as I love her. And I've scarcely ever spoken to her. Besides——"

"Besides what, Paul?"

"Well, you see," he replied, "she's the daughter of Mr. Bolitho, the man who's worsted me in everything. It was he who sent me to Strangeways Gaol. It was he who blackened my name. It was he who beat me in the fight! And I love her and hate her at the same time!"

There was a silence for some time and Paul saw that her face was dark with anger.

"And have you ever spoken to her?" she asked. "Does she know what you feel? Forgive me for asking, Paul, but I've been thinking about all these things through the years, and wondering about them down there in the lonely farm. For I've had scarcely anyone to speak to. My one thought and my one comfort has been you! And I've said to myself, 'He's a young man now, and, like all young men, he'll love his lass.' I'm your mother, Paul, and I think I can see into your heart. Have you ever spoken to her?"

It seemed as though all the barriers of the past were broken down. He had thought never to mention his secret to anyone, and yet he found himself speaking freely.

"Scarcely, mother," he said. And then he told her of the times they had met, and of what he had said and what she had said. He told her, too, of the rumours concerning Ned Wilson, and of his hopes to make her his wife.

"And he's your enemy, too?"

Paul nodded, and his eyes became dark with anger as he thought of the past.

"Paul," she said at length. "I live only for you now, only for you! Your enemies are my enemies; your friends are my friends! Those you love, I love; and those you hate, I hate! Whether you're right or whether you're wrong, my laddie, I love you!"

"Who ever I love, mother," he said, "it makes no difference between me and you, and my home must ever be yours."

"Ay, I dinna ken about that," she replied, lapsing into the speech of her girlhood. "But that doesna matter. Paul, I must see thy lass. You must find out when next she comes to Brunford, and I must see her. And you shall have her, too; whatever stands in the way must be removed!"

A little later he kissed her good-night at her bedroom door, and her words seemed to him like a prophecy.

CHAPTER IX

THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

For the next few weeks Paul's life was utterly changed. The coming of his mother had wrought a transformation, and in a very real sense old things had passed away, and all things had become new. Each morning he went to his work with a glad heart, and when the time for returning came he looked forward to meeting her with a joy unknown to him before. He had insisted on taking her to Manchester, and, in spite of many protests, had bought her what she called finery only fit for a lass. But Paul had taken a peculiar pleasure in this. He loved to see her eyes sparkle at some unexpected act of kindness on his part, and as day by day passed away and he marked the improvement in her looks, saw the lines of care wiped out and an expression of contentment come on her face, more genial feelings filled his life. As he repeated to himself often, "I have a home and a mother now," and the fact made even the dirty town in which he lived seem like a paradise. He was glad, too, to take business friends to his new home, and noticed with the keenest pleasure that they regarded his mother with cordiality and respect. So great was the change that came over him that for a time he grew careless about discovering the man who had caused such a dark shadow to fall upon her life long years before. It seemed for a time as though the past were obliterated, and that he had begun a new chapter of his life. His business prospered, and all anxiety in that direction seemed to be removed far from him.

In spite of all this, however, there was still a dull ache in his heart, a feeling that something was wanting in his life. He had not forgotten Mary Bolitho. He knew he never should. Never since the day after the election had he seen her in Brunford, and he often wondered what this might mean. Whether Ned Wilson ever saw her or not he had no idea, but, from the fact that Ned was often away from home, he feared that such was the case. Never, since he had discovered who was responsible for the circular issued at the time of the election, had he made any remarks about it. It was never referred to even between himself and his partner. Paul remembered it, however, and there were those in the town who,

when they learnt the truth, said one to another, "Ay, Stepaside will pay Wilson out for that! He's noan the chap to let a thing like that bide!"

Mr. Bolitho himself had visited the town only once since the election. He had on this occasion accompanied a Cabinet Minister, who spoke on the political situation, in the biggest hall in the town—but Paul had not gone to hear him. He heard that the new Member was not accompanied by his daughter, and then all interest in his visit had ceased. And so the months passed away, until more than a year had elapsed since the counting of the votes in the Town Hall.

Meanwhile, Paul constantly appeared in the town with his mother, and to his delight she received invitations from some of the most important people in Brunford. Not that she accepted these invitations, but Paul's joy was very great, nevertheless, because he saw it gave her satisfaction, and because he felt that it eased the burden of her life.

To Ned Wilson he never spoke. They met in various ways and at various places, but they ignored each other completely. This was naturally remarked upon by the people in the town, and many prophesied that the time would come when an open rupture would take place between these two men.

"You see," said one old weaver, when the matter was being discussed, "Paul's noan religious. He believes i' nowt—not but what he's a good lad, but his heart is closed to faith. He has no anchor anywhere, and when a man has noan of the grace of God in his heart he's hard. Onything may happen."

The autumn that his mother came he was invited to stand as a councillor for one of the wards in the borough. But this he declined. He was glad he had received this invitation, because it gave his mother joy, but the memory of his failure during the political contest still remained with him. He felt he could not be satisfied with the lesser when he had been refused the greater.

"No, mother," he said when he told her what had happened. "I'm not going to do this. I mean to be Member for Brunford, and if I take on this work it would stand in my way."

"You've never forgotten that lass, Paul?" said his mother.

"No, and I never shall!"

"You're not much of a lover," she said, looking towards him with a wistful smile.

"What do you mean, mother?"

"I mean," she said, "that if I were a lad and had made up my mind to win a lass, I would do it. I wouldn't stay away from her! If you love her, Paul, tell her so. She'll think none the less of you!"

"How can I?" he asked. "I don't know where she lives."

"And have never taken the trouble to find out!" was his mother's retort. "I tell you, my boy, no lass that ever lived thinks more of a lad for staying in the background. You don't know what Wilson's doing!"

"No," replied Paul. "But I do not think she has promised him anything; in fact, I am sure she has not. I saw him only to-day, and if she had promised him, he would not look as he did look! All the same, I feel as though my lips were sealed, mother! If I went to her now she would scorn me, and I couldn't bear that. No, I must wait my time, and when that time comes neither Wilson nor anyone else shall stand in my way!"

"If she could see you two together," replied his mother fondly, "there's not the slightest doubt as to which she would choose!"

"Nonsense, mother!" said Paul with a laugh, and yet her words cheered him in spite of himself.

"I'm not so old, my boy, but what I know what a lass feels, and what she likes!"

"I'm nobody yet," said Paul. "I'm only just a beginner, and Wilson is one of the richest men in Brunford."

"If she is worth having, Paul, she won't think so much about that! I went to the kirk last Sunday where Wilson goes, and I saw him. I tell you he is not one that a lass would take to if she knew you cared for her. But if you don't speak, well, there——"

"I hear she's coming to Brunford soon," said Paul presently.

His mother looked up eagerly. "Coming to Brunford?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Paul. "She's coming on a visit to the Wilsons'. My partner, George Preston, told me. It seems that his mother's servant is friendly with one of the maids up at Howden Clough. That's how he got to know."

The mother looked at her son for a few seconds with a strange expression in her eyes. It was easy to see how she loved him, and how her heart went out in strong desire to bring him happiness. She did not seem at all jealous that he should love anyone beside her, her one thought seemed to be how to bring him joy.

"You must meet her, Paul!" she said. "You must meet her!"

"Ay, that's very likely," he laughed bitterly. "But what's the good? She would never think of me, I am nameless!"

He was sorry the moment he had spoken, for he knew he had not only wounded his mother, he had aroused in her heart feelings which he had hoped were dying out.

"You have heard nothing more?" she said, and her voice was hard and almost hoarse.

"No, mother," he replied. "I seem to be met by a blank wall everywhere. I have made every inquiry in my power, and, as I told you, I went to Scotland in the hope that I should be able to get at the truth, but I learnt nothing—nothing! If he's alive he's somewhere in hiding; he's afraid of what will take place—because the marriage is clear enough, at least, in my mind."

"But in the eyes of the law, Paul?" she asked eagerly.

"Ay, even in the eyes of the law," he replied. "If I could find him, I could face him with what you both wrote in that book in the old inn. Both the man and the woman are still alive, and they had no doubt about it. But I cannot find him. I've tried, and, as these Lancashire people say, 'better tried.' I sometimes think we'll have to give it up!"

The woman rose to her feet and came towards him like one in anger. "Paul," she said, "never hint at such a thing again. For myself it doesn't matter. Everyone here calls me Mrs. Stepaside, and there are but few who ask questions about my marriage, although I know it's been talked about. But there is you to consider. Stepaside is not your real name. It is the name of a hamlet, the place where I fell down, thinking and hoping and almost praying that I should die. It's a name of disgrace. It was given to you because the workhouse master could think of nothing else. And I should never rest in my grave thinking that you did not possess your rights! We must find him, Paul. We must make him do you justice, ay, and make him suffer, too, as I have suffered!"

"Have you not forgotten or forgiven yet?" he asked, almost startled by the look on his mother's face.

"Forgotten, forgiven!" And it did not seem to be like her voice at all. "Never, while I have a brain to think or a heart to feel! Forgiven! As I said, for myself it does not matter, although for many a month I was in hell! But I can never forget the injury he has done to you—you who were branded in the village where you were reared as a come-by-chance child, a workhouse brat, reared, upon the rates, a burden to the parish! Can I forgive that, while perhaps he—he may have married again."

"Perhaps he did not," said Paul. "Perhaps he sent that man to your old home to inquire because, after all, he was caring for you!"

"What's that?" cried the woman angrily. "To send to inquire! Did he follow the steps I took? If he cared for me, if he were faithful to his promise, he would have traced me to Cornwall. He would never give up seeking for me until he had found me or discovered the truth about me. No, Paul, we must make him pay for it, we must! And don't ever hint about giving it up again. I've had a feeling lately that I'm going to find him, and when I do—when I do——"

And Paul saw that his mother's eyes burned red. She seemed to have lost control over herself entirely. "I have plans even now," she went on presently.

"What plans?" he asked.

"I am not going to tell you," she replied. "But I've not been thinking all these years for nothing! Directly you wrote me the account of your visit to Scotland it all came back to me again. I've been thinking it over week after week and month after month. And I have a feeling that I shall find him. I must, for your sake, Paul! You love that lass, and you must marry her. I know that you are dreaming of her night and day. I know that you'll never be happy without her!"

He opened his mouth as if to contradict her, but could not. The woman had spoken the truth. Proud and self-contained as he was, he knew that nothing would ever satisfy him until he had won her love. And yet how could he? What chance was there?

"If she comes to Brunford, as you say, Paul, I am going to see her!" went on his mother. "I shall know if she's worthy of you, and if she is, you needn't fear, Paul—trust a woman! I'll bring you together somehow!"

"I have been thinking it over," he replied. "Months agone I made a vow that I would compel her to love me. People in Brunford say that I'm the kind of man who gets his way, and I vowed that by sheer strength I would conquer her, but I know it won't do now! I remember the look in her eyes when last we met. She's not the kind of woman whose love can be forced!"

"No woman's love can be forced," replied his mother. "It must always be won! Still, a lass loves a strong man and despises a weakling. Trust to me, Paul, trust to me!"

"I'll trust to myself, too," he said grimly. "But you're right, mother. I want a name to offer her, not only the name I've made, but the name I've inherited—or ought to inherit—and when I've got that,

neither Ned Wilson nor any other man shall stand in my way!"

A few days later Paul entered the Mechanics' Institute, and, standing in the entrance hall, he saw a number of men he knew. One of them was young Wilson. Paul was about to pass into the reading-room, without speaking, when one of them called to him. "Ay, Stepaside," he said, "hast a' heard the news?"

"What news?"

"It seems that we may have another election on us," replied the man.

"Another election! What kind of an election?"

"Why, Parliamentary, of course. There are rumours that they are going to make a judge of Bolitho, and if they do, he'll have to resign his seat. A judge, you know, is supposed to be non-political. So it seems as though there'll be another fight. What do you feel about it?"

"I must know if the gossip is true first," replied Paul.

"There's not so much doubt about it," replied the other. "Ned Wilson here is bound to be in the know. Perhaps," added the man with a laugh, "Ned'll sign your nomination papers!"

"Or send out a circular without signing it!" said Paul. And everyone laughed as he spoke, because it was fully known what he meant.

"My dear fellow," retorted Wilson, "what you and your party do is nothing to me! If there is another election I shall have nothing to do with it. I am as fond of a fight as any man, and under certain circumstances I would even fight a man of your calibre, but there is no necessity for it now!"

Paul's face was pale to the lips. He hated a scene, hated the thought that his private affairs were being discussed in such a place. He could not help feeling that there was something vulgar about it all, and he in a moment of forgetfulness had yielded to what, had he been calmer, he would have resisted to the utmost. Still, his anger was aroused, and he saw that those who stood around were enjoying the situation.

"That's a matter of opinion," he replied. "At any rate, my name has never been associated with sending out a lying circular. And I have never been ashamed to put my name to any document I wrote! I never hired a barrister to tell lies about anyone, and I never stabbed a man in the back!"

"What do you mean?" asked Wilson. "Why should I stab a man in the back?"

"Because you're afraid to meet him face to face!"

"By God! you shall pay for that," said Wilson, and his voice quivered with rage.

It was the first time Paul had spoken to Wilson for many a long day. As we have said, he had, ever since the election especially, refrained from having any intercourse with him, and he would have given anything to have recalled the words he had uttered. He had fought with the weapons of a clown. He had bandied words with a man who was openly his enemy, and he felt ashamed of himself. Still, nothing could be done now, and, on the whole, he did not think he had had the worst of the encounter. All the same, he knew that if Wilson had hated him before, he hated him more now. And he was sure that if he were able to harm him in any way, he would stop at nothing to carry out his purposes. As to Paul's financial position, he did not so much fear. He was on safer ground now, and was able to meet any ordinary difficulty; but there were other things. He wondered whether Wilson ever guessed the secret of his heart, wondered whether he knew that he was a would-be rival. That Wilson was enamoured of Mary Bolitho was universally believed, but whether she in any way returned his affection no one was able to guess.

A fortnight later that which had been rumoured concerning Mr. Bolitho's resignation actually took place. He had been made a judge, and, as a consequence, could no longer remain Member for Brunford. The result of it was that the deputation who had come to Paul before, again made their appeal to him.

"Paul," said old Abel Bowyer, "now is thy chance. Thou'lt be Member for Brunford after all. Thou art noan a Lancashire lad, but we're proud on thee all the same. Thou hast made thy money in Brunford, and all thy interests are here, and while I don't agree with you in all your views, you're our lad! Thou mun go to Parliament. Wilt a' fight?"

"Yes," said Paul, "I will. But who have I got to fight against?"

"I don't know yet, but that'll noan matter. If you had been treated fairly last time you'd have got in, and this time there'll be no doubt about it. I'm not sure but what it'll be the better for thee, too. Thou'lt be the talk of the country. At a General Election individuals are noan taken notice of. It's just a fight for the party, and when every borough has its election, particular cases are taken no notice of. But at by-elections the chap that gets in makes a bit of a stir. Anyhow, we can set to work."

"Yes," said Paul. "We must set to work, and we must arrange our committees right away."

"I hear," went on old Abel, "that Bolitho's coming here to say 'Good-bye' to us. You see, he's noan

taken on the job of judge yet, and until he does he'll be free to speak for his party. So I'm told that he's just coming to pay us a last visit, in order to advise the people to accept a sort of nominee of his as his successor. 'Appen thou'lt see him then."

During the last few weeks Paul had been expecting to hear that Mary Bolitho had come to pay her promised visit to Howden Clough, but no news of her had arrived. Presently, however, gossip had it that both the new-made judge and his daughter were to be guests at Howden Clough when his opponent made his first appearance. A few days later huge placards were posted over the town to the effect that the Honourable Stephen Boston would speak in the Industrial Hall, and that the chair would be taken by Mr. Bolitho.

"Would you like to go and hear him?" asked Paul of his mother.

"Hear who?" she asked.

"Why, the man who beat me at the last election," said Paul. "You see, he's coming to take the chair for the new candidate."

"No," she replied. "I've no interest in him. I should like to see her, though."

"I am afraid there's no chance of that," said Paul. "Unless you happen to be in town when she's driving round."

"I'll see her somehow. And, my boy, I'll bring you both together!" And there was a far-away look in her eyes.

On the afternoon of the meeting Paul was at the railway station when the train from Manchester came in, and as he watched the passengers alight his heart throbbed violently, for, descending from the train, he saw not only Mr. Bolitho, but Mary, accompanied by a young fellow who, he judged, would be the Honourable Stephen Boston.

"Oh, Stepaside," said Mr. Bolitho, going up to him with outstretched hand, as though nothing but pleasantries had ever passed between them, "I'm glad to see you. Of course, you know what's happened?"

"Yes," said Paul. "I suppose I ought to congratulate you!" The words were curtly spoken, and Bolitho was not slow to recognise his tone's, but he decided to take no notice of it.

"I hear you're to be the candidate on the other side again," he went on. "Allow me to introduce to you your opponent. I am sure you'll have a good, honest, straight fight!"

"I hope so," said Paul quietly, at the same time holding out his hand to Mr. Boston.

"We shall not fight on equal terms, I am afraid," said the young man with a laugh; "that is"—and he corrected himself—"I shall be altogether at a disadvantage. You know these people, and I don't. I am afraid, too, that many of them regard the land-owning class with disfavour; still I'll put up the best fight I'm able, and I am sure we shall have a jolly good time! I am glad to meet you, Mr. Stepaside, and I hope, whatever the result of the election is, we shall part good friends."

"It shall not be my fault if we do not," said Paul heartily. "But I warn you that I'm going to beat you!" And he laughed almost merrily.

"Well, you know what Randolph Churchill used to say about an Englishman who could not stand a licking!" laughed the other. "And if I'm licked I hope I shall take it in good part. But I don't mean to be. I am trying to persuade Miss Bolitho here to canvass for me as she did for her father!"

"And will you?" asked Paul, turning towards her.

"Would you be very angry with me if I did?" she asked laughingly.

"No," said Paul. "But I'd give a great deal to have you on my side!"

"If you had," said Boston pleasantly, "I should stand no chance at all. But if she works for me she will more than counterbalance the fact that I am a stranger to the town. Well, we must be going, Bolitho. Of course, Wilson is not expecting us by this train, or no doubt he would have been here to meet us. But as I have to get back to Manchester to-night, we must say what we have to say to him at once. Good afternoon, Mr. Stepaside. I have no doubt we shall meet often during the next few weeks."

"Of course, I can't wish you luck, Stepaside," said Mr. Bolitho cordially. "You see, you're on the other side. All the same, as far as you and I are concerned, we have decided to let bygones be bygones, haven't we?"

But Paul did not speak. He would have given anything to have spoken to Mr. Bolitho in the same spirit in which he had spoken, but for the life of him he could not. A weight seemed to be upon his tongue.

"Perhaps we shall also meet again," he said, turning to Mary Bolitho. "Do you know, I sometimes think you do not understand me! And I should like to have half an hour's chat with you. It might alter

your views concerning me and the class I represent." He spoke almost humbly, and even her father did not resent his words. Ordinarily he would probably have been angry that a man of Paul's status should have dared to have spoken to his daughter in such a fashion—now there seemed nothing wrong in it.

"I should love to," laughed the girl. "Perhaps you do not understand my father either. I am sure I could convince you that he's right!" And with a pleasant smile she left him alone on the platform.

Only a few words had passed between them, and if an outsider had been listening to them, he would have regarded them as of no import whatever, but Paul felt that they had changed everything. In a way he could not understand, the old antagonism had gone, and, stranger to her as he still was, it seemed to him that a bond of sympathy had been formed. On previous occasions when he had met her it had seemed to him as though he were meeting an enemy, even although she had filled the whole of his horizon. But now the very atmosphere was changed, and he was sure that when they met again he could make her understand him, and that they would be able to speak on equal terms.

When he returned home that night his mother wondered why his eyes were so bright and his voice so cheerful.

"Have you heard good news, my boy?" she asked.

"I feel that I'm going to win, mother," was his reply, and his words meant a great deal more to him than to her.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW MEMBER FOR BRUNFORD

The day following the meeting at the railway station Paul saw Miss Bolitho in the streets of Brunford and to his delight she greeted him with a frank smile.

"Have you begun your work of canvassing?" he said, with a laugh.

"Not yet," she replied. "Indeed, I doubt whether I shall take any part in this contest. I have been engaged in a far more feminine occupation!"

"Shopping?" asked Paul.

She laughed in assent. "But I've finished now," she said. "I am just returning to Howden Clough."

"Are you staying in Brunford long?"

"No, I leave to-morrow."

"May I walk back with you?" he asked, wondering at his own temerity. They went together some little distance without Paul speaking a word. He felt he had much to say to her, and yet, now that the opportunity had come, he was speechless. He noticed, too, that the people in the street were watching them, and doubtless many were commenting on the fact that he, who had no reason to be friendly with Mr. Bolitho, should be walking with his daughter. Once or twice he looked shyly towards her, and could not help thinking how utterly different she was from the girls of her own age who lived in Brunford. She seemed to have no connection with the town at all. Everything there was smoky and grimy and harsh. She seemed more like a country girl than a denizen of a town or city. Sometimes, when he had watched people in the market square selling violets, the incongruity had struck him. The violets brought in fresh from the country seemed utterly out of place in the grimy hands of these Northern people. As he looked at the young girl by his side he could not help thinking of the violets.

"I want to apologise to you," he said at length. "I was rude to you when I met you in the fields near Howden Clough, and I've been angry with myself ever since. It is very good of you to forgive me. I don't deserve it."

For the first time Mary Bolitho realised what she was doing. In a moment of thoughtlessness she had yielded to his suggestion that he should walk to Howden Clough with her, and she felt angry with herself. Had anyone told her that morning that she would have allowed him to walk by her side through the public street she would have laughed at the idea. It is true she had been interested in him ever since she had first seen him. There was something masterful in his presence. His political campaign had been marked by incidents which appealed to her imagination, and she felt she could never forget the look on his face when he had flung out his defiance to her father on the day of the election. She felt there was something morose and sullen, if not savage, in his nature, and even while she spoke pleasantly to him in her father's presence, the thought of being alone with him in such a way would have been deemed impossible. Directly he had suggested walking home with her, however, she felt she must fall in with his desire. There was something in him that interested her and almost mastered her.

"You thought I was rude, didn't you?" he continued. "Well, I apologise, humbly and sincerely. But perhaps there was some excuse for me. Your father treated me badly, and, naturally, I associated you with him."

"You mistake my father," she said. "He would never treat anyone badly."

"He was unjust to me," said Paul. "I know that barristers are supposed to do their best for their employers, but through him I suffered unjust imprisonment. He did not try to arrive at the truth. He only tried to win his case, and, in so doing, he stopped at nothing to make it hard for me. I am thinking now of that riot trouble. Of course, you heard that I was innocent of the affair?"

"Yes, I have," she replied. "I am very sorry. But surely you understand my father's position?"

"I can never understand injustice," he replied. "Still, it was not your fault, and I acted to you like a brute. Besides all that, you were a friend of the Wilsons, and Ned Wilson hates me."

"Why should he hate you?" asked the girl.

"I will not tell you that," replied Paul. "That would be stabbing a man in the back, and I will not be guilty of that. Anyhow, years ago, I incurred Ned Wilson's enmity by telling him certain home truths. He has never forgiven me. But for the stories he set afloat and his action towards me I should have won the last election. All this made me bitter towards you."

"I wonder," she replied, "if you feel so angry towards me, that you should care to make these explanations." And she did not understand at all why she spoke. They were some little distance from the roar of the traffic now, and could hear each other plainly.

"I want you to think well of me," he said.

"Why should you?" she asked.

"I cannot tell you now," replied Paul. "But some day I should like to. You wish me good luck in this fight, don't you?"

"How can I," she asked, "when I look at things so differently? I think I admire your pluck, and if I were in your place I should be proud of the influence you have over the working-men; but, then, I think your policy is a dangerous one."

"Let me explain that to you," he replied eagerly. "I think you do not understand how the working classes feel, and I, even although my father did not belong to that class, I—well, I have been a working-man. And there is a shadow over my name, too, and over my mother's life. I should like to tell you about that."

"Really, Mr. Stepaside, I have no right to hear."

"But I want you to," he urged, and his voice was tremulous. "You really do not know, Miss Bolitho, all I have been thinking, and how I long for you to know the truth. You must know it, too. You have had harsh thoughts about me. Yes, you have been unjust to me, and it's my right that you should know the truth. I wish you knew my mother, too. If you did——"

His speech was here broken off by the advent of Ned Wilson, who came from a side street. He seemed utterly surprised at seeing her and Paul together, but, without taking any notice of Paul, he exclaimed, "Oh, this is luck, Miss Bolitho! I am just returning home, and I shall have the pleasure of walking back with you. Or, if you like, we will go back to the mill together. There's a conveyance there."

"No, thank you," she replied. "I'd rather walk. Good-afternoon, Mr. Stepaside. I hope you will—that is——" And then, without finishing her sentence, she walked away by Ned Wilson's side, leaving Paul alone.

"Well, of all the impudence!" said Wilson angrily. His tone did not please the girl. She was vexed with herself for allowing Paul to accompany her, especially as she did not know why she should have done such an unprecedented thing, but she resented Wilson's remark, nevertheless. It seemed to suggest proprietorship.

"How in the world did you allow him to walk with you? Really, Miss Bolitho, I cannot allow it!" And his voice was hot with anger.

"I am afraid I do not understand!" And Wilson saw that he had gone too far.

"I mean, you do not know him. He's a low-bred clown, a fellow who—well, who should not be seen walking with you, Miss Bolitho. Besides, people will talk; they do not understand."

She did not know why it was, but she felt it was for her to defend Paul, and, without thinking, she burst out, almost angrily, "I think he's a magnificent fellow, and I do hope he'll win!"

"You hope he'll win?" cried Ned.

"Yes. You see, I like strong men—that is, I like men who will never be beaten, who know what they

want, and who never rest until they get it; men with great purposes, great ambitions. And he's a man who will surely be heard of. Nothing can stop him. I hear he's becoming a rich man, but that will not content him. He's ambitious to take a great place in life. I should not be at all surprised if some day he won a national reputation!"

"Nonsense!" cried Ned. "National reputation, indeed! He might have a national reputation for some great crime, but for nothing else. He has the instincts of his class, Miss Bolitho, and I am sorry you were seen walking with him. If I were to tell your father, he'd be angry, too."

Ned knew he was doing himself harm by saying these things, but at that moment his hatred of Paul was increased. He had never dreamt that Mary Bolitho could think of him in such a way. He believed she was interested in him, and that somehow Paul had fascinated her by his presence. Jealousy of him, therefore, was added to the old grudge.

"I am afraid you do not understand, Mr. Wilson. Oh, here's a tram, which will take me a long way towards the house." And without taking any further notice of him, she walked towards the conveyance.

Three weeks later Brunford was again on the tiptoe of excitement. Again a great crowd had gathered around the town hall, again there was the excitement of counting votes, and this time Paul, to his great delight, found himself Member for Brunford by a big majority. That he was gratified goes without saying. He felt, somehow, that the day brought him nearer the things he longed for. All things seemed possible to him now, and his heart beat high with joy. It is true, Ned Wilson bad done his best to defeat him, but this time he had been powerless. He was unable to use the methods he had used on the previous occasion, and while he had resurrected the old stories concerning Paul's parentage, they had apparently done the young man no harm. Paul was delighted, too, with the conduct of his opponent. The Honourable Stephen Boston had been true to his word. He had fought the battle fairly and with a sportsman's spirit, and when the results were announced no man in Brunford was more cordial towards the new Member than the defeated candidate.

"I did my best to lick you, Stepaside," he said, when all the noise and excitement was over. "But you were too strong for me. All the same, I congratulate you. You have fought a good fight, and you'll be heard about in the country yet. When you come to London, I hope we shall see more of each other, and it may be I can introduce you to some people whom you would like to know."

It was long after midnight at this time, and they had met with a number of men at a kind of social club which had no political bias. The leading people of the town were there, and Paul also noticed that Ned Wilson was among them. He fancied he had been drinking heavily. His eyes were bloodshot, and his voice was loud and truculent.

"It's good of you to say so," said Paul. "And never do I want to fight with a fairer opponent. I hope that neither of us will ever be able to think of this election with a shadow of regret."

"Yes, but Brunford will!" interposed Wilson.

"Nay, nay, Ned," remarked someone near. "Hold your tongue. It's no use probing old wounds now."

"I say Brunford will!" shouted Ned, heedless of the other's warning. "The time will come when it will be ashamed of what it's done to-day. For my own part, I think I will move out of the town. Politics have become a dirty business now, when a nameless vagrant can become a Member of Parliament. Still, we know the old adage, 'Give a beggar a horse——'"

Paul did not speak. For one thing, he was in a great good humour. He had been victorious and could afford to forgive Wilson for all he had done. Besides, he remembered the last quarrel they had had in a public place, and he did not want another scene now. But Wilson was evidently bent upon a quarrel. He was deeply chagrined at the other's victory, and this, added to the whisky he had been drinking, made him more than ordinarily quarrelsome.

"If I had my way," he went on, "none but those of honourable birth, and whose parentage was respectable, should legislate for a country like this. As for this fellow's parentage——" And then he gave a sneering laugh.

"Be quiet, now, Ned! Do be quiet! You'll get into trouble presently.

"Trouble!" cried the other. "I'm going to say my say. Why, if the fellow had any sense of shame, he would at least have kept his mother out of the town." And then he uttered words which I will not write down—words which, had Paul's mother heard them, would have made her long to fly the town.

This proved too much for Paul. Insults hurled at himself he did not mind, but for such words to be uttered about his mother in a place like this was beyond endurance. With a face as pale as ashes, and a voice hoarse with passion, he strode towards Wilson. "You dare not repeat those words!" he said, scarcely knowing what was passing his lips.

"Repeat!" said Wilson. "I shall repeat what I like, and scum like you shall never stop me. Who are you that you should dare to be here among gentlemen? You may have been elected by the riff-raff of the town, but that does not hinder you from being what you are—a workhouse brat. It does not hinder your mother from being——" And again he uttered words which I will not write down.

Paul forgot where he was now. The day's election, his longing to keep away from vulgar quarrels, all his ambitions became forgotten in the passion of the moment. A second later Ned Wilson was lying on the floor, blood flowing from his mouth. A blow from Paul had laid him prostrate, almost senseless. What Paul would have done to him, I do not know, but he was held back by many strong arms. "No, no, Stepaside," men said. "This is a bad beginning for your new career. If this gets out in the town, and it's almost bound to——"

"I don't care," interrupted Paul. "No man could hear what he has said without resenting it. Let me go, I tell you!"

By this time Wilson had risen. The blow, while it had partially stunned him, had also to some extent sobered him. For a few seconds the two men looked at each other, each with great passion in his eyes.

"Remember," said Wilson, "I'll pay you out for this! By God! I'll pay you for this! You and I have had our knives in each other for a long time, and I have always got the better of you, and I will again, in spite of this!" And he left the club with a look of murder in his eyes.

Paul also left immediately after. In spite of his day's victory, he was heartily ashamed of what he had done, and yet the mad anger in his heart caused by what Wilson had said kept him from regretting the blow he had struck.

"He is right," said one of the men who had witnessed the affair. "He'll pay thee out for this, Paul. Ned Wilson is a chap that never forgives, never forgets."

"If it comes to paying out," said Paul, "I've a bigger score than he has, and he'll always find me ready."

"It serves him jolly well right," said the Honourable Stephen Boston. "I wonder Stepaside did not kill him! I know I would if anyone said such a thing to me! All the same, I am sorry it has taken place. Had I known Wilson was here I would not have asked Stepaside to join us."

When Paul reached his home he found his mother sitting up for him. She met him with a look of joy in her eyes. "Paul," she said, "they've brought me the news."

"What news, mother?" he asked.

"The news of your victory, my son. It's glorious! I little thought when I saw you first that I should ever live to see such an hour as this. But what's the matter with you?"

"What should be the matter?" he asked.

"You're as pale as ashes, and you do not look like one who has won a great victory. What has happened?"

"Oh, never mind," he replied.

"But I must mind, Paul. Something has taken place that has upset you. Tell me what it is."

Even yet Paul was scarcely master of himself. The words he had heard still rang in his ears and rankled in his heart. He felt as though all the joy of the day had been destroyed by what Wilson had said. He knew, too, that it would become public property by the morrow. There were those who witnessed the affair who would not be slow in making it known. Perhaps, too, it would come to his mother's ears in a garbled fashion, and would wound her more than if he told her himself.

"Has the man Bolitho done anything?" she said. "Or is it your opponent? Was he terribly cut up because you beat him, Paul?"

"No," he replied. "I've never heard of Bolitho, and as for Boston, he's a splendid fellow. He took his beating like a man and offered me his friendship afterwards."

"Then what is it? Is the news I've heard, that Wilson is engaged to Miss Bolitho, true?"

"Have you heard that?"

"Yes; I have heard it only to-day."

"I wish I had killed him!" he said, and his voice was hoarse and unnatural.

"What do you mean, Paul? Tell me what has happened."

Had he not been excited beyond measure, he would have told the story in such a way as to take away the sting from it. As it was, never dreaming of the results, he related what had taken place, and repeated the words Wilson had said. No sooner had he spoken, however, than he was mad with himself for being so unguarded. His mother's face became drawn with agony. Her eyes shone with a strange light, and he saw her clench and unclench her hands like one in great pain.

"Did he say that?" she cried. "Did he say that?" And he scarcely recognised her voice.

"Anyhow, he's suffering for it," said Paul. "Ay, and he shall suffer for it, too."

"He shall! He shall!" And her voice almost rose to a shriek. "I have violent blood in my veins, Paul. Back in the old days my people would have only been content to wipe out such an insult in blood, and I will make him suffer for it!"

"I am sorry I told you, mother," said Paul. "I was a fool to do so; but I did not think, I did not remember!"

"I am glad you have told me!" was her reply. "I know now what I have to do. I have been so happy that I was almost forgetting; but I will not forget now! And that man is your enemy, too. He means to marry Mary Bolitho, and he will, too, unless, unless—Paul, you needn't fear! I tell you, you needn't fear." And after that she would not speak another word.

For a long time Paul lay thinking of what his mother had said and of the strange look in her eyes. It seemed as though he had roused something evil in her nature, and for a time he wondered whether her brain had not been unhinged. He knew she was a proud woman, and that she was jealous beyond words of her good name. The thought of Wilson's words being bandied around the town must be worse than death to her, and yet what could he do? He blamed himself more than he could say for having told her the truth so brutally. Had he not himself been so overwrought he would have acted with more deliberation. He remembered, too, what his mother had said when they had first met, and he wondered whether Wilson had proposed marriage to Mary Bolitho before she had left Brunford, and whether she had accepted him. It might be so. And then all the joy of his winning the election would be as nothing.

For the last three weeks he had been looking forward to this day with great anticipation. He felt sure he would win from the beginning, and he had wondered whether Mary would send him some word of congratulation. He did not expect she would, but she would hear of his victory, and perhaps their next meeting would be under more favourable circumstances. He knew that, in spite of the fact that he had been elected for Brunford, the sky of his life was black again. The words he had heard had filled him with black shame and feelings of deadly anger, while the look on his mother's face aroused in him an unnameable fear.

When morning came, however, he felt better. A few hours' sleep had restored him to something like normal health. The excitement of the last few weeks had told upon him, and the strain upon his nerves had been tremendous. Now that the fight was over, however his splendid constitution stood him in good stead, and he felt strong and vigorous. That which had appeared black at night assumed less sombre colours in the light of day. After all, he had won a great victory. He had received nearly a thousand votes more than his opponent. He had wrested a seat for the cause in which he believed, and he was member for Brunford!

He slept until nearly nine o'clock, and when he came downstairs he found, to his delight, a heap of congratulatory messages lying upon the table. After all, it was delightful to be a victor, delightful to have won in the battle of life! He noticed, too, that his mother had become like her old self again. She spoke in her natural voice, and made no reference whatever to what had taken place the night before.

"I shall have to go to London, to-day or to-morrow, mother," he said. "I hope you won't be lonely while I'm away."

"Oh, never fear for me, Paul, my son!" she replied. "I shall be all right."

"I do not like the idea of your being alone, though," said Paul. "And I shall have to be away from Brunford a great deal when Parliament meets. I think I shall have to take you to London with me!"

"No," she replied. "I would rather stay here. I should only be in your way if I went to London, besides increasing your expenses—and that I must not do."

"Why not, mother? I can afford it very well. We're having a specially good run of luck just now, and the extra expense would not bother me at all. Besides, I want you to be near me!"

"No, Paul. I would rather remain in Brunford. I have my work to do."

"Your work, mother! What do you mean?"

She did not reply, and Paul could not understand the look on her face.

"Tell me, mother," he said, "what do you mean by having your work to do?"

"There's only one work for me now, Paul—only one thing I care about—and that is to give you your rightful name, and to make you happy!"

"I have thought lately he's dead," said Paul.

"No," she replied, "he is not dead. I feel it in every fibre of my body. He is not dead! And I am going to find him. And I must not leave Brunford—something has told me I must not. And I must watch Wilson, too."

"I have been thinking about that, mother," he said; "and, after all, it's not so bad. The man was drunk, or he would not have said such a thing!"

"Drunk or sober," was her reply, "he shall pay for those words. But do not trouble, Paul. You shall be happy. And you shall have your rightful name, in spite of everything."

A week or two later, Paul had forgotten almost everything in the new life which he led. He had journeyed to London to take his seat in the House of Commons, and, amidst the excitement of his new experiences, even the incidents of the election faded away. It was wonderful to him, the nameless lad who had come to Brunford a few years before, to be one of the legislators in the greatest Empire of the world. Even yet he was little more than a youth, and he had practically no experience of life. Thus London, with all its excitement, and the world of possibilities which it revealed, made everything new to him. Never had he realised the meaning of history until now. Never had the greatness of his country so impressed him. Hitherto he had not realised what his ambitions meant. Now they became clear. The House of Commons became the pivot of the world, and it seemed to him as though he had his hand upon the pulse of humanity. London was the great heart of the Empire, sending out its streams of life-blood through the length and breadth of the world. And the heart of London was the great pile of buildings on the banks of the Thames. He was no one as yet—just one of the unknown men among nearly seven hundred who gathered there. He had an obscure seat in the House, and, unlike many of the other men with whom he came into contact, he had few friends. Still, he rejoiced in his isolation, and dreamed dreams of the time when he would emerge from his comparative obscurity, and when his voice would be heard in the councils of the Empire. No one was more regular than he in his attendance at the House, and he took a supreme delight in wandering through the buildings, and in trying to understand their significance. Westminster Hall, especially, attracted him. He thought of the scenes which had taken place in that historic building, and remembered how it had stood there through the centuries. The greater part of the parliament houses was comparatively new, but this remained almost unchanged by the ravages of time and of fire. Here great trials had taken place. Here great battles had been won—battles which had changed the destinies of the nation. Brunford, which had seemed so important to him a few years ago, was now only an insignificant manufacturing town. It had but little history, little meaning; but London—London was everything. There, in Westminster Abbey, close by him, kings had been crowned and monarchs were buried. There, too, the great ones of the world had come. Men whose names were imperishable were buried in that mausoleum of the illustrious dead! And he—well, he was nothing now, but men should hear of him in the future. While keenly observant of the procedure of the House, he sometimes found himself dreaming dreams. He thought of the time when Disraeli was refused a hearing in that historic assembly, remembered how the Irish, led by the great Daniel O'Connell, refused to listen to him, and how, when at length he had sat down, after trying to make a speech, he shook his fist in the faces of the excited crowd, and cried: "You will not hear me now, but one day you'll be glad to hear me!" Well, why not he? It is true Disraeli was a man of genius, but he was handicapped on every hand. He was a Jew, and when he commenced his career the prejudice against Jews was stronger even than it was to-day. He was in debt, too, and was hampered on every hand, and yet he had broken down all opposition. He had conquered prejudice, had mastered one of the greatest prime ministers of the age, and was for years the central figure of the Government of the Empire. It just showed what one strong man could do; and he would do it. But at the back of everything was the face of Mary Bolitho. It was for her he was going to win fame and renown. It was at her feet that he would lay all he could win.

Of course many will feel like smiling at these dreams of youth. All the same, the young man who does not dream impossible dreams and determine to win impossible battles will never do much. It is these things which keep the world young and eternally hopeful. Sad will it be for the youth of England when they cease to be!

Fleet Street, too, fascinated him beyond words. Next to the Houses of Parliament, he loved to walk along this busy thoroughfare. Sometimes he would stand there and watch the crowd as it went hurrying by—perhaps the most interesting crowd in the world. Here nameless vagrants rubbed shoulder to shoulder with men who were influencing the thought of the nation. This was the home of one of the greatest estates of the land. It was from here that millions of newspapers were sent, containing the hopes, the aspirations, the life of the people. None of these papers mentioned his name as yet, for he had never dared to try to catch the Speaker's eye, but the time would come when he would. Leading articles should be written about him, and his views of life and politics should be discussed.

In spite of all these things, however, the session came to an end without Paul Stepaside having tried to speak a word in the British House of Commons. His time had not come yet, but it was coming, and he knew how to wait. Those months were to him months of education. He was accustoming himself to his surroundings and preparing for the future. He was studying the methods of the men whose words carried weight. He was seeing the inwardness of this great parliamentary game which was being played, and he was learning to understand how he could use his knowledge, not simply as a means of self-aggrandisement, but for the betterment of the people he loved.

Three times during the session he had gone to Brunford on matters of business, but nothing had happened worthy of recording. His mother had inquired eagerly concerning his doings in London, and had stored within her memory every incident which he had related to her.

"I'm glad you have not spoken in the House yet, Paul," she said, again and again. "When you speak it must be on something which is near and dear to you—something which has gripped your life. Then you will make them feel what you feel. Ay, and you will, too, my boy! It's coming! I can see it!"

"Yes," replied Paul. "I'm going to do it, mother. I'm going to make the name of Stepaside honoured."

"Nay, but you're going to have another name, Paul—your own!"

"Have you found out anything yet?" he asked repeatedly. But at this she would shake her head, as if all her efforts had been in vain, and yet Paul felt assured that she knew more than she cared to tell him.

During the second session Paul made his first speech. As he thought of it afterwards, he was terribly disappointed. It seemed to him that he had not said the things he wanted to say, while the things he had said seemed crude and unimportant. The atmosphere of the House of Commons was so utterly different from that of any assembly he had ever addressed, and he knew that he was speaking to what was perhaps one of the most critical audiences in the world. As fortune would have it, too, the House was full when he spoke, and a great deal of interest was attached to the Bill that was being discussed. That was why he was so disappointed that his language, especially during the first few minutes, was so poor and stilted. He imagined, too, that he had been listened to respectfully, and even cordially, because it was his maiden speech. As a matter of fact, however, Paul had made a great impression. Something of his history was known, and his striking appearance told in his favour. Indeed, it was remarked freely that his speech was one of the most promising that had been heard for years from a new and untried member. Consequently, when Paul returned to Brunford the next time, he was met with congratulations on every hand. He was beginning to fulfil the promises he had made, and many prophesied a great career for him.

And Paul was greatly elated. Indeed, so much was he carried away by visions of the future that he never dreamed of the dark, ominous clouds that were filling his horizon.

CHAPTER XI

PAUL'S DARING

One of the results of Paul's success was entirely unexpected by him. He suddenly found himself made much of by what is called Society. Hitherto he had been altogether unnoticed in this direction. While he was scarcely looked upon as a Labour Member, he was regarded by many as belonging to that class. Moreover, he had done nothing to bring himself into notice, and so, having no advantages of birth, and no circle of acquaintances in London, he had been comparatively neglected. Suddenly, however, he had become a public man. His speech was not only talked about in the Members' Lobby, but it was discussed by a number of society women who professed to be interested in politics. More than one paper devoted articles to him, and many spoke of him as a coming man. This meant that Paul received invitations to society functions which hitherto had been unknown to him.

The wife of a Cabinet Minister gave a reception, and Paul was among the invited guests. "It's a risk!" said that lady to her husband, when the invitations had been sent out, "but, as you know, I love risks, and these things are usually so tame! Will he come in his working-clothes, do you think?"

"Everything is possible!" laughed her husband. "Still, I don't think you need be afraid!"

"I do hope he'll do something shocking!" said the lady. "From what I've heard, he's young and handsome, and if he does something outrageous it'll make the thing go!"

"I should not be surprised if he does not appear in good clothes," said the Cabinet Minister.

"Let's hope they'll be badly fitting, anyhow!" said the wife.

Paul felt very strange as he joined the gay throng. It was his first experience of that sort, and he had not the slightest idea as to what would be expected of him. He had always refused to go to the social functions in Brunford, and now to be ushered suddenly into what he had heard was to be one of the most brilliant political gatherings of the season was staggering. With a fast-beating heart he saw conveyance after conveyance arrive at the scene of gaiety, and men in immaculate evening clothes and ladies in gay attire emerging from them. But Paul quickly gained the mastery over himself. "After all, what does it matter?" he said. "I don't care about this kind of life. These chattering, overfed women have no attraction for me! Still, it may be interesting."

It was a large gathering, and he noticed that many of the most prominent people in the country were present. When he heard his name mentioned to the host and hostess he saw a look of surprise on the latter's face. Evidently she was altogether disappointed, although she was much interested.

"Mr. Paul Stepaside!" said a man in a loud voice, and Paul was shaking hands with one of the leaders of London society.

"So glad to see you," said the lady. "Did I catch your name aright—Mr. Stepaside?"

Paul bowed, uttered a few commonplaces, and passed on.

"I thought you told me he was a working-man?" said the lady to her husband. "I hoped he would

come in his working-clothes. This fellow is immaculate!"

"He's a fine figure of a man, anyhow," said the Cabinet Minister.

"The most striking-looking man in the room!" was the lady's answer. And then her attention and smiles were given to the next comers.

Paul was not long left alone, and quickly found himself quite a centre of interest. More than one Member of Parliament brought his lady friends to see the new star. Indeed, he was so much monopolised that for a time he had little opportunity to take notice of the guests as a whole. By and by, however, he managed to get away by himself, and to take the part of a spectator.

It was all very strange to him, this gay throng—and he was not very favourably impressed. If this was Society, he did not want it! Everyone seemed blasé and satiated with pleasure. The conversation was clever, but superficial. It seemed to him as though almost everyone lacked earnestness—lacked reality.

"I am glad you are interesting!" said one lady to him during the evening. Paul had been with her some time, and had given expression to some very unconventional opinions. "The greatest sin I know of is to be dull, and you can't be dull."

"No?" said Paul. "I think I'm a fairly good actor."

"No, you have a good deal of the devil in you, and I like a man of your sort. Do you know I saw a criticism of a book the other day of which you remind me?"

"And of course you've read the book?"

"Oh no! The critique said that the only bad book was the book which was badly written, no matter what its morals might be, and this book, although excellently intentioned, was not well written. You know I have a similar feeling about men. The greatest crime in the calendar is to be dull. Men may break all the other commandments if they like, but he who breaks that is impossible. And I find you so interesting!"

"And I feel myself so dull," said Paul. "I don't follow your simile a bit."

"Ah, but you're not conventional. The great charm of a man is that he's always going off the beaten tracks. When he gets back to those he is impossible! Do you know, I hoped you would come in your working-clothes. Our hostess told me you were coming, and I quite looked forward to seeing you."

"My working-clothes are very shabby," said Paul. "Still, if I had thought you wanted to see them, I would have brought them."

The lady laughed good-humouredly. "Oh, but do remain unconventional!" she said. "Don't become a polished Society man. If you are to be interesting, always keep off the beaten tracks."

"Even at the expense of politeness?" said Paul.

The lady looked at him quizzically. "Yes, even at the expense of politeness."

"Then I'll run away. There's someone over here I want to speak to," he said.

The truth was, at that moment he had caught sight of a face which had set his heart beating wildly, for he felt sure it was that of Mary Bolitho. "Oh, I wonder, after all, whether it can be!" he said to himself.

Regardless of passing faces, he found his way toward the spot where he thought he had seen her, and to his delight he discovered that he had not made a mistake. Their eyes met as he came up, and she held out her hand with a smile.

"This is splendid!" he said. "It's so pleasant to see a face that one knows amid a crowd of strangers!"

"But surely you must know hosts of people here," was her response.

"No, I know very few," replied Paul. "Some of the men I have met in the Members' Lobby, but nearly everyone is a stranger to me."

"And yet I find that many people are talking about you!" was her reply. "You are quite the lion of the evening. It must be very gratifying to you."

"Do you know," replied Paul, "that I am not so unsophisticated as not to know the value of these things?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I can see how much a moment's popularity is worth," he said, almost bitterly. "A lifetime of good work is passed by unnoticed, but if one happens to make a speech that causes a certain amount of discussion, no matter how silly it may be, one gets noticed until someone else appears. And my speech

was a very poor one! I feel ashamed every time I am complimented on it!"

There was something in the way he spoke that annoyed her, why she could not tell. "Then I will not add to your shame," she said.

"No," he replied eagerly. "But I do want you to think well of it even although I know it was a failure. I have been wondering lately if I should meet you, and I was afraid once or twice lest I had seen you."

"I do not quite understand."

"I am comparatively new to this sort of function," said Paul. "And, to tell you the truth, I have been very weary of it all."

"How disappointed your hostess would be if she knew!"

"No," said Paul, "I don't deserve that. But I suppose it's because I have not been brought up in this world. I am a plain, humble fellow, and have had to work my way through the grimy and sordid things of life. Still, there's something real in it, something healthy, too, compared with this—at least, some of it. The other night I was at a banquet, and I was afraid I saw you. You see, I have all sorts of old-fashioned ideas. I'm a Puritan of a sort, and am what these people would call bourgeois."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I saw a girl who looked like you smoking a cigarette. She had the same coloured hair, and bore such a strong resemblance to you that my heart became as heavy as lead. A little later I saw the same girl, or someone very much like her, drinking a liqueur. Of course, it seemed quite the order of the day, and I ought not to be shocked, but had it been you I should have been very sad."

"Why, what is there so terrible in a cigarette or a liqueur?" asked Mary Bolitho.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he replied.

"You'd have taken no notice if a man smoked a cigarette or drank a liqueur. Is a woman different from a man?"

"She ought to be," said Paul. "At least, so it seems to me; but then, as I tell you, I am altogether out of place among that kind of people. I have all sorts of old-fashioned ideas about women. I know they are unpopular. They are thought to be bourgeois, and entertained only by the middle classes. But there you are—I am bourgeois; or perhaps I belong to a lower class even than that. I'm a working man."

"Can you find a chair for me somewhere?" asked the girl. "Of course I don't agree with you in the least, but it's rather interesting to hear you."

He found a chair for her and stood by her side. "I'm so glad it wasn't you."

"How do you know it wasn't I?" she asked.

"Because you're not that sort! You don't drink liqueurs. You don't smoke cigarettes!"

"Why not?"

"I don't know," replied Paul; "but you don't. If you did—well, it would be wrong somehow. I can't explain it, but it feels to me something like—well, what I think a Roman Catholic would feel if he found someone trying to caricature the Virgin Mary." His voice was so earnest and sincere that she could not be offended.

"I am not like all these men here," went on Paul. "I was brought up among the working-classes, and I have, in spite of everything, idealised women. I expect it is because I love my mother. And when I see a girl drinking liqueurs, smoking cigarettes, and doing things like that, I feel that somehow my ideal is, well, besmirched somehow. I believe less in the modesty of women, and I think it's a bad thing for any man to lower his ideals concerning women! Yes, I am so glad it wasn't you!"

"Still I don't understand why."

"Because you are the most sacred thing in my life!" he answered. "I have tried to tell you that before now, only somehow I haven't been able. You are the most wonderful thing in the world to me, and you hate these things too, don't you?"

"Why should you think so? There are many better girls than I who smoke and drink liqueurs."

"No," said Paul. "No. Do you know that, although I have hated you, you've been the one dream of my life, and that you've made everything possible to me? You're angry with me, aren't you?"

"No," she replied, "not angry. But still, you must not speak to me like that!"

"I cannot help it," he replied. "Do you know that but for you I should not have been a Member of Parliament now?"

"But for me?"

"Yes," said Paul. "From the first time I saw you, just after I came out of Strangeways Jail, you've always inspired me, even while you angered me, and have determined me to win when otherwise I should have lost. Tell me honestly now, do you think I shall ever overcome life's handicap?"

"Does it not depend what the handicap is?"

"My handicap is that I'm nameless," he replied. "I told you the story, didn't I? At least, I tried to. Miss Bolitho, am I mad?"

"You are certainly talking very strangely."

"I hate your father," went on Paul, and his voice, although very quiet, was very intense. "The first time I saw him I hated him. No, no one is listening, you need not fear. I believed he was the tool of the Wilsons. I believe it still! I don't think he fought me fairly either. I think he dislikes me, too. But, but—shall I tell you something?"

"I think you had better not," she replied. Even although she was surrounded by a crowd of people, and their voices were wellnigh lost in the hum of conversation, she was afraid.

"I do not think I can help myself. Miss Bolitho, I have been sustained in all the work of my life by one thought—I want to win you for my wife! Do you think it's possible?" And then, without waiting for her reply, he went on: "It must be possible. It shall be possible! I will make it so."

"I must ask you to excuse me. I have some friends over here wishing to speak to me."

"Not yet," he said. "You must forgive my rudeness, but when a man feels as I feel, and have felt for years, niceties of behaviour don't count. You, in spite of everything, have become the one thing in life worth living for, and yet I ought to be ashamed of speaking to you now. I have no right!"

She looked at him wonderingly, as if not understanding what he meant.

"You see, I have no name," he said. "I don't know who my father is or where he is. I only know that he and my mother were married in Scotland, and he left her the day after the wedding. She, in her trouble, went to her mother's old home in Cornwall, and was looked upon as a poor outcast thing. She lay down on a bank near a little hamlet called Stepaside, and thought she was going to die. From there she was taken to a workhouse, where I was born. She would not tell her name, and that was why I was called Stepaside. It's a terrible handicap, isn't it? No father, no name! Ned Wilson made the most of that at the election; but there, I've fought it down so far. Will you promise me something? I hope you will, I think you will. I don't think I'm altogether a clown, and I feel sometimes as though I can do great things if you—— You see, you are everything to me, everything! Promise me this: If I find out who my father is, may I speak to you again? Do you think—do you think it is possible for you——?"

At that moment some acquaintances came up, and Mary Bolitho turned as if to leave him.

"But give me an answer before you go!" he said eagerly. "Is there any possibility—in spite of my handicap?" And then he felt that his heart had, for a moment, ceased to beat. He forgot where he was. The chatter of the crowd was nothing to him; it did not exist.

"Everything is possible to a man who doesn't know when he's beaten!" she said with a radiant smile, and then turned towards her friends.

Paul remembered little of what took place after that, and he soon found himself walking near Hyde Park alone. It was very wonderful to him—so wonderful that he could not altogether realise it. She had seemed to promise him so much, even though she had said so little. He felt as though the sky had become higher, the world bigger. He had never dared to hope for so much, never dreamt she would speak to him so kindly. They belonged to different worlds, were reared amidst different associations, and yet she had not treated him with scorn. Yes, everything was possible! And he would translate that possibility into the actual. He would win her a name and a position that even she might be proud of. For he had idealised her. To him she was far removed from all the others that he had ever met, and he must do something worthy of her. For hours he walked around the Park alone, wondering how he should begin to carry out the object nearest and dearest to his heart. Poor Paul, he knew little of the ways of the world, especially of the world in which Mary Bolitho lived. Among the lads and lasses in Brunford courtship and marriage were very simple. The boy met his girl there, and they married each other without difficulty. But Paul knew that there were certain formalities that had to be complied with in the class to which Mary Bolitho belonged. She was a judge's daughter, and he, although he had succeeded beyond his hopes, was still looked upon as little more than a working man. One thing, he knew he ought to ask Judge Bolitho for his permission to seek his daughter's hand. He had no right to pay her attentions otherwise. It was a frank and honourable course of action, too, and appealed to him strongly, and if he succeeded, then the way was made plain. Not that he liked the idea altogether, for he had still an instinctive hatred of the man who had treated him, as he believed, so unfairly. But he must destroy that hatred now. He must think kindly of the father of the woman who was all the world to him.

Before the night was over he wrote Judge Bolitho a letter, asking for his permission to try and win Mary Bolitho for his wife. He did not refer to the shadow that rested upon his name, told him nothing of what he had said to Mary. He only told him of his hopes and ambitions, and of his undying love.

Three days later the answer came, and when Paul read it his heart was filled with black rage. It

contained only a few words, but they seemed to blot out the sun from his horizon. Without saying so in so many words, Judge Bolitho treated the proposal made in his letter with thinly veiled scorn and contempt. He made him feel, although he did not say so, that what he had said was an impertinence. It was true the letter was couched in terms of politeness, and yet it might have been written to a groom who had the temerity to seek his mistress's hand, and it contained a command that he must never dare to speak to her again.

Paul was scarcely master of himself as he read, and every evil passion of his nature was aroused. This man had added insult to injury. Ever since the day of his trial he had been his enemy, and now he had sent him this! "But I will speak to her again," he vowed. "I will win her in spite of everything; by fair means or foul she shall be mine!"

Shortly afterwards he returned to Brunford for the Christmas vacation. Only a few days were allowed by the leader of the Government, because much and important business had to be transacted; but those few days were destined to change the course of Paul Stepaside's life. His mother met him when he returned to Brunford with unusual manifestations of affection. He had sent her a copy of the *Times*, wherein was a full report of his speech. He had also forwarded to her a number of other papers which had spoken kindly of him, and she was elated beyond measure at his success. To her Paul was everything, the one object of her love, the one hope of her life. For him she would brave everything, suffer everything. In her inmost heart there was only one thing she desired, and that was Paul's happiness. She had stifled all thoughts of jealousy when she had learnt that Paul loved the daughter of the man who had treated him so badly. She would have loved to have had him all to herself, so that they might have been all in all to each other, but she had seen into his heart, and knew that he loved this girl. And he must have her, and whatever stood in his way must be removed. For that she lived and thought and planned.

The day before his home-coming she had seen that which grieved her sorely, and angered her beyond words. A local newspaper had it that Ned Wilson and Mary Bolitho were engaged, and she wondered how she could break the news to her boy. That the engagement should be broken she had fully made up her mind—no matter what happened Paul must have the woman of his choice!

After dinner they sat alone in the little room on which Paul had bestowed so much attention, and she wondered whether he had beard the news which bad brought her so much pain.

"It was a great speech you made, Paul!" she said, when they had been sitting quietly for some time.

"Nonsense, mother!" was his reply. "Nonsense; it was a failure!"

"No, no. I read every word, Paul, and it was not a failure. You're going to be a great man, my son!"

He laughed bitterly. He remembered the letter which Judge Bolitho had written to him. "I feel as though I don't care about anything!" he went on at length. "What's the good of success? What are we in the House of Commons, after all, but a lot of voting machines? What does it matter which party is in power?"

"Nay, nay, Paul. That's not like you to talk so!"

"I'm tired of it—tired of everything!" he went on.

"You're thinking about that lass!" said his mother, and although he made no reply, she knew she was right.

"Have you ever seen her?" she asked at length.

He nodded.

"And done nothing, I expect?"

"I wrote to her father," was his reply. "I asked him in a straightforward, honourable manner to let me try and win her for my wife."

The woman's eyes shone bright with excitement. "And, and——?" she said.

"Here's his letter!" he replied. "I carry it around with me to tell myself what a fool I've been. You can read it if you like! You can see it's written in the third person, and evidently typed by his secretary. That of itself is an insult, when one bears in mind the kind of letter I wrote to him!"

The woman read it carefully, word by word. She could not help seeing the insult contained in every line, could not help realising that Judge Bolitho regarded Paul's request as an unpardonable piece of impertinence.

"Can't you be happy without her?" she asked at length.

"Never!" he replied. "Everything I may get in life could be but Dead Sea fruit now! Oh, mother, if only I had a name, if we could find out the truth!"

He was sorry he had spoken the moment the words passed his lips. He saw that her face became hard and set, that her eyes burnt with deadly anger. "Do you know that she is engaged to young

Wilson?" she asked at length.

"What!"

"It's all over the town, Paul; there can be no doubt about it! It's in the newspaper."

"She does not care for him!" he cried. "She cannot!"

"But he'll be one of the richest men in Lancashire, Paul!"

"But she could not! She could not!"

"Perhaps it explains this letter," said his mother. "Judge Bolitho has doubtless set his heart upon his daughter marrying a rich man, and her feelings are not considered. But don't give up hope, Paul. Don't give up hope. Ned Wilson shall never have her!"

"But what can we do, mother?"

"Are you a son of mine to talk like that?" she asked. "Can you, a strong man, give up tamely?"

"No," cried Paul. "I'll not give up tamely; but of course her father is against me, and he has chosen Ned Wilson for her. As you say, he'll be one of the richest men in Lancashire, and now that Mr. Bolitho has become a judge, his income will not be so much as it was. However, I'll put a stop to it; I can and I will!"

"How can you do it?" asked the mother.

"Never mind," replied Paul. "But it shall be done." That same night he wrote a letter to Ned Wilson.

"Dear Sir," he wrote.

> "Circumstances necessitate that I shall have an interview with you immediately on a very important matter. Will you kindly let me have a note by return of post when and where I can see you? I may add that the matter is of such importance that you must not think of refusing me."

The next day he received a type-written letter from Wilson, in the third person:

> "Mr. Edward Wilson is sorry that he cannot see Mr. Paul Stepaside, as there is no conceivable matter on which he could think of granting him an interview."

Paul read this curt note with a grim smile upon his lips and an almost murderous look in his eyes. But he made no comment.

Before many hours were over he had discovered Wilson's whereabouts, and had determined to waylay him. They met in a lane not far from Howden Clough.

