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Masterman and Son

by

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I

THE MASTER-BUILDER

Archibold Masterman, tall, heavily-built, muscular, and on the wrong side of fifty, was universally esteemed an excellent specimen of that dubious product of modern commerce, the self-made man. At twenty he was a day-labourer, at thirty a jobbing builder, at forty a contractor

in a large way of business. At that point may be dated the beginning of his social efflorescence. It was then that he began to wear broadcloth on week-days, and insisted on a fresh shirt every other day. Hitherto careless of his appearance, he now took a quiet pride in clothes, and discovered the uses of the manicure. A little later he discovered that a man's position in society is judged by the kind of house he lives in, and that it is social wisdom to pay a high rent for a small house in a discreetly "good" locality, rather than a low rent for a much better house in a deteriorated suburb. That was the year in which he purchased Eagle House, a pompous, old-fashioned residence standing in its own grounds in Highbourne Gardens.

Highbourne Gardens was one of those London suburbs which contrive to preserve a faint aroma of gentility for many years after the real gentlefolk have left it. It had many old houses of the plain and specious order, inhabited a century ago by great London merchants. In the floors of these houses might be found vast beams of some foreign wood, hard enough to turn the keenest chisel; in the gardens at their backs were copper beeches, mulberry trees, and an occasional cedar of Lebanon. Modern London, with its vast invasion of mean streets, stopped respectfully before the proud exclusiveness of Highbourne Gardens. It was one of the last localities to have roads which were marked "Private," guarded by locked gates, and to employ watchmen in faded liveries, who dwelt in tiny sentry-boxes and at stated hours collected the letters of the residents.

It was precisely the kind of neighbourhood for such a man as Archibold Masterman to make his first social experiment, and he was quick to recognise its advantages. Eagle House, Highbourne Gardens, was a thoroughly respectable address; if it did not convey the impression of social distinction, it clearly did imply solid competence, which was a good deal better. Jones, the well-known city tailor, lived there, and drove a pair of horses which any lord might envy; there were half a dozen brokers who kept as good tables as any man in London; and there was Loker, the famous manufacturer of soaps, whose rhymed advertisements met the eye in every railway-carriage. According to the views of Archibold Masterman, in his present stage of social enlightenment, these illustrious persons composed a real aristocracy of solid merit.

Above all, there was in Highbourne Gardens a church, at which most of these prosperous persons were regular attendants, and Archibold Masterman was shrewd enough to see that such a church was admirably adapted to the plan of social advancement which he had in view. It was not an Episcopal church, it was true; but that scarcely mattered in a neighbourhood which was by long tradition Non-conformist. It was enough for him that it contained the people he wished most to know, and his first act on settling at Eagle House was to rent the most expensive pew in the church which then chanced to be at liberty. The day when he took possession of this pew was a red-letter day in his life. He was conscious that he was well-dressed, and that he and his family were favourably remarked. Loker, the soap manufacturer, took the collection in his aisle, and when Masterman put a new five-pound note upon the plate, he knew that he had created a sensation. When he left the church, Loker shook his hand with great cordiality, and from that hour his position was assured.

All this was, of course, many years ago. Since then he had played his cards so well that he had become almost the best-known man in the locality. He was certainly esteemed the wealthiest. He was a deacon in the church, *vice* Loker deceased, and he now trod the aisles with the collection plate, and kept a jealous eye upon its contents. Among the church folk his record for generosity stood high. Among the younger men the story of his life had become a stimulating tradition. There were two versions of this tradition. In the young men's societies, and at their annual club dinner, he was accustomed to tell a touching story of how he once did a piece of humble work which no one else would touch, and found his fidelity rewarded by sudden promotion, which gave him his first real chance in life. This story never failed to arouse loud cheers, and when irate parents found their boys unwilling to black their own shoes or weed the garden, they would cry, "Remember Masterman." Among a few old cronies in the building trade, in convivial moments, this tradition took a different form. To them he boasted that he bought his first plot of land by issuing a cheque when he had nothing in the bank, only borrowing the money just in time to prevent discovery.

"It was a prison or a fortune," he was accustomed to remark. "And I took the risk. I took the risk, and see what I am to-day." Whereat his old cronies, particularly Grimes, a small builder in Tottenham, who were all more or less under financial obligations to him, would applaud him even more vigorously than the church young men.

The whole character of the man may be discerned in the incident. That he should have risked a prison to make a fortune was nothing to be ashamed of; although he had sense enough to know that it was not the kind of story which would be received with acclamation by the church young men. Therefore to them he gave a milder version, suited to their innocence. But in his heart he was proud of his own daring, still prouder of his triumph. His blood thrilled pleasurably whenever he recalled that perilous and nearly fatal morning—his sudden decision to buy the land whose speculative value none but he could recognise, the bold bluff he practised on the sellers, the false cheque which he knew put the handcuffs oh his wrists, the mad, breathless rush across London to secure the money at any rate of interest from any kind of lender. And then the ecstatic moment when, just ten minutes before the bank closed, he had paid in the five thousand pounds which saved his credit. In the end he had made twenty thousand pounds out of that land, and from that moment he dated his prosperity. He had taken risks, and that was to him the equivalent of heroism. Life was full of risks, and the man who dared nothing was a coward. It was the simple philosophy of the buccaneer, the pirate, the adventurer. Had he lived a hundred years earlier and

been bred to the sea, he would have gloried in the black flag, and would have competed with Captain Kidd for terrifying fame. The very joy of living lay in taking risks.

He had been taking risks ever since, although time and prosperity had taught him caution and a more sober craft. Sometimes, and especially since he had become a resident in Highbourne Gardens, he had resolved to content himself with the kind of business which avoided speculative perils, but the old instinct always proved too strong for him. Show him an opportunity that offered the chance of great and sudden profit, and he could no more help putting all he had in jeopardy to secure it than can the old gambler refuse one more cast of the dice. But under the chastenings of his new respectability he had become more and more secretive in these dubious transactions. His own family never once suspected them. All that they knew was that there were recurring periods when he went about the house in grim silence, and sat up half the night in the little room which he called his office. At such times his face seemed to harden; new lines appeared about the eyes and the firm mouth; but it always remained impassive and inscrutable. Some day the cloud would lift suddenly; the grim toiler in the midnight office came forth, jovial, loud-voiced, ten years younger; and there was a period of joyous extravagance, a new pair of horses in the stable, a conservatory added to the drawing-room, a large subscription to the church funds, and the genial stir and tumult of dinner and lawn-tennis parties. After a time the cloud rolled back again, but his friends were alike ignorant of the causes that produced or the triumphs which dissolved it.

So Masterman lived his life, and it was part of the man that the church had come to occupy a considerable place in it. He felt that he owed it gratitude, for had it not done much to forward his social ambitions? He no longer moved in it humbly, as a man sedulous of notice; he had long since become its undisputed king. The day was past when he was grateful for the hand-shake of a Loker: it was his turn now to confer the favours which he once had sought. It represented an essential feature in his triumph. When the time came that he sought public honours, which he meant to do, the church would prove a valuable factor in his ambitions. He would then get back all that he had given it, in willing service. It pleased him to think that the church itself would turn out a good investment when that time came.

Not that he was destitute of all sense of religion; in his own way he valued it, though not upon the grounds that were common with ordinary pious folk. He thought it a good thing that men should have definite views of truth, especially when their views encouraged them in the belief that they would become in another world persons of as much importance as they had been in this. As he understood the matter, it was necessary for a man to have certain right beliefs in order that he might become secure of the reversion of eternal happiness; and if that were true, a man would be a fool who did not accept these beliefs. Hence he was severely orthodox, and insisted on orthodoxy in his family. He liked a good sermon, he liked good music, and it was part of his pride that the Highbourne Gardens Church had both in all excellence unapproachable by any of the lesser churches in the neighbourhood. This was the limit of his apprehension as regards the church. He recognised in it one of the great proprieties of life, a kind of etiquette toward God which no moral human creature would refuse.

That he was moral, in the ordinary meaning of the word, there could be no doubt. Long ago, when he was a mere day-labourer, he had indulged in a week's drunkenness, and had learned once for all the lesson that success in life is not compatible with insobriety. He had been discharged from his employment, and had spent a miserable month in hunting work with a damaged character. From that hour he was a water-drinker. Life, having taught him this lesson, proceeded to teach him a second, that the man who means to succeed must not meddle with the coarser passions. He had come near to an entanglement with an evil woman, and had issued from it with a fixed conviction that the pleasures of passion were never worth the price men paid for them. Here the original hardness of his nature served him, and this was soon reinforced by the temper of ambition. Cool, shrewd, alert, he became too much enamoured of success to stop for wayside pleasures; he knew the more recondite joy of climbing over the shoulders of disabled men to seize the prize which they had forfeited. In a word, it paid him to be moral, and his temperament jumped with his self-interest.

But of morality in its higher forms of ethical ideals he knew nothing. Deacon of a church as he was, he was still a pirate, a buccaneer, a highwayman of commerce, thirsting for illicit adventure. There was a grim humour in the situation of which he himself caught brief glimpses. Like the bandit who makes a gift to the Virgin from his spoils, and holds himself henceforth reconciled to heaven, so Masterman paid his tithe to God, in the comfortable faith that no one had the right to examine too closely the means by which it was obtained.

"A hypocrite," the shallow reader will exclaim, but no word would be farther from the truth, for the real and only hypocrite is he who, having light to see the highest things, deliberately uses them to serve his lower instincts. Masterman did nothing of the kind. He simply had no higher light. Not even a jury with a damaging verdict, or a judge with a scathing allocution, could have convinced him that it was a wrong time to write a bogus cheque in an emergency, when twenty thousand pounds hung upon the chance of his deceit being undiscovered. He would have done it again to-morrow, done it proudly, with a kind of fearless, misguided heroism. Life was like that, he would have said; you took your chances. And what he would have said and done at thirty-five, he would have said and done at fifty. There was a hard, unmalleable quality in the man that turned the edge of all those fine ethics which the preachers uttered. It was their duty to utter them, no doubt; it was what they were paid to do; but what did they know of life? What did John

Clark, the minister of Highbourne Gardens Church, comfortably paid, and living in a good house, know of life as Masterman had found it? He was like a child playing in the shallows; he had never known deadly contest with tides, and waves, and tempests. So Masterman listened to him with a kindly irony, and went upon his way totally unmoved by any delicate displays of pulpit rhetoric.

Yet of late things had somewhat altered; he was conscious that there was a changed atmosphere in the world. John Clark was preaching a different kind of sermon, a bolder, plainer sermon, full of pungent references to public evils and daily conduct. That would not have mattered much, for Masterman was perfectly aware that he was John Clark's master whenever he might choose to assert the rights of the purse. But a much more pertinent and painful problem was gradually rising in Masterman's own household. He had but two children, Helen and Arthur, and upon the boy all his hopes were set. He had sent him to Oxford, where he had done tolerably well; from the University he had returned with a fund of new ideas which were to his father strange and detestable. And among them was a vague socialism, which displayed itself in vehement attacks on the common processes by which wealth was acquired. There came a day when Masterman was aware, for the first time, that he was face to face with a separate personality in his son, which had its own springs of action and claimed its own liberty of thought. And as the boy uttered his youthful diatribes, the father began to wonder how much he knew about his own life, how far those diatribes might be directed obliquely against himself.

He listened in silence, with a difficult good-humour. He never attempted to retort. When he did speak, he meant to speak once for all, but he would choose his time. He often wondered what he should say; whether he would tell the boy with a brutal frankness all about his methods of business, or leave him to discover a little at a time, when he entered the office, as in due time Masterman meant that he should. But whatever he said or did, he would act with finality when the time came. There were means of bringing Arthur to heel as well as John Clark.

The present trouble was that Arthur seemed greatly to approve John Clark's teaching. He quoted it, amplified it, and insisted on its rightness. And yet in all this the father knew quite well that his son could intend no disloyalty to him. The boy's frank gray eyes had no deceit in them. But they also flashed an unmistakable challenge on the world. The father could not but admire the boy. He was no fool, he often told himself with a bitter smile. Perhaps these new opinions of his were, after all, mere froth; it might be wise to let him talk himself out. Surely he must come to see life from the commonsense point of view, which of course was Masterman's. So the father eagerly debated, and once more the light burned late in the little office, and as the days passed, his mouth grew grim and the lines deepened on his face. Here was a problem much more difficult than buying land without money, and it was not solved by mere daring.

So matters stood when John Clark preached his notorious sermon on jerry-building, in which he accused without mercy the men who ran up rotten buildings for the poor as thieves and assassins.

Archibold Masterman heard the sermon, and left the church with a frowning face. For the rest of the Sabbath he shut himself up in his office, and a heavy silence dwelt in Eagle House.

II

A DISCUSSION

It was in Masterman's office that the informal meeting of some of the leading church officials took place next day. The meeting had been preceded by what was known as "a high tea," for the customary evening dinner was dispensed with when deacons were the guests. This was done out of deference to the inferior position of some of the younger deacons, who had not yet attained the social dignity of late dinners.

Masterman, however, took care that this substitutionary meal did credit to his own social superiority. Where the younger deacons were accustomed to provide for the entertainment of their brethren plates of exiguous ham, manifestly bought at the cookshop, insufficient salads frugally overlaid with sliced eggs, and a sparse variety of home-made cake and pastry, Masterman spread a groaning table with a cold sirloin of beef, a pair of fowls, and an entire ham, to say nothing of thick cream and expensive fruits. Masterman's coffee, too, was of a richness quite unapproachable by the inferior decoctions of Beverley and Luke, whose wives dealt at local shops, and were not above using a certain detestable invention known as coffee essence. Luke and Beverley also used gas fires in their dining- and drawing-rooms, to save labour, which was necessary when but one maid was kept; whereas Masterman had a coal fire even in the hall, and burned logs of wood in his living-rooms. Upon Masterman's table there was also real silver of undeniable price, and a vast silver urn; whereas Beverley and Luke could pretend to nothing better than electro imitations, which were not even silver-plated. So that it was clear that though Masterman gave high teas, they were scarcely distinguishable from evening dinners; and if he

was a deacon, he was by no means a common deacon.

Arthur Masterman had long ago come to regard those diaconal high teas with a kind of sombre merriment. It amused him to remark his father's difficult adjustment to a form of meal to which he was not used; his conflict between condescension and hospitality; his manifest, and not quite successful, effort to modify his blunt, domineering outspokenness to the sensitive susceptibilities of his guests. He was aware also, with a sort of pride, how big his father seemed beside these men. He loomed above them like some vast cathedral front over huddled houses. They were city dwellers all, and had never been anything else. They had the precise, neat manners of men accustomed to formal ways of life. Their talk rarely went beyond the gossip of church affairs, or the recapitulation of something in the morning's paper. But no one could look at Archibold Masterman without a sense of something primitive and massive in the man. The heavy frame, the great breadth of shoulder, the clean-shaven face with its firm lines, the eyes, clear, watchful, dominating, with a certain almost vulpine intensity and hardness—all these declared a man at all times unusual, but most unusual in contrast with these men, who bore in every feature the evidence of how cities by mere attrition grind men down into conventional similarities. That the boy should fear his father was natural, for Archibold Masterman was a man whose will was law; that he should not wholly understand him was also natural, for a vast world of experience lay between them: but his pride in him was a genuine and steadfast feeling, all the more remarkable because the father was uneducated, and the son had drunk deep of the waters of Oxford scholarship.

With the sister, Helen, the case was very different. Arthur had inherited from his father the gift of self-poise. He knew how to look at things with a single eye, to meditate on them in silence, and to take up an attitude of his own toward them. Helen's whole nature was of lighter calibre. She was a girl easily influenced by chance acquaintance, more ready to enjoy life than to examine its underlying elements, in all things more comformable to conventions. When she came home from an expensive finishing-school, she brought with her less her own character than a character imposed upon her by her teachers. She took her place in life with an instant alacrity of adaptation; formed a dozen light-hearted friendships, became popular for her vivacity and gaiety, and in her heart thought her father dull. She had none of the sense of his essential bigness that Arthur had. She had no curiosity about him: he was simply an element in the convenient furniture of her own life. She sometimes wished him a little more polished, resented his brusque manners, misunderstood his heavy silence, and was inclined to be ironical about his social ambitions. Yet these same social ambitions were the chief common bond between them. Through them she saw her road to a life that would gratify her vanity. Somewhere, in the dim future, she discerned a golden world, which she hoped to enter when her father's force of character had broken down the barriers of social caste. What her father's character really was, or by what means he meant to reach that desirable golden world, she did not ask. As long as the result was reached, she had no curiosity about the process.

The last person in the family group to be remarked is the mother. She sat at the end of the long table, dispensing tea and coffee with an air of weary assiduity. In her youth she had had some claim to beauty, and there still clung to her a kind of tired elegance. Her hair, once blond, had become almost white, and lay in rippled fullness over a forehead much lined. Her face was without colour, the eyebrows dark and beautifully curved, the eyes gray and clear, with a certain startled expression, as if life had presented to her little else than a series of unforeseen surprises. She was a very silent woman; silence was her dominating quality, but it was enigmatic silence. Persons of effusive and flamboyant manners found her silence scarcely distinguishable from scorn; people of vivacious temperament called it stolidity; the general impression among her acquaintance was that it was significant of a nature at once cold and colourless. They were all wrong, however. And those were yet further from the truth who confused her silence with placidity. There were times when a sudden flash of fire in the gray, watchful eyes witnessed to an inner heat. If she spoke little, it was not because she felt little—it was rather because she realised the total ineffectiveness of language to express her thought. Helen had characteristically never tried to understand her mother. But as Arthur had grown older, and especially since his return from Oxford, he had often found himself speculating on the real nature of his mother's character. He saw her, an apparent automaton, content to fill an automatic place in life, making no claims for herself, offering no opposition to the claims of others, apparently desirous of squeezing herself into a position of neglected insignificance; but he was acute enough to know that all this self-effacement was artificial. What were her real relations with his father? Was she a woman simply overborne by his superior weight? How much of her silence sprang from fear of his heavy-handed judgments? But no sooner did such thoughts visit him than the boy recoiled from them with a sense of their indelicacy. Not to speculate at times upon the relations of his parents was impossible in one who was just at that stage of observation when the entire area of life is an object of intense curiosity; but to cherish or pursue such thoughts was too much like violating a privacy which both nature and custom had declared sacred. Yet of one thing he was sure: his mother's native force of character was not inferior to his father's, and her silence rested on a deep-lying intensity of temperament, not on apathy.

The meal pursued its common course of dullness. Luke retailed some petty gossip about a family named Vickars, who had recently joined the church; and Beverley contrived to get upon his usual topic of fiscal reform, producing as his own opinions the substance of a leading article which had appeared in the morning paper. No one took any notice of Beverley, but Luke's topic of conversation proved more interesting, especially to the only other deacon present, a middle-aged,

slightly gray man, with quick, crafty eyes, called Scales. Scales kept the record of the seat-holders, and felt that Beverley was intruding on his own peculiar domain when he described the Hilary Vickars, the new family which had joined the congregation.

"I know them very well," he remarked. "They have only taken two sittings, and they are not the sort of people who will add much strength to the church. They live in a small house in Lonsdale Road—one of your houses, sir," he added, turning to Masterman.

"A very good class of people live in Lonsdale Road, I believe," said Masterman drily.

"Oh yes, of course—I know that; and in the changing conditions of the neighbourhood a street of houses like Lonsdale Road is a great benefit to the locality. But this Hilary Vickars only rents a part of a house, I am informed, and that is what I meant when I said he wouldn't add much strength to the church."

"Hilary Vickars," said Arthur. "Why, isn't he a writer? I think I saw his name mentioned the other day as the author of a novel which appeared this spring."

"Very likely," said Scales. "Now I think of it, some one told me he wrote for the papers. I wonder now if he couldn't give the church a write-up in *The Weekly Journal* some day?"

"In that case he might prove a greater accession to the church than you imagine," said Beverley, who was always glad to score a point against Scales, whose assumption of authority he disliked.

Scales made no reply. He really had no information about Hilary Vickars, beyond the fact that he had taken a sitting in the church. As he never read a book of any kind, nor a literary journal, he was quite ignorant of Hilary Vickar's pretensions as a writer. But since Beverley appeared to think Vickars an acquisition of some value, he was eager to prove the contrary. He remembered opportunely that it was immediately after John Clark's sermon on jerry-building that Vickars had applied for sittings, and immediately said so, with a crafty glance at Masterman.

"Of course I don't know what other people think," he added, "but I consider that sermon an outrage."

Arthur flushed.

"Do you really?" he asked. "It seems to me that to say that is to beg the whole question. The real, and therefore the only, question is, Was it true?"

Masterman turned his heavy, frowning gaze on Arthur.

"We won't discuss that here," he said. "If you are ready, gentlemen, we will adjourn to my office."

The men rose and left the room, Masterman leading the way. When the office door closed, Masterman at once began to speak.

"I don't propose to beat about the bush," he said; "it isn't my way. You all know just why we are here, and what the subject of discussion is. It's Clark."

The others remained silent.

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked, with a sombre glance at Scales.

"We would all prefer to hear you first," said Scales. "Have you any course to propose?"

"Yes, I have," said Masterman, in a formidable voice. "I've had about enough of Clark. I know he's a good preacher and all that, but he's greatly changed. For weeks past he has been attacking people from the pulpit. That's not the kind of thing we pay him for, and it must stop. Unless it stops, either he or I must leave the church, and it's for you to choose."

Thus bluntly adjured, the fountains of discussion were at once open. Masterman lit a cigar, and sat before the big writing-table, smoking stolidly. He had shot his bolt, and was pretty sure of its effect. He had the great advantage of having meditated on his course with sober boldness. He knew very well that he could do without the church better than it could do without him. He did not wish to leave it, but he had now reached a point in his career when he was relatively indifferent to its advantages. It would not hurt him much if he did join the rival Episcopal church in the neighbourhood, which had recently become quite popular under a new incumbent of mellifluous voice and no particular convictions. It might even help him socially—conceivably it might. But that was a course which he did not mean to take except under extreme pressure. It would certainly have the aspect of defeat, and to be defeated by John Clark was intolerable.

As he saw the matter, the issue was absolutely clear. Clark could no longer hold his own if he should oppose him. A church can always get a minister, but a minister could not always get a church. If Clark should recognise the weakness of his position, and amend his ways—well, he was not vindictive, and he would accept any reasonable compromise. No, he was neither vindictive nor unreasonable, but he meant to have his way, and the only question in debate was by what

means he should secure it.

To Beverley's cautious platitudes and Luke's halting remonstrances he scarcely listened, but when at last Scales began to speak, he was all attention. He knew better than to place Scales in the category with Luke and Beverley. Although his social position was not much superior to theirs, yet he had by suavity and some real ability insinuated himself into a place of some authority in the counsels of the church. People listened to him. He always spoke with gravity, and with a certain air of deprecation, as of one who admitted his humility, but was quietly aware of his importance. And he usually knew exactly what to say to influence opinion, for he had a habit of collecting privately the opinions of other people before he announced his own. Nothing sounds so like wisdom in debate as for a speaker to give back in clear form the half-articulated opinions of his audience, and in this art Scales was an adept. Therefore Masterman listened to him eagerly, when he began in his usually non-committal voice to array reasons and suggest a course.

Open opposition would not do, he remarked. That would in all probability stiffen Clark in his views, and rally round him those who agreed with him. But it was a known fact that Clark was about to pay a long-projected visit to the Holy Land. Let them give him a cordial send-off—they might even give him a cheque toward his expenses. Then, when he was gone, would be the time to call a special meeting to inquire into the condition of the church. At such a meeting people would speak freely, as they would not if Clark were present. Of course no one could prophesy exactly what might happen, but it would not be surprising if a good deal of opposition developed both to the minister and his views.

"Which means in plain words?" interrupted Masterman.

"That possibly he may not come back," said Scales quietly.

"I will be no party to getting rid of the minister," said Beverley.

"Certainly not," said Scales. "But it is possible—I only say it is possible, you know—that he may resign."

"Under compulsion, you mean?"

"Not at all. Simply in recognition of inevitable facts."

Masterman's grim mouth relaxed in a broad smile. His eye rested on Scales with a glance of ironic admiration. What a pity such a man was after all only a superior clerk, with no opportunity to display his diplomatic gifts except upon the narrow stage of church affairs. Yet he was conscious too of a curious element of repulsion which mingled with his admiration of the clerk's astuteness. His mind, which half an hour before had been filled with hot enmity against the minister, now recoiled swiftly and inclined to his defence, when he saw the kind of weapons which Scales meant to use against him. He was a man both by nature and by habit not delicate in his use of means to attain an end; he could be both cruel and unscrupulous upon occasion; but he had no taste for deliberate perfidy, he had no capacity for meanness, and he contemplated the narrow-shouldered, suave-tongued clerk with a rising disgust.

"I don't like your plan," he broke forth loudly. "That Holy Land scheme of yours, getting rid of Clark and then attacking him, it's mean, it's too much like tying a rope across a road to trip up a man in the dark whom you dare not tackle openly."

"It's only a suggestion, sir," said Scales deferentially.

"It had better remain a suggestion, then."

He turned his back on Scales, and began to arrange the papers on his desk. It was the signal that the conference was over. Luke and Beverley soon left, but Scales remained.

"I don't think you quite appreciate your own position in this affair," Scales remarked.

"My position? What do you know of my position?"

"More than I cared to say before the others. I would like to ask you a question."

"Ask away," Masterman retorted grimly.

"Well then, do you know the real reason why Clark preached that sermon?"

"Oh, I suppose it was the expression of the new-fangled socialism he professes."

"In part, yes. But there was a personal element, too. Do you recollect a church you built at Orchard Green about ten years ago?"

Masterman's face darkened, for he knew very well what was coming. He had received more than one letter lately from the trustees of Orchard Green Church, who complained that the west wall of the edifice was sinking, owing to imperfect foundations. It would have to be rebuilt, and they naturally traced their disaster to his bad workmanship. Hitherto he had taken no notice of these letters. The people who wrote them were not persons of any influence. They had no legal

claim upon him. Of course his work had been properly certified by the architect at the time of its completion, and in any case the lapse of ten years made him immune from all responsibility. Nevertheless, it was not an affair that he cared to have generally known, and he was startled at Scales' reference to the Orchard Green Church.

"Well," Scales continued, "it seems Clark has friends at Orchard Green. When he went to see them a little time ago, they told him that the walls of the church were sinking. They had uncovered a part of the foundations to discover the cause, and had found instead of sound concrete a rotten mixture of oyster-shells and road-gravel. Of course they told him that you were the builder, and he came back raging. Then he preached his sermon."

"And you disapproved his sermon?"

"Certainly—certainly," Scales replied in an eager voice.

"Even though his facts were right?"

"Ah! I couldn't agree to that, sir. And I'm sure you wouldn't admit it."

Masterman threw away his cigar, lit another, and stood regarding Scales with a sardonic eye. Somehow the craft of the clerk did not appear to him the admirable quality that it had seemed half an hour earlier. To rob upon a large scale was one thing; to cheat the mind into false conclusions was quite another. The first he had done, and would do again; but by a strange paradox this robber in action remained honest in thought, and could not bring himself to say the thing he did not mean. He felt again that spasm of aversion to Scales, and with his aversion there was mixed a strong curiosity to know just how far the clerk's supple conscience would serve him, and what was the part he wished to play.

He wheeled suddenly upon Scales, and broke into a harsh laugh.

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked.

"Yes, that is all."

"Well, now listen to me. The facts about the Orchard Green Church are all right. I admit them. They wanted everything as cheap as could be; they wanted me cheap; so I gave them cheap work just to balance matters. Don't think that's an apology, for it isn't. As for Clark, I don't object to his saying anything he likes about the business, but I do object to his saying it from a pulpit. He wants to injure me, and so he can't complain if I get back at him. But there's two ways of fighting a man—one's face to face, and the other's by hitting him behind. I'm going to fight honest. And do you know, Scales, much as I dislike Clark, I really think I like him better than I like you, after all."

"I fail to understand——" Scales began.

"Oh no, you don't; you're much too clever for that. But if you do really want a little light, I'd have you remember this—that Archibold Masterman was never frightened yet by threats, and when he fights he fights fair."

III

THE BIG STRONG BEAST

The next morning Masterman wrote a letter to the overjoyed trustees of the Orchard Green Church, offering to make good without cost all defects of workmanship in the building which might be justly charged to him. He was careful to explain that while they had no legal claim on him, he regarded this work as a debt of honour.

He had just finished the letter when Arthur came into the office. Arthur's manner was constrained and almost timid. Masterman, on the contrary, was in his most jovial mood. He had just performed an act which was not only good in itself, but wise and politic; for, of course, he knew that his action toward the Orchard Green trustees would become public, and would be quoted to his credit.

"Well," he began, "getting a bit tired of doing nothing? Not that I grudge you your liberty, you know. I promised you a year to look around, before you settle to your life-work, and I shall stick to my bargain. But I confess it will be a glad day for me when I write 'Masterman & Son' over my doors."

"I'm very far from doing nothing, sir," he answered. "Oxford is one world, and London quite another. I am learning every day a lot of things Oxford never taught me."

"Of course you are. London's a big world, and the things it has to teach are the things that count. Not that Oxford isn't worth while too. It gives a man a start in life nothing else can give. That's why I sent you there, you know."

"Yes, I know, father, and I am grateful to you."

"Nothing to be grateful for, my boy. I owed it to you." His face softened with a musing look very unusual with him. "I got no kind of start myself, you know," he continued. "At fifteen I was working in a brickfield. When I went home at night, my father used to beat me. I don't think I ever hated any one as I hated my father. One day I struck back, and ran away from home. Queer thing—I was always sorry for that blow. I used to lie awake at nights for weeks after, wondering if I really hurt the old man. From that day to this I never saw him any more. But I'm still sorry for that blow. Sons shouldn't hit their parents, anyway. I ought to have let him go on beating me; he'd got the habit, and I could have stood it all right. Well, well, it's such a long time ago that I can hardly believe it ever happened."

He stopped suddenly, with a lift of the shoulders, as if he shook off the burden of that squalid past. But the rude words had left the son inexpressibly touched. A swift picture passed before his mind of a gaunt boy toiling over heavy tasks, ill-paid, cruelly used, wandering out into the world lonely and unguided, and a strong passion of pity and of wonder shook his heart. Above all, those artless words, "Sons shouldn't hit their fathers, anyway," fell upon him with the weight of a reproach. Had he not already condemned his father in his thoughts? He had known very well to whom Clark alluded in his sermon, and yet he had approved. He had entered the office that morning with the fixed intent of endorsing Clark's tacit accusation of his father. And now he found himself suddenly disarmed. That old sense of something big about his father came back to him with redoubled force. To start like that, shovelling clay in a brickyard for twelve hours a day, and to become what he was—oh! it needed a big man to do that, an Esau who was scarcely to be judged by the standards of smooth-skinned, home-staying Jacobs.

"I didn't know you had suffered all that, father. You never told me that before."

"There's a sight of things I've suffered that I wouldn't like you to know. But they were all in the day's work, and I don't complain. And that's one thing I want to say to you, and I may as well say it now. You've got a start I never had, and you won't suffer what I suffered, but I want you to know that the world's a pretty hard place to live in anyway. You can't go through it without being badly hurt somewhere. You've got to take what you want, or you won't get it. Talking isn't going to mend things: life's a big strong beast, and it isn't words but a bit and bridle and a whip a man needs who is going to succeed. Now you're at the talking stage, and I don't complain. You admire talkers like Clark, and you think they are doing no end of good, don't you? Well, you'll learn better presently. You'll find that the world goes on much the same as it ever did, in spite of the talkers. I want you to digest that fact just as soon as you can, and then you'll be ready to step down into the thick of life where I am, and help me do the things I want to do."

"But, father, is what Clark said concerning you true?"

"Do you want to discuss it with me?"

"No; I have no right to ask that."

"Yes, you have. I want you to join in the business when you're ready, and you've a right to know what kind of business it is, and, if you like to put it so, what kind of person your partner is."

"He is my father, and I love him. That is enough," said Arthur proudly.

"No, it isn't enough. I had a father, and I didn't love him. But as to this business of Clark's. He found out something against me, and instead of coming to me about it, he preached a sermon on it, and for that I don't forgive him. Well, what was it he found out? No more than this—that ten years ago I had to do a cheap job, and I did it cheaply. My work has held together ten years, which is about all that could be expected at the price. Now I'll tell you what I've done. I've agreed to do the work over again for nothing. There's the letter which I've just written. You had better read it."

Arthur took the letter, and read it slowly. His father had risen from his desk, and stood watching him narrowly. Perhaps until that moment he had never quite realised how much his heart was set on having his son in the business with him. And he wanted above all things to win the son's approval. Perhaps there was some underlying thought of this kind in his mind when he wrote the letter. Not that he meant to alter all the methods of his business to suit his son. Once in the business, Arthur would learn what these were by imperceptible degrees, and would grow accustomed to them. But just now the father's heart was wholly set upon concession and conciliation. He remembered, with a rush of tenderness, how he had long ago taught the boy to swim. He could still see the slight, childish form shivering on the rock above the swimming-pool. He had begun with threats, but had soon found them useless. Then he had used persuasion and cajolery, until at last the boy had slipt into the pool, and in a week was swimming with the best of them. Well, it was like that now. If he could but cajole him into the deep stream of life, that was enough; when the deep water heaved beneath his feet, he would have to do what the others did in pure self-defence.

"Well?" he said at last.

Arthur laid down the letter and turned a shining face upon his father.

"It is a noble letter, father. Forgive me that I misjudged you."

"That's all right, then."

"You have taught me a lesson. I shall not forget it."

"Oh! don't take it too seriously, my boy. It is only a small affair, after all."

But each knew that it was not a small affair. In that moment these two opposite natures were nearer together than they had ever been before, and, although neither knew it, nearer than they would ever be again.

Arthur left his father with a strong sense of exaltation. The cloud of misgiving concerning his father's methods of business had miraculously dissolved. In the quick rebound of feeling he was inclined to judge himself intolerant and unjust, and his father's image glowed before his mind, endued with heroic virtues. He shuddered when he thought of his father's youth, with its dreadful disabilities; he kindled with admiring ardour when the thought of his father's triumph over a weight of circumstance which would have crushed a weaker man. If some of the mire of the pit yet clung to him, if in many things he was crude, violent, narrow, it was not surprising; the marvel was that his faults were not more numerous and more unpardonable. As Arthur went to his room, he caught a vision of himself in the mirror of his wardrobe—a slight figure admirably clothed, a face fresh and unlined, with white forehead and close curling hair, the picture of youth delicately nurtured, upon whom the winds of life had not blown roughly—and he was filled with compunction at the contrast afforded by that other picture of a poor drudging boy toiling in a brickfield and beaten by a drunken parent. In spite of all his superficial superiorities, he seemed a creature of small significance beside this Titanic father of his.