"Mr. Wilson," said Paul. "Just a word, please."

Ned looked at him with great hauteur, and then was about to pass by without further notice.

"No," said Paul, "That will not do. You received my letter."

"And you received mine."

"That was why I followed you here," said Paul. "I told you that the matter on which I wished to see you was of the utmost importance."

"I do not transact any business with you," said Wilson. "And there is no other matter in which we can be mutually interested. Let me pass, please."

"You cannot pass until you have heard what I have said to you. I am sorry to have to meet you in this way——"

"Not so sorry as I am!" interrupted Wilson. "Still, I will hear you. What is it?" He spoke as though Paul were a persistent beggar, and seemed to regard him as a millionaire might regard a pauper.

"It's this," said Paul. "I noticed in the *Brunford Gazette* this morning that you are engaged to marry Miss Mary Bolitho."

"And what then?" said the other. "I do not discuss such matters with men of your class."

"It must be contradicted immediately," said Paul quietly. Wilson looked at Paul in astonishment. "I

think you must be out of your mind!" he said.

"No, no; I am sane enough. Will you write a letter to the editor, denying this rumour, or must I?"

"In Heaven's name, why should I?"

"I know it's not true"—and Paul still spoke quietly—"that is why this paragraph must be contradicted at once."

Wilson laughed as though he were enjoying a joke, but it was easy to see that he was far from comfortable. He did not like Paul's quiet way of talking. He did not understand the tone of his voice.

"Of course," said Wilson, at length. "I cannot discuss these matters with you. I would sooner discuss them with one of our grooms. Whatever be the truth of the report, it cannot have anything to do with such as you. Still, I will humour you. What's the matter?"

"This is the matter," replied Paul. "You are not fit to associate with such as she."

"Come, come, my good fellow. I have borne a good deal, and I am nearly at the end of my patience. Besides, I cannot allow Miss Bolitho's name to be bandied about by such as you."

"Will you kindly deny that statement which appears in the *Brunford Gazette*?" persisted Paul, still quietly.

"Certainly not!"

"Then I must make you," said Paul.

"Make me! You!"

"Yes, I!"

"And how, pray?"

"Simply that I shall tell Miss Bolitho the truth about you if you don't."

"The truth about me?"

"The truth about you. You see, I happen to know a good deal about you. Oh, you needn't start. I have all particulars and proofs to the minutest detail. If you do not wish Miss Bolitho to know exactly the kind of man you are, what your responsibilities are, and your duties are, you must send a note to the editor, signed by yourself, declaring that there is no truth whatever in the announcement."

"You spy! You sneaking hound!" said the other, quite losing control over himself.

"Spy, if you like," said Paul. "Sneaking hound also comes well from such as you; but, as it happens, I have had my reasons for a long time for forming certain impressions about you; and as Miss Bolitho is a friend of mine—naturally, I take an interest."

"A friend of yours!" said Wilson.

"Of mine," said Paul. "Now then, will you do what I tell you?"

Neither of them knew that they were being watched, and neither of them knew that, although their conversation was not overheard, two men could hear angry voices, and were wondering what it could be about. These two men knew of the feud which existed between them, and knew that each hated the other.

"Will you write that letter, and give up all thoughts of such a thing for all time?"

Wilson answered in language which I will not set down. This time his words were loud enough for the two men to hear—words which were calculated to rouse anger in the heart of the mildest of men, and Paul was not a mild man. They saw Paul look towards the other with murder in his eyes, saw his hand uplifted as if to strike, then they saw him master himself.

"Very well, then," he said. "I shall do what I say," and turned on his heel to walk away.

He had not gone six steps, however, before Wilson, blind with rage and the pent-up fury of years burning in his heart, rushed after him, and with all the strength that he possessed struck Paul on the head with an ivory-handled walking stick. The young man fell to the ground with a thud, for the moment stunned, while Wilson stood over him trembling with passion, and as if waiting for an attack.

Paul quickly recovered himself, and rose to his feet. He wiped the blood from his face, and then seemed undecided what to do. He struck no blow, but spoke in tones loud enough for the watchers to hear him plainly. "I might have expected this," he said. "It was a coward's blow, the kind of blow such as you always strike. But, remember, I always pay my debts—always, even to the uttermost farthing." Then he walked away without another word.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT OF DOOM

Paul found his way back to his home, thinking over what had taken place. He was still half-dazed by the blow he had received, and his heart was filled with black rage. Perhaps, too, he was the more angry because he found it difficult to perform what he had threatened. In spite of himself he shrank from writing to the paper contradicting the engagement. He had no right to do so. For all he knew, the engagement might be an actual fact. He did not believe that Mary Bolitho had consented of her own free will to marry Wilson, and yet he did not know. Rumour had it that her father was not a wealthy man; and, after all, Wilson was one of the richest men in Lancashire, the home of huge fortunes. It might be, therefore, that Judge Bolitho had persuaded her against her will to marry this man. It would relieve him of all financial worries. From some standpoints it would be a brilliant match. It was true, Wilson was not a man who would shine in Mary Bolitho's circle, but money can do a great deal, and here he was almost all-powerful. But that was not all. Brunford, like all provincial towns, was noted for its gossip, and if he contradicted the engagement, all sorts of wild rumours would be afloat. Mary Bolitho's name would be discussed by all sorts of people, and things would be said which would madden both him and her. Still, she must know the truth. If he told her certain things he knew about Wilson, he believed he could save her from him. But even here difficulties presented themselves. Could he prove these facts in such a way that Mary Bolitho would be convinced? And should he not, by so doing, make himself appear to her a spy and an informer? He did not know much about such matters, but it was not a dignified rôle to play. In a way it would be striking below the belt. He would not be playing the game. And the thought was hateful to him. "But she must know, she must know!" he said to himself, as he trudged along the road. "And I'll not be beaten, especially by a man like that." And then he remembered the blow which had been struck. "Yes, he shall pay for it!" he said grimly, as he wiped the blood away from his face. "He shall pay for it to the uttermost farthing!"

When he reached his home it was dark, and he was still undecided as to the exact course he should pursue. He opened the door with his latch-key, and switched on the electric light. As he did so his mother came into the hall. "Paul," she said, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing," he replied, trying to evade her gaze.

"But your face is bleeding. There's an ugly wound in your temple!"

"It's nothing," he replied. "Just a slight scratch, that's all."

"It's no scratch," said the mother. "Tell me, what is it, Paul? I must know!" And she caught him by the arm.

"It's no use telling you, mother," he said, facing her. "And you needn't trouble; I am not hurt very much."

The woman looked searchingly at his face, and knew by its extreme pallor and the tremor of his lips that he was much wrought upon.

"Paul," she said. "This is Wilson's doing!"

"Is it?" he said, with an uneasy laugh. "Well, he shall pay for it, anyhow!"

"I was right, then. It's true. Has he beaten you?"

"No, mother," he said. "I'm not to be beaten by Wilson."

"You shall not! You shall not!" And her voice was hoarse. "Tell me, Paul, tell me. What is it? I must know—I will know!"

"Very well," he said. "If you will know, come into my study." And then he described the scene which had taken place.

The woman fixed her eyes upon him, and kept them fixed all the time he was speaking. Her face never moved a muscle, although her hands clenched and unclenched themselves nervously. "And you'll pay him out for this?" she said at length, when he had finished his story.

"Yes," he said, "he shall be paid out."

"But how? Tell me, Paul?"

"I have not quite made up my mind yet, mother. I must sleep on it."

"Sleep on it!" And there was an intensity in her tones which almost frightened him. "Sleep on it—sleep on it! Will you let a man like that get the better of you? Will you have a wound like that—a wound, the marks of which you'll carry to your grave, and then say you'll sleep on it? Paul, you're chicken-

hearted."

"No," he replied. "I'm not chicken-hearted; but whatever is done, mother, I must save Mary Bolitho's name from being dragged into the mire. But you need not fear."

For an hour or more they talked, the woman asking questions, and Paul answering them.

"Come," said his mother presently, "you'll be wanting some supper!"

"No," he said. "I want no supper, but I think I want to be alone, mother. I have a great deal to think about."

"I wish you'd let me do your thinking for you, Paul." And Paul almost shuddered as he saw the look in her eyes. "You think I'm a weak woman," she went on. "You think I know nothing, and can do nothing. But you're mistaken, my boy. I know a great deal, and can do a great deal."

She reached towards him, and put her arms round his neck. "Oh, my lad, my lad!" she said. "You're the only thing I love. All through those long years in Cornwall I had nothing to brighten my life but the thought of you. I had only one thing to live for and to hope for, and that was your happiness; and you shall have it. All that you hope for, Paul—all that you hope for shall come to pass. Sometimes a weak, ignorant woman can do more than a clever man; and you're clever. Oh, yes, you are! You've got into Parliament, and you'll make a name in the world; but you haven't found the things you started out to find. You haven't got your rightful name. But you shall have everything, Paul: you shall have revenge, and you shall have love; and I, your mother, will give it you. As for that man Wilson, never fear, Paul, you shall have your revenge!"

"What do you mean, mother?"

"I mean all I say, Paul; never fear. But you want to be alone now, so I'll go and leave you."

As she went towards the door, he heard her muttering something about Howden Clough, but he did not pay much attention to her; his mind was too full of other things.

She closed the door behind her, and left him to his thoughts. He went into the lavatory and bathed his face, and as he looked at the wound on his temple a curious smile played around his lips. Presently he went back to his study again, and sat for hours brooding and planning, Murder was in his heart. "And they talk of God," he said. "They talk of a beneficent Providence that controls all and arranges all! A man has to be his own Providence. He has to shape his own destiny. He has to fight his own battles."

It was nearly midnight when at length he rose to his feet. His mind seemed to be made up as to what he intended to do. His course was mapped out. "Why, it's nearly twelve o'clock," he said. "And mother has not come to bid me 'Good-night.' I wonder why." He left the room, and found that the house was in absolute silence. All the lights were turned out; the ticking of an eight-day clock in the hall sounded clearly in the silence of the night. "I'll go up into her room," he said. Forthwith he went noiselessly up the thickly carpeted stairway, and knocked at her bedroom door. There was no answer. "Mother," he said, "mother. I want to speak to you." But there was no reply. All was silent.

He opened the door and went in. The room was empty, and the bed was unruffled. A strange feeling possessed him; he did not know what it was. It seemed as though something terrible had happened, but he could see nothing. Almost mechanically he opened some of the cupboards in the room, and saw his mother's dresses hanging—the dresses which he had bought for her with a great love in his heart. "I wonder where she is," he said. "I think I will go up to the top floor, and rouse the servants." Suiting the action to the thought, he went up the next flight of stairs. He stood for a moment and listened. He thought he heard the servants breathing heavily. Evidently they were fast asleep, and would know nothing about his mother. "I should only start them talking if I asked them where she is," he thought to himself. "Perhaps, after all, she is in one of the other rooms!"

Feeling almost like a thief, he visited every part of the house, but no one was there, and everything was as silent as death. "I can't go to bed and not know where she is," he reflected. "I wonder what she meant when she talked to me so strangely—what she had in her mind! I must know, I must know!" He opened the door, and went out into the night. The sky was moonless, but for a wonder it was resplendent with stars. All the factory fires were low, and the air was no longer smoke-sodden. The wind came from the sea, and he breathed deeply. It seemed as though a great healing power passed over his heart. He went into the little garden upon which he had bestowed such care, and stood still, listening. Not a sound broke the silence. Not a footstep was to be heard. A thought struck him, and he hurried back to the house again. The bonnet and boots which his mother usually wore when she went out were missing, and, as he noticed it, a great fear entered his heart. He looked at his watch; it was nearly midnight. "I wonder—I wonder!" he said to himself. A minute later he had closed the door, and was walking in the direction of Howden Clough.

It was six o'clock in the morning when he returned; but the month being December, darkness still reigned supreme. Black clouds now covered the sky, and a wailing wind passed round the house. He turned up the electric light, and saw that his mother's boots were placed ready for cleaning. They were covered with mud. Evidently she had had a long tramp.

"At any rate, she has returned," he said to himself. He went into all the downstairs rooms, but she was nowhere visible. Then he climbed the stairs again, and stood at his mother's bedroom door. He

opened it and went in. The bed had not been used at all, but sitting in an armchair, just under the electric light, was his mother, her face buried in her hands.

"Mother," he said, "where have you been?"

She took no notice; perhaps she did not hear him. He came up to her side and touched her, upon which she started to her feet. "Mother," he repeated, "where have you been?" And he could not help noticing a kind of unholy triumph in her face. "Why are you not in bed?" he asked. "It is six o'clock in the morning, and your bed has not been slept on."

"It's all right, Paul," she said. "It's all right. Never mind; you needn't fear. I've found out something. I've done something!"

"Found out something! Done something! What?"

"I am not going to tell you," she said, and the look on her face frightened him. It might be that some long-desired thing had been given to her—some great object attained, some unholy desire gratified. For the look on her face was not one that a man loves to see in the face of his mother.

"All you hoped for shall come to pass, Paul. Yes, all—all, my boy; don't be afraid. I've done it!"

Her words sounded like a knell in his soul. It seemed to him that they had a dark, ominous meaning. He was not a nervous man, rather he was strong, determined, not easily moved; but it seemed as though something had gripped him, and he was afraid.

"I never dreamt when I went out," she said, "that I should do such a good night's work—never dreamt that everything would come so easily." And then she laughed.

"Tell me what you mean, mother."

"No, Paul, nothing. But you'll have a surprise—yes, you'll have a surprise!"

She might have been mad. Her face was strange, her words were strange, the look on her face was such as he had never seen before.

"Go to bed," she said. "Go to bed quickly. The maids will be up soon, and they must suspect nothing. Sleep in peace, my boy; your debts shall be paid, paid to the utmost farthing!"

He stooped to kiss her, and she threw her arms wildly round his neck. "Oh, my lad, my lad!" she said; "morning is coming, the morning is coming. There's a God in the Heavens after all! And yet, and yet—— Oh, Paul, I forgot, I forgot! Did I tell you that everything could be? Nothing can be, my boy, nothing! I forgot! I forgot!"

And her voice almost rose to a scream.

"What is it, mother?"

She walked round the room like one demented. "I did not think of that," she said. "I did not think of that. I thought I had made everything plain. I thought, I thought, and now——"

"Tell me, mother, tell me!"

"No, I can't tell you. It would kill you—kill you; and I thought there was a God in the heavens. And there isn't, Paul. There isn't. Only the Devil lives. Oh, my boy! my boy! But leave me, leave me. I must think, I must think. There, go away. Don't trouble about me, Paul. I'm all right, I'm all right. But go away! Go away!" She pushed him out of the room as she spoke, and locked the door behind him.

"She's right in one thing, at all events," said Paul. "I can do no good by staying with her, and I had better go to bed. The servants will be talking, else, and they must know nothing." He threw himself on the bed, and tried to understand all that had taken place. It seemed as though something terrible had happened, some dire calamity had taken place. The world seemed a different place from what it had been a few hours before. Since meeting with Ned Wilson, that had happened which had altered the whole course of his life. The very air seemed laden with terror, the skies were black with doom. It seemed to him as though ravens were croaking, and the church bell tolling for the dead; and then, while trying to drive the black scenes of the night from his mind, it seemed as though his senses became dulled. Everything became unreal. The past might have been blotted out, even those years at St. Mabyn were like a dream, while all the events since were just as a tale that is told. It was simply Nature taking him into her arms, and rocking him on her broad bosom. His strength had given way. The events of the night, his home-coming, his mother's strange behaviour, and the excitement which it all meant had simply worn him out, and now Nature was trying to restore him. He fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, and lay like a log upon his bed. How long he slept he did not know, but presently he heard a sharp knock at the door.

"It's half-past eight o'clock, sir. Are yo noan gettin' up?"

"What?" he cried, half asleep.

"Half-past eight o'clock, sir. Are yo noan gettin' up? And summat terrible has happened!"

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Mr. Ned Wilson is dead. He's been murdered! He was found this mornin'."

He did not reply. It seemed as though he had lost the power of speech. Mechanically he looked out of the window, and saw the murky, smoke-laden air. It seemed to him as though the roar of a thousand looms reached his ears. He pictured the weavers standing in their weaving sheds. He did not know why he did this; in fact, it did not seem to matter. Nothing mattered. Mechanically he dressed himself. There seemed no reason why he should go downstairs, but he was merely a creature of habit. "I wonder where she is!" he said to himself again and again. "I wonder where she is. I wonder, too——" Again a knock came at his door.

"Well?" he said. "What is it?"

"A sergeant of the police and two constables are at the door. They want to see you particular," said the servant.

"All right," he said. "I shall be down in a minute."

He remembered tying his necktie with great care, and then went down into the hall. No sooner had he done so than the sergeant came forward, and put his hand upon his shoulder.

"Paul Stepaside," he said, "I apprehend you for the murder of Mr. Edward Wilson."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW MARY BOLITHO RECEIVED THE NEWS

Just before Christmas Mary Bolitho returned to her father's house from London, where she had been visiting some friends. It was during this visit that the meeting between herself and Paul, which we have previously described, took place. During the rest of her stay in London she constantly thought of what he had said to her, and wondered whether, in the excitement of the moment, she had spoken foolishly. She admired Paul greatly, even in spite of the dislike which still lurked in her heart. She had an admiration for strong, capable men, and had been greatly interested in the career which she felt sure lay before him. Nevertheless, a strong feeling of antagonism possessed her. His air of masterfulness irritated her, and in her quiet hours she felt angry because he possessed a kind of fascination for her. She could not help being pleased at his evident admiration for her, and she thought of his avowal with feelings almost akin to delight, and yet she never meant to encourage him. A great gulf lay between them, and the thought of crossing it was not seriously entertained. He might be ambitious, and he might carve out a great future; but still he was of the working class, and doubtless had the instincts of his class.

On her return home she found her father much preoccupied. During the whole of the dinner hour he scarcely spoke, but presently, when the servants had left them, he seemed desirous of entering into conversation with her.

"Have you had a good time in London, Mary?" he said.

"A very interesting time indeed," was her reply. "The Scotmans were very kind."

"I suppose Stepaside's speech was talked about a good deal?"

"Yes," replied the girl. "He seems to have made a great impression. People are very much interested in him, too; and he was at the house of Sir John Sussex on the night when he gave that reception."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes," she replied.

"And speak to him?"

"It was difficult to avoid doing that. You see, I had met him once or twice, and when he came to me I had to be civil."

"The impertinent upstart!" cried Mr. Justice Bolitho, and there was almost a snarl in his tones.

"He's not looked upon in that light in London," said the girl. Somehow, she knew not why, she wanted to defend him against her father's evident dislike.

"We live in a topsy-turvy age," said the Judge. "Do you know what the fellow did? He actually had the temerity to write, asking for my consent to pay his addresses to you! You did not know of this, of

course?"

"No." The word escaped her almost mechanically, but she felt a warm flush pass over her face.

"I never knew of such impertinence! Fancy the fellow whom I sent to jail only a few years ago daring to think of such a thing! Had he come to me in person, I think I should have had him horsewhipped. And he ought to be horsewhipped, too. Why——" And then he laughed harshly.

Mary Bolitho did not reply. Somehow words did not come easily to her. All the same, a feeling of hot rebellion came into her heart.

"I answered him, of course," went on the Judge. "At first I thought of returning his letter without any remark whatever. Still, I sent him a few words which I think will have a beneficial effect on his colossal cheek!"

"What did you say?" asked the girl.

"I have a copy of it here somewhere," went on the Judge. "Would you like to see it?"

He took some papers from a drawer, and, having selected one, passed it to her. Mary Bolitho's face crimsoned as she read. She knew what Paul would feel. There was an insult in every line, almost in every word, veiled by conventional politeness, it is true, but still a note which, to a proud man, would wound like a poisoned knife.

"I had to put a stop to that sort of thing, of course. Just because he has made a little money, and has become a Member of Parliament, he has dared to—— But I say, Mary, this leads me on to something else; and, as we have an hour alone, it is well to have an understanding. How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty-one," she answered.

"I don't want to lose you, of course, but the time must come when I shall have to do so, and—of course, you'll not be surprised to know Ned Wilson was here two or three days ago, and I fancy he considers the matter settled. Do you know that he has spoken to me more than once?"

"But I gave him no encouragement," said the girl. "I have promised him nothing."

"No; but you have not repulsed him."

"You did not wish me to meet his appeal with a blank refusal," said the girl. "You said you had special reasons for that. But I gave him no encouragement. I do not want to marry him."

"But you do not dislike him; in fact, you told me you felt very kindly towards him."

"But not in that way, not in that way!"

"Mary, I want to be absolutely frank with you," said the Judge. "I wish you to marry young Wilson."

"Is that a command?" said the girl, and her voice was as cold as ice.

Her father looked at her steadily for a few seconds. He seemed to be on the point of resenting her tones, but presently decided not to do so.

"Let us put it this way," he said quietly, "Your marriage with Wilson would help me out of many difficulties, and save me from many troubles."

"I don't understand, father."

"You've always looked upon me as a rich man," said Judge Bolitho. "I'm not. I have been unfortunate in my investments, and while I was practising at the Bar I made a good income; but we have always lived up to it. You see, I have had to entertain a good deal; and then my Parliamentary career, though short, was very expensive. I know I have been very foolish, but I kept on that London house when I ought not to have done so. A man who keeps up two establishments should be rich. I thought I could afford it at one time, as my investments promised well. Still, everything has gone to pieces, and I have enormous liabilities. Had I known how things would have turned out I would never have accepted the judgeship. You see, the salary is but small compared with what I could make before. Within the next few months I have to find huge sums of money; and—well, when you are Wilson's wife, it'll be easy. But, for the life of me, I do not know another man who could help me out of my troubles! There, Mary; I am sorry to have to make such a confession, but it is best for you to know."

"Then I am to be sold!" said the girl. "Sold like a bale of cotton!"

"Don't put it in that way," said the father. "It's not fair. Besides, consciously or unconsciously, you have doubtlessly encouraged Wilson. You've repeatedly gone to the house, and you have known what gossips have said."

"I have refrained from contradicting gossip for your sake," replied Mary.

"Yes, I know. But you've always seemed pleased to see him, and as far as I can judge, always found pleasure in his society. He's a good fellow, too. I have made inquiries about him. He has a blameless

record, and I am sure would make you a good husband. As for position—it is true he belongs to the manufacturing classes, but trade is no longer regarded as it used to be. Why, how many men in Ned's position have, during the last few years, obtained peerages! Among all our circle of friends in London there is not one who could do for us what Ned can do; and—Mary, as far as a father can promise for his daughter, I promised for you. I knew you liked him, and Ned regards it as settled."

"Have you fixed the date, too, and decided where the wedding's to take place?" And there was a world of scorn in her voice.

"Come now, Mary. Don't be unreasonable!"

"Unreasonable!" cried the girl. "Surely I have my own life to live. If I have been friendly with the Wilsons it has been at your request. You know that, during the election, I begged of you to stay at an hotel, instead of continually accepting their hospitality. But you practically commanded it, and so I went with you. But when you promise that I shall take a man like Wilson for my husband I think it's going too far. I should loathe his presence. I should shrink from him every time he came near me."

"But, Mary," said her father, evidently determined to keep his temper, "surely this is strange. You knew his feelings towards you years ago, and you never evinced any repugnance. You liked to spend hours upon hours with him at the time of the election. You have been seen with him a great deal. And when you have known that people have coupled your name with his, you've still consented to go to Howden Clough."

"As though a girl may not think differently at twenty-one from what she thinks at nineteen!" And her voice was tremulous with anger.

"Why should you think differently?" he asked. "You've seen no one else whom you like better?"

Mary was silent.

"Perhaps you would like to marry this fellow?" And her father placed his hand upon the letter which they had been discussing.

"A thousand times rather than him!"

"Mary, Mary!"

"A thousand times rather than him!" repeated the girl. "At least, Paul Stepaside cannot be despised."

"And what is there to despise about Wilson?"

"Oh, nothing!" said the girl. "But had he been placed in Mr. Stepaside's position years ago, what would he have been?"

"Well, think it over," said the Judge, rising. "In fact, if you care anything about me, you will do what I say. Surely you've not fallen in love with that fellow?"

"No," said the girl. "I've fallen in love with no one. But, father, can't you see, can't you understand what a girl feels? Marriage is, or ought to be, the most sacred thing in life, and to think that I am sold to such a man, because—because——"

"Oh, you'll think better of it by to-morrow," said Judge Bolitho as he left the room. "I know that young girls are silly. But remember, Mary, I am older and wiser than you, and I am thinking of your future as well as of my own." He left the room as he spoke, while Mary sat for a long time thinking deeply.

Every fibre of her being revolted against her father's proposal. She hated the thought of a marriage of convenience, and her heart hotly rebelled. All the same, she loved him greatly, and she knew that he must have been in dire straits or he would not have told her of his financial troubles. For Judge Bolitho was a proud man, and did not talk freely of such matters. Had it been simply because her father wished her to marry a rich man, she would never have given the question a second thought; but when he asked her to save him from what seemed like ruin, what could she do? She knew that a judge could not afford to get into financial difficulties, and knew that his honour must be, as far as the world is concerned, stainless. How, then, could she refuse? All the same, her whole nature rose in angry rebellion against such a thing.

Again she thought of what Paul Stepaside had said to her, and wondered whether, if she had never seen him, she would have been so angry at what her father had done. For hours that night she lay sleepless, trying to think of a plan whereby what seemed to her now as a calamity, and worse than a calamity, could be avoided.

When she came down the following morning her face was pale and almost haggard. Although she did not realise it, what Paul Stepaside had said to her had altered the whole outlook of her life. A heap of letters lay on the breakfast-table, but they were all for her father. A servant moved quietly round the room, arranging for their morning meal, while she stood listlessly looking over the garden. It was now nine o'clock, and her father always came punctually to the minute.

The clock on the mantelpiece had barely ceased striking when he came into the room. He kissed her perfunctorily, and then turned to his letters.

"Nothing important, Mary. Nothing important," he said, with an evident desire to be cheerful. "I think we're going to have a nice day, too, although we are so close to Christmas. But it's really too warm for this time of year."

For several minutes he evidently tried to make conversation, with but little success. The girl made no response to anything he said, but sat silently toying with the food that was placed before her.

The meal was nearly at an end when a servant came in bearing a telegram. The Judge took it from the salver and opened it almost indifferently, but a second later his eyes were wild with terror, and his hands trembled like an autumn leaf shaken with the wind.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"What is it, father?"

He had risen from his seat. He did not speak. He seemed unable to answer her.

"What is it, father? Is someone ill—dying—what?"

And she snatched the wisp of thin paper from her father's hand.

"Ned murdered," she read. "Found early this morning with a knife in his heart. Stabbed from the back. Stepaside apprehended for murder. We're all distracted.—WILSON."

For a moment the words seemed to swim before her eyes. She could not grasp their purport; and yet, even then, that which filled her heart with terror was not the fact that Ned Wilson was dead but that Paul Stepaside was apprehended as his murderer. She knew of the long feud that had existed between them. She had heard a garbled account of Paul's attack on Wilson on the night when he had been elected a member for Brunford. She remembered all that rumour had said during her father's political contest in Brunford, knew that it was the talk of the town that Wilson had tried to ruin him. And Paul Stepaside was not a gentle man. He was strong, passionate—a man who in his anger would stop at nothing. Had Wilson, she wondered, aroused him to some uncontrollable fury? And had Paul, in his anger, struck him down? But a knife in his back, what did it mean? Paul could never do that, and yet ——

She felt her head swim. It seemed to her as though her senses were leaving her. The vision of her father standing before her, pale-faced and horror-stricken, was a blurred one. Nothing was real except that ghastly terror was everywhere.

"Of course, it can't be true!" she said, at length.

"But don't you see, it's from his father? It was sent off this morning. I wonder—no, I wonder at nothing! My God! what shall I do?"

Even at this moment he seemed to be thinking more of himself than of the agony which must be realised in Brunford. It was not Ned Wilson's death which had whitened his face and caused him to tremble so. It was the thought of his own ruin. Unless he could meet his liabilities, he, an English judge, might be disgraced. Still, no; he thought he could manage everything. It only wanted time, and perhaps —well, things might not be so bad after all.

"But it can't be true!" repeated the girl. "Paul Stepaside could never do such a thing."

Judge Bolitho had mastered himself by this time. His eager quick mind had grasped all the bearings of the case. He remembered his last interview with young Wilson, and the arrangement which had been made. Yes, things were not so bad, after all. He could manage.

"Of course he did it!" was his answer. "Who else could there be? Stepaside was Ned's only enemy."

"What will the Wilsons feel?" said the girl. "The horror of it! But surely he could not be capable of it! He could not do it!"

"He's capable of anything devilish!" replied her father. "I felt it years ago, when I got him sent to prison. Of course, his name was cleared somewhat, but he was always an incipient criminal of the worst order—clever, if you like—ambitious, undoubtedly, but he belonged to the criminal class. And yet—— There, don't you see, 'Stepaside apprehended.' I thought he was too cunning for that, anyhow. I judged that a man of his order would have done the deed in such a way that the guilt would seem to belong to someone else. However, such fellows always overreach themselves."

"But he could not do it, father. He could not do it!" cried the girl.

"A man of Stepaside's character could do anything." He was almost calm now, and able to consider

the bearings of the case judicially. "The thing has been growing for years. Event after event has prepared the way for it. Stepaside has never forgiven the Wilsons for sending him to prison. As you know, too, he has always hated me for that. Besides, Stepaside has always had the belief that Wilson has been trying to ruin him financially. You know what was said during the election? There have been rumours lately to the effect that this fellow and his partner have lost a good deal of money. Very likely he tried to fasten that on Wilson; and so in the end he murdered him. But we shall see! We shall see! There will be more detailed news presently."

"But he could never have done it!" and the girl reiterated it with weary monotony. It seemed to her as though she must fight for Paul Stepaside's life, as though she were called upon to proclaim his innocence.

"Who else could have done it?" said the Judge. "Don't you see, events must have pointed to him clearly, or they would never have dared to apprehend him. Besides, Ned Wilson hadn't an enemy in Brunford besides Stepaside; no other in the world as far as I know. The Wilsons have always been kind masters, always popular with their employees. Ned was a general favourite in the town. He's always borne a good character, too. During the years we've known him, there's never been a breath against him. Yes, it's all plain enough. But I must make inquiries, and find out."

He wandered round the room for more than a minute like one demented, while the girl sat watching him with a hard, fearsome look in her eyes.

"Do you remember what he said that night when I was elected for Brunford?" said the Judge presently. "Do you remember how he defied me, and proclaimed savagely that we should meet again, and always to fight? Well, it seems as though we shall meet again, but this time it will be as judge and criminal!"

"But, father," cried the girl, "you don't mean that you would ever sit in judgment on him?"

"It seems probable that it will be so," said Mr. Bolitho, after a moment's reflection. "Yes, and I will see that he shall have justice, too, full justice. The atheistic scoundrel! You can now see the logical outcome of the opinions of such men. He has vaunted for years that he believed neither in God nor Devil. He admitted no responsibilities to a Supreme Being, and when a man occupies such an attitude, what moral standard can he have? He hated Ned—poor Ned!—and then, having no standard of right before him, having no religion to sustain him, or to rebuke him, he became, in fact, what he was at heart—a murderer! You know what I have always said, Mary, about these socialistic fellows: Atheism lies at the root of it all! When a man ceases to believe in God he can be trusted for nothing. If religion is destroyed then all is destroyed!"

Each word seemed to ring like a knell in the girl's heart. It was as though judgment were passed already, and Paul Stepaside were condemned.

"But I must find out more about it," he went on. "Particulars will be flashing over a thousand wires by this time. I must send a wire to Howden Clough, too. I must try and find out the truth, the whole truth!"

And then he went out of the room, leaving Mary bewildered.

CHAPTER XIV

PAUL IS APPREHENDED FOR MURDER

"Paul Stepaside, I apprehend you for the murder of Mr. Edward Wilson!"

The words stunned him, and for the moment he scarcely realised their purport—but only for a moment. His mind asserted itself, and the meaning of what he had just heard came to him in all its grim reality.

"I have to inform you," said the sergeant of the police, "that anything that you may say to me may be used against you as evidence hereafter."

Paul looked at the man's face with a kind of curiosity. For the moment he seemed to be watching some drama of events with which he had nothing to do. The three policemen were of the ordinary well-fed and somewhat self-satisfied class of men. They acted upon order, without much intelligence. Paul hesitated a moment, and began to reflect deeply. He called to mind all the events of the last few hours, and his heart was filled with a great terror. That which, a little while before, had seemed only a dark shadow now assumed tangible shape.

"Very well, I will go with you," he said quietly. And then, again reflecting a moment, he continued: "But first of all I would like to speak to my mother."

"No," said the sergeant. "I can't allow you to go out of my sight."

"Think what you're saying, my man!" said Paul sharply.

"I can't help it, sir," replied the sergeant. "I'm only acting upon orders"; and he spoke humbly, apologetically. Even at that moment a passing stranger could not have helped noticing the difference between the men. The policemen were stolid, commonplace, the mere creatures of formula; the young man whom they had come to apprehend was, to the most casual observer, a man of mark. Neither of them could help feeling it. Pale of face, clear-cut features, black, flashing eyes, square forehead, a well-shaped head covered with black, glossy hair—tall, erect, well-dressed—it might seem as though he were their master and they his servants; and yet each realised that he was a prisoner, apprehended for murder.

"Very well, Broglin," said Paul quietly. "I see you take this thing seriously, and, of course, I do not wish to hinder you from doing your duty. But, at least, I have the right to know what authority you have for apprehending me?"

"I have a magistrate's warrant," replied Broglin, the sergeant.

"Yes; but they cannot have made out a warrant without some sufficient reason for so doing. To be charged with murder is a serious affair!"

"I know it, sir," replied Broglin. He had forgotten the part he had intended to play. He was altogether conquered by the stronger personality with which he had come into contact.

"Well, what are the grounds for apprehending me, then?"

"First," said the policeman, after a moment's reflection, "Mr. Ned Wilson was found dead this morning. This man here, Police-Constable Ashworth, was on his beat, not far from Howden Clough, when he found him lying face on the ground, the knife driven into his heart."

"Very sad, very terrible," said Paul. "But pray, what have I to do with that?"

"Of course, he started to work," said the constable, "and before long two men who are well known in Brunford, Abel Scott and James Thomas Dixon, stated that they saw you the previous night. They heard what took place between you; they saw Mr. Wilson knock you down with a heavy stick—you can't deny that; there's the wound on your temple now—and they heard you threaten to pay him out."

"Yes," said Paul, "but that's not enough on which to apprehend me."

"I have got the magistrate's warrant," said the policeman.

"Still, there must be something more. What is it?"

The policeman did not feel himself obliged to answer the question; but, still yielding to Paul's stronger presence, went on humbly: "Well, sir, of course the people at Howden Clough were knocked up at once, and a letter was discovered from you to young Master Edward, asking him to meet you."

"Still, that's not enough to apprehend me," said Paul.

"Maybe not," replied the constable. "But the knife which was buried in Mr. Ned Wilson's heart is known to be yours. It was seen on the desk in your office only yesterday."

Paul's lips became pale as these words were spoken. He knew it was damning evidence. He remembered the knife; he had reason to. "Very well," he said. "I will go with you; but, first of all, let me ring for a servant. No, I do not wish to move away from you farther than the bell here." He pressed a button as he spoke, and the servant, who had been listening, eagerly rushed to him.

"Mary," said Paul, "where's my mother?"

"I don't know," replied the girl. "I don't think she's up yet."

"Perhaps she's not well," said Paul. "Tell her for me that I have to go down into the town with these men, on a matter of business, but that she need be under no apprehension about me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl.

She had heard all that had been said. She knew that her young master was accused of murder, and in a way she believed it, but she could not treat him disrespectfully. There was something in his presence that made it impossible.

"The cab's outside," said Broglin. "I'd better put on the handcuffs, I suppose?"

Paul lifted his eyebrows. For the first time he fully realised what was taking place. All the ghastly disgrace, the terrible notoriety, became real to him. He knew that in a few minutes the whole town would be agog with excitement. His most intimate affairs would be discussed by every gossip in Brunford. Still, it could not be helped. The thing had to be gone through, and he must go through with

it. But he must be careful not to betray himself or anyone else.

"There is no need of the handcuffs, Broglin," he said. "Still, do your duty."

"I am sorry," said the man. "But, you see, it's a serious affair, and—and——"

"Never mind," interrupted Paul, "put them on!"

He stepped into the cab, and the three burly forms of the policemen also went with him. The word was given to the driver, and a few minutes later he felt himself drawn towards the Town Hall.

"Shall I pull down the blinds, Mr. Stepaside?" said Broglin.

For a moment he was tempted to say "Yes," but only for a moment. It was no use. What would be the good of blinds? Every one would know. Even now he saw groups of people in the street, talking excitedly, while more than one looked curiously at the cab in which he rode. He had no doubt that reporters were near, eager to get a sensational account for the local papers. It would be a godsend to them. Paul Stepaside, Member of Parliament for Brunford, the man who had been spoken of as the idol of the people—he, whose one speech in the House of Commons had given him an almost national reputation, would now be notorious for one of the foulest deeds of which a man is capable. Still, he did not lose control over himself. He sat quietly, grimly, thoughtfully. There was that in his heart which he dared not reveal, and which at all hazards must be kept buried.

Presently the cab reached the Town Hall. A number of loafers were hanging around, while many had gone so far as to leave their work in order not to miss such a sight. It was not like an ordinary murder. Ned Wilson was the son of one of the most prominent men in the district; and Paul Stepaside, who had come to Brunford only a few years before, had become the most noted man in the town—and now it had come to this! A few minutes later he found himself in a cold, dark cell.

Of what he thought during the many hours he remained there it is not easy to tell, but that he felt the terror of it and the grim tragedy which pervaded everything can be easily realised. He was apprehended for murder, and he had been taken to that gloomy cell because of it. Of course, the reasons were plain enough, and as far as he could see, the police officials could not evade their duty. The long-standing feud between himself and Wilson was well known. Many threats had been uttered on both sides, while the quarrel which had taken place the previous night had evidently become public property. It seemed to him as though the hand of Fate had been at work in order to encompass his ruin. Of course, he was innocent of the deed. He had never struck Ned Wilson the blow which deprived him of life; nevertheless, every circumstance seemed to point to him; and, to crown all, it was his knife that had been found in Wilson's heart.

During the time he had been in the cab he had been thinking of the means he should use to clear himself, for he felt sure he could do so. Sitting alone in the cell, however, this became impossible. Such a terror as he had never known before filled his heart. He believed he knew who had committed this ghastly deed, but his lips must be sealed. He must not tell; he would rather die than tell of what he knew. His mother, out of love for him, and with a desire to be revenged upon the man who had been his enemy, had, in her mad passion, taken away his life.

He called to mind the incidents of the previous day. He remembered that, not long after he had arrived at his office that morning, his mother came to see him. She had come in by a side entrance and had found her way across a little piece of intervening yard, and had thus come to his office without the notice of others—at least, he hoped so; at any rate, it was quite possible that she should have done so. He wondered why she had come that morning, because she seemed to have nothing to say to him of importance. But while they were there, she had noticed a large knife lying upon his desk. It had been sent to him some time before by a man from South America, with whom he had done business. It was an ugly, murderous-looking weapon, and keen as a razor. He remembered her asking questions about it. Soon after he had been called out of the office, and when he returned he noticed that it was not lying on the table. He had paid no particular attention to this fact at the time, because his mind had been filled with other things. He had been trying to discover Ned Wilson's whereabouts, and he had been thinking of the things he meant to say to him.

During the afternoon he had forgotten all about his mother—he had reason to—but on his return, after he had told her all that had taken place, he remembered she seemed like one bereft of her senses. Every detail of the interview they had together came to him there, as he sat alone in the darkness, thinking and remembering. He called to mind every word she had spoken; and, in the light of after events, he thought he could plainly see their meaning. She had told him that he need not fear, that he should be avenged, that the desires of his heart should be realised. She had said something about Howden Clough. He had paid no particular attention to it then, as he fancied she was thinking of the place where he had quarrelled with Wilson; but now he knew.

He remembered going into his mother's bedroom and looking into the wardrobe where she kept her dresses. He had noted that it was nearly midnight, and her bed had been untouched. He called to mind, too, how presently he had left the house, determined to find her; how he had walked for hours in vain, not daring to make inquiries; and then, when presently he had returned, he had found her in her bedroom, evidently under the stress of a great emotion. There was a look of unholy joy in her eyes, and she had uttered wild words. He could not understand them then, but he understood now. His mother, wrought up almost to a pitch of insanity, roused to hatred of Wilson, not only because of what he had

done to him but of what he had said about her, and madly thinking that she was going to help him, had gone out and committed this deed.

Of course, there were many things he could not explain; but the grim logic of facts stared him in the face, and they explained the unnameable fear which had come into his heart, the black shadow which had rested upon everything.

In a way, he was almost glad that they had apprehended him; and there in the silence he made a vow that, whatever should happen, he must see to it that no suspicion should ever rest upon her. Evidently she had not been in the mind of the officials at all. No one would suspect that she had not gone to bed when she left him. He was the only one who knew, and he must guard the secret at whatever cost.

He knew something of the course of the procedure which would be taken against him. Whether he were committed for trial or not—ay, whether any jury might find him guilty or not, he must say nothing, and do nothing, which should have the slightest tendency to connect her with this terrible thing.

The meaning of the tragedy itself did not appeal to him. The fact that Wilson, the man who through the long years had been his enemy—yes, and his rival, too—was dead did not appeal to him. The ghastliness of the tragedy was not what he thought about at all. Ever and always his mind reverted to his mother. She must be saved.

He had wondered the night before whether she were quite sane, and he wondered now; but that did not matter. Under no conceivable circumstances must the thoughts of men be directed to her!

But what should he do? He did not want to die; he hated the very thought of death. He remembered, too, the smile that Mary Bolitho had given him when last they met. He thought of the hopes she had inspired in his heart, of the dreams which had made the world beautiful. That was all over now. His mother had made everything impossible. But whatever she had done, she had done out of love for him, and he could not think harshly of her. Rather, in a way he could not understand, he loved her more than ever.

"Poor mother!" he said to himself. "It was all for love of me—all because she wanted to make me happy!"

Again he went over the whole miserable story, and tried to see whether he had not been mistaken in the suspicion which haunted his brain, but he saw no loophole anywhere. Who could have committed the deed but she? There was the fact of the knife, the fact of the wild threats she had uttered, the fact of her going out into the night alone, the fact that when he returned in the morning he had found her in an almost hysterical state of mind in her bedroom, the fact that his knife was buried in Wilson's heart. No, no; there could be no doubt about it. He did not love her the less, rather the more. He did not regard her as a murderess, and yet he felt sure it was she, even although he lay there apprehended for one of the foulest deeds man could commit.

The following morning Paul was brought before the magistrates. He knew that their duty was largely a matter of form. It was for them to justify the warrant that had been taken out against him, the warrant to arrest him on a charge of murder.

When he entered the justice room he was perfectly calm. He had mapped out his course of action to the minutest detail, and he had no doubt about the findings of the magistrates. Up to the present no coroner's inquest had been held on the body of Edward Wilson. That might not take place for another day or so. Certain preliminaries would have to be arranged first.

The court was thronged, and he afterwards learnt that the street outside was literally deluged with people who had tried to obtain admission. He had no doubt that thousands who had shouted with exultation when he became Member for Brunford now believed him to be a murderer; while others, with that morbid interest which is ever associated with crime, wanted to be present while he was tried. Every seat on the magistrates' bench was occupied; both the victim and the supposed murderer were well known.

Several witnesses were examined; the two men who had seen the quarrel between Paul and Wilson gave evidence of the very angry scene which took place. They described Wilson's rage, and told how he had struck Paul a very heavy blow on the head with a stick; and that Paul, on his recovery, had threatened to be revenged. The knife, also, which had been found in Wilson's body, was proved to be Paul's property, and had been known to be in his possession, while the long enmity between the accused and the murdered man was the talk of the town.

The results of the magistrates' sitting were, of course, inevitable. No bench of magistrates could do other than they were obliged to do. He had set up no defence nor made any statement. Paul Stepaside was remanded, and sent to Strangeways Gaol in Manchester to await the coroner's inquest.

By a little after six that evening Paul found himself again a prisoner in the gaol where he had previously spent six months. But this time all was different. On the former occasion, even although he knew he had been unjustly accused and more unjustly prosecuted, he was aware that much public sympathy was felt for him. He was regarded as a kind of hero among a large class of people. He felt sure, too, that in due course his name would be cleared, and even although the marks of his prison life would ever remain upon him, he would be outwardly very little the worse for what he suffered.

Now, however, the situation was worse. The sky was black and murky; the air was smoke-laden; the atmosphere seemed to be tense with gloom; but it was not blacker than the sky of his life. Everything was hopeless, and he could do nothing.

Hour after hour he sat in Strangeways Gaol, thinking and wondering. When the magistrates had remanded him for trial, he had shown no sign, but had stood proud, calm, erect, and had shown no perturbation whatever at their judgment. It might have been the most commonplace thing imaginable. But now that he was alone in his cell everything was different. He saw what it all meant, and he knew, too, where the pathway in which he had elected to tread would lead.

He was not a coward, and he had steeled his heart against the worst. Death he did not fear; but even although he believed that to no man who was dead was there any life hereafter, and, as a consequence, he would know nothing of what took place, he dreaded the thought of disgrace. He knew that throughout the whole land his portrait would be printed in a thousand papers. He knew he would be discussed by people whom he despised. He knew that his name would be a byword and a hissing in the country, while his mother—— But no, he would not think of her.

And what of his hopes? What of his ambitions? What of his life's work? All seemed to be at an end. He called to mind what his mother had said to him years before on the Altarnun Moors. "Find your father," she had said. "Clear your name from reproach, and be revenged for all he did." And now he would have to die, with his work unaccomplished. In spite of everything, he had failed to find his father, failed to find the slightest clue to his whereabouts. Thus, as far as that went, his life's work would be unaccomplished. He thought of his career, the career which he was just beginning to make brilliant. He had become a Member of Parliament. He had risen from obscurity to what was the promise of fame. He had been invited to the houses of the rich and great. His name had been spoken of as one that would have a great future, and now all that was at an end.

But more than all this, he thought of Mary Bolitho. He remembered the words she had spoken to him on the night of the gathering in London, remembered the flash of her eyes, the smile on her lips. What if her father had written an insulting note of refusal? It weighed nothing with him. He had sworn to win her, and he believed—yes, he believed that he could have done so. But now all that was impossible, too. Of course, she had heard of what had taken place, heard of the accusation which had been laid against him. She would look on him as a murderer; yes, and as the perpetrator of a gross, vulgar murder, too. What would she think of him? Yes, that maddened him. The rest seemed small in comparison with this, and he knew what would take place, too. Next there would be a coroner's inquest, then another meeting before the magistrates, and then he would have to meet judge and jury at the Manchester Assizes. Every detail of his life would be discussed, no matter how sacred it might be, while the vilest thoughts and feelings would be attributed to him by a gaping, vulgar crowd, and he must suffer it. And this was to be the end of life. A few weeks more and the end would come, and he, Paul Stepaside, who had such hopes of a brilliant future, would end his life on the scaffold. A hangman's cord would be around his neck, and he would drop into Eternity, reviled and spurned despite his innocence.

CHAPTER XV

THE CORONER'S INQUEST

The next day he was brought back to Brunford again, this time to be present at the coroner's inquest. A prison van took him from Strangeways Gaol to the station, and thence he went to the town in which, to use the words of one of the morning papers, "he had won an almost unique position." He dreaded this inquest almost more than he dreaded anything else, for he knew that the inquiry which would be made would not be hedged in by so many formulae as those which are associated with the Assizes. The business of this coroner's inquest would not be to condemn a murderer or even to apprehend a murderer, but officially to decide upon the means whereby Ned Wilson came to his end, and, as a consequence, anyone could elect to give evidence, and anyone could tell not only of what he was sure, but of what he believed. All sorts of irrelevant matter might be adduced here—gossip, suspicion, unsupported statement. All belonged to the order of the day. He knew what Brunford was. On the whole the people were kind-hearted and well-meaning. Many of them might be coarse and somewhat brutal, but on the whole they were people he loved. But he knew their morbid interest in crime, their love of gossip; knew that they were eager to hear and to discuss every bit of scandal which might be adduced.

The place in which the inquest was held was crowded. The jurymen who had been sworn had examined the body according to the dictates of the law, and had now met to decide as to the cause of his death. A number of people were there, ready to give evidence or to state what they knew or believed concerning the matter. All were eager, and many enjoyed the situation as they had not enjoyed anything for years.

"I would not miss being here for a week's work," said one man to another.

"I see George Preston is over there. He looks pale, does George. It must be an awful blow to him!"

"Dost believe Stepaside did it?"

"I don't know. I never thought him to be that sort of chap; but then, you know, he and Ned Wilson have been at it for years."

"I can't see that the motive is sufficient," said another. "What motive had he for killing Ned Wilson? Here he wur in Parliament, and making a name for hissen. Is it likely that for a bit of spite he'd kill a chap in that way? Besides, he's fair clever, is Stepaside. Would he be such a fooil as to kill him wi' a knife as was known to be his own?"

"No; but when a man is in a passion he thinks o' nowt. He just becomes like a savage. And Paul always had a bit of a temper."

"Ay, but he were a quiet chap, too, and he must ha' known that he'd ha' been suspected. I can't believe that he would be such a fooil—and yet, as tha ses, nobody knows."

At length the proper business of the inquest commenced. The coroner, who was a local doctor, sat grave and disturbed. He knew Paul well, and the two had often fought side by side on public questions. The jurymen, too, although they in a way enjoyed their position, were sad at heart. Nearly every one of them knew Paul and respected him. It was terrible to them to see him before them there as a prisoner, and yet they could not help admiring him. He was carefully dressed, and he had seen to it that his clothes were brushed, and that his linen was spotless. Not by a tremor of his lips or by the movement of a muscle did he show what he felt. Pale, haughty, calm, dignified, he stood before them as though he were a mere spectator of a scene which he despised.

The case was taken in the ordinary way. The first to give evidence was old Mr. Edward Wilson, the father of the murdered man. Even Paul almost pitied him as he saw him. His face was haggard and drawn. He who had been usually so florid looked as pale as ashes. His cheeks were baggy and his voice was unnatural. He identified the murdered man as his son. He confessed to his having returned that night after his quarrel with Paul, when he had seemed much disturbed. Two letters awaited him, both of which he had read and then destroyed by throwing them into the fire. About nine o'clock he went out, saying that he was going to his club. Since that time he had never been seen alive. Where he had gone he could not tell; certain it is he never came home again. He told of the feud which had existed between his son and Paul Stepaside. He knew that Paul hated the murdered man with an intense hatred, and had been known on many occasions to threaten him with violence. He adhered strictly to the truth, and yet that truth was so coloured by his own feelings and prejudices that it was evident he had no doubt about who killed his son. He enlarged upon the fact that, as far as he knew, his son had not a single enemy in the world besides Paul Stepaside, and certainly no other had a sufficient motive to murder him.

After this came the statement of the policeman. He had been walking on his beat about seven o'clock, and had seen the body of a dead man lying in a lane not far from Howden Clough. He quickly identified it as that of Mr. Edward Wilson. He described the position in which it lay. He told of the knife which was driven through the body. He immediately reported the matter to his superiors, whereupon the usual steps were taken. A doctor was summoned, who had made an examination, and so forth.

After the constable's statement the doctor gave his evidence. He had no doubt as to the cause of death. He had died as a result of a knife that was driven through his heart. The blow was struck from behind. As far as he could judge, Mr. Edward Wilson had been murdered between half-past four and five that same morning. While the doctor was speaking there was a deathly silence in the room. It seemed as though there were another nail driven into the scaffold on which Paul Stepaside was to hang. Up to now Paul's name had been seldom mentioned, and yet his was the personality which dominated everything. Eyes were constantly turned towards him. Whispered remarks were often heard concerning him. All that the magistrates had asked at their meeting was remembered. The story of the past became vivid again.

Presently the two men who had watched the quarrel between Paul and Ned Wilson told their story. It may be that they did not adhere strictly to the letter of the truth. Perhaps they were anxious to make an impression at the gathering. Certain it is that, in their own rough way, they made it almost certain that Paul was the murderer.

"You say," said the coroner to one of them, who was more gifted with speech than the other, "that you saw the deceased and Paul Stepaside quarrelling?"

"Ay, I did. I were just going down t' lane wi' my mate here, and I heard a sound of voices. It wur gettin' dark, but I could see plainly who they were. We wur a bit curious, and so we both on us waited and listened. They did not see us."

"Did you hear what was said?"

"Weel, nowt what you would call anything connected like, but it were easy to see as 'ow Stepaside were threatenin' Wilson. They were both on 'em pale wi' passion."

"Was Stepaside armed at the time?"

"No—at least, as far as I could see, he'd nowt in 'is hands, but more'na once he lifted his fist as though he would strike Mr. Wilson."

"You say you heard no connected speech between them?" said the coroner.

"Not much," replied the man; "but we heerd summat."

"Well, tell us what you heard."

"I heerd Wilson say to Stepaside, 'You spy! You sneaking hound!' And then I heerd Stepaside tell Wilson he must do summat, but what it was I couldna rightly say. It seemed to be summat about a letter."

"Well, and what then?"

"Well, then Wilson was in a fair fury, and he spoke loud."

"And you heard what he said?"

"Ay, I heerd."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he insulted Stepaside's mother. I cannot remember the exact words, but he said she were no better'na she ought to be, in fact that she were—I'd rather write it down, maaster," he said.

"And after that?" said the coroner presently.

"And after that I saw Stepaside look murder. No one could help seeing it. His great black een just shot fire, and I thought he was going to knock Wilson down, but he didn't. He just stopped hissen, and he only said, 'Very well, then, I shall do what I say.' Upon that he turned on his heel to walk away, but he had not gone more than six steps when Wilson lifted that stick of his with an ivory handle to it, and struck Stepaside a smashing blow on th' head. I thought first of all he had killed him, for he fell on t' ground like a lump o' coll, and lay there for maybe a minute, while Wilson stood over him."

"And then?" asked the coroner.

"Presently he picked himself up. 'I might have expected this,' he said after a bit. 'It's a coward's blow, a kind of blow such as you always strike. But remember, I always pay my debts, always; even to the uttermost farthing!' And then he went away without another word, and I shall never forget the look on his face as he did go away."

"And after that?" asked the coroner.

"After that I know no more," replied the man.

The question of the knife was then considered, and there were several who testified that this knife belonged to Paul. It had been sent to him from abroad by a man with whom he did business, and his partner, George Preston, admitted that he had often seen it lying on Paul's desk.

During this evidence it was noticed that Paul listened intently. It seemed as though he were specially interested. Never once did he relax his attention. It might seem as though he regarded this as the most important piece of evidence. During the earlier part of the examination he had seemed almost careless, but now every faculty was on the alert, every nerve was in tension.

"Did Stepaside ever carry this knife with him?" asked the coroner.

"Not to my knowledge," replied Preston.

"Has he ever discussed the knife with you?"

"Well, I can hardly say that," he replied. "But when it was sent I remember him saying that it was a murderous weapon, and it would be easy to kill a man with it. It was as sharp as a razor, too."

"Do you know whether he had it on the day in question?"

"I only know that it was on the office desk that day."

"Do you know of anyone who entered the office that day who would be likely to take it?"

"No," replied Preston; "I know of no one. You see, since we took the new mill my partner had one office and I had another. Of course, we were constantly going into each other's offices, but each of us regarded the other's room as private."

"Is your office situated close to his?"

"Not far away."

"Could anyone go into his office without your hearing or knowing?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but I do not think it likely."

"And you say you know of no one who entered Stepaside's room that day?"

"No, I can remember no one."

"Were you in it that day yourself?"

"Yes. We always meet and discuss matters every morning when I do not go to Manchester."

"And you met that morning?"

"Yes."

"Did you happen to see the knife?"

"Yes, I saw it lying on his table."

"Was Stepaside in the habit of locking his office before he went out?"

"Always. He was very particular about that. He thought he had reason to be."

"What reason?"

"Well, he believed that we had enemies. I do not wish to enlarge upon it now, but it's well known in the town."

This led to a number of questions wherein Paul's relationships with the murdered man were freely discussed. Witness after witness gave evidence of this. There could be no doubt about it. A long-standing quarrel had existed between the late Edward Wilson and Paul Stepaside.

"There's one further question I would like to ask of Mr. Preston," said the coroner presently. "It seems to me of very vital importance. A knife known to belong to Paul Stepaside was found driven into the body of the deceased. The question I wish to ask is this: Do you think it possible that anyone could have obtained this knife without Stepaside's knowledge and consent?"

"I am afraid not," and Preston spoke the words with a kind of gasp.

"And you, who were in your room most of the day, have no knowledge of anyone going into his office who would be likely to take it?"

"I have no knowledge. Indeed, my partner left at midday, and I do not remember him coming to the place at all afterwards."

At the close of this evidence Paul gave a sigh, seemingly of relief. This might seem strange, for every word that had been spoken had seemed to fasten the guilt more securely on himself. Presently he was asked whether he wished to make a statement, and again all present were struck by his demeanour. His face was very pale, and his eyes had a peculiar light in them, but otherwise he showed no excitement or fear. His voice was perfectly steady; his lips did not quiver; his hands did not tremble. The evidence against him was as black as night. Indeed, no one seemed to have any doubt as to the finding of the jury—but he did nothing to clear himself. It is true, he declared emphatically that he had no hand in killing the deceased man; he also said that when he had last seen the knife it was lying on his office desk, but he made no endeavour to show how it might have been taken away without his knowledge.

He was also just as reticent about his whereabouts on the night of the murder. During the examination of the other witnesses, especially that of his partner, he had seemed perturbed and anxious, but directly that was over he became calm and almost indifferent.

If there was one ray of light in the whole of the ghastly business, it was that Mary Bolitho's name had never been mentioned. The truth was, no one knew of his dreams concerning her. No one fancied that he had ever given her a thought. It was generally believed in the town that she was to become the wife of young Edward Wilson, but the thought that the deceased man had a rival in Paul was outside the realm of their calculation. Consequently, the words which he had dreaded were never spoken.

The inquest came to an end presently, and the jury found what had been a foregone conclusion throughout the day. Their verdict was that the deceased man had been wilfully murdered, and that the murderer was Paul Stepaside.

Everyone felt and knew that this was but another preliminary step; everyone knew that the trial was yet to be held, and yet no one doubted but that this, as far as Paul Stepaside was concerned, was another step towards the gallows. Many had hoped with a great hope that some evidence would be adduced whereby a shadow of suspicion might be thrown on someone else, but none was forthcoming. Every hand seemed to point to Paul Stepaside. When the jury gave their verdict, even although all knew it was not final, a great sobbing sigh was heard. The air seemed to be charged with calamity. The faces of many were white, and tears flowed from the eyes of many unused to weeping.

"Thou'st hanged tha partner," said one man to George Preston. "Thine was the most damning

evidence of th' lot."

Preston's face was pale as ashes. He could scarcely speak. "I couldn't help it," he said.

"Nay, I suppose not. But it seemed to me that every answer tha gave was another strand in the rope which shall hang him."

"God knows," said Preston, "if I could have answered in any other way than I did I would have done so."

"Then tha doesna believe he did it?"

"I don't know what to believe. I know he hated Wilson. I know they've been at daggers drawn for years, but I can't believe that Paul did it that way. He isn't that kind of man. Besides, it doesn't stand to reason that he should have taken the knife that was known to be his to do such work."

"That's where I'm stalled."

"And yet, what could I do? As far as I know, nobody did go into the office, and nobody could take it without his knowing."

"We've noan heard the last on it yet. Things'll come to light."

"Ay," whispered another man in another part of the room. "'He that hateth his brother is a murderer'—that's Scripture, ain't it? And Paul hated Wilson. Besides, he had no faith in owt. He believed in neither God nor devil. Ay, it's a sad thing when a chap's given up faith in religion."

And so men talked, while many shook their heads and wondered. Many did not believe in his guilt, and yet when the question was asked as to who could be guilty if not he, no reply was given.

"He'll have a weary Christmas," remarked an old weaver as the prison van went towards the station. "I wish I could send him summat to make it a bit brighter, but what can us do?"

"At ony rate, we can pray for his soul."

A little later Paul was brought back to Brunford again. He had to appear a second time before the magistrates, who, after another examination, committed him for trial to the Manchester Assizes.

"What'll happen to him now?" asked someone after the committal.

"He'll have to stay in Strangeways Gaol in Manchester until the Assizes are held," was the reply.

"When will that be?"

"It may be weeks; it may be months. But I expect it'll be held somewhere about the end of January." It was a young lawyer who said this, who was hoping that the trial would mean some work for him.

"Poor Paul!" was the response. "I wonder how his mother is takin' it?"

CHAPTER XVI

AWAITING THE TRIAL

Of course, the newspapers were full of the accounts of the murder of young Edward Wilson. The two Brunford papers were filled with practically nothing else. The Manchester dailies devoted several columns to it. Not only were the Wilsons an important family in Lancashire, but Paul Stepaside was a Member of Parliament, who had lately made a speech of note in the House. Even the London dailies gave a large amount of space to it; and on the morning following the coroner's inquest Mary Bolitho felt as though someone had struck her a blow, when, on the first page of the newspaper which had been sent to her father's house, she saw the staring headlines: "Brunford Murder. Coroner's Inquest. Paul Stepaside, M.P., committed for trial." She had no breakfast that day, but went straight to her room, where she spent hours reading and re-reading the reports given. Everything pointed to the fact that Paul was guilty, and yet she felt sure he was not. The shock of Ned Wilson's death, of course, had been very great, and she had written a letter of condolence to the family. But even her horror at the murder was nothing compared with her feelings as she realised that Paul Stepaside, even at that moment, lay in Strangeways Gaol. She remembered him as they spoke together the last time they had met. She called to mind her admiration of him, and reflected that, although he had been brought up among the working classes, his appearance gave no suggestion of it. Perfectly dressed, perfectly calm, and possessed of that *savoir faire* which seems to be innate with a certain class of people, Paul was infinitely removed from the class of men with whom one associates criminal deeds. She knew enough of law, and had talked sufficiently often with her father, to know how absolutely false circumstantial

evidence may be, even although it seems absolutely conclusive; and now, despite the fact that her father seemed to have no doubt about Paul's guilt, her mind simply refused to accept it.