It was an exquisite spring morning, one of those mornings when London draws her first fresh, unimpeded breath after the long, choking fogs of winter. The lawn lay green beneath the window, presided over by a busy thrush, who flirted his wings in the strong sunlight, and stopped at intervals to address a long mellow note of rapture to the blue sky; the japonica had hung the garden wall with crimson blossoms; the poplars took the light upon their slender spires, till each burned with yellow flame. Nature, unconquered by the gross antipathy of man, was invading the brick Babylon, flinging brocades of light upon the beaten ways, and filling them with the music of the pipes of Pan. Arthur could not resist the call.

He felt a need of solitude. He had many thoughts that cried aloud for readjustment. He stepped out in the blither air, and took his way to Hampstead Heath. Soon the narrow streets were left behind, the long hill rose above him, and his feet trod the furze-clad slopes, little altered since the day when Roman legions camped upon their crests, and eighteenth-century highwaymen concealed themselves among their hollows. He walked far and fast, meditating much on life. It seemed a wonderful thing to be alive, where so many generations of men had fought and perished, to be for a little time sole possessor of a world that had cast off such myriads of tenants; and there came to him, with an almost painful wonder, the sense of the richness of his opportunity. He would make his own life something worthy. It was true, as his father had said, that he started at a point of vantage not given to every one. By so much that he started higher, he must soar higher, go farther. But in the midst of all his exultant thoughts there intruded his father's terse picture of life as a big strong beast only to be mastered by bit and whip and bridle. And at that thought the tide of exaltation began to leave him. He walked more slowly, became listless, was conscious of weariness. It no longer seemed an easy and a rapturous thing to live; life rose before him as a menace.

In the early afternoon he came to the Spaniards' Inn, and entered it. Coming from the brilliant air into the dim room of the inn, he did not at first recognise a man already seated there, finishing a frugal meal of bread and cheese and ale. The man was tall, with somewhat stooping shoulders; his face was long and bearded, his forehead high, with thin dark hair, his eyes dark and penetrating. He wore a flannel shirt with a silk tie of some indeterminate colour akin to dull crimson. He held a book in one hand, and read as he ate.

As Arthur entered the room he looked up.

"You don't know me, I suppose," he said genially. "But I know you by sight at least. My name is Hilary Vickars."

So this was Hilary Vickars, of whom he had heard Scales speaking at the deacon's tea. Now that he looked at him more closely he recognised him at once. Among the crowd of ordinary faces in the church, that face had stood out with a singular distinctness. It was a face at once grave and composed, sad and humorous; the face of a man who had striven much and suffered much, but had retained through all a certain vivacity, which was distinct from gaiety while including it. And all these qualities seemed to rest upon a deeper quality of composure, so that the final impression was of a man who through suffering had won his way to some secret knowledge which gave him an air of gentle authority.

"I have often wished to know you," said Arthur.

"And I you."

"Why should you wish to know me?"

"Oh! a fancy of mine. It is my business to study people. And you do not look like the run of folk in Highbourne Gardens. Most of the folk in Highbourne Gardens are dear, good, comfortable folk, but stodgy. They are as alike as peas. I could tell you their exact method of life, even to what they have for breakfast. They are products of manufacture, all turned out just alike to the last hair, and all doing just the same things every day, without the least variation. That is what stodginess means."

"And I am not stodgy?" Arthur laughed.

"No; you are fluid. You have not hardened into shape yet. You are a problem."

Arthur looked at the dark, ironic face, and felt a sudden friendliness for the man. It was a long time since he had conversed with a man of ideas; he had scarcely done so since he had left Oxford. The church young men he had found distasteful to him. They were good young men for the most part, much enamoured of respectability, laboriously virtuous, cherishing many mild scruples about the use of the world and inclined to judge it by standards quite foreign to their real tastes; but they had no mental horizons. They were also inclined to be a little shy of him, as a rich man's son with a superior education; a little envious, too, and not at home in his presence, so that intercourse with them had not been easy. But here was a man who spoke another kind of language; it was that language of ideas which at once asserts kinship, among those to whom it is intelligible.

Arthur drew his chair to the table, and soon found himself absorbed in conversation. Hilary Vickars talked slowly, with hesitating pauses—a trick which lent emphasis to what he said. It was as though he fumbled for the right word, and then flashed it out like a sudden torch. Arthur noticed, too, that he occasionally did not pronounce a word in the way common among educated men. The variation was slight; it could scarcely have been called erroneous; but it suggested some deficiency of early training. Perhaps the boy's face betrayed his surprise too ingenuously, for after one of these variations Vickars said abruptly:

"I envy you. It was my dream to go to Oxford. I didn't dream true in that case."

"Perhaps you have done just as well without Oxford," said Arthur generously.

"No, I have never cherished that—delusion. Deprivations in middle life don't matter; but deprivations in early life can never be made up." He paused a moment, and then added. "I was a gardener before I became an author."

Arthur looked his surprise, whereat Vickars laughed.

"Oh! I assure you," he said, "even gardeners have their dreams. Mine, as I said, was Oxford, for I spent my youth within sight of her spires, within sound of her bells. I believed I could become a scholar; indeed, I still believe my old belief not quite foolish. I spent all my money on grammars and dictionaries which I did not know were obsolete, got to know the classics in a crude fashion, and went on imagining that some day I might enter the University. Of course it was all an absurd dream; you do not need to be told that. My first real discovery in life was that learning is the privilege of wealth. That led me to some other discoveries of the same nature, the sum of which was that the great mass of mankind are born disinherited, and that I was one of them. It hurt me dreadfully at the time, but in the long run it was the making of me. It set me studying life as it is, not as it once was in ancient times. And the more I studied it, the more I came to admire common men and women, until at last I was glad that I belonged to them. It is a great thing to know just to whom you belong; no man does any kind of good work till he knows that."

"But you are not a common man," Arthur interrupted. "You are a writer."

"Oh! I have some aptitudes that are not common, no doubt; I am immodest enough to think that. But if I am a writer, I write of common people. It is common life that interests me, the virtues, vices, trials, heroisms, debasements, and nobilities of plain people. But I did not mean to talk about myself, and you must forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive. What you say deeply interests me. My father said a thing to-day about life which has been in my thoughts a good deal, and you make me recall it. By the way, do you know my father?"

"Yes, I know him."

He spoke the words with a certain caustic accent which did not pass unnoticed.

"You mean you do not like him," Arthur replied with a flash of anger.

"No, I don't say that. I know him merely as a type. But what did he say?"

"He said life was a hard business, in which one was sure to be hurt; that it was a big strong beast which could only be subdued by whip and bridle."

"An excellent definition. Life is strong and cruel and hard. Men who really live soon discover that."

"Have you found it so?"

"Yes. And I've seen the big strong beast tread thousands down—the people who haven't got the whip and bridle."

He spoke the words with remarkable intensity. They were flashed from him rather than spoken. Then, as if ashamed of his display of feeling, he rose from the table, and said in a matter-of-fact tone, "The evening is coming on. I must be going."

They went out of the inn together. The long gray road with its groups of trees and dim houses lay before them; and, as the darkness deepened, the distant lights of London flung a yellow conflagration on the sky. "That's where the big strong beast lies," said Vickars. "You can hear his mighty hooves at work." And, as he spoke, from that great caldron of life, that lay packed and mist-swathed to the eastward of the road, there did come up a sound as of waves upon a groaning beach, a sound of crashing and rending, mingled with the dull thud of wheels and the demoniac shriek of engine and of factory whistles.

But he did not recur to the theme. The talk became trivial, commonplace; once only did it touch a theme of interest, when Vickars recalled how Coleridge and Keats and Haydon and Leigh Hunt had trodden that same road, each with his own separate vision of what life meant, and what man was meant to do in it.

It was nearly dark when they reached the neighbourhood of Highbourne Gardens. Presently Vickars stopped before a small house, one of many, in a long gravelled street. The houses were all alike; each had its strip of garden, its bow-window, its door with glass panels, its aspect of decent mediocrity. There was still enough light to see that though the houses were comparatively new, a kind of premature decay had overtaken them. The iron garden-gates sagged upon their hinges, and the bricks appeared to be joined with sand, which errand-boys had picked out in deep grooves while waiting in the porch for orders. The dilapidation of age may be respectable and even romantic, but in this dilapidation of newness there was something inexpressibly depressing.

"This is where I live," said Vickars.

"I don't think I was ever in this street before," said Arthur. "It must have been built while I was at Oxford."

"It was," said Vickars. "Your father built it."

They said good-night and parted.

IV

MRS. BUNDY

A few days after Arthur's memorable conversation with his father, Archibold Masterman entered on one of his recurring fits of gloom. He went about the house silently, ate and drank in silence, took little notice of any member of his family, and sat alone in his office till long past midnight. The causes of his silence were, as usual, inscrutable. Sometimes he looked on Arthur with a long, brooding, wistful gaze, as if he would like to confide in him, but the confidence never came. Possibly if he had followed up his recent burst of tenderness with complete confidence, the boy might have been won. But in Masterman's nature there was a curious element of perversity, which often prevailed over the dictates of reason and even of self-interest. It was this element of perversity that lay at the root of much that seemed complex in his character, exhibiting itself sometimes in gusty tenderness, sometimes in unscrupulous hardness, so that to the casual observer he appeared a man of formidable moods, none of whose actions could be predicated from any precedent experience.

Once, when Arthur said timidly, "Can I be of any help to you in the office, sir?" he replied curtly, "None whatever. I'll tell you when I want you," and the boy said no more. His sister had gone away to spend some weeks with a friend, his mother was as silent as his father, and he was left more completely to himself than he had ever been.

It was little wonder that he turned eagerly from that gloomy house to the society of such friends as were available. Among these was Hilary Vickars, for whom he had conceived a strong liking. He walked with him occasionally in the afternoons, but as yet Arthur had not visited the

house. Another friend, whose house was always open to him, and had been since he was a boy, was a certain Mrs. Bundy, a motherly, cheerful, eccentric Scotchwoman. She was a person of extraordinary slovenliness and good-humour, indefatigably kind, generous, and light-hearted, who had been so used to carrying burdens herself that she cheerfully shouldered other people's burdens as a kind of right. Every one knew where Mrs. Bundy lived; lonely Scotch youths who had come to London to push their fortunes found in her an ardent sympathiser; and should one come to her sick with the shame of some sudden defeat of virtue, he never failed to find in her a shrewd and optimistic friend. Over such youths she exercised a directorship as complete as that of a Jesuit Father; she inspected with a jealous eye their morals and their underwear; mended for them, dosed them when they had colds, fed them with anything that came to hand, took charge of their money, made them small loans, and addressed them with apostolic fervour upon the perils and the pitfalls of London life.

"Poor laddies!" she would say, "they need mothering," and her ample breast swelled with pity at the picture of their loneliness in shabby London lodgings, where they did unequal battle with rapacious land-ladies. Not that she herself was childless; she was the proud mother of two of the most odious children in the locality, who spent their whole time in making life intolerable to their neighbours. But to her, of course, they were merely riotous young angels, whose mischief was the proof of hearty spirits, and whose worst faults reposed upon a solid base of good intentions.

Life for these youngsters was merely a joke and an adventure, and, to tell the truth, Mrs. Bundy's view of life was not unlike theirs. Her whole existence had been fugitive and precarious, for her husband was a speculator who had followed for thirty years the will-o'-the-wisp of sudden fortune. He was a solemn little man, with large, dreamlike eyes, whose immense power of industry had been almost uniformly turned in wrong directions. At the whisper of gold, silver, lead, coal, nitrates, oil, land-booms, he was ready at a moment's notice to wander off into the most inaccessible places of the earth, from which he returned sometimes penniless, and sometimes with a profusion of spoil which he soon contrived to lose again. Most women would have tired of these fruitless quests, but Mrs. Bundy's faith in her husband never faltered, and all the strange caprices of his fortune did not disconcert her. When her adventurer returned with bags of gold, she at once rose to the occasion, moved into a larger house, rode in her carriage for a few weeks, and thoroughly enjoyed the sunshine while it lasted. When the luck failed, she went back contentedly to the cheapest house she could find, used up her fine gowns in household service, and waited hopefully for the return of Bundy. He always came back, though more than once he had been away a whole year; and his return was sometimes dramatic—as, for instance, when he appeared at midnight, and flung a diamond necklace round her throat, while she hid in her pocket a county-court summons for a year's milk bills which she could not pay.

"Come in wi' you, my bonny lad," was the usual greeting to Arthur, and she would lead him into the kitchen with the air of a duchess introducing him to a salon; for it should be said that at this time the Bundy star was in eclipse. And then she would sit down and tell him wondrous tales of people she had known, much too grotesque and tragic for any reasonable world, with stories still more grotesque of the wanderings of Bundy in Brazil and South Africa, and the narrow escapes he had had of being a multimillionaire. Just now, it appeared, he was engaged on some mysterious business in Canada, where a handful of dollars judiciously expended might purchase an estate as large as England. And she would tell these stories with such a vivid art, and with such good faith and humour, that Arthur would roar with laughter, which perhaps was what she wished him to do, for he often came to her with a clouded brow.

"It's small good staying in England these days, if you want to prosper," she would remark. "What wi' all the ships upon the sea and all the new lands that lie beyond, it's a shame for a youth to sit at home. You don't get any fun out of life that way."

Arthur might have retorted that there did not seem to be much fun in a kind of life that left Mrs. Bundy sole tenant of a ruinous old house in Lion Row, whose rent she could scarcely pay, while Bundy wandered in Brazil or Canada, but Mrs. Bundy was so unaffectedly enamoured of her lot that he never said it. On the contrary, there was sown in his mind a little germ of adventure which was to ripen later on, and he got exhilarating glimpses of the romance and bigness of life.

She examined his hand one night, for she affected a knowledge of palmistry, and ended by saying, "You'll have your adventures before long"; and in spite of his entire scepticism, a pleasurable thrill shot through his veins at the prophecy.

"You've got a hand like Bundy's," she remarked; whereat he laughed, and said rather rudely that he had no wish to resemble Bundy.

"Bundy's had his bad times," she retorted, "but he's had his good times too. But if you asked him, I don't think he'd regret anything, and he'd live the same life again if he had the choice. And so would I, for that matter."

And then she swept across the kitchen in her soiled silk dress with the air of pride and dignity that would have become a palace, and Arthur was left reflecting on the happy courage of her temperament as something to be greatly envied.

He learned much from Mrs. Bundy in those weeks, and above all he learned to love her. She

was, in spite of all her eccentricities, so motherly, and such a fountain of inexhaustible sympathy, that he got into the way of confiding to her many of his private thoughts.

One night he spoke to her about his father, and of his father's plans for him.

"He wants me to enter the business," he said.

"And why not, laddie?"

"Frankly, I don't like it."

"That's neither here nor there. You've got to live, and as long as a business is honest, one business is as good as another."

"But is it honest?"

He had not meant to ask the question. It came from him unawares. It was a long-silent, long-concealed thought, suddenly become audible.

"What is dishonest in it?"

"I can't quite tell. But I do know that my father buys land for speculative building, and puts up houses that are built of the rottenest material, and sells them to ignorant people."

"Aye, laddie, your father's like the man in the parable, 'an austere man, gathering where he has not strawed.' But he's a strong man, is your father. There's few stronger men than Archibold Masterman.

"Strong, but is he good? I mean, is his way of life right?"

"I canna' tell about that, laddie. But if I was you, I think I wouldn't ask that question about my father. There's a lot of goodness in men, and my conviction is that most men are about as good as they know how to be. There's many people wouldn't call Bundy good, because he's what they call a speculator, and has to live with wild men, and doesn't go to church when he's home; but I know he's got a heart of gold. He never cheated any man knowingly. He's lost himself much more than men have lost by him. And he'd always give away his last penny to the poor."

"Ah, but that's not the point. I know my father is good in that way. Why, only the other day he rebuilt a church entirely at his own expense for people who had no legal claim at all on him. But it's his business, it's the method of it. And I must find an answer, for I must join him in the business or refuse it."

"Well, if you feel like that, refuse it, laddie. Not that I'll say you're wise, nor even right. Fathers have some claims on their sons after all, and these claims ought to come before your own tastes. Only if you know you couldn't draw together with your father, and would only make him and yourself unhappy trying to, then the best thing is to say so at once."

"I suppose you are right," he said in a lugubrious voice. And then he added, "There's another trouble, too. How am I to get my living?"

"You'll find that out fast enough when you become acquainted with hunger," she said with a laugh.

"But if I don't go into my father's business, God only knows what I can do. I don't seem to be fitted for anything in particular."

"I wouldn't worry about that, either," she replied. "There's very few men do the things they think they're fitted for; but they find out how to do other things that are just as important. There's Bundy, now; you'll never guess what he thought himself fitted for when I married him."

"Well, what?"

"A clergyman."

Arthur laughed profanely. The thought of the nefarious Bundy, whose life had been spent in the promotion of companies of a singular collapsibility, as a clergyman was too ridiculous.

"Ah! you may laugh, but let me tell you he'd have made a first-rate parson if he'd gone to college, and started fair."

She spoke with heat, which immediately passed into laughter, as she caught a glimpse of the whimsicality of the thing.

"Ye canna' say Bundy has not a fine flow of language when he chooses, and he can look as solemn as a bishop, and I'm sure he would have had a fine bedside manner," she continued. "But my belief is that a man who can do one thing well can do any other thing just as well."

"That's a consoling faith, at any rate."

"It isn't a faith, it's a fact. It's just a question of ability. The worst of you London-bred lads is that you all want a place made for you, and you don't see that the strong man makes a place for himself."