He had never done the deed. He simply could not! If she were asked her reason for this she could not have given one, only she knew—she was absolutely sure.

Like many others, too, she tried to think who could have been guilty of the murder. The fact that young Ned Wilson was dead was, of course, beyond doubt. Someone must have killed him. Who was it? Her father had repeatedly declared that, excepting Paul, Ned had not an enemy in the world. He had lived all his life in Brunford; he was known to the people. His father was a large employer of labour, and was regarded as a good master. Ned lived on good terms with everybody. Who, then, could have killed him? Of course, every finger pointed to Paul—the long feud, the repeated quarrels, the injuries which Wilson had often done to him, the blow on his head on the very night of the murder, and Paul's threat. Then, again, there was his refusal to give an account of his actions between midnight and six in the morning—and, last of all, the knife acknowledged to be the property of Paul, with which the deed was done. The chain seemed complete; there did not appear to be a loophole anyhow, and yet she was certain Paul had never committed the deed. Was it likely that a clever man such as he, even if he had wanted to commit murder, would have used such brutal means? Would he have left behind him the knife which must inevitably be traced to him? The thing was impossible! Paul could not have done it. Then she remembered the strong, passionate nature of the man, the flash of his eyes, his grim resolves, and her mind became torn by conflicting thoughts. Why did he persist in being silent? Was there someone whom he desired to shield, and, if so, who was it? And again and again there were the old haunting questions.

When the news was presently announced that the Brunford magistrates had committed him to the Manchester Assizes for wilful murder, her father was in the room.

"You've seen this, Mary?" he said, and he noted how pale her face was, noted, too, the dark rings round her eyes.

She nodded.

"I haven't had time to go to Lancashire," continued the Judge. "Of course, I wrote a long letter of sympathy to the Wilsons. I hope you've also done this?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Poor Ned! He was a good lad," said the Judge. "To think that such a life as his should have been cut short by that atheistic villain!"

"Are you sure it was he?" she could not help saying.

"Nothing is sure in such cases," replied the Judge. "But I have read every line of the evidence. I've had full reports sent to me from Brunford, and I have carefully weighed everything. Besides, you see, I know the history of both men, and I know the motives likely to be at work. Unless something comes out at the trial which utterly alters the impression made by what has previously taken place, nothing can save him. Any jury in the world would condemn him!"

Her heart became like lead as he spoke, but she remained silent.

"Poor Mary!" continued the Judge. "Of course, you feel Ned's death keenly, and it must be ten times harder for you to bear than if it had taken place in the natural way. Talk about not believing in capital punishment after this! Why, the people would tear him to pieces if they could get hold of him!"

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, and her voice was hoarse as she spoke.

"From what I can gather, public feeling against him is terribly strong," went on Judge Bolitho. "It seems that the news has got afloat that he had been planning this for months."

"It's a lie!" cried the girl.

"What?" asked the Judge in surprise.

"It cannot be true. I saw him only a few days before the murder. He is not capable of such a thing, father."

The Judge laughed sarcastically. "I ought to be the last man to prejudge a case," he said. "But when you talk about such a thing being impossible I cannot help being amused. Besides, no one can look at his face without realising the streak of the savage that is in him. He always looked like an incipient criminal. Anyhow, we shall see, and justice must be done."

Christmas passed away and the New Year came, and there was nothing further in the newspapers about Paul Stepaside save that he was lying in Strangeways Gaol in Manchester awaiting the coming Assizes. Early in the New Year, however, Mary noticed that her father's face looked strangely perturbed. He was very silent, and seemed very anxious.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Aren't you well?"

"Oh, yes, quite well," he replied.

"What is it, then?"

"I don't like it," said the Judge. "As far as I can see, I shall have to try Stepaside. I thought I should have escaped it, but for some reason or other Leeson has dropped out, and I am the next on the rota. There is not sufficient reason, either, why I should raise any objection, and, after all, the jury will have to decide his guilt, not I. Besides, if I did, it would cause a certain amount of comment. Still, I don't like it." And it was easy to see, by the look on his face, that he meant what he said. Much as he had always disliked Paul Stepaside, he shrank from having to give judgment against him—and that, he seemed to believe, would be inevitable.

"It is settled," he said a day or two later. "I have to go to Lancashire next week."

"Father," said the girl, "let me go with you, will you?"

"Go with me, Mary? Surely you do not mean to say that you wish to stay at the Wilsons'?"

"Oh, no," she cried quickly. "But I should like to be near you. There are good hotels both in Manchester and Liverpool, and I dread the thought of staying here alone."

"The Gordons have invited you to go to their place. Why not accept the invitation?"

"I don't wish to," she replied, "Let me go with you."

"Come, come, Mary. I shall begin to think that you are getting morbid. This vulgar affair can be nothing to you, after all. Of course, I know you feel Wilson's death keenly, but why—why——"

"Don't ask me any questions, father. I want to go with you. I want to be near to you."

"Oh, very well," he replied. "If you can find any pleasure in being in Lancashire at this time of the year by all means come. But I think you'll repent of it."

A few days later, however, she started upon the journey northwards with her father, knowing that, according to all probability, he would be the judge who would try Paul Stepaside for murder.

Meanwhile the accused man lay in Strangeways Gaol. Up to the present he had been treated with leniency, if not kindness. First of all, according to the English law, every man is regarded as innocent until he's proved to be guilty, and as yet this had not taken place in Paul's case. He was allowed to see whom he would. If he wished lawyers to come and consult with him with regard to the method of his trial, or to arrange for counsel, it was in his power to do so. He could also see friends. Of course, he was held in strict confinement, but until the word of doom was spoken certain privileges were allowed to him which would be impossible afterwards. As a matter of fact, too, many people came to see him. An ambitious young solicitor from Brunford, a friend of Paul's, came to urge him to be defended and to offer his services. "You and I, Stepaside," he said, "have known each other for years. Won't you allow me to prepare your defence?"

"No," said Paul.

"But why?"

"Because I have none."

"Do you mean to say, then, that you're going to plead 'guilty'?"

"I don't say that—no, I shall plead 'Not guilty.'"

"Then will you allow yourself to be undefended?"

"I choose to defend myself," he replied.

"But, my dear fellow, you minimise your own chances that way!"

"Nevertheless, what defence is made on my part I shall make myself," he replied.

The young solicitor looked at him in astonishment. "You must be mad!" he said. "It isn't as though you can't afford it."

"No, it's not a matter of money," said Paul.

"You're going to plead 'Not guilty,' you say?"

"Yes."

"Then what is the line of defence you're going to offer?"

"That will be seen when the time comes."

"Come now, Stepaside, do be reasonable. I know a man, perhaps the most brilliant K.C. on the

Northern Circuit. Won't you let me bring him to you?"

Paul shook his head. "No," he said. "I want to see no one."

"No one?"

"No, no one for that purpose. I shall make my own defence in my own way."

The interview which affected him most during the first weeks after he had been committed for trial was that between himself and his mother. He had been sitting alone for hours, brooding over the terrible position in which he found himself placed, and, naturally, his mind reverted to Brunford and to its many associations.

"She has never been to see me," he reflected. "Never once. Well, after all, perhaps it is better not. If she does come I must be very careful. I was afraid she might have been subpoenaed as a witness at the inquest, but we were both spared that. It would have been too terrible. Still, I am afraid they will insist on her being here at the Assizes. I wonder, I wonder——"

A few seconds later he felt as though his heart had grown cold within him. He heard his mother's voice as she spoke to a warder; and a little later they were together. The light was very dim, but still, he could see the ravages which the last few days had made in her appearance. During the last few months Paul had reflected on his mother's looks. She had been growing young and handsome. Her face had been ruddy and free from marks of care. In spite of everything, the life with her son had renewed her youth. Her hair was still black and glossy; her form unbent. It was no wonder—she was still but young in years, and the effects of the tragedy of her girl-life had begun to wear away. Many a one in the town had remarked what a handsome woman Paul Stepaside's mother was, and she, although she professed to care nothing for her appearance, could not help being pleased. Now, however, all was changed. The last few days seemed to have added years to her life. The ruddy hue of health was gone. Her face had become almost ashen, while in her eyes was a haunted look. Paul was almost startled as he caught sight of her, although he said nothing. But he drew his own conclusions, nevertheless.

Neither of them spoke for some time. The woman's arms were round her son, and her cheek close to his, and that was all. She did not sob convulsively as one would have expected under such circumstances; she did not cry out in agony, rather she appeared like a dumb, half lifeless creature, while in her eyes was a look of mute inquiry.

"My poor boy! My poor boy!" she said presently.

"It's all right, mother."

"I thought we'd come to the end of our troubles. I thought the new day was dawning," she said. "I thought that God was in the heavens after all, and that He had used me, a poor, weak woman, instead of a strong man like you. But, oh, Paul, my boy, my boy!"

He did not understand her at all, and he fancied that her mind had become somewhat unhinged by the experiences through which she had been passing, but he said nothing. He thought he had better not.

"What is the good of speech?" he reflected. "She loves me. I am everything to her, and I would not add to her pain for worlds!"

"I tried so hard, Paul," she said presently. "And I thought—no, never mind what I thought; besides, even now I can say nothing that would—— But oh, my dear, dear boy! When I was a lass on my father's farm everything seemed hopeful—everything! Of course, I had my troubles—my stepmother was cruel to me, and she did not understand the longings and fears of a lass such as I was; but still, I did not trouble. But ever since, Paul, ever since he came, it seems as though everything has added to the confusion, to the mystery, to the misery! I don't know how it is, but it seems as though Almighty God has placed a curse upon me. Whatever I've done has turned out wrong. I don't blame you, Paul. No, I don't blame you; but to think—to think——"

"I don't understand, mother." He was obliged to say this, although he still believed his mother's mind was wandering.

"Of course, you've got your defence?" she said. "You would say nothing about it at the trials at Brunford, but I know you have something at the back of your mind. You have, my boy, haven't you?"

His voice was almost grim as he replied, "Yes; I have something at the back of my mind."

"What maddens me," she went on, "is that everything one does seems to be so futile—it ends in nothing! I thought I had done that which made everything plain for you. I thought the sun was going to shine on you continually, and that the desires of your heart should be gratified. And now I find I'm a fool. Almighty God laughs at me—just laughs at me! I've done and suffered in vain. But, of course, you'll clear yourself?"

Again the young man looked at his mother steadily. What did she mean by this—"Of course, you'll clear yourself"?

"It will be very difficult," he could not help saying.

A look of terror came into her eyes. "But not impossible, Paul. No, I see you mean that you'll get out of it. You're so clever. You can see your way out of things which to other people would be impossible. You've got your plans all made, haven't you?" And she looked at him with a mad light in her eyes.

"Yes," he replied with a sigh; "I have my plans all made."

"Someone told me that you refused to have anyone to defend you. Better so, Paul, better so. You're cleverer than any of these barrister men, 'King's Counsels,' I think they call themselves. If you got one of them to defend you you'd have to tell them too much, and you mustn't do that. You know what to say, what not to say, what to tell and what to keep back. It'll be very hard for you, Paul, but I can trust you. You're my own brave, clever lad. About that knife, Paul, I think I can help you."

Still he did not understand her. She seemed to be talking riddles.

"George Preston said that no one was near your office, Paul. As you know, I was there, and I saw the knife lying on your desk. Paul, Paul, let me confess to it! After all, it doesn't matter about me. Let me confess to it, so that you can go free—I will if you like. I don't mind the shame, I don't mind the disgrace. Let people say it was his mad mother, let them say——"

"No, no, mother." His voice became harsh and almost unnatural as he spoke. "No, mother, not you. Whatever is borne, I will bear it. You needn't fear. My business affairs are all arranged satisfactorily; even while I'm lying here, money is being made. The contracts I made were good, and Preston is an honest, capable fellow; and you can live on at the old house, mother."

He hardly knew what he was saying, so great was the terror which filled his heart and life. His mother had practically confessed to him the thing he feared, but he was not angry with her. Instead, his heart was filled with a great yearning pity. Oh, what she must have suffered! the agonies through which she must have passed; and it was all for him, all for him. He would a thousand times rather plead "Guilty" to the crime than that one shadow of suspicion should fall upon her. Besides, he did not believe she was altogether responsible for what she had done. Even on the night of the murder, he had noticed the madness in her eyes. He remembered the look which had haunted him almost ever since. In her love for him, a love which was unreasoning, and which rendered her anger almost uncontrollable, she had done what under ordinary circumstances would never have been possible.

"Poor mother!" he reflected. "All her life she has blamed herself for having brought, as she thought, disgrace upon me. Her only object in life has been that I might find happiness, and that justice should be done to me. No thought of self ever came into any deed she has done since I have been born. She was silent for me; she suffered for me; she thought for me; she slaved for me; and now she has become —— But it was all for me. No, she shall suffer nothing that I can defend her from. But, oh, her burden must be a ghastly one! And I must try hard, too; yes, I must make her think bright thoughts."

"It's all right, mother," he said. "You needn't fear!"

"It'll all come out right," she said, and there was a kind of hysteria in her voice.

"It must," was his reply. "I have thought it all out, mother. I have gone over the ground, step by step, and you needn't fear."

"That's why you're going to defend yourself, isn't it?" and she almost laughed. "You're going to surprise them at the trial? You won't tell what your thoughts are to anyone, for fear they shall make a bungle of it? Half these barristers, I'm told, are very muddle-headed, and make all sorts of foolish admissions; and you're going to defend yourself in your own way, aren't you?"

"Yes, mother," he replied, "in my own way."

"I expect they'll bring me as a witness."

"Well, what if they do, mother? You must know nothing, absolutely nothing. Do you see? You went to bed that night in the ordinary way, don't you remember? I came home from London, and we had a long talk together, and then you asked me to go to bed, and I told you I had a great many things to think about, many plans to arrange; and, of course, you went to bed. You saw nothing, suspected nothing. That's your line, mother. Don't hazard any opinion when they ask you questions. Say 'Yes,' or 'No.' Do you see?"

"Is that what you want?" she said.

"That's what you must do."

She looked at him steadily, searchingly. "And I can trust you, Paul?" She seemed on the point of telling him something—something which he was afraid to hear. So he went on hastily:

"Of course you can. You must fear nothing, absolutely nothing; and you have nothing to do, nothing to say. Yes, it will be awful for you, for they will be sure to bring you as a witness, but that's your line."

"Yes, I understand, Paul. You can trust me. Perhaps they will not bring me at all."

"I hope, I hope—— No, it's all right; nothing will be said."

When they parted a little later, Paul thought his senses were leaving him. He understood nothing, except that he was in a cell in Strangeways Gaol, awaiting his trial for murder.

Presently the news came to him that the assizes had commenced, but when his own trial would come on no one seemed to know. He still refused all offers of defence. The truth was, he dared not open his heart to any lawyer. He saw that if he were to allow anyone to defend him, he must of necessity give them a certain amount of confidence. He must trust them. That he could not afford to do. He was not afraid to die, and at least he had courage enough to be silent.

Presently the news reached him that he was to be brought to the bar of judgment on the following day, but still he refused all offers of defence. He gave no reason for this; indeed, he became more and more grimly silent than ever. He simply shook his head when those who pretended to wish him well pleaded that they might be allowed to appear for his defence.

On the night before his trial, therefore, he sat in his cell alone. The day had been black and grimy, and not a shadow of sunshine penetrated the gloom. Perhaps there is no town in England which looks more grey and sordid than Manchester does in the dead of the winter. The streets are covered with black, slimy mud; the atmosphere is dank and smoke-laden; the houses are grey and enveloped in gloom; even the crowds which throng its streets seem oppressed by the grime-laden air. And Strangeways Gaol is perhaps the most forbidding place in the whole of this great northern metropolis. As someone has said; "Manchester is one of the best places in the world to get out of." Of course, there's another side to that; it is a city full of strong, clear-headed, progressive people. On the whole, too, there are but few people in the world more loyal and more kind-hearted than those in what a great divine used to call, "Dear, black, old, smoky Lancashire." But in the dead of the winter, and to a man with the shadow of the gallows resting upon him, there can be no place in the world so little to be desired. The black night of despair was resting upon Paul's heart. On the morrow the great trial would commence, and although he thought he had arranged everything perfectly, he could not help fearing the results. And then, while his thoughts were at their blackest, he heard a voice which thrilled his being and caused every nerve to quiver with delight.

"This is the one," he heard a warder say. And a minute later he was alone with Mary Bolitho.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LOVERS

Had anyone told Mary Bolitho, even when her father consented for her to accompany him to Lancashire, that she would have sought admission into Paul's cell, she would have repudiated the idea. Even while she could not help believing that there was some awful mistake, and that Paul was utterly incapable of such a deed, she felt that there was nothing for her to do. When she arrived in Lancashire, however, and the assizes had commenced, she realised the terrible issues at stake. If Paul were found guilty, he would be hanged. The thought was like a death-knell in her heart, and all its grim horror possessed her. Day by day passed away, and she could not shake it off. She pictured Paul lying in Strangeways Gaol, waiting his trial, and realised something of the loneliness and the terror which must have encompassed his life.

One day, while visiting a shop in Market Street, she heard some people talking. "He's said no word, I suppose?" said one man.

"I've never heard of anything."

"A curious business, isn't it?"

"Ay, very curious. It don't seem right, somehow, that a man like Paul Stepaside should do such a thing. Of course, the jury will have to go upon evidence, and the evidence is all against him. I've heard as 'ow he's refused to be defended."

"What'll that mean?"

"I don't know, but what I am thinking is, why should he take such a step?"

"Perhaps he's guilty, and wants to get it over!"

"Ah, but what if he's wanting to shield someone? Anyhow, unless something happens, he'll swing! My word, though, I wouldn't like to be in his place! Fancy lying in yon Strangeways Gaol day after day! It's not a cheerful place at any time. I've heard that when they're condemned to die, they can hear the carpenters nailing the scaffold together. Hellish, isn't it?"

"Ah, and he must be very lonely. Fancy the terror of it!"

It was only gossip, which might be expected under such circumstances, but it fired Mary Bolitho's

imagination. It helped her to realise the situation more keenly even than she had yet realised it. Paul swinging on a scaffold! Paul dead! Then she knew the secret of her heart. What she had never dreamt of as possible became a tremendous reality. He was the one man in all the world for her. Without him life would be a great haggard misery. She did not know why it was, or how it was, but the man had become king of her life; and he was lying in a prison cell accused of murder!

She must do something; she must! She felt as though she were going mad; she free in the streets of Manchester, free to live her own life, to follow her desires, while he lay there alone, with the shadow of the scaffold resting upon him! And he was innocent. She was sure he was innocent. She had no more a doubt about it than of her own existence. The evidence at the Brunford Town Hall and at the coroner's inquest was nothing to her. Circumstantial evidence was nothing. The gossip which was so freely bandied was nothing. Paul was innocent, and she loved him. But what could she do? Rather, what must she do? Regardless of the consequences, she immediately took steps whereby she might be enabled to see the prisoner.

Naturally Paul had no idea of the thoughts that were surging in her mind. He never dreamed of what she intended to do. He sat alone in his cell, thinking and wondering. He had given up all hope of ever seeing Mary again. All his fond imaginings had come to nothing. The resolutions he had made were but as the wind. One day he was full of hope, full of determination; he would conquer difficulties, he would laugh at impossibilities; the next day all hope had gone; defeat, disgrace, horror blotted out everything else.

That was the greatest burden he had to bear. His life broken off in the middle? Yes, he could face that. The career which promised great things utterly destroyed—well, that did not seem to matter. The destruction of the dreams of a lifetime? Terrible as it was, he met it with a kind of grim despair. But the loss of Mary Bolitho—to feel that he would never see her again, never hear her voice again, never enter into the joy which he had promised himself should be his—that was terrible beyond words.

He had no belief in a future life, even while his heart demanded it. When the last act was over, then came a pall of eternal silence, eternal unconsciousness. Of course it was a great, grim, ghastly tragedy, but he had to accept facts as they were. There was no God, no Providence, no justice; life was a hideous mockery, a meaningless tangle. No; he would never see her again, never hear her voice again, never catch that glad flash of her eyes which he had seen during their last meeting. It seemed to him as though he had entered an inferno, over the portals of which was written: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

Then, suddenly, the heavens opened. It seemed as though the black night had ended in the shining of a summer morning. The blackness of his cell, the grim future of his life were as nothing. He heard her voice, and they stood face to face.

For a moment they did not speak. He looked at her like one fascinated. It was too wonderful to be true. Presently he would wake from his dream, as he had wakened from other dreams, and everything would mock him again. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to wipe away the shadows which hung between him and reality. Yes, Mary was there; she was looking at him with kind eyes, and her lips were tremulous. Then in a moment the meaning of what she had done became real to him. If there was one thing for which he had feared, it was Mary's good name. One of the great objects of his life had been to save her from being connected with the shame which surrounded his name. Little as he cared for gossip under ordinary circumstances, he dreaded it now. What would be said if it were known that she had come to see him? And people would know! Would not a thousand suspicions be aroused? Would not evil tongues wag? His own suffering he could bear, but she must not suffer.

"Why have you come?" It was not a bit what he intended to say, but the words seemed drawn from him in spite of himself.

"I came to see you," she said. "How could I help it?"

Again he looked at her wonderingly. He did not understand. He fancied that his brain must be giving way. He could not connect cause with event. He could not grasp the issues of the situation.

"Why could you not help it?"

"Paul, you know!" she said.

He thought his heart would have burst; the excitement of the moment was too great. His head whirled with a mad wonder, and yet he would not have exchanged places with a king. The prison cell seemed like a palace; that second of joy more than atoned for all he had suffered.

"Mary!" he cried, "do you mean that? You know what is in my heart. You know what for months I have been afraid to tell you. You must have known! Why, it has been like fire in my brain; it has been the great passion of my heart. You knew it when we were in London together, even before I told you, didn't you?"

She nodded her head, and Paul saw that her eyes were brimming with tears.

"And you cared enough to come and see me?" he said.

"I could not help coming, Paul," was her reply. "How could I, when I knew that you were alone, and

that you needed me?"

"But you must go away," he said. "It's heaven to have you near, but you must go away. No one must know. Why, think of what the world would say!"

"As though I care what the world says," was her reply. "As a matter of fact, I obtained admission to you without difficulty, and I do not think anyone knows who I am. You see, I have means unknown to other people. But I do not care who knows. Why should I care? I came to you because I—I—— But you know, Paul! You know!"

"And you came to tell me that?" he said.

"Yes, to tell you that," she replied. "Of course, I could never have told you had things been as they were; but now—I can't help it. How can I? And I've come to save you, too!"

"To save me?"

"Yes, to save you."

"But do you know what I am accused of?" he asked, and his voice was hoarse.

"Of course I know. How can I help it? But that's nothing."

"But, Mary, you don't understand."

"I understand everything," she said. "That is, everything that matters. You and I are all the world, Paul. For days I've been fighting; perhaps I've been a little mad; I sometimes think I have. But that's all over. I have thrown fear to the wind. I don't care what the world says. I don't care though all the gossips in the world talk about me. I came to you because you needed me, and because I love you, Paul."

Her words were simple, but there was something glorious in her self-abandonment. To her the non-essentials of life did not seem to exist. She had thrown everything to the winds. The wondrousness of her womanhood had burst forth. Her heart had spoken, and she had listened to it. The ways of the world, the conventionalities of society, the gossip of tongues were no more than thistledown. The great thing in life was the love which had been born in her heart, a love which overwhelmed and submerged everything else. For that she had dared everything, and she had found her way to the cell of this man accused of murder.

"But even yet I do not think you realise," he said. "Oh, don't misunderstand me, Mary. You know how my heart rejoices in this moment—how I would gladly suffer ten times more than I have suffered for the joy of this hour. Why, the thought of your love has been life to me. It has been the inspiration of everything I've done. Ever since that day I caught the flash of your angry eyes—the day when I came out of prison, you have dominated everything. Your presence has filled everything. Even while I hated you, I loved you. Even when I steeled my heart against you, you were everything to me. I did not know you, but that did not matter. What is knowledge? Of course, I only thought that you regarded me as a thing beneath your notice, but that did not matter. You were born for me, and I swore that you should be mine, even although I went to hell to get you. And now, now that you've come to me like this, Great God, Mary, you know what it must mean to me! Words are such poor little things, aren't they? But you're here, here!"

He caught her hand as he spoke, and again looked into the depths of her eyes; while she, although she was half-afraid, stood steadily gazing at him.

"I'm accused of murder, Mary. Do you understand? Murder! I was never jealous of him, and yet men said that you and he were to be wedded. You know all about it?"

"Yes, I know," she said.

"And you believe I'm guilty, don't you?"

"Guilty!" The girl laughed as she spoke. "Guilty! I believe in my own guilt rather than yours."

"But I'm going to be hanged for it," he said. "The knife which was found in his heart, is my knife. Don't you see?"

"I see everything," she replied. "I see nothing. But you guilty!" And again she laughed.

"You don't believe it, then? You have seen what the newspapers have said? You have read every bit of damning evidence against me? You know that I have been lampooned in a thousand newspapers? You know that I have been discussed by every pothouse villain in the land? And it is said that there is not one link wanting in the chain that binds me to the scaffold."

"I don't know, I don't care about that," she replied. "You are as innocent as the angels in heaven. Why, Paul, if all the juries in the land were to condemn you; if all the newspapers in the world were to lampoon you; if your best friends told me they had seen you do it, I would not believe it."

"Then you believe me innocent?" And his voice was tremulous with joy.

"I don't believe," was her reply. "I know."

"How do you know?" He spoke like one bewildered.

"Because I know you, Paul. I've seen into your heart; and my own heart has spoken to me, and God has spoken to me. You guilty!"

He felt as though the shadow of death were lifted from his life. The great terror which had enveloped him for days had been that Mary Bolitho would look upon him as a murderer; and now, with the self-abandonment which was to him past all thought, she had come to him of her own accord, she had thrown conventions to the winds, and she had confessed, as only she could confess, that she believed in him and that she loved him.

The heart-hunger which had consumed him during the long weeks was too great to be borne. He opened his arms; and each, forgetful of where they were, forgetful of the grim prison walls, forgetful of the painful silence of the prison, held the other.

Years before Mary Bolitho had admired the words of Lovelace, the poet:

> "Stone walls do not a prison make, or iron bars a cage."

But now the lines seemed poverty itself. How little it expressed the deep feeling of her life. They were not in prison. The solemn bell of doom was not tolling. She was in heaven. So great is the power of a pure love. As for Paul, at that moment everything faded but the blissful present. There was no past, there was no future. Nothing mattered but the now. He had entered into the joy of which he dreamt, and he would not think of anything else. How long they remained in that condition of untold happiness he did not know, he did not care. But presently all the grim realities came back again. He knew where he was. Mary would shortly have to leave him. He thought of the warder peering curiously into her face and making surmises as to why she came. He thought of whispering tongues; but more than all that, he thought of the terrible future which awaited him. Paul's temptation had not yet come, but the hand of the tempter was even at that moment knocking at the door of his heart.

"Now, Paul," she said, and her voice was changed, "now we must think about the future."

"Not yet, not yet, Mary. Let me remain in heaven while I can. Hell will come soon enough."

"No, Paul, you must think about the future. You must think about it at once. You are not guilty of this, and you must know who is. You must tell me. Hitherto you have refused to confide in anyone. You have maintained a silence which has been misunderstood, and which has caused so many to think of you as guilty. It must be broken, Paul. You must tell me everything, and I will save you."

It was then that he realised what he had to face. For Paul Stepaside believed that he knew who had killed Wilson. For many a weary hour he had thought over his mother's strange behaviour, thought of the flash of madness which had shot from her eyes, thought of the wild words she had uttered. He remembered, too, the sight that met his gaze on the morning of the murder. He saw her again, sitting in her bedroom, saw the look of unholy joy in her face; and in his heart of hearts he felt sure of what she had done. It was all for him. She had loved him with a mad, unreasoning frenzy; for him she was willing to sacrifice her own life. How much wonder, then, that she had been willing to sacrifice another's life. She had believed that Ned Wilson stood between him and happiness, and she had determined to move him out of life's pathway. He had seen her on the day before the murder, with the knife which had killed Ned Wilson in her hand. She, unknown to his partner, George Preston, had come to his office. He had seen her handling this murderous weapon, and he remembered the look in her eyes; remembered, too, what she had said. How could he doubt? Indeed, she had practically confessed the deed to him, and he had sworn that not a shadow of suspicion should rest upon her name. She was his mother. She had suffered for him. She had committed a crime for him. But he could not let her pay the penalty for it. No, no; he was willing to die himself, but he could not bear the thought of his mother's name being tarnished. He shuddered at the very suggestion of her being held up before the world's gaze.

"You see, Paul," went on Mary Bolitho; "I know you never did this, and I know you're hiding something. And you must clear your name, for my sake. You see, don't you?"

It seemed as though the god of silence sealed his lips. He could not speak. How could he speak, when, if he told what was in his heart, his words would be of such terrible portent? Then, like lightning, the issues became clear to him. They were written from sky to sky. If he did not speak, if he maintained the silence which he had hitherto maintained, the jury would find him guilty, and he would be hanged. But his mother's name would be saved from disgrace. She would not have to pay the penalty of the deed which she had done out of love for him. No one could associate crime with her. He had gone carefully into his business matters, and he knew that he would leave her enough to live comfortably. The hand of want would never knock at her door. Of course, it was all very terrible; but she would never be branded, and she might find some measure of peace. Anyhow, he was willing to pay the price for what happiness she could get. He would be an ingrate indeed if he were not. Had she not done everything for him? Ah! but there was the other side. Mary's coming had made everything a thousand times harder to bear. He did not mind it before, for he believed that everything had become impossible, but now that she had come to him, now that she had freely told him with her own lips of the love she bore for him, now that she was willing to link her life with his, regardless of what the world might say, now that a happiness such as he had never dreamt of was possible, how could he do it? In that moment

Paul Stepaside seemed to live an eternity. Whichever way he turned, he was met by blank impossibilities. How could he enter into happiness, knowing that in order to do so he had sent his mother to the gallows? Rather a thousand times that his tongue should be paralysed than that he should utter a word to fasten the crime upon her. And yet, if he did not do so, he must lose Mary for ever. He must end his days in a way which has become a byword and a shame for every right-thinking man.

"You'll tell me what you know, and all you know, won't you? It's for my sake, Paul. It's for both our sakes, our life's happiness is at stake. You see it, don't you? Tell me, my dear, tell me?"

What would he not have given to have been able to have told her! But how could he?

"No, Mary," he said at length. "There is nothing to tell."

"You mean you will not tell?"

"There is nothing to tell," he repeated.

"Paul, you're not guilty; you know you're not guilty. You are absolutely innocent of everything with which you are charged. You know it. I don't want you to answer me. You know it, and I know it."

He looked at her with a glad light shining from his eyes, even although her words were laden with such a terrible meaning. It was heaven to know that she believed in him so—heaven to realise that her trust was so infinite.

"There is nothing to tell," he repeated with dreary monotony.

"But there is, Paul. You can save yourself if you will, you know you can." He did not speak, but sat still, looking at her with steady gaze.

"Will you leave me so?" she went on. "I will not plead with you for your own sake, or for your own happiness, but will you not for mine? Think, Paul! I love you. All that I have and am belong to you. To lose you will be losing everything. Will you not, for my sake, speak? There, Paul"—she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him—"there, Paul, I love you; I love you more than life. Will you not tell me for my life's happiness?"

He knew what temptation meant then, as he had never known it before. His heart hungered for her as even he had never thought it could hunger. His whole being cried out for her and for happiness, and if he would but speak, then everything became possible; while if he were silent——

It seemed as though his mind were giving way, as though the trial were too hard to bear. God, if there were a God at all, could never expect him to give up such a joy. He was young—only a little more than a lad in years—with life all before him, with glorious possibilities, and the love of Mary Bolitho. While she, she who stood there, was glorious in her youth and in her beauty. She, who, with the sacrifice of all that lesser women hold so dear, had come to him and besought him to enter into the joy he longed for. Oh, he could not give her up; he must speak.

He nerved himself to tell her, nerved himself to relate the story of his life, and the story of what he was sure his mother had done; but even as he did so, he saw his mother's face. He remembered her years of loneliness and disappointment and sorrow. He remembered how her life had been blackened and broken, and that she had done everything for him. No, he could not, he could not.

"There is nothing to tell." He reiterated the words as though they were some formula, and he thought indeed all was over. But to his surprise, the girl laughed again.

"Do you think I don't know you, Paul? Do you think I am going to give up our happiness without a struggle? Do you think I am going to allow you to go down to your grave without fighting for you? You will not tell me, but I'm going to find out! I know you are shielding someone. Your eyes have told me the truth, and you cannot deny what I have said. Who it is doesn't matter. But I'm going to find out. I'm going to save you, Paul. And we shall be happy in spite of everything."

"No, no." His voice was hoarse and unnatural.

"But I will," she said. "Do you think my love is something that makes me helpless? Do you think I can stand by knowing that you are innocent, and allowing you to appear guilty of such a crime? I don't love you for nothing, Paul. I love you to serve you—to save you."

Never, even in those hours when he had thought most fondly of her, had he dreamt of the depths of her nature, or thought of what she was capable. Now he realised that Mary Bolitho was no ordinary woman, that all along there had been depths in her being which he had never fathomed, knew that she meant what she said.

"No, no, Mary," he repeated, "you must not. If you love me, you will promise me this. You will promise to be silent. You will promise that you will give no hint or suggestion of what you fancied. Besides, I'm guilty, Mary. I'm guilty, Mary. That is, promise me, for the love you bear me."

There were footsteps in the stone corridor outside. It was a warder coming to tell her that her time was up, and that she must leave him.

"Promise me, Mary." He caught her and held her close to him. "Tell me you'll do nothing!" he cried.

"On one condition I will," was her answer.

"What is it?" he asked eagerly.

"That you'll tell the truth before my father and the jury."

"Your father?"

"Yes, did you not know? He is the judge who has to try the case."

"Then, then, Mary, promise me——"

The key turned in the lock, and Mary and Paul separated. Neither had made a promise.

Presently Mary Bolitho went back to her hotel, where she sat in her room alone for hours, thinking and planning; while Paul Stepaside sat in his cell, with heaven in his heart; yes, heaven, even although he suffered the torments of hell.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRST DAY OF THE TRIAL

It was the morning of the trial, and the Assize Court was crowded. Before daylight a number of people, hungry for excitement, had hung round the strangers' entrance, and as soon as the doors were opened had rushed with a kind of savage curiosity to the part of the hall where the public was admitted. Long before the trial was opened every inch of space was occupied by a seething, excited crowd. So great was the interest created that many, who might not have been expected to witness the scene, were so eager to be present that the officials were inundated with applications for admission. Long before the court began its sitting, the air was hot and tense with eager curiosity. Some, indeed, talked casually and carelessly, as though a murder trial were an everyday occurrence, but in the main the atmosphere was electric. Men's faces were set and stern, and more than one woman showed signs of hysteria. Outside, a great throng of people, who were unable to gain admission, waited as if held by a spell. The ushers found difficulty in maintaining anything like order. The hum of voices was heard everywhere.

"I wonder how he'll look," said one. "I'll warrant he'll be as pale as death."

"Nay," said another, "he's noan that soort. He'll look as proud as ever. He'll mak it seem as though we were th' murderers, and he wur innocent."

"Ay, but he must have had a terrible time!" said another. "He's been waiting there for weeks. Just think of it! I've heerd he's given in, too."

"Given in? What dost a' mean?"

"Ay, I've heerd as 'ow he's consented to have a counsel."

"Who has he got, then?"

"I don't know for certain, but it is said that young Mr. Springfield hev took on th' job."

"But he can noan clear hissen."

"I'm noan so sure. He's a rare clever chap, is Paul!"

"It would be fun to see him swing, wouldn't it? It's a shame that they hang people in private now, instead of in public like they used to."

And so on. To them it was like a scene in a theatre. Their appetites were morbid, and they had come thither to appease their hunger.

One by one the barristers found their way to their seats. Clerks were busy writing at their desks, while the reporters sat at the table allotted to them, writing descriptive articles. To them the occasion offered a fine opportunity. It was no ordinary trial. Paul Stepaside was a young member of Parliament, and had become popular throughout the whole county. He had been freely discussed as a coming man. What wonder then that tongues wagged! What wonder the crowd eagerly waited his coming!

The murdered man, too, was well known in the county. He was a big employer of labour, and had freely moved in Lancashire society.

Sitting close to the barristers' seats, ladies belonging to some of the best families in Lancashire had gathered. They, too, were eager, hungry for excitement. Some of them were educated women, delicately nurtured, and it seemed strange that they should find an interest in such gruesome proceedings. Yet, with a kind of reversion to the savage instincts of former days, they had gathered with the rest. After all, civilisation is only a veneer, and the old, elementary, savage feelings lie dormant in it all.

"Bakewell's for the prosecution, I suppose," said one young barrister to another.

"Yes; and it couldn't be in better hands. I wish Stepaside were not such a fool!"

"Why, would you like the job?"

"Like it! I should think I would! It's one of the finest opportunities since I've been called."

"But he's no defence, man!"

"Oh, a defence could easily be made. It would give a fellow a splendid chance. You see the case is the talk of the country, and the question of motive has to figure largely. Why, the evidence could be riddled! To say the least of it, one might get a verdict for manslaughter."

"You mean to say he won't give you the chance you want." And the other laughed.

"Anyhow, it seems jolly mean of him not to allow one to make the most of such an opportunity. You know Binkley, don't you? He's now making thousands a year. For years he used to hang around the courts, unable to get a brief, and then a case something like this turned up, and he acted for the prisoner."

"But he didn't get him off."

"No; but, don't you see, it gave him his chance. His cross-examination was clever, and his speech for the defence was so brilliant that it gave him a reputation. It made him! After that, briefs came in like mad. But I see time is up."

A minute later the clerk of the assizes came into the court. Then a great hush fell upon all present. From a door at the back of the hall came Mr. Justice Bolitho and took his seat. Immediately all eyes were turned towards him.

"Handsome, isn't he?"

"Yes; a striking figure of a man."

"Isn't it strange though? Only a year or two ago he and Stepaside fought for the Brunford seat. They ran neck and neck too, and he got in. Of course that was before he was made a judge. Do you know what Stepaside said when the figures were announced? He said that he and Bolitho would meet again, and always to fight; and now it's come to this!"

"Ay; and he appeared against him years ago, when he was up for the riot. Then he only got him sent to gaol for six months, and now it seems as though he'll put on the black cap and condemn him to be hanged. My word, though, I shouldn't like to be a judge!"

Judge Bolitho was indeed a striking figure as he sat there in his judicial robes and heavy wig. His features were large and commanding. His eyes had the look of authority. His mouth was set and stern. He looked every inch of what he was, a representative of the dignity of the law, a man set apart to do justice—a cultured, able man, too, with fine, almost classical features, even although they were somewhat heavy. Not a cruel man—at least he did not appear so; indeed, he was well known as one who could tell a good story and pass a timely joke. A popular man, too, with those of his own order—one who by ability and worth had risen to his present exalted position.

One of the ushers shouted "Silence" as he sat down; but there was no need for him to speak. The place was as still as death. Everyone waited for what should happen next. Then, if possible, the atmosphere became more than ever charged with the spirit of the day's trial. Distant footsteps were heard, and then, accompanied on either side by a policeman, came Paul Stepaside.

Paul had scarcely slept a wink that night; not that he feared the trial—that seemed to be in the background of his life now. Everything else was swallowed up in the interview which he had had with Mary Bolitho. Throughout the long night he had been fighting a great battle. What should he do? If he were to tell the whole truth—— But he would not think of it. Still, all the old questions recurred to him again with weary reiteration, the old battle had to be fought and re-fought. Love for his mother, love for the woman who was to him a thousand times more than his mother yet in a different way, struggling for ascendancy. What should he do? What should he do?

The chaplain came to him again that morning—as he had done once or twice before—to offer him his ministrations, but Paul was still as hard as adamant. The chaplain was an earnest, good man, narrow in his faith, but deeply in earnest. He believed in Paul's guilt, and would have given a great deal to have brought him to a state of repentance.

"If you'd only accept the consolations, the help of religion!" he had said to him.

"What consolations?" asked Paul.

"Do you not realise the need of pardon?" asked the clergyman. "Do you not need to feel the atonement made for sin?"

"I only want justice. Look, sir," said Paul. "What is the practical result of religion? Does it make men do justice and love righteousness? I will tell you something. There was once a man who betrayed a woman. He was a religious man. He partook of the sacraments. But all his religion did not keep him from forsaking the woman he betrayed and allowing her to spend her life in disgrace and misery. If religion could cause that man to come forward, confess his wrong, and atone for his guilt by doing justice to her, perhaps I could believe. But all these little theories of yours are so many parrot cries."

It was in this state of mind that Paul was led from his cell to the dock. He was still wearing his own clothes, for although he was an accused man, he was not yet proved to be guilty; and with that innate pride and that care for personal appearance which was natural to him, he had carefully dressed himself. His garments were well cut, and fitted his figure perfectly. His linen was spotless, and he stood upright, with a proud look on his face.

There was a kind of gasp when he entered the dock. He was not the kind of man whom many had expected to see. Tall, erect, muscular, pale cheeks, clear-cut features, well-shaped head, dark flashing eyes, sensitive lips and nostrils, he was a direct contrast to those who are usually associated with the crime of which he was accused. Even the judge, who looked at him with keen, penetrating eyes, could not help being impressed by the fact. He was a man capable of controlling other men, a man who could deal with large affairs. Passionate, perhaps, and vengeful, but not likely to wreak his passion like a brute.

"Handsome, isn't he?" said one lady to another. "I'd no idea!"

"Yes, terrible pity, isn't it? But still, I suppose he's had a grudge against Mr. Wilson for years. He belongs to the working classes, too, although by his cleverness he's risen above them. But it's always the same, my dear—common people are common people."

Paul looked steadily round the court. His eyes did not rest long on the judge, although he gave him a keen, searching glance. Even then he felt that the circumstances were far out of the ordinary. Only the previous evening this man's daughter had confessed her love to him. She had defied all conventions, defied the possibility of malign gossip, but of course Judge Bolitho did not know that. They met there as judge and accused, and such were the relations that they must maintain. A few weeks before, this man had written a letter to him—an insulting letter—forbidding him to approach his daughter; and now he, the judge, sat in his seat of authority, while Paul was in the dock.

His gaze swept round the room. He recognised many faces. He saw Edward Wilson, father of the murdered man, pale as ashes, and with set, stern face. He saw the Mayor of Brunford and some of the councillors. He saw men who had fought for him at the last election—men with whom he had done business. He saw people of the common orders—some of them were his own employees—who a week or two before had paid him homage in so far as any Lancashire man pays homage to his employer.

No; it was not like an ordinary trial at all, and yet the issues were tragic. The air seemed to pulsate with doom. No word had yet been spoken, and yet men's hearts were beating wildly. Even the barristers, who sat looking at the prisoner, seemed strangely moved.

The clerk of the assizes rose, arranged his wig, settled his gown.

"Order! Order!" shouted the ushers.

The clerk read the indictment in solemn and impressive tones. Few remembered the words he said, but all realised their purport. Paul Stepaside, standing there in the prisoner's dock, was indicted for the murder of Edward Wilson.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied the prisoner. There was not a tremor in his voice, and many thought, as they looked at him, that he seemed to regard the question as an insult.

The jury had been sworn. This was a somewhat tedious proceeding, the swearing of the jury, and on Paul's face passed a look of contempt. It seemed so tiresome, this reading of a formula to twelve men, making them promise that they would consider the case "without fear or favour, upon the evidence given," and so on and so on. Still it was necessary, even although in many cases it might have become a mere matter of form. Certainly, too, each juryman seemed to realise the importance of his position and the seriousness of what he had to do. They were not men of great intellectual acumen, these jurymen—just kind-hearted, commonplace men who had been selected for the purpose. Still, they would do as well as others who might be got. They would hear the evidence given. They would listen attentively to the counsel's words and to the judge's summing up.

At length all was ready, and the jurymen settled in their seats, each with his note-book, and each prepared to listen attentively. No sooner had they sat down than the counsel for the prosecution rose. Mr. Bakewell was a man well known on the Northern Circuit. He had for many years appeared in the Assize Courts of Manchester, and had been spoken of as an able man. It had even been said of him that

he cared more for verdicts than for justice. But this did not seem to annoy him. After all, the verdict is what a barrister has to think of. He had his reputation to maintain, his case to win, and he was the counsel for the prosecution. He had studied the case thoroughly, point by point. In this instance, too, he was more than ordinarily interested. He had met Paul Stepaside. On one occasion there had been a slight passage of arms between them, and Paul had come off best in the encounter; and ever since, Mr. Bakewell, while bearing no grudge against him, had been somewhat chagrined that this young man, who had never been trained in the law, should have got the better in their encounter.

"I am for the prosecution, my lord," he said, and sat down.

"Who is for the defence?" asked the judge.

This question was met by deathly silence.

"Have you no one to defend you?" asked the judge, turning towards Paul. And even then both of them felt the incongruity of the situation.

"No," replied Paul.

"But I advise you very seriously to accept counsel for defence."

"No," replied Paul. "I wish no one." His voice rang out clearly in the hall, even although he spoke in low tones. No one seemed to breathe. What could be the meaning of such an attitude?

Again Judge Bolitho spoke:

"I repeat," he said, and his voice was very solemn, "that you will be wise if you accept someone for defence. Mr. Langefield, now?" and he nodded towards the man who had that same morning regretted Paul's obstinacy in not securing his services.

"No," said Paul. "I must decline your lordship's suggestion. What defence is offered I will offer myself."

"Of course this is not usual," said the judge. "And I think it my duty to tell you that you will have a perfect right to cross-examine any witness who may be called."

"Thank you, my lord."

The counsel for the prosecution here rose to address the jury and to give a statement of the case. This he did in a lengthy speech, a speech which showed that he had not only thoroughly studied the facts, but had gone to some trouble to trace Paul's history.

"My lord and gentlemen," said Mr. Bakewell, "this is no common case, and the prisoner is no ordinary man. Although he came to Brunford as a poor lad, he soon rose to a distinguished position. So much ability did he show, and such was his influence in the town of his adoption, that he was at length invited to stand for Parliament in the interests of the working classes of the town. I would not mention this but for the fact that it bears upon the case we are now considering. It was during this contest that the prisoner accused the murdered man of acting against his, the prisoner's, interests, and of doing his best to ruin him. I shall also bring evidence to show that during this part of his history he repeatedly swore to be revenged on the deceased. By and by he was elected as Member of Parliament for Brunford, and immediately after that election, as I shall prove to you, a quarrel took place between him and the murdered man, during which the prisoner struck him a murderous blow, and was only kept back from a renewal of the attack by those who were standing round."

He then went on to describe the scenes immediately associated with the murder, and told in minutest detail the happenings which we have recorded in these pages.

As he went from point to point, all present could see, as if in the eye of imagination, link fastened to link, and every one was riveted with care and precision. The whole chain of evidence seemed perfect. Even Paul himself, as he listened, could not help feeling that, as far as circumstantial evidence was concerned, no stronger case could be brought to prove a man's guilt. Indeed, had a vote been taken at that moment, not only among the jury, but among all present, there would have been a general admission that Paul was guilty of the murder of Edward Wilson.

"It remains now, my lord and gentlemen, for me to call witnesses to prove the facts which I have laid before you. And it is for you, gentlemen, to judge whether those facts are not sufficient to pronounce the verdict of guilty upon the prisoner who now stands before you."

There was a rustle in the court as he sat down. It seemed as though everyone wanted to find relief from the tense excitement which had been created by his words. The judge shuffled in his chair and looked at his notes. The barristers who sat round nodded to each other and seemed to say that undoubtedly Bakewell had made a very fine speech. Many eyes were turned towards Paul, who remained perfectly calm. His face was hard and stony. Not a tremor was to be seen. He seemed to have no nerves. Then, before the first witness was called, he looked round the court and saw, for the first time, the face of Mary Bolitho. He had no idea that she would be present, and for a moment his heart became cold and heavy. Their eyes met, and she smiled. It is true her face was deadly pale, but there was no lack of confidence in the look she gave him. As plainly as words could say them she said: "Do

not fear, Paul. I love you. I know you're innocent, and I will save you."

In spite of all that had taken place, his heart became light again. He still adhered to his resolution to keep his secret in his heart, but that one look changed the whole atmosphere of the place. He knew that the one, and the only one, for whom he cared, believed in his innocence and looked upon him with eyes of love.

The counsel was about to call the first witness when there was a sound of confusion. Through the crowded court a woman was making her way, and Paul, looking, saw his mother. How she got there he did not know, but got there she had. He saw how pale and haggard her face was, saw, too, that her eyes gleamed with the old light which had shone from them on the night of the murder. He thought she seemed to be making straight for him, but she presently stopped. The judge was at that moment busily making notes. Presently, however, he lifted his head as if in wonder at the counsel's delay. She looked at Paul, but only for a moment. Her eyes were fixed upon Judge Bolitho.

"It's Stepaside's mother," whispered someone to Mr. Bakewell, and many eyes were turned towards her.

Then a scream rent the air—a scream of agony, of madness, and the woman fell down in the court insensible.

CHAPTER XIX

PAUL DISCOVERS HIS FATHER

As may be imagined, the sensation in the court was very great, but it quickly died away. Paul's mother was immediately removed, and the order of the day was resumed. For some time, however, Paul was unable to give due attention to what was taking place. The sight of his mother's face, added to the stress of the scene through which he was passing, was affecting his iron nerves in spite of himself. Presently, however, when someone whispered to him, saying that his mother was quite recovered, he seemed more at ease, and was able to devote his attention to the evidence which was being elicited from the witnesses.

He did not know why it was, but he seemed to be the only man in the court who was unmoved by what was taking place. On every hand was strained attention to every word that was spoken. The most insignificant question seemed to be carefully noted, not only by the jury but by the spectators. But to Paul there was a sense of unreality in everything. All these same questions he had heard before. All these witnesses had appeared at the Coroner's inquest and before the Brunford magistrates. It seemed to him, too, that the way the counsel for the prosecution dwelt on insignificant details, details which could have nothing whatever to do with the real issues, was childish. Indeed, Mr. Bakewell appeared not only to have a positive genius for, but also a personal interest in, dragging out the case as long as possible. In a way Paul supposed it was necessary to inquire into the minutest details concerning the evidence that was given, nevertheless, it was wearying in the extreme. As far as he could judge, too, both counsel and witnesses were supremely anxious to acquit themselves in a way that should give satisfaction to the spectators. It was a matter of intellectual juggling rather than a desire to arrive at the truth. The counsel evidently hoped that his examination would be commented upon as clever and searching, while the witnesses, aware that the eyes of the many who knew them watched them closely, were eager to be spoken of as having acquitted themselves with some amount of distinction. Hours passed away, and, it seemed to him, they failed to get at the heart of the case, while such a large amount of irrelevant matter was allowed and discussed that, from the standpoint of a spectator, it seemed to the prisoner that the methods of an English law-court needed to be rigidly revised. During the afternoon sitting, however, they got nearer to the heart of things. The counsel began to ask questions which had a vital bearing upon the case, and, as a consequence, the attention of all present became more tense. It was then that Paul could not help feeling that the judge had already made up his mind. During that part of the proceedings when he had advised him to obtain counsel to defend him, and told him that he was at liberty to cross-examine the witnesses, he felt more kindly towards him. There seemed a desire to do him justice, and to give him every chance to put his own case in the best possible light. But as matters proceeded, the judge appeared to have arrived at a conclusion, and to regard the prisoner as guilty.

He renewed his determination, too, to maintain his attitude of rigid silence. Had he been free to act, he felt he could have destroyed the effect of the evidence which was given, but he could not have done so without throwing suspicion upon someone else. If he were not guilty, then someone else was. Who was that someone?

For a long time therefore he did not seek to interpose, and witness after witness left the box without any attempt on his part to cross-examine them.

Only once did he really interpose in the proceedings, and that was after a short cross-examination by the judge himself. Whether it was a mere matter of form or not, the judge had asked each witness a

number of questions on the evidence which had been given, and as Paul listened to those questions, they seemed utterly unsatisfactory to him. He remembered Judge Bolitho's career, remembered, too, that when he was practising at the Bar, he was said to be one of the most severe cross-examiners on the Northern Circuit. But now his queries seemed to be trivial and unworthy. The questions he asked might have been those of a newly-fledged barrister, who had not learnt the ABC of his profession!

This, as it seemed to him, was especially noticeable when he questioned Mr. Edward Wilson, the father of the murdered man. Mr. Wilson's evidence, of course, created a great sensation. He stated that, as far as he knew, his son did not possess a single enemy in the world except the prisoner in the dock. He also went on to say that almost ever since Paul had come to Brunford he had been the sworn enemy of his son. He spoke of the prisoner as clever, ambitious, unscrupulous, a man who would adopt any means to accomplish his own purposes. He stated that his son, although a brave, strong man, had told him, his father, that he feared what the prisoner might do to him. He denied that his son had sought to ruin Paul Stepaside, although he admitted that the prisoner might have had reasons for believing that his son would not be sorry if he could be driven out of the town. And he related certain incidents which went to prove that Paul hated his son Ned with deadly hatred.

No one could help feeling when the counsel sat down after examining Mr. Edward Wilson that the case looked blacker than ever against Paul. He had supplied the motive which had caused Paul to commit this crime. It was personal hatred, personal enmity, and a desire for revenge. The gossip of years had been dragged into the court, and the picture which he drew of Paul was that of a relentless, persistent enemy of his son. When Mr. Bakewell had sat down after this examination, Judge Bolitho asked the witness certain questions, and it was at this time that Paul felt as though the judge were seeking to help the counsel for the prosecution rather than to do justice to the accused man.

"My lord," he said, when the judge had finished, "I will take advantage of what you said at the commencement of the trial and cross-examine the witness."

The judge nodded.

"Then I will ask Mr. Wilson two or three questions bearing on his evidence," said Paul. "Mr. Wilson, you have stated more than once that I have uttered threats concerning your son?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind telling me what those threats were?"

"You threatened to do him injury."

"What injury?"

The witness looked confused.

"Have I at any time in your hearing threatened your son with harm?"

"No, not in my hearing."

"Then you have been repeating gossip rather than telling of what you actually know?"

"You've threatened my son himself."

"With what?"

"Well, you have said to him, 'I'll pay you out for this.'"

"For what?"

"For certain supposed injuries."

"But I am here on the charge of murder. Did I ever threaten to murder him? Did he ever tell you that I had threatened to murder him?"

"No, not in so many words."

"That's all, my lord," said Paul. "I would not have interposed, only, since you have so kindly allowed me to cross-examine witnesses, I thought you would not mind if I mentioned such an obvious thing!"

On this the judge made no comment, and the case was proceeded with. They had made but little headway when the business of the day came to an end, and Paul was taken back to his cell.

When he again found himself alone, everything became unreal to him. It seemed to him as though he had been dreaming a horrible dream. Every actor in the grim tragedy which had been played seemed but a phantom of the brain. Everything was intangible, even although he knew how terrible the issues were. By and by, however, he was able to grasp things more clearly, and to remember the events of the day, as well as to call to mind the faces of the people who had been in the court. He knew that the evidence had been very black against him; knew, too, by the look on the faces of the twelve jurymen, that even although they might not be convinced of his guilt, circumstances were leading them in that direction. All the same, the thought of death was far away. He could not believe that he, so

young and strong and vigorous, full of physical and intellectual life, would soon cease to be; could not believe that those twelve commonplace unimaginative-looking men who sat in the box could condemn him to die. It was so absurd, so foolish. Then he remembered his little passage of arms with the judge, and he wondered what Mary Bolitho would say. He did not realise her presence at the time, but now it all came back to him. His words had been polite enough, and yet his insinuation had roused a doubt concerning the judge's impartiality. What would she say? What would she think? He was sorry now he had spoken. Why could he not have remained silent? If he had roused doubts, if he had made the jury see how absurd it was to fancy that he could be guilty of this crime, the sleuthhounds of the law would set to work to find the real criminal, and that was what he wanted to avoid. Better bear anything than that the real truth should come to light.

He remembered his mother's face, too, as she came into the court, remembered the look of agony in her eyes, remembered the unearthly scream she had given. What did it mean? His mother was not a weak woman, she was not given to hysterics, rather she was cold and grim and hard to all the rest of the world. She was only tender towards him. What did she mean by coming in such a way? What led her to cry out with such intense pain? The thought had scarcely passed his mind when he heard the key of the warder in his door, and a moment later his mother came into his cell. For some time neither of them spoke. The woman came towards him slowly, and then, throwing her arms round his neck, held him close to her for a long time. Paul felt the quiver of her body, and realised the intensity of her feelings.

"Are you better, mother?" He was able to speak quite calmly by this time, and was determined that neither by look nor sign would he say anything of his suspicions concerning her.

But she did not answer him. She still held him close to her, her face pressed hard against his chest.

"I saw you come into court this morning," he said, as though the matter were the most casual thing imaginable. "You seemed frightened, mother. Why was it?"

Still she did not speak, but Paul knew by her quivering hands and by her convulsive sobs that something had aroused her to the depths of her being.

"I hope you are better now," he went on. "It was very thoughtful of you to let me know you had recovered. You mustn't trouble about me, mother. I shall be able to manage all right."

"Yes, yes," she gasped presently, "but you don't know, Paul! You don't know!"

"I think I know all that is necessary," he said, and then he stopped, for he was on the point of mentioning the ghastly thought which had been haunting him throughout the day. He believed he had read his mother's motive in coming into the court, and that, but for her falling down in a faint, she would have carried out her purpose. He felt sure she had come there that day to tell of her own guilt, and thus to save him. He imagined that she would have found it easy to gain admission by telling the officials that she was the accused man's mother, and that had she carried out her purpose he would by that time have been a free man.

"You must not give way to these feelings, mother," he said. "I am abundantly able to take care of myself, and I am afraid neither of judge nor jury."

"The papers say you asked some awfully clever questions," she said, and there was a mirthless laugh in her voice. "People are saying in the city, too, that you've got something up your sleeve, and that presently, when the right time comes, you will confound them all. But, oh, Paul, Paul, my poor boy, my dear boy! I've come to tell you something!"

"Don't tell me, mother," he said. "I'm sure it will give you pain, and there's not the slightest need. Everything is right and perhaps there's truth in what the people say."

He was still possessed with the idea that his mother was referring to her own guilt, and he determined at all hazards to keep her from making any confession. He did not quite know what the course of procedure might be during the coming days, but he knew that according to English law no prisoner accused of murder can be obliged to answer any questions before a judge and jury. He had, during his preliminary trials, evaded everything which might arouse the suspicions he feared, but if his mother told him that which he felt sure was on her lips, he did not know what he might have to do at some future period of the trial.

"But I must tell you, Paul. I must tell you. It will be terrible for you. It will drive you mad. But you must know! You must! you must!" Her voice rose almost to a shriek as she spoke, and he feared lest any warder listening at the door might hear what she should say.

"Speak low," he whispered, "or, better still, do not speak at all. No, don't speak, mother. I know all there is any need to know!"

"But you must hear. Yes, yes, I won't speak aloud, but you must know. I must tell you. Paul, Paul, I —I——"

"No, no, mother, be quiet!" His voice was low and hoarse. "I tell you nothing matters. Everything will be all right. You needn't fear for me, I'll be a match for them all!"

"But I must tell you, Paul, even although it may drive you mad. It'll alter everything, everything! I've found out something. To-day, to-day——" The tones of her voice had changed, and there was a mad intensity which he could not understand. She had grown calmer, too, and her body had become as rigid as a stone.

"Listen, Paul," she went on, "I've found your father!"

"Is that what you wanted to tell me?" And although he was excited beyond words, he also realised a great relief.

"Yes, I've found your father."

"My father! Who is he? You cannot mean it!"

"Yes. Don't you know? Can't you guess?"

His mind was bewildered, the blow was too stunning. After all these years of unavailing search for the truth, to come to him like this almost unbalanced his mind.

"No, I can't guess," he said. "How did you do it, mother? How? Where is he?"

"The judge, the judge," she said hoarsely. She stood back from him as she spoke, and the dim light of the room fell upon her face. She looked years older now than she had looked when they spent their last evening together in their home in Brunford. Her face was marked with deep lines. Her eyes were sunken. Her hair had become dull, and her hands trembled as though she had the palsy.

"The judge, the judge!" she repeated. "He's your father, Paul."

"The judge! What judge? Great God, you don't mean that—that——"

"Yes, Judge Bolitho. That was not the name he gave to me. He said he was called Douglas Graham. I expect it was only a ruse to deceive me. I don't know how it would affect my marriage, Paul. You see, Scotch marriage is so strange, and it may be that the change of name would alter everything. And yet I don't see how it could. Do you, Paul? But never mind. He married me! I told you about it, didn't I? Up there on the wild moors, in the light of the setting sun, with only God as our witness, he took me to be his wife. He promised to love and cherish me, Paul. He told me I was all the world to him, and that he would die to save me from pain. I told you about it, didn't I? And we knelt down together, too, on the heather, and it seemed as though God's angels were all around us as we knelt. And he prayed, Paul. He told me he was a man of faith and took the Communion. And I believed him. Oh, yes, we were married. And now he's your judge. My God, think of it! You the criminal and he the judge, and he your own father!"