Arthur did not quite like that, and he liked it the less because he knew that it was true. For was not he London bred? Had not his path been made easy for him? And how could that happen without some emasculation of nature? To grow up in streets, carefully paved and graded, punctually lit at night; to live in houses where a hundred conveniences sprang up to meet the idle hand, to be guarded from offence, provided for without exertion—ah, how different that life from the primitive life of man, familiar with rain and tempest, with a hundred rude and moving accidents, always poised upon the edge of peril, and existing instant by instant by an indomitable exercise of will and strength! For the first time he caught a vital glimpse of the primeval life of man, and recognised its self-sufficing dignity. For the first time he realised that the essence of all true living lay in daring. It was a truth which neither London nor Oxford had imparted to him. He had not even learned it through his own father, whom he knew conventionally rather than really. Strangely enough, it came to him now through the talk of Mrs. Bundy, wise with a wisdom which vicissitude alone could teach, and through the somewhat sorry epic of her husband's hazardous adventures.

"The strong man makes a place for himself"—it was sound doctrine and indubitable fact as well; but was he one of the strong? The question hung upon the confines of his mind, a whispered interrogation, which disturbed and sometimes tortured him. Youth is always a little ludicrous, often pathetically ludicrous, and in nothing so much as in its capacity for taking itself seriously. Life seems such an immensely solemn business at one-and-twenty. Later on we discover that the decisions on which we supposed angels waited are of scant interest to any one but ourselves, and that the world goes on much the same whatever we do or say.

Yet youth is right, even in its crude vanity and egoism, for the history of the world would be poor reading if it recorded nothing better than the commonsense and commonplace performances of middle-age. Mrs. Bundy, from her fifty years' coign of vantage, saw life as Arthur could not see it; above all, she saw its width, which was a great vision to attain.

"No man really enjoys life," she said to him one day, "unless he starts poor."

"How do you make that out?"

"Because the poor are the only people capable of adventures," she replied. "As long as a man is poor, anything may happen to him; but after he becomes rich, nothing happens."

"But you would like to be rich, wouldn't you?"

"Not rich enough to want for nothing," she replied.

As usual she fell back upon her own experience for wisdom, and drew a shrewd and humorous sketch of one of her episodic emergences into wealth.

"Bundy was really rich that time," she remarked. "He'd struck oil in Texas, and had only to sit still and let the oil work for him. It was good fun at first. We took a big house at Kensington, and Bundy spent his time getting cheated over horses, and I spent mine being cheated over sham Sheraton furniture, and when we tired of that we bought pictures, until at last the house was so full of things we couldn't get another stick into it. 'What shall we do now?' says Bundy. 'Let us try being fashionable,' says I." [She uttered the word "fash-ee-on-abell," with an indescribable drawling accent of contempt.] "So we tried that, too, and drove in the Park, and gave dinner-parties, and Bundy had to wear dress-clothes, though he never could make out how to tie his white tie, and made more fuss than enough of it. We got plenty of folk to eat our dinners, but a duller lot I never met. The men all wanted to talk oil, and the women couldn't talk of anything but dress, and men and women alike hung round Bundy, and let him know as plainly as they dared that all they came for was to see if they could get any oil-shares out of him. After a time we grew tired of being fashionable, and Bundy says, 'I think we'll have a yacht.' So we bought a yacht, though neither of us liked the sea, and we made out a summer that way. And all the while the oil was pouring out of those wells in Texas, and the money was pouring in, and we saw no end to it. Then Bundy tried being a philanthropist, and that was really interesting while it lasted. There wasn't a crank in London—nor, one would suppose, in Europe, from the look of his mail-bag—that didn't find him out. They sat upon his doorstep to catch him coming out, and hunted him down the street, and all the men he'd ever known anywhere claimed him as an old friend, so that the poor man lived the life of a partridge on the mountains, as the saying is. He grew quite old-looking, and lost his sleep, and after a time he didn't even read what the papers said about him, which is a pretty bad sign in a man."

"Poor Mr. Bundy!" said Arthur, in mock commiseration.

"Ah! you may well say it, laddie, and poor Mrs. Bundy, too, for I'd never been so miserable in my life. You see, it was the dullness of the thing that made us miserable. When you can get everything you want, you don't want anything after a time."

"And how did it end?"

"Well, one morning I lay a-bed late, for there was nothing particular to get up for, and I could hear Bundy in his dressing-room, opening and shutting drawers, as though he couldn't make up his mind what clothes he wanted to wear. There came a knock on the outer door, and I heard a crumpling of paper, and then he whistled.

"'What is it?' I called out.

"He didn't answer, but I heard him rampaging round. So I jumped out of bed, and ran into the dressing-room, and there stood Bundy laughing to himself, and upon my word he looked happier than I had seen him for twelve months or more.

"'What is it?' I says again.

"And then he looked at me mighty solemn and queer, and says, 'Can ye bear it?'

"'Bear what?' says I.

"'Oh! nothing much,' says he, 'only we're bust. The oil's given out.'

"'Then we're poor?' says I.

"'Poor we are,' says he—'poor as Job. For, you see, I've been spending everything as it came, thinking that that oil would last for ever, and now we're bust.'

"'Hallelujah!' says I. 'That's the best news I've heard a long time.'

"He looked at me a minute, kind of doubtful, and then he burst out laughing, and says, 'I rather think I feel that way myself.'

"'I knew you would,' says I. And then I put my arms round him, and we danced round the room, and I give you my word that was the happiest hour I ever spent in that big house at Kensington. You see, we'd both been dying of dullness, though neither of us liked to say it. We'd got where there weren't any adventures; and that's why life didn't seem worth living."

She looked at Arthur with humorous eyes, in which also there was the gleam of motherly affection and solicitude.

"You're dreadfully afraid of being poor, aren't you, my dear?" she concluded. "London makes men feel like that. And it's because men get afraid of life that they take the first comfortable groove that offers, and then all the fun is over for them. Well, don't you be like that. If I was you, I'd live my life, and let the question of getting a living shift for itself. And remember what I say, for it's true—the only people who really enjoy life are the poor, because they're the only people who have lots to look forward to."

V

THE MAGIC NIGHT

Coming home one night along the Lonsdale Road, Arthur found Hilary Vickars standing at his garden gate, taking the air. It was June, that most exquisite of all months in London, when the perfume of summer finds its way into the narrowest streets, and the imprisoned people thrill with a new sense of freedom and deliverance. In the soft twilight even Lonsdale Road was touched with the idyllic; its impudence of newness was concealed under a faint wash of mauve, and its tiny gardens were fresh with the scent of mown grass.

Hilary Vickars himself seemed softened with the hour; when he spoke to Arthur there was a new kindness in his voice. Perhaps he could not have explained his mood; few of us can explain these sudden softenings that come to us, sometimes through the influence of external things, sometimes from the welling up in us of founts of tenderness which we had thought for ever sealed. A gust of wind among the trees, a bird's song in the dusk, a girl's voice at her piano, in its first fresh, unrestrained sweetness—who of us cannot recall how things as slight as these have had a strange power to provoke some crisis of emotion, which perhaps has coloured all our after-life? Hilary Vickars had been listening that night to his daughter as she sang. She had sung a song her mother had been fond of, and in the mind of the widowed man all the past had leapt into agonised distinctness. And from that he had passed to the perception of the daughter's likeness to her mother, and to the pathos of her youth. Her voice yet lingered in the air, as he stole out of the room, and stood bareheaded at the garden gate. And then he saw Arthur coming up the road, and as his eye rested on the slim, graceful figure he again realised this infinite pathos of youth.

"He wants help, and I ought to help him," was his instant thought.

Hitherto a kind of pride had imposed a barrier of reserve between himself and Arthur. He had seen him as a rich man's son, the member of a class for which he had only scorn and anger. But now he saw him simply as a youth launching his frail bark upon the perilous sea of life, and he loved him. So Nature wrought within him, using his softened mood for her own ends, and with Nature came Destiny, casting the first threads of her inscrutable design upon the loom of life.

He held his hand with a lingering pressure, and then said, as if obeying a resolve imposed upon his own will rather than suggested by it, "Won't you come in?"

He led the way into the house, and Arthur followed with a glad alacrity.

The narrow hall-way opened upon a room at the back of the house, which served both as living-room and library. The only light in the room came from two candles on the piano brackets. Between them sat a young girl, her fingers still upon the keys, her face, rayed with the nimbus of the candlelight, turned upward with a charming air of expectation and surprise.

She was not beautiful, judged by the canons of exacting art; yet there was no artist who could have been indifferent to her, for she possessed an element of charm much more rare than beauty. The hair, dark and abundant, was very simply dressed above a low white forehead; the face was beautifully moulded, and expressed a delicate fatigue; the mouth, too large for beauty, was mobile and eager; the eyes were a stag's eyes, brown and full and limpid. It was in these that her charm was concentrated. They held depth beyond depth, eyes into which the gaze sank, fathomless as water in a well.

She rose as her father and his guest entered the room.

"My daughter, Elizabeth," he said.

She bowed, and turned toward Arthur the regard of her unfathomable eyes. Arthur stood transfixed. For a long moment his gaze clung to hers, and a new, strange, pleasurable heat thrilled his blood. A subtle, undecipherable telegraphy was in that clinging gaze. It was as though soul challenged soul; the citadel of sentience in each awoke to sudden life, and quivered at the shock of contact, with an emotion half alarm and half delight. Then the veil fell between them, and the soul of each receded into secrecy.

It was a relief to each when Vickars lit the gas, and began to speak in accents of conventional courtesy.

"This is my work-room," he said.

And indeed the room told its own tale. Bookshelves, closely packed, covered each wall; the books lay in heaps upon the floor; and in their midst stood a wide table piled with manuscripts, proofs, and notebooks. There was not a single picture in the room, not an ornament of any kind. Near the window stood a typewriter and a small table, and on the other side of the window the piano.

"I suppose there are few rooms in London that know more about brain-toil than this room—that is, if rooms can receive impressions, as I sometimes think they can," he continued. "Certainly none in Lonsdale Road," he added with a smile. "Ah! that reminds me of a story. When I first came to live here, there was the greatest curiosity to know what I did for a living. Lonsdale Road could not account for any man who did not go to the city every day, and therefore refused to accept his credentials of respectability. I never knew how far this aversion went till one day our little servant told us with tears that she must leave us. It took a long time to draw from her her reason. You would never guess it. At last she said, 'Mother say she thinks you are a burglar.' And then I found that our neighbours had actually woven this ingenious romance about us, and I am not sure that they have discarded it even yet."

He spoke lightly, and yet with an accent of resentment and of hurt pride. To Arthur the story was a revelation of the social loneliness of Vickars's life. But he was thinking less of the father than the daughter. Once more his eyes sought that fair face, and he was surprised to find no laughter in it; it was evident the story had pained her.

"Elizabeth does not like that story," said her father, noticing her silence.

"No, father, I do not. It makes me hate the world to think it treats you unjustly."

"Oh! the world's very well, little girl," he replied. "One doesn't expect justice from it. One should be content if the world merely allows him to live."

"Yet you are always fighting for justice. You know you are, father."

"Ah! justice for other people—that's a different thing. But the condition of such a fight as that is to be indifferent to the question of justice to one's self. That is a very small matter indeed."

"That is how he always talks," she answered, with a charming friendliness of appeal to Arthur. "He never thinks about himself."

"There, there! we're getting very serious, little girl," Vickars replied. "Suppose we change the

subject. We don't often have a guest. Don't you think a little supper and some music afterwards might fit the occasion?"

"How forgetful of me!" she said. She rose and left the room.

"You mustn't take my fine sentiments too seriously, so I give you due warning," he remarked. "Men who write books get into the way of talking their own books. You'll find, as you come to know me better, that there's a good deal of—of the artificial in me. The only merit I have above other men is that I am conscious of it."

"I have read your last book," said Arthur, "and I found nothing artificial in it. I thought it a great book."

"Have you? Well, I'm glad." His pale face was illumined for an instant by the boy's ingenuous praise. "No, Arthur," he added, "it's not great. It is merely true. And I think I can say this with real sincerity—I care much more for its truth than for its greatness."

"Are they not the same?" said Arthur.

"Not for this generation. This is the age of 'best sellers,' and the book that is called great is usually the book that has least to say about the truth of life."

"I was not thinking of contemporary opinion."

"Contemporary opinion is the only court of appeal we have. A book must justify itself to the generation in which it is written, or be sure of it no other generation will know anything about it. Yet I do sometimes think that truth must make itself heard. I cherish the belief, in spite of history and experience."

He spoke with an accent of infinite dejection. Arthur could find no words of reply. If, an hour before, he had been asked what kind of life came nearest his ideal, perhaps he would have replied, "The literary life," and he would have instanced Vickars. Now, as he looked at the writer's tired face, it was as though the naked realities of such a life lay before him, stripped of all delusive trappings. To drain one's life-blood into books that no one read, to prophesy to deaf ears and undiscerning eyes, ah! surely there must be a better way of life than this; and on the instant he knew what that way was. That warmth which still pierced his veins spoke to him more clearly than any voice. To love—that was life. To live the lyric life of love—that was better than to write of it. And straightway there came to him a vision of wide plains and deep forests, dotted with the homes of men, beneath whose roofs lip met lip in faithful kisses, and heart beat to heart through long nights of sleep, and all the primeval life of man went on in birth and death, as it had done since the gates of Eden closed. Ah! infinite desirable delight of love, strong, and natural, and enduring, on which the great seal of God had always rested! In that moment he ceased to be a boy; his manhood rushed upon him; he blushed, and in his heart a voice cried, "Elizabeth!"

She re-entered the room at that moment, carrying a supper-tray, and Arthur could not but observe the supple poise and grace of her young figure. She moved easily, with a soft gliding motion; she was dressed wholly in white, and conveyed an impression of a creature inimitably virginal. The face had not lost its look of delicate fatigue, but it was clear that this fatigue was of the mind rather than the body, and owed itself to no physical defect. Both he and Vickars rose together to clear a place upon the littered writing-table for the supper-tray, and in performing this act his hand touched hers. It was but a feather's touch, but it thrilled him, and his very flesh seemed to dissolve in a fire of rapture. Again he sought her eyes, but now they were averted. The moment passed like a chord of music that left the air vibrating. It seemed to him that all the world must know what had happened.

Then the current of his life ran back into its normal channels, and he found himself talking with excited eagerness. The meal was as simple as a meal could be, but for him it had ambrosial flavours. She sat quite silent, listening, apparently unaware that he talked for her alone. Vickars caught the gaiety of his good spirits, and talked as eagerly as he. The conversation soon found its accustomed grooves—books, and London, and the interminable comedy and tragedy of man. Presently Vickars happened to mention a young poet who had lately died, and Arthur asked if he had known him.

"Yes, he came here once. It was in his last days, when he had finally discovered that the world had rejected him. But he never knew why he was rejected."

"Why was he rejected?"

"Because he could only sing of the past. He had no vision of the modern world. He despised it, and his contempt blinded him to its real significance.

"I do not think that is quite just, father," said Elizabeth.

"Ah! I forgot to say," said Vickars, with an admiring glance at his daughter, "that Elizabeth is a much better critic than I. She is a better critic because she is a kinder."

"No, it's not that, father. My criticism, such as it is, is only feeling, and I felt that poor Lawson

was just finding his way to the right method when he died. Don't you remember those lines on London in his last sonnet?—

O Calvaries of the poor, dim hills of pain,
Whose utmost anguish is not nail or thorn,
The beaten blood-smeared brow, the soft flesh torn,
But this, that ye are crucified in vain.

The man who wrote those lines surely saw the modern world, and realised its significance."

She recited the lines slowly, in a low fluty voice which would have imparted dignity and music to much worse lines. Arthur listened entranced. Surely there was magic in this summer's night, a magic of the soul as well as of the flesh. His hand had touched hers, but now her mind revealed itself, and thrilled his with a subtler contact. In one swift glimpse he understood her exquisite sensitiveness, her pitifulness and tenderness, her strength and goodness; it was as though the Madonna's halo rested for an instant on that fair brow, and awed him into worship. He drew a long breath, and now, when his eyes sought hers, her gaze was not averted. She accepted the challenge of his eyes with complete sincerity, and with a frankness which was the last effect of complete innocence and modesty.

The voice of Vickars broke the spell.

"Yes, you are right," he said; "you usually are." And then, turning to Arthur with a whimsical smile, "Do you know Elizabeth writes my books for me?"

"Typewrites, he means. That is all, I assure you," she said.

"And corrects my blunders, which are many."

"Only the spelling. Father never could spell, and when he is in difficulties he makes a hieroglyphic with his pen, and leaves me to decipher it."

"I am afraid the critics find it hieroglyphic too," said Vickars, with a return to his dejected manner. "I sometimes wish we had Grub Street back again, with all its tribe of famished hacks; they at least would understand a book that deals with poverty. But who are the critics to-day? They are gentlemen with settled incomes who write in comfortable armchairs, and know as little about real life as the tadpole knows of the ocean. The result is they simply cannot understand the things I write about. They persuade themselves that such things don't exist. What can one say of them but the accusation which is as old as time—'having eyes they see not, and ears they hear not, and hearts they do not understand'?"

"They will surely understand one day," said Arthur.

"Ah! one day—but when? When the common people have forced them to see and understand. For there is my real hope, after all—the common people. They know what they want, and don't go to the critics for their opinions. A venomous review may do much to injure a young author; but if he goes on writing undismayed, the time comes when reviews, whether bad or good, don't affect him. If he can justify himself to the common people, he is certain to triumph in the long run. But there, we are getting too serious again. Let us forget books, and have some music. One can find solace for any kind of disappointment in music. It is the only art that makes a universal appeal."

Elizabeth rose and went to the piano, stooping as she went to kiss her father's brow.

She played nothing that was not familiar, but it seemed to Arthur that all she played was the expression of her own personality. She played on and on, wandering at will from Chopin to Tchaikowsky, and in the profound melodies of the great Russian her whole spirit spoke. And it seemed to Arthur that the Spirit of the World spoke too—a romantic and enchanted world, and yet a world of infinite yearning and pain, of love and battle and heroism, till he saw, as it were, the weird procession of human life, with white faces strained in final kisses, hands that rose above encroaching waves to touch and part, hearts that broke in ecstasies of love and joy and sorrow. The cool night breeze came in at the open window, the leaves whispered as it passed, and at intervals the deep voice of London ran like an undertone inwoven with the music. O wonderful, various, inscrutable world, what, bliss to be alive in it, even though it be for the briefest moment! But there was a bliss beyond bliss, unspeakable, unimaginable, not to live alone, but to love as the greatest hearts have loved, and surely that was the final message of this magic hour! Time, and the years, and all the centuries, and all events and histories, seemed to concentrate themselves in one fair girl, from whose slender fingers came this music of the world; she alone was important; she was the race itself in its final flower of love and loveliness. So ran the incoherent thoughts of youth, songs rather than thoughts, the wordless musical out-cries of a heart waking to a knowledge of itself, and finding all outer objects lit with the glamour of the magic hour.

The music ceased abruptly. There was a dull repeated thud upon the wall.

"What on earth is that?" cried Arthur.

"Oh, merely our neighbours," said Vickars. "Poor souls! they rise early and work hard, and I

suppose they want to go to bed."

"Why, I shouldn't have thought they could have heard as plainly as that."

"That's because you don't live in Lonsdale Road," said Vickars with a smile. "Why, I can hear the children sneeze next door. And there's a crack in the party wall, big enough for light to shine through, and I know when the light appears that they are going to bed. My dear fellow, I honestly believe it's only the paper that holds the walls together at all."

Arthur blushed furiously, for he had remembered what Vickars had forgotten, that the house was the work of Archibold Masterman. It was a horrible irruption of the commonplace upon the magic hour.

Vickars, recognising his mistake, turned the conversation into ordinary channels. Arthur still clung to the vanishing skirts of his romance. Once more he thrilled as he touched Elizabeth's hand in farewell, but as he went out into the cool dusk it seemed as though Life strode beside him, a dark and menacing figure, no longer lyrical and friendly.

"What can they think of my father?" he thought, as he walked home. And behind this lay another thought: "If they think ill of my father, as they have a right to, can they think well of me?"

VI

YOUNG LOVE

A month had passed, a wonderful month; it was as though the whole of life had flowered in that month. All the days and years that had preceded it had been but so many roots and tendrils which had stored the strong essences of life, that at last they might display themselves in this miraculous bloom! It is the flower that blooms but once, this exquisite flower of young, adoring love. Maturer years may bring the strength of calm affection, the heat of turbulent passion, but, in the incredible romance of sex, once only comes the wonder-hour, when the whole world is dipped in splendour, winged with song, glittering with the fresh dew of young desire. We who are older recall that hour with a kind of mournful wonder. Just to wake and think she wakes too, she breathes the same morning air, was an intoxicating thought. And what beautiful and foolish things we did: how we kissed the scrap of paper that bore the adored name, watched the adored shadow on the blind, were at once so bold and shy, so determined and so fearful, so daring and so absurdly sensitive. No one else had ever loved as we loved; we alone possessed the immortal secret, and the knowledge of that secret separated us from common men and common life. Yes, we are older now, wiser and colder too, and the flesh no longer thrills with ecstasy at the touch of lip or hand; but who would not give all this late-found wisdom to recapture for a moment this divine folly of first love?

Arthur gave himself to the divine folly with complete abandonment. He did all the foolish things that lovers do: sat night after night in Vickars' room, pretending interest in the father while his eyes never left the daughter; trembled when she spoke, shivered when her dress touched his hand, shrank from her as if unworthy to touch the hem of her garment, and in the same moment longed to clasp her in his arms. He waited long hours just to gaze an instant into the depths of her timid eyes; gazed with ardour, and then flushed for shame, as one convicted of an outrage. When he left the house he walked only to the end of the street, came back again, and in the darkness watched the house, wondering what room was hers, and picturing her silent in the innocence of sleep. What if the house should burn? What if some outrageous wrong should violate her slumber? What if she should die in the night? When he went home at last, to the grim silence of Eagle House, it was to dream of her; and no sooner did he wake than he must seek Lonsdale Road, finding fresh joy and amazement in the impossible fact that she was still alive.

All this time his father said not a word to him, and made no question of his comings and goings. He passed him with averted face, his eyes not unkindly but absorbed, for it was a time of panic in the city, when richer men than he watched the trembling balance of events, which meant sudden triumph or sudden ruin. But with the unconscious cruelty of youth Arthur discerned none of these things. The material life had practically ceased for him; wealth and poverty were alike terms of no significance; they belonged to a world so far removed that he no longer apprehended it. It was enough for him that the punctual day awoke him with a new cup of happiness; with its first beam he mounted to the heaven of his romance, and there dwelt among rosy clouds, with the singing of the morning stars in his ears.

With Vickars it was different; him Arthur saw daily, and he could not dismiss him from his consideration. He had begun by admiring him with youthful ardour; he sincerely liked him; but now a new question disturbed their relationship—did Vickars approve of him? He was at pains to understand Vickars' view of life, for he knew that whatever his view was, it was Elizabeth's too. Had she not typewritten all his books for him? Did not her mind speak in them as well as his? And

he knew instinctively that in both father and daughter there was a certain resolute fibre of conviction which could not be softened by mere sentiment. They each lived by some kind of definite creed; in a sense they were Crusaders pledged to loyalty to that belief; and if he were to become to either what he hoped to be, he knew that he must understand their attitude to life.

It piqued Arthur that Vickars said so little to him on these matters. But one night the opportunity arrived. Vickars had been busy over some literary task; when Arthur came into the room, Elizabeth was putting the cover on her typewriter and gathering up a mass of MSS.

"Come in," said Vickars. "You find me at a good moment. I have just finished a piece of work that has given me a vast deal of trouble."

"Another novel?"

"No, not exactly. I suppose it is fiction in form, and no doubt most people will regard it as fiction in essence too; but as a matter of fact it is a plain statement of what is wrong with the world, and a proposition for its remedy."

"That sounds rather formidable, doesn't it?"

"It would be formidable if the world would take it seriously. But they won't. I don't suppose it will even get read. I am by no means sure that it will even get printed. My publishers are considered bold men, but they are only bold along lines thoroughly familiar to them. Show them something new, really and truly new, and they will most likely be frightened out of their wits."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It's not bad at all. It's absolutely plain commonsense. I wonder who the fool was who first talked of commonsense? My experience teaches me that sense is the most uncommon thing in the world. Most men are so at home with folly that nothing is so likely to alarm them as the irruption of real rational sense."

"I wish you would tell me all about it," said Arthur earnestly.

"Do you?" said Vickars, with an ironic smile. "Well, I don't know about that. You see, at heart I am a fanatic, and, like all fanatics, I should expect you to agree with me. If you didn't, I might not—like you. And then there's Elizabeth. I rather think she agrees with me. And she might not—like you."

"Oh no, father," Elizabeth began, and then flushed and dropped her eyes.

"Oh yes," he retorted. "Why, don't you know that the one great divisive force in society is opinion? I like the man who agrees with me, and I dislike the man who doesn't; and although I may accuse myself of intolerance, and persuade myself that he possesses all kinds of virtues, I shall still go on disliking him, because I think him stupid. And he will dislike me for the same reason—he will think me stupid."

He rose from his writing-table, lit a pipe, and stood with his hands behind him, with that whimsical smile upon his face which Arthur knew so well.

"No," he continued, with a sudden flash of passion, "I don't suppose I shall get heard. The nearer truth you come in your writing, the less likely are you to get heard, for above all things men hate truth. They crucified truth two thousand years ago on Calvary; and they have been doing it ever since. Yet truth is the most obvious thing in the world, to any one who is sincere enough to discern it. You want to know what I think, what I have been writing about. Well, I will tell you. I have simply put down in plain English a series of facts which are all indisputable. That war is folly, to begin with, and if the cost of armies and navies were removed, the prosperity of Europe would be instantly doubled. That the reckless growth of cities is folly, and if you could make the people stay upon the land by giving them land on equitable terms, three-fourths of the poverty would disappear. That unlimited commercial competition is folly, and that if you could make nations act as a great co-operative trust, only producing what each nation is best fitted to produce, and only as much of any commodity as was really needed, you would cure all the ills of labour. And I say all this is absolutely obvious. Every one knows it, though every one ignores it. It is so obvious that if God would make me sole dictator of the world for a single year, I would guarantee to make the world a Paradise. I wonder God doesn't do it Himself, instead of letting man go on age after age mismanaging everything, with the result that a few are rich and not happy, and the multitude are poor—and miserable. So now you know just the sort of man I am. Didn't I tell you I was a fanatic?" He broke off his harangue with a laugh. "Now how do you like me?" he asked.

"I like you better than I ever did," said Arthur.

"Ah! you think you do. But remember my definition: you only really like the man with whom you agree. Do you agree with me?"

"I think I do."

"Then what are you going to do with your own life?"

The abrupt question struck upon the mind with a sharp clang, like the sudden breaking of a string on a violin. It was the old question which Arthur had debated so often and so wearily. During this lyric month of love it had been forgotten, his mind had been bathed in delicious languor; but now the question returned upon him with singular and painful force, and his mind woke from its trance. What was he to do with his life? And as he asked the question, for the first time he caught a full vision of the gravity and splendour of existence. Man was born to do, not alone to feel, to act as well as love. And beautiful as love was, he saw with instant certainty that in creatures like Elizabeth it rested on a solid base of intellectual idealism. That was its final evolution: it was no longer the wild, passionate mating of forest lovers; it was a thing infinitely delicate and pure, infinitely complex and sensitive, in which the spirit, with all its agonies and exultations, was the dominating force.

For a breathless moment he was conscious of the grave eyes of Elizabeth resting on him with an anxious tenderness of inquisition. Then he answered in a low voice, "I wish to make my life worthy of the highest. That is as far as I can see." The speech was the implied offer of himself to Elizabeth, and she knew it. Her face was suffused with happy light, and her breast rose and fell in a long satisfied sigh.

"That is as far as any one need see," said Vickars. And then the tense moment broke, and the conversation flowed back into ordinary channels.

From that hour began a real intimacy with Vickars which had a great influence over his own character. Hitherto he had admired the man without understanding his real aims. Now he began to comprehend these aims. Vickars had spoken truly when he described himself as a fanatic, but his fanaticism was so wise and so gentle that it provoked love rather than antagonism. And it had also a certain restful and melancholy quality which was infinitely touching. He did not expect to be heard, and he knew that he would not prevail; yet he would at any time have suffered martyrdom with cheerful courage. Many men have found it not difficult to die for a faith which they believed would move on to triumph by the way of their Golgotha; but Vickars was prepared to die for a faith which he knew must fail. He had no illusions; he saw all things in a clear bleak light of actual fact, knew the world ill-governed and man incurably foolish, but not the less he was willing to sacrifice himself for convictions which the world called absurd. His speech about what he would do were he dictator of the world was not mere rhetoric; it was his genuine belief that life was at bottom a very simple business, and that mankind missed available happiness merely by perverse repudiation of the simplest principles of happiness. So he gave himself in hopeless consecration to the exposition of these principles; and if the martyr is great who can die because he sees the crown and palm waiting for him in the skies, how much greater is he who can die expecting no reward?

It was only by degrees that Arthur came to recognise these qualities in Vickars. What he did not recognise at all was that the influence of Vickars was slowly loosening all the moorings that held him to his own former life. Although he had not said it openly, he knew now that he could not join his father in the business. He was careful to frame no accusation of his father even in his own most secret thoughts, but he knew that their ways lay apart. This life his father loved of scheming and of toiling, with its empty wealth and emptier social rewards, had no attraction for him. It was too crude, too barbarous; and beside it the life of Vickars, in its noble poverty, shone like a gem. He did not judge his father, but he judged unmercifully the society in which he moved, especially the church society, with its pettiness of interest, its lack of idealism, and its honour for smooth hypocrites like Scales; and this set him wondering why Vickars went to church at all. He asked him the question one day.

"I go for Clark's sake principally," he replied. "He is the one pulpit-man in the neighbourhood who has a real glimpse of truth, and I feel it my duty to support him."

"But what about the Church itself?"

"You mean, what do I think of it?"

"Yes."

"I think that it will disappear, that, in fact, it is in process of disappearance. Dry rot has set in, and so, though it looks stately and stable, it is like the towering mast of a ship, only held upright by a thin varnished skin, but rotten at the core. It will last as long as the weather is fine; when a storm comes, it will fall."

"Well, but what has happened? I don't think I understand."

"Something has happened that very few persons have observed. Wealth has bought the Church; it is in the proprietorship of the rich. They finance it, they dictate its policies, and naturally those policies are not going to be hostile to themselves. Then it has ceased to be democratic in any true sense. It will be charitable to the poor, but it will not be just. Thus its very charity is a bribe to make men forget justice. And besides this, the note of conviction has left the pulpit. Half the preachers spend their time in apologies for Christianity, and the apologetic person soon finds himself despised. The centre of gravity has shifted, and the people who do

believe most heartily in Christianity are people outside the churches—men like Tolstoi, for example. Why is it that the Church is always complaining of its want of success? It ought to succeed as nothing else can. It has privileges and attractions which no other institution has. The reason is that its vitality has run out. It has the dry rot, as I said, and the only skin that holds the thing together is the custom of worship. That also is becoming spotted with decay, and when the decay eats through the outer skin, the end will come."

"But we must have religion."

"Yes, we must have religion; but the Church and religion are not synonymous terms. The Founder of the Christian religion stood outside the Church." He paused a moment, with that curious hesitation which marked the movement of emotion in him. Then he laid his hand upon Arthur's shoulder, and said in a gentle voice, "Do you remember what you said you would do with your life? You said you wished to make it worthy of the highest. 'The utmost for the highest'—that's it, isn't it? Well, you needn't bother your head about the Church. That saying of yours is a tolerably complete definition of religion. You'll find it more than sufficient, if you'll be true to it."

There were many conversations such as this between Arthur and Vickars in this wonderful summer month. Life and love, like twin flowers on one stem, were opening, their petals simultaneously for Arthur. His mind flowered in contact with Vickars, his heart in contact with Elizabeth; for though the girl said little, her silence was eloquent of the bond of complete sympathy which existed between her father and herself. He tacitly included her in all his views of life. And it was clear that she gave him adoring discipleship—the discipleship of a young girl, long motherless, who had drawn from him all the elements of thought and will in her own character. It was a beautiful relationship, rare always, but especially rare in that conventional society which surrounded them, in which women were merely the butterfly appendages of men whose chief work in life was to provide them with the means of easy gaiety.

Vickars did not press his opinions upon Arthur; he was much too wise and gentle to play the pedant. If Arthur learned much from him, it was by indirection; knowledge came to him unconsciously, as an atmosphere to be breathed, rather than as a lesson to be mastered. Vickars had a curious knack of evading controversy. He would flash a winged sentence on the air, satisfied that it would find its mark; and then dismiss the subject with a laugh, or with the usual comment, "But we are growing too serious; let us have some music." Then Elizabeth would open the piano, and find her way to some solemn theme of Beethoven or Tchaikowsky, and the soft, perfumed wind would blow across the room from the open window, and the divine melodies would lift the spirit into worlds of unimaginable agony or rapture. But all the time the word that had been spoken would vibrate through the music, till the music seemed its real interpretation; and thus it was endowed with new vitality and emphasis by Elizabeth's playing. "How well she understands him!" Arthur would reflect, wondering at the perfect bond of sympathy between them; and then, with a pang of yearning, "Will she ever understand me like that?"

In such moments he trod the lover's hell, which is as real as the lover's heaven. He could never attain to her. He saw the miraculous freshness and richness of her nature, and knew the crudeness of his own. What was there in him that she should desire him? This very bond of sympathy between her and her father, so rare and sensitive, became his menace. She could not *want* him; but, O God! with what an agony of yearning did he want her! And then, as he sat disconsolate, with head resting on his hand, she would turn to him, as if she divined his thoughts, with a gaze infinitely pitiful and kind; and his eyes clung to hers for an instant in mute appeal and adoration, and something told him that there was yet a void in that virgin heart that he alone could fill. O exquisite terrors, authentic agonies, brief sky-daring hopes, surely it were worth all the millions of years of slow evolution from the brute to touch but for an instant so painful and delicate a bliss!

One night—it was a Sunday night—the three sat together in the little room.

Vickars was unusually silent.

"You look depressed, father. What is it?" said Elizabeth.

"Oh, nothing personal, my child. I think it's merely the spectacle of the congregation at church to-night that has disturbed me."

"What was wrong with the congregation?"

"Nothing was right, I think. Didn't you notice how stolid they looked—and in the presence of truths and hopes so vast, that had they believed them, they must have leapt to their feet and shouted in ecstasy?"

"That would be a novelty indeed," she smiled.

"It would have been natural," he replied. "But alas! who is natural? Most people never live at first-hand. They are plagiarists. Arthur, don't be a plagiarist. It cuts the fibre of sincerity. It's like drinking stale water from a dirty cup. But there," and then came the usual comment, "let us have some music."

And Elizabeth began to play. Perhaps it was the suggestion of the Sabbath evening that made

her play sweet and solemn airs from Handel. Presently she wandered into old hymn-tunes, and finally began to play "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

Suddenly she stopped, for Vickars had left the room.

"Oh, I forgot!" she cried. "I ought not to have played that."

While she spoke, her father returned. His face was pale: he held in his hand a miniature of a woman.

"Do you remember what to-day is?" he said in a soft, shaken voice. "Twenty years ago to-day. And that was the last thing she played ... and then she went ... in the night ... upon her long journey. And it all seems but an hour ago. O my child! you are so like your mother."