"And he never told you his name was Bolitho?" He asked the question mechanically, as though his mind were far away.

"Never mentioned it. I never thought of it until—but never mind that. Of course, you told me about Judge Bolitho, but at that time I never thought of him as being the man I married. Why, he had been your enemy. He sent you to prison, years ago. He fought you in Brunford. Well, on the night of the—the murder, I—I—but there is no need to talk about that now. I—I went into the court, and when I saw him, I thought I was going mad. He has changed, yes, of course, he has grown older, his face is fuller, but I knew him in a second. I could take my Bible oath. I could swear a thousand oaths it is he, Paul. He is the man who married me. He is the man who is your father, the man who you swore that night on the Altarnun Moors should do me justice, the man on whom you said you'd have your revenge. It is the man whom I have hated and whom you have hated, Paul. When I saw him first, I thought I was going out of my mind. It seemed as though everything became as black as night. Only his face was plain. He did not look at me. I do not think he saw me at all, but, oh, I saw him, and then—and then—but you know what happened after that, Paul. Throughout the day I have just wandered, and wandered, and wandered, thinking and thinking. At first I thought I dared not tell you. I could not, it was too terrible. But at last my feet were dragged to you. I could not help myself. I came here and gained admission. Of course, they could not keep me out. I am your mother. Paul, Paul, what are you looking like that for? You don't hate me, do you? You understand?"

Her words brought him back to the reality of the situation. At first he seemed utterly confounded by the blow. He forgot all about the murder now. It did not seem to exist, or if it did it was somewhere far back in the background, and everything was altered. He had dreamed of the time when he would find his father for himself—thought, too, of what he would say to him, painted pictures of their first meeting. But now everything seemed shattered. Nothing was real! Everything was real, terribly real!

Even yet he could not understand the whole bearings of the case. His brain was confused. Every issue seemed involved, but he did not doubt his mother's words. It seemed to him the key of the puzzle which had been haunting him for years. Judge Bolitho his father! Yes, his treatment of him had been a part, a natural part, of the whole history. What wonder that he who had deceived and betrayed his mother should also be the enemy of his son! He understood his feelings now, understood why when he had first seen this proud, clever man he had a feeling of instinctive hatred towards him. He had been cruel to him in the examination when he was tried years before for the part he had taken in the riot. As the counsel for the prosecution he had seemed to delight in fastening all the guilt upon him, his son. He remembered the look of satisfaction upon his face when the justice committed him to six months'

imprisonment in Strangeways Gaol. Yes, he had hated him then, for that matter they had hated each other. Then came the election at Brunford. Every incident of the fight came back to him. He had felt then that this man Bolitho was fighting him unfairly, using devil's tools to beat him, allowing his mother's name to be dragged in the mud, in order to gain the victory, while all the time he—he——

"Don't speak, mother, don't speak for a minute. Let me try to understand."

He walked around the cell like one demented, his face set, his eyes flashing. Again and again he dashed his hand across his forehead as if to sweep away the shadows which rested upon his brain, as if trying to untangle the skeins of his life.

Yes, he had defied him even to the very last. When the votes were counted, and when his father, his enemy, had won the victory, he had defied him. He had told him before the surging mob that they would meet again, and always to fight, yes, and they would, too. He had a new weapon in his hands now!

What would the world say if it knew? He almost felt like laughing at the thought. What would the world say if it knew that the judge and the man accused of murder were father and son? How the tongues of the gossips would wag! What headlines there would be in the newspapers! What a sensation it would create throughout the country!

He laughed aloud, a half-mad laugh. His brain reeled at what his mother had told him. Even yet he did not realise fully the issues of her momentous communication. That would come later! The thing which appealed to him now was that he had found his father, and his father was the man who was sitting in judgment on him!

Never did he hate him as he did at that moment. This man had deceived his mother, blackened her life, allowed her to remain in loneliness, misery and disgrace. Because of him a shadow had rested upon his own life, a shadow which nothing had been able to lift. Yes, he hated him. He thought of the cross-examination that day. This man at the beginning of the trial had pretended to act as his friend, had advised him to accept counsel, had told him that he might defend himself and ask questions. And, utilising the power which he possessed as a judge, had himself asked the witnesses questions, on the pretence that he was trying to do the prisoner justice!

And what questions! To his excited and poisoned mind he had simply supplied the deficiencies of the counsel for the prosecution. Every word he had uttered was only meant as another nail in his scaffold. He was glad he had said what he had said now. He had made both jury and court feel that the judge was unjust because of his prejudice against him. But that was nothing to what he could do, nothing to what he would do. Why, supposing on the next day—yes, and he could do it, too—supposing on the next day of the trial he, the prisoner, were to proclaim before the court, before the twelve jurymen, before the eager counsel, before the gaping, excited crowd, that this Judge Bolitho, this man who assumed an immaculate air, was one of the most damnable villains that ever crawled upon the earth, that this man, who looked so virtuous and spoke of the majesty of justice, had foully deceived a poor, ignorant, innocent girl, dragged her name in the mire, left her to die, as far as he was concerned, in disgrace! He, the judge, had done this, and all the world should know it. Yes, all the world. This man should be pilloried before all England, and every healthy, clean-minded man in the nation would shudder at his name.

Yes, he saw his revenge now.

"No, mother, do not speak yet," he cried, as he stamped around the cell. "Do not speak yet. I've got it!"

He hugged himself with delight, for at that moment Paul Stepaside was possessed of the devil. He was filled with unholy joy. "It makes one believe, after all, that there's a God in the heaven. 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' Yes, I've heard a man read that in the old chapel down at St. Mabyn, in Cornwall. 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay.' And I will repay too."

Never had he realised that such vengeance would be possible. Why, it some mighty wizard had been scheming to place a weapon in his hands whereby he could avenge his mother's wrongs, avenge his own wrongs, and punish the man who had been his enemy even before he was born, he could not have placed a more powerful weapon than this. He seemed to possess the very genius of victory. He did not care one iota about the murder now, did not trouble as to what verdict any jury might find. The evidence which might be adduced against him was as nothing. He held in his hands the sword of justice, which should surely fall on the head of the man who had that day sat as judge.

He laughed aloud again. "Thank you, mother," he said. "You did right in coming to me. Yes, it makes everything right—everything, everything. And to-morrow I'll do it. To-morrow shall be my day of victory. Dead or alive, it shall be my day of victory. Right shall be done, justice shall be done, and this scheming, hypocritical villain shall be dragged in the dust and disgrace and infamy!"

The words had scarcely passed his lips when he came to a sudden stop, and he gave a low, terrible cry.

"What is it, Paul?" The mother was startled by the look in his eyes, by the mad agony expressed in his face.

"Mary!" he said.

Oh, the world of sorrow, of defeat, of terror, which seemed to be expressed in that one word. Yes, he would rejoice, rejoice beyond words at his father's ignominy and shame. But what of her, the woman who believed in him, trusted in him against all evidence, the woman who had defied all conventions in coming to see him, the woman whom he had held to his heart, and whom he loved more than life? Every blow struck at her father was also struck at her. His shame would be her shame, his ignominy would be her ignominy.

It seemed as though the foundations of his life were being broken up. Why, then, too, if that marriage up on the Scotch hill-side were legal, as he believed it was, and thus all stain were wiped away from his name, what of Mary's name? If Judge Bolitho had married another woman while his mother was alive, then he would not only be a bigamist, but Mary's name would be tarnished—Mary, whose happiness was to him the most precious thing in the world. But even that was not all. He understood now what his mother meant when she said he would be driven mad, understood why she was afraid to tell him. Mary was his own sister! His sister!

"Forgive me, Paul, for telling you;" and his mother looked at him with hungry, beseeching eyes. "Forgive me, I could not help it. You see—well, it was necessary that you should know."

"And I for the moment felt like believing in God," he said, like one talking to himself. He thought he was going to fall on the hard stone floor. His head was whirling, his limbs were trembling. He seemed to have lost all control over himself.

"My sister!" he said. "Great God! My sister! And I love her as a man loves his wife!" A new passion, a new force had entered his life now. His longing for revenge was conquered by another feeling, a nobler feeling. Love for Mary Bolitho was stronger than a desire to be revenged on his father. At all hazards she must not suffer. But—but—— No, he could not grasp it. His brain refused to fasten upon the real issues of the case. His thoughts were as elusive as a mist cloud. His brain swam. Everything was real, terribly real, but nothing was real! What could he do?

Never, surely, was man placed in such a horrible position. He had thought a few nights before, when he had fought his battle between love for his own mother and the desire to keep disgrace and death from her, and the love for his own life, a life which could be made bright and beautiful, that the great struggle was over. It seemed to him then that he had fought his last battle and had won it. Duty had overcome self-love. But it seemed as nothing compared with the issues which now stared him in the face.

"My sister! My sister!" he repeated. "The same father, although not the same mother. Do I love her the less? Does my heart cry out for her one whit the less because we are children of the same father?"

No. Why, he could not understand, but she seemed even more to him than ever. The new link which bound them together seemed also, if possible, to strengthen his love and to make him more than ever long for her happiness.

"He's your father; you believe that?" said the woman, who had been looking at him as though she would read his very soul.

"Yes," he replied.

"And she is your sister."

"Yes."

"Then if your birth is honourable, hers is base," said the mother passionately. Even at that moment the longing to do justice to her son was uppermost in her mind and heart. "I am his true wife; remember that! He married me. I can't be robbed of that, Paul, can I?"

He saw what her questions meant, knew the thought that was burning in her brain, realised her mad desire to proclaim her right as a wife and as an honourable mother.

Paul Stepaside loved his mother, and never more than then. All those feelings of filial affection which had been aroused in his heart by the remembrance of her sad story were intensified at that moment. Yes, she was his mother, and she must have her rights. But if she had them?

That was the question, the supreme question. His desire for revenge had lost its power now. A new motive force was at work, a new set of circumstances clamoured for recognition.

Oh, what a muddle life was! Who could explain its mystery? Who could unravel the entanglement?

The steps of the warder were heard in the corridor outside, and Paul knew that his mother's visit must come to an end.

"What will you do? What will you do?" she asked.

"I must wait—I must think," was his reply. "Of course, you have told nothing to anyone else?"

"No, Paul. How could I?"

"And that man has no suspicion?"

"No; he did not see me."

He could not see a ray of light in the darkness anyhow. He saw no means whereby he could solve this great puzzle. Everything was mad confusion.

He heard the key turning in the lock.

"I must wait; I must think, think, mother. Meanwhile, do nothing."

The door opened, and a moment later his mother left the cell, leaving Paul alone.

CHAPTER XX

MAN AND WIFE

A number of men were dining in the principal hotel in Manchester. They all belonged to the legal profession, and had been drawn thither by the assizes which were being held. Most of them were men who had won a position in the realm of the law, and were now visiting Manchester because their profession had called them thither. They were attached to the Northern Circuit, and were doing their best to make their stay in the smoky metropolis as pleasant as possible. A few there were who were as yet hungry for briefs and could not get them, but who deemed it a privilege and an honour to be invited to dine with their more successful brethren.

Perhaps there is no profession in the land which offer greater possibilities than that of the Bar. On the other hand, there is no calling more fraught with disappointment. Many there are who, after a brilliant University career, and having adopted the Bar as a profession, have to wait year after year without even earning the salary of a four-loom weaver. Proud, sensitive men as some of them are, to have to wait around on the chance of getting a brief must be exquisite torture. Yet such are the chances of the Bar that many undergo the ordeal in the hope that by and by success will come. There were some of these at the gathering which I have just mentioned. They had accepted the invitation to dine with their successful brethren, not without hope that some crumbs might fall from the rich man's table and be enjoyed by them. Added to this, Judge Bolitho, who had won such renown while practising as a barrister on the Northern Circuit, and now appointed judge at the High Court of Justice, was also present. Some of the younger men regarded him with a certain amount of awe, and they wondered whether the time would come when they, who now depended upon the goodwill of their friends, might aspire to the heights which he had reached. After all, it was not impossible, for the Bar, like every other profession, was a gamble.

It had been a merry gathering. They had dined well. The hotel was noted for its cuisine and for the quality of its wines, and the best which the great establishment afforded had been placed at their disposal. Many good stories were told. Those who were now at the top of the tree related incidents of their younger days, when they, like the young fellows who now listened to them so eagerly, were hungry for briefs. Mr. Bakewell, in particular, the man who that day was the counsel for the prosecution in Paul Stepaside's case, was an utterly different man from what he had been when he appeared in court. Then he was solemn, pompous, and almost lugubrious; now he cracked a joke with the best, and told humorous stories with infinite gusto. The judge, too, while naturally patronising and unable to throw aside in entirety the dignity of his office, so far unbent as to be the best of companions.

Naturally, the case which had excited the whole country loomed large on the horizon. Indeed, it gave rise to most of the stories which had been told that night. More than one barrister related incidents of some murder trial in which he had been engaged, and tried to trace connections between them and the one which was now being tried.

If the issues were not so momentous, moreover, the way they discussed the question would have been amusing. Paul's life or death was to many of them a mere secondary consideration. To them he was a case, and they judged of the merits and demerits of the case as if it were some purely imaginary or academical affair especially manufactured for their delectation. It is true the judge did not look at it in this light, but he was not in a talkative humour that night, although he added a certain share to the conversation, and his presence gave a kind of éclat to the proceedings. They had reached the stage of nuts and wine, and most of them were in great good humour.

"I am inclined to think," said one, "that Stepaside has something up his sleeve. The fellow is as sharp as a needle, and although he hasn't yet offered anything like a defence, one can't believe that he was guilty of such a thing."

"I don't know," said another. "Of course, circumstantial evidence has often been proved to be false, nevertheless, a jury has to go upon such evidence as is adduced in court, and the evidence is damning!"

"Think of the point he made this afternoon when he cross-examined Mr. Wilson."

"I make nothing of that," said Mr. Bakewell rather pompously. "Of course, he put it strongly, and for the moment made a point, but that kind of thing is not going to save him!"

"Do you think, then," asked a member of the local Bar, "that the jury will find him guilty?"

"I do indeed," said Mr. Bakewell. "Even although he had a man like Montague Williams or Russell to defend him he would stand no chance. You see, the thing is a perfect chain of reasoning, because there is a perfect chain of events."

"Yes, but how can one think of such a man as Stepaside, keen as a surgeon's knife, cool as the devil himself, as watchful as a sleuth-hound, and having everything before him in the way of a career, so far committing himself as to use the knife known to belong to him, and then to leave it in the body. Why, the thing is absurd!"

"Exactly. But then the cleverest and most daring criminals in the world have been known to have done similar things. Why, think of that Blackburn murder in which I was engaged years ago. It was almost identical with this affair, and there was not the slightest doubt that he was guilty. Why, he confessed it to the chaplain afterwards. You must remember that Stepaside was in a mad passion at the time. Besides, you see, he's never accounted for those hours between midnight and six in the morning!"

"Yes, but no prisoner charged for murder is obliged to account for his time."

"Exactly, but a jury has to give its verdict upon evidence. And remember this, too," and Mr. Bakewell would not perhaps have spoken so freely had his tongue not been unloosed by the generous wine he had been drinking. "Remember this, too, and, of course, we are all friends here, and what I say will not go beyond this room—but the evidence to-morrow will surprise you!"

"In what way?"

"Well, one of the witnesses to-morrow will swear that he saw him not half a mile from Howden Clough, in a state of excitement, about five o'clock on the morning of the murder, that is to say, about half an hour after it took place, according to the doctor's evidence. You see, we have the servants' testimony that they heard him come up to the top storey of the house; that he stood at their bedroom door and then went down again; that they, wondering what had happened, followed, and saw him go out into the night alone. Of course, on the face of it, it does seem unlikely that a clever fellow such as Stepaside undoubtedly is, with a great career possible for him, should have done the deed so clumsily. But, don't you see, everything points to him, and unless he brings some extraordinary witnesses on the other side, which he isn't trying to do, mind you, the jury have no alternative but to find him guilty."

"My own belief is that he's hiding something in his sleeve, and that if he's hanged it'll be a miscarriage of justice."

A waiter then came into the room bearing a slip of paper, which he took to Judge Bolitho. The judge received it calmly and unfolded it, talking meanwhile to his neighbour at the table. After reading a few lines, however, a puzzled expression came on to his face, which was followed by a look almost amounting to terror. More than one who watched him thought he saw his hands tremble somewhat; nevertheless, he held himself in check, like one who was trying to appear to be calm, as he read it the second time. The men who were at the bottom of the table went on with their stories, but Judge Bolitho evidently did not listen. His mind was far away. His cigar had gone out, too, but he did not seem conscious of it.

"I wonder what is in that letter?" asked a man of his neighbour, as he watched the judge's face.

"Oh, there's no knowing. Fellows in Bolitho's position are always getting queer missives."

"He looks mighty uncomfortable, anyhow."

The judge took a wineglass in his hand and began toying with it, but it was evident that he did not know what he was doing.

"I say, Bolitho"—it was a county court judge who spoke to him—"Did you notice that woman's face who fell down in a faint this morning? It was positively ghastly when she looked at you."

Evidently Judge Bolitho did not hear. He took not the slightest notice of the remark. He was still toying with the wineglass.

"I say, Bolitho, aren't you well?"

And still the judge's face was rigid, and his eyes had in them a fixed far-away look. The other caught him by the sleeve.

"Aren't you well, Bolitho?"

The judge gave a great start.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Aren't you well? You look deathly pale. Have another glass of wine, my dear fellow."

But the judge rose to his feet.

"No; I'm not very well," he said. "I think I must ask you to excuse me."

By this time the attention of all present was drawn to him, and there were general expressions of sympathy. But of these Judge Bolitho seemed unconscious.

"Good-night, gentlemen," he said. "I am sorry to be obliged to leave you, but I don't feel very well."

"There was something in that letter," was the general whisper. "Something that disturbed him!"

But the fact was almost forgotten as soon as he had left the room.

The judge found his way to his own apartment.

"Where's Mary, I wonder?" he said. But Mary was nowhere visible. He knocked at her bedroom door, but received no answer. He went into all the rooms set apart for their use, but she was nowhere to be seen.

"She did not tell me she was going out, either," he reflected. But it was evident he had very little interest in her whereabouts. He acted more like a man in a dream than one in full possession of his faculties. He threw himself into an arm-chair and again carefully read the letter which had been sent to him. When he had finished, he looked around the room as though he were afraid he were being watched.

"No; no one is here," he said. "No one knows."

For fully five minutes he sat holding the letter in his hand, staring into vacancy.

"What can it mean? What can it mean?"

He put on a heavy ulster and left the hotel. "I don't think anyone noticed who I am," he reflected. And then he made his way down past the Free Trade Hall, towards Deansgate.

"Twenty-five Dixon Street," he kept on repeating to himself—"twenty-five Dixon Street, off Dean Street."

He did not seem to know where he was going. More than once he hustled someone on the sidewalk and then passed on as if unconscious of what he had done. Presently he reached Dean Street and walked along it some little distance; then, turning, he found himself in a network of short, dark streets, evidently inhabited by a working-class community. He looked at the numbers carefully as he passed along. After some little time he stopped. He knocked at one of the doors and was immediately admitted.

A second later the light fell on the form of a woman. Her face was pale and haggard. In her eyes was a look of madness. The gaslight also shone upon Judge Bolitho's face. He had placed his hat upon the table, and his every feature was exposed.

The woman came close to him and looked at him steadily, while he, like one fascinated, fixed his eyes upon her face.

"Douglas Graham," she said, "do you know me?"

For a few seconds he did not speak, but looked steadily at her. Then, as if with difficulty, words escaped him.

"Jean!" he gasped. "Jean! Then you're not dead!"

"You know me, then, Douglas Graham? I have waited a long time for this night. Sometimes I thought it would never come. Year after year I've watched, all in vain, and then suddenly I learnt the truth!"

She did not seem like one in a passion. Her voice was low and hard. Her hands were steady. Her eyes burnt with a mad light. It seemed as though all the passion, all the hatred, all the despair of more than twenty years were expressed in them just now.

"What do you want of me, Jean?"

He did not seem to know what he was saying, and the words escaped his lips as if in spite of himself.

"Want of you? Want of you? Can you ask that? Your memory is not dead. You know, and I know—— Why, I am your wife! Do you remember that day up among the Scotch hills, when, before God, you took me, you swore you would be faithful to me? Do you remember the promise you made on the day you left me? 'I will soon come back to you,' you said, 'and make our marriage public.' And I have never seen you since, until to-day! But now my hour has come!"

Usually Judge Bolitho was a man of resource. He seldom lost possession of his power to act wisely. He was seldom taken at a disadvantage. He was cool and daring. But now he seemed to have lost the *sang froid* for which he was so noted.

"Jean! Jean!" he said again and again.

"Yes, Jean," replied the woman. "The girl you deceived! The girl you married and then deserted! The woman whose life you have blighted and ruined! I had almost given up believing in God; but now—now—faith may come back to me; but it's only a faith inspired by hatred!"

"You hate me, then?" he said.

"Is it possible to do anything else?" she replied.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Let me think. I shall be able to speak connectedly presently. For a moment I've lost hold of things. Yes, yes; I don't deny anything; but wait a minute! What have you done with yourself all these years, Jean?"

"Done with myself? What could I do? I was almost without a penny. A few months after you left me my father drove me from home. I was in disgrace, and only hell seemed to gape at my feet!"

"But you're here," he said in a dazed kind of way. "You're well clothed. This cottage, though poor, shows a degree of comfort. You're not penniless, then? Have—have you married—again?"

The woman started back from him at these words, and lifted her hand as if to strike him.

"Douglas Graham," she said, "do not drive me too far!"

"But how have you been supported all these years? What have you done?"

"You know! You know!" she almost screamed.

"I know nothing," was his reply. "Where have you lived? Where do you live now? Is this your home, or are you only staying here temporarily?"

He seemed to be trying, in a confused sort of way, to understand how things stood. Evidently the shock of meeting her, after all the long years, had wellnigh unbalanced his mind.

"But don't you know? You must know! No; it may be that you don't," and the woman laughed like one in glee. "Then I will tell you," she said. "I am Paul Stepaside's mother, and Paul Stepaside is your son!"

The man gave a gasp as if for breath. His body swayed to and fro as though he found it difficult to stand upright. Then a hoarse cry escaped him:

"Paul Stepaside my son!"

"Ay, your son," replied the woman. "Yes, I have read what the man said this morning. It was in the evening paper, so I know that you know all about it. I had no name, so he was given the name of the hamlet where I was lying when they found me, thinking I was dead. They took me to the workhouse, where Paul was born, and because I refused to give them my name they called him Stepaside. But he's your son, don't you see? Your son! Your son!"

And the woman laughed harshly.

He seemed to be trying to understand the full meaning of her words.

"My son! My son!" he repeated again and again.

"Yes, your son! And he's accused of the murder of Ned Wilson, and you are the judge who is trying his own son! Truly, the ways of the Lord are as a deep sea. Yet he's a God of justice, too! I never believed in it as I believe in it now."

"But tell me more," he said presently; and his voice was hoarse and unnatural.

"What is there to tell?" replied the woman. "You deserted me, and Paul was born—born in a workhouse, reared in a workhouse, educated in a workhouse. He was called a 'workhouse brat' by the people. He lived on the rates for years—your son! And I have only to speak and all the world will know of it. Have you nothing to say for yourself?" And she turned to him just as a caged lioness might turn to a keeper with whom it was angry.

He stood with bowed head and never answered her a word. He seemed to have forgotten everything in the thought that Paul Stepaside was his son and he was accused of murder, and that he, his father, was his judge.

"Have you nothing to say for yourself?" continued the woman. "Oh, it'll be a beautiful story to tell to the world! I've been hearing many things about you through the day. I'm told you speak at great religious meetings, that you're a prominent religious leader, that you advocate sending the Gospel to the heathen, that you're very particular about attending to all religious observances. I've been reading what you said about Paul being an atheist. You declared that men who had given up faith in God were not to be trusted. When I tell my story, won't the world laugh!"

He made no answer. He still stood perfectly motionless, with bowed head. The woman's words did not seem to reach him.

"You know my Paul's story," she went on. "Therefore, I needn't repeat it. He came to Brunford, and was falsely accused in this very city, and you—because you were well paid and because I think your conscience smote you and you felt an instinctive hatred towards him—you did your best to get him a heavy punishment. Through you he was sent to Strangeways Gaol for six months, he an innocent man! Then you fought him at the election. You told all sorts of lies about him, and you besmirched my name; he your son, and I your wife, the woman you promised to love and cherish, and then deserted. Do you understand? Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," he said; but still it did not seem like Judge Bolitho's voice at all.

"But mind," and here her voice rose somewhat. "But mind, I'm your wife. You married me. I'm your true lawful wife. You don't deny that?"

"Jean," he said, "you don't know; you cannot know. But you'll forgive me, won't you? I do not know myself, that is—— No, of course I can't expect you to forgive me."

"Forgive you?" said the woman, and there was a world of scorn in her tones. "Forgive you, when I've suffered twenty-five years of disgrace because of you! Forgive you, when my son has been lying in gaol because of you! Forgive you, when, but for you, he might be free now! But there's a God in the heaven."

"And Paul Stepaside is my son, my son!"

The thought seemed to have a kind of fascination for him. He repeated it over again and again, as though he took a certain pleasure in doing so. He remembered all that had taken place, remembered that ever since they had first met there had seemed to be a kind of fatality which caused them to feel antagonism for each other. He remembered Paul's words: "Mr. Bolitho and I will meet again, and always to fight, always to fight!" And he was his son! He had never dreamed of this. Often during the years which had elapsed since he last saw the girl he had married, he had wondered what had become of her, but never once had he dreamed of this. It seemed to him as though the foundations of his life were taken away from him. His brain refused to act. His eyes refused to see. A great blackness fell upon everything. He who was usually so keen witted, so clear sighted, could not grasp the meaning of all he had heard, could not understand the issues. He only knew that he was enveloped in a great black cloud, and that he could not see which way to turn or what to do.

"Oh, my God, forgive me!"

The woman turned to him as he uttered these words. "God forgive you!" she cried. "How can God forgive you? I would cease to believe in Him if He did. What, you! who basely deserted me; you! who married me under a false name; you! who during the years have never taken a step to try and find out what had become of me; you! who have hunted my son as though you were a sleuthhound; you! who have dragged him to prison. God forgive you! Tell me, why did you do it?"

There seemed no logical sequence between her last cry and the words which had preceded it. She was a creature of passion, and seemed incapable of thinking coherently.

"Let me sit down," he said presently. "I think perhaps if I do I may be able to see more clearly. At present I hardly know where I am, and my mind is almost a blank; but, my God, what a blank!"

The woman looked at him grimly. "Yes, you are suffering," she said. "That's what I meant. No, I'm not going to do you any bodily harm. I needn't do that. I needn't do anything to punish you except to tell the truth!"

Judge Bolitho sat down in an arm-chair which, had been placed close to the fire and tried to understand what he had heard. He had no doubt about the truth of everything. It was impossible to fail to recognise the woman who stood before him—the very incarnation of hatred and vengeance. He knew by the look in her eyes of what she felt concerning him. There was no suggestion of tenderness in her face, no thought of pity in her heart. Well, it was no wonder. The secret which he had hidden for so long could no longer remain a secret, and his name, the name of which he had been so proud, would be blackened before all the world! How long he sat in the chair, with bowed head and aching brain, trying to understand, he did not know, but presently he was drawn to look at her. He had no thought of denying what he had done. It had never entered his mind. He had made no defence; that did not come within the realm of his calculation. He was simply stunned by what he had heard, by the revelation which had shaken his life to the very foundations. But presently he was led to look at her, to study her features, and as he did so he called to mind the face of the young girl whose heart he had won a quarter of a century before. Yes, she was beautiful still, even although her face was drawn and haggard and the hair which he remembered so well was lustreless. It needed but happiness to bring back all the winsomeness of her girlish days—happiness! Yes, he had loved her, and he had promised to cherish her. He knew he had taken her to wife as truly as if their marriage had been attended by all the pomp and ceremony which might attend the marriage of a king. She had come to him trustful and innocent, and he—he—— No, he did not attempt to deny it; he would not. What the future had in store for him he did not know, he did not care. But that was not the great thing that oppressed him, that crushed his power of thinking, that made the heavens black with the thunder of the clouds of God. It was that Paul Stepaside was his son! He had always admired him, even while he was angry with him; and he was his

son! That very day he had sat in judgment upon him—that very day even he had helped to forge a chain which would bind him to the scaffold—and he was his son! Presently he spoke aloud, and his voice was almost natural again.

"And so you have lived at Brunford," he said, "and kept house for him? I've heard it is a beautiful home."

"Ay, my boy always loved me—always!"

"And, of course, you hate me, Jean?"

"How can I do otherwise?" she asked. "Nay, that word is too weak to express what I feel towards you! How can it be otherwise?"

"I quite understand," said Judge Bolitho.

"Are you going to make no defence?" said the woman. "Are you going to bring up some little tale to excuse yourself? Are you going to try and manufacture a few lies?"

"No," he replied. "None of these things. I can't think to-night, Jean. You must think my conduct very strange. I simply can't think! It will be all real to me in a few hours. You know what these Manchester fogs are, don't you? You know that sometimes you get lost in them. You cannot recognise the street in which you were born and reared. Everything is blotted out. Then presently, when the fog has rolled away—everything becomes clear. Perhaps that is what it will be with me by and by, but now I simply cannot think. I do not blame you in the slightest degree. It's just that you should hate me! It's just that I should suffer! Is there nothing more you wish to say to me?"

"Not now," said the woman.

"I do not ask you to forgive me; you cannot do that. It's not to be expected."

"But what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I do not know. I cannot tell yet. When my mind gets clear I shall understand. But I seem to be falling and falling and falling into a bottomless abyss just now."

"You don't expect me to keep quiet?"

"I expect nothing."

"You do not ask me to be merciful to you?"

"I do not ask anything. I've no right to expect anything or to ask anything. I think I will leave you now—that is, unless I can do anything for you. You do not need money, do you?"

He did not know what he was saying. His bewildered brain was expressing itself in an inconsequent sort of way. He was just a creature of impulse, and that was all.

"Money!" snarled the woman. "Money! when my son is lying in a prison cell waiting for the hangman!"

"Yes," he said, and his voice seemed as the voice of one far away. "In a prison cell, my son! my son! It is right that I should suffer, but surely he ought not to suffer!"

He rose to his feet and walked unsteadily towards the door.

"May I go now? You know where I am staying. If I can be of any service to you, let me know."

"And that's all? You have nothing more to say?"

"What can there be more?" he said. "You can do what you will; I will deny nothing."

"But what are you going to do?" she asked again.

"Do? What is there to do? I cannot tell; I am just in the dark, Jean, but perhaps a light will come presently." And then, without another word, he found his way along the narrow passage into the dark, forbidding street.

CHAPTER XXI

TRAVAIL

For more than an hour Judge Bolitho tramped the streets of Manchester, unheeding whither he went and as little knowing. He was vainly trying to understand what he had heard, trying to bring some order out of the chaos of his thoughts and feelings. Everything was confused, bewildering. He was like a man in a dream. The experiences through which he had passed refused to shape themselves definitely. A mist hung before the eyes of his mind, and yet he knew it was no dream. It was all real, terribly real, and presently everything would stand out before him with a ghastly clearness. Even now one thing was plain enough, one fact impressed itself upon the tablets of his brain—Paul Stepaside was his son. The interview he had had with the woman he deceived was in the background; even although past memories had been roused and the deeds of his youth had been brought before him with awful clearness, they were as nothing compared with this fact of facts. He did not know he had a son; he never dreamt of such a thing. During the long years which had elapsed since he parted with Jean at the lonely inn near the Scottish border he had often wondered what had become of her, wondered, too, whether those past days would ever be resurrected; but the thought that he had a son had never occurred to him. And now the knowledge overwhelmed everything else.

Little by little things shaped themselves in his mind. He saw them as others would see them. The events of the past few years, since he had first met Paul, began to stand out with clearness. He remembered his own impressions on the day when Paul was first brought before him, accused of rioting and of inciting others to deeds of violence. He remembered, too, that he had a kind of pleasure in obtaining a hard sentence for him. He recalled the fact that both Mr. Wilson and his son Ned had spoken of him as an evil-dispositioned fellow, who deserved the utmost penalty of the law, and he had fallen in with their ideas, and had taken a kind of grim pleasure in doing so. It was a strange business altogether. For the moment he seemed to be a kind of third party considering a curious phenomenon. He seemed to have no direct connection with it at all. But as he remembered after events, when he called to mind the fact that he fought Paul at the election and failed to condemn those who made use of slanderous gossip, then he was more than a spectator. He realised all too vividly against whom he had been fighting. And it had come to this: this man whom he had always disliked, and against whom there seemed to be always a feeling of antagonism, was revealed to him as his own son! His treatment of Jean, bad though it was, took a second place; indeed, at that time he troubled very little about it. He felt as though he could deal with it later on. Everything was centred upon the situation, which was summed up in a few words: He had a son, his son was accused of murder, and he was the judge!

Presently he found himself in Oxford Road. He did not know how he had come there. He had no recollection of passing through the streets which led him there, but as he noticed the gables of Owens College he realised where he was. He remembered some time before being an honoured visitor at this centre of education. The principal of the college had sought to do him honour. The professors made much of him. He was strangely interested in the fact. Why should it be? Owens College was nothing to him. It was simply the centre of one of the newer universities. Why, then, did it interest him? Then he remembered that Paul had been a student there. He had travelled all the way from Brunford so that he might attend certain classes—and Paul was his son!

Always this! Always this! In whichever direction his mind travelled, it always came back to this point—Paul Stepaside was his son!

Slowly he trudged back towards the city again. Presently he found himself outside Strangeways Gaol. He looked at the grim, forbidding-looking building. He thought of the creatures who lay there, some awaiting trial, others suffering the penalty of their misdoings. During the very assizes which he was now attending he had committed several to suffer there; but it was not of them he thought. What were they?—merely the off-scourings of Lancashire life. The only one who mattered was his own son, and he lay there in a dark cell, waiting for the morrow. He did not ask himself whether he was innocent or guilty. At that moment it did not seem of importance. Paul was his son! He, Judge Bolitho, was his father. He, who had never realised that he had a son, suddenly woke up to the fact that his son lay there in Strangeways Gaol, while he, his father, was the judge.

If he could only go to him, talk with him, it might help him to clear his mind, help him to understand. But he could not do that. He had been too long a servant of the law to so far transgress against the most elementary usages of the law. No judge was allowed to see a prisoner alone while his case was being tried. But if he could—if he could!

He called to mind Paul's face as he had seen it through the day. Even when he sat on the Bench he remembered being struck by it. It was so calm, so proud, so unyielding. He had felt angry that this man, accused of murder, had seemed to treat his accusers, as well as his judge and counsel, with a kind of contempt. Now he felt almost proud of him. Paul Stepaside was no ordinary man. And he was his son!

Again he looked at the gloomy, grim pile. Of what was his boy thinking? He lay in a black prison cell, with the shadow of death hanging over him. What were his feelings? During his career Judge Bolitho had been brought into contact with some of the darkest characters in the land. He knew something of what men suffered for their crimes. And at that moment he realised what Paul was suffering.

"Oh, if I could only go to him!" he repeated to himself—"if I only could!"

He did not know why it was, but he felt a change coming over him. He realised that he had a wondrous interest in this man whom he pictured lying in Strangeways Gaol. He knew that the anger and scorn which he had felt for him were passing away. A kinder feeling was coming into his heart. It

seemed as though old bitternesses were being removed, and he began to long with a great longing to do something. The young girl whom he had met as a boy, and who was Paul's mother, was for the moment forgotten. That stormy interview did not possess his mind at all, only in so far as she had revealed to him the relationship between him and the prisoner. Then, suddenly, it seemed to him as though the barriers around his heart were broken down. He loved, as he never realised that he could love, the prisoner who lay waiting for the next day's trial. He wanted to go to him with words of comfort. He wanted to kneel before him and beseech his forgiveness. He wanted to tell him that all the strength of his being were given to him. It seemed to him as though he had become a new man, capable of new feelings, realising new emotions. His knowledge had swallowed up everything else. He no longer regarded the prisoner as a case, or even as one with whom he had had associations in the past. He was everything to him—his son, his only son!

But he could not go to him. Even the warders would not allow him. They knew their duty too well for that. He was the judge and Paul was the prisoner. But, oh! how his heart went out to him! How he longed to go to him!

"I wonder what he would say to me if I went to him, supposing I defied all law and all usage?" he asked himself. "Supposing I found my way into his cell, what would he say on seeing me? What would he do?"

And then into Judge Bolitho's heart came a great, haunting fear. He knew that his son must hate him, even as Jean hated him. Paul had heard her side of the story. He knew only of his mother's wrongs, her years of loneliness, the unworthy betrayal! The punishment seemed almost too hard for him to bear. Whatever Paul had suffered, whatever his mother had suffered, Judge Bolitho was sure that neither of them suffered as he did at that moment.

Slowly his mind asserted itself more and more. His vigorous intellect, strengthened by long years of training, caused him to grasp the whole situation more and more clearly. He began to take a practical view of everything, and to form plans as to what must be done in the future. And even as he did so the grimness of the tragedy faced him. Throughout the day he knew that he had, to a large extent, prejudged Paul's case. His own inherent dislike of the man had caused him to feel sure he was guilty. Of course there were difficulties, and of course a clever counsel would mercilessly riddle the evidence which had been adduced. Nevertheless, he had felt convinced that the jury would find him guilty. There was a perfect chain of circumstantial evidence, and he, with his long experience, knew what juries were. They could only judge according to evidence. He went over the points one by one—the years of enmity between Paul and the murdered man; the threats he had made; the injuries which the murdered man had persistently done to the accused; the knife which was known to belong to Paul, and which could only have been in his possession; the quarrel on the eve of the murder; the fact that Paul had left his own house at midnight and had not returned till just before dawn; Wilson found not far from his own house with Paul's knife in his heart; and the evidence which would be surely adduced that Paul had been seen not far from Howden Clough that same morning, acting in a most strange and distracted manner. Added to this was the fact that Wilson was respected in the town; that he was not known to have an enemy in the world but Paul. No, no! Unless Paul could bring evidence of the strongest nature, the jury would find him guilty.

Then the terror of it seized him. His own son would be hanged!

He lifted up his hands to heaven like a man distraught.

"Great God, forgive me and help me!" he cried. But it seemed to him even then as though his prayer were a mockery, as though the black, cloud-laden sky were filled with doom.

Almost mechanically he turned his face towards his hotel.

"I must think this out," he said to himself. "Besides—— Oh, my son! My son!"

He had not walked far towards his hotel when he suddenly stopped in the middle of the pavement. His intellect, which had wakened from its torpor, awakened something else. He began to realise his own share in this tragedy. It was not Paul who was guilty of murder at all—it was he, the judge. If long years before he had done his duty, if he had not listened to the voice of self interest, if he had been true to the pleadings of his own heart and openly confessed to having married the girl whose love he had won, then Paul would have grown up honoured, and this deed would never have been committed. He, he, Judge Bolitho, was guilty. But he could do nothing; how could he?

A few minutes later he found himself back at the entrance to the hotel, and the porter saluted him respectfully. Judge Bolitho had often spoken to this man in a friendly sort of way, and the man was proud of his notice.

"A dark, dreary night, my lord?"

"Yes; a dark, dreary night," repeated the judge.

He found his way to the suite of rooms which he had engaged, and as he divested himself of the heavy ulster he had worn he planned a kind of programme for the night. He had no thought of going to bed. During his early days at the Bar, whenever a complicated case presented itself to him, he had always written out a kind of resume, or synopsis of the whole situation, so as to have everything clear before his mind. After that he had been able to classify and to arrange with precision and accuracy. He

made up his mind to do this now. But on entering the room where he intended to work he was startled to find that his daughter Mary was awaiting him.

"Not in bed, Mary?" he said. "It's very late!"

"No, father. I've been waiting for you."

"Why?" he asked; and there was something almost suspicious in his voice. He had a kind of feeling that his daughter knew something of where he had been that night.

"I could not go to bed," said the girl.

"But why, my child? By the way, did you go to the Gordons? I was glad when I heard that they had asked you, because I had to attend a dinner, and I did not like the idea of your being alone."

"No; I did not go to the Gordons'," she replied.

"What have you been doing, then?"

"I have been sitting alone all the evening, part of the time in my bedroom, part of it here."

"What have you been doing?"

"Thinking. Father, I was at the trial to-day."

"I am very sorry," he replied. "Such places are not for you."

"Why? There was no one so interested as I."

"Of course you are naturally interested in the murder of Ned Wilson," he replied. "All the same, it is unhealthy and morbid, this desire to be present at murder trials. But good-night, Mary. I want to be alone. I have a great deal to do."

"Not yet, father," she said. "I want to talk with you about this trial. Of course you do not believe him guilty?"

"Why not?"

Somehow the presence of his daughter had made him cool and collected again, and he had a kind of instinctive feeling that she must be kept in the dark concerning what had happened. He was so far able to control himself, too, that he spoke to her quite naturally.

"You do not believe him guilty, father?" she repeated.

"Don't you?" And there was something eager in his voice as he uttered the words.

"Why, father, how could he be? It is madness to suppose such a thing!"

"I cannot discuss it with you," he said; and his voice was almost harsh. "Go to bed, my child. Good-night."

She looked at him searchingly, and for the first time in her life she felt almost afraid of him. His face was drawn and haggard, and in his eyes was a look she never saw before.

"You do not believe him guilty, do you?"

"My God, I don't know," he replied hoarsely. "I would give—I would give——" And then he ceased speaking.

"I tell you he's innocent," replied the girl. "And I am going to——"

But Judge Bolitho did not hear her. "Go to bed—go to bed!" he said; and taking her by the arm he led her from the room, and, closing the door, turned the key. A moment later he had unlocked the door and called her back.

"What is that you said about—about something you were going to do?" he asked.

"Surely, father, you do not believe him guilty?" was her reply. "I know that the evidence is black against him; but he could not do it! He could not do it!"

As the judge looked at his daughter's face, a ray of hope shone into his heart. If the trial had impressed her in this way, might not the jury also be led to doubt the evidence given? He knew that many men had been hanged on circumstantial evidence, but it might be that they would refuse to accept the evidence in this case as sufficient.

"You see," persisted the girl, and he noticed that her lace was full of anguish, that her eyes shone with an unnatural light—"he could not do it, father."

"Do you mean to say that you regard the evidence as insufficient?"

It was utterly unlike him to talk with her about any trial in which he was engaged. Such things, he had always maintained, were not for women. They had neither the training nor the acumen to give an opinion worth considering. But now he caught at the girl's words like a drowning man might catch at a straw.

"Oh, I know the evidence is terrible enough," she replied. "But that doesn't convince me a bit. Father, you cannot allow them to hang him."

He stood still looking at her steadily, and as he did so the horror of the whole situation seized him more terribly than ever. He knew what she did not know. His mind was filled with thoughts of which she was in utter ignorance.

"I can do nothing, my child," he said, "nothing! It is a case for the jury. They have to hear the evidence, and then they pass judgment accordingly. If they condemn him as guilty, I must pass judgment of death, I cannot help myself. I am as helpless as the hangman. If the jury says 'Guilty,' I must pronounce death, and the hangman must do the horrible thing!"

"But, father, don't you see? He has refused to have counsel, and you would have to sum up the evidence. And when you are summing up you could say how inconclusive it was, how terrible it would be to hang a man because a set of circumstances seemed to point in a certain direction."

He was silent for a few seconds. The old numbness had come over his mind again. But he determined to let his daughter know nothing of it.

"You see, Mary," he said, "a judge can do so little, even in the way of summing up, and he must do justice. A judge sits on the bench as a representative of justice, and all he can do is to analyse the evidence. And you know what the evidence is!"

"But he could not do it," said the girl.

"Think," went on the judge, and he spoke more like a machine than a man. "Think of the terrible train of events: the long years of personal enmity between them; the injuries which the prisoner suffered at the hands of the murdered man; the blow struck on the night of the murder; and then—don't you see, Mary? Besides, there is something else, something which has never come to light, something which must never come to light. Wilson had been, as you know, spoken of as your fiancé, and you know the letter I received from Stepaside. He asked that you might be his wife, and he would be jealous of Wilson. Don't you see? Don't you see? Mind you, this must not come to light. It must not be spoken of at all. Nobody guesses that Stepaside cared anything about you. But what am I saying? Drive it out of your mind, Mary—it's of no consequence at all, and you must not consider it for a moment. Oh, my God, the horror of it! Don't you see, Mary? The horror of it!"

Evidently she did not understand altogether what he was thinking. She did not realise that Paul was her half-brother, and therefore could not altogether understand her father's cry of anguish.

For a moment the two stood together, silent, each looking into the other's face and trying to read each other's thoughts.

"Father," she said at length, "I want to tell you something. I have been to see Paul."

"Been to see Paul! Where? When?"

"I went to see him in prison."

Her father seemed to be staggered by the thought.

"You went to see the prisoner?" he said. Even yet he could not call him by the name that was so dear to him. The legal formulae were almost a habit with him.

"I went to see Paul," she said.

"Why?"

"I went to tell him that I loved him," she replied simply. "I knew what he must be suffering, and I know that he loves me, because he told me so. And I wanted to comfort him. I wanted to assure him that all would be well."

The judge started back as though someone had struck him. "You love——"

"Yes," she interrupted. "I told him so, too. I never loved Mr. Wilson, father. You know I didn't. I had not thought that I really cared for anyone until, until——"

"But you love Paul Stepaside?"

The words came from him as if mechanically. Indeed, he had no knowledge that he had uttered them.

"I do," she replied. "And when he's at liberty I shall be his wife."

For a moment the judge rocked to and fro like a drunken man, and then, staggering towards a chair, fell into it, and covered his face with his hands.

"Father!" cried the girl. "Did you not guess?"

"Oh, my God, that I should suffer this too! I never thought, I never dreamt——"

"I know that Paul is shielding someone," went on the girl presently. "He did not do this. He could not do it. He is utterly incapable of it! You see that's why I am so certain. And I'm going to find out who did it. Do you understand, father? That's why I wanted to speak to you to-night. You must give me time. You can make the case last for days, if you want, and I'm going to find out who did it. He's hiding someone."

The judge lifted his head, and in his eyes was a gleam of hope.

"You believe this, Mary?" he said.

"I am sure of it!" she replied. "You can do this to help me, can't you?"

"But, my child, don't you see the utter hopelessness of it? You must not love Paul Stepaside. You dare not! Why—why——"

"But I do dare," replied the girl. "This charge is nothing to me. He is not guilty, and I love him. Don't you see, father? And I'm going to save him. And you must give me time. Make the case drag on, father. Of course, it will be suffering for him, but I cannot help that. When I'm ready I'll let you know."

The judge sat for some minutes as though in deep thought. Confused and bewildered as his mind was by the events of the night, there was something in his daughter's demeanour that gave him hope for the future.

"I must think, Mary," he said. "I've had a trying day, and I do not think I'm very well. I want to be alone a little while, and then—well, perhaps in the morning I shall know better what I can do. Good-night, little girl!"

He rose to his feet as he spoke and kissed her. Then he led her out of the room again.

"Oh, my God!" he said. "My punishment is greater than I can bear. For that one deed of wrong, of cowardice, must I suffer this?"

He went into the dressing-room and bathed his head in cold water. It seemed to him as though his brain were on fire. A few minutes later he felt better. He could think again. He sat in an arm-chair beside the fire and reviewed the past. His mind went back to the time when he, a free-hearted lad, went on a walking tour with some other fellows among the English lakes, and then on to Scotland. He had been full of good resolutions, and his heart was light and free. He had meant no harm when he made Jean Lindsay love him, but he had never dreamt of what would follow. And then, then all the ensuing events passed before his mind in ghastly procession. What must he do?

In spite of everything, Judge Bolitho believed himself to be a religious man. He had identified himself with religious movements, had professed himself a believer in prayer. In one sense he was a man of the world, keen as far as his profession went, eager for his own advancement. But in another he had held fast to the faith of his childhood. He had had a religious training, and while both his father and mother had died when he was young, he had never forgotten their teaching, and had never been able to shake himself free from early associations.

Almost like a man in a dream, he knelt down by the chair and tried to pray. What must he do? Life was a tangle, but he entangled it yet farther himself. He, by his own act, had made everything difficult, terrible, tragic. His conscience was roused within him, and as he prayed he seemed to see, as though in a vision, the road he ought to take.

"No, not that!" he cried. "Not that! Great God, not that! I could not do it! I could not do it!"

He rose from his knees and began to pace the room. His mind was clear enough now, for God had spoken.

"But I cannot do it," he said. "If I do what seems right, I shall bring pain, disgrace on so many. No, I cannot do it! It cannot be right to do right! It cannot!"

And still he paced the room, struggling, fighting, and sometimes offering wild, inarticulate prayers.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

On the morning of the second day of the trial Paul Stepaside woke from a troubled sleep. Throughout the night he had been living again in his dreams the scenes of the trial. They had been confused and bewildered; but one fact dominated everything else: the man who was his judge was his father! When he woke, that was the first thought that appeared clear in his mental horizon. Before he had gone to sleep he realised that he hated his father with a more intense hatred than when his mother had told her story on the Altarnun Moors. No thought of tenderness came into his mind. No feeling of affection entered his heart. It seemed to him as though all the darkness of his life, all the pain he had ever suffered, all the wrongs he had ever endured, were because of the man who, his mother declared, was his father. And he hated him! It was through him he lay in prison. It was through him the shadow of the gallows rested upon him. He realised, too, even although his heart refused to assent to the finding of his brain, that he must no longer love the woman who was dearer to him than his own life. His sister? His heart made mockery of the thought! No man loved a sister as he loved Mary Bolitho. Only a half-sister, it is true, but they were both children of the same father. Oh, the bitter mockery, the terrible irony of it! And this man, who stood for justice, who represented the majesty of the law, who had risen to one of the highest places in the realm of the law, had been in reality a criminal ever since he came to manhood. And this man had made it, as it seemed to him, a sin for him to love the woman who was all the world to him. His sister! His sister! He had some idea that the English law did not forbid a man marrying his own stepsister, but something in his heart revolted against that. And yet, and yet—— But what did it all matter? He lay there in Strangeways Gaol charged with murder. The first day of the trial had gone black against him, and, although he knew no more as to who murdered Ned Wilson than the veriest stranger, he realised that he stood in the most imminent danger. And the man who was really responsible for everything, the man who was at the heart of it all, was the judge! What should he do? If he did what was in his heart, he could make him a byword and a hissing through the whole country; but that, again, meant disgrace for Mary, and he had sworn that she must suffer nothing. The warder brought him his morning meal, which he ate silently. He was thinking what the day would bring forth. He wondered how long the trial would last, and what the jury would say. He could not see his way through the tangle of his life. But as he thought of everything a grim resolve mastered him. He would not die; he simply would not! He would fight to the very last. He would tear the evidence which had been adduced in fragments. He would proclaim his innocence, and not only proclaim it, but prove it. He was sadly handicapped, for whatever else he must do he must see to it that no suspicion would attach to his mother. But without allowing anyone to think of her in such a relation, he would make it impossible for the jury to condemn him.

When breakfast was over, he tramped his little cell, thinking, thinking, considering a score of plans, and discarding them, yet all the time fighting his way towards his course of action.

He laughed as he reflected on the irony of the situation. The judge would not know what he knew, but sitting there in all his stately dignity, arrayed in his robes of office, he would not realise that the man charged with murder was his son. He wondered how he could let him know it, wondered how he could bring his own villainy home to him. He had not one tender thought for his father, not one—only scorn, contempt, hatred was in his heart when he thought of him. And yet he was his own father—father, too, of the woman he loved, the woman whom he had held in his arms and who had expressed her infinite faith in him.

Not long before the hour of the trial the chaplain again paid him a visit. But Paul was in no humour to receive him.

"I am afraid you only waste your time coming to me," he said. "I appreciate the fact that you are a kind-hearted man, but see, I haven't an atom of faith, not an atom. I do not believe in the value of your religion. I am an atheist."

"You believe nothing?" said the chaplain.

"Nothing as far as your profession is concerned," said Paul, "nothing."

"Would nothing convince you?" said the chaplain.

"Nothing," replied Paul grimly. And then he laughed. "I am wrong, though," he added. "Yes, I think one thing would convince me. You remember the story I told you yesterday—or shall we call it an incident, and not a story?"

"I remember. I suppose it had something to do with your own life?"

"You have heard the miserable stories, then?" said Paul.

"I have heard a great many things about you," replied the chaplain.

"Well, then," said Paul. "Let me say this to you: I think this would convince me that there might be something in religion if my father confessed his wrong, publicly confessed it, mind you, and sought to do right; if he proclaimed his ill-deeds before the world, and did all in his power to rectify the wrong he had done. Then I might believe."

"And nothing else would convince you?" said the chaplain.

"Nothing else," said Paul.

"But who is your father? Where is he?"

"Ah," said Paul. "But it's no use thinking of it any more. The whole thing is hopeless, and life is just a great mockery."

The chaplain left him with a sad heart. He was a kind man, and sought to do his duty, and Paul had interested him strangely.

The court that day was, if possible, more crowded than ever. The morning papers had been filled with reports of the previous day's trial. The wildest of rumours had been afloat. Descriptive articles had been written about the young Member of Parliament who was accused of such a terrible crime. His every word had been commented on. His appearance had been discussed. The evidence given had been the subject of thousands of gossiping tongues. And so the court that day was simply thronged with an intense, eager crowd. Moreover, the inwardness of the trial had seized upon the imaginations of the people. It was more real, more vivid to them than it had been the day before. And when Paul entered the dock, accompanied by two policemen, a great silence fell upon the court, while every eye was fixed upon him.

"He looks as hard and proud as ever!"

"Yes, there's not much sign of repentance!"

"I wonder if the trial will close to-day?"

"There's no knowing. I've heard as 'ow several witnesses will be brought into court which was never thought of at the beginning. Will Ashley says as 'ow he saw Paul about half-past five on the morning of the murder not far from Howden Clough. Will says as 'ow there was a look in his eyes like the eyes of a madman."

"But Will never appeared before the coroner's inquest?"

"No; I suppose he wanted to be kept out of it. But he 'appened to tell his missis, and his missis told it to somebody else, who told it to one of the policemen, and that's 'ow it came about."

In another part of the court, not far from the barristers' seats, two ladies discussed Paul. They, too, had been brought there by morbid curiosity aroused by this trial.

"Did you know that Judge Bolitho's daughter was here yesterday?"

"No. Was she?"

"Yes. I watched her face during the trial. It was as pale as death. I wonder how she dared to come."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Oh, you know she was engaged to young Wilson."

"I've heard that was denied."

"Well, anyhow, there's something about it in one of the Brunford papers, and there's no doubt Wilson was in love with her."

"Then no wonder she was pale."

"Mrs. Jackson told me she saw her smile on the prisoner."

"She must have been mistaken. It's terribly interesting, isn't it?"

"I wonder when they will commence. It's five minutes past time."

This was true. Five minutes had passed away since Paul had been led to the dock, and still the trial had not commenced. The reason for this was evident—the judge had not yet appeared. The jurymen were in their places, conversing in low whispers one with another. More than one was anxious and pale. A number of barristers were also present, eager for the commencement of the day's trial. They were wondering what new factor would be at work that day. To most of them it was a case that was deeply interesting, one which they wished to study and which might help them in days to come. Newspaper reporters sat busily writing. Each was trying to vie with the other to produce a sensational description. Presently, as if by magic, a great silence fell upon the court. It was now ten minutes past the time when the trial should commence, and still the judge had not appeared. Each seemed to be wondering what was the matter. The air was tense with excitement. Could anything have happened? What did the judge mean by being late? And still they waited and watched, until at last the silence became almost painful.

Presently a deep sigh rose from the crowded seats. It seemed as if the spectators wanted to give vent to their feelings. A curtain at the back of the hall was drawn aside, and Judge Bolitho, with bowed head and staggering footsteps, found his way to his accustomed seat.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT (*continued*)

The attention of all present, which had been directed towards Paul, was now diverted to the judge. It seemed for the moment as though Paul were no longer the centre of interest, nor indeed did he occupy the chief place in the great drama of life which was played before him. It was no longer Hamlet who held the stage, but the King.

There was little wonder at this. He fell into his chair as if he were unable to support himself, and everyone saw at a glance that something of terrible import must have happened to him. His eyes were bloodshot; his face, usually so healthful looking and florid, was pale and haggard; his cheeks were baggy; and he was bowed down as if by some great calamity. Everyone felt this, although no one spoke. All eyes were riveted upon him; everyone took note of his slightest movement.

For a few seconds he sat with bowed head, apparently looking at the papers before him, but really seeing nothing. He seemed to be pondering what to do, what to say. More than one noticed that his hands trembled. The clerk of the assizes mentioned something to him, but the judge took no notice; the man might not have spoken at all.

At length he seemed to gather himself up as if by a great effort. Twice he essayed to speak, and twice he failed. It might appear as though the power of language were gone.

If the silence had been intense when he had entered the court, it was more than ever so now. People seemed afraid to breathe. The jurymen looked towards him in wonder, and barristers who were *habitués* of courts of law, and who had grown callous even with regard to the most interesting cases, watched him with an eagerness that they had never known before, while the spectators seemed to be afraid to breathe.

And yet nothing had been said. From the casual observer's point of view the case was to recommence in the ordinary way, save that the judge was a few minutes late. But everyone knew something was about to happen. The very air they breathed was tense with emotion.

"Gentlemen," said the judge presently—and it did not seem like his voice at all, it was so hoarse and unnatural—"Gentlemen, I wish to make a statement which is of the utmost importance. I wish to say that I can no longer sit in judgment on this case, and that therefore, to all intents and purposes, the court is dismissed."

No one moved or made a sound, save that the reporters at their desks were busily writing. Their pencils, as they swept over their note-books, made quite a noise, so tense was the silence which prevailed. More than one of these reporters declared afterwards that they did not know what they were writing. They were simply like automata, acting according to custom.

Although the judge had dismissed the court, no one moved. As if by instinct, all felt that there was something more to be said. What had prompted Judge Bolitho to make this statement they did not know, they could not conceive; but they felt rather than thought that something tremendous was at stake. Old, habitual theatre-goers declared to each other in talking about the matter afterwards that no drama they had ever witnessed had ever been so exciting as the scene that day. But nothing had depended upon what was said. The words of the judge were few and simple, but the very place seemed laden with doom.

"In abandoning all associations with this case," went on the judge, and his voice was more natural now, "I wish to make a further statement. Perhaps there seems no sufficient reason why I should do so, nevertheless I must. I can no longer sit in judgment upon the prisoner for the gravest of all reasons ——" Again he stopped. He did not know how to proceed. Perhaps such a thing was almost unprecedented in the history of trials. Up to that moment Paul had been like a man in a dream. On entering the dock and finding that the judge was not present he fell to wondering at the reason of his lateness, and presently could not help being affected by the influences which surrounded him. He, too, felt there was something in the air which, to say the least of it, was not usual. He had come there with his heart full of bitter hatred, with a feeling that the man who was to sit in judgment upon him, even although he were his father, was his enemy. In a vague way he wondered what would happen through the day, wondered whether he should be able to keep his knowledge to himself, wondered whether, at some moment when the judge manifested some particular injustice to him, he might not yield to the passion of the moment and proclaim the relationship. Outwardly he was still cool and collected, although his face was very pale and his eyes burned like coals of fire.

When the judge entered the court he, too, was much moved by his appearance. He saw that he had been suffering terribly, and into his heart came a kind of savage joy. There seemed something like poetical justice in the thought of this man's suffering, and he wondered whether he had in some way learned the truth.

When Judge Bolitho opened his mouth to speak, Paul's heart seemed to stop. So intense was his interest in what he would say that, for the moment, he forgot his own position. The shadow of death was somehow removed from him; that grimness and the horror of the trial had lost their meaning. That

"Gentlemen, I wish to make a statement which is of the utmost importance. I wish to say that I can no longer sit in judgment on this case …"—what did it mean? A thousand wild fancies flashed through his mind. He wondered whether Mary Bolitho had been at work, whether this was the first step in her endeavours to prove him innocent. He did not know how it could be, but, like lightning, his mind and heart flew to her.

He gave a quick glance around the court and turned towards the spot where he had seen her on the previous day. Even then he realised that all attention was turned from him to the judge, realised that everyone waited with breathless interest for the next words that should fall from his lips. But he could not see Mary. Again his eyes swept over the crowded benches which held the spectators, but she was not there. He wondered why. In a sense he was glad. At least she no longer looked upon his ignominy and shame. And yet he felt the loss of her presence. The day before she had cheered him in spite of himself, strengthened him to bear the brunt of the battle; but now he was alone.

Again the judge spoke, and Paul listened to every word that passed his lips. Like the other spectators, he was eager to know what would follow.

"I cannot continue to sit in judgment upon the prisoner," went on the judge; and every word was clearly enunciated. "And my reason for this is all-sufficient—I cannot sit in judgment upon him because I have learnt that he is my own son!"

Paul's heart gave a leap as he heard the words. It seemed to him as though the atmosphere of the court changed as if by magic. There was something electric in it, something that seemed to alter the whole state of affairs and change the current of events. His heart beat with a new hope and burned with a strange joy. He had not yet grasped what it meant. He could not yet read the thoughts that were passing in the judge's mind, but he felt their consequence, felt that, in spite of everything, the sky was becoming brighter.