He kissed her forehead.

Twenty years ago, and love still fresh! Arthur bowed his head before the sacred vision. He rose to go. He felt he had no right to look on that unveiled immortal sorrow.

Elizabeth stood for a moment with him at the garden gate.

"Could you?" ... He stopped, for emotion choked him. "Could you ... love me like that?"

He could see her tremble, and in the dim light he could divine her startled gaze. His hand clasped hers.

She pressed his for a single moment, turned, and fled.

VII

ENTER SCALES

August had come with its heavy, brooding heat, and the idyllic weather had disappeared. There were no more fresh breezes, tempering the hot sunlight, no more cool nights of lingering twilight; over the weary city spread a pall of stifling haze, and the atmosphere had the flatness of an unaired room. The trees turned brown, and the leaves began to fall, as though it were autumn, not summer. The greenness of the parks had vanished, and the pleasant sward had become a dirty gray, upon which vast tribes of ragged children camped. August in London, when from countless miles of brick walls and stone pavements heat is radiated; when roads steam beneath the casual visitations of the water-cart, and barefooted urchins paddle in the gutters, and the city sprawls like a languid drab too tired to be conscious of her dishevelment; August, when a million hearts feel a dull ache of yearning for green fields and open spaces, and in fortunate homes guide-books are being studied, routes of travel discussed, boxes packed, fishing-tackle and golf-clubs overhauled, and carriages, piled high with trunks, with pale, excited children gazing from their windows, day by day roll down every street, and converge at last in the wild pandemonium of the great terminal stations which are the doorways of the country.

In Eagle House such preparations were in process, but it was a joyless business. Masterman had informed his family that there would be no Scotland for them this year; times were hard, and they must make the best they could of Brighton.

"I'm sure Brighton will cost just as much as Scotland," objected his daughter.

"It's near London, and I can't afford to be far from town this year," he replied.

"We don't know any one there, father. All the people we know are going north. Why can't we?"

For this young lady was accustomed to get her own way in most things, and to consider every one her enemy who opposed her. There was not much of her physically; she was *petite* and graceful, with irregular features, pretty hair, and shallow blue eyes which showed no evidence of a soul; but like many small persons, she had a wonderful gift of obstinacy. As a rule, she could do as she liked with her father in small ways, by means of a childish wheedling manner, which concealed her obstinacy; but every now and again she came upon a hard strata in his nature which turned the edge of her assaults, and it was so now. Of course, she did not so much as perceive the grim lines that had written themselves upon his tired face during the past two months. Neither did she believe his plea of poverty. It was merely a selfish whim of his to be near London through August, and she must needs be sacrificed to his whim.

"At any rate, you might choose a better place than Brighton," she retorted petulantly.

"I might choose, but I don't," he retorted. "There's a good train service to Brighton, and it suits me. It will have to suit you, too."

"I'm sure I would just as soon stay in London," Arthur interrupted; and he was rewarded by a glance of intense disdain from his sister's eyes.

"No; you'll go to Brighton with the others." And Masterman, not knowing the private thoughts of Arthur, was gratified with his remark. He saw in it the evidence of that serious sense of duty which was presently to make him the kind of man for whom business is an imperious master. "You see, we must go somewhere. If we didn't, folk might talk. I've had a pretty hard time, my boy, but it's nearly over now. And I want you to go to Brighton for a reason of my own. There are some people there I'd like you to meet."

"Of course I'll do as you wish, father."

"That's the proper spirit," he replied kindly.

But when Masterman left the room, Helen turned upon her brother spitefully.

"Oh! you needn't think I don't know why you want to stop in London," she cried. "I know where you spend your evenings. You're not nearly so clever as you think you are."

"Do you?" he replied, trying in vain to subdue the hot blood that rushed to his cheeks.

"Yes, I do. And you just wait until father knows. I've a great mind to tell him."

"You can tell him anything you wish," he replied proudly.

"And do you wish it?"

And with this Parthian shot she drew her small figure up in anger, and left the room.

But the Parthian arrow left its wound, for it was tipped with subtle poison. Magic months are exquisite experiences; but the pity of it is that the magic is rarely so complete that the outlines of the plain world are totally obliterated. Helen's words were a sword that slashed a great rent in the purple curtains of young love, and the outer world lay visible. No use to turn the eyes away or to patch the rent; there lay the fact of things, palpable enough. Did he wish his father to know his love for Elizabeth? He had never yet faced the question. But the moment it was asked he saw with fatal prescience all that it implied. He had chosen not alone Elizabeth, but with her a path of life, an ideal of conduct. That path led out into a strange, uncharted world, the very existence of which his father had not so much as surmised. And he knew that his father never could be brought to see it.

He knew this, but he knew also that he himself had reached a clearness of vision of which nothing could deprive him. He had seen the land very far off, and henceforth his eyes could see no other. He was vowed to the highest, as men had been in days of knighthood, and he must follow the gleam wheresoever it led. To his father it would all seem the wildest folly; no doubt in that forgotten dream-time of the world, to men bartering in the market-place or reaping in the fields, young Sir Galahad must have seemed mad as he rode past singing, into the haunted forest. It would be no better now; nay, it would be far worse, for was not the world one vast clamorous marketplace, no longer merely disdainful but actively antagonistic to the dreamer? Not that he was worthy to rank himself with the Sir Galahads; he was merely a boy, intoxicated with the new wine of love and life; but nevertheless he had his ideal of what life should be, and he meant to pursue it. To one thing at least he had attained—he was not afraid of poverty. Hilary Vickars had taught him that, by showing him how little outward circumstance can affect the inner peace of the soul. And when all things are said and done, perhaps that is the greatest truth that a youth can learn, for if it does not necessarily produce heroism, it at least makes it possible. For it is through fear of poverty that men sell their souls; and not until that ignoble fear is gone does the soul have a chance to live.

But he did not wish to challenge his father to the conflict till the proper hour came. The clash must come, but he would leave the foreseen moment in the hands of time. It could not be long delayed, but he would not anticipate it. And in so determining he was thinking of his father rather than himself. His father might be wholly wrong in his method of life, but that old sense of his father's bigness still dominated him. Primeval, proud, scarred with savage conflict, he saw his father rise before him; he could not but admire even while he censured; and simply because he knew that it was in his power to wound the giant in a vital part, he was afraid to strike.

So in the first week of August the Masterman household accomplished its annual exodus, and Arthur found himself one of five hundred tenants in a vast hotel at Brighton. Brighton is not precisely a pleasant place in August—"a sea without a ship, and a shore without a tree"—but undeniably it has at all seasons a certain strong glitter of life, and its shipless sea is an inexhaustible reservoir of tonic breezes. But poetry does not breathe in the air of Brighton, and Arthur's heart was at the stage when poetry is indispensable to happiness. He could have been relatively happy in some deep Scotch glen, whipping a stream for the infrequent trout, and listening unconsciously to the wind-music in the fir-tops; for though he would still have been separated from Elizabeth, he would have seen her face mirrored in the stream, and heard her

voice in the wind, and have felt her presence in the wide peacefulness. But the hard materialism of Brighton jarred upon his senses. It was London over again, a cleaner and a meaner London. The same kind of face met him everywhere—the heavy, soulless face of men who have their portion in this world. In the men it was a clean-shaved, rubicund face, in the women it was puffed and sometimes rouged; and this face was reduplicated everywhere—in the hotel, on the parade, on the pier, till it became a persecution such as one suffers in dreams. Looking at these faces, Arthur had not only a strong repulsion, but he knew the cause of it; these faces were the mirror of unclean souls. There was something dark and turbid in them, a mire of sin washed up from the abhorred depth of life; these eyes all had the same expression, something of greed and glassy insolence and vulpine shrewdness, and the mouths had the same looseness of sensual thirst. Perhaps he did not see with entire justice, for Elizabeth's face hung like a picture in his heart, before which he had built a shrine and lit a lamp of faith; or perhaps he did see with perfect lucidity the souls of these fellow creatures of his, simply because that lamp of pure love in his heart gave him light. At all events, he hated Brighton, and betook himself daily to the green empty Downs, and sometimes as far as Chantlebury Ring, where the width of the world could be felt once more, and the shy voice of love might be heard, like a cuckoo-note, in the great sylvan silences.

Helen had soon found friends, and was now quite reconciled to Brighton; his mother, more fragile than ever in appearance, was content to sit still all day, looking at the smooth sea-plain with its gem-like glitter. More than once he was moved to open all his heart to his mother, and there were times when her eyes seemed to invite his confidence; but always between them was that gulf of silence, for which speech could frame no bridge. He wondered much about this silence of hers. It was scarcely apathy; no eyes could be as bright as hers if the heart were apathetic. It seemed rather to be a resolved incuriousness about things around her, a turning away of the face from life, as from something dreadful, that had only pain to offer her. Could one imagine a human creature, with "a bright, sunshiny day after shipwreck," sitting beside an empty sea, willing to think of nothing that came before or after, but just to breathe, and watch, and wait —that was the kind of impression Mrs. Masterman made upon the mind. Arthur was always delicately tender with her. He hung about her chair, arranged her shawl or pillows, was quick to perceive her wishes; but in the very kiss with which she rewarded him there was restraint. The time was to come when he was to know what it meant, but that time was not yet. Now, as in all the later years which he could recall, her one wish seemed to be to efface herself, and to take up as little room in life and in the thoughts of others as possible.

He was greatly surprised one night, when he came back to the hotel from a long walk over the Downs, to find his father in conference with Scales. There was a mass of papers lying on the table, and it was clear the two men were deeply interested in them.

"Come in," said Masterman. "We're busy, you see, but we'll soon be through now."

Scales greeted him with his usual smooth civility, and, as usual, it was a little overdone.

"Shall I wait?" said Arthur.

"No. You'd better dress for dinner. Scales is going to spend the night here. I have something to say to you later on."

Arthur left the room without remark; but as he was dressing the thought suddenly took hold on him, What did his father want with Scales?

He knew that his father did not like the man, and that made their present relation the more unintelligible. He had heard his father speak with brusque scorn of Scales' plan to punish John Clark, by getting him off to the Holy Land, and then starting a church revolution in his absence. That the man was false was beyond doubt. Falsity looked out of his narrow, deprecating eyes, falsity breathed in his smooth voice, falsity declared itself in his obsequious manners. Under no possible circumstances could such a man play fair either as friend or foe. Judas was such another as Elisha Scales, and Judas was an apostle as Scales was a deacon.

And here Arthur laughed at the absurdity of the suggestion.

"He'll find it hard to betray father," he said.

But not the less he was uneasy. There was something in the man that was sinister, supple, diabolically adroit, and he felt instinctively that his presence in his father's room boded no good for any one. Suddenly there recurred to his memory his father's statement that there were persons in Brighton he wanted him to meet, and he felt sure that it was to Scales he referred. Yes, it must be so, because no one else who could claim his father's acquaintance had appeared in Brighton; and, if it were so, it argued some kind of compact or pre-arrangement with Scales.

That night, however, nothing was said that could illumine the situation. Scales spent the night in the hotel, was closeted late with his father, and accompanied him to London on the following day.

Another day passed, and then his father sent for him.

"Arthur," he began, "I'm not going to interfere with our compact. I gave you till the end of

September to make your mind up about the business, and I don't want you to speak a word until then. But there's a matter of business on which I want your help now."

"I'm not much good at business, father. I don't think I ever shall be."

Masterman ignored the confession.

"You don't know that until you try."

"Of course, if there's anything in which I can help you, father, I'll do my best."

"Well, you're old enough to use your eyes, and that's all I want of you. Sit down, and let me explain."

Thereupon he explained. It seemed that Scales had got wind in the broker's office where he was managing clerk of a certain amalgamation of several brick companies which was likely to come off before long. One of these companies was in Sussex, not far from Brighton. It was in difficulties, had been a long time, and might be bought cheap. Masterman proposed to buy it, and then resell to the trust when it should be formed. Properly handled, there might be a fortune in the transaction.

"I thought you didn't trust Scales," said Arthur quietly.

"And I don't. Not an inch farther than I can see him. I know very well he'd sell the shirt off my back if he got a chance."

"Of course he's not working for nothing."

"Certainly not. If he were, I should distrust him still more. You'll find that in business no one does anything for nothing."

"But I don't see anything I can do, father."

"That's the point I am coming to. I dare not go to look at this Sussex property. I'm known. If I appeared upon the scene, they'd spring the price at once. But you can go to see it. It's at Leatham, not more than twenty miles away. What I want you to do is to go to the village, stop at the inn for a few days, make all the inquiries you can, quietly, and then report to me. Will you do it?"

How could he refuse? It was at least a break in the dull monotony of Brighton. And he was really touched, too, by his father's faith in him.

"But I have no expert knowledge, father, and surely that is what you need."

"Not at all. They'd suspect an expert. All that is wanted is a pair of good eyes, and good commonsense. I think you have these."

"Very well, father, I will go. When do you want me to start?"

"At once. You can't be too quick."

"I will start this morning, sir."

"That's the spirit I like," said Master-man. "It will be the first bit of business you ever did for me, and it won't be the last."

On that pious hope Arthur made no comment. He could not refuse to do what his father asked, and he did it the more readily because in his own mind he knew it would be likely to prove both the first and the last act of the kind he would perform.

"I daresay Scales will turn up at Leatham. Behave to him as civilly as you can."

"I'll try, sir." But he said it with so wry a smile that his father laughed.

"He'll be civil enough to you, never fear."

Of course, thought Arthur. Judas was no doubt a pleasant-mannered gentleman, and the very pattern of civility—until he bared his fangs.

So Arthur went to Leatham, and for the first time found himself in contact with that mysterious world of business in which his father lived. At first this contact produced an almost pleasurable sensation, such as the swimmer feels when the sting of the salt water thrills his nerves. It was all so new, this contact with rough reality. He found the owner of the brickfield an old man, as skilled in craft as Ulysses. The old man came to see him in the village inn, and played the game of cross-purposes with inimitable subtlety. He supposed the young gentleman wanted to settle there? No? Well, it was a fine neighbourhood, few better, and the sport was considered good. Interested in business? Well, for a safe paying business there was few things like bricks. People must have bricks, because they must have houses. He was an old man, and had an idea of retiring. If the young gentleman was interested in bricks, he'd like him to come over the works

some day. Not that it could be supposed he was interested. Bookish, wasn't he? Been to college? Well, lots of college men went into business now, and even titled ladies kept bonnet-shops. So he'd heard. He was really an amusing old man, and Arthur enjoyed his company more than could have been supposed of a young Sir Galahad.

His father had not been mistaken when he had credited him with a pair of good eyes and cool commonsense, and the more he used his eyes the less he thought of the possibilities of the Leatham brick-works. It was clearly a bankrupt concern. It was handicapped by being four miles from the rail. It had been able to do a small local trade for several years, and that was about all it was ever likely to do. If there was a fortune in it, it was of such microscopic proportions that it needed keener eyes than Arthur's to discover it.

On the Saturday night Scales came down, deferential and obsequious as usual, but clearly a little ill at ease. Arthur dined with him in the old-fashioned inn-parlour, and after dinner came at once to the point. He said bluntly that he believed the Leatham Brick Manufacturing Co. was a worthless property.

Scales smiled enigmatically.

"You appear to dissent," said Arthur.

"No, not altogether. I never thought much of it myself."

"Then why do you want my father to buy it?"

"Why, to resell it, of course."

"If it's worthless, you can't resell it."

"It won't be worthless if your father gets it. If it's worthless now, it's because it hasn't been developed. The present owner hasn't had the money to put into it. Your father will develop it."

"And then?

"Make it a company."

"And then?"

"Resell it to the Amalgamated Brick Trust."

"And if the Amalgamated doesn't want it?"

"But they will. It's my business to look after that."

"Then why not let the present owner sell it to the Amalgamated? He's worked it all his life. If there's a fortune to be made out of it, as my father seemed to think, it's that poor old man who ought to get it—not my father."

"That's not the way business is done."

"It seems to me the way it should be done. It's the only honest way."

Thereupon Scales entered on an exposition of the methods of modern business, according to which it seemed that fortunes were only made by snatching advantages from the weak who could not hold them. Arthur listened in silence, and as Scales proceeded the boy's face had a curious likeness to his father's in his grimmest mood.

"It's no good," he broke out at length. "If that is what business means, it seems to me to be nothing better than organised theft. I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Scales—for no doubt you hope to make something yourself out of this fine scheme—but my father expects me to report honestly what I think, and I shall report against the purchase."

"You'll regret it if you do."

"I should regret it all my life if I didn't."

"Think over it. Don't act hastily."

And as he spoke there was something like a tremor of anger in the suave voice.

"I've done my thinking already," said Arthur. "There's only one thing more I want to say. If the transaction were never so honest, there's a weak place in your scheme which I think my father will appreciate. It is that he has only your word for it, Mr. Scales, that the Amalgamated will, buy the property, and, to be quite frank, I don't trust your word."

He left the room and went to bed. The next morning he returned to Brighton. The first thing that met his eyes as he entered his room was a letter from Elizabeth.

VIII

THE ACCUSATION

It was a very brief note, simply informing him that Hilary Vickars was ill, and wished to see him.

An hour later he was in the train. Fortunately he had written his report of the Leatham business before he left the village, and this he left upon his father's desk. As he went up to London he read and re-read Elizabeth's brief note, in a conflict of torture and delight. There was but one phrase in it which impressed the personality of the writer. "I am alone with father, and very anxious," she wrote. He felt the throb of her heart in those words, and he realised that she leaned on him for strength. His own heart swelled with tenderness at the thought. There is a kind of pain which is so exquisite that it becomes joy; he realised such a pain now, an immense yearning to take the lonely girl to his bosom, and kiss her wet eyelids, and defend her from the imminent sword of sorrow.