The effect on the court, as may be imagined, was tremendous. The barristers sat in their seats open-mouthed. Never in all their experience had they witnessed such an event. The jury seemed incapable of moving, but many of the spectators, unable to restrain their emotions, sobbed hysterically.

"I wish to say," went on the judge, "that I have had no communication in any form with the prisoner, neither did he know of what was in my mind as I came here to-day. I have not seen him during the trial except in this court. Realising our relations as judge and prisoner this was impossible. But no sooner did I learn of the relationship which existed between us than I realised the impossibility of my continuing to sit on this case."

For the moment he stopped, as if he had said all that he intended to say. Perhaps he felt that it was not for the jurymen to know, or for that gaping crowd to know the real thoughts that were in his heart. But no one made a movement as if to go. Men and women sat there, hungry to hear more, eager for the continuance of the exciting scene which had aroused them to the very depths of their nature. One man who was there has told me since that he forgot, just as others had forgotten, that Paul Stepaside was being tried for murder. It was rather some great drama of life which was being acted for their benefit, and which held them all spellbound as if by some magician's power. They could not understand the why and the wherefore. Their minds were too bewildered and excited to realise what lay behind it all, but all felt that there was something momentous, tragic.

Presently the judge lifted his head as if to speak again. That he was suffering terribly, and undoubtedly that he was under the influence of mighty emotions all were sure. Many there were who, forgetful of all else, pitied him. But the prevailing feeling was that of wonder and eager expectation of what might come next.

"I need not say," went on the judge, "that the proceedings of yesterday are nullified by my action to-day. I need not say that another of his Majesty's judges will have to sit in my place, that a new jury will have to be sworn, and the case will have to be re-tried from the beginning. But with that I have nothing to do, and for the moment, although it is not in accordance with any law or usage, I want to say what is in my heart. It was only late last night that I learnt of the relationship between the man who is known as Paul Stepaside and myself, and therefore I could not make known my intentions before; but this I do wish to say, here, in the presence of all who have gathered together to witness this trial—Paul Stepaside is my lawful son, and, unknowingly, I have sinned against him grievously and greatly. His mother is my lawful wife—how and where she became so it is not for me to tell you or for you to know—but such is the truth. Concerning the fact itself, however, I wish it to be made known—as it will be made known—that his mother is my lawful wife, and that he is my lawful son, and that I do here and now confess the wrong which I have done to him, even although that wrong was to me largely unknown. In a sense there is no need that I should make this explanation in this way; but I do it because my conscience compels me to do so and because I wish here and now to ask my son's forgiveness."

He still spoke in the same slow, measured tones, his voice somewhat husky, but every word reaching the ears of all present. And as he spoke, Paul seemed to feel as though the foundations of the world were slipping away from under his feet. His thoughts of revenge were being scattered to the winds. He had never dreamt of this; never in the wildest of his imaginings had he thought Judge Bolitho would have made such a confession. Even now he could not understand it, much less realise it; but he felt it to be the most tragic moment of his life. He felt as if the world could never be the same to him again. And yet he hated the judge. Why it was he could not tell; but even as he spoke, even as he made

this most momentous confession, his heart steeled against his father. In spite of his humility, in spite of his suffering, in spite of what it must have cost him to have spoken the words to which he had just listened, he still hated him. The man had wrecked his mother's life, robbed her of her girlhood, sent her away into loneliness and sorrow, allowed her to bear her disgrace in solitude. He had robbed him also of his boyhood, of his name. He had ever been his enemy. From the first time they had met he had sought to crush him; and he wondered, even now, with a mad wonder, whether there were not some kind of ulterior motive prompting him to say these things.

The effect, however, upon the spectators, was entirely different. Although his words seemed commonplace enough, there was something pathetic in them. All present realised something of the inwardness of that to which they had just been listening. Although it was no distinct thought in their minds, all realised what it must have cost him to make such a confession. When he said that he had made it in order to ask his son's forgiveness, a great sobbing sigh swept like a wave over the court.

Still the judge spoke on in the same slow, measured tones, although all felt that he was a man in agony.

"Of the rights and wrongs of this trial," he went on, "it is for me to say nothing. Whether I believe Paul Stepaside, my son, to be guilty of the murder of the late Edward Wilson I must not say. It will be for another to listen to the evidence. It will be for another to advise the jury concerning their verdict. I am simply the judge who has been, and therefore can say nothing except this—that if Paul Stepaside is guilty of the murder of Edward Wilson, I am not innocent. If he struck him the blow which has been described, a measure of the guilt belongs to me. If I had done my duty to him as a child, as a youth, and as a young man, he would, in all probability, not have been here. And therefore, although technically and legally I know nothing of the murder, if he is guilty I must share in his guilt. This I say that the truth may be understood and realised."

Again he ceased speaking. It seemed now as if he had said all he intended to say—much more than any of the spectators thought a man in his position could have said; but still they sat in silence, except for an occasional sob, or the hoarse breathing of some woman who could not control her excitement. The pencils of the reporters were still. They were waiting eagerly for the next word that should fall from the judge's lips should he speak further. They realised by now the tremendous possibilities of the case. No murder trial on record ever gave such an opportunity for a descriptive journalist as this, and they knew what effect their report would have upon the excited public.

The judge rose to his feet.

"That is all I think I need say," he said.

He turned as if to leave the court, then paused, and his eyes moved towards his son. For a moment the two men stood looking at each other. Paul, pale, erect, tense, almost overwhelmed by what he had heard, yet strong in his mastery over himself and wondering what it all might mean; the judge bowed, haggard, with bloodshot eyes and trembling limbs. For several seconds they stood looking at each other, while the crowd, forgetful of where they were, sat watching, waiting, listening.

"Paul, my son, can you forgive me!" said the judge.

But Paul made no sign, and then Judge Bolitho, like a man who had received his death warrant, staggered out of the court.

Immediately the whole place was in confusion. So affected was everyone by what had taken place that they even forgot the presence of the prisoner. Each talked excitedly with his neighbour concerning the revelation which had been made. No attempt at keeping order was made. Ushers, barristers, jurymen, spectators were all eagerly discussing what they had heard.

"Never heerd owt like it!" said one weaver to another. He had come all the way from Brunford that morning to be present at the trial. "They can never hang him after this!"

"Nay," said the other. "But, after all, it's got nowt to do with th' murder. Either Paul killed him or he didn't; and if he killed him he'll be hanged for it."

"I'm noan so sure," was the reply. "Why, the king would interfere. I've heerd as 'ow Judge Bolitho is very friendly with his Majesty, and he would never let his son get hanged."

"Nay, king or no king, people'll cry out for justice. If Paul Stepaside killed Ned Wilson, no matter if he is the son of a thousand Judge Bolithos, he'll swing."

"But did'st ever hear owt like it? I wouldn't have missed it for a month's wage. Just think on it! The judge gets up and says as 'ow he canna go ony further 'cause the murderer is his son!"

"I never liked th' chap before," was the response, "but I canna 'elp liking him now, a bit 't ony rate. It must have cost him summat to get up in t' court like that."

"But just think on 't!" said the other. "If what he says is true, the woman as we have known as Mrs. Stepaside is Judge Bolitho's wife! Weel then, canst a' see? Judge Bolitho must be a bigamist. His daughter is in the town at this very time, and he must have married her mother while Paul's mother was alive. I tell thee, there'll be rare doings."

"Ay," replied the other; "but I expect they'll patch it up. These lawyer chaps can do onything. I heerd one on 'em say once that all law was a matter of interpretation, and you may be sure that they'll interpret it to suit theirsen."

"Nay; I'm noan so sure," replied the other. "But it's a rare business. By goom! All t' preachers i' Lancashire will have this affair for a text!"

In another part of the court the two ladies who had been discussing Paul on the previous day were now discussing his father.

"Did you ever dream of such a thing?"

"Well," was the reply. "When I come to think of it, there is a resemblance between them."

"How can you say that? The prisoner is tall, dark; he has black hair and black eyes, while Judge Bolitho is florid and has light hair."

"No; but their features are the same. Do you know, after all, there's something in blood. No one can help seeing that Stepaside is a gentleman."

"Why, I thought you said before that his common blood showed itself."

"My dear, you misunderstood me. See the way he has risen in the world. I am told that Judge Bolitho comes from one of the oldest families in the West of England, and family tells, my dear, family tells!"

"But just think of it! Would you have believed that a proud man like Judge Bolitho would have stood up and made such a revelation to a gaping crowd like this?"

"Conscience, my dear, conscience!"

"Yes; but what about his conscience during the years? I tell you we've not seen the end of this business yet. Can't you see the complications?"

"Do you know, I've often been tempted to invite Stepaside to my house. I wish I had now; he must be an interesting man."

"They'll never hang him after this. Do you think so?"

"I don't know. If these things had come to light a few days ago, before the trial commenced, they might have hushed it up; but I don't see how they can now."

"But wasn't it tremendously exciting. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I felt a shiver down my back all the time the judge was speaking. What a splendid scene for a play!"

And so they continued talking. The real deep issues of the case were as nothing. To them it was an event which interested them beyond words. It fed their love for excitement, and promised to be a subject of conversation for many days to come.

Meanwhile the barristers had gathered together in excited groups. They discussed the matter in an entirely different way. To them the case was everything, and they fastened upon all the legal difficulties which might arise. More than one wondered, too, whether out of such a maelstrom of events work would not be bound to fall to them.

"Who will be appointed judge, I wonder?" said one.

"Oh, Branscombe, I expect."

"I wonder whether Stepaside had some inkling of the truth. Perhaps that was the reason he refused to engage counsel."

"Do you think Stepaside knew all the time?"

"There's no knowing; he's such a secretive fellow. Did you notice the expression on his face all day yesterday when he looked at the judge? And this morning I couldn't help noticing it. I tell you, Stepaside knew a great deal more than we imagined, and he's had something up his sleeve the whole time. There'll be an interesting *dénouement* to all this."

"Will he be hanged, think you?"

"Ask me another! As far as circumstantial evidence goes, the man's dead already, unless he has something to fire forth at the last."

"I see now," said another. "That was the reason Bolitho was so excited last night. Don't you remember how he trembled when that note was brought to him, and how he left the room like a man in a dream? That's it. There was some hint of this in the letter he received. Then he went out and made certain."

"But how could he do that?"

"Who knows? The fact remains that he didn't know till last night. He said as much just now. Anyone can see he didn't have a wink of sleep last night."

"Yes, that was plain enough. He must have suffered the torments of the damned!"

"All the same, it was a plucky thing to do! Would you have done it if you had been in his place?"

"A man doesn't know what he would do under such circumstances. All the same, we can't help admiring him. You see, Bolitho always had a strain of religion in him, and although he was as hard as nails in many respects, he possessed the remains of an old conscience."

Slowly the court emptied itself, and the people found their way into the street, still eagerly discussing every phase of the question, still asking and answering questions.

"I tell thee what," a rough collier was heard to say. "God Almighty's been to work, and when God Almighty gets to work wonderful things happen! When I get back to Brunford I'm going to our minister straight away and ask him to call a meeting for prayer. We mun pray, I tell you. We mun!"

During this time Paul was led back to his cell. The warders would far rather have remained in the court and talked the matter over with the others, but still the influence of discipline was upon them, and they had to do their duty. As a consequence, Paul was soon away from the noise of the excited crowd, and a few minutes later was alone in his cell. As may be imagined, if the scene that morning had caused such excitement among the spectators, it had aroused his nature to the very depths. Everything was so unexpected, so unthought of. In all his calculations Paul had never thought of this. He had wondered in what way Judge Bolitho, whenever the truth became known to him, would meet the difficulties which arose, but he had never dreamt he would stand up in a crowded court like that and make such a confession. Paul knew him to be a proud man, knew, too, that he was sensitive to the least approach of shame, knew that he valued the name he owned—one of the oldest in England. One part of the judge's speech remained in his memory. He repeated the words over again and again to himself as if trying to understand their inwardness: "In a sense there is no need that I should make this explanation in this way, but I do it because my conscience binds me to do so and because I wish, here and now, to ask my son's forgiveness."

In spite of himself he was moved. He realised what it must have cost the judge to utter such words; realised, too, the battle which he had fought during the night, before he had decided to make such a statement. "Because I wish, here and now, to ask my son's forgiveness."

Even yet he hated his father, and fought against the kinder feelings which surged up in his heart. He could not forget the dastardly deed which the man had committed before he was born: the base betrayal, the almost baser desertion, and those long years when his mother suffered in silence and solitude. For himself he did not care so much, but his mother he loved with all the strength of his nature. And a few lachrymose words could not atone for the misery of a lifetime. Still, they had their effect upon him. He called to mind, too, the look in the judge's eyes as he left the court, the simple words he had spoken: "Paul, my son, can you forgive me?"

He wanted to forgive him. A thousand forces which he could not understand seemed to be pleading with him. All the same, his heart remained adamant. The shadow of the gallows was still upon him, the weary weeks he had been lying in a dark cell, covered with ignominy and shame. His portrait had appeared in almost every scurrilous rag in the country. His name and history had been debated among those who always fastened upon every foul bit of garbage they could find. And in a way Paul traced everything to this man, Judge Bolitho; why, he did not know, but he could not help it.

Still, the happenings of that morning impressed him. They seemed to change his intellectual and spiritual whereabouts. They broke the hard crust of his nature. They appealed to him in a way which he thought impossible, and he wondered with a great wonder.

Everything was bewildering, staggering! Where was his mother? he wondered, and, more than all, where was Mary? The thought of the relationship between them almost drove him mad. He could not bear to think that he and Mary were children of the same father. It outraged something in his heart and mocked the dreams which he still dared to dream. Somehow, the battle for his own life which he had determined to fight more passionately than ever had sunk in the background now. It was not the only issue at stake. Other forces were liberated, other interests overwhelmed him.

Still, as he sat there, brooding and planning and dreaming, one thing became clear to his mind and heart—he would not die! He would not betray his mother, but he would fight for his own life. He was a prisoner, and he had refused, and would still refuse, to engage counsel to defend him or lawyers to gather evidence. He knew too well the danger of that. No, no, whatever happened to him, no breath of suspicion should fall upon his mother; but he would fight for his own life step by step, inch by inch. He would tear the circumstantial evidence to pieces. He would convince the jury that it was impossible to condemn him. Whatever else must be done, that must be done—he owed it to Mary.

Directly he thought of her his heart grew warm and tender. She believed in him. She had declared her faith in his innocence in spite of circumstantial evidence. She had laughed at it; she would laugh at it; and he would prove himself worthy of her faith. That at length became the dominant thought in his mind, the great motive power of his life.

Outside, the city of Manchester was stirred to its depths. Like lightning the news had passed from

one lip to another of what had taken place that morning, while the reporters rushed to their various offices to transcribe their notes and to prepare copy for the papers. In an almost incredibly quick time the evening newspapers appeared. Newsboys were rushing through the streets shouting excitedly, and there was a mad scramble among the people to buy. The printing presses could not turn them out fast enough; the machinery was insufficient to meet the demands of the excited crowd. "Great murder trial!" shouted the boys. "Wonderful revelations!" "Judge Bolitho confesses that he is the prisoner's father!" "Tremendous excitement in court! Many women fainted!" and so on and so on. Factories became emptied as if by magic. At every corner crowds gathered. Business was at a standstill. The members of the Manchester Exchange had forgotten to think of the rise or fall of cotton. Everything was swallowed up in the news of the day.

Every telegraph office, too, was filled with eager people, and the means of communication from one part of the country to another was taxed to its utmost. Some few months before the Prime Minister of the country had come to Manchester to speak on a question which was exciting not only England but the whole Empire, but even then the telegraph wires had never been so congested with news as on that morning. In a little over an hour after the judge had left the court the London papers were full of it. Stirring headlines were on the placards of all the evening papers, and people bought them with almost the same avidity as they had bought them in Manchester. In a sense there seemed no reason why so much interest should have been aroused, but in another there was. Such a confession on the part of the judge was almost unprecedented, and as both Judge Bolitho and Paul Stepaside were so largely in the public eye, their sayings and doings seemed of the utmost importance. There was something romantic in it, too. A father sitting in judgment upon his own son, and not knowing until a few hours before that he was his son!

But Judge Bolitho was unconscious of all this. He never thought of it. When he left the court that morning he retired for a few minutes into the judge's room; but he could not remain there—he was too excited, too overwhelmed. He must do something. For now that he had made his confession the whole case appeared to him in a different way from what it had appeared to the public. They, in their wonder at the revelation of the facts which Judge Bolitho had made known, had almost ceased to think of the possible doom of the prisoner. But that became of supreme importance to him. In a way which no man can explain, his heart had gone out to his son. Nature had asserted itself. Years had become as nothing, past events seemed to lose their force, in the thought that Paul Stepaside was his son; and he feared for his future, he was in danger of his life. When the new judge was appointed, whoever it might be, he knew that he would consider this case impartially on the evidence given. Young Edward Wilson was murdered, there could be no doubt about that, and all the evidence pointed to Paul Stepaside.

When he reached the street he got into a cab, and was driven to his hotel, and there he thought out the whole case again. On the previous night, during the long hours when he was sleepless, it was a difficult battle he had to fight. It was then for him to make known his son to the world. Perhaps it had been a quixotic, almost a mad thing to do; but, although the suffering it entailed was horrible, he could not help doing it. He had fought a long battle over what he conceived to be his duty, and duty had won. Now that was over, and he had done his duty, the other problem faced him: how could he save his son? But again his mind refused to work. Nothing seemed clear and definite to him. The great feeling in his heart was hunger for his boy. He wanted to be by his side—nay, he wanted to kneel at his feet, to plead with him, to beg for his love.

He had not been long in his room before a look of determination came into his eyes. He had yielded to the overmastering feeling in his heart, and a few minutes later he was in the street again, on his way to Strangeways Gaol.

CHAPTER XXIV

FATHER AND SON

Daylight was now dying, although it was only a little after three o'clock. The sky was murky and smoke-laden, the air was utterly still. All round the centre of the city the people still discussed the events of the morning. Outside the Town Hall, in the Square, outside the Hospital, all down Market Street, along Corporation Street, the people stood in excited groups; and although the intense feeling which had been aroused in the morning had somewhat subsided, there was only one subject which was of paramount interest. Strange as it may seem, however, the district round Strangeways Gaol was comparatively deserted. The Assize Courts were no longer the centre of interest, even although they were the source from which everything emanated.

By this time Paul Stepaside had become almost in a state of torpor. He was suffering a reaction from the intense feeling which had possessed him that morning. When he had at first returned to his cell his mind was intensely alive, and a thousand plans were flashing through his brain, a thousand questions occurred to him which demanded an answer. Now, however, that numb, dull feeling which ever follows such experiences possessed him. After all, what mattered? Mary Bolitho could never be his wife, and if Fate had decided upon his death, die he must. Indeed, he did not seem to care very much. It

seemed as if, for the time being, his nature had become almost paralysed. Of course, the experiences through which he was passing were only transitory. Presently his strength would assert itself again, and everything would become vivid and vital. And so he lay in a semi-comatose condition on the comfortless couch which had been provided for him, and the realities of the situation seemed far away. He had been lying thus for perhaps an hour, and was on the point of falling asleep, when there were footsteps in the corridor outside, and the door of his cell opened.

At first he felt almost annoyed at the intrusion. Why could they not let him rest? After all, everything was hopeless, and he did not very much care. Still, he turned his eyes towards the door, and when he saw that it was Judge Bolitho who entered, he started to his feet. His nerves grew tense again, and his mind active. The judge waited while the door was closed, and then turned to Paul. The older man looked around the little room like one trying to take in the situation, noted the light of the dying day as it penetrated the prison window, let his eyes rest upon the little couch where Paul had been lying, and made a survey of the items of the room as though it were his business to care for the prisoner's comfort.

Neither of them spoke for some seconds. Paul was silent because, in spite of everything, there seemed an insurmountable barrier between him and the man who had come to visit him; the judge, because he almost feared the son whom he had come to see.

Presently their eyes fastened upon each other's faces, and each scrutinised every feature as if trying to read the other's mind. It was Paul who spoke first.

"Why have you come here?" he asked.

"Surely you can guess?" was the reply. "I could not stay away. There was but one place to which I could go."

"You must know that I have nothing to say to you, even as you have nothing to say to me."

"You are wrong," replied the judge. "I have a great deal to say to you. How can it be otherwise? Have you no pity, my boy?"

Paul looked at him angrily. "Pity!" he replied, and there was a world of scorn in his voice.

The judge stood with bowed head. "Yes, I understand," and he spoke almost in a whisper. "I understand, and I deserve your scorn. I deserve it a thousand times over. But do not think I have not suffered, Paul."

Paul gave an impatient shrug and took two steps across his little cell.

"I am afraid I cannot give you a welcome befitting your lordship's position," he said. "As you will see, my *ménage* does not suggest very great luxury, and I think my servants are in a state of revolution. But will you not be seated?"

"You see," he went on, "when a man is being tried for murder, even although the English law says that every man must be regarded as innocent until he has been proved to be guilty, it does not provide any luxuries!"

"Paul, my boy, do you not know? Do you not understand?" said the judge. "Yes, I have been guilty of all those things of which you are thinking. I deserve all the contempt and all the anger you feel for me, but I come to you as a suppliant."

"For what?"

"For your forgiveness, your love. I am no longer your judge. If I were I could not be here. That's over now. Another will take my place. If I can do anything to atone, my boy, I will do it, if you will let me know what it is. Do you not see? Do you not understand?"

There was a world of pleading in his voice, while in his tired eyes was a look of yearning and longing that Paul could not understand.

"If you will tell me what you wish," said the younger man, "if you will explain to me your desires, perhaps—although, as you see, I am so curiously situated—I will do what I can to meet your wishes."

His voice was still hard, and there was no look in his eyes which suggested yielding or pity.

"I deserve nothing from you," replied the judge. "How can I? And yet I could not help coming. After all, you are my son!"

"How did you learn it?" asked Paul.

"Last night I went to see your mother," he replied. "She is staying at a little house not far from here. I received a letter asking me to go to a certain number in Dixon Street. It was couched in such language that I could not refuse. I went there, and I saw your mother. I had thought she was dead—at least, I had no reason to believe her alive. There I learnt everything. Since then there's been only one thought in my mind, only one longing in my heart——"

"And that?" said Paul.

"The one thought in my mind," said the judge, "has been that you are my son; the one longing in my heart has been that you would forgive me and love me. It took some time to shape itself, but there it is, and I have come. I cannot put my feelings into words properly. Words seem so poor, so inadequate! Can't you understand?"

The picture of his mother's face rose up before Paul's eyes as his father spoke, and with it the remembrance of the long years of pain, sorrow, and loneliness.

"Do you not understand?" asked the judge again.

"I understand my mother's sufferings," said Paul. "I understand how, when she was a young girl, forsaken, disgraced, she suffered agonies which cannot be put into words. I understand how she tramped all the way from Scotland to Cornwall, the home of her mother's people. I understand what she felt towards the man who betrayed her, especially when her only child was born in a workhouse, a nameless pauper! I understand that!"

The judge stood with bowed head. He might have been stunned by some heavy blow. He rocked to and fro, and for a moment Paul thought he was going to fall.

"Yes," he said presently, "I deserve it all. Even the circumstances which I might plead do not extenuate me."

"What were they?" asked Paul.

For a moment he had become interested in the past. He wanted to know what this man had to tell him, what excuses he had to make.

"You won my mother as Douglas Graham. Whence the change of name? I suppose you masqueraded in Scotland as Douglas Graham because you did not wish your true name to be known? You're a villain, and you thought if you called yourself Bolitho that villainy could not be traced. I am not one who quotes rag-tags of religious sentiment as a rule, but there are two sayings which occur to my mind just now. One is, 'Be sure your sin will find you out,' and another, 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.' It may be all nonsense in most cases, but just for the moment it seems as though there were something in it!"

"Paul," said the judge, "as I have said, I know I deserve nothing at your hands save the scorn and contempt which you evidently feel for me, but is there no means whatever of bridging over this awful gulf? I would give my life to do so!"

"No," said Paul. "I am no theologian, and yet I cannot close my eyes to the fact that sin and penalty go together—only, the injustice of it is that the penalty not only falls on the head of the one who sins but on the head of the innocent."

"Then you can never forgive me?" said the judge, and there was a world of pleading in his voice.

"If your lordship will just think a moment," said Paul. "You have asked me to try and understand you; will you try and understand me? I am here in a prison cell, accused of murder. Possibly I shall be hanged—although I mean to fight for my life," this he added grimly, with set teeth and flashing eyes. "I am twenty-five years of age, and it is not pleasant to think that one's life shall end in such a way! Let me remind you of something, Mr. Justice Bolitho, and, in reminding you of it, perhaps you will see that I have no reason to play the part of the yielding and affectionate son. I was born in a workhouse. My only name has been the name given to me because my mother was found lying near a little hamlet called Stepaside. I was educated a pauper. The parish paid the expenses of my learning a trade. When I was seventeen my mother told me the story of her life, told me of my father's villainy. What such a story would do for most men I don't know, but this it did for me: it robbed me of everything most dear. It killed in me all faith. It destroyed in me all belief in God and Providence. When I went out into the world it seemed to me that the only legacy I had was a legacy of hatred for the man who had robbed my mother of her youth and of her honour, and me of my boyhood and of all the things that make youth beautiful. I need not tell you my story since. You know it too well. But, if I am hard and bitter, you have made me what I am. Consciously or unconsciously, yours has been the hand that has moulded me. Do you wonder, then, that I cannot respond to this appeal for filial affection—that I cannot clasp my arms round your neck like a hero in a fourth-rate melodrama? When you rob a man of his faith in human nature and God, you rob him of everything, you dry up the fountains of tenderness."

For a moment there was a silence between them, and then Paul went on: "But where's my mother now? You say you saw her last night. What did she tell you? What did you tell her? Do you know what has become of her?"

"I scarcely know what I did tell her," replied the judge. "I was so overwhelmed when she told me that you were my son that I was scarcely capable of thinking. Besides, she seemed in no humour for asking questions. She felt very bitterly towards me, naturally, and my mind was numbed; I could not think."

"Perhaps you will tell *me*?" said Paul presently.

"I will tell you everything that you ask, my boy."

"Then tell me why you masqueraded in Scotland under a false name? Tell me why you left my mother on the day you married her."

"Douglas Graham was my name," he replied. "I had no thought of masquerading."

"Then why have you become Bolitho?" asked Paul. "My mother told me that on the night of your wedding day you read a letter which had been given to you which seemed to surprise you very much. Tell me the meaning of it."

The judge gave no answer, and again he rocked to and fro in his misery. "Paul, my son," he said. "I cannot!"

Again the two men looked at each other steadily. Paul's mind was active again now.

"You know what your confession meant this morning," he said at length. "You declared to the court that I was your son, your lawful son; that my mother was your lawful wife. But what of Mary? Tell me that. You know what I wrote to you concerning her. I asked you to allow me to try and win her as my wife, not knowing of the relations which existed between us—not knowing anything. You know, too, the cruel reply you sent to me—a reply which contained an insult in every line, in every word. But let that pass. If my mother is your lawful wife, what of Mary's mother? Will you answer me that?"

Still the judge stood with bowed head. It seemed as though he had been struck a death-blow. More than once he essayed to speak, but no words passed his lips. It seemed an eternity to Paul before the judge spoke again.

"At least I tried to do you justice, Paul," he stammered. "I tried to do—that is, I tried to proclaim to the world that your mother was a lawful wife."

"Yes," cried the young man, and his voice was hard with anger. "And do you not see what it means? It means that Mary's name is tarnished. For your sin and your punishment I do not care so much; but what of her? Think of the stories which gossiping tongues will be telling about her just now! Think of the sneering lies, the scornful gibes which will be uttered about her! My disgrace did not matter so much; I had become used to it. But what of her?"

"Stop, stop, Paul! In pity stop! Great God! Yes, it's true; but I did not realise this."

"Then the name of Bolitho is assumed," said Paul. "It is not your true name at all. Will you tell me the meaning of this?"

"I cannot," said the judge. "I know what you must be thinking, Paul, but I cannot do it."

"Then," cried the young man angrily, "it was cruel to her to make the confession you did this morning. I would a thousand times rather suffer myself—ay, and see my mother suffer, too—than see her suffer. And this is what you've done. Had you not better go away and leave me alone? Had you not better recant what you said this morning, and say you spoke while your mind was unhinged?"

"Paul," said the judge, "will you let me sit down on your couch here? I realise the truth of every word you have said, although you have spoken cruelly. Perhaps I did wrong in coming to you; but I could not help it. Believe me, my son, much as you have suffered, it is nothing to what I suffer at this moment."

There was no whine in his voice, no appeal to pity. It was a simple statement of fact, and for the first time Paul had a feeling in his heart which he could not understand. After all, the man before him was his father, and his haggard face, his bent form, his bloodshot eyes, all told of the agony through which he was passing.

"Son," said the judge, "some time, at all events, I hope I may be able to make known the things which you have asked, but I cannot trust myself to try and do so now. Will you let me be quiet for a few minutes, my boy? I want to think. And will you try and forget this part of the story?"

The judge sat down on the couch, while Paul, leaning against the prison wall, watched him. Minute after minute passed away, and then the judge spoke again.

"Paul," he said. "Are you guilty of this murder?"

"I would rather not discuss it with you," said Paul.

"My son," said the judge, "you do not believe what I have told you. To you my words are a mockery. But I love you like my own life. Even now, if I could die in your place I would be glad. At any rate I may be able to help you. Mary doesn't believe you are guilty. She told me so last night. I can speak freely of this now, for I am no longer the one who shall sit in judgment on you, and I want to help you."

Paul looked at his father and wondered what was passing in his mind; wondered, too, how much he knew. He could not tell him of his suspicions, could not even hint at the fact that he believed his mother was guilty of the murder for which he was accused. He knew of Judge Bolitho's reputation; knew, too, that he would eagerly fasten upon everything he learnt and follow it to its logical sequence.

In spite of everything, however, a change seemed to be coming over their relationship. The feeling of half an hour before had somewhat passed away. The sensations caused by their first meeting had become less powerful.

"Whatever else I can do, Paul," said the judge, "I want to help you in this. Can't you trust me?"

Paul was silent. He was afraid to answer directly, afraid lest the haunting fear in his heart would become known. Then, in a way he could not understand, he found himself talking with his father more freely, found himself telling something of his life in Brunford, until by and by he realised that he had been subjected to a close examination. It seemed to him as though it had become a battle of wits between him and his father; and although he was angry with himself afterwards, he knew he had disclosed many things which he had sworn should never pass his lips. Still, he had said nothing definite. He had never even hinted at the possibility of his mother's guilt.

"If you could only trust me!" said the judge at length. "If you would tell me exactly what happened, I might even yet be able to save you."

"Do you not believe me guilty, then?" said Paul.

"Mary does not," replied the judge.

"I know that," was Paul's answer. "And for her sake I mean to fight for my own life."

"Even although you did this thing?"

"Even *if* I did it!"

"But have you any evidence to add that shall tell in your favour—anything that will destroy the impression which has been made?"

"Do you believe they will hang me if I don't?"

"I mean to say, as far as circumstantial evidence is concerned, the case is terribly black against you, and the jury must act upon evidence given. And, oh, Paul, Paul! Can't you realise? Can't you understand what I feel? If I must tell the truth, one of the reasons I decided to say what I did this morning in the court was that I might be free to try and save your life. Will you not tell me what is in your mind?"

Paul shook his head. "You have wormed a great many things out of me," he said, "which I did not mean to tell; still, I think I have been a match for you."

"Don't you realise, Paul, what your life is to me? Can't you understand what the knowledge that you are my son means to me? Don't you believe that I would give everything I possess, everything I am, to bring you happiness? Oh! I know what you feel, and I do not wonder at it. I know, too, what you must be thinking about me now, and I cannot help myself. But, Paul, if there's a possibility, let me save you. Tell me the truth—the whole truth!"

"You would not thank me for doing so," replied Paul grimly.

For a little while there was another silence between them, then the judge seemed to change his tactics.

"I think you do wrongly, my son, not to employ counsel. I do not doubt that your brains are quite as good as anyone's you might engage to defend you; but you cannot understand the methods of cross-examination as a trained barrister can. You do not know the hundred weapons he can use in your defence."

"I think I know," replied Paul.

Both of them had become calm by this time, and each talked in an almost unrestrained manner. The judge was no longer almost overwhelmed by that through which he had been passing, and Paul had seemingly, to a very large extent, forgotten the bitterness which he had felt at the beginning of their interview.

"May I come to see you again?" asked Judge Bolitho.

"To what end?" asked Paul.

"Because I love you, my son. Because I long to be near you. Because I want to win your love; to hear you say you forgive me. I have sinned against you; but, believe me, I have done all in my power to atone. I must go now, but I shall be thinking for you, hoping for you, working for you, praying for you."

There was something so humble and so sincere in the tones of his voice that, in spite of the past, Paul could not longer repel him.

"Won't you shake hands?" he said. "Won't you tell me that you will try to forgive me?—only *try*, Paul!"

But Paul stood as still as a statue. He felt himself yielding to his father's pleadings, and he was angry with himself because of it. And yet he could not destroy the tender feelings which were coming into his heart.

"Will nothing move you, my son—nothing?"

Still Paul did not reply. He was afraid to speak. He felt as though, if he uttered a word, it would end in a sob. They had been together more than an hour, and in the near distance a clock began to chime.

"I must go now," said the judge. "But I shall come again. I shall never cease coming until I have won your love. Paul, I cannot live without it now! Look into my eyes, my son; can you not see? Can you not understand?"

In spite of himself Paul did as his father had told him, and realised how the proud man was humbling himself. He saw the lines of pain upon his face, saw, too, the look of infinite yearning and tenderness in his eyes; and he felt that his own were filled with tears. But still he hardened himself and made no sign.

The judge threw his arms round Paul's neck.

"Paul, my son, my son! Forgive me!" he said, "and love me!"

And Paul did not repulse him, even although he did not yield to his father's entreaties.

There was a sound of footsteps in the corridor, the noise of the key turning in the lock. A minute later Judge Bolitho had left the cell; and then Paul threw himself on the couch, while his frame shook with mighty sobs.

Judge Bolitho left Strangeways Gaol without speaking a word. In spite of everything he felt his visit had not been in vain. There was a joy in his heart for which he could not account.

"Some day he will know," he said to himself. "Some day he will know, if he lives! And I must save him. I do not believe he is guilty—he cannot be. He is hiding something from me. He is shielding someone. I must find out."

It was quite dark by now, and it was some time before he found a cab. A little later, however, he was back in his hotel again. It seemed to him as though his powers of action were coming back. He was no longer bewildered and overwhelmed as he had been.

"Is Miss Bolitho here?" he said to a servant who answered his call.

"No, my lord. She left this morning."

"Left this morning?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Did she leave no message?"

"No, my lord."

He remembered what she had said, and began to realise.

"All right," he said. "Will you bring me a cup of tea?"

A few minutes later he was in the street again. This time he used no conveyance, but walked rapidly towards Deansgate. Ere long he found himself in the region where he had been on the previous night, and, finding his way into Dixon Street, he went to the house where Paul's mother had met him. When he knocked at the door, however, it was answered by a stranger.

"Is Mrs. Stepaside in?"

"No; she left here to-day."

"She's coming back again, I suppose?"

"No; I do not think so."

"Did she say where she was going?"

"I think she has gone back to Brunford, but I cannot tell."

"She left no message concerning her intentions?"

"No, she left nowt."

He was about to turn away when evidently a thought struck him suddenly.

"Had she any visitors to-day?" he asked. "Has a young lady been to see her?"

"Ay; a young woman came this morning about ten o'clock."

"Did you know her?"

"Nay, she was not from these parts. She was dressed i' furs and all that sort of thing."

"I see," said the judge. "Thank you very much."

He returned to the hotel, and began studying a timetable.

"Yes, I think I understand," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. JUSTICE BRANSCOMBE

For some days after Judge Bolitho had made his confession in court no further steps were taken in the trial of Paul. Another judge had to sit upon the case, and this meant delay. What took place in certain judicial circles I have no knowledge. It is for me simply to relate what actually resulted. Undoubtedly, the judge's unprecedented confession caused some stir in the realms of legal authority. Many forms had doubtless to be complied with, and, as a consequence, Paul had to wait one weary day after another without anything publicly taking place and without any knowledge of what was being done.

During this time not one of the three people whom he expected again came to see him. After the interview which I have tried to describe in the last chapter the judge, in spite of what he had said, failed to seek admission again to Paul's cell. As for Mary Bolitho or his mother, he had no knowledge concerning them. No word was sent to him, and as a consequence day succeeded day in the dull, dreary monotony of a Lancashire prison.

Not that he was without visitors. Two lawyers who had been friends of his came to see him, and each tried to change his mind in relation to the conduct of his own defence. They felt sure, they said, that they could do better for him than he had done for himself, and each pleaded with him to allow them to prepare his case and to place it in the hands of some leading counsel. But Paul persistently refused. He knew that if he trusted in them he must state certain facts which, although they might release him, would throw suspicion of the strongest nature upon his mother. He wanted to live in spite of everything. But even although the worst came to the worst, he would rather suffer the extreme penalty of the deed of which he was accused than that the mother who had suffered all for him and done all for him should be dragged before the eyes of the world as it had been his lot to be. The interviews with these lawyers were long and trying, and while he did not yield to them in the slightest degree, they were not without advantage to him. They helped him to arrange his plans with more clearness, and they let drop many hints which he felt sure would be of service to him. When he had entered upon the trial everything had been confused; he could not decide upon any method of procedure. But now things began to take shape. He felt as if he had had some experience, and that he would not enter upon the fight for his life without some knowledge of the weapons he had to use.

Presently the news came to him that his re-trial was to come on, and one morning he was taken from his cell, as in the first instance, accompanied by two policemen, who led him into the prisoner's dock.

His experiences had left their mark upon him. He was still scrupulously precise about his dress, and every detail of his person was attended to as carefully as if he had arranged to make a set speech in the House of Commons. But no one could help remarking on the change which had passed over him. He looked thin and haggard; in his eyes was an expression of weariness; his skin was grey and almost parchment-like; and, instead of seeming to be without nerves, as on the previous occasions, his hands trembled as they rested upon the rail in front of him. But no one could suggest that he asked for pity. There was still the same proud look upon his face, the same expression of defiance. He stood perfectly straight and upright, too, and seemed to regard both judge and jury with a feeling of contempt. In addition to all this there was something in his square jaw and set teeth which denoted a grim determination. Here was not a man who was going to deliver himself over to the butcher without a protest. Everyone felt that he would fight, and fight to the very last.

Although he had been told that it would be so, he did not realise until that moment that the trial would have to commence *de novo*. He looked at the judge with keen interest, and noted the difference between him and the one who had last sat there. He could not help remembering, too, what had taken place. The things he had heard had shaken his life to its very foundation; he who had regarded himself as fatherless had found his father, and this fact had altered everything. Perhaps, too, Judge Branscombe, who from his elevation looked at Paul, felt this. In any case, it was evident he had a keen interest in him. He noted his every movement, marked his every feature, and formed his impressions concerning the man who was there for trial.

Judge Branscombe was utterly different from his predecessor. As we have said, Judge Bolitho was florid, somewhat heavy featured, in spite of the fact that his face was cast in a classical mould. He was fresh coloured, too, and suggested a *bon vivant*. Judge Branscombe, on the other hand, was a little man, with small, watchful eyes and sharp-pointed features. He was a lawyer to his very finger-tips, keen, penetrating, and a master of detail. He was a judge who did not deal with broad issues. He dealt with facts, hard, incontrovertible facts, rather than what might lie beyond them. What might be called "internal evidence" had little weight with him. What any prisoner might be likely to do under a given set of circumstances had little or no weight with him. It was what the prisoner had been known to do that he fastened upon and held to with the tenacity of a terrier. Not a cruel man by any means, but in a sense a little man; a man of keen intellect but of narrow outlook; a man who followed out a certain set of circumstances to their logical issue regardless of all other probabilities which might appear. Such was the judge who sat to hear Paul's case that day. Such was the man who in time would have to advise the jury concerning their verdict.

Paul was not long in summing up the nature of Judge Branscombe, and he felt sure that under his guidance the trial would more than ever rest upon circumstantial evidence. This man was not a reader of character, not one who studied probabilities, therefore he felt his battle would be hard to fight.

The court was again crowded to its utmost capacity, and the excitement which had prevailed at the first trial had not lessened in the slightest degree. Everyone there knew of what had taken place and realised the reason for the change of judges. All sorts of rumours had been afloat concerning what had become of Judge Bolitho, what had been said in high places, and what the result would be in his future career. The whole affair had been the talk of the country. People had come from afar to witness the outcome of this strange case, and, as on the previous occasion, the atmosphere was tense with excitement and keen with expectation.

Again the clerk of the assizes rose and read the indictment, and again the judge turned to Paul and asked him whether he were guilty or not guilty.

"Not guilty, my lord," he replied.

Everyone noted that there was a tone of defiance in his voice which they had missed on the first occasion. He found himself examining the jurymen. As far as he could judge, they were of the same calibre—unimaginative, commonplace, and, to a large extent, self-satisfied men. He thought, however, that they looked toward him with an expression of sympathy which he had not noted before. Perhaps they, too, had been influenced by the happenings of the previous trial.

Then Mr. Bakewell rose and said, "I am for the prosecution, my lord."

"Who is for the defence?" asked the judge.

And again there was deathly silence.

"Have you not engaged anyone to defend you?" said Judge Branscombe, turning to Paul.

"No one," replied Paul. "I wish to defend myself."

The judge uttered an exclamation of surprise. It might seem as though he knew nothing of the previous trial. He was a lawyer of the very strictest class. What had been was nothing to him. He was there to begin the trial at the beginning, and he would act as though nothing had taken place and as though he were utterly ignorant of what had been discussed throughout the whole land.

"I strongly advise you to accept the service of someone to undertake your defence," he said; and he mentioned one or two names of those whom he felt sure would be willing to act for him. To Paul this seemed like a repetition of a formula. It was all artificial, unreal.

"No, my lord," he replied. "I intend to defend myself."

"Then you will know," said the judge, "that you have the right to cross-examine the witnesses."

"Thank you, my lord."

Again Mr. Bakewell rose for the prosecution. His speech was very nearly a repetition of the one he had delivered on the previous occasion, but for some reason or another it did not have the same effect as during its first deliverance. The jury were acquainted with the facts that had been discussed a hundred times in a hundred different ways during the last few days. Still, there could be no doubt about it, the case looked very black for Paul when it concluded. The long feud which was known to exist between Paul and the murdered man; the many threats which had been uttered; the quarrel which had taken place on the night when Paul was elected member for Brunford; the open insults which the murdered man had hurled at the prisoner; the scene which had taken place on the night before the murder, and the threat he had made to avenge the injury. Mr. Bakewell also dwelt upon the excited state in which Paul was when he returned to the house, as would be proved by the evidence of the servants; of his going upstairs to the landing outside the servants' quarters at midnight; of his going out into the night alone; of his return early in the morning, pale and haggard; then, as the crowning evidence of all, the knife, which was known to be Paul's, which had been lying in his office—an office which was always locked when the owner of it was not present—the sharp, murderous weapon was found in the body of the murdered man, struck from behind.

All these things Mr. Bakewell described, and spoke with telling emphasis on the main features of the case. Possibly he knew the character of the judge to whom he addressed himself, and he had so arranged his speech that the chain of evidence was apparently complete. When he sat down a great pent-up sigh arose, not only from the jurymen, but from the excited spectators. Although during the early part of what he had said the emotion was not so great as during the first trial, yet, as he summed up the case for the prosecution, fastened one link to another of the chain of events, and declared in solemn tones that the witnesses he had to call would prove everything he had said to the minutest detail, it seemed as though they expected the judge to put on the black cap and to utter the terrible words which have to be uttered on every condemned prisoner.

Paul, however, was not greatly moved by Mr. Bakewell's speech. He listened keenly, attentively, to all he had to say, made a note, and that was all.

It is not my purpose to follow the trial step by step. Those who care to do so can turn up the files of the Manchester papers, where they can find it in every detail; but in this history I do not purpose dwelling at length upon the many examinations that were made and on the voluminous evidence given. As far as Paul was concerned, he did not endeavour to cross-examine many of the witnesses. As far as he could see, their evidence was in the main true. They had given a statement of facts, and he felt that it would be utter waste of time to deal with details which might show discrepancies, but which were, as far as he could judge, of but little importance. He wanted to fasten upon the main features of the case, and then, without in the slightest degree hinting at anything which would connect his mother with the murder of Ned Wilson, to prove how utterly improbable, if not impossible, it was, that he should be guilty of the deed of which he was accused.

Still, he did cross-examine some of the witnesses, and it was evident by the look in the judge's eyes that he appreciated the cleverness of the cross-examination. Indeed, so successful was Paul that on more than one occasion he made this keen-minded lawyer—more lawyer, indeed, than man—realise that circumstantial evidence might be false, and that a jury would assume tremendous responsibility in passing judgment of death upon anyone upon such evidence. Especially was this true in the case of the examination of the murdered man's father. He, as on the opening day of the first trial, was the most important witness, and after Mr. Bakewell had elicited from him practically the same admissions as had been given on the previous occasion, Paul rose to cross-examine him.

"Mr. Wilson," he said, "you have stated more than once that beside myself your son had no other enemy. Do you still adhere to this?"

"Certainly."

"Do you mean to say that during his life he has never gained the ill-will or the enmity of anyone besides me?"

"Not that I know of."

"You insist on this?"

"Yes. That is, no enmity of importance."

"What do you mean by importance?"

"I mean any enmity that would lead anyone to murder him."

"I want to ask you further questions about this. One of the witnesses who gave evidence concerning the quarrel between your son and myself on the night prior to his death is called Scott, is he not?"

"Yes."

"John Scott?"

"Yes."

"John had a son called Nick; is that not so?"

"Yes."

"Some three years ago he had a quarrel with your son?"

"Yes."

"It ended in Nick Scott being sent to prison. Is that true?"

"It is true that Nick Scott was sent to prison, but it had nothing whatever to do with his quarrel with my son. That was about a very trivial affair."

"But did not Nick Scott say that he'd pay your son out if he had to swing for it?"

"There was some such rumour, I believe. I paid no attention to it."

"I am taking this line, my lord," continued Paul, "because of the witness's evidence. He says that his

son had no enemy in Brunford. I am going to prove to you that he had."

The judge nodded, while Paul again turned to the witness.

"You still adhere to the fact, then, do you, that your son had no enemy beside myself?"

"I did not think of Scott, because he was not in the country; besides, it was of no importance. Men often utter threats like that."

"It pains me to bring up another case," said Paul. "But please remember I am here accused of murder. Do you know a woman named Mary Bradshaw? She lives in Clough Street."

"I have heard of such a woman; yes."

"Your son was once very friendly with her. Had that woman no reason to hate him?"

"That was years ago."

Paul asked many questions concerning this woman which I will not set down here, because they were necessarily of a sordid nature, but which went to prove that although in neither case could these people have had anything to do with the murder, Ned Wilson was not universally beloved, as his father had stated, but bitterly hated.

"You have admitted to me," went on Paul at length, "that he was believed to have wronged two people, and that both of them had reason to bear him enmity. Might there not have been others of whom you never heard?"

"Of course my son was thirty years of age, and he lived his own life. At the same time it is universally admitted that he was respected in the town and beloved by practically everyone."

"With the exception of these people, who, as you have admitted, uttered dark threats against him?"

At this the witness was silent.

"We will now go on to the question of the knife," said Paul, "concerning which you have made so much." And he dealt with this question in a similar way to that with which he had dealt with it on the previous occasion. The tendency of his questions was to show how unlikely it was that he, whom the witness still called a clever, scheming, cold-blooded villain, should use a knife known to be his, a knife that had been seen on his office desk, and leave it in the murdered man's body, knowing that all the time it could be traced to himself.

"There is still something more important," said Paul. "From the evidence given it is known that I parted from your son at twilight on the night before the murder."

"Yes."

"On that occasion he struck me down when I was walking away from him. The blow almost deprived me of my senses, and I lay stunned for some seconds."

"Yes."

"When I rose I made no attack on him."

"No."

"But I uttered a threat that I would be even with him."

"Yes. I regard your words as practically a threat of murder."

"Do you know what your son was doing between that time and the time when he was supposed to meet with the person who murdered him?"

"No; I cannot tell."

"You say he came into the house where two letters awaited him; those two letters he read, and then threw them into the fire. Do you know what was in those letters?"

"No; I have no idea."

"You saw the envelopes. In what handwriting were they—that of a man or a woman?"

"I did not take particular notice, but I thought one was written by a man and the other by a woman."

"Just so! and he threw these letters into the fire?"

"Yes."

"Did he seem to be pleased at seeing them?"

The witness was silent for a second, then he said: "It is difficult to tell."

"That is not an answer to my question. Did he not show anger, or at least annoyance, as he read one of these letters?"

"Well, perhaps he did."

"Thank you. Now then, I want to ask you this: You say he went out after dinner that night. Did he tell you where he was going?"

"No. I thought he was going to his club."

"You know, too, that he did not go to his club. That has come out in the evidence."

"I am told that he was not seen there."

"Now then for the question that I regard of such importance. Do you know of any woman likely to write to your son and ask him to meet her?"

Again the witness looked confused. "I think the question unfair," he said. "One might have all sorts of suspicions, but it would be wrong to give expression to them, as I have no definite knowledge."

"I must insist on the question, my lord," said Paul, turning to the judge.

"Certainly," replied the judge. "It has a strong bearing upon the case."

"Then I must repeat the question," said Paul, turning to the witness.

Whereupon Mr. Wilson admitted that he had more than once seen his son in company with a woman whom he did not know.

"Might it not have been her letter that night?"

"Of course, I cannot tell," replied the witness. "Everything I say upon the question is pure surmise, and I can substantiate nothing."

"Was the writing on the envelope that of an educated woman?"

"No, I should say not; but it might have been disguised."

"Thank you," said Paul. "You say you saw your son in company with this woman. Where did you see them?"

"At some little distance from the Coal Clough Golf Links."

"Did they seem on good terms?"

"I cannot say. I should not think so."

"Was the woman angry with him?"

"She might have been."

"You judged that she was?"

"Yes; I thought she was."

"Now to return to the night of the murder. You say that your son did not tell you where he was going?"

"No."

"That you thought he was going to his club?"

"I thought it probable; yes."

"Don't you think it probable that he went to meet this woman?"

"I don't know."

"You see how important the question is. You say your son left the house at ten o'clock that night, and that he was not seen until the following morning, when he was discovered by the policeman, murdered. According to the doctor's evidence he had been dead some little time before that. Thus there are several hours to account for. Have you no idea where he was during those hours?"

"None at all beside what I have told you."

This part of the examination continued for some time; though beyond what I have written nothing of importance was elicited. But the evidence given created an impression which could not be gainsaid.

Paul had made it abundantly evident that the murdered man was not without enemies, as had been so strongly insisted, and he had also raised doubts concerning what he had been doing between the hours when Wilson left his father's house and the time of the murder.

In this cross-examination, however, Paul was much handicapped. He dared not refer to the conversation which had taken place between himself and Ned Wilson during their quarrel, for fear of in any way bringing Mary's name into evidence. Up to the present, no one thought of connecting her with the matter in any definite way, and Paul was determined that, whatever took place, this must be avoided. Neither could he remove the difficulty of the knife without connecting it with his mother. As we have said, she was in his office on the morning of the day of his quarrel with Wilson, and was, as far as he could see, the only one who could have obtained possession of it. Still, he had made the most of his opportunities, and although on this murderous weapon the issues of the trial seemed largely to rest, he made more than one juryman feel that he was not the kind of man to use it in such a fashion and then leave it as evidence against himself.

During his cross-examination of the next witness, too, he further destroyed the statement that Wilson was a man without enemies.

John Scott was one of the two men who had witnessed the quarrel between himself and Wilson. Mr. Bakewell examined him very closely.

"You say," he said, "that you saw the prisoner and the murdered man together?"

"Yes."

"You heard angry words pass between them, but you could not tell what they were?"

"No."

"You saw the prisoner walk away, and as he was doing so, saw Mr. Edward Wilson strike him with a stick?"

"Yes; he knocked him down."

"Will you tell us what followed?"

"I saw Mr. Stepaside get up, and I thought he was going to attack Wilson. There was a look of murder in his eyes, as I thought, but he didn't do owt. He simply said that he'd pay him out for this, or summat of that sort. And I said to my mate, 'Stepaside'll kill Wilson for that.'"

This evidence, which was given in the rough Lancashire dialect, was nevertheless very impressive. The witness and Mr. Bakewell made the jury see, as if in a picture, the two men quarrelling, Wilson striking an angry blow, and Paul breathing out murder against him.

"John Scott," said Paul, when he rose to cross-examine him, "you've known me a good many years?"

"Ay; I've known you ever since you came to Brunford."

"You know the kind of man I am?"

"Ay; I think so."

"You say you saw me walk away from Wilson, who lifted his stick and struck me down?"

"Ay, I did."

"After I had been stunned for two or three minutes I rose to my feet?"

"Ay."

"We were in a lonely place at that time, and you say I was unaware of your presence?"

"Yes; that is so."

"Do you not think if I meant to murder Wilson that I should not have done it at the time when my anger was aroused, rather than wait several hours?"

"Weel, I should think so; but there's no knowing."

"Just so. Now I want to ask you another question. As you know, it has been stated many times that the murdered man had no enemy in Brunford beside myself: would you say that was true?"

"No, I shouldn't. My Nick hated him like he hated the devil. He were a kind-hearted lad, but Ned Wilson treated him terribly bad. Nick is out of the country now, but there's no doubt he has a grudge against Wilson."

"Do you know of any others in Brunford who have a similar feeling towards him?"

"Weel, I know that there was no love lost between Ned Wilson and lots of people."

This led to many more questions and answers which went to destroy the illusion that the murdered man had been universally popular. And for some time after that the trial seemed to go in Paul's favour rather than against him.

Then it seemed as though a bolt came from the blue. A man was called into the box who had not appeared in the previous trial. He was a collier, who appeared in a great state of nervousness.

"You were returning to Brunford on the night of the murder, and had to pass near Howden Clough?"

"Ay; I wur."

"What time did you pass near Howden Clough?"

"It must have been about five o'clock in the morning. But I'm noan sure, and it wur dark."

"What were you doing there?"

"I had been to see my lad, who lives over Rakes Royd. He wur married twelve months ago, and his missis sent me word that he were very poorly. I stayed wi' him most o' th' night, and then walked back so's to be in time for my wark."

"And you say you think it was about five o'clock when you passed Howden Clough?"

"Ay, it wur."

"Tell the jury what you saw."

"Well, I were going along th' road, when I thought I heerd somebody moaning. I wondered what it could be, and I stopped still. I wur in the lane not far from the big 'ouse, and I heerd footsteps."

"Was it a man's voice or a woman's voice you heard?"

"I thought it were a man's voice."

"Well, go on."

"I had not been standing still above 'aaf a minute when I see'd a man coming toward me. He come close to where I was, and then he stopped still."

"Did he see you?"

"Nay; he couldna see me, for I was standing close t' th' edge, and he was looking straight on."

"Did you recognise who it was?"

"Ay, I did. It were Maaster Paul Stepaside."

"You are certain of this?"

"Ay, I'm certain."

"But you said it was dark, just now. How could you be certain who it was in the dark?"

"Well, it was noan so dark as all that, and as I had been walking four mile, my eyes had got accustomed to the darkness; and more than that, there was a break in the clouds just then, and I think there must have been a bit of moonlight. Anyhow, I can swear it were Mr. Paul Stepaside."

"Did he speak to you?"

"Nay; he never spoke to me. As I told you, he never seed me, but were looking straight on."

"Did he seem calm, self-possessed?"

"Nay; all t' other way. He looked like a man beside hissen."

"Did you hear him say anything?"

"Ay, I did. I heerd him say, 'My God! I never thought it would come to this,' or summat like that. I won't be sure as to the exact words, but it was summat like that."

"Did he stand beside you long?"

"Nay, not more than while one could count ten, perhaps. Then he rushed off, and he were muttering to hissen; but what he were saying aw could noan make out."

"And that was all?"

"Ay, that was all."

"But you did not tell this at the inquest."

"Nay; I didn't want to be dragged into it. Besides, I didn't know what it meant; but I did mention it to my missis, and my missis mentioned it to the wife of a policeman, who told it to her 'usband; and that's how it come out."

As may be imagined, the effect of this evidence was remarkable. It supplied a kind of link in the chain. It was now proved beyond question that Paul was in the vicinity of the murder very near to the time when it actually took place. And in the face of it all, all that had been said in his favour seemed to be as nothing. Not only was it Paul's knife that was found in Wilson's body, but Paul, although he had not been seen to strike the blow, had been seen close to the spot where the murder took place almost at the time of its actual occurrence, and he had been heard to utter words such as a guilty man would have been likely to utter.

At this time the court adjourned, and all felt that Paul's doom was sealed.

CHAPTER XXVI

PAUL'S DEFENCE

The next morning the trial was resumed, and to the surprise of many it did not come to an end that day. Many other witnesses were called which at first were unthought of, and thus the case was dragged out to what seemed to Paul an interminable length. On the third day, however, the examinations were concluded, and Mr. Bakewell rose to address the jury on the evidence which had been given. Some spoke of his speech afterwards as one of the finest that had ever been delivered in Manchester, while others declared it to be devilish in its cleverness, but that, in view of the fact that the prisoner would have no one to defend him, it was unfair. One eminent counsel, who would gladly have taken Paul's case, said that it was the custom of counsel for prosecution in the case of murder to seek to give absolute fair play to the prisoner, and to suppress nothing which might tell in his favour, but that it seemed to be the set purpose of Mr. Bakewell to secure a sentence of death for Paul, just as he would try to secure a verdict in favour of any client for whom he was trying to obtain damages. But this was mentioned in private, and could, of course, have no weight with the jury. Certain it is that he made a very strong case against Paul. He opened his speech with the usual remarks about the seriousness of the case before them and the difficulty he had in approaching it in the right spirit. He also admitted that Paul was a young man who bore a good character in the town, and had so far secured public favour as to be rewarded with the highest measure of confidence with which any town could reward him. But having said all that, it was his duty to deal with the facts which had been brought before them, and it was for the jury to say whether, in the face of that evidence, the prisoner was not guilty of the terrible deed of which he was accused. He referred to the fact that the prisoner had chosen to defend himself, and as a consequence lessened hid chances of acquittal, but they had also to consider the inwardness of that fact. What was the prisoner's reason for being undefended? It was not that he could not afford to obtain the most eminent counsel at the criminal bar, or because he was not advised by the judge to secure such counsel. An innocent man had nothing to hide. It was only the guilty who sought to shelter himself behind silence. He would like to testify to the prisoner's ability in cross-examination and of his power to nullify the force of certain evidence which told against him. But they had not to deal with sophistries. They had to deal with the hard facts which had been submitted to them. These facts he enumerated one by one, dealing with the evidence which had been given in support of them. He admitted that there might be certain difficulties in their way, certain things hard to explain, and which could only be explained by the prisoner. Still, certain facts remained—facts upon which they would have to judge. Presently came the summing-up of his speech, and it was here that Mr. Bakewell justified the reputation he had won as one of the cleverest of criminal lawyers. Everything in Paul's disfavour was set before them in cold, clear, terse language. One point after another was emphasised with terrible precision, and so great was the impression made that it seemed as though both judge and jury could see only with his eyes. All the things which appeared as difficulties were apparently removed. The facts of the case pointed to one man as the murderer of Edward Wilson, and that one man was Paul Stepaside. Mr. Bakewell seemed to be under strong emotion, but that very emotion strengthened the impression which he had made, especially when he spoke of the sacredness of human life, spoke of the terrible responsibility of a jury in condemning a prisoner to death. Nevertheless, he seemed to make it impossible for them to do anything else. When he sat down it seemed as though the scaffold were already erected, and the ghastly rope swinging from it.

Of course, the court was again crowded almost to suffocation. Mr. Bakewell had spoken for more than two hours, and during the whole time the interest had been intense, the excitement almost overwhelming. Whenever he paused it seemed as though they could hear the wings of the Angel of Death fluttering over them. Women sobbed aloud, strong men breathed forth quivering sighs. Even the barristers who sat watching the case, and who as a rule regarded murder cases with an air of nonchalance, could not hide their emotion. Everything seemed to be prejudged. No evidence had been adduced strong enough to save the prisoner, and each juryman, who sat with eyes fixed upon the eloquent counsel, looked as though there were only one thing to do, and that was to pronounce the

word "Guilty."

Paul had sat during the whole time of the delivery of this speech, listening to every word with breathless eagerness. Never until that day had he realised how near death was to him. Throughout the whole trial he had never really believed that the jury could find him guilty. Now, however, it seemed as though they could do nothing else. Never had he felt his loneliness as he felt it then. The judge did not seem to be a man, but merely a legal machine, uninfluenced by great emotions, and considering his case only as a case. No one had been to see him since the trial had recommenced under Judge Branscombe, save the warders and the chaplain. In one way he was glad it was so, but in another he longed for society, longed for comfort. Eagerly on each morning of the trial had he looked around the court, dreading yet hoping to see the face of Mary Bolitho, whom he still loved as a man should love the woman he hopes to marry, even although he knew her to be his sister. Each morning, too, he had longed to see the face of his mother, although he hoped she would not be there. And while he still declared that nothing could soften his heart against Judge Bolitho, he felt as though the sight of his face would have helped him.

What were they doing? he wondered, the man whom he had lately learnt was his father, and his mother, and his half-sister—no, he could not call her sister even now, and he wondered why it was. When Mr. Bakewell had finished his speech he heaved a sigh of relief. At least the worst had been told. All that could be done to hang him had been done—at least, as far as evidence was concerned. And then there came back to him the old determination to fight to the bitter end. At least he had his chance to reply, and he nerved himself for the work he had to do. He had no idea of time. He had never thought of it. He knew it was at the beginning of the afternoon session when Mr. Bakewell rose to address the jury, but he had no thought of the time which had elapsed. He had been simply listening, listening, as if it were a matter of life and death—as in reality it was—to the address which had been made. He was expecting the judge to call upon him to make his speech for his own defence, and was arranging his thoughts in order to do so, when the judge turned towards him and asked him if his defence would take any considerable time.

"Yes," replied Paul, "it will."

"Then we will adjourn the court until to-morrow."

"Perhaps," added the judge, with a wan smile, "you will be glad of this. It will allow you some little time to make your preparations."

"Thank you, my lord," he replied.

And then he was led away to his cell.

When Paul entered the dock on the following morning he carried with him a sheaf of papers, the result of the previous night's work. When he returned to his cell he asked for writing materials, and then for several hours worked steadily. A strange calm possessed him while he was doing this, not without a certain sense of enjoyment, grim as the circumstances were. He was fighting for his own life, and there was a kind of intellectual pleasure in framing his arguments and in meeting the statements which Mr. Bakewell had so forcibly expressed in his final speech. He had always loved a battle of wits, and, terrible as the circumstances were, the pleasure which an intellectual struggle gave him was not absent even on this occasion.

When he had concluded writing he was utterly exhausted, but here his splendid physique came to his aid, and he slept several hours peacefully. At least he had one satisfaction. Whatever might be the issue of the terrible day which lay before him, terrible whatever might happen, he was an innocent man. He had struck no murderous blow, and he could go down to the grave with a clear conscience, knowing that he had tried to do what was right under the circumstances. Sometimes a shadow of doubt came into his mind as to whether his mother were really guilty of the terrible deed of which he was accused, but as he reviewed the circumstances, and remembered what she had said to him, it seemed as though a cold hand had gripped his heart, and it convinced him that it was she in spite of himself. Considering all the events, he could think of no one else who was likely to commit the deed; and so, while he determined to fight to the very last, he could at least do his utmost to keep any shadow of suspicion from falling on her.

Great as the excitement had been on the previous day's trial, it seemed, if possible, greater now, or rather it was an excitement of a different nature. Hitherto a sense of strangeness and wonder had predominated; a morbid curiosity and a desire for sensationalism had possessed the minds and hearts of those who had witnessed the trial. But to-day another element was added—an element of terror. On the previous days there had been a suggestion of a stage trial. Many, although they had breathlessly followed the evidence given, did not seem to realise that it might end in death. But that was all over now. The inwardness of everything, the ghastly issues of the scene, became tremendously real. All felt that now Paul Stepaside was indeed fighting for his life. The shadow of the scaffold rested upon him. A thousand unseen enemies seemed to be there trying to drag him to his doom. And he, unaided and alone, had to meet not only the terrible charge which was laid against him, but a kind of fiendish cleverness with which that charge had been urged. Men held their breath as he entered the dock; reporters forgot their duty as they watched his face; the jurymen, bearing in mind the terrible speech which Mr. Bakewell had delivered on the previous evening, and believing that nothing could remove the impression of that speech, looked on him with gloomy interest. Even the judge, legal machine as he appeared to be, showed more than ordinary interest and seemed to be wondering what he had to say

for himself.

To all appearance, indeed, Paul was the most self-possessed man in the court. Pale he was, it is true, but upright, clear-sighted, determined. Unversed as he was in the intricacies of the law and possessing none of the experience which characterised the counsel for the prosecution, Mr. Bakewell felt that here indeed was a foeman worthy of his steel, and that had he been trained for the bar he would not have long remained an obscure member of that learned profession.

The formalities of the day were quickly gone through, and Paul rose to address the jury.

I cannot here give in detail the speech which he delivered, cannot describe the intensity with which he spoke, although I watched the trial from day to day. I can only convey a vague impression, not only of the speech which he delivered, but of the effect of his words. Even now I can see him standing in the dock, quietly arranging his papers with firm, steady hands, and then pushing them away as if they could be of no use to him. I can see the steady light in his eyes; the pale, clear-cut face; strong, determined features, upright form. I can feel, too, the tremendous emotion which seemed to overwhelm all present. But these things cannot be conveyed in cold print; they can only be hinted at.

He commenced by saying that he stood there accused of the most serious of charges. It had been urged that he was guilty of murder, and there could be no doubt that a murder had been committed. It was not a question of pleading for partial forgiveness. No question of mercy could be considered. Either he was guilty of murder or he was not, for undoubtedly the deceased man had been murdered. If he had been guilty of that murder, then the jury would do right to pronounce that verdict; if not, then they took upon themselves the responsibility of condemning an innocent man to death.

"The counsel for the prosecution," urged Paul, "has mentioned something about giving me the benefit of a doubt. There is no matter of benefit in it, and I decline to accept the term. It is only a matter of justice. It is only justice I desire. My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I have refused to enter the witness-box, not because I desired to keep back anything in relation to the murder, for in truth I know absolutely nothing, but because I might be, probably should be, asked questions on matters on which I desire to remain silent. I appeal to your understanding in relation to this. There are secret matters—ay, and sacred matters—in everyone's life which one does not wish to be discussed by the world at large, and it is for this reason, and this reason only, that I have declined to go into the witness-box. If it were simply a matter of dealing with my connection with the death of the deceased man, I would gladly answer any question that may be asked, because, as I repeat, I know nothing.

"The learned counsel has also referred to my decision to be my own defender, and has admitted that I may possibly suffer some disadvantage because of it. I did so for more than one reason. The first I have just suggested. No counsel could be of any value to me unless I gave him my absolute and complete trust. Again I say, there are certain matters utterly and wholly removed from the crime of which I am accused which I do not wish to make known. Possibly this may tell against me; but, gentlemen, when you think of the happenings of the last few days, when you remember, my lord, the wonderful and unprecedented confession which was made from the chair you now occupy, a confession which vitally affects me, you can understand that there are other things in my life—perfectly innocent, yes, and in a vital sense very sacred—which I do not wish to confide to any man. More on that question I will not say. The other reason I have for defending myself is that while an abler man than myself might be obtained, a more eloquent man, a far more learned man, I could secure no one who is so certain of my own innocence as I am myself, and as a consequence no one could plead with the same earnestness, albeit haltingly, yet no one can plead with the same conviction that I can. For, my lord and gentlemen, at the very outset of what I wish to say I must again urge that I know absolutely nothing of this man's murder. I struck no blow, and am as far removed from his death as the little children who were born in this city last night!

"Now, my lord and gentlemen, the whole weight of the accusation brought against me depends entirely upon circumstantial evidence, and you, my lord, who are so learned in the law, know full well the value that can be attached to such evidence. You know that again and again it has proved to be false. You know one particular case especially, when a man, who was condemned to die on circumstantial evidence, was three times brought to the scaffold, and three times the rope broke, and then, because of what may be called the superstitious feelings of the community at large, that sentence was reduced to penal servitude for life. I say you know, my lord, that although that circumstantial evidence seemed complete, when a renowned thief and murderer was brought to his trial and condemned to die, he confessed to this very murder. Moreover, you can see that when a man's life or death depends upon circumstantial evidence, that evidence must be complete. No link in the chain must be missing. If it is missing, then it would be a crime, and worse than a crime, to take away the life of a man because of it. And I shall show you, my lord and gentlemen, that not only is the chain of evidence incomplete in this case, but that many links are wanting in that chain, and therefore it has no strength whatever."

Paul paused here, and for a moment seemed to have forgotten his line of defence. He turned towards his notes, which he had placed beside him, as if with the intention of refreshing his memory, and then, like one angered at his seeming unreadiness, he appeared to make a mighty effort to gather together his scattered thoughts and to concentrate them. He gazed around the crowded court, watched the pale, set faces, not only of the jury, but of the spectators, noted the strained attention of the barristers and the steady scrutiny of the judge. He seemed for the moment like a man put upon his mettle and determined to play his part manfully.

"I would like," he said, "first of all to refer to the question of motive. The learned counsel has urged that I committed this murder because of personal hatred. The evidence which he sought to deduce, and upon which he dwelt almost to the point of tediousness, was that there was a long-standing feud between the murdered man and myself. He related incident after incident which went to show that, to say the least of it, no love was lost between us. I have no word to say against that evidence, no word to say against his methods of urging it against me. It was his duty as counsel for the prosecution. But I must ask you to examine this more closely. It is true that the murdered man had been my enemy for years. But should I be likely, because of his enmity, to murder him? Or, even if I belonged to the class of criminals which he would make me out to belong to, should I have chosen such an hour to commit that murder? Should I not have committed it, not in my hour of triumph, but in my hour of defeat?

"It has come out in the evidence that at the first election at Brunford the deceased man did his utmost to ruin me. He not only tried to tarnish the name of my mother as well as my own, but he did his best to ruin me financially. This has been proved, proved beyond a doubt; and as a result of what he did I lost that election. I say, if I had intended to murder him, would not that have been the time when I should have done it? Or again, would it not have been likely that I should have done it while in the heat of passion? As far as I can remember, the quarrel, which took place between us on the evening prior to the murder, has been correctly described. When I left him he struck me down. Gentlemen, I am not a weak man, but a strong man. If it was my desire to do him bodily harm, should I not be likely to do it then? We were there alone. As far as I knew, no eye was watching us, and naturally my passions would be roused by the cowardly blow he struck me; but I did nothing. I, so it was said, uttered a threat that I would be equal with him for this blow which he had struck, and then went away. Then, the learned counsel has urged, after I had walked nearly two miles back to my own home, after I had dressed for dinner, I waited until midnight, and then, with cool calculation, went out to kill this man. Can anyone in his senses believe such a thing? Besides, think of another thing. I was in a position to laugh at Wilson's enmity. I had won an eminent position in the town of my adoption. I had risen from obscurity to be a member of Parliament for that town. I had made a speech in the House of Commons which had attracted notice throughout the whole country. I was the subject of leading articles in newspapers. What was Wilson's enmity to me? I could have afforded to have left Brunford altogether. I could have lived in London, where I need never have seen him. Was I likely, then—not in a moment of mad passion, mark you—not in resentment for a coward's blow which had been struck immediately before, but after seven hours—was I likely to go out into the dead of the night to kill him? Forgive me for urging this matter, but the question of motive must come in, and to say that this deed was the outcome of a long personal feud is, under the circumstances, preposterous. Is this link in the chain strong enough to hold? Nay, is it a link at all? And does not the chain break in consequence?"

It was at this point that Paul held both judge and jury strongly. I know I altogether fail to convey the impression he made. In cold print, while his words may seem reasonable, and even forcible, they only give a hint at their power when they were uttered as he uttered them.

The next point with which he dealt was with that of the knife. This knife, known to be Paul's, was found driven through Edward Wilson's heart, driven from behind. And it had been used with great skill by the counsel for the prosecution. He had considered it from every standpoint, and it had seemed, at the time, that no one but Paul could have used it.

"This," said Paul, "is the one definite thing urged against me. Everything else is pure surmise, but the knife was known to be mine. The knife was in my office, an office which is always locked when I have occasion to leave it. Therefore, no one but myself could have used it. Such is the counsel's argument. Again I ask you to consider this carefully. Remember that no secret was ever made about my possessing this knife. It had been sent to me by a customer from abroad. It had been used as a paper-knife. It had been frequently seen by those who visited me lying on my office desk. It was not some secret thing, something about which the world knew nothing. It was known to be mine by scores of people—please bear that in mind. Then there is another thing-. It has come out in the evidence that I was not in the habit of carrying it. It is a sharp, murderous-looking blade, and it has been examined, my lord, not only by you, but by every member of the jury. I admit that this knife is mine. I admit all that my partner, Mr. George Preston, has said about it. But I want you to consider the tremendous gap between the fact of the knife known to belong to me, and the accusation that with this knife I murdered Mr. Edward Wilson. Now, will you please think carefully. It has been urged that I did this deed in cold blood. It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon when I had a quarrel with Wilson and he struck me down. My servants have given testimony to the fact that I came home, talked with my mother, went into my study, stayed there for several hours. Then it is urged that I went out, carrying this knife with me; and, mark you, they did not see the knife in the house, no one saw me take it away from the office; but it is urged that I went out, after several hours' cool and calculated thought, at midnight; that I caught the murdered man unawares, drove the knife into his body, and then ran away and left it there. Now, think of this, gentlemen, and remember that my life or death depends upon the reasonableness of it, depends upon this link in the chain of circumstantial evidence. It has been urged again and again that whatever I am, I am not a fool, that I am capable of careful and connected thought, that I commenced my career in Brunford in a very small way, and that in a few years I have made it to be what it is, large and prosperous. It has been urged that I am far-seeing, careful, calculating, and that as a rule I am not a man who acts upon sudden impulses. Now, my lord and jury, I ask you, would such a man as I be likely to do this? I could have understood the accusation if in the heat of the passion which I naturally felt when the deceased man struck me a cowardly blow, I had, if I carried such a knife with me, which I never did, seized it and struck the murderous blow, and then in a state of panic rushed away for fear of the consequences. But after several hours had elapsed, during which time I should have time to think about it, and to realise the results of such a deed, that I should

then, in a cool and calculated fashion, seek out a victim, strike the blow, and then leave the weapon in the body which must be inevitably traced to me, is a deed of such madness that I can only wonder that a gentleman with the erudition of the counsel should have thought it worth while to mention it!"

From this point Paul went on to deal with another matter, of which the counsel for the prosecution seemed to have taken no notice, but which, put as he put it, strengthened his case very considerably.

"I want you to consider the circumstances connected with the accusation again," he said presently. "It is known that I had only returned from London the day before. It has come out in the evidence that I wrote a letter to Wilson, asking him to meet me, and that Wilson replied refusing to do so. It has also been proved that I waylaid him not far from his own house, and that we had a quarrel. Concerning the nature of that quarrel I am not going to speak, but a quarrel there was, this I admit. Now, please bear in mind that I had only returned from London the previous day; that I knew nothing of Wilson's possible whereabouts; that I could have known nothing of his plans. It was impossible for me to tell what he was going to do, or where he was going to be. It has also come out in the evidence that I asked certain questions about him on the afternoon of the day before the murder. I went from one place to another where he had been, in order to find him—remember this was not done in secret, but openly—therefore I must have been utterly ignorant of his movements, or of his plans, except what I openly gathered that afternoon. Then we had a quarrel. He struck me down, and I, when I recovered from the blow, rose, said a few words to him, and walked away. I went back to my own house, and, on the testimony of the servants, was there the whole evening. I did not go out at all. It is also admitted that no messenger of any sort came to me that night, that no letters were received. Please bear these things clearly in mind. Then I went out at midnight, on a dark night, with the intent to murder 'him. Now think of the position. Would he not in all probability be in bed, as far as I knew? Brunford is not a town of late hours. Ordinarily, except when there is a social gathering, or something of the sort, people retire to rest between ten and eleven o'clock. But it is urged I went out with the intention of murdering him, carrying the knife with me, and yet having no means of even suspecting that he would be out; and that then I met him by chance, and having the knife ready, killed him, and left the knife in his body. My lord, and gentlemen, does not the chain of evidence entirely break? Is there any connecting link here at all? Can you condemn a man upon such evidence? Think of the tremendously long arm of coincidence which has to be imagined before you can connect me with it!

"With regard to the evidence which the counsel for the prosecution has urged with so much effect: I admit it is true. I was worried and perplexed that night. I did not utter the words which he has mentioned, but I do remember walking along a lane at no great distance from Howden Clough. I was troubled about a personal matter, and, if I may so put it, a secret matter, a matter which I cannot discuss, but which does not even by a gossamer thread connect me with the crime of which I am accused. And if you condemn me on such an evidence, then no man's life is safe. No man can be worried and perplexed without, under similar circumstances, being accused of a crime of which he would never dream!"

Again Paul made the jury feel as he felt, see as he saw. The evident sincerity of his tones, the force of his language, language which I have utterly failed to reproduce, carried conviction with every word. For the time being, at least, they felt that such an accusation bordered on the edge of the absurd, and to say the least of it, there was a tremendous gulf which had to be filled up, and that to fill it up by the belief in the long arm of coincidence, and to commit a man to the scaffold because of it, would be criminal indeed.

"There's only one point more that I wish to urge," said Paul. "It is this. It is plain to me that the deceased man was murdered. It is plain to us all, therefore, that someone must have been guilty of the deed. Who would be likely to be guilty? The statements which found credence here in the early part of the trial, that the deceased man had no enemy beside myself has been shattered and destroyed. It has been shown that one woman, at least, had reason to hate him with a deadly hatred, and that case alone throws a tremendous light upon the character of the deceased man. Far be it from me to throw suspicion upon any innocent person—I have suffered too much myself to think of doing such a thing—but even the deceased man's own father has made terrible admissions. Do these admissions mean nothing? Are they to count for nothing? That woman whose name has been mentioned, and who, from the evidence given, could have no connection with this crime, had a thousand times more reason to hate him than I. May there not be others? Nay, there must be others——"

At this point Paul, knowing that he was drawing near to the end of what he had to say, felt that he was indeed fighting for his life, and I will not endeavour to describe his speech further. Possessing a mind of more than ordinary clearness, having the gift of language to a marked degree, and also having the strongest motive to make the most of the facts which stood out clearly before him, he spoke almost like a man inspired. With trembling voice, he was outwardly calm in appearance. He again reviewed the evidence, showed its weakness, tore the sophistries of Mr. Bakewell to pieces, and moved the hearts of all present by his passionate appeal. More than once the spectators broke in applause, while the barristers nudged each other with nods of approval, as he made some special point in his defence. And presently, when he sat down, everyone felt that Paul had saved his own life, that he had fought a great battle and won it, that he not only did not commit the deed of which he was accused, but that he was utterly incapable of it, and that he would leave the court amid shouts of triumph. Even to this day his speech is spoken of as one of the most triumphant efforts ever made in the Manchester Assize Courts.

But this was only for a time. It is true he had seemingly answered Mr. Bakewell in every point. It is true, too, that it seemed a crime beyond all description to pronounce the Verdict of guilty upon him, but naturally it was an *ex-parte* Statement, it was the speech of a clever man fighting for his life, who

naturally did the best with the material at his disposal. He had been talking for nearly two hours, and during that time all were under the spell not only of his words but of his personality.

When he had finished, the judge waited for perhaps a minute, and seemed to be looking at his notes, and presently all eyes were transferred from the prisoner's dock to the judge's chair. What had this keen legal machine to say? Throughout Paul's speech he had listened with close attention, and had evidently admired the points he had made. But as we have said, Judge Branscombe was a lawyer, a lawyer to the finger tips, and he was one who thought much of outward facts, and little of what might be probable or not probable. Long associated with the law as he was, he had known many cases where criminals had done the most unlikely things, and where facts had scattered theories to the winds. He had won eminence at the Bar because of this attitude of mind. He cared nothing about probabilities. He cared little about theories, but dealt with facts.

He began his summing-up by speaking of the unusual way in which the trial had been conducted. The prisoner had elected to be his own advocate, and that, as a consequence, he, the judge, had not been so particular about formalities as he would have been under different circumstances. He had allowed matters to be introduced in the cross-examination which were not strictly evidence. He also referred in high terms to the prisoner's defence. He spoke of him as a man of more than ordinary intellectual ability, who, with the gift of an orator, had played upon the various emotions of the jury as a clever musician plays with an instrument of which he is a master. And then, little by little, he went back to what he called "the cold hard facts of the case." From the pure lawyer's standpoint, his summing-up was perhaps just, but from the standpoint of the prisoner it was deadly. With a cleverness of which Paul did not believe anyone capable, he wore away the effect of what he had said, until, as it seemed to him, his speech seemed to be like that of another counsel for the prosecution. And yet, as I said, no one could accuse him of being unfair. He admitted the responsibility of the jury, spoke of the tremendous Issues at stake, and seemed desirous of guiding them into right paths. For nearly an hour he spoke, and then, amidst an excitement which was painful in the extreme, the jury went away to consider their verdict.

Minute after minute passed away, while everyone waited in painful suspense for the jurymen to return. The old feeling of uncertainty had come back to the spectators, the barristers, who had been so eagerly listening to the case, discussed in whispers what the probable result would be, and more than one woman had to be carried out of the court in a state of collapse. Men sat with hard, set faces, scarcely daring to move. How long they were away I do not know, but it seemed to all present like an eternity.

Presently the foreman of the jury appeared, and the judge returned to his chair.

"Gentlemen, are you agreed as to the verdict?"

"No, we are not agreed."

It was as though a mighty sob arose from the throats of all present. The judge, who wore an uneasy look as he reentered the court, seemed perturbed. A look of eager expectation was on the faces of the barristers. As for Paul, he became instinct with new life. His case was not hopeless—they were not agreed. The fiendishly clever speech of Mr. Bakewell and the deadly summing-up of the judge had not secured a verdict of guilty. He felt almost like a conqueror. Hope was in his heart. He would live even yet. The judge looked at his watch, as if in doubt what to do, but it was evident that he quickly made up his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VERDICT

"If you will tell me the points on which you are disagreed," said the judge at length, "I may be able to throw some light upon them, and also, perhaps, advise you."

"The points are these," said the foreman of the jury. "First of all, some among us are far from being convinced that the prisoner, if he were the murderer, would be likely to leave the knife in the murdered man's body. If he had struck the blow in a passion, and had then, overcome by panic, run away for fear of the consequences of what he had done, we could have understood it. But as we are dealing with circumstantial evidence, it seems utterly unlikely that a man who had premeditated a murder should have run away leaving a weapon which could be easily traced to him. That, at least, is the feeling of some members of the jury, and is one of the points which causes us to be divided.

"The second is this: there are some among us who feel very strongly the point of the prisoner's remarks concerning the probability of his knowing where the deceased was at the time of the murder. As he has stated, he would probably have been in bed at the time when he was actually killed. If the murder was premeditated, there are some who feel the utter unlikelihood of the prisoner going out alone at midnight on the chance of finding his victim.

"These are the points, my lord, on which we are not agreed, and unless further light is thrown upon them, there is no likelihood of agreement."

The juryman spoke in a hesitating fashion. He was evidently labouring under a very strong emotion, and was unable to control his voice or to express his thoughts with anything like clearness. Still, what we have just stated conveys a rough idea of the difficulties which faced them.

Again an intense silence pervaded the court as the foreman of the jury sat down. The suspense seemed almost too horrible to be borne. There was not a man in the court who was not pale to the lips, and whose nerves were not quivering with painful excitement. Again the reporters almost forgot their duty. In their eagerness to know what would be said they forgot to write. Suppressed sobbing was heard almost everywhere. Even the judge looked exceedingly grave, and for the moment seemed unable to decide what to say.

As for Paul, it seemed to him as though his fate hung on a delicately poised balance. The weight of a hair in either scale might decide either his life or his death. It was one of those tragic moments which seldom occur in any man's life, and it was only by a tremendous effort that he remained outwardly calm. But pride came to his aid even now. He had not shown weakness yet, and he would not show it now. He would not break down before this gaping, excited crowd, but retain quiet dignity even to the last. In spite of the intense excitement, too, he was becoming almost callous. Nature has its own way of alleviating pain, and the way she chose now to help Paul to continue to bear the dreadful strain was to numb his feelings, and to make him almost indifferent concerning what should take place. For the past few hours every nerve had been at full tension, and so greatly had he been wrought upon that he could not have remained in such a condition much longer. And so kindly Nature had lessened the pangs he was suffering, and made him able to bear to the end by her own anaesthetics.

"I quite understand your position, gentlemen," said the judge, "and I will do my best to help you. We will take the points in the order in which you mention them. First, there is the question of the knife, and in order to fully understand the sequence of this, we will again consider it from the very beginning. We must remember that the prisoner was very careful about locking his office. No one was allowed to enter it when he was absent. He kept the key in his own pocket. We have to remember, too, that his own partner declared that he knew of no one who entered the prisoner's office that day, and even if anyone entered the office, there was no one who, as far as he knew, would dare to take that knife from the prisoner's desk. The fact remains, however—and it is facts we must consider, gentlemen, and give them their due significance—the fact remains that the murdered man was found with this knife in his heart. Now, gentlemen, it is for you to decide how that knife could have left the prisoner's office. Was there someone who could have entered the office, and, with set purpose, take it away without the prisoner's knowledge, and use it in the way mentioned? Or, did the prisoner take it away himself and use it as has been described by the counsel for the prosecution? I say you must decide on this question because it is most vital. You have heard all the evidence in relation to this matter, and it is for you to decide now first whether any outsider obtained entrance into the prisoner's office and took away that knife and used it for the purpose of murder, or whether the prisoner himself took it away in the way described? That is the first point to be considered in relation to the knife. Now with regard to the ostensible difficulty which appears to you. From one standpoint, it seems utterly unlikely that a man of the prisoner's evident intellectual acumen should have used this knife, known to be his, for the purpose of murdering an enemy, and then have left it in his body in such a way that it would be inevitably traced to him. I understand your difficulty, gentlemen, and I appreciate it, and it is a point that you must keep clearly before your mind. There is, however, another side which you must also keep just as clearly in view. It is this. If the prisoner had made up his mind to do this, would not a clever man, such as he undoubtedly is, probably come to the conclusion that it would seem so absurd that he should leave the knife in the body of his victim that he might do so as a mere matter of bluff? A clever man, a far-seeing man will sometimes do things which a duller man would not do, and it is for you to decide whether these things might not have been in the mind of the prisoner when he decided to act in this way.

"You have also to consider this. It is true it has been urged that the murderous deed was uninterrupted, but we cannot be sure of this. Might not the one who struck the blow have heard approaching footsteps at the time, and then in a state of panic have rushed away? These things you must carefully consider. But the real point at issue, the vital point which you have to consider is: could anyone else have become possessed of the knife in the first place? Did anyone else become possessed of that knife? If not, then the difficulty in your minds is easy to explain.

"That is the first point. Now for the second. What you urge, and most rightly urge, too—and I fully appreciate the evident thought and care which you have bestowed upon it—is the unlikelihood of the prisoner going out at midnight to commit murder, when he had no knowledge whatever that the murdered man would not be in his own home. You say that some of you feel that his going out under such circumstances, and depending on chance as to whether he should meet him, was altogether unnatural. I will admit that you have to consider this point carefully, remembering that a man's life or death depends upon the decision at which you arrive. But there is another thought which you must keep clearly before your minds. You have no knowledge that the prisoner was not aware of the murdered man's whereabouts. They had a quarrel the previous evening. How do we know that the murdered man did not tell the prisoner something of his plans, or where he intended to be? He has not submitted himself to cross-examination, and therefore we have not been able to hear from him. Consequently, we have no knowledge that the murdered man did not, during the excited conversation, say something of his intentions, or let fall some hint whereby a man with the quick perception of the prisoner, might find out what he intended to do. If this were the case—and while there is no proof that

it is so, it is not at all improbable—it would remove your difficulty. If they met, it is probable that another quarrel ensued, and then in the heat of passion the prisoner might have struck the blow which resulted in his victim's death, and then rushed away and uttered the words which the man Ashley overhead. This is all I can say on these points, gentlemen, and you have to consider, in the light of the evidence to which you have listened, whether this might be the case. As has been repeatedly said, the whole case rests upon circumstantial evidence, and it is for you carefully to consider the matter again, and may Almighty God guide you in your momentous deliberations!"

Again it was evident that the judge tried to be fair, but again his elucidation of the points at issue was deadly, as far as the prisoner was concerned. Rightly or wrongly, more than one felt that the judge had made up his mind as to the guilt of Paul Stepaside, and speaking as he did, in cold, calculated words, yet with all the authority of his position behind him, many felt that each sentence strengthened the chain of evidence which would hang the prisoner.

Paul listened without moving a muscle or uttering a sound, nevertheless his eyes were fixed upon the judge with a kind of stony stare. It seemed to him that there was a kind of malignant cunning in the judge's words, that the man was conjuring up possibilities in support of the evidence which seemed to point to him.

Again the jury retired, and a solemn silence reigned. This time there was not even the sound of whispered consultations as to what the verdict might be. It was a kind of ghastly waiting for the jurymen to return. Slowly the clock ticked on, and it seemed to be numbering the seconds of Paul Stepaside's life. And yet there were many who simply could not believe that any jury could find him guilty. Standing there alone in the dock, tall, erect, calm, his features refined by the long weeks of suffering through which he had passed, thin and pale as a consequence of his confinement and anxiety, many felt that it was impossible he should be guilty of such a bloodthirsty deed. And yet in face of the judge's summing up, in face of the terrible speech which Mr. Bakewell had delivered, it seemed as if the gallows would surely claim their victim.

Minute after minute passed, until the waiting seemed unbearable. At length, however, the door of the room in which the jury sat opened, and one by one they returned. With strained eyes, all looked at their faces, trying to read there what their decision was. It seemed almost grotesque that these twelve, commonplace, unimaginative men, with no ability out of the common order, with little or no knowledge of the law, with minds unfitted to grasp the inwardness of the evidence which had been given, should have to pronounce the verdict of life or death upon the young man who stood in the dock. Under ordinary circumstances Paul's voice, Paul's opinion, would have weighed more than all theirs put together. Yet such was the case. They held in their hands the issues of life and death. What they had decided upon would be final.

"Gentlemen, are you agreed as to your verdict?" And as the listeners heard the question asked it seemed as though their heart-strings were strained, and as though they could not bear to hear the answer.

"Yes."

"Do you find the prisoner guilty, or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

It seemed like a knell of doom in the court. The pent-up feelings of the crowded spectators burst forth in a mighty sob. More than one gasped, "No, no." The utmost confusion prevailed, and more than one had to be carried out of the court, overcome by emotion. The jurymen sat each in his place pale and evidently moved. The verdict had been according to the best of their abilities. Perhaps had the judge's summing up been different they would have given the alternative finding, but the feeling was that the judge, who was far wiser than they, believed in the prisoner's guilt, and they, carried away by his weight and authority, and by his cold, yet telling, words, pronounced the verdict of "Guilty."

Paul, when he heard the verdict, reeled for a moment, and felt as though his limbs were giving way under him; but only for a moment. His resolution and his pride, which had borne him through the rest of the trial, should bear him through this. He would not show any weakness. His face was blanched, and his lips were white, but his eyes still burned with a steady light, and in a few seconds he again stood erect and calm, and looked at the judge's face.

The judge communicated for a moment with the Clerk of Arraigns, who went through the usual formula, and then the clerk, addressing the prisoner in the dock, said to him:

"Paul Stepaside, you have been found guilty of the wilful murder of Edward Wilson. Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you in due form?"

Paul hesitated a moment as if undecided whether he should speak—everything seemed to be pure mockery now. The end of all things had come. He knew that when a jury pronounced a verdict of guilty of wilful murder, especially as there were no extenuating circumstances sufficient in any way to lessen the guilt, all hope was gone. And yet he felt as though he must say something. It seemed like allowing himself to be led as a lamb to a butcher if he uttered no word of protest.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I feel impelled to say a few words, even although I realise their uselessness. I have no complaint to make concerning the motives which inspired the jury. I

have no doubt that each one has tried to do his duty. Neither do I complain of the action of the counsel for the prosecution in doing his utmost to fasten the guilt upon me. I suppose it was his duty so to do, and he has done it. Neither, I suppose, ought I to complain of your lordship's summing up, although it struck me as more like another speech by the counsel for prosecution than the judicial analysis of evidence by an impartial judge. But then my position has been of such a nature that perhaps my own judgment is warped. Be that as it may, however, and knowing that, whatever I may say, I cannot alter anything that has been done, I wish to repeat that I am utterly and wholly guiltless concerning this murder. My hand never struck the blow that killed Edward Wilson, and I have no knowledge whatever concerning the murder. In the course of events, I suppose I shall be hanged, but, my lord and gentlemen, you will hang an innocent man, and by your finding to-day, you will send a man into eternity who is not only altogether innocent of the murder, but altogether unconnected with it! I shall go into the great silence, into the land of forgetfulness, but of this I am sure, you, my lord, and you, gentlemen of the jury, must for ever be haunted by the thought that you have sent an innocent man to an unmerited doom."

The tones of his voice gathered in strength and condemnatory intonation as he proceeded, and when he had finished it seemed to many as though he were the judge and those to whom he spoke were criminals. More than one of the jury, who had been unconvinced, but who had given way to the opinions of others, felt as though his words were true. They shuddered as he spoke, and it seemed to them that they were guilty, even as he said they were.

But the word had gone forth and could not be recalled. When once a jury, after careful deliberation, has uttered the verdict of "Guilty," that verdict is final. Even although the judge were convinced of Paul's innocence, he could only pronounce sentence of death. In that respect he was no more responsible than the hangman who had to fasten the rope around his neck. Each would play his part in the grim tragedy, and each would have to do so, because he had accepted the responsibilities of his office.

It was evident that the judge was greatly wrought upon. His hands trembled, his face was haggard, and in his eyes was an expression that looked like fear. He turned for a moment and saw that the chaplain was standing behind him, a pale, cadaverous-looking man indeed, a veritable death's-head.

The judge put on the black cap.

"Paul Stepaside," he said, "you have this day been found guilty of wilful murder. The jury have, upon the evidence given, passed that verdict upon you," he stopped. He had seemed on the point of saying something else, but was unable to do so. Perhaps, as is often the case, he was going to preach him a homily upon a wasted life, or upon a career cut off in the middle, destroyed by an act of brutal passion, but he did not do so. Perhaps there was something in Paul's face which forbade him. Perhaps he almost feared the scornful smile which was on Paul's lips, and the steady look in his eyes.

A painful silence followed, a silence of nearly a minute, and then the judge pronounced his sentence.

"You will be taken from this place to the place from whence you came, and from there to the place of execution, and there you will be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and your body will be buried in the precincts of the prison where you will have been confined after your conviction, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

He spoke the words in slow, measured tones, and with deathly impressiveness. Although he was a little man, his voice was deep, almost sonorous, and thus when the chaplain followed him with a thin, piping voice, "Amen!" there was something so incongruous in the contrast that many who had been wrought up to a high state of excitement felt like giving way to hysterical laughter. Nevertheless, the utmost silence prevailed, until Paul spoke again.

"Thank you, my lord," he said. "I am an innocent man, and when my time comes, I will meet death as an innocent man should!"

For a moment he looked around the court, scanned the faces of those present with an expression almost like curiosity. It seemed as if he realised he was looking at them for the last time. It was a look of farewell. He was no longer a prisoner, he was a condemned man. He nodded to some of the people whom he had known in Brunford, and then, with a proud smile, he left the box, under the vigilance of two policemen, who led him to the condemned cell.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PAUL'S MOTHER AND MARY

When Mary Bolitho left her father on the night following the first day of the trial, she was naturally much excited. She could not understand the great change which had come over him. Never before had

she known him to be so much moved by any case with which he had to do. She wondered why it was, and in the solitude of her room began to think of reasons. Had he learnt something about Paul of which she was ignorant? Had he discovered the real murderer? She had sat throughout the day's trial, and no word had fallen, no argument of whatever sort had been urged, that in the slightest degree shook her faith in the man she loved.

She quickly dismissed this from her mind, however. Whatever her father's conduct might mean, she saw no sign that he believed in Paul's innocence. Still, her conversation with him caused all sorts of fancies to flash through her brain, and, sitting down before her fire, she, for the thousandth time, tried to think of means whereby she could save him.

"I must save him; I must!" she said to herself. "Paul knows of something which he refuses to tell me. He is shielding someone."

Naturally she knew nothing of what her father had learnt that night, had no suspicion of the revelations which, when they became known to her, would destroy the thousand fancies which she had cherished and revolutionise her life. The one dominant thought in her mind was that the man whom, in spite of herself, she had learnt to love, was charged with murder, and that unless something was done to nullify the evidence which had been brought to court that day he would have to pay the penalty with his life. Paul, for some reason unknown to her, would not use the means she was sure he had in his power in order to save his life. Of course it was pure surmise on her part, but she was perfectly certain of it; and what he would not do she must do.

Throughout the evening she had been reading the Brunford papers, in which the whole story had been described. Paul's first appearance before the magistrates; the coroner's inquest; and, again, the second appearance before the local justices; and his final committal. No detail of these reports had escaped her notice, and now, after her talk with her father, she again set herself to consider the whole question, determined, at whatever hazards, to save her lover.

Finally her mind fastened upon two or three thoughts, and these thoughts became the centre around which everything revolved. To begin with, Ned Wilson was murdered. Next, Paul Stepaside, who was being tried for that murder, was guiltless of it; that also was a settled conviction in her mind. Who, then, was guilty? Someone must have done the deed, but who? In whatever light murder could be considered, it was something ghastly beyond words. The person who had driven Paul's knife into the murdered man's heart must have had a terrible motive. What could that motive have been? Who would be likely to do it? Who had a motive sufficiently strong to commit such a crime? She thought of one person after another, realising all the time that her imaginings were vain. Yet she knew that it was in this direction that the truth, if it were to be discovered, must be found.

She went over the whole story of the knife, and remembered the deadly words which the counsel for the prosecution had uttered about it. The knife was known to belong to Paul. It was lying in his office, an office which he always locked when he left it. She remembered that Paul's partner had sworn that he knew of no one who would be likely to, or, indeed, could, enter the office and take it away without Paul's knowledge and consent. And yet someone must have done so, for she was still certain that Paul had never done the deed.

Presently she began to think of the question from another standpoint. She had told Paul that he was trying to shield someone. She did not attach much importance to it at the time, but now its consequence became very real. If her surmise were true, then Paul would rather suffer death himself than tell what he knew. She had pleaded with him, only as a woman moved by a great love could plead. With her arms round his neck and her eyes fastened on his she had besought him to tell the truth, and he had been silent. Only the strongest of all reasons could have kept him silent.

Her heart gave a great leap. With that swift intuition of which only a woman is capable her mind leapt to its conclusion. There was only one person in the world besides herself whom Paul loved dearly, and that was his mother.

Like lightning she began to connect the evidence, and it seemed to her that at last she had found the key to unlock the mystery. It was for his mother's sake that Paul was bearing the shame and was suffering the torments of a man accused of murder. She felt sure she had found the truth, and she was at last in a position to save his life. Everything fitted in with the thought which had so suddenly flashed into her mind. Who would have free access to Paul's office? His mother. Why should he refuse to engage a counsel to defend him? Because he feared to incriminate his mother. Again she read the evidence at the coroner's inquest, and noted each point. And she saw, or thought she saw, evidence in every word he had uttered of his endeavour to keep all thoughts from being directed to her.

Presently, however, difficulties began to appear before her mind. What motive could she have had to do this deed? Again her mind worked swiftly. She was, according to all she had heard of her, a passionate woman. She loved Paul with all the strength of her being. For him she had toiled. For him she had suffered. And it was the gossip of the town that Paul's mother loved her son with a wild and almost unreasoning love. She knew of Ned Wilson's enmity towards Paul, knew how he had persecuted him through the years. Possibly, probably, she knew of her son's love for herself, Mary Bolitho; knew, too, that gossip had connected her own name with that of Ned Wilson. Of course, a great deal of it was surmise, but everything pointed to the one fact. Besides, Paul, on his return home after his quarrel with Wilson, would probably tell her about it. He would not be able to hide his wounded forehead. The blood would be trickling down his face, and she would ask him questions about it. Would not a vindictive,

passionate woman such as she was said to be, seek to avenge her son? And, of course, Paul would discover everything. The evidence of the servants had proved that Paul had left the house during the night. Why? Yes, that was it. Of course, he would do everything to keep even a shadow of suspicion from resting upon her. It would be like him to do so. Paul's mother had come back, and he had discovered what she had done. That would explain the mystery of the knife. Paul, even though he might have so far yielded to the spirit of revenge as to kill his enemy, would never leave a knife in his victim's body known to be his, and which could be identified and traced to him. But a woman was different, especially such a woman as Paul's mother. Of course, there were motives which she could not understand, thoughts in her mind which were yet hidden from her; but this was the key, this would unlock the door of the mystery, and this would save her lover's life. No, no; much as Paul might love his mother, much as he owed to her, she could not allow him to suffer death in his mother's stead. It was too horrible.

She called to mind the scene she had witnessed that morning. She remembered being startled by the face of the woman who found her way into the court. She had seen the look of madness in her eyes as she looked first at Paul and then at her father. After which she uttered the scream of a maniac and then fell to the ground.

Another thought struck her. Was Paul's mother sane? Would not this account for the difficulties which, in spite of everything, she could not explain away? If she were mad, and carried away by the passion which had been aroused by Wilson's attack on her son, would she not, regardless of consequences, commit this deed of which Paul was accused?

Again and again she considered the circumstances, pondered over each fact, weighed every scrap of evidence which had been adduced; and the more she thought about it the more she was convinced that she had arrived at the truth. By and by, however, the terror of the whole tragic scene came home to her. What would Paul think of her if she were instrumental in bringing his mother to the gallows? Even his love could not bear that test. But she would do it. Rather than see Paul die a thousand should die; for while a woman's love is the most beautiful and the most holy thing on earth, it is also the most merciless and the most pitiless. And at that moment no pity for others entered the heart of Mary Bolitho. Her one thought was of Paul.

No thought of sleep was possible. Every faculty was awake, every nerve in tension. During the years in which she had been interested in her father's work she had, out of pure curiosity, and because of her love of intellectual problems, studied the cases with which he had been connected, and her knowledge of the intricacies of the law and of the value of evidence came to her aid now. All she had was laid at Paul's feet. It was for him she must think, for him she must work.

But she must do something. She must test her theories. Surmises, however true they might be, would not save the man she loved; and save him she would, at whatever cost.

Her mind was made up at length. She saw her course of action, and she believed, too, that she saw a way whereby the truth might be demonstrated.

"Paul, Paul, my love!" she cried. "Do not fear. I will save you, in spite of everything."

She threw herself beside her bed and prayed for wisdom, prayed for strength. She cared nothing for the sacrifices she might be called upon to make, or the sufferings which she might have to endure. She only asked God to help her to save the man she loved.

The following morning Mary Bolitho left the hotel and found her way to the assize courts. Early as it was, she found some of the officials present. One of them, who had seen her the day before and had been informed who she was, touched his hat respectfully.

"I've been wondering," said Mary, smiling at the man, "whether you could help me?"

"I'm sure I will if I can, miss," he replied.

"You were here at the courts all day yesterday?" she asked.

"Yes, miss, I was, and a sad business it was too, wasn't it? Ah, miss, it's not all fun being a judge, as I've no doubt you know very well. I was saying to my missis only last night as 'ow I wouldn't like to be in your father's place. T'other day, afore th' assizes were opened, and people saw his lordship coming into the city, they thought what a grand thing it were, but they don't realise what he's got to do."

The man was of a friendly, garrulous disposition, and seemed pleased at the opportunity of talking to his fair visitor.

"Are you interested in this case?" she asked.

"Ay, miss, who isn't? I heard Mr. Stepaside speak in the Free Trade Hall here once, and I cannot believe he is a murderer. It were a grand speech he gave. There were a Cabinet Minister who spoke before he did, and people thought he were doing grandly, but when young Stepaside got up he took the wind out of his sails completely. As the manner of saying is, he made the people stand on their heads. It's noan for the likes of me to pass opinions, but I can never believe as 'ow Mr. Stepaside is guilty."

"Did you notice the woman who came into the court yesterday morning?"

"What, the one as fainted? Ay, but that were Mr. Stepaside's mother. She fair made me shiver. Well, it was no wonder. Fancy a mother seeing her son in the dock. I heerd as 'ow she was going to be called to give evidence."

"Is she staying here in Manchester, do you know?"

"Ay, she is. I hear as 'ow she's been here a week, waiting for her son's trial to begin. I know where she's staying, too—25 Dixon Street, just off Strangeways. An old man and an old woman live there, and th' old man is very deaf. I hear she's practically got the house to hersen."

This was what Mary had come to find out, and she was glad that she had been able to obtain her information without ostensibly asking for it. A little later she found her way towards Dixon Street, and with a trembling hand knocked at the door of the house which had been mentioned. As she heard footsteps in the passage her heart almost failed her, for she realised the object which she had in mind, and she believed that she would soon be face to face with the murderer of Ned Wilson. Still, she was not to be shaken in her purpose, as she had determined the night before, no matter who might suffer, Paul must not suffer. A pale, near-sighted old woman opened the door to her.

"Is Mrs. Stepaside in?" asked Mary.

"Ay, she is."

"I would like to see her, if I may."

"Who might you be?"

"If you will take me to her I will tell her who I am."

The woman looked at her suspiciously.

"Has it got anything to do with the murder?" she said; and then added: "Nay, the likes of you can have nowt to do with that!"

"Will you please take me to her?" said Mary.

"I don't know. She's noan so well this morning. Last night I left her i' th' house alone. Me and my old man went over to Crumpsall to see our lass. She said as 'ow she didn't mind being left alone, and so we were away several hours. But I was sorry afterwards that we went, for she was in a fair way when we come back. She looked just like a corpse. You see, she's brooding over her son. Ay, but it's a terrible business!"

"Will you please tell her a young lady wishes to see her?" urged Mary.

"She's in the little room behind, having her breakfast," said the woman. "Ay, I s'pose I may as well."

She led the way and Mary followed her, and a minute later entered the room where Paul's mother was.

"Here's a young woman come to see you."

Paul's mother rose as the woman spoke, and looked at Mary intently.

"I've something to say to you," said Mary, "something very important."

"What is it about?"

"I'll tell you when we are alone," was Mary's reply. And then, at a nod from Paul's mother, the owner of the cottage left them together.

For a few seconds there was a silence between them, as each looked steadily at each other. In Mary's eyes were wonder and a sense of horror. She was speaking to Paul's mother, the mother of the man to whom she had given her heart. She was speaking, too, to the woman whom she believed guilty of the crime for which Paul would be again tried that day. The other met her gaze steadily, and looked at her searchingly. She seemed to be trying to read her thoughts, trying to understand her heart, for she knew, as if by instinct, who Mary was—knew that she was looking at the maid whom Paul loved. She did not know that Mary had been to see her son, knew nothing of what had passed between them, knew nothing of what Mary had confessed. For the moment she seemed to think of her only as the girl to whom Paul had given his heart.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Mary.

"Yes, I know. Why have you come here?"

The girl was silent. She could not answer the question. Determined to save Paul as she was, she could not, at such a moment, make the reply which she longed to make.

"Has your father told you anything?"

"Told me anything? I do not understand."

"Ah!" replied the older woman, and she knew that Mary knew nothing of what had taken place between her and Judge Bolitho in that very room the night before.

"Let me look at you," she said presently. "Come here to the light," and taking hold of Mary's arm, she led her to the window, and scrutinised her face slowly.

"You're the lass that my Paul loves," she said, after some seconds. "You know he loves you, don't you? Of course you do. He told me about it himself. Oh, my laddie, my laddie!"

Mary did not speak. She seemed to be fascinated by something in the woman's eyes, while the tones of her voice thrilled her. She felt now how she loved her son, realised how deep was the passion which filled her whole being.

"He's in prison, accused of murder—you know that? He's to be tried again to-day."

Still Mary was silent. There seemed nothing for her to say.

"You love my lad, don't you? Ay, I see you do. Trust a mother to know. Yes, you love him, and he would die for you, willingly. Do you know that?"

"Yes," said Mary.

The interview was turning out altogether differently from what she had expected. This woman was leading her into paths she had not dreamt of.

"I'm his mother," went on the older woman, "and he's everything to me, everything! And I would stop at nothing to make him happy. I'd lay down my life, willingly, to bring joy into his heart. But do you understand? Do you know the truth?"

"What truth?" asked Mary. "I do not quite understand you. Do I believe Paul guilty? No, I don't. He could never do such a thing. He's too great, too noble."

"Do you say that? You?"

"Yes," replied Mary. "I am sure he never did such a thing. He's simply incapable of it. You know it, too, don't you? Of course you do."

"Then you take no notice of the evidence?"

"What's evidence?" asked the girl. "The one thing I'm sure of is that Paul never did what he is accused of. He simply couldn't."

"And you're *his* child!" said Paul's mother. "*His* child. Let me look at you again." She scrutinised Mary's face feature by feature. She seemed to be looking for something.

"You're a good lass," she said presently. "And you love Paul, don't you?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "I do." There seemed nothing incongruous in the confession, nothing strange in making it to the woman to whom she was speaking for the first time. And yet the interview was bewildering. Her thoughts, as she found her way along the grimy street, were clear enough. Now they were being scattered to the winds. Neither could she adhere to her resolution. How could she accuse this woman of such a terrible deed?

"What have you come here for?" asked Paul's mother presently.

"Need you ask?" asked Mary. "I've come to you because we must save Paul."

"Do you think Paul needs our help?" asked the other. "When the time comes Paul will clear himself. You do not know what a clever lad he is. I know what is being said about him. I read it all in the papers, but I don't fear. Paul is cleverer than all of them put together, and, of course, he never did it; he'll surely come triumphant out of this. Oh, I know it's terrible for him; but it's not that that makes me fear, it's something else!"

Again Mary's eyes met those of the other, and she was sure she detected a look of madness. The woman's mind was unhinged. She was not altogether responsible for what she was saying.

"No, it's not that," continued Paul's mother. "It's not that. Paul is so clever that he will beat them all."

"Not unless the real murderer confesses," replied Mary. "You see, I know what Law Courts are, and what juries are, and I've read every word of the evidence, and unless the real murderer is found, I am afraid—terribly afraid!"

"You mean that they will hang him?"

Mary was silent. She felt she could not utter the words that hung upon her lips.

"That's why I've come to you," said Mary. For the moment she felt like uttering the thoughts which had been haunting her throughout the night, but it seemed as though something sealed her lips.

"Will you not help me?" she said. "We must work together."

For a moment Mary had made the other feel what she felt herself—that Paul's life was really in danger—but only for a moment.

"No, no," she cried. "They'll never hang him when they know what I know!"

"What do you know? Tell me," cried Mary, feeling that she was nearing the object after which she strove.

"Yes, you must know. The truth must come out. After last night it cannot be hidden long."

"My father, as you know, is the judge," said Mary. "And he must do his duty. It's not he who's responsible; it is the jury, you know."

There was something unreal in her words, and they seemed to pass her lips without any effort on her own part. Paul's mother almost laughed.

"Why is it I feel so tender towards you?" she said, "when you are his child? I expect it is because I know that Paul loves you and that you love him. I ought to hate you. I can't understand why I don't. And then everything is so tangled too."

Mary was sure now that she was talking to a mad woman. Her words were meaningless. They were simply the ravings of a disordered mind.

"Can a man condemn his own son to death?" continued the older woman. "Now that he knows the truth, can he send him to be hanged?"

Mary began to be afraid. The woman's wild, unreasoning words and the strange look in her eyes almost frightened her.

"I do not think you realise what you are saying."

"Not realise?" was the reply. "Oh, my lass, my lass! Yes, I see you think I'm mad. It would be no wonder if I were. I've gone through enough to unhinge any woman's mind; but, no, I am not mad. Yes, I may as well tell you, for you must know sooner or later, that judge—Judge Bolitho as you call him—your father, is Paul's father too, and my husband. Paul has told you about it, hasn't he? He married me when I was a girl up among the Scotch hills, and he's Paul's father, and he's your father too. Don't you see?"

For a moment Mary was almost stunned. In spite of the wild words which she heard, she could not help being convinced of their truth. Her mind fled to the interview she had had with her father on the previous night, and what the woman had said seemed to explain the terror in his eyes and the mystery of his words.

"My father, Paul's father!"

"Yes; he courted me as Douglas Graham. How he changed his name I don't know yet; that will come, I suppose. He is my husband and Paul's father. I told him so last night, so he knows—knows everything. Why didn't he tell you? But—don't you see?—he cannot condemn Paul to death. How can a father condemn his own son?"

The two stood close by the window, and Paul's mother still had her hand upon Mary Bolitho's shoulder, and was looking into her face. Mary felt the hand tremble, and saw the strong woman reel to and fro.

"You are ill, Mrs. Stepaside," cried Mary; and then, scarcely knowing what she was doing, she led her to a chair.

"My lass," said the woman, "take me home. Take me to the home Paul gave me. I cannot think here. I cannot stay any longer. Will you?"

"You mean that you wish me to go to Brunford with you?" asked Mary.

"Ay, if you will, my lassie. I think I am going to be ill. I feel as though I have borne all I am able to bear, and I want to get home—to the home which Paul gave me. Will you come with me?"

Mary was almost overwhelmed by what she had heard during the last few minutes. She was not sure that the woman's story was true, and yet she felt it might be, that it probably was. She wanted to be alone to think. If her father were Paul's father, then, then——

The thought was staggering, overwhelming, but above and beyond everything, Paul's safety, Paul's salvation was her great and paramount thought. She quickly made up her mind what to do. She could do no good in Manchester, and if she accompanied this woman to Brunford she might be able to find proofs to confirm her convictions.

"Yes; I will go with you," she said.

"Thank you, my lassie. Ay, but you're a good child, and you're bonnie, too. No wonder my Paul loves

you better than he loves his mother!"

"Are you sure you are well enough to travel?" asked Mary.

"Yes, I am sure I'm well enough to get home."

"Then excuse me for a little while," said Mary. "I will go back to the hotel and pack a few things, and come for you with a cab. In half an hour I will be here. Can you get ready in that time?"

"Ay, I'll be ready; you need not fear."

A few minutes later Mary was back at the hotel again. When she arrived there she found that her father had gone. It was still early for the assize courts, but she paid no attention to it. There was doubtless sufficient reason for her father's early departure. Perhaps, perhaps—— But she could not formulate the thoughts which one after another flashed through her mind. Seizing a piece of paper, she scribbled a hasty note and gave it to the hall porter.

"This is for Judge Bolitho," she said, and then, entering the cab which waited for her, she drove quickly to Dixon Street. Arriving there she found Paul's mother was ready for her, and ere long they were in the train bound for Brunford.

During the journey scarcely a word passed between them. Mary was busy with her own thoughts. She was trying to bring some order out of the confusion of the events which had been narrated to her. Everything was altered. If what the woman had told her was true—and in spite of everything she believed it was—then Paul was her half-brother; and if Paul were her half-brother and his mother were still alive, then, then——

But she would not trouble about this, bewildering as it was. What mattered her own future? What mattered what the world might say? Her first business was to save Paul, and save him she would, at all hazards. She looked at her companion, who sat near to her staring into vacancy. Mary's excited imagination began to conjure up wild fancies as she looked. She thought of what Paul's mother must have been twenty-five years before, tried to picture her as a girl. Yes, she must have been very beautiful, and might easily have attracted such a young man as her father was at the time. She fancied the two up among the bare Scottish hills, saw the flash of the young girl's eyes when the stranger told her he loved her, realised the throbbing of her heart, the joy, the wonder which must have possessed her when she promised to be his wife. For the moment all the grim realities of the present seemed to retire to the background. She lived in the world of fancy, of imagination, and the poetry and the romance of the past became very beautiful to her. Strange to say, her own part in the affair did not for the moment trouble her. The terrible logic of events were not yet real to her. By and by they would appear to her in all their ghastly nakedness, but now they did not seem to matter.

"If I am going to be ill," said Paul's mother, "you'll stay with me, won't you?"

"Yes," she replied, not realising what the words might mean.

"You see I shall be all alone. I have no friends in Brunford. Many would have liked to be friends with me for Paul's sake, but I kept them all at a distance. You see I waited until my name was cleared, and it will soon be cleared now."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he knows, he knows everything—I mean your father. He's afraid of Paul, I know he is; he always has been. It's strange that Paul is not anything like him, isn't it? Paul has black hair and black eyes, just as I have. He's my boy, my boy! Thank God for that! And they can't harm him, can they? You are sure of that."

Mary was silent. The meaning of the work she had to do became real to her now. She, too, believed that no harm could come to Paul, but she realised the cost of his salvation. Paul could never be saved until the true murderer was found and proved to be the murderer.

"I am afraid I am going to be ill," went on the older woman. "These last few weeks have been too much for me. And you've promised to stay with me, haven't you?"

"Yes," replied Mary eagerly. "I'll stay with you, and you must tell me everything."

"Everything? What do you mean?"

"Oh, everything," replied Mary, and into her heart came the determination to wring the confession from her at whatever cost.

Presently the smoky chimneys of Brunford appeared, and Mary looked out of the carriage window over the great, ugly town; but somehow it did not seem ugly to her—the grey sky, the long rows of cottages, the hundreds of chimneys belching out half-consumed coals did not repel her. This was Paul's town. He was member of Parliament for it. It was here he had made his position. It was here, too, she had first seen him, and here he had learnt to love her.

"You've never seen the home Paul has given me?" she heard her companion say. "It is the prettiest home in Brunford. Paul did it all for me. You won't think you're in Brunford when you get there. It's

quiet and clean up there. The birds sing in the springtime, and the smoke doesn't blow that way as a rule. I never saw another house like it. Oh! I would gladly die there. All I want now is to see my Paul happy. As for the other man——"

She ceased speaking here, and Mary noted the angry flash of her eyes, watched the quivering lips, and wondered of what she was thinking.

"There will be no servants in the house," went on Paul's mother presently. "They are in Manchester. They have been summoned for witnesses. But I told Mrs. Bradshaw to keep everything bright and clean, as I might come home any minute. I thought that before now Paul and I would be back together, and so she'll be expecting us. You're not hungry, are you?"

"No," said Mary.

"I expect he'll be acquitted to-day," she went on. "That man can't sit in judgment on him any longer now, and the people will be glad. Won't there be shouting when my Paul comes home?"

When they arrived at Brunford station, Mary noted how the porters looked curiously at them and spoke one to another in whispers. She knew that before an hour was over the whole town would be talking about them. They would be wondering why she, the judge's daughter, should accompany the mother of the man who was accused of murder. But she did not trouble about it. She called a cab, and a few minutes later they were on their way to Paul's home.

Mary began to get excited. Once in Paul's house she would be able to examine everything, and would perhaps discover things that would lead the woman by her side to make her confession. She felt sure that she was on the track of discovery, felt convinced that before long the truth would come to light.

When they arrived at the house Mary found the door standing open, and a motherly-looking woman waiting to receive them.

"I've done as yo' told me, Mrs. Stepaside," said Mrs. Bradshaw the woman. "There's a fire in the kitchen range, and another in the study, and everything is clean and nice."

"Mrs. Stepaside is not very well," said Mary quietly. "I've come with her from Manchester. But she will be all right with me."

"And who might yo' be?" asked Mrs. Bradshaw suspiciously.

"I'm Mrs. Stepaside's friend," she replied. "Will you lead the way to the room where the fire is?"

A few minutes later they were in the house alone. Mrs. Bradshaw had brought a cup of tea, and then, saying she'd be back again presently, had left them.

"Somehow I don't feel a bit lonely now you're here. Why is it, I wonder?" and the older woman looked into Mary's face curiously.

"I'm glad you're not lonely," said Mary. "Are you well enough to talk?"

"Ay, I'm feeling ever so much better. I wonder why it is?"

"Did you sleep last night?" asked Mary.

"Nay, I couldn't sleep. Was it any wonder? You see we met after all those long years, and I told him the truth. Ay; but he's suffering—he's suffering! And it's right he should, too. Ay, and I'm suffering, too, my lassie. I feel strange. I think I'll go to bed if you'll help me."

As Mary helped her upstairs she felt like one in a dream. Everything was intangible, unreal. What was she doing in this house? What right had she to be waiting on this woman so carefully and tenderly, when she was guilty of the awful deed which threatened to bring Paul to the gallows? But she spoke no word.

A little later they were in the bedroom together, and Mary was ministering to her with almost tender solicitude.

"Sit by me while I sleep, won't you? I don't know how long it is since sleep came to me, but I feel now as though I could rest. Ay, lass, but you are bonnie! It's no wonder that my Paul loves you."

Her overwrought powers had doubtless given way. The scenes through which she had passed had made her incapable of realising the true consequences of everything. Mother Nature had come to her aid, and in her own way was applying healing balm.

A little later she was sleeping like a child.

Mary sat almost motionless by her side for some time. Things were turning out altogether differently from what she had expected. Up to the present she had made no accusation. She had not even suggested what she was sure was the truth. She wondered why it was. All the same, she waited, feeling sure that her time would come.

Presently, noting that Paul's mother was not likely to wake, she left the room; and then, led by a strange curiosity, wandered round the house. She went into Paul's bedroom. She knew it was his by a thousand things. Here he had dreamed his dreams and made his plans. He had dreamed of her, doubtless, not knowing that she was his sister—his sister! She could not realise it. Her brain, her heart, refused to accept it as a fact, and yet she felt sure it was so. Again she went into the study, the little den which Paul had taken so much care to furnish. She looked lovingly at his books and noted those which he had evidently used most. She went to the writing-table where he had done his work, and noted the various pictures which hung around the room. It was not like the ordinary Lancashire manufacturer's house at all. It suggested the student, the man of letters, the lover of art. And how silent it was! Away in the distance was the hum of the busy town, but here, sheltered by the great hills which sloped away behind, all was peace. After sitting for a time, she went into Paul's mother's bedroom again, and watched her as she lay asleep. Could what she had dreamt of be true? Could this woman who lay sleeping as peacefully as a child be guilty of the terrible crime of which she had accused her? In her sleep she looked almost like a girl. The lines had somehow left her face, as though an angel's hand had wiped them out. A smile was upon her lips. In her sleep she did not suggest a strong, passionate woman, but the girl whom any lad might love.

She left the room again and wandered aimlessly around. She found a strange interest in being in Paul's home. She felt, too, as though she had a right there; and why should she not have that right, since Paul was her brother? More than once she looked toward the garden gate as if expecting that he would come in. She did not think of him as being tried for his life in the assize courts at Manchester. But she had strange fancies of what was happening there. What would her father say? What would he do?

Presently she heard shrill cries in the road not far distant. She listened attentively.