He stood at the door of the little house in Lonsdale Road. The street lay silent in the August heat, the little patch of grass was brown and parched, there was an aspect of forlornness over everything. A sudden terror smote him: what if it were Elizabeth herself who was ill? His hand trembled as he rang the bell. The door opened softly, and there stood Elizabeth, pale and quiet as a spectre.

"Elizabeth!"

Her hand lay in his, her beautiful eyes, swimming in tears, met his; he drew her to him in one long kiss. It was the first time he had kissed her, and how often had he imagined the ecstasy of that kiss! It had come at last, but not with the kind of ecstasy he had imagined, yet with the diviner ecstasy of sorrow. The rose of her heart was yielded to him, but it was wet with tears.

"Elizabeth!"

She withdrew herself from his embrace, saying simply, "I wanted you so much."

And in that brief phrase all was said, and each knew that henceforth an irrevocable vow bound their hearts together.

She took his hand, and together they went into the room where they had so often talked. The desk was littered with papers, half-corrected proofs, unanswered letters, the mute, pathetic witness of an arrested hand.

"How long ago is it?" he whispered

"Four days."

"What is it?"

"Typhoid, the doctor thinks."

"Can I see him?"

"It was he who told me to write you. He wants to see you."

"And you?"

"Yes, I wanted you too."

There was a tender reproach in the words, which he was quick to recognise.

"I should not have asked the question. Forgive me."

"No, you need not have asked it."

They went upstairs together. Vickars lay very straight and quiet in the bed, his face pallid, his eyes closed. He roused instantly at their entrance, and at once began to speak in a weak, eager voice.

"So you see I'm caught at last," he said with difficult cheerfulness. "I've never had an illness—ailments, but not illness—and I don't quite know what to make of it. It's an experience that makes one humble."

"Don't talk, father. It exhausts you," said Elizabeth.

"On the contrary, it keeps me cheerful," he said, with the old whimsical smile. "Habit, I

suppose. And besides, I have certain things to say to Arthur."

Elizabeth took the hint and left the room. Arthur sat beside the bed in awkward silence.

Presently Vickars said abruptly, "You love her?"

"Yes, with all my heart."

"I thought so."

He was silent for some moments. Then he said, "A month ago I suppose I should almost have hated you for that confession. She is all I have; I have always wanted to keep her wholly to myself.... I have dreaded this hour.... But I see now it is the course of nature. I may have to leave her soon—I don't know. But I'm glad now you love her. Yes, I think I'm glad, and I wished to tell you so."

"I hope you'll soon be better."

"Ah! do you? But then, you see, I might not feel the same toward you. But there—that's irony. You know that. Honestly, I'm glad you love her."

His eyes closed, and Arthur, sitting silently beside the bed, could not but mark the change in Vickars since last he saw him. The bones of the face showed white through the stretched, transparent skin, the eyes were sunken, and new lines had been etched upon the forehead. It came to him, in a rush of pity and of admiration, that he loved this man. And there came to him also some dim perception of the depth of that sacrifice which Vickars endured in resigning his sole jealous claim upon Elizabeth. It is seldom that young love attains to this vision. It is all hot eagerness, imperious and intense with the overmastering impulse of sex, and blind to the tendrils of old affection which it tears apart to reach its goal. But to Arthur there was granted a truer vision, a nobler temper, because love in him had always had a sacred meaning, and had never been the more clamorous cry of sex.

It was as though Vickars divined his thoughts. He opened his eyes, and said, "Bring me my notebook. It is lying on the table."

Arthur brought the book.

"I want to read you something. It was written by a wayward man of genius, who made many blunders both in thought and morals, but he understood love, and the one best thing in all his life was that he did know how to love. Listen. 'To love we must render up body and soul, heart and mind, all interests and all desires, all prudences and all ambitions, and identify our being with that of another.... To love is for the soul to choose a companion, and travel with it along the perilous defiles and winding ways of life; mutually sustaining when the path is terrible with dangers, mutually exhorting when it is rugged with obstructions, and mutually rejoicing when rich broad plains and sunny slopes make the journey a delight, showing in the quiet distance the resting-place we all seek in this world.'"

The words, beautiful in themselves, had a strange solemnity as Vickars read them. It was as though all the ages spoke in them, as though one overheard in some dim cathedral the low whispering of multitudes of lovers, confessing the ultimate secret of both life and love.

He put the book down, sank back upon his pillow, and began to talk in a low, intense voice.

"Yes, I loved like that.... A companion of the soul, that was what I found. Women are such delicate and fragile creatures, but oh! so strong—much stronger than we are; and a good woman is the strongest of all. The heavier the load you lay upon them, the happier they are. I know. I should have fallen by the way but for her. She always smiled at difficulty ... such a tender, smiling mouth she had ... like a fresh flower in the sun. Then God took her. She went smiling—her last word a word of encouragement to me, her eyes signalling courage as they closed. And Elizabeth is like her. She has carried my burdens and borne my sorrows.... Poor child! it may be I have leaned too heavily on her. Well, well. God forbid I should grudge her her right to joy. Take her, Arthur, and don't lean too heavily upon her."

Instinctively Arthur knelt beside the bed. His eyes were full of tears. Vickars stretched out his hand, and laid it on his head. There was no need of further words.

When he next spoke, it was with his old manner of whimsical humour.

"If I must needs have a son, I don't want an idle one," he said. "I want you to help me, Arthur."

"I'll do anything I can."

"Well, this is what I want you to do. You will find the proofs of my new book downstairs on my desk. They must be corrected at once, or the book will miss the autumn season. Will you correct them for me?"

"If Elizabeth will let me," he said with a smile.

"I think she will let you. I am sure she would let no one else."

"Then I'll begin at once."

"Well, that's a load off my mind. And don't you think I'm going to die, for I'm not. But I'm in for a hard fight, there's no doubt of that. Now go to Elizabeth—and the proofs. I'm tired out, and will sleep. I've never been lazy in my life before, and it's a new and quite exquisite sensation."

From that hour a strange chapter of life began for Arthur. Eagle House was closed, and he took refuge with Mrs. Bundy. He wrote his father a brief note, saying he was detained in London, and would not return to Brighton. He had not the courage to tell him the whole truth; that revelation would come soon enough, and he did not wish to antagonise his father by an abrupt declaration of his position. To this note his father made no reply.

Most of his hours were spent in the little house in Lonsdale Road. There he toiled over Vickars's new book. Much of it consisted of rough drafts, which he had to copy and piece together as best he could. In this delicate work he could obtain no counsel from Vickars.

Of Elizabeth he saw much, and yet far less than he would have imagined possible. She was constantly at her father's bedside. And as the days wore on, the fight for life in that shadowed room became intense. A silent pressure of her hand, a silent kiss—and she would glide from him like a ghost, and disappear into the gloom of that upper chamber.

One night it happened that she had gone to rest, worn out with long watching, and Arthur took her place at Vickars' bedside. For a long time Vickars lay in complete stupor. The gray dawn was near, and a milk-cart rattled down the road. The noise roused him for a moment, and he began to speak in half-delirious words.

"The old story," he said. "Rotten work, and human lives to pay for it. The poor ... the poor pay for everything in this world ... with their blood. And the rich sit in houses splashed with the blood of the poor, and don't even know it.... I always knew the drains were bad. I always said they smelt of death. But that damned builder didn't care—not he. He only laughed ... laughed."

The voice trailed off into an incoherent whisper.

When Vickars began to speak, Arthur listened drowsily; but as he finished, his entire mind sprang into vivid apprehension. It was as though a sudden torch flared through his brain.

What did the sick man mean? And with the question there came back to Arthur's memory a snatch of conversation at the deacons' tea, when he had first heard the name of Hilary Vickars. He recalled the suave, purring voice of Scales explaining to his father that the Vickars were inconsiderable people, living in Lonsdale Road—"in one of your houses, sir."

"I always said the drains smelt of death. But that damned builder didn't care. He only laughed."

And the builder was his father.

A blackness of great horror fell upon him. He struggled against it, as against an overwhelming tide. Could it be that Vickars knew this dreadful thing all the time, knew it even when he had laid his hand upon his head, and welcomed him as a son? It seemed hardly possible. He told himself that after all he had nothing to go upon but a few delirious words. Perhaps Vickars was not thinking of his own case at all. It might have been simply some scene in one of his books which he rehearsed—a snatch of drama flung out by the toiling, unconscious brain. But in his heart he knew that such an explanation was untrue. An inner force of conviction, stronger than reason, affirmed the reality of Vickars' words. The delirious mind had uttered a tragic truth which the conscious mind had concealed.

The dawn had now come. He heard Elizabeth going down the stairs silently. How could he meet her? Perhaps she also knew the truth, had known it all the time. He hastily wrote a note, saying that he had gone for a walk, and would return in an hour. Vickars still slept. He knew that in a few minutes Elizabeth would be with him. He went softly down the stairs, and let himself out into the Lonsdale Road.

In the freshness of the morning air his tragic suppositions seemed incredible. Life lay round him in its wide security of joy; birds sang, flowers bloomed, men were astir; everything breathed of honest industry, honest kindness, and it seemed a thing impossible that behind this fair show of things there lay unimaginable depths of cruelty. He passed Eagle House, shuttered and silent, and he fell to thinking of his father. Stern, inscrutable, resolute he knew his father to be, but he had never known him cruel. Yet if he had done this thing he was a monster. He had made a compact with death for money. Over the porch of Eagle House there hung a Virginia creeper, already touched with the first rusty crimson of autumn, and to the boy's wild imagination it was a stain of blood. "Splashed with blood of the poor," Vickars had said.... Yet, at that moment, every memory of his father that he could summon up was kind and gracious. He remembered his generosities to him during his university career, his patience with him while he waited for a decision on which his heart was set in burning eagerness, his trust in him over the Leatham business, and all that pride and love which had a thousand times met him in his father's glance.

But he knew also that in the scales of justice even such memories as these were worthless. They could not outweigh deliberate fraud. He must know the truth; he was merciless in his appetite for truth; until that hunger was satisfied there was no place for kinder thoughts.

It struck him all at once that there was an easy way to satisfy his doubts. The doctor would know the exact truth, and to the doctor he would go.

Ten minutes later he stood in the doctor's waiting-room. Dr. Leet was not yet up. He would be down in half an hour.

Presently the doctor entered, a somewhat formal, gray, middle-aged man, with a hesitating manner which had grown upon him in the constant effort to avoid hurting the susceptibilities of patients who asked awkward questions which he was unwilling to answer.

"Ah, you come from Mr. Vickars? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"No, doctor. I left him asleep."

The doctor nodded and waited.

"I came to ask you a question, doctor."

"Yes."

"It's about Vickars. I want to know the cause of his illness. I have a good reason for asking."

"The cause? Well, you see, Vickars had been run down for a long time before he became ill. He had probably worked too hard for years. That meant a certain devitalisation, which made him susceptible to fever."

"And is that all?"

"Well, not altogether, of course. There is still the question of the fever itself."

"That is what I want to know, doctor. I shall be very glad if you tell me plainly what you think."

"Oh, there's not much room for conjectures. Drains, of course. Lonsdale Road had been a perfect nest of typhoid germs for years. I don't know who built the street, but I do know that, whoever he was, he was a scoundrel. The drains run under the kitchen floors, and I'll be bound that there isn't one that is not a death-trap. I've seen some of these drains exposed, and I give you my word for it that the pipes are not so much as cemented together."

Arthur turned sick and pale. Then he said quietly, "My father built those houses."

"Oh, my dear sir," began the doctor, "I'm sorry I spoke. I had no idea."

"You need not apologise," said Arthur. "I asked a plain question and expected a plain answer. I understand that Vickars is the victim of bad drains?"

"Well, yes, primarily. Of course, run down as he was, he might have fallen ill, any way. But honestly I can't say that I believe this. The real cause is only too clear."

"Then Eliz—Miss Vickars is in danger too?"

"Any one is in danger who lives in those houses," said the doctor hotly, forgetting his usual caution. "They are mere death-traps, I tell you. And though I don't want to hurt your feelings, yet I am bound to say that in my opinion a highway robber who takes your purse upon a public road is a respectable person compared with the rascal who condemns scores of decent people to certain suffering, and some to certain death, for the sake of a few pounds of illicit gain."

"Thank you, doctor. I think I'll go now."

He groped for his hat, like a blind man.

"You'd better wait a little while," said the doctor. "Stop, and have some breakfast with me."

And then Arthur's self-control broke. He leant against the library shelves, covering his face with his hands.

"O my father," he cried, "how could you do it?"

"Don't take it too hardly," said the doctor. "Perhaps he didn't know ... surely he didn't think."

"Yes, he knew," said Arthur, turning on the doctor a pair of flaming, tear-wet eyes. "He's done it before. He once put oyster-shells and road-gravel into the foundations of a church instead of concrete. I heard him say so. He must have done it many times. And he doesn't care. People die, and he doesn't care. And I'm his son ... the son of a man who is a scoundrel."

He pushed the astonished doctor aside, and somehow found his way into the open air. There lay the world, even as he had left it, but its aspect was wholly changed. In the fresh morning light it had smiled upon him, it had seemed honest, it had breathed security of joy; now the mask of hypocrisy was gone, and it was an old, evil, wrinkled face that leered at him. It was the stage of tragic passions, it was full of the habitations of cruelty.

"Splashed with blood of the poor"—so he saw the world at that moment, a red grotesque, a grim crimson horror. And he saw his father, too, clothed in the same blood-red livery of crime.

IX

THE CONTEST

The troubles of the young are apt to move the ridicule of the mature, who have long since discovered that even tragedies can be outlived, disasters forgotten, and the worst defeats repaired. That there is a strange and stubborn resilience in life, which enables us to survive a thousand shocks, is indeed a wonderful quality which is needed to explain the persistence of the race. But the final view of life is never the immediate view, and, whatever we may think now of ancient sorrows, unless the memory is quite dulled we know well that they were once real and terrible enough. The child's terror of the dark, his bitter tears over slight or injustice, his first agony of homesickness, his rage against acts of cruelty or tyranny, the wounds inflicted on his tenderness or pride—these things may appear to us now absurd or insignificant episodes in the process by which we adjusted ourselves to the social scheme; but it may be doubted if any tears were bitterer than these, any later sorrow comparable with these young sorrows that left us dumb with fury and astonishment. The years bring healing and forgetfulness—or perhaps it were truer to say, a tougher skin, a less sensitive organism; but, if we care to examine our hearts, most of us would find that the scars of these earliest wounds run deep and are ineffaceable.

How well does the writer recollect a certain mournful morning when he stood at bay in the corner of a large school playground, tormented by the jeers and blows of a jovial crowd of young bullies, who found occasion for fresh mirth in every fresh impotent spasm of rage and grief. Since that day he has wept over open graves, said farewell to so many of those he loved that the unseen world seems less uninhabited than the seen, been betrayed by friends he trusted, been humiliated in a thousand ways by the cruelty or stupidity of men, but he has known no sorrow quite as keen as that sorrow, and no betrayal that seemed quite so cruel as the act by which his parents gave him to the wolves in that brutal playground. He can jest about the story now, but in his own private heart that fatal morning still looms tragic, and there are times when he still wakes out of painful dreams with the old horrible sense of forsakenness that he felt then.

So he finds it impossible to treat lightly Arthur Masterman's first cruel astonishment when the revelation of his father's misdoing was made plain to him. If Arthur had been more observant, he would have learned it by degrees, and so its force would have been broken; if he had not built up for himself an admired image of his father, the shock would have been easier to bear. As it was, the revelation came with a shattering blow which shook his life to the centre. And the blow struck him precisely at the point where he was most sensitive. His father had all but slain Vickars, who was his friend, and he might yet strike down the daughter who was dearer to him than his own life. He had as good as planned their death, for what he did he had done deliberately, well knowing the issue of his deeds. And how many more were there who were his helpless victims? How many graves had he filled? Where would the harvest of disgrace and death end? The doctor was right—the highwayman who took a purse was a reputable citizen compared with the criminal who wilfully sowed the seeds of death among innocent people for a few pounds of illicit gain! And he was the son of the man who had done this; the very clothes he wore, the food he ate, the books he read, were purchased by his father's sin.

To Vickars, slowly recovering from a mortal sickness, he dared not speak, to Elizabeth still less. So he took refuge with Mrs. Bundy, whose bosom was an open hospice for all sorts of vicarious sorrows.

"Well, well!" she said cheerfully, "Didn't I tell you that your father was like the man in the parable, 'an austere man, gathering where he had not strawed'? But it takes all sorts to make a world, laddie, and your father's none so bad as some."

"That's poor comfort," he replied gloomily.

"Poor it may be, but it's not to be forgotten. I mind the time when Bundy was in trouble, and it was your father helped him. Did I ever tell you that?"

"No."

"Well, he did. He lent Bundy what he asked, and did it cheerfully."

"Oh! I don't doubt he can be generous, but that's not the point. It's not what he may do with his money, but how he makes it."

And then he proceeded to pour out all the bitterness of his heart in hot, indignant words. He raged like a man blind with pain, who knows not how or where his blows fall.

"You cannot justify him," he cried. "God knows I've tried hard enough, but I cannot. Dr. Leet said he was a scoundrel, and I, his son, could not contradict him. I have tried to think he did not know, but this is a thing he must have known. It's a hard thing to hear your father called a scoundrel, and be silent. And I was silent, for I knew that it was true."

"Hush, hush, laddie! It's not for you to say that."

"I must say it. There are hundreds of people saying it. And I am his son—the son of a scoundrel."