"Wonderful confession at Manchester!" It was a boy's voice she heard, and every word reached her clearly.

"Strange confession by the judge! Paul Stepaside's father!"

Heedless of what she was doing, she rushed down the garden path, and found her way into the street in the near distance. A boy was selling newspapers. She bought one, and hurried back to the house. She had no idea of the lapse of time, did not realise that it was now three o'clock in the afternoon. She had come by a slow train from Manchester, and Paul's mother had been sleeping for hours.

Eagerly she opened the paper, and there, great staring headlines met her gaze. For a long time she was absorbed by what she read. There, in cold, plain words, was her father's confession. It was true, then; every word of it was true. She did not know why she did it, but, taking the paper in her hand, she hurried upstairs to the bedroom where she had left Paul's mother asleep. The town hall clock was chiming in the distance. She looked at her own watch, and saw that it was half-past four. She had been reading the paper for an hour. As she entered the woman on the bed awoke.

"Something's happened, my lassie. What is it?"

"It's all here," said Mary. "It's all here. Shall I read it to you?"

CHAPTER XXIX

MARY'S ACCUSATION

As Mary looked at Paul's mother she noted the improvement in her looks. The wild, mad expression of her eyes had gone. She appeared more human, more womanly.

"Yes, read it to me," she said. "It's something about Paul, isn't it? Have they acquitted him?"

"Listen!" said Mary. "A wonderful thing's happened. What you told me was true. My father has made a confession before the court. Oh! what it must have cost him!"

"Confession? Read it! Read it!"

And Mary read, while the woman lay still and silent.

The paper which she had obtained was one of the principal Manchester evening journals. The members of its staff had, immediately after Judge Bolitho's confession, rushed eagerly to the office with their copy. Perhaps it was one of the most graphic descriptions of the scene which appeared in any journal, and caught more truly the inwardness of the event which set all Lancashire talking, than any other. Mary read the whole story from beginning to end; read the description of Paul's entrance into the prisoner's dock, the great excitement which pervaded the court as all present waited for the judge; read the description of how his lordship looked, and of the tremendous emotion under which he was

labouring. It was a fine piece of journalism, done by a man who afterwards occupied a high position on one of the great London dailies. He made the scene live, made everything so real and vivid that these women, who were so terribly interested in the story, saw everything as he saw.

Paul's mother lay rigid as Mary read the judge's words, until finally she came to the confession. "This I do wish to say, here in the presence of those who have gathered together to witness this trial. Paul Stepaside is my lawful son, and, unknowingly, I have sinned against him grievously and greatly; his mother is my lawful wife. He is my lawful son, and I do here and now confess the wrong which I have done to him, and I do it because my conscience commands me to do so, and because I wish to ask my son's forgiveness."

As Mary read these words the woman rose in her bed and gave a cry of joy.

"At last! At last!" she said. "But I never thought he would do this. No, no; I never dreamed of it. He's confessed it before everyone. Don't you see, my lassie? He's confessed it there in the open court that I'm his lawful wife and that Paul is his lawful son! There's no stain upon his name now—and no stain on mine either!"

She sat up in the bed, her eyes aglow. She was radiant. She did not think of what this might mean to Mary, did not realise that the vindication of her own honour might mean Mary's shame. That never entered into her mind. All her thought was of Paul; and even her joy that all disgrace was taken away from her was because thereby Paul's name would be honoured. She looked years younger. It seemed as though a great weight had rolled from her mind, as though the dark skies had been made clear and the sun were shining.

"Are you not glad, my lassie? Does it not rejoice your heart? Think of it! Think of it!"

But Mary was silent. Naturally, the happenings of the day had bewildered her, almost unhinged her own mind. She thought, too, of what her father had suffered. No one knew better than she what a proud man he was and what it must have cost him to have made this confession. But more than all this she realised Paul's danger. Although she was greatly moved by the revelations which had been made, although her being had been aroused to its very depths and her life become revolutionised, the thought which was above every other thought was Paul's safety. She knew what her father's confession would mean. If he could no longer be the judge, then another would be appointed; and as she read her father's words she seemed to feel that he believed his son to be guilty of the deed of which he was accused. And if her father believed this, would not the judge who would try the case anew believe it also? And if the judge believed it, would not the jury believe it, and condemn him?

"What is the matter, my lassie? You don't look glad. You are pale. What do you fear?"

Even then Paul's mother did not think of what it might mean to Mary. Nothing mattered but her own son.

"But what of Paul?" Mary said. "We must save him!"

"Paul, Paul? What do you mean?"

"I am afraid," said Mary. "Do you not see what my father said? 'If Paul Stepaside is guilty of the murder of Edward Wilson——' Oh, don't you see—don't you see?"

"But they cannot harm my Paul—they cannot, they cannot!"

"But we must save him!" cried Mary. "Do you know of anything? You do, don't you? Paul never committed this murder. He couldn't do it. But unless the real murderer is found he will have to die. Don't you understand?"

"Paul die? Paul die?"

"Yes; they will condemn him unless the real murderer appears. Everyone says so. And you know who did it, don't you?"

"Do you mean to say that you think my Paul cannot get himself off?"

"Oh, don't you realise?" cried Mary. "Jurymen are stupid. They only look at the surface of things. Of course I know he didn't do it. I know he couldn't! But unless the truth comes to light, the jury will condemn him, and then, no matter who is judge, he will be hanged! Don't you see—don't you see?"

"Do you believe this?"

"I can't help believing it," replied the girl. "I've heard my father discuss law cases again and again, and I know what will happen. Won't you tell what you know? Won't you confess? For you do know, don't you?"

"But do you mean that you, who love my Paul, who believe in him, who know how clever he is, and who are sure he's innocent, do you believe that he can't clear himself?"

"How can he, when the evidence all points to him? Someone killed Ned Wilson. Someone struck the blow with Paul's knife. Don't you see? Who did it? You know!"

"I know?"

"Yes, you know. Paul is trying to shield someone; you know he is. Who is he trying to shield? He's giving his life for someone. Who would he give his life for? He's refused to go into the witness-box, refused to confide in anyone. Don't you see the meaning of it? Who is there in Brunford or anywhere else that Paul would be willing to die for?—for that is what it means. Why is he silent? You know; tell me."

The girl was wrought up to such a pitch of excitement now that she did not care what she said; neither had she any pity in her heart. She felt almost angry, too, that this woman should be so rejoiced because of what she had read to her when all the time Paul was in danger of death. What mattered name, what mattered honour, what mattered anything if Paul were pronounced guilty?

"*I* know, my lassie. *I* know," cried the woman.

"Of course you know—you *must* know. Who is Paul trying to shield, tell me that? Who went into Paul's office and got the knife? Paul did not kill Ned Wilson. Who did? Tell me that!"

She fixed her eyes on the elder woman, and there was such intensity in her look, such passion in the words she had spoken, that at length Paul Stepaside's mother guessed what was in her heart.

"You believe that Paul is shielding me?" she said quietly. "You believe that I murdered him?" and her voice was hard and stern.

"It was not Paul who did it," said Mary. "Although a thousand men were to swear they saw him do it, I would not believe them. Who did it, then?"

"And you believe that?"

"Who is Paul trying to shield?" repeated the girl, with almost monotonous iteration.

For a few seconds a painful silence fell between them, and it was evident by the look on the face of the elder woman that she was thinking deeply.

"Do you believe," and her voice was almost hoarse, "do you believe, my lassie, that Paul is lying in that gaol charged with murder because he wants to shield me?"

"What else can I believe?" cried Mary. "Tell me the truth. You say you love your son; if your love is worth anything, you will confess to the truth!"

Again a painful silence fell between them. The elder woman, who sat up in bed, seemed to be trying to realise the meaning of the other's words. She might have been living over the night of the murder again.

Presently she fixed her gaze upon Mary, and the girl saw that the old mad light was coming back into her eyes again.

"You believe that—that!" she gasped. Her body swayed to and fro for a moment, and then she fell back on the bed like one dead.

A great fear came into Mary's heart. She believed that Paul's mother, stricken to the heart by her accusation, and realising the terrible import of her silence, had been killed by her words. For a moment she did not know what to do, but, soon overcoming her weakness, she tried to restore her to life. She put her ear over the heart of the prostrate form on the bed, and gave a cry of satisfaction. "No; she's not dead, she's not dead!"

But what could she do? She was there alone in the house with this unconscious woman. She had little or no knowledge of nursing, and she did not know how to obtain help. But help she must obtain. This woman must not die—at least, before she had made her full confession. Even yet Paul's safety was the great thought in her mind. Nothing seemed to matter beside that.

There was a sound of footsteps, and she heard Mrs. Bradshaw's voice asking whether she could do anything. It seemed like Providence that the woman should have entered at this moment, and eagerly she rushed to her.

"Mrs. Stepaside is worse!" she cried. "She ought to have a doctor. Could you run and fetch one?"

"My boy's at home," said Mrs. Bradshaw. "I'll send him up to Dr. White's house at once. He's the best man in Brunford, and he's friendly with Paul, too."

"Does he live far away?"

"No, not so far. There are one or two others who live nearer, but I don't reckon much on 'em."

"Run, then, quick!" said Mary. "There's no time to be lost."

"Ay, and after I've sent Peter Matthew I'll come in again and get you something to eat. You must be fair pined."

Mary returned to the room again, and waited what seemed to her an interminable length of time, looking anxiously at the sick woman the whole time. She lay very still, almost motionless in fact, but Mary was sure she was not dead, and she prayed as she had never prayed before that she might live. As it seemed to her, it was not Paul's mother's life that hung in the balance, but Paul's.

At length Dr. White came, and went quickly into the bedroom. Dr. White was a tall, spare man, between forty and fifty years of age. He was one of those doctors who loved his profession with a love almost amounting to passion, and he had worked himself almost to a skeleton. People said that he ought to be a very rich man, but he was not. A great part of the service he rendered was a labour of love. Scores of people in Brunford wondered why he never sent a bill to them, and when he was asked the reasons for his remissness, he always put the inquirers off with a laugh. "Oh, you'll be getting it some day." The truth was he hated sending bills to poor people, and his great delight was not in receiving cheques or payment for his services, but in seeing his patients restored to health and strength again. He was almost worshipped in the town, and, indeed, no one worked so hard for the good of the people as he did in his own way.

When he entered the room he looked at Mary rather wonderingly, but asked no questions. He went straight to the patient's bedside, and examined her carefully. When he had completed his examination he turned to the young girl, who was watching him with wide, staring eyes.

"When did this happen?" he said.

Mary began to explain Mrs. Stepaside's relationship to the accused man in Manchester and of the sufferings through which she had gone.

"I know all about that," said the doctor. "But tell me the immediate cause of this."

As may be imagined, this was a difficult task, but Mary's ready wit helped her through with it.

"I brought her from Manchester this morning," she said. "She did not seem very well then, and she asked me to come with her. Then, then——" And her eyes rested upon the newspaper which she had been reading.

"Oh, I see," said the doctor. "It was a sudden shock. Yes; it's quite understandable—long weeks of suspense and agony, and then this on the top of it!" He did not ask any further questions, for Dr. White was a wise man. He knew the whole circumstances of Paul's arrest, and was therefore able to estimate the truth.

"Mrs. Stepaside has had a great shock. Of course, I need not repeat that, and she may lie like this for some days. One cannot tell the developments which will take place."

"Do you think she will die?" asked Mary anxiously.

"She's had enough to kill her, anyhow!" replied the doctor, "but she may pull through. We'll do our best. Whatever happens, nothing must be said or done to agitate her—you understand that? I fancy she will have fleeting periods of consciousness, but she must be always met with a smile. I am sure you understand this?"

"But how long will it be before—before she is allowed to talk?"

"Weeks!" replied the doctor shortly; and the word seemed like a knell of death. If Paul's mother were not allowed to speak, if she could not make her confession, then Paul might die! The thought was horrible, yet what could she do? Even if she became strong enough to speak and to make her confession, it would not be of any value. Any judge or jury would regard it as the ravings of a disordered mind.

"You're here alone," went on the doctor. "Of course I understand why you came with her," and again he looked at the newspaper which Mary had been reading.

The girl did not reply, and the doctor went on. "But you must have help. It would be madness for you to remain here alone. Of course the servants are in Manchester. They have been summoned as witnesses. But do not trouble; I'll help you. I'll send a nurse at once, and I think I can manage about the servants, too—that's the best of knowing everyone, Miss Bolitho. I'll call again in a couple of hours. Good-day."

To Mary the man's conduct seemed utterly brutal. He uttered no word of comfort. The few words he spoke were curt, almost harsh; and yet she knew he was a kind man. She continued to sit by the bed, looking at the sick woman's face, her heart filled with a great dread. She could do nothing. She must only remain there and wait and watch.

In about an hour Dr. White returned. This time there was a nurse with him. Mary did not know that he had, on leaving her, driven to the hospital at a speed which endangered the community, obtained the services of a nurse, and then came back at the same headlong pace. She did not know, either, that he had set means on foot whereby a capable woman would be secured to look after the house. Dr. White was not a man who talked much, but he did a great deal. He seemed to be pleased with the patient's condition on his return. As far as he could judge there were no evil signs.

"Now, Miss Bolitho," he said as he went away, "I want you to understand that Paul Stepaside's mother is not the only patient I have. You are another. You must go to bed immediately."

"I could not—I could not!" she cried.

"Very well, then," said the doctor. "I noticed as I came up that there was a fire in Stepaside's study. There's a comfortable sofa there. Go and lie down."

"I could not lie down!"

"But I say you can, and you must!" said the doctor. "Here, I've brought something for you."

He poured a powder into a glass of water, and bade Mary drink it. The girl obeyed him.

"Now," he said. "Come down at once."

He led her downstairs by the arm into Paul's study, and having arranged the cushions on the sofa, he insisted on her lying down. Seizing a rug, he wrapped her up in it just as a father might.

"I'm not going to have you ill," he said. "Remember that! I'll call again to-night, but not before ten o'clock. I've a busy evening before me. In less than half an hour you'll be asleep, and you'll sleep for at least three hours; then you'll wake up better. By that time some dinner will be ready for you. What a grand thing it is to have a meddling fellow who takes everything out of your hands, isn't it?" and he gave the ghost of a laugh.

A few minutes later Mary felt a sense of drowsiness creeping over her, and then became unconscious.

When she awoke again it was to find her father sitting by her side.

She started up from the couch, for the moment unable to realise the situation. At first she thought she was back in the hotel in Manchester, but in a few seconds she realised the truth.

"Father!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Mary. I felt sure you'd come here. Directly I could get away I came as fast as I could, but the trains are terribly slow. I've only been here a few minutes."

For a few seconds there was a silence between them. Each seemed to know all that the other was thinking.

"I felt I must have a talk with you, Mary," said Judge Bolitho at length. "There are so many things to say, and so many things to do. Could I stay here to-night, I wonder? I must go back to Manchester again to-morrow morning."

"Why, father?"

"Of course you have read the newspapers. You know what took place in Manchester this morning?"

He spoke calmly and collectedly now. In one sense it seemed as though a great burden had been lifted from his mind. From the way he spoke, too, he might regard his confession as of little import.

"Father," cried the girl, "it's so bewildering, so terrible!"

"Yes, yes; I know. I've a great deal to tell you some time, Mary, but not now. You see I've passed through a great deal during the last twenty-four hours. All life has changed. What the future may bring forth God only knows. But I've done the right thing now. I sometimes think, Mary, that one of the greatest sins in life, the sin which leads the way to more than any other, is that of cowardice; and I was a coward. My God! what a coward I was! And I'm paying for it now. But for that I might have been a happy man; I might have had——"

He rose to his feet as he spoke and walked across the room. He seemed to be pondering deeply.

"Of course you despise me, Mary," he said. "You cannot help it. Everyone despises me. It's right and natural. I needn't tell you any further about it now, need I? You've read what is in the paper? You understand?"

"Yes, I think, I—I—I think I understand. But, father, we must save Paul! Whatever happens, we must save Paul!"

"If it is possible," said the judge. "For, oh! God helping me—— Yes, I should die! It would kill me if —if the worst comes to the worst! That's why I came, Mary. I must have another talk with her. I think after to-morrow I shall be free; but I must go to Manchester then, perhaps to London. There are so many formalities to be complied with. But never mind, formalities or no formalities, nothing must stand in the way of his salvation."

"He's not guilty, father; you know that? He's been shielding someone all the time. That's why he would have no one to defend him. That's why he confided in no one. I'm sure of it!"

The judge nodded his head. He, too, had been thinking deeply, and his trained mind had gone farther into the matter than that of Mary.

"Yes; I've been thinking of that," was his reply. "In fact, I felt almost sure of it when I went to see him to-day."

"You've, been to see him to-day? What? Since what you said in the court? What did he say? How did he look? Did he—did he——"

"The thing that troubles me," said the judge, interrupting, "is this—who is Paul trying to shield?"

The girl looked anxiously around the room, then went to the door and peered into the passage outside.

"Can't you think, father? Whom would he be likely to shield? I accused her of it this afternoon. I could not help it. The doctor doesn't know, but that's why she's so ill now. When she realised what I meant, she seemed like one struck down by a blow."

"You mean to say," he gasped, "that you believe Jean—that is, his mother—was——" He did not finish the sentence. It seemed too horrible, too terrible.

"No, Mary," he continued at length. "That's not it."

"But it must be, father."

"No; that's not it. Now then, tell me everything you know. You went to Dixon Street this morning; the woman told me all about it. You brought her here. You had a talk with her. Tell me everything that has taken place. You went to see Paul before the trial, too. Tell me everything."

Half an hour later Judge Bolitho was in possession, not only of all that Mary knew, but of all her suspicions and her reasons for those suspicions. He had submitted her to a very thorough cross-examination. His mind had fastened upon a hundred things of which she had taken no cognisance. He saw through the fallacies of her reasoning, and drew his conclusions accordingly. His mind was quick and active now. It seemed as though his freedom from the responsibilities of his judgeship gave him a sense of liberty. The fact that he had work to do had done something to lessen the remorse which was gnawing at his heart.

"I must go over this whole business again, Mary," he said. "Did you say that you had those Brunford papers here with you?"

"Yes, father; every one."

"And I have all the other facts since. Oh, my boy, my boy!"

"You believe you can save him?"

"I will, I will!" he cried. "I have sinned, but God will never allow me to suffer this. He could not. One thing my confession to-day will do, too—it will give me time. There's sure to be some delay before another judge is appointed, and the whole case will have to be tried again. Meanwhile I must be up and doing."

"Oh, if she were only conscious!" said Mary. "But the doctor says that perhaps she will be unconscious for weeks, and under no circumstances must she be questioned."

"Did she speak of me?" asked the judge.

"Only indirectly."

"Did she seem to despise me—hate me?"

The girl was silent, and the judge understood what her silence meant.

"It's just," he said. "It's just. But I must save Paul!"

A knock came to the door, and the woman whom Dr. White had obtained told them there was food in the dining-room.

"Thank you," said the judge. "Yes, we must eat, Mary; it seems like waste of time, but we must. And after we have had some dinner I'll read through everything again. There must be a way out. Are you well enough to run upstairs, Mary, and ask how—how—she is?"

There was a strange, yearning look in his eyes as he spoke. He might have been ashamed, too—there was indeed a change in Judge Bolitho.

"She's no worse," said Mary, coming down a few minutes later. "The nurse says she is sleeping peacefully. The doctor will be here in a little while now. He seems a very hard-hearted man, but he admires Paul greatly, and he's very clever."

During the meal both of them were silent. Each, of them had much food for thought, and there are

times when words are vain.

"To think," said the judge, when they had finished their dinner, "that I should be here in this way, in my son's house, and that his mother—— Mary, bring me those papers, will you?"

A little later he was deeply immersed in the early history of the trial, noting each detail, fastening upon every weakness of the charge and the difficulties of defence. It seemed to him as though he were practising at the bar again, and he were preparing his case for the defence of the prisoner. But this time he had an interest never known to him before. It was for him to fight for the life of his own son.

Presently he heard the doctor's step on the stairs. He had been in the sick-room, and when he had finished his visit, Mary had led him to the room where her father was. Dr. White looked at the judge curiously. At each house he had called that afternoon there was but one subject of discussion. No one knew that Judge Bolitho was in Brunford; had they done so, excitement would have exceeded all bounds; but as it was, the confession which he had made had set the whole town talking.

"Will you tell me how my wife is?" asked the judge.

"Your wife?" queried the doctor.

"Yes, my wife. Will you tell me how she is?"

The doctor gave a significant glance at Mary, which the judge was not slow to interpret; but he made no sign. Now that he had made his confession and told the truth, he was the same proud man who, not long before, had been Member of Parliament for that town.

"She's very ill," said the doctor.

"But she will not die, will she?"

"Of course, that's impossible to say. She's a strong woman, but she's had—well, you know what she's had to bear."

The judge nodded. "But will she get better?"

"I do not think she will die just yet."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think it is possible her body may recover."

"But her mind?" said the judge, noting the significance of the doctor's words.

"Concerning her mind I can promise nothing," said the doctor. "The strain she has borne for so long has been enough to drive one of her sensitive nature mad."

The judge was silent for a few seconds, then he spoke in his old, almost authoritative tones.

"Let nothing be left undone, doctor," he said. "Engage any help you think may be of value to you. You know the best man in your profession. Get into communication with him at once. We must fight, man; we must fight!"

There was a ring of defiance in his voice, and even then Mary thought how different he was from the preceding night, when she had parted from him in Manchester.

"Have you made up your mind what to do, father?" she asked, when the doctor had gone.

"Yes, I have. By the way, Mary, I know you must be longing to ask questions about yourself, but ——"

"Don't trouble about me now, father. I know what you are thinking of. But my name, my future, are nothing compared with—— Oh, father, we must save Paul!"

"If it is within the realm of human possibility we will, Mary."

"And you believe it is?"

"Give me three days," said the father, "and then perhaps I can tell you."

CHAPTER XXX

THE TESTIMONY OF ARCHIE FEARN

"Father, have you discovered anything?"

"Nothing," and the judge shook his head despondently. "It seems as though every road is a cul-de-sac. I have followed up hundreds of clues, and they have all ended in nothing."

"You know what I believe, father?"

"I know, Mary; but you're wrong."

"But Paul never did it!" She seemed never to grow weary of making this assertion. No matter how strong the evidence might be, no matter what the world might say, nothing shook her.

"Branscombe thinks so."

"He has not told you, has he?"

"Oh, no. I have not said a word to him about the trial; but I've been reading the evidence this evening—you know, the case came on again this morning—and it's clear to me from his questions that he has no doubt about the matter. Things looked very black against Paul when the case was adjourned this evening."

A look of wild terror came into Mary's eyes. "But, father, don't you see?" she cried. "Paul had no secrets from his mother. He told her everything—everything. When he came home that night, after his quarrel with Wilson, he would tell the whole story to her. Afterwards—— Can't you see, father? Can't you see?"

"We've gone over this ground a hundred times," said the judge. "But it won't do, Mary. In any case, it would be impossible to make an accusation against her. No one saw her that night, and, as far as I can see, nothing can be traced to her in any way. And even if it could—— Don't you understand, Mary?"

"And will you allow Paul to be hanged?"

The judge was silent. They were sitting alone in Paul's study some days after the judge had made his confession. He had been true to his promise, and had devoted every possible moment to the elucidation of the mystery which faced him. He had brought all his knowledge of the law to bear upon it; he had utilised all his experience in the discovery of criminals; he had exerted himself to the utmost; but there was not a ray of light anywhere.

"Do you know anything? Have you heard anything more?" he asked.

"As you know," replied Mary, "she has not been fully conscious ever since that day. But I have found out something. This afternoon she has been much better, and now and then there seemed to be some return of reason."

"Well?"

"Well, her mind is full of this trial, full of the horror of Paul's situation—you can tell that from her wanderings—and this afternoon I heard her say these words: 'They make a great deal about the knife. They say no one could have got into the office; but I was in the office, and I saw the knife. Paul and I spoke about it.'"

"Yes," said the judge eagerly. "Was there anything else?"

"No, nothing more, nothing more; but surely it is enough?"

The judge was silent for a few seconds.

"If she had been able to attend as a witness this would have come out," he said. "I find that she was subpoenaed, but her illness makes it impossible for her to be there." And he gave a sigh, half of relief, half of sorrow.

"And can you do nothing, nothing?" asked Mary.

"Nothing yet," said the judge.

"But you cannot believe they will find him guilty?"

"Paul will be allowed to make a speech in his own defence. He may work wonders that way. He has done very little cross-examining to-day, but that may be part of his method. I think he's going to rely on his analysis of evidence. It's not an unsound process. Cross-examinations ofttimes mean very little. Justice Hawkins, you may remember, when he was practising at the Bar, used to depend almost entirely on his closing speech, and he won more cases than perhaps any other man. Still, we must not depend upon that. Nothing shall be left undone, Mary."

"Father, I'm going to see Paul."

"Better wait, better wait," he replied. "I am afraid a visit from you would do him more harm than good. You'd have to tell him about his mother's illness."

"I'm going to write to him to-night, anyhow," said Mary.

"But tell him nothing that will pain him, Mary."

When Mary left the room Judge Bolitho nearly lost control over himself. The days were slipping away, and nothing had been done. In spite of every inquiry he had made, he seemed to be getting no nearer to the solution he sought for. Like Mary, he was convinced that Paul had never done the deed; and yet, unless the murderer could be discovered, he could not close his eyes to Paul's face. For more than an hour he went over the whole miserable story again, connecting link with link, incident with incident, opinion with opinion. Still the same blank wall met him.

"I can't stay indoors any longer," he muttered. "I must get out into the open air."

It was now about nine o'clock, and, almost heedless whither he went, he found his way into the heart of the town. Judge Bolitho had by this time become an almost familiar figure among the people of Brunford. He had gone all over the town making inquiries. He had spent much time in the neighbourhood of Paul's factory making investigations. He had talked with all sorts of people, and all, knowing what he desired, had told him everything they knew. But still the secret remained a secret.

Presently he found himself in the market-place, where there were excited groups of people discussing that day's trial. The judge wandered from one group to another listening eagerly. A large ulster almost covered his face, for the nights were very cold, and but few recognised him. It seemed to be the settled conviction among the people that Paul's case was hopeless. At length he heard someone speaking who attracted his attention strangely. It was not because of what he said, but because of the unfamiliar accent which the judge immediately recognised. The man was a Scotsman, and he spoke with the accent common to that district where Jean was reared. The judge drew nearer and listened attentively.

"I tell you," said the man, "I saw this Bolitho when he was but a lad. My brother, Willie Fearn, courted Jean, and it was Bolitho who took her away from him. Ye dinna believe me? Am I not called Archie Fearn? Ay, but I know."

The men to whom he spoke laughed incredulously.

"Yo've been drinking too much Scotch whisky," said one with a laugh.

"I can carry more whisky than any man in Brunford," was his reply. "I was ne'er a steady, God-fearing man like my brother Willie. It might have been better for me if I had been. He's a rich man the noo, while I have to come to this dirty hole to get a living. Ay, I know more about this business than you think."

At this there was much incredulous laughter, and then Judge Bolitho heard the man cry out something about his having seen someone on the very night of the murder. The conversation was not by any means connected, but Judge Bolitho, anxious to catch at any straw, determined not to allow the Scotsman to escape him. It might end in nothing; still, there was possibly something in what the man had said.

A few minutes later Archie Fearn left his companions, evidently with the purpose of making his way to a public-house which stood at the corner of the Market Square. Before he reached it, however, the judge had come up to him and touched his arm.

"So you call yourself Archie Fearn now, do you?" he said quickly.

"Ay, and who dares say I'm not Archie Fearn?" replied the man. "Was I no born in Scotland? And do I not speak like a Scotsman?"

"You did not call yourself Archie Fearn the last time I saw you," said the judge.

"And when might ye have seen me?"

"I saw you in Liverpool two years ago. You called yourself John McPhail then, and it was my duty to give you six months with hard labour."

The man looked at the judge coolly. "Ay, very likely," he replied. "Ay, I remember noo, I remember noo," and he laughed significantly.

"Why do you laugh?" asked the judge.

"I was thinking," was the reply. "I think of mony things. The Scotch are a canny people. You'll be knowing that yourself, my lord."

"And you say you're Willie Fearn's brother?" said the judge.

"Ay, I am and all. It's perfectly true that Willie is an elder in the kirk, while I am—weel, what you see me; but, for all that, I know more about the fundamentals of doctrine than he does. I know the second catechism by heart, and I could put any meenister in this toon to shame. Ay, man, but if you want to hear preaching you must go to Scotland. It's there that the meenisters are groonded in the faith. In these English kirks they are very lax in the faith." And again the man laughed as though

something amused him.

"You seem to boast a good deal of your knowledge," said the judge, trying to estimate the man.

"I ne'er boast," was the reply. "I'm just a canny Scotsman, that's all. If I told all I kenned—weel, I might become popular. But a still tongue makes a wise heid."

"If you are Willie Fearn's brother," said the judge, and it pained him to say what next passed his lips, but as I have said, he was eager to catch at any straw, "you knew Jean Lindsay?"

"Ay, I kenned her weel," was the reply. "But I was aboot to go into the 'Hare and Hoonds,' Mr. Judge Bolitho. Perhaps for the sake of the time when you called yourself Graham you might like to give me a drop of whisky?"

"Come with me," said the judge. "I want to talk with you. If we go up Liverpool Road it will be quiet there. But stay, come with me to the house I'm staying at."

"Dootless you keep a bottle of good whisky in the cupboard there?"

"You shall not regret going," said the judge, and he led the way to Paul's house.

Half an hour later the two sat together in Paul's study. During their walk thither the man of the law had been thinking deeply. He had been trying to piece together the conversation he had heard in the market-place, trying to understand the significance of what Archie Fearn had said. He had no great hope of important revelations, but a lifetime of legal training and practice had proved to him that oft-times the greatest issues depended on the most trivial circumstances, and he could not afford to allow the most insignificant happening to pass by unnoticed.

"How long have you been in Brunford?" asked the judge.

"Since a month before Christmas," was the reply.

"You came here to get work?"

"I came here because I wasn't known in the toon, and because I thought I might be able to pick up an odd sax-pence."

"You say you knew Jean Lindsay when she was a girl?"

"Syne I expected her to be my ain sister-in-law, it was very natural that I should," was the reply.

"Do you think you'd know her again if you saw her?"

"I kenned her the moment I saw her in the streets of this toon, not long before Christmas," was the reply.

"You saw her then?"

"Ay, I did. I saw her and recognised her, just as I recognised you. But it took me longer to mak you oot. Although, as you say, you gave me six months in Liverpool, did not, at that time, connect you with my ain hame. But when I saw your picture as large as life in the house where I lodged, I began to put things together. When I saw you in Liverpool you had your big wig on, and your judge's goon, that's what put me off there, I expect. But in your picture you looked more natural, and I said: 'That's the lad who took away my brother Willie's lass.'"

The judge's mind was working quickly by this time, and he saw that the incident might have great possibilities.

"And you say you saw Jean in the streets of Brunford?"

"Ay, I did."

"And did you speak to her?"

"Nay, not at the time. The sight of her gave me a shock, as you may say. But as I tell't you, the Scots are a canny race, so I asked a man in the street who she was, and he told me she was Mrs. Stepaside, and that led to other inquiries, till presently I found out all there was to know."

"And what then?" asked the judge.

"Your lordship is a rich man," replied Archie. "And you'll not be expecting me to tell all I know for nothing. And I'm in sair need of a drop of whisky, too!"

The judge took a couple of sovereigns from his pocket.

"When you tell me all you know, you shall have these," he said.

The Scotsman's eyes glittered greedily. "Two sovereigns; weel, it's a sma' sum, a sma' sum for the likes of you, and I think I can say something that will interest you, too. In Scotland we think a great

deal of a five-poon note!"

"Very well," said the judge. "If you know anything worth telling me, and you speak plainly, you shall have the five-pound note."

"Of course, your lordship is a fair-minded man as far as money is concerned? I'll say nothing about anything else," and again the Scotsman laughed like one enjoying himself.

"You'll have to trust me for that," said the judge. "In any case, if you speak freely I'll give you the two sovereigns. If I judge your information to be important you shall have the five-pound note."

"It's this way," said Archie Fearn, "—and I think your lordship will see that what I have to tell ye is worth five poons, although I doot whether ye'll be pleased—when I discovered all aboot Jean, and what people were saying aboot her, and when I had made up my mind aboot Mr. Bolitho, who was at one time the Member of Parliament for this toon, I fell to thinking, and I was not long in assuring myself that Mr. Bolitho was the same lad who came to the Highlands lang years syne as Douglas Graham. Of course, I had heard a great deal about Paul Stepaside, and being, as I tell't ye, a reasoning man, I put two and two together. So I sent a letter to Jean, and asked her to meet me."

"A likely story!" said the judge.

"Like or not, it's true. And more than that, she came to see me on the very night that young Wilson was murdered, so noo then!"

"Then you spoke to her that night?"

"Ay, I did. I thought to myself, 'Now that Jean has plenty of siller she'll be glad to know the truth!'"

"And you told her the truth?"

"Ay, I did. I showed her your photograph which I'd brought with me. We were standing under a street-lamp, and I showed it to her. And there's not the slightest doot but she recognised you."

"What time was that?" asked the judge.

"It were late," said the man. "It must have been well after eleven o'clock."

"How long was she with you?"

"A goodish time, for she had many questions to ask, and we talked a good deal about old times. And I was not long in convincing her of the truth, I can tell ye. Ay, man, but you should have seen her face when she looked at your photograph. 'Oh, that's he, that's he!' she said."

"And then," said the judge, "did she come back here alone?"

"Nay, I walked back with her. Do ye think I'd be likely to allow a lass who was to have been my ain sister-in-law to come hame alone?"

"In what part of the town did you meet?"

"It was near the part they call Howden Clough."

"And at what hour did you return?"

"Oh, it must have been after midnight. You see," went on the Scotsman imperturbably, "I asked her to come and see me, and I fixed a late hour because I thought—weel; she might be a little more leeberal late at night than in the middle of the day. I have made a profound study of women, and I was in want of money at the time, and I thought I could make a better bargain with her. That's why I fixed a late hour for meeting. But I brought her home safely, and left her at the door here. It must have been in the early hours of the morning when I left her."

"Did you come into the house?"

"No; in that I thought Jean didn't act like an old neighbour should—seeing that at one time she was likely to be my sister-in-law! She didn't ask me in. Still, she seemed very grateful for the information I gave her."

"And you saw her go into the house early in the morning, you say?"

"Ay, I did."

"And then, did you go away immediately?"

"Nay, I waited out of curiosity for a few minutes. I heard the door snick, and then I waited until I saw a light in her bedroom. I said to myself, 'Jean will have a good deal to think about to-night.' I didn't think then that things would be so unfavourable to me."

"What do you mean?" asked the judge.

"Well, being, as I tell't you, a Scotsman, and a canny Scotsman at that, I naturally thought that the man who had discovered her husband for her would have a slight claim on her when she came into her own."

"Ah, I see," said the judge.

For more than an hour they sat talking, the Scotsman cool and self-contained, the judge asking keen, searching questions.

Presently Archie Fearn wended his way towards the part of the town where he had a lodging. "It's a peety the public-houses are all closed," he said, as he lovingly felt the five-pound note which the judge had given him. "Still, there's a to-morrow; and it may be I've done a good night's work after all."

As for the judge, he sat for a long time thinking. The house was now in silence. Everyone had gone to bed. He went upstairs and listened outside Mary's bedroom door. Evidently his daughter had retired. He went to the door of the room where his wife lay. All was silent. Then he came downstairs again.

"I am in my son's house," he said to himself, "and he—he's lying in Strangeways Gaol! I wonder whether, after all, this night may not mean a great deal. Anyhow, it's narrowed the circle of inquiry. It proves Jean was guiltless of this thing, and Mary altogether mistaken. I wonder what she will say when I tell her!"

The following morning he related to Mary what had happened on the previous night; told her in detail all that the man Fearn had said to him.

"You see, Mary," he said, "your suspicions were utterly wrong. The man's story has made it practically impossible for what you have thought to be true. Whoever committed the deed, it was not she—thank God for that!"

In spite of herself Mary was at length convinced. For hours she sat thinking over what her father had told her, considering the consequences of every point, and trying to see what they meant. Yes, he was right; and yet she felt sure that Paul believed in his mother's guilt, and that the reason of his silence was that he was trying to shield her. Then the old question came back to her. Paul did not commit this deed; who did it?

Presently Mary Bolitho gave a start as though some new thought had come into her mind. Her eyes flashed with a bright light. She seemed to see something which in the past had been hidden from her.

A few minutes later she was in the street, walking rapidly to Paul's factory. Arrived there, she asked for George Preston.

"He's in Manchester," was the reply. "He's there for the trial."

"But someone must be left in charge?" she urged.

"Ay, Enoch Standring is looking after things while they're away."

"I want to see him," said Mary. "Where is he?"

Without a word the youth to whom she had spoken led the way to Paul's office, where Enoch Standring was busily writing.

"I am Miss Bolitho," she said to the young man. "Perhaps you know me?"

"Yes," replied the other. "I know you very well by sight. What can I do for you?"

"You will naturally understand," said Mary, "that I am keenly interested in—in the trial in Manchester?"

"Naturally," said the young man.

"I suppose," said the girl, "you have in your books a record of all the people you employ?"

"Certainly."

"When they are engaged and when they leave?"

"Certainly—that is, we put their names down in a book when they come, and cross them off when they cease working for us."

"And you have all these books at hand?"

"Certainly," replied Standring. He was proud of the way in which the books of the firm of Stepaside and Preston were kept.

"How many hands do you employ?"

Standring told her.

"Will you let me see your books?"

"It's not usual," replied Standring. "You see, it's the wage-book, and the account is kept there of the amount each person earns."

"But I'm sure you will let me see it?" said Mary, looking at the young man with a smile. "Believe me, I do not ask without serious reason!"

The young man hesitated a few seconds and then put the books before her. "Here they are," He said. "Every name is put down here, and what each has earned."

"I want to see the pages for the month of December," said Mary. "By the way, do you often discharge your hands?"

"We never discharge anyone except for a serious reason," said Standring.

"Have you discharged anyone since—since—Mr. Stepaside went to Manchester?"

"No," said Standring. "You see, there was no reason. Business has gone on just the same as ever."

The girl looked eagerly down the list, and noted each name and the wages paid, while Standring watched her suspiciously. He wondered what this girl could mean by wanting to examine the wage-book.

"Do you keep on names after the people have ceased working for you?"

"Not after they've been discharged. There, you see, that man was discharged early in December. His name was crossed out. It doesn't appear the following week. On the other hand, if anyone is taken ill, we keep their names on, although they may not work. There, you see, Eliza Anne Bolshawe, she was taken ill at the beginning of December, but we kept on her name; the second week in December, no wages; the third week, no wages; the fourth week she came back again, and there's the amount she earned put opposite her name."

"I see," said Mary.

At that moment someone came into the office. "You're wanted in the mill, Enoch," said the visitor.

"Pray do not let me keep you, Mr. Standring," said Mary. "I'll do no harm while you're away." And she gave him a smile which removed any doubts which he might have had concerning leaving her alone.

Eagerly Mary went on examining the books, until presently her hands began suddenly to tremble. It seemed as though the idea which had been born in her mind were bearing fruit. Snatching a piece of paper from the office desk, she began to write rapidly.

When Enoch Standring returned, Mary was still busily examining the books, but the piece of paper on which she had made her notes was put out of sight.

"Have you seen what you want, Miss Bolitho?" said Standring.

"Yes, I think so," said Mary, "and I must congratulate you on the way these books are kept. The penmanship is perfect, and everything is clear, and easy to understand. I am sure Mr. Stepaside will be pleased with everything when he returns."

Standring looked at her sadly. He was one of those who believed that Paul Stepaside would never be acquitted, and he wondered what the future might bring forth.

When Mary returned to the house, she took the piece of paper from her pocket and looked at the notes she had made.

"I wonder, I wonder!" she said. "At any rate, I'll go and see her. Brunclough Lane, Brunclough Lane," she repeated to herself. "27 Brunclough Lane."

Heedless of the fact that she had had no food since the morning, she went out again, and presently found herself in a long narrow street where all the houses partook of the same character, each jutting on the causeway. At one of the corner houses she saw the words, "Brunclough Lane." Her heart was beating wildly, and she was excited beyond measure. The more she reflected, the more she became convinced of the importance of what she had done. She told no one of what she was thinking, or of the chain of reasoning which had led her to go to Paul's office that morning. But she had not acted thoughtlessly. Her father's account of the meeting with Archie Fearn, and what the man had said to him, had altogether changed her plans. Hitherto she could not help acting on the assumption that Paul's mother was guilty of this dread deed, consequently all her inquiries had been influenced by this belief. Up to now they had ended in nothing, even as had those of her father. Directly she had become convinced, however, that Paul's mother could have known nothing of the murder, and that on the very night when it took place her mind must naturally have been filled with other things, she saw that she must go on entirely different lines. As a consequence of this she had made her seemingly unaccountable visit to Paul's office, and had made what Standring regarded as an almost unprecedented request, to examine the wage-books. When she had gone, Standring went through those

same books again. He was trying to discover Mary's motive in all this, and was wondering whether she suspected him of immoral practice in relation to the wages of the operatives. No suspicion of the truth, however, entered his mind, and although many curious eyes watched her as she came into Brunclough Lane that afternoon, no one dreamed of her reason for going there.

She was not long in finding the number she sought. A hard-featured woman, about forty-five years of age, came to the door in response to her knock.

"Does Emily Dodson live here?"

"Ay," said the woman, looking at her suspiciously. "And who might yo' be?"

"I'm Mr. Paul Stepaside's sister," said Mary.

The woman did not speak, but looked at her visitor suspiciously. Had Mary been watching her face just then, she would have noted that her eyes seemed to contract themselves, and that her square jaw became set and defiant.

"Are you Emily Dodson's mother?"

"Ay, I am."

"Is she in now?"

The woman looked up and down the street like one afraid, but answered quietly, "Ay, she is."

"I'm given to understand," said Mary, "that she was one of my—that is, Mr. Stepaside's workpeople?"

The woman was silent.

"Is she ill?"

"What's that to yo'?"

To a South country person the woman's attitude might have seemed rude, but a Lancashire man would have regarded her answers to Mary's questions as natural. As I have before stated, there is nothing obsequious in a Lancashire operative's behaviour. They are rough, oft-times to the point of rudeness, although no rudeness is meant. Possibly this woman might have regarded Mary's visit as a piece of impertinence. If a neighbour had come, that neighbour would have been received kindly, but Mary's appearance suggested that she did not belong to the order of people who lived in that street, and there were many who resented anything like what seemed interference.

"But your daughter is not very well, is she?"

"I never said owt o' th' so'ort."

"I hear she's not been at work for several weeks, and as Mr. Stepaside is unable to attend to business just now, I thought I might be of some service."

The woman laughed sourly. "Ay, you're Bolitho's lass, are you?" she said. "A pretty tangle things have got into; and what I want to know is if, as newspapers say, according to the confession your feyther made on the Bench, he married Paul's mother, where do yo' come in?"

Mary's face blanched, not only because of the woman's words, but because of the look she gave her. Still she held on her way.

"I'm naturally interested in the people Mr. Stepaside has employed," she said, "and as I am given to understand that she's been unable to work for several weeks, I thought I might be of service."

"I'm noan asking for charity," replied the woman.

"No, I know," replied Mary. "Still, if your daughter is out of employment she won't be earning anything, and I thought if I could be of any help to you——"

"I want no 'elp. I never asked anyone for charity yet, and never took none owther, and I'm noan going to begin now."

There was a defiant ring in the woman's voice, and Mary realised that here was one of those strong, determined characters who are not easily moved, and which are not rare among the Lancashire operatives.

"But if your daughter is ill," went on Mary, "she must be lonely. Has she had the doctor, may I ask?"

"Would you mind my telling you, miss, that that's noan o' your business. If our Emily has no mind to work, she'll noan work. Good afternoon." And the woman closed the door in her face.

As Mary turned to walk away she noticed that a number of people were watching her, as if wondering what she should be doing there. But no one spoke to her, and presently she found herself

again near Paul's home, pondering deeply over what had taken place. She recalled every word that had been spoken, every question she had asked, and every answer the woman had given. She had said nothing that might arouse any suspicions, and her action was quite natural. She had simply gone to ask after one of Paul's employees, and therefore no one could attach undue importance to her visit, although they would be naturally curious to know why she went. During the time she had canvassed these people, when her father was candidate for Brunford, she had got to know many of their characteristics and to understand their methods of thinking, and this fact helped her to form her conclusions now, helped her to know how to act under the circumstances by which she was surrounded.

When she reached the house she asked for her father, and was informed that he was not in. He had left early that morning and had not yet returned. Hour after hour Mary sat alone, thinking, planning, wondering. She was afraid to attach too much importance to what had taken place that day, yet she felt sure that what she had seen and heard was not without meaning. But she felt her inexperience greatly. Oh, if her father would only come!

Presently a telegram was brought to her. Eagerly she opened it and read the contents. She saw that it was sent from Manchester, and it told her that her father was returning by the last train, and that there was no need for her to wait up for him.

Mary seized a time-table that lay on the table, and saw that the last train arrived at Brunford at eleven o'clock. There were four long, weary hours to wait, but she could not think of going to bed. Consequently, when Judge Bolitho returned that night he found his daughter awaiting him.

"Has something happened, Mary?" he said, as he noticed the look in her eyes.

"Have you found out anything?" she asked.

He shook his head sadly. "Nothing," he said. "I am afraid the trial has gone against Paul to-day too. I suppose it'll end to-morrow. Paul is to give his speech for his defence then. I wish I could be there; but I cannot; I dare not interfere in any way. It would prejudice his case too."

"Father," she said, "listen to me."

"Have you discovered anything?"

"I don't know yet," she said. "Listen."

CHAPTER XXXI

EZEKIEL ASHWORTH, HERBALIST

"Yes, Mary, what is it?"

"It may be I have been foolish, father, but for days I have been thinking about nothing except this. Being absolutely certain that Paul is innocent, I—well, you know what my suspicions were, father. But since you told me what that man Archie Fearn said, I was obliged to come to the conclusion that you were right."

The girl hesitated a second, and then went on excitedly: "I believe I've found out something."

The judge looked at his daughter questioningly, but there was no look of hope in his eyes. He could not believe that what he had failed to do she could accomplish. He had, as far as he knew, examined every possible source of evidence, and although he was still fain to believe as she believed, his reason still pointed to one dread conclusion.

"Until this morning," she went on, "I expect all my inquiries had been coloured by my belief, but when you destroyed that belief I was obliged to think on new lines. It's still a question of the knife, isn't it, father?"

"Yes," said the judge. "It's still a question of the knife. You see this is the fact, the salient fact, upon which the jury will have to fasten. Who could have become possessed of it? Paul was always careful about locking his office, and although it seems unlikely he should have done what it is believed he has done, what other explanation can be given?"

"Yes, I see," replied the girl. "But after you'd gone this morning I remembered lots of things which seemed to have no meaning before. We know now that Ned Wilson has not borne as good a character in the town as we thought."

The judge nodded.

"I heard all sorts of strange rumours," went on the girl, "to which I did not attach much importance. But when you convinced me that Paul's mother could not possibly have done it, I began to think those rumours might have some meaning. It may be the thing that I have found out has no meaning."

"What have you found out?" he asked sharply.

"This. First of all gossip associated Ned Wilson's name with a girl in this town by the name of Emily Dodson. People say she is very good-looking."

"Yes. And what then?"

"She worked for Paul," replied the girl. "She has worked in his factory for some months. Well, this morning a thought struck me, and I've been to Paul's factory and have examined his books. And I found out this: Emily Dodson was at work on the day preceding the murder, and she has never been near the place since. Of course, that of itself may mean nothing, but the coincidence struck me. It seemed a little strange that she has never been to work since that day. I went to the house where she lived and saw her mother. I asked to be allowed to see her, but the door was closed in my face. It seems that she's been ill ever since that time, and practically nothing is known of her."

The judge was silent for a considerable time. Evidently Mary's words had given him food for thought.

"It may mean nothing, father," she went on. "But don't you see? Her name has been associated with that of Wilson. Gossips say he has treated her badly. She is also spoken of as one of those dark, handsome, gipsy-looking girls, who is very passionate. Now then, think. Might she not have had an opportunity of going to Paul's office? Might she not by some means have got hold of this knife? Remember, she was one of his workpeople."

The judge shook his head. "You have very slender evidence for your assumption, Mary," he said sadly.

"Yes, but is it not strange that she never returned to work, and that she's been ill in bed ever since? From what I can gather, she's had no doctor, no one has been allowed to see her, and the night she ceased working was the night when Ned Wilson was murdered."

"Her illness is easily accounted for," said the judge. "If she were fond of Wilson, might not his death have so overwhelmed her that her health broke down? Still——"

"I have seen all these objections," urged Mary. "But don't you see: Paul didn't do it—he couldn't—his mother could not have done it, and someone did! I know that what I've been thinking seems to rest upon pure coincidence, but, father, I've thought, and thought, and thought, until I'm sure!"

"Tell me more about it," said the judge.

Mary related her experiences of the day, told in detail of her visit to the factory, described her examination of the books, and then related her conversation with Emily Dodson's mother.

"Of course, prima facie," he said presently, "you have reasons for your suspicions, but even if your suspicions are true, what can be done? Unless we can prove that she took the knife, unless someone saw her under suspicious circumstances, we are helpless. She might have done the deed and still Paul might have to be hanged."

"But, father!" cried the girl, and there was a wail of agony in her voice.

"Oh, do not fear, my child, the thing shall be tested. Everything shall be sifted to the very bottom. No stone shall be left unturned, I can assure you of that!"

Again the judge sat for a long time thinking. Presently he started to his feet. "Mary, you're a clever girl!" he said. "And it seems to me that if Paul's life is saved, we shall owe everything to you! But—but —— Go to bed, my child, my brain is weary now, as yours must be. Let us try and get a little sleep. To-morrow we can act."

The following morning, when the two met again, there was a new light in Judge Bolitho's eyes, a ring of determination in his voice. His step was firm, and his whole demeanour suggested an eagerness which for a long time had been absent.

"I ought to go to Manchester this morning," he said. "You see, my position is very peculiar. But I shall not go, no matter what happens!"

"You believe there's something in what I told you?" and her voice was almost hoarse with eagerness.

"There may be something in it," was his reply. "If—if——"

"What?" asked Mary.

"Paul's fate will be decided to-day," replied the judge, and his voice trembled. "Bakewell finished last night—of course, you have read the newspapers?—and this morning Paul will speak in his own

defence. Perhaps that will take nearly the whole morning. Then Branscombe will sum up."

"And you believe——?" cried the girl.

"From what I can see of Branscombe's questions, I should say it is his opinion that Paul is guilty."

"But it will depend upon the jury!" cried the girl.

"Juries are influenced by the judge's summing-up."

"Oh, if—if——!" cried Mary.

"Yes, I see what is in your mind; but nothing can happen in time to influence the finding of the jury. You must not build upon that. But all hope is not lost yet, Mary. We will not give up until the last moment."

That morning Judge Bolitho's mode of action was not easily to be explained. He went to all sorts of strange and unthought-of places, and made many inquiries which, from the standpoint of the casual observer, were utterly irrelevant to the purpose he had in mind. Still, he kept on his way, asking his questions, keeping his own counsel. He visited Paul's factory, asked many questions of the employees, examined the books which had so interested Mary on the previous day, went to the scene of the murder. But no one could guess from his face as to what his conclusions might have been. That he was anxious and perturbed no one could have doubted; but whether his inquiries gave him any reason for hope it was impossible to tell. Strange as it may seem, he did not go to Brunclough Lane, but by means of many out-of-the-way inquiries he discovered the name of the doctor who attended the Dodsons in case of illness. He found out, too, that this doctor was not a fully qualified medical practitioner. Lancashire is a very Mecca for quack doctors. Long years ago, before legislation became stringent in this direction, many unqualified men earned large incomes among the factory hands. Herbalists of all sorts and men who pretended to cure diseases which baffled all the doctors were in great demand. In later years, although this practice had been considerably curtailed, a number of unqualified people managed to eke out a living. Judge Bolitho discovered that one of these—a certain Ezekiel Ashworth, who pretended to a knowledge of herbs, and who was also one who held high place among the spiritualists of the town—had attended in a medical capacity on various occasions at 27 Brunclough Lane. He also found out that this man had, during the last few weeks, sent a good deal of medicine to Mrs. Dodson's house, and, more than all this, that he had been called in on the previous evening some two hours after Mary had been in the street.

A little after noon Judge Bolitho found his way to Ezekiel Ashworth's house. He lived in a small, narrow street in one of a row of cottages which was let to him for four and sixpence a week. Ezekiel Ashworth had in his younger days been a weaver, but his mother, who was renowned as a very wise woman, had imparted her secrets to him before she died, and he had from that time followed his mother's calling. He also claimed that the spirits told him many things which doctors were unable to find out, and thus he imposed upon the credulity of ignorant people. Indeed, Ezekiel had quite an extensive practice, and many there were, even among those in affluent circumstances, who sought his aid.

When Judge Bolitho knocked at Ezekiel's door it was opened by the man himself. He was attired in a suit of shabby broadcloth; a greasy frock-coat hung below his knees, and his linen had evidently been a stranger to the laundry for some considerable time. His feet were encased in a pair of gaily coloured carpet slippers.

On seeing Judge Bolitho he assumed quite a professional air. "What can I do for you, my dear sir?" he said. "You don't look very well."

"No, I am far from well," replied the judge.

"Ay, I thought so. You're a stranger in these parts, I reckon?"

"I am not a Brunford man," replied the judge; "but I happened to be here, and, hearing about many of your wonderful cures, thought I would call and see you."

"Ay," replied Ezekiel. "I know a good deal more about doctorin' than half of these chaps with a lot of letters to their names; but the Government has made it very hard on us, and we can't do what we would."

"I see," replied the judge. "But I hear you have a fairly extensive practice, all the same."

"And no wonder," replied Ezekiel. "I cure cases which the doctors give up, and I don't charge a quarter as much as they do. Just think on 't—only sixpence for a bottle of medicine and a shilling a visit!"

"But what do you do in the case of a fatal illness?" asked the judge.

"That's where the hardness comes in," replied Ezekiel. "Then the poor people have to get a fully qualified man for the certificate. But you'll noan come about that, I reckon? You've come about yoursen?"

"No," said the judge. "I've come to inquire into your rights to practise medicine!"

"What do you mean? You're noan one of these inspectors, are you? I call this a sort of snake-in-the-grass proceeding! It's noan fair to come in like one ill, and then pounce upon a chap!"

Ezekiel gave another look at the judge, and then decided that he had better be civil. He realised that the man before him was not one who could be bullied.

"Look here, maaster," he said, "I never do owt agin law, and although, as you say, I've attended a lot of people, I've never been had before the beaks. Whenever a patient of mine gets near the danger line I always insist upon a fully qualified doctor being sent for. I hope you'll noan be hard on me."

"That depends," replied the judge. "The truth of it is, Mr. Ashworth, I've heard strange rumours about you, and, while I do not wish to take any harsh measure, I want a proper understanding. You often treat patients without ever having seen them, I'm told?"

"But never in a way as can do them any harm," replied Ezekiel. "When people come and describe symptoms, I send medicines to them; but my medicines are made up of yarbs, and canna hurt onybody."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the judge.

"Ay, I'm sure."

"Then what about the girl Emily Dodson, in Brunclough Lane, whom you've been treating for several weeks? You've repeatedly sent medicine there without having seen the patient."

Ezekiel looked uncomfortable. "Her mother told me she was just low like," he said, "and all she needed was some strengthening medicine."

"But no doctor should go on giving medicine without seeing the patient."

"Well, I'm noan going to give her any more," replied Ezekiel. "I were called in there last night 'cause Maria Ellen told me her lass was worse."

"Oh, you went to see the girl last night, did you? And what did you discover?"

"The lass were in a very bad way. But I can cure her all right."

From that time Judge Bolitho assumed a very severe air, and, when presently he left the house, Ezekiel looked exceedingly anxious.

"Of course, you'll understand," said the judge, on leaving him, "that it'll be to your interest that this interview remains a secret?"

"Ay, I see that," replied Ezekiel, with conviction.

"You'll understand also that Doctor White must be sent for at once?"

"Doctor White's no friend of mine," said Ezekiel. "He's always been hard on those of us who were not in the regular line of things."

"I insist on Dr. White," replied the judge.

"Weel, if you insist, it shall be done. But you'll not make it hard for me, will you?"

"I'll see what can be done," replied the judge. And then he walked away in a very thoughtful frame of mind.

A little later he was at Dr. White's surgery.

"I want half an hour's private talk with you," he said.

"Important?"

"Very important!"

When the judge had informed the doctor of the purport of his visit the latter looked very grave. "This cannot be decided off-hand," he said presently. And then, leaving the room, he spoke to his dispenser.

"Daniel," he said, "I have to leave the surgery at three o'clock, and it only wants half an hour to that time now. Are there many people waiting?"

"Ay, a good number."

"Take down their names and send them all away. Tell them I cannot see them until six to-night."

"Very well."

The doctor returned to Judge Bolitho again. "Now let's hear your story from end to end," he said.

When their interview closed, Dr. White looked, if possible, grimmer than usual, and when he visited his patients that afternoon more than one wondered what was the matter with him. He did not seem himself at all. Evidently his mind was much perturbed.

Judge Bolitho did not return to Paul's house until nearly five o'clock. As he came to the door, Mary met him with eager questions on her lips, but those questions were never asked. The ghastly look on his face made it impossible for her to speak.

"It's all over," he said hoarsely.

"All over? What's all over?"

"The trial. I've just telephoned to Manchester."

The girl stood looking at him with horror in her eyes.

"They've found him guilty," said the judge hoarsely. "He's condemned to be hanged!"

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE CONDEMNED CELL

Paul Stepaside was alone in his condemned cell. He was no longer merely a prisoner waiting his trial for the most terrible deed a man can commit; he was condemned for that deed, and his whole circumstances were altered accordingly. No one could see him except in the presence of a warder, and he was under the most rigorous inspection. Care was taken that no means were offered him whereby he could take his own life. Thus, grim and horrible as had been his previous conditions, they were far worse now. The days of hope were gone, because the days of action were gone. Nothing he could say or do now promised a possibility of escape from the terrible doom which had been pronounced.

For many hours he had been thinking over his fate, and wondering what had become of those he loved. Vague rumours had reached him that his mother was not well, but he had no definite knowledge of anything concerning her. A short letter from Mary had also reached him. It was only a few words, but it had been his great source of solace and comfort. But that, too, had lost much of its meaning. It was written before his sentence had been pronounced. It had told him to hope, and it had expressed the undying faith and love of the writer. But even in this short letter he seemed to see a change. It was like the letter of a sister rather than the outpourings of the woman whom he had hoped to make his wife. Of course it was right and natural that this should be so. She had discovered their relationship, and believing herself to be his half-sister, she could no longer think of him as on that night of their meeting in the prison. Then they had met as lovers, and she had promised him that when he was free—as she felt sure he soon would be—to be his wife. But that was all over now. Even although he had been set at liberty, all his hopes would have been in vain. It seemed as though the facts of his life had mocked every hope, as though a grim destiny had fore-ordained that everything he longed for and believed in should mock him.

Since the last hour of the trial, when the judge had pronounced the dread words which made his name a by-word and a shame, and held him up for ever to the reproach of the world, he had been practically alone. He knew nothing of the heart-pangs of others; nothing of great determinations which alternated with wild despair; nothing of agonised prayers, of sleepless nights, and of vain endeavours to prove his innocence. He was a condemned man, alone in a condemned cell, waiting for the last hour. For the first few hours after the final words had been spoken he had a sort of gruesome pleasure in thinking of the future. He fancied that some few days would elapse, during which his case would be considered by the Home Secretary; and then this highly-placed official, having no reason for showing him any special mercy, would go through the formula necessary to his death. Then would come the erecting of the scaffold, the symbol of disgrace and shame. What the cross had been to the old Romans the scaffold was to the modern Englishman. After that, under the grey, murky sky, he would be led out, and the dread formula would be gone through. He would be asked whether he had anything to say before the fatal act was committed, after which the hangman would do his work.

Well, well, he would go through that as he had gone through all the rest. It was a ghastly tragedy, a grim mockery, but he would bear it like a stoic.

Presently, however, his feelings underwent a change. Memories of his early days came back to him—his life in the workhouse, his schooldays, when he took his place among the rest of the pauper boys, the learning of a trade, and his work in the mine. Always his life had been overhung with shadow, and yet he had enjoyed it. He had found pleasure in fighting with difficulty, in overcoming what seemed insuperable obstacles. He remembered the visits of the minister of Hanover Chapel, and of what he had said to him. Yes, the incipient atheism of his boyhood had become more pronounced as the years went by. His unbelief had become more settled, and yet, and yet——

He called to mind the hour he had first seen Mary. How wonderful she had been to him. She had brought something new, something nobler into his life. How, in spite of his anger, he had loved her! Ay, and he loved her still. He thought of his dream of going into Parliament, of fighting for the rights of the working people of the town in which he lived and for the class to which he had belonged. Yes, above and beyond his ambition to be a noted man he had a great consuming desire to do something for the betterment of the condition of the people whom he loved, a great passion to advance their rights. And, to a degree, he had done it. Brunford was the better, and not the worse, because he had lived. If it had been his fate to live, he would have continued to work for the toiling masses of the people. He thought of the dreams which had been born in his brain and heart, and which he hoped to translate into reality; of the Bills he had framed, and which he had meant one day to bring before Parliament, Bills which he had hoped would become Acts, and which would have a beneficent influence on the life of the nation.

But this was all over now. The end of all things had come. His doom had been pronounced. What a ghastly mockery life was—and men talked about God! He, an innocent man, was about to end his days in the most shameful way imaginable because he had been found guilty of a crime of which he knew nothing. But at least he had saved his mother. There was something in that. No shadow of shame or disgrace rested upon her name. Whether her days were many or few, nothing evil could be associated with the life of his mother. How it all flashed back to him. That night in the cell, when she had told him her story, told him that the man who had sat in judgment upon him was his father and her husband! Then came that great day in the court, when Judge Bolitho had made his confession. How still people were. The court was almost as silent as the cell in which he now lay. After all, his father could not have been a villain. It is true he had steeled his heart against him even after that confession. Had he been right? He remembered the visit of Judge Bolitho on the evening of his confession; how he had pleaded with him; how he had sought his love. It is true he would explain nothing of the mysteries which he, Paul, desired to learn. He was dumb when he had questioned him concerning the shame in which Mary's name lay. Nevertheless he had to confess in his heart that his father had tried to do his duty by him and his mother.

He recalled the words which he had spoken to the chaplain who had visited him one day. He had told this man that if his father would confess his evil deeds and seek to make atonement, he might believe in God, in Providence. It was a poor thing to say after all. God, if there was a God, must not be judged by poor little paltry standards. The God Who made all the worlds, who controlled the infinite universe, Who was behind all things, before all things, in all things, through all things—that God must have ways beyond his poor little comprehension. But was there such a Being? Or was everything the result of a blind fate, a great mysterious something which was unknown and unknowable, a force that had no feeling, no thought, no care for the creatures who crawled upon the face of this tiny world?

Then the great Future stared him in the face. Was this life the end and the end-all? Could it be that he, who could think and feel, who had such infinite hope and longings and yearnings, would die when he left the body? After all, was not Epictetus, the old Greek slave, right when he said that the body was only something which he carried around with him, and that his soul was something eternal which the world could never touch. If that were so, there must be a great spiritual realm into which he had never entered.

He thought of the opening words of the Old Testament: "In the beginning God——" It was one of the most majestic sentences in the literature of the world, sublime, almost infinite in its grandeur. Then he remembered the words of Jesus. Years had passed since he had given attention to these things, yet the memory of the words he had learnt as a boy was with him now. What a wonderful story it was! What a Life, too! The mind of Jesus had pierced the night like stars. He had torn to pieces the flimsy sophistries of the age in which He had lived, and looked into the very heart of things. What a great compassion He had for the poor, how tender He was to the sinning. Yes, He understood, He understood. And what a death He had died, too. He might have escaped death, but He had died believing that by dying He would enrich, glorify the life of the world. In a sense it was illogical, but there was a deeper logic which he eventually saw. After all, it was the death of Jesus that made Him live in the minds and hearts of untold millions during nineteen centuries. According to the standards of man, His death was unjust, and He knew it to be unjust, but He never flinched or faltered. "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," He had said when the ignorant rabble had railed at Him. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," He had said, and then gave up the ghost. It was wonderful!

In that hour Paul Stepaside realised that he had been less than an infant crying for the light, and with no language but a cry. He had shut out the light by a poor little conceit of his own. He had dared to judge life by paltry little standards. He had dared to say what was and what was not—he! He knew less than nothing!

After all, that which had embittered him more than anything else, that which he said had robbed him of his faith—even in that he had been proved to be wrong. It was a great thing his father had done. Of course he had sinned, of course his life had been unworthy. His treatment of his mother was the act of a dastardly coward—the base betrayal, the long absence, the marrying another woman—oh! it was all poor and mean and contemptible! Nothing but a coward, ay, a villain, could have done it. And yet there was something noble in his atonement. Of course sin must be followed by suffering and by hell. He saw that plain enough. He saw, too, that not only the sinner suffered, but others suffered. Yet who was he to judge? His father—a proud man, proud of his family name, proud of the position he had obtained, one of the highest in the realm of law—had, in face of a crowd hungry for sensation, eager to fasten upon any garbage of gossip which might come in its way, confessed the truth, even although that truth had made his name the subject of gossip for millions of tongues. Yes; there was something noble

in it, and Paul felt his heart soften as he thought and remembered. Whatever else it had done, it had made his own fate easier to bear.

He thought of the look on Judge Bolitho's face as he came to his cell on the day of the confession, remembered the pleading tones: "Paul, my son, I want your forgiveness, your love."

Perhaps it was because his heart was so weighed down with grief, and his life was unutterably lonely, that he cried out like one whose life was filled with a great yearning: "Father, father!"

He heard a sound at the door of the cell. The warder entered, followed by the form of a woman. His heart gave a great bound.

"Mary!" he cried.

He had not expected this. It had become a sort of settled conviction in his mind that he would have to die alone and uncomforted. He had a vague idea that people would be allowed to see him, but no definite hopes had ever come into his mind. Perhaps he had wondered why he had been left so long alone, but he had never doubted Mary's love.

Regardless of the fact that the warder stood there, the man who, as it seemed to him, was coarse and almost brutal, watching his every action, listening to his every word, he threw open his arms: "Mary, my love!"

A minute later she was sobbing out her grief on his shoulder.

"I wanted to come before, Paul," she said; "but father did not think it best."

"No, no; I understand. Oh, Mary, it's heaven to me to see you, to hear you speak, to hold you like this; but I almost wish you had not come. Why should you suffer?"

"I have come, Paul, because I could not help it, and because—— Oh, I want to tell you something. Must this man stay?"

"Can you not go and leave us alone?" said Paul to the man.

The warder shook his head. "Against rules!"

"But surely you need not listen to what—to what—my—that is, this young lady has to say to me."

The man did not speak. Perhaps he had some glimmering of understanding, perhaps he realised the position better than they thought.

"Whisper it, Mary," said Paul, still holding her to his heart.

"Paul, you are innocent."

"Yes," he said. "I am innocent. I fought for my life as hard as I could; but law is not justice, Mary. It's a huge legal machine."

"And Paul," she whispered, "you have believed all along that someone else was guilty. You have believed it was your mother."

She felt him shudder as she spoke the words.

"*I* believed it, too. It came to me one day that you were trying to shield her, and that was why you have allowed yourself to be here. You could have cleared yourself else, couldn't you?"

She knew by the deep sigh that escaped him how her words moved him.

"On the day when my father made that confession," she went on, "I found out where your mother was, and went to see her. I had made up my mind to obtain a confession of guilt from her. Oh, Paul, it's terribly hard to tell you this, and I know that you'll hardly be able to forgive me; but it was all for you! You believe that, don't you?"

"Go on, Mary. Tell me what it is."

"I went back to Brunford with her. You see she knew who I was by this time, and I think she liked me. She said she was ill and was afraid to stay in Manchester any longer, and she asked me to go back to Brunford with her."

"Yes, and you did, Mary."

"Yes, I did. And then I begged her to tell me the truth. I made her see who I suspected."

"Yes, and then——" he whispered.

"I don't know what it was, whether it was the shock of my words, or whether it was because she could no longer stand the strain she had been suffering, but her senses forsook her, and—oh, Paul! forgive me—but she's been ill ever since. She's had no knowledge of anything that's been going on."

He was silent a moment, then he said: "It's best so, Mary. If she does not know she cannot suffer, and no shame can attach to her name now."

"No, Paul; but I haven't told you all yet. It wasn't she who did it! She was as ignorant of the crime as I was!"

"How? Tell me!" he almost gasped.

She related the story of what took place between her father and the man Archie Fearn, while he, with hoarse whispers, besieged her with questions.

"Thank God!" he said at length. It seemed as though a great burden had gone from his life, and as though the only way in which he could express his feelings was by thanking the Being in Whom he had said he had no belief.

"Paul, could you have saved yourself if you had known this?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I might—that is—no, I don't know. I went out that night to seek her, Mary. When I had told her of my quarrel with Wilson, you remember, on the night of the murder, she acted as though she were mad. She promised me I should be revenged, that I should have justice. She said things which, when I began to think about them afterwards, made me afraid. I thought she had gone to bed, and I sat in my study for hours, alone, thinking and wondering. Then, when I went to her room to bid her good night, I found she was gone, and I went out to seek her. Undoubtedly it was a senseless thing to do, because I had no knowledge of the direction in which she had gone. She had, however, uttered one sentence which guided me: 'I am going to Howden Clough,' she said. 'It's near there I shall see him.'"

For a long time they spoke in whispers, the warder standing as far away from them as possible, and seemingly taking no notice.

"It's just as well, Mary," he said. "Perhaps I couldn't have saved myself if I'd known; and it might be —yes, it might be that if I had said what was in my heart—— No, it's just as well! It's just as well!"

"Time's up!" said the warder.

"Let me stay a little longer," pleaded Mary.

"Against rules!" was the reply. "Time's up!"

"Paul, lean down your head again."

She kissed him passionately, and then whispered in his ear: "All hope's not gone even yet, Paul."

"I want no King's Pardon," said Paul almost bitterly. "I wouldn't have it!"

"It's not that. I have been trying and trying, and my father has been trying——"

"You mean——"

"I mean that he's with us at Brunford, Paul. He's at your house. He has been working night and day, and, and——"

The warder opened the door. "This way, please, Miss!"

"Don't give up, Paul!" she cried. "And remember this, I'm working and praying for you, and father is working and praying for you. It may—oh! it may end in nothing; and I dare not say more, but Paul, Paul——"

Again Paul was alone. Mary's kisses were still warm upon his lips. He felt her breath upon his face. Her presence pervaded the room even although she was gone—Mary, whom he loved like his own life! It was not as though his sister had been to see him at all. It was still Mary, the woman he loved as his wife!

Day followed day, and no further news reached him. Eagerly he had listened to every echoing footstep in the corridor. Feverishly he had watched the face of the warder who had brought him food. Like one who had hoped against hope, he had at stated times scanned the faces of other prisoners when he had been allowed to go for exercise into the prison yard. But he heard nothing, saw nothing which could give him hope.

One night the chaplain entered his cell, and Paul saw, from the look on the man's face, of what he was thinking.

"It's to be to-morrow, isn't it?" he said.

The chaplain nodded and was silent.

"What o'clock is it now?"

"Half-past three."

"And what time to-morrow?"

"Early. I don't know the exact hour."

"Is it known outside—I mean, does the world know?"

"I don't know; I expect so."

"Ah," said Paul. "She will come to-night; so will he. But mother cannot come—no, of course she cannot come; but I am glad she knows nothing."

"My brother," said the chaplain, "may I not speak to you about higher things? Remember that in a few hours——"

"Stop!" said Paul. "It's good of you to come, and I'm afraid that in the past I've sometimes spoken rudely to you. I have regarded you as one who has done his duty, just as the warders have done theirs; and just as they are paid to lock the door upon me and bring me food at stated intervals, so you've been paid to utter your shibboleths and to say your prayers. But perhaps you've meant all right. Still, nothing that you can say would help me. I have no confession to make to you, not a word, except that I adhere to what I said in the courts: I am absolutely innocent of this murder. There's no crime on my soul!"

"But are you ready to meet your God?" said the chaplain.

"Pardon me," said Paul, and his voice quivered with emotion, "but that's a subject too sacred to talk about. Hark! what's that?"

There was a sound of hammering outside.

"Does it mean—that?"

Again the chaplain nodded. "Think, my brother——"

"No, no," said Paul. "If I am soon to meet God face to face, as you say, well then—no, I'm neither ashamed nor afraid; that is, as you're regarding it. I am ashamed—but, there, you could not understand. Please leave me, will you?"

Again there was a dull sound of the impact of the head of a hammer upon the head of a nail outside.

Silence reigned over Brunford, and for a wonder the night was clear. Overhead unnumbered stars shone brightly. The wind came from the sea, and more than one declared that they felt the salt upon their lips. In spite of this, however, gloom rested upon the town. It had gone forth, that, on the following morning Paul Stepaside was to be hanged, and hundreds, as they trod the granite pavements of the streets, seemed to be trying to walk noiselessly. At almost every corner groups of men were to be seen evidently discussing the news they had heard.

"He was a rare fine lad, after all, ay, he wur. I canna think, in spite of everything, as 'ow he did it. He wur noan that sort."

"Ay, but the judge and jury, after hearing all th' evidence, and after hearing one of the grandest speeches ever made in Manchester, found him guilty. Ay, and it wur a grand speech, too; I heerd every word on it, and I shall never forgeet it to my dying day. When he finished I said, 'He's saved hissen!' I thowt as no judge and jury in the warld would ever condemn a man after that. It seemed to me as though he had knocked Bakewell's legs from right under him, and I nearly shouted out loud."

"Ah, but he could not get over th' judge; nay, the judge seemed to have made up his mind, and his summing up were just terrible. Mark you, I've heard a lot of complaints about it. You know what Paul said after he were condemned? He said as 'ow the judge's summing up might have been another speech by the counsel for the prosecution; and I watched the judge's face when he said it, and I tell you he went as white as a sheet. But theer, 'tis done, and tomorrow morning he'll have to stand afore the Judgment Seat of God!"

"'Twould be terrible, wouldn't it, if he didn't do it after all? S'posing it should turn out that someone else did it!"

"But how could it be, man? 'Twere that knife. Who could ha' got it? Paul never allowed onybody to get into the office. The door was locked, the window was locked. No, no! Ay, but it's terrible!"

"Haaf-past seven, as I've heerd, it's going to take place," said another.

"Nay, haaf-past eight."

"I wonder if he's made his peace with God?"

"Perhaps; we shall never know. Paul was never a chap to say much about that kind of thing."

"I've just come from a prayer-meeting at Hanover Chapel. Never was there such a prayer-meeting before. Paul never went to chapel, but, but there——"

"Well, God Almighty knows if he's innocent," said another.

"Yes," was the reply. "And it's a good thing, too, that his mother'll know nothing about it. I've heerd as 'ow Dr. White says that even if she lives her mind'll never come back to her again."

"I suppose Judge Bolitho's still in th' town?"

"Ay; I hear he's been writing to th' Home Secretary. I know he's been to London more nor once."

"The nurse up at Paul's house say as 'ow he hasn't slept for three nights, and he's acted fair and strange, too. I wonder if there's onything in his mind?"

"I never thowt," said another, "as 'ow they would have ever hanged him when it coom to be known that Paul's feyther was a judge. I wonder 'ow it'll turn out."

And so they gossiped. Even in the public-houses a kind of solemn awe was present. No jokes were passed, even among those who were drunken. It seemed as though the Angel of Death were hovering over the town in which Paul had lived for so many years.

When midnight came, a messenger went from Brunclough Lane to Dr. Wilson's house. It was a neighbour of Mrs. Dodson's, who had been aroused from his sleep, and who had been requested to fetch the doctor, as her daughter was worse.

There was a communication by means of a tube between the front door and the doctor's bedroom.

"Hallo, Dr. White!"

"Yes, who are you?"

"I'm Amos Gregson. I come fro' Mrs. Dodson. She says as 'ow Emily's worse, and you must come at once."

"Very well; I'll be on in a few minutes."

The doctor might not have retired at all, for he was out in the street fully dressed a very few seconds after the man had left. With long, rapid strides he made his way to Paul's house, which stood in the near distance, and from one of the windows of which a light was burning. He knocked at the door, which was opened by Judge Bolitho.

"I told you to wait," he said. "I knew the crisis would come to-night."

"Has she sent for you?" asked the judge hoarsely.

"Yes, the man left my door not ten minutes ago. You have Crashawe with you?"

"Yes; he's been with me all the evening, and he's now lying on the sofa asleep."

"Come, then."

A few seconds later three men left the house and made their way rapidly towards Brunclough Lane. Presently they stopped at the door of number twenty-seven and knocked. It was immediately opened by a neighbour, who looked suspiciously at Dr. White's two companions.

"Mrs. Dodson is up in th' room," she said.

"And Emily?" said the doctor.

"She says she mun see you."

"Remain here," said Dr. White to the others, and went straight upstairs. Evidently he had been there many times, and knew his way perfectly.

He entered a room which was lit by a cheap, common lamp, and which threw a sickly light upon the bed. A girl lay there who must have been extremely beautiful when in health; even although the hand of death was upon her now, she gave evidence of that beauty. Her eyes were coal-black, her face was a perfect oval, and every feature was striking and handsome. Her hair was raven-black and lay in great waving tresses upon the pillow.

When the doctor entered, she looked towards him eagerly.

"Mother," she said, "go out!" for her mother sat by the bedside.

"Why mun I go, Emily?"

"I want to tell th' doctor something," she said.

"And why may I not hear it? I suppose I can guess, can't I?"

The woman spoke angrily even then.

"Don't thee be white-livered, Emily, or say owt for which you'll be sorry afterwards."

The doctor noted the look on the girl's face. Even then there was something strong and defiant about her. She had a Juno-like appearance which would have attracted notice anywhere, and her firm, square chin denoted a nature which could withstand almost any opposition.

"Go, mother," she said; and the woman sullenly left the room.

"Doctor," said the girl, and although the death dews were even then upon her forehead and she spoke between sobbing gasps of breath, there was a kind of defiance in her tone. "Doctor, you've been trying for days to wheedle summat out of me—you know you have."

The doctor did not speak.

"While I thought I was going to live," went on the girl, "I would say nowt. Nay, if the king on his throne and all the judges and juries in the land were to try and drag from me what I'm going to say I wouldn't have said it. Ay, but I'm afear'd to die, doctor! Am I going to die?"

"Yes, you're going to die, Emily."

"How long can I live?"

"Perhaps a few hours, perhaps not so long."

For some seconds the girl lay silently. Even yet she seemed to be fighting some great battle.

"Mrs. Cronkshaw was up here a little while ago, and she said as 'ow Paul Stepaside was to be hanged to-morrow morning. Is that true?"

"Yes, that is what I've heard," said the doctor.

"Ay; you've tried to get out of me if I know summat about it," said the girl. "Ay; but you've tried hard, doctor!" and there was almost a triumphant tone in her voice. "But have I said a word? Nay, not a word! While I thought I should live I wouldn't speak for onybody. And you've believed I knowed summat about it."

"And I was right," said the doctor, "wasn't I?"

"You're sure, now?" and the girl's tone was almost angry. "You're sure I can't live?"

"You can live but a few hours, Emily."

"And can onybody do owt to me if I tell you summat now?"

"No; no one can do anything."

"Weel, then, look 'ere—I killed Ned Wilson!"

Although Dr. White expected this, the words made him shudder.

"I've ne'er said a word to onybody," went on the girl. "I believe my mother guessed, but she's noan one to talk, is mother. Besides, I've been very poorly. But I've ne'er said a word to onybody, although I could see by yar questions that you thought I knowed summat about it. I'm going to tell you everything now. I don't want Mr. Paul Stepaside to die when it can do no good. If I were going to live, I'd ha' let him die, no matter what happened; but now—— It wur like this 'ere——"

"Wait," said the doctor. "I want someone to come and listen to what you have to say."

"Nay, nay; I'll tell no one but you."

"But you must!" said the doctor. "If you don't, your confession will be of no use. There must be witnesses."

"You mean that I couldn't save him from hanging if I only told it to you?"

"Yes, I mean that," replied the doctor.

"Who do you want to come up?" said the girl presently. "Nay, I don't care who comes now. I did it, and there'll soon be an end to it. Let 'em come, whoever they may be!"

In a few seconds Judge Bolitho and the other man came into the room. The doctor whispered to the judge.

"There must be someone else," said the judge. "I am afraid my evidence would be valueless, although I want to be here. You see, I'm Paul's father."

"Wait a minute," said the doctor, and he ran quickly downstairs. "Mrs. Cronkshaw," he said. "Come

into the bedroom at once!"

The girl who lay upon the bed looked from one face to another, as if wondering what was happening.

"Give me some strengthening stuff," she said, "or I shall noan be able to speak."

While the doctor poured some liquid into a glass, the judge passed round to the other side of the bed, while the lawyer—Crashawe by name—sat under the light with writing materials to hand. The woman who went by the name of Cronkshaw eagerly watched the proceedings, and looked like one vastly curious.

"It wur like this 'ere," said the dying girl. "Ned Wilson courted me, and he promised me that he'd marry me. He did it on the quiet, nobody knew, and I, like a fool, trusted him. Ay, but I wur fond on him. You see, well, I knowed I wur a good-looking lass, but I wur always a bit rough, and it seemed wonderful to me that a great gentleman like he should have cared owt for me. And when we had met two or three times, and he told me that he loved me, I wur ready to worship the very ground he walked on! As I told you, he promised to marry me; ay, and it were his duty to do so, too, for I wur i' trouble. Then he tried to get me out of Brunford, but I wouldn't go. I tried to make him stand by his word. As you know, people said as 'ow he wur going to marry Miss Bolitho, but I wouldn't believe that. Ned had promised me fair. He swore to me by the God above us that he'd marry me. Then I saw in the Brunford paper it wur arranged that he should marry Miss Bolitho. For a day or two I think I wur mad, and he kept out o' the way o' me. Then I axed him about it, and he laughed at me. He said he wur only joking when he promised to marry me, and that a lass like I couldn't expect him to throw away his life by marrying a mill girl. He offered me brass to leave the town—a good deal on it, too—but I wur noan going to be treated like that. I said, 'No.' Give me some more stuff, doctor."

The doctor raised the girl and placed another pillow under her head, while she eagerly drank what remained in the glass. The room was in intense silence, save for the scratch of the lawyer's pen, who was taking down what the girl was saying, word by word.

"I 'eerd as 'ow Paul Stepaside had come back from London," she went on, "and I thought to myself, 'He'd help me. I'll tell him all about it. He's very clever, and he doesn't like Ned Wilson,' for by this time a fair hate got hold of me, and I thought to myself, 'I'll see him on the quiet.' I saw him go to his office that morning. I wur just walking across the mill yard; but as he wur talking with someone I just waited a bit. I didn't want no one to see me. Presently I see his mother come, I don't think onybody else saw her, because she came in by a side way, and as you know, Paul's office is shut off from the mill. So I waited around, and after a bit I saw his mother go out, and I said to myself, 'Now's my time.' So I went up a little passage, and no one could see me; but just as I wur coming up close to the door he came out quickly. I think he wanted to speak to his mother about something. Anyhow, he left th' office door open, and I said to myself, 'I'll go in there now, and wait till he comes back.' Well, I did; and I waited perhaps two minutes, but he didn't come. And then I seed the knife on th' table, and I got 'andlin' it, and all sorts of black thoughts came into my mind. And I said to myself, 'I'll say nowt to Mr. Stepaside at all.' I can't explain why it was, but I took 'old o' th' knife and come away. When I got home for dinner, I just wrote a letter to Ned Wilson, and I told him I must see him that night late. It wur something very particular. And I told him that, as it was the last time I should ask him to do onything for me, he mustn't refuse."

"Well," said the doctor. "What then?"

"Weel, I wur at the place I told him about, and he coom'd. It wur very late. You see I made the hour late, 'cause I know'd if it wur early, and he wur likely to be seen with me, he wouldn't come. So I made it late, and I told him, too, that if he didn't come I'm make everything known. I never said owt to anybody, but I kept t' knife with me. Give me some more stuff, doctor; I feel as though my head is all swimming!"

The doctor did as the girl desired, and made her pillow more comfortable.

"Ay, that's better," she said. "Weel, we met, and I begged him again, begged him as I thought I should never beg onybody to do anything—for I am a proud lass—to marry me. But he wouldn't. He said he wur going to marry Miss Bolitho, if only out of spite to Paul Stepaside. So I said to him, 'What has Paul Stepaside to do with it?' And he laughed. So then I axed him what I wur to do, and he told me that I might go to Manchester and get my living as best I could. And after that hell got hold of me, but I kept quiet. And I said, 'Good-night, Ned,' and he said, 'Good-night, Emily. Be a sensible lass.' And then he turned round to go back home, and then I up with the knife and stabbed him in the back. I thought my heart was going to leap into my mouth when I saw him fall on his face without a word and without a sound, and I never stayed a minute, but I run all the way home."

The scratch of the lawyer's pen continued some seconds after the girl had ceased speaking.

"That's all," she said. "I'm glad I've told you. A've been i' 'ell for mony a week, and, and—but there, it's all over now!"

"Just a minute," said the lawyer. "Let me read through what you have said."

"I can noan bear it; my head's swimmin' again!"

Dr. White administered another dose of powerful stimulant, and the girl breathed more easily.

"You can bear it now, Emily," he said kindly. "And you've been a brave lass."

"I know I ought not to have killed him," said the girl, "but he treated me bad, and he said things to me which no man ought ever to say to ony lass. But theer——"

The lawyer came close to the bed and read the girl's confession aloud.

"Ay, that's right," she said when he had finished. "It's all true, every word, so help me God!"

"Will you sign your name here?" said the lawyer.

They propped her up in bed, and a pen was placed in her hand. Judge Bolitho was afraid for the moment that she would never have strength enough to perform the task of writing her name; but the girl, almost by a superhuman effort, conquered her weakness. She seized the pen and wrote her name.

"Thank you," he said. "That will do."

The girl lay back on her pillow, panting for her very life. A minute later the document was witnessed by the others in the room.

Two hours later Emily Dodson was dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HOME-COMING

The warder came into Paul's cell bearing his breakfast.

"There," he said. "I've got something good for you this morning. How did you sleep?"

"Scarcely at all," replied Paul quietly. "You can take away this; I shall not eat it."

"Eat it, man; it is the best breakfast you've had for many a day, and it'll help you to go through with it."

"No," replied Paul quietly; "I'll go through it without that."

There was a sad, wistful look in his eye. He knew that the dread hour had nearly come, and that he must bid good-bye to everything. During the previous evening he had been in a state of great excitement. He had listened eagerly for the coming of Mary and his father, but they never came. In a numb sort of way he wondered why. He would like to have bidden them good-bye. He longed to hold Mary in his arms once more, and longed, too, to tell his father that he forgave him. For he had to confess to himself at last that he had done this. With death knocking at the gates of life, it seemed to him he could do no other. His father had sinned, but he had done his best to atone. Of course, all was vain, and the tangled skein of life had not been straightened out. He felt that somehow life with him had begun wrong, and it had continued wrong to the end. Still, there was a quiet resignation in his heart which almost surprised him. At that moment he could have said with Tennyson, "And yet we trust that somehow good will be the final goal of ill." As for the future—well, he would soon solve its mystery. He did not want to die; rather, he longed to live—he had so much to live for in spite of everything. Of course, Mary could never be his wife, but he could love her and guard her and cherish her all the same. As for the rest——

He felt a kind of curiosity as to what the future would bring forth. He looked at his hands, so strong, nervous, vigorous, and thought that in a few hours they would be inert, lifeless. That something which men call "life" would be gone. Where would he be? For the first time in his life he felt almost certain that the essential "he" would continue to be. Where, and under what circumstances, he wondered? Well, he should know soon.

A little later he was out under a dark, gloomy sky. He saw a great black cloud hanging in the heavens. Here and there was a patch of blue where the stars peeped out. It was bitterly cold, and he felt himself shivering. Others were there, too; strange, shadowy looking figures they appeared to be, but he took very little note of them. Only one man was perfectly clear to him; that was the chaplain, who wore a gown and carried a black book in his hand. It was his duty to read the Burial Service. He heard a bell tolling, but it did not affect him as he thought it would. Of course, it was the very refinement of torture, and ought not to be allowed. No man, whatever he had done, should be made to suffer in this way. But he did not care much. He was not afraid. In the dim light he saw that a scaffold had been erected—a gaunt, ghastly thing, the very symbol of despair and shame and death. He wondered what took place next. He supposed there would be certain formulae to go through. The parson would utter a homily as well as read the miserable Burial Service.

"What's going to happen next?" he said to the warder; and he spoke rather as a spectator than as the one who was the chief figure in this terrible scene.

But before the man had time to reply there was a strange confusion. Something had happened. Excited voices were heard. The governor of the gaol said something, the purport of which did not reach Paul, but still something which seemed to change the atmosphere and made the grey dawn bright with the light of day. Another moment, and his heart thrilled. He felt soft arms around his neck, a warm face close to his, while on his lips were burning kisses.

"Paul! Paul!"

"Mary!"

He wondered what it all meant, for even yet the truth had not dawned in his mind.

"You should not have come, Mary," he said. "You see I can bear it all right."

"Paul, don't you understand?" And she laughed and sobbed at the same time. "You are not going to die. You are saved!"

"Saved?"

"Yes. She has confessed, Paul."

"No, no!" And there was agony in his voice. "No, no! Better I should die than that she should!"

"No; but, Paul, it was another—a woman named Emily Dodson. You were right, you see, in your defence. He had deceived her, wronged her, and she killed him. She confessed it last night. It's all written down and signed. Don't you understand, my love?"

"Then, then——?"

"I congratulate you, Mr. Stepaside!" It was the governor of the gaol who spoke. "Thank God, the news has come in time! Yes, my lord, of course you can speak to him."

"Paul, my son." And his heart thrilled at the sound of his father's voice. "Thank God! Thank God! Will you shake hands and forgive me?"

It seemed to Paul at that moment as though the foundations of his life were broken up.

"Oh, God, I thank Thee!" he cried, "Oh, Mary, Mary! My love!" And again he strained the young girl to his heart.

For many days Paul Stepaside's mother lay sleeping calmly in the room where sickness had confined her. Her face was tranquil, the lines which had been so deep a few weeks before had passed away. She had been unconscious ever since the day on which Mary had made known to her the terrible suspicion which filled her mind. Sometimes there had come to her minutes when the past became partially real, but those minutes were only as dream phantoms. She knew nothing of what had taken place, did not seem to realise that Mary Bolitho had been in the house with her, or that the man to whom she had given her heart long years before slept beneath the same roof. She knew nothing either of the agony through which they had passed or of their feverish endeavours to save her son. She suffered no pain. She simply lay there as though nothing mattered and as though the windows of her mind had been closed.

The nurse sat by her bedside watching her. The doctor had been that morning, and had remarked that he saw no change either one way or the other.

"I have seldom seen anything like it, nurse!" he had said. "Physically, she seems to be improving. Her pulse is quite satisfactory; she has no temperature; and her strength is well maintained. But I do not understand this long condition of coma. I wonder how it will end!"

The nurse, as she sat by the patient's bedside, was thinking of what the doctor had said, and was curiously watching her face.

The woman's eyes opened, and the nurse thought she saw the light of reason in them. She looked curiously around the room.

"Who are you?" she said.

"I'm a nurse from the hospital, Mrs. Stepaside. You haven't been very well."

"Ay, I remember being poorly. Where's Paul?"

"He's not come back yet," said the nurse.

"What do you mean? Ay, but he's near! Don't you hear them shouting?"

In spite of the fact that she still believed her patient to be unconscious, she listened, and thought she heard distant shouting.

"I know, I know! It's Paul coming home! He's cleared himself. Do you see? He's proved himself innocent! I knew he would! My own clever boy! There! There!"

Again the nurse listened, and this time she knew that something was taking place. It seemed to her like a shout of great multitudes, the roar of a mighty sea of voices, and it was coming nearer and nearer the house.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"God bless ye!"

"He's saved!"

"He's innocent!"

"The truth has come out!"

She could only faintly distinguish the words, but this was what she thought she heard. It was like the roar of a great storm, the shout of a mighty multitude.

Still it came nearer and nearer, and the volume of sound ever increased.

The woman in her bed laughed. "Don't you see?" she said. "I left Manchester only yesterday, and that lassie came with me. Where is she noo? She'll be gone to meet Paul. Just think of it! I didn't think he could clear himself so soon, but she thought—ah, never mind what she thought!"

Still the roar of voices continued, ever increasing in volume and jubilancy.

"Don't you see?" went on Paul's mother. "The crowd knew he would come, and they met him at Brunford station, and they're bringing him home as he ought to be brought home. But I must not be here, in bed, I must get up!"

"No, no," said the nurse. "You're not well enough for that!"

"Not well enough! I'm all right. My Paul must not find me like a sick woman when he comes. He must find me up and dressed, ready to meet him. Quick, quick!"

She got out of bed of her own accord. "There," she said. "You say I'm not strong enough! They are at the door, do you hear? Hark how they're shouting! Ay, my own Paul, the light's come to him at last!"

She ceased speaking. Her mind seemed to be gathering up the events of the past weeks. She remembered the visit which Judge Bolitho had made to her in Dixon Street—called to mind, too, the confession he had made, and which Mary had read to her.

"And there is no stain upon his name now. No one can twit him now!" she continued, jubilantly. "There they are at the door! Now then, bring me that dressing-gown. Oh, if I'd only woke up sooner, I would have put on that new dress which Paul brought me, the one he likes so much. He said it made me look like a lassie."

The front door opened, and both of them heard the confusion of tongues beneath. Then there was a heavy tread upon the stairs. The door of her bedroom opened, and Paul entered.

He had expected to see her lying on a bed of sickness, pale and emaciated, instead of which she stood erect.

"Mother!" he said, and folded her in his arms.

"Ay, my laddie!" she cried. "You've beaten them all, then?"

He did not know what was in her mind, but he thought it best to humour her. "Yes, mother, I've beaten them all."

"I knew you would. When I left Manchester yesterday I knew you'd beat them. Why, to think of you, my Paul, doing such a thing! And that crowd I heard shouting, Paul? They came to meet you at the station, didn't they?"

"I believe hundreds of them came from Manchester," was the reply. "Then, of course, there were many at the station, too."

"That's well, my son!"

"Mother, what is it?" cried Paul, noting the change that passed over her face.

"I'm not so well, my laddie, and I'm not so strong as I thought I was. But it's all right. I think I'll lie down again."

He lifted her in his arms and placed her back in the bed, and in a few seconds she was asleep.

The crowds departed after a while, but there was little work done in Brunford that day. Never was such an excitement known before, never such joy manifested. Directly the news had become known that the real murderer had confessed, the news flashed over many wires and the Press of the whole country was flooded with the wonderful story. Throughout Lancashire it passed, from town to town, from mill to mill, from cottage to cottage, like wild-fire. People who had been certain of Paul's guilt the day before had known all along that he was innocent, and pretended to rejoice accordingly. No sooner did the news reach Brunford than all the mills in the town ceased running. The streets were filled with excited multitudes, talking over what had taken place. Paul Stepaside, for whom the scaffold had been erected and the cord made ready, had been proved innocent at the last moment, and stood before the world a free man! It would be impossible for me to describe in detail the rejoicings of the people or the demonstrations that were made. Even to this day the people in Brunford talk about it as a red-letter day in the history of the town, as a time when it was moved beyond all thought or imagination.

Meanwhile, Paul sat with Mary in his own house. The past weeks seemed like a hideous nightmare to him now. But he had awakened from his sleep, the dark clouds had rolled away. He was home again! The crime of which he had been accused was as nothing. His innocence had been proclaimed to the world. His name was without a stain. But he felt strangely restrained. It seemed as though a weight were put upon his lips, and while he grudged every moment that Mary was out of his sight, he almost feared to be alone with her.

"Paul," she said to him late that afternoon, "your mother does not seem to suffer at all because of the excitement this morning!"

"No," he said quietly. "It's very wonderful! When I was with her just now she was quite cheerful and happy. Even yet she does not know all the truth. Of course, she'll have to know it some day, but we will keep it from her as long as we can. But I do not quite understand the look in her eyes, all the same! She seemed as though she were expecting some one."

"I think I know whom she expects."

"You mean your father?" replied Paul. Even yet he was unable to speak of Judge Bolitho as his own father.

"Yes, I believe she is wondering why he has not come."

"I think I rather wonder, too," said Paul. "You see, he left us directly after I was—after—after the truth was made known, and I've heard nothing from him since. Have you, Mary?"

"No," said the girl. "I've heard nothing. I think he went to London. You see, as far as you're concerned, there are heaps of formalities to be complied with!"

"Yes, yes, I know!" said Paul almost hastily. It seemed as though he wanted to drive the whole terrible thing from his mind.

"Mary," said Paul at length, "have you ever spoken with your father about the past?"

"No," she replied, "never. I was afraid; I don't know why. Once or twice he seemed to be trying to broach the subject, but there was such an awful look in his eyes that I could not bear to hear him speak about it. Besides, I had no time to think about myself! How could I, when, when—— But you know, Paul!"

It was very wonderful to him to be sitting alone in his own house with Mary in this way. Sometimes he thought he was in a dream, and that he would wake up presently to find all the wild, ghastly realities come to him. But it was no dream. The hundreds of telegrams which came to him expressing delight at the proof of his innocence, and the innumerable messages of goodwill which constantly reached him, made all his black fancies impossible.

He was not happy in a full and complete sense of the word. Even yet he felt his life to be enshrouded in mystery. It seemed to him the problem was not yet solved, and never could be solved this side of eternity. Still, his heart was joyful, for was not Mary by his side? Was he not for ever seeing her winsome smile and the flash of her bright eyes? Was she not for ever seeking to minister to his comfort and to bring sunshine into his life?

He dared not go into the town. He feared to meet the people. He could not bear to hear their kindly words, their exclamations of delight and joy. He knew that the sight of homely faces would unman him, and that he would break down like a child. While the shadow of guilt was upon him, he could be strong even as a stoic might be strong. He could bear hard words and suspicious looks. All through the long trial he had been composed and self-reliant, but that was over now. In a way he could not understand, the hard crust of his nature had been broken up. Paul felt a new man. That black, grimy town was no longer dirty and sordid to him. It was the home of tens of thousands of kind hearts, the home of the people he loved. He saw a meaning in their life which he had never seen before. He had dreams of their future to which he was a stranger in the old days. But he could not go out and meet them, could not clasp friendly hands, could not meet smile with smile. Perhaps it was no wonder. Paul had passed far

down the deep, dark Valley of the Shadow of Death, and it seemed at one time as though he would never emerge into the light again, and so it was not strange he should desire to be alone with Mary.

Night came on, and still Judge Bolitho did not come. The last train had arrived in Brunford, but there was no news of him.

"He'll be back when he's done his work," said Mary.

"What work?" asked Paul.

"I don't know," she replied. "But, Paul, you are grieving about me. Don't! I know what's in your mind, but it doesn't matter one bit, not one bit, Paul!"

"But, Mary——"

"No, Paul, not one word! There, it's time for you to go to bed. Kiss me, my love!"

He went towards her, meaning to give her a brotherly kiss, but when he came close to her he caught her in his arms again, and held her passionately to him.

"Good-night, Mary. May God bless you!"

"God?" she said, looking up into his face wonderingly, and there was almost a sob in her voice. "Do you believe in Him at last?"

"May God bless you, my—no, I can't say it. Good-night!"

When Paul went to his room that night, the first night he had slept there since the dread things which had so altered the whole of his life came to him, he sat for a long time thinking. Again he reviewed the past, tried to see its deeper meaning. Then he knelt down by his bedside. He uttered no words, formulated no prayer, but he knew he was very near to the heart of things.

Days passed, and still there was no news of Judge Bolitho. Paul's mother, as steadily she grew stronger, seemed ever to be listening and watching, but she asked no questions and spoke no word about the man of whom both Paul and Mary were sure she was thinking. Both of them rejoiced as they saw her health coming back to her, saw a new light in her eyes, a tenderer expression on her lips. All the same, each of them wondered what the future would bring forth. Neither Mary nor Paul referred again to the shadow which hung upon the former's name. Not one question did Paul ask about her mother, or about the days before they first met each other. He was afraid it would give her pain, and he would rather suffer anything than do that.

On the fourth day after his return, Paul's mother was well enough to come downstairs again. She had clothed herself in the last new dress Paul had bought her, and she blushed like a girl when he told her how young and handsome she looked.

"Nay, Paul, I'm an old woman," she protested. All the same, it was easy to see that she was pleased.

"You're just young and handsome, mother," he repeated. "There's many a lass in Brunford who'd give anything to have your good looks."

"And they say you're the very image of me, Paul! Think now, when you're praising my good looks you're just praising your own!"

In spite of their pleasantries, however, it was easy to see that she was wondering about and longing for something of which she spoke no word.

"Mother, it's eight o'clock. It's time for you to go to bed. You must not take liberties with yourself."

"No," she said. "I'm going to stay up a little longer. I'm not so weak as you think. Did I give way when—when—when I heard how near you were to——? Oh, Paul! my boy! my boy! Thank God! No wonder you love Mary. It was she who saved you! I fancied you had got yourself off by your own cleverness, but, without her——"

"Without her everything would have been impossible," said Paul, but he did not lift his eyes. He was afraid what his mother might see there.

"All the same, you'd better go to bed, mother. You'll be overtired!"

"Listen," she said, and both Mary and Paul saw her hands tremble. "There! There! Don't you hear?"

All plainly heard the sound of wheels outside, an eager step on the path, and then a knock at the door. Paul Stepaside's mother sat rigid. She seemed like one afraid; yet there was a bright light in her eyes all the time.

"Run, my lassie," she said quickly. "Run. Don't wait for one of the maids to go, perhaps it will be ——"

But Mary did not hear the end of her sentence. She ran to the door, and opened it, and both mother and son heard whispering voices in the little hall.

A few seconds later Mary returned again, accompanied by Judge Bolitho. He looked from one face to another, as if uncertain of his welcome. He had evidently come from a long journey, for he looked travel-stained and weary, but each noticed how eager his face was. Paul's mother sat rigidly in her chair. She gave no word of welcome, no sign of recognition. It seemed as though the presence of the judge had placed the seal of silence upon her lips. Paul rose and held out his hand.

"No," said the judge. "I will not take your hand."

Paul looked at him in astonishment. It seemed strange to him, after what had passed at their last meeting, for him to act in this way.

"I will not take your hand, Paul, until I have told my story, until you have heard all there is for me to say," said the judge.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JUDGE BOLITHO'S CONFESSION

As Judge Bolitho spoke, Paul saw that his mother drew herself up in her chair and fixed her eyes upon the newcomer with a look of feverish inquiry. No word had passed between them about the past ever since his return home. Never once had she mentioned an incident of her girlhood, neither had she spoken to Paul about the judge's confession, or what it had meant to them both. The servants still spoke to her as "Mrs. Stepaside," even as they spoke of Paul as Paul Stepaside. There seemed something strange in their relations to the judge even yet. There was still, however, that look of continual watchfulness and inquiry in her eyes. It seemed as though she were waiting for something, something of which she dared not speak.

"I feel as though I had no right to sit here," went on the judge, "no right to a welcome of any sort until I have told the truth. When I have spoken you may drive me from your doors, but at least what there is to be made known shall be told truthfully."

No one spoke, but it was easy to see that all were greatly moved. Mary Bolitho, although she had not spoken a word concerning the story of her past, even to Paul, waited with intense eagerness. Her face had become pale and her lips were tremulous. Paul, too, felt as though the issues of light and darkness lay within the next few minutes, while his mother sat rigid in her chair, never moving a muscle, her eyes fixed on the man who had just come into the room.

The judge pulled off his heavy fur-lined coat and went to the door. He seemed afraid lest someone might be listening.

"What I have to say," he said, "is between ourselves alone. A great deal of it is not for the ears of the world, although some of it must perforce be made known."

Silence followed for some time, and the listeners seemed almost too much moved to breathe, while the speaker appeared to find his task even harder than he had imagined. There was a look which suggested fear in his eyes, and although he constantly glanced at the woman opposite him, he seemed unable to gaze at her steadily.

"I need not describe at length that visit to Scotland," he said presently. "You all know practically what there is to know. I was an orphan. On my father's side I belonged to the Scotch people, on my mother's to Cornwall. They died when I was very young, leaving a sum sufficient to educate me and to start me in life—at least, so they thought. I had chosen the profession of the law, and when I took my degree at Oxford I began reading for the Bar. I had imagined that I had an income sufficient to keep me during the time I was passing my examinations and while I might have to wait for briefs. It was at this time that I went to Scotland with some companions. There I met with you, Jean. There I fell in love with you."

The woman gave a quivering sigh as he spoke, but uttered no word. Her eyes were fixed on him steadily. She seemed to be trying to read his soul.

"I do not think I was a bad lad," he went on, "and I loved you truly. I meant every word I said to you. Doubtless from the worldly-wise man's standpoint I was foolish and acted without due thought, but I yielded to the promptings of my heart, and—and so, at least, I can tell you that, Jean."

He was evidently speaking to her rather than to the others. For the moment they might not have existed at all.

"Badly as I may have treated you, you may believe that, at all events, I loved you with all the fresh, warm affection of a boy, and meant nothing but what was right and true."

Again he paused, as if trying to recall the scenes among the Scottish hills.

"You know I had arranged to leave 'Highlands' that morning and to meet you later in a lonely valley among the mountains. Naturally I was much excited and eager to get to your side. Yet even then I was a coward. Had I acted as I ought, I should have taken you to a minister and have married you before witnesses, but the other way appeared easy, and you did not seem to mind. I must confess, too, that the idea of a Scotch marriage was, in some ways, unreal to me. It did not appear to me as binding as a marriage service should. I expect that was why I suggested this method of our becoming man and wife, for I can see it now—I was a coward even then!

"Still, as I have said, I longed to get to your side, longed to make you my wife, even although I felt I might be acting foolishly. So excited was I that when a servant brought me a letter just as I was leaving, I did not trouble to open it. Had I done so, our future might have been different; I do not know; but I'm telling you this that I may keep nothing from you, for I am determined that you shall know the truth and the whole truth. I thought nothing of the letter through the day; my joy at being with you was too great for that, and the excitement of the thought that I was taking you as my wife made me forgetful of everything else. You remember the scene, Jean? You remember how we took each other as man and wife, there amidst the silence and loneliness? You remember, too, how you suggested that we should ask God to bless our union, and how we knelt side by side and prayed? The memory of that hour has whipped me like scorpions ever since.

"When presently we reached the inn, I thought of the letter and read it. It was from my mother's cousin, who had charge of my affairs and acted as a guardian to me. It seems that he loved her when they were boy and girl, and although she married another man, his love never died. Perhaps that was why he was fond of me. But he never liked my father, and hated the name Graham as a consequence. In the letter he wrote, he told me that the little property which I had thought to be mine had all vanished. It seems that it had been invested in what were thought to be perfectly safe securities, but which had become worthless; therefore I, who was not yet called to the Bar, and had no profession, was penniless. He told me it was necessary for me to return immediately, as he had other news of the gravest import to convey to me, but which I could not properly understand through the medium of a letter.

"I've been reading that letter to-day," went on the judge, "and I do not wonder at my being moved by it. It was written in the most solemn fashion, and hinted at a great deal more than it said. It urged me in the most impressive way to return to Cornwall immediately, and told me that I must allow nothing to stand in the way of my coming.

"Well, Jean, you know what happened. I left you on the morning following, telling you to return to your father, to inform him of our marriage, assuring you that I should return very shortly."

Again the judge was silent for some time. He seemed to be fighting with himself, seemed to be unable to express the thoughts which filled his mind.

"My guardian's name," he went on, "was Bolitho. As I told you, he had always been fond of me from a boy, and he was more to me than most fathers are to their sons. When I returned to him late that night, for, as you know, I caught an express train from Carlisle early in the morning and travelled continuously for fourteen hours, I found him eagerly awaiting me, and I thought he looked pale and ill. In spite of my protests, he would not wait until the morning before telling me what he had in his mind. Ever since he had discovered the truth about my affairs, it seemed that he had been making plans about me, and it was not long before I discovered them. As I told you, he hated the name of Graham, because my father had robbed him of the woman he loved, and he told me that he wanted me to take his name and become his son. On condition that I would do this, he would make my future secure and leave me what fortune he possessed. But there was something more than this, and here comes the story of my fall."

Paul's mother moved slightly in her chair, and then, if possible, her form became more rigid than before, but she did not speak.

"Are you sure you can bear this?" asked the judge. "Are you strong enough?"

"I'm not strong enough to leave this room until I know," replied the woman, and each of them realised that every nerve in her body was in tension, and that her suffering, although not physical, defied all description.

"He told me something else," went on the judge. "He told me that he had lately visited his doctor, who had informed him that it was essential to his life for him to go to some Southern land, and suggested New Zealand or Australia, for at least two years. He said that a lengthy sea voyage was first of all absolutely necessary, and that then a residence for a considerable time in a suitable climate must be a condition of his life. If he did not do this he would die.

"You can see what this meant," continued the judge, for the first time looking at Mary and Paul, "and his words almost staggered me. But this was not all. He had promised to care for a widowed sister's child, a girl who was at that time about eighteen years of age; promised her, too, the protection which she had never known from her father. She was called Mary Tregony, and, like the Bolithos, the Tregonys are among the oldest families in England. Of course, I had known her all her life, and in a way looked upon her as a sister."

"'You like Mary?' said my uncle to me.

"And I had to confess that I did, although I only thought of her as a kind of sister.

"'Douglas, my boy,' he said, 'I want you to marry Mary; not yet, for she has not yet left school, but in, say, two years' time, when I am well enough to return to England; then I want you to make her your wife.'"

"It was here," said the judge, "that my cowardice first appeared. I ought to have told Mr. Bolitho that I was already married, and that I had only left my wife early that morning, but I did not. There was no excuse for me, I know; all the same, although I still loved you, Jean, or thought I did, our marriage seemed shadowy, unreal. I forgot what I owed you, forgot my duty to you.

"Mr. Bolitho, although he loved me dearly, was a man who was stern and unbending, a man of iron will, a man always accustomed to have his way. For years I had looked on him with a kind of awe, and had never once dared to disobey him. His word had always been law to me, and even although practically I had reached man's estate, the influence of the past was strong upon me. I dared not tell him the truth, dared not say that I could not do what he asked. I know I was a coward, worse than a coward, but I was silent.

"Presently, however, I made a feeble sort of opposition. I demurred against changing my name, for one thing, and I remember saying that I had no reason to believe that Mary cared for me. But, in his strong, imperious way, he swept down all my opposition. The influence of the past was strong upon me, and I forgot my present duty. Besides, as I said, he was adamant. He grew angry even at the little opposition I offered, and told me that if I did not care enough for him to do what he asked, I must look to myself for my future. And I was penniless, dependent upon him for every farthing. I had no means of earning a living. It is true I had taken a degree at Oxford, but I had no knowledge of any trade, no early prospect of earning money in a profession. What could I do? Besides, I was a coward. No one can scorn that cowardice more than I, but there it was. He appealed to my pity, too. He told me that if I did not go with him abroad he would have to go alone, a sick man among strangers. I soon found out, too, that even my belief in my own property was largely a figment of my own imagination. It is true some little money had been left to me, and had been lost in the way I have indicated, but without him I could never have gone to Oxford, without him I should have been practically a waif. Besides, he was a man of strong personality, and, as I said, of iron will."

The judge made a movement as if of impatience. "What is the use of enlarging upon all this?" he went on presently. "I promised to do what he asked, promised to change my name. That was not much. I knew little and cared less about my father, but my mother was a Bolitho, and I almost adored her memory. I was willing to be called Bolitho instead of Graham. That cost me very little. As to the other, the thought of travelling for two years appealed to me. It is true I was fond of my studies, but I reflected that I could take my books with me, and although it might delay my being called to the Bar by some year or two—I was young, and it did not matter; and so, God forgive me, I forgot the vows I made, forgot my honour. I was a coward! Added to all this, the marriage on the moors became less and less reality. Indeed, after I had been in Cornwall two or three days, it seemed little more than a joke, an episode in a boy's life. I was forgetful of what the consequences of such a deed might be, and I began to look forward to coming days. Presently I wrote that letter. No wonder you could not forgive me. No wonder Paul hated me for it. But there, I wrote it! One thing, and one thing only may be urged in my favour. Although I seemingly consented to the marriage with Mary Tregony, I hoped that something would happen to make it impossible. It all lay in the distance, and that made everything easy to an optimistic youth. I never breathed a word concerning my marriage with Jean. Indeed, I came to look upon it as something that was utterly illegal, and that I could never be expected to stand by what was only, after all, a mere farcical thing, the act of a madcap boy."

The judge wiped the perspiration from his brow before going on again. It was evident that he was suffering greatly. It seemed as though he had not yet reached that point of his story which was more difficult to tell than any other, still, he plodded on his weary way, although the words came with difficulty.

"In two years' time we returned from abroad. By this time I was accustomed to the name of 'Bolitho.' Steps had been taken to make it legal, and I had to a very large extent forgotten my former name. I was Mr. Bolitho's adopted son, and I called him 'father.' During the years we had been away together, too, his influence upon me had grown stronger. I was afraid to do anything in opposition to his will. His resolute, imperious nature made me almost like an obedient slave, and not only that, I loved him too. I knew I owed everything to him, and he was almost uniformly kind to me. Thus, while I feared him, my fear was mingled with filial love.

"When we returned to England I started in earnest with my law studies. I had not altogether neglected them while I had been away, and so I went to London for my dinners, and in due time was called to the Bar, with, it was said, a great deal of distinction. By this time my experiences in Scotland became, to my shame, almost a shadowy memory to me. I cared for no other woman, and there were times, too, when I dreamed of Jean, and thought of her fondly, but only rarely. The Scotch episode was but an episode. One thing gladdened me, Mary Tregony seemed to care nothing for me, and in spite of Mr. Bolitho's persuasions, there were no definite arrangements made about our marriage. Presently, however, after I had been practising some time, and had obtained a modicum of success, indeed, a success great enough to promise well for the future, my adopted father wrote to me saying that Mary had at length consented to our wedding. It was at this time that I began to be afraid. What I had laughed at in my heart as the Scotch episode, became real. I remember, too, that at that time I was engaged in a bigamy trial, and I remember the terms which the judge used concerning the man who

was found guilty. Yet here was I, who had acted as junior counsel for the prosecution of this man, contemplating taking a woman to wife, when I had promised before God to be faithful to another. I tried to persuade myself that the Scotch marriage was not only informal but illegal, and could have no weight of whatever nature, yet my heart swept away all the sophistries of my mind, and proclaimed me to be a villain. So much moved was I by this that I at length decided to send a man to Scotland to make inquiries. Of course, he never dreamed of my connection with the affair, and thought that I was only hunting up evidence for some case in which I was interested professionally. After a time he returned with the news that Jean Lindsay was dead, that she died some months after I had left her, probably of a broken heart, certainly in disgrace. Need I say what I suffered? You would not believe me if I told you! How could anyone who had acted a coward's part as I had, suffer? Yet so it was. And yet in my suffering was a sense of freedom. Nothing now seemed to depend upon the possible legality or illegality of my former marriage. The woman I had wedded was dead, at least so I was assured, and so I believed. I went to Cornwall prepared to do my adopted father's bidding.

"When I arrived there, I found him almost in a state of panic. Mary was missing! What had become of her no one knew. Personally I believed that she so hated the thought of marrying me that she had determined to escape. More than five years had now passed away since my visit to Scotland, and, as I said, I had been called to the Bar with fair prospects of success. The name I bore was old and respected. It was a passport into any society that I desired. Again I felt as though the fates were fighting for me. After all, in spite of everything, I should be free to live my own life, and the consequences of my cowardice and sin would never be visited upon me. The fact that my name had been changed from Graham to Bolitho was practically unknown, and even those with whom I forgathered as a student had become accustomed to my new name. It seemed natural to them, I suppose, that I, in order to become my adopted father's heir, should also adopt his name. Indeed, I have been described in certain handbooks as the only son of Hugh Bolitho of Tredinnick, Cornwall.

"More than a year passed before I heard anything again of Mary Tregony, and then I received an urgent message summoning me to the West of England. It seems that my adopted father had at length found out where she was, found out, too, that she had been the victim of a villain. A wild rake, a man of no character, who had been kicked out of the army, and who was already married, had deceived her. I need not mention his name now, indeed it is well that I should not, and it has no real bearing upon what I am telling you, but he was a handsome dare-devil kind of fellow who appealed to the heart of a romantic young girl, and she trusted him. Soon after their supposed marriage she found out what she had done."

The judge ceased speaking for a few seconds.

"There was no one louder in his condemnation than I, no one called him viler names than I, and yet I knew in my heart all the time that my villainy was as great as his.

"My adopted father met me at Plymouth and led me to a low part of the town where she had taken lodgings. It was here her child had been born, a child she dared not own, a child to whom the stigma of disgrace would be attached if the truth were made known. As I told you, my adopted father loved Mary Tregony almost as he loved me, and it was the dream of his heart that we should be man and wife. It seems almost like a fairy story now, but at that time it was terribly real. Even yet I can hardly believe in its truth. We found Mary lying in a miserable room, with her child sleeping by her side—a little girl."

The judge turned, and gave a hasty glance at Mary as he spoke. It was only for a second, but he saw that her face was blanched and set, while in her eyes was a look of horror.

"The doctor who had been called in had said that Mary Tregony was dying, that at most she could live only a few hours, and my adopted father demanded that I should marry her, and thus save her name from dishonour, and take the child as my own. I have told you of the power he had over me, how practically all my life I had never thought of disobeying him, and in spite of myself he persuaded me now."

During the whole of this recital Paul's mother had never uttered a word, save in answer to the one question which Judge Bolitho had spoken to her, but she had sat rigid in form and face, her hands clasped to the arms of her chair, her eyes fixed on the speaker's face, never missing a word that was uttered. Now, however, she spoke.

"And did you dare to marry her?" she said passionately. "You—you, who had——"

"Wait a minute," said the judge. "There were certain legal formalities to be complied with, a certain time to wait before any marriage could be made legal. We were no longer in Scotland, as in the days when I married you, Jean. We were in England. Yes, I decided to obey my adopted father's command. As it seemed to me, I owed everything to him and I could not withstand his pleadings. For he did plead, pleaded as I never thought a man could, pleaded his love for Mary, his love for her honour, pleaded that her child should have an honourable name—and I yielded to him."

"Then I am not your child really?" cried Mary.

"Wait a little," said the judge. "Before the time came when Mary could legally be made my wife, she died."

"Then you never married her?" said Paul's mother, her voice hoarse and unnatural.

"No. I never married her."

"Then—then?" said Mary.

"Then my adopted father made me solemnly promise that I would take you as my child, that it should be made known that I had married your mother secretly, and that she was dead.

"I suppose I was much excited. Certain I am that my mind did not fully comprehend the real issues of the case. Anyhow, I promised him. As you know, Mary, I have never told you much about your mother, neither have I since visited that part of Cornwall where she was known. All you have heard has been that your mother died when you were born, and you have regarded me as your father from the time you understood anything."

There was a silence in the room for some time, save for the tick of the clock on the mantelpiece. All seemed to be so overwhelmed by what they had heard that for the moment they were incapable of speech.

"It is ever the same," said the judge. "Lying, cowardice are followed by the most terrible penalties. I have felt many a time that cowardice is the father of nearly all our crimes."

"But," cried Paul, and his voice was vibrant with strong emotion, "then Mary is not my sister, she is—she can be—— Oh, Mary, forgive me! I did not think! I did not remember!"

Mary did not appear to hear him. Her eyes were fixed on Judge Bolitho's face, and she seemed to be trying to understand.

"I could say nothing about this before," went on the judge, "even when the truth which was revealed during the trial came to me. I had sworn to be silent. I dared not make known the truth. I dared not let this shadow rest upon Mary's name, even although it seemed as though a greater shadow rested upon it. You know what followed after that day in the courts, when I confessed that Jean was my wife and that Paul was my son. At last I had made up my mind that I would be a coward no longer, that, whatever the consequences might be, I would walk in the straight path. I could not tell all the truth because of my solemn oath to my adopted father. Besides, the great thought in my mind was to save Paul. I need not refer to that now, you know all about it! But for Mary, here—well, thank God, Mary saved him! But for her, the truth would never have come to light. But directly I knew that Paul was free, I left you, determined to make the crooked places straight. I hastened to London, and after doing what needed to be done there, I hurried on to Cornwall. I saw my adopted father—he's an old man now, but he's lost none of the strength of his younger manhood. I fought a hard battle with him, but that's nothing—the result is that I am able to tell you what I've told you."

The judge's eyes sought those of the older woman, who still sat rigidly in her chair. He seemed to be on the point of speaking to her, but before he could do so Paul broke in.

"Then the shame which has been attached to my name must be attached to Mary's!" he cried.

"Never," replied the judge. "That need not be. Concerning Mary's birth no word need be uttered. There is no need that we should deceive anyone, nevertheless the truth is not for the world. I need only say that Mary is not my child, but that I have simply reared her as my own. Her mother was a pure woman, but concerning her parentage we need say nothing."

"I would rather," cried Paul, "that my own name——"

"Stop, Paul!" said Mary. "It does not matter at all. How can it, when—when—— Oh, Paul, Paul, my love!"

"I've always loved you like my own child," said the judge, "and under ordinary circumstances these revelations should never have passed my lips, but—but I—I thought, I understood——"

Paul dared not speak again. The truth was that the knowledge which had come to him in such a strange way overwhelmed him with joy. It seemed to him as though that dark winter night had changed into a June morning. Everything was possible. His mind had swept aside the little conventions of men. Mary's presence and Mary's love were all the world to him.

The judge again looked towards Paul's mother. "I have not quite finished yet," he said, and his voice trembled as he spoke. "And I want to say something more. You know all now, Jean, know what a coward I've been, know how that cowardice meant your misery and your disgrace. I do not seek to excuse my conduct. It cannot be excused, and yet I must speak the truth, I must——"

He hesitated a second, and then went on, "Can you forgive me, Jean? Through all you have been pure and worthy, while I have been unworthy. My name has been spoken of with honour, and yours has been covered with shame through me. Can you forgive me? And more—perhaps you will scorn me and repel me when I tell you this—but after that night when I saw you in Manchester and knew that you still lived, all my old love came back to me; I know that really it had never died. Jean, can you forgive me?"

The eyes of the man and the woman met. At first hers seemed hard and unyielding—she was evidently fighting a great battle. Then slowly, little by little, they underwent a change, and Paul saw

that the tears were welling up.

"Jean! Jean!" said the judge, holding out his hands. "Have you no word for me?"

"Come, Mary," said Paul. "Let us go into the other room."

And they went out, leaving the two together.

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