If Arthur had not been blinded by his anger he would have known why Mrs. Bundy sought to stop the torrent of his words. For, while he was speaking, young Scales had entered the house, and stood in the doorway watching this unusual scene. The Scales family had returned that evening from their holiday, and it had occurred to young Benjamin Scales to call at Mrs. Bundy's, where he would be sure to find some of his acquaintance. Young Benjamin was not a pleasant youth; he had a mean, narrow face, like his father, and wore eye-glasses, not from any defect of vision, but because he imagined that they gave him an air of cleverness, and among his strong antipathies was jealousy of Arthur. So what more natural than that he should seize avidly on Arthur's angry words, and duly report them to his father, who in turn waited his opportunity of reporting them to Archibold Masterman.

The opportunity came a few days later, when Scales went to Brighton to see Masterman upon the Leatham business, which was still undecided. Scales knew very well why it was undecided, and his grudge against Arthur had grown by careful nursing. And now, thanks to Arthur's angry words, he had the means of avenging himself.

Masterman had, of course, read Arthur's report, and was secretly delighted with it. It was an admirable piece of writing, plain and convincing, and it was expressed with a lucidity to which he was not accustomed in similar documents. "The boy has brains," he said, as he read it; "he will go far." It was the first time he had tested those brains on any practical affair, and his pride in his son was great.

"I'm not at all sure Arthur isn't right," he said to Scales, and so he had postponed decision from day to day.

But the time had now come when the decision must be made, and Scales was fully resolved that that decision should be favourable to his own interests.

"I don't deny," he said, "that your son's report is admirably done, but you must recollect that he has no real experience of business. And besides——"

"Besides what?"

"I don't think he will ever understand business."

"Why not?"

"From words he said to me. From words he has said to others."

"What words? Tell me plainly what you mean?"

"I had rather not."

"Now look here, Scales," said Masterman, "either you have said too much or not enough. In a few weeks Arthur will be my partner, and the sooner you begin to think of him in that way the better for our future relations."

"I don't think he will ever be your partner," said Scales quietly.

"Why not?"

"Because he is a wild, impracticable boy," said Scales, throwing away his caution. "Because he told me that business—your business and mine—was, in his opinion, organised theft. Because he has been going about saying that you are a scoundrel——"

"What's that?" cried Masterman, rising to his feet. His face was pale and terrible, and his attitude so menacing that Scales was afraid. But in that mean heart hate was stronger than fear, and it supplied a certain desperate courage.

"I didn't mean to tell you, sir. But you ought to know it. Ask what he has been doing in London this last fortnight. Ask him where he has been. I can tell you. He has been living with Hilary Vickars, he has been making love to his daughter. Vickars is a Socialist. And your son

shares his views, and he has said publicly that your methods of business prove you a scoundrel."

"Is that true?" said Masterman.

"It is God's truth. Do you think I would have come between father and son with a lie that was bound to be found out."

"No; I believe if you lied, you'd choose a safe lie, Scales," he said bitterly.

"You are unjust to me, sir. I have never lied to you. I don't lie now."

"That will do," said Masterman.

"But what will you do?"

"That's my affair," he retorted grimly.

"But it's my affair too, sir. I want to know whether your son's report is to go against my experience and yours? whether you will complete this Leatham purchase or not?"

"Ah! I wasn't thinking of that." He turned away, and stood for some moments looking out of the window in silence. Then he walked rapidly to his desk, unlocked a drawer, and took out Arthur's report. "This is my reply," he said. He tore it in pieces, slowly, almost methodically, and trampled it beneath his feet. "Come in an hour," he added. "I will sign the purchase papers. Now go."

"I hope you'll forgive me, sir——"

"What's that?" he roared in sudden rage. "'Go!' I said. Man, can't you see I'm dangerous? Go ——"

The door banged behind the retreating Scales, and Archibold Masterman was alone.

So this was the end of all his hopes, his dreams, his ambitious purposes for Arthur! For he did not think of doubting the story Scales had told him. He knew very well that Scales would never have dared to tell the story if it were not true. In a swift moment of agonised apprehension he knew also that there had always been an element of insecurity in those very hopes and purposes on which he had set his heart so eagerly. His son had always stood aloof from him, there had always been some impalpable barrier between them. Yet of late he had been much less conscious of this barrier than he had ever been. Arthur had shown himself willing to meet his father's wishes, and in the Leatham business he had displayed practical faculties for which he had not given him credit. Instinctively Masterman knew that something had happened of which even Scales had not the clue.

If Arthur had been guilty of any of the common indiscretions of youth, he could have forgiven him readily; he would indeed have almost welcomed the opportunity, since it would have destroyed the barrier between them. But this was a different matter. He caught a galling vision of his son as his judge and critic publicly condemning him; no father could condone that. He had been too lenient with him, too generous. He had as good as admitted his superiority, he had even been humble before him. And this was the result—his son forgot all gratitude, all decency even, and denounced him as a scoundrel. The word stung him like a gadfly. His heart began to harden into cold, pitiless anger towards his son.

Yet he must give him a hearing. That was only fair. And he was too proud to seek it. His first instinct was to wire Arthur to come to Brighton at once, but this would be to admit an importance in the situation which he was resolved to ignore. In a day or two the family would be back in London, and then the opportunity would come.

The opportunity came a few days later.

Eagle House was reopened, and the common forms of life were re-established. Dinner was just over. Helen was chattering about the new friends she had made at Brighton, but no one else had anything to say. A heavy restraint rested like a cloud over the family. Mrs. Masterman sat silent as usual, Arthur had not said a word during the meal, Masterman had replied to Helen's ceaseless small talk in curt monosyllables.

Arthur rose quietly to leave the room, when his father's voice arrested him.

"Arthur."

"Yes, father."

"I want to see you."

"Very well, sir."

The words were colourless in themselves, but to one ear in that room they rang like a clash of swords. Mrs. Masterman looked up, her face quivering and eager. Her eyes sought Arthur, and as

he passed her chair she pressed his hand. Arthur understood that silent overture, and was grateful for it.

"Come into the office," said Masterman, rising from the table.

Arthur followed obediently. The hour long foreseen had come, and upon the whole he was glad. He was sick of suspense, sick of the deceit of eating his father's bread with bitter resentment in his heart, but not the less he trembled. There was a strangling pressure in his throat, his heart swelled, a vein in his temple throbbed painfully. He had long rehearsed the hour; he had shaped every phrase that he would use to sharpest meaning; but now he felt unaccountably dumb. And, as if memory herself turned traitor, a sudden picture flashed before him of how, years ago, in some childish illness, his father had sat beside his bed, had taken him upon his knee, and had hushed him to sleep upon his bosom. It passed through his thoughts like a strain of music, like the fragrance of incense from an altar, subtly suggestive of a forgotten sacredness in old affections and of their inalienable claim upon his heart. And with it came that old sense of bigness in his father. Strange how that persisted, but it did. This rough mass of man, this big fighting figure, this man of many combats, did he really understand him? And he replied with the sadness of a great pity that he understood him too well, and he saw the gulf between them.

But there was no such touch of grace or tenderness in the father's mind. He also had rehearsed this hour, but with an extraordinary vehemence of rage, which grew by what it fed on. He had come to conceive himself a too generous and indulgent parent wronged by an ungrateful child. And worse still, he had come to conceive of Arthur as a weakling, who refused the battle of life; a fool, who wanted life arranged on a plan of his own; an attitudinising Pharisee, who held himself aloof from realities, and said to the man who grappled them, "Stand aside, I am holier than thou." Well, he would teach him! He would give him a lesson which he would never forget. His only mistake had been that he had not done it long ago.

The moment the door was closed he wheeled round upon him with a formidable gesture.

"I want a word with you," he said, "and I'll thank you not to interrupt till I'm done. It seems I've got a son that doesn't approve me. Well, I could bear that, but what I can't bear is to have a son that is fool enough to go about saying so. It seems I'm not good enough to be the father of this son. I'm a scoundrel, so he says, and he says it with my meat in his belly and my clothes on his back. My father was a hard man, and beat me, but I never told other folk what I thought of him. I never went whining to other folk and called my father names. I bore what I had to bear, and kept my mouth shut. But it seems I've got a son that must be talking. Well, I'm going to take care that he talks where I can't hear him. I thought to take him into my business—the more fool I. Business! Let me tell you business needs commonsense, which it seems you haven't got. And business needs a still tongue, which you'll never get, to say nothing of some kind of decent faith between partners, which you haven't a notion of. Partners! Why, let me tell you, I'd sooner take the most ignorant boy in my office and make him my partner than you! He'd at least have commonsense enough to know which side his bread's buttered, which you'll never know. So that's at an end, and you know my mind."

"But, father, you are unjust to me. You don't understand."

"What don't I understand?"

"What was in my thought."

"It's not a thing I'm at all anxious to understand," he retorted grimly.

"But you must. I won't be condemned unheard."

"But you condemned me unheard."

This was a shaft that drew blood. It was true, Arthur knew it to be true; he had taken the word of other people against his father.

"There were circumstances——" he began.

"Circumstances? Every fool pleads circumstances," Masterman interrupted. "Give it the right name, you that are so honest, and say lying gossip."

"No, it was not gossip, father."

And thereupon he went over the whole story of the illness of Vickars, his visit to Dr. Leet, and the doctor's angry denunciation of the builder of the Lonsdale Road houses as a scoundrel. He spoke with quiet force, and his father listened in perfect silence, but with averted face.

"Have you done?"

"Yes, father."

"Are you sure you've omitted nothing?"

"No, that is all."

"Well, now listen to me. Dr. Leet may be right or wrong in what he says—I don't know, and I don't care. The only thing I know is that when I built those houses I gave the best value I could at the price. I've told you before that if I am paid a cheap price I give cheap work. All the talking in the world can't upset that position—it's plain business."

"But if people die through the cheap work! O father, you can't mean what you say!"

"A good many people have lived in Lonsdale Road and haven't died. Your doctor is an old woman, telling fairy-tales. But even if he were right, I disclaim responsibility. I give the best value I can for the money; if people won't pay for things, they can't have them. *I* didn't set the standards of business. They existed before me, and they'll exist after me. If I hadn't built those houses, some one else would have built them, and probably worse."

"But the dishonesty of it!" cried Arthur.

"Dishonest? Well, I'll admit that too, if you like. But whose dishonesty? Find me a business in London that isn't dishonest. It's London itself that is dishonest. It insists on having what it hasn't paid for, and won't pay for. It prefers shoddy because it's cheap. It has no right to complain of what it gets."

Arthur listened in appalled silence; before this brutally lucid exposition of what business meant, it seemed as though all his fine ideals of right and justice were so many burst bubbles. For a long moment it was as though he saw the world streaming past him, like a dark torrent thronged with dead faces, upon whose agonised pale lips was the eternal accusation of things as they are.

"Father, it can't be right!" he cried.

"There's a power of things isn't right in this world, as you'll find out some day. And talking won't put 'em right, either. But that brings me to what I wanted to say. It's about the thing you omitted to mention when you told me your story."

"What was that, father?"

"I'll tell you. You can show me what's wrong in my business, and now I'm going to show you something that's wrong in your conduct. If I told you you'd behaved like a sulky young whelp, you'd say I was unjust, wouldn't you? Well, that's just what you've done."

"Father——"

"Don't interrupt. You've had your say, and I mean now to have mine, and be done with it. If you'd come to me when this thing began to trouble you, I'd have talked it over with you frankly. But what did you do? You kept away from me. You did worse. You went about repeating what Dr. Leet said. You hadn't even the common decency to wait until you'd seen me. You hadn't even the gratitude to recollect that I'd done the best I could for you, and was planning to do more. You behaved just like a bad-hearted little boy who goes about letting folks think that his father is his enemy. That's pretty behaviour in a son, isn't it? But it seems that's the kind of son I've got. And for that I don't forgive you. You've made it clear that you and I can't draw together."

"I never meant anything of the kind."

"Never meant! What kind of excuse is that? It's what every slack-baked youth in the office says when he's played the fool. And when a youth can find nothing better to say than that, I fire him. And I'm going to fire you."

"I am entirely in your hands, father. I can see that I was wrong in not coming to you at once. What more can I say?"

"It's too late to say anything. You can't undo wrong by just saying you are wrong. The plain fact is, I can't trust you. There's only one end for it—you must go your way, and I mine."

There was a rough dignity in Masterman as he uttered these words which was profoundly moving. Had he been only angry, violent, or satirical, Arthur could have borne it. He would have been sustained by the justice of his cause. But now that very justice on which he had relied for strength broke beneath him like a rotten prop. He who had been so keen for justice was himself unjust. He saw himself—an implicit parricide, a child who had taken arms against his father. And he saw with a sudden agonised clearness of perception his father's nature, with its strange blending of rugged virtue and unscrupulous craft, its hard, indomitable fibre shot through by soft veins of tenderness, his public traffic with dishonour almost counterbalanced by his stern reticence under the early cruelties he had endured, and his honourable, stoical silence under their brutal ignominies—he saw all this, and he saw himself as weak, hysteric, foolish, crying out for justice in another, but blind to the folly of his own behaviour.

"I am sorry, father," he said in a broken voice.

"That's the first sensible word you've said to-night. Only, you see, it comes too late. You and

me's got to part. Our roads lie different."

"What do you wish me to do, father?"

"I don't know. I want to think things over. You'd better go now."

And then with a sudden savage burst of anger, as Arthur left the room, he shouted after him: "You can take my compliments to Dr. Leet, and tell him he's a confounded interfering fool!"

But there was more of pain than anger in this violent dismissal.

X

THE FAREWELL

The night had fallen upon Eagle House. Arthur sat alone in his bedroom at the open window. A soft wind talked to itself in the branches of the big mulberry tree on the lawn; a few placid stars shone in the blue-black heavens, then the late moon like a yellow fire; a nested sparrow chirped contentedly beneath the eaves; and, like a solemn wash of waves upon a hidden beach, London moaned and murmured through all its vast circumference. Out of the deep night the Spirit of his own Youth arose, and sat beside him.

"Listen to me," said the Spirit. "I bring with me two swords—Faith and Courage. Gird them on."

But London laughed. A soft derision shook the leaves upon the mulberry tree, and the waves upon the hidden beach were scornful.

"You have your life to live. Live it," said the Spirit.

But the stars, like eyes, turned slowly toward him in despairing irony. "How many millions have we heard say that," they whispered, "and each has been overcome in turn, and has sunk in nameless dust."

"You are not as the nameless millions," said the Spirit. "You are yourself, with your own right and power to live."

And at that the heavens moved, and an infinite procession of scarred brows and sad eyes, passed by, and a multitude of lips whispered, "We said that once, but Life was too strong for us."

"Nevertheless, thou canst conquer Life," said the Spirit.

"Nay, Life will conquer thee," replied the legions of the dead. "Let be. Submit. Why strive when all strife is vain?"

And then, out of the deep well of his misery, a bubble of light swam up, and something in his soul cried, "I will not submit! I will gird on the two swords of Faith and Courage. I will conquer Life!"

* * * * *

He had sat so long in absorbed silence that he was unconscious that the door of the room had opened and shut. The noise of the closing door, gentle as it was, roused him like a clap of thunder. He turned at the sound, and saw his mother.

She was robed in white, a white silk shawl was drawn over her head, and in the dim light she looked like a gentle apparition.

"Mother!" he cried.

She came toward him with outstretched arms.

And then, as by a magic touch, he became a little child again. She sat besides him, drew his head down upon her warm bosom, put her arm round his neck, and whispered, "I know." And beneath her gentle caress, thawed as it were by the mere warmth of contact with her, something hard and cold in his own heart dissolved and drained itself away in delicious tears. He wept unrestrainedly, as a child weeps who is in no haste to cease from weeping, lest the consolation for his tears should cease with the tears themselves. And the chief sweetness of it all lay in the silence of their communion. Neither spoke because there was no need of speech. He knew that he was comprehended, and this is the final ecstasy of all communion. From this faithful bosom he had drawn his life; these hands had been the first to touch him; and as they had long ago bound up his childish bruises, so now their very touch drew the hurt out of his pained heart. He drank

life from her again; he was conscious of a warm inflowing flood of strength, of restful power, of quiet blessedness.

When at last he lifted his eyes he saw her transfigured. The frost of silence had melted from her face; he caught in the dim light the sparkle of her eyes, divined rather than discerned the flush of her cheek and the new youth and vehemence of her aspect.

"Mother!" he said again.

She quietly pushed him from her, and gazed deep into his eyes.

"And now let us talk," she whispered.

"You know what has happened?" he said.

"Yes, I know."

"O mother, what am I to do?"

"You must do right, my son."

She was silent for a moment, and he felt her hand tighten as it held his own. Then she said abruptly, "I have my confession to make before I can counsel you."

"Your confession, mother?"

"Can't you see that one is needed? Have you never asked yourself the reason for my silence, my aloofness, and my lack of interest in life? Did you never feel yourself that these things were unnatural, that there must be a reason for them, and that the reason must be tragic? I am going to tell you that reason. I have waited for this hour for years—O my God, what dreary, fearful years! I have watched your growth with terror, Arthur—yes, with terror, because I feared what you might become. Do you know what I feared? God forgive me! I feared you might be like your father. I watched every little seed of thought as it opened in you, fearful of what flower it might bear. I studied every glance, every sign of disposition, every drift of temperament; weighed your words, analysed them endlessly through sleepless nights, gazed into your mind and heart with dread and yearning. No one knows what I suffered when you went to Oxford. There was not a night when I did not lie awake for hours thinking of you. I said, 'Here he will meet the world in all its grossness, and he will succumb to it, as a thousand others have done. He will lose his fineness; he will become like the rest.' Each time when you came home I met you with a kind of terror. I dared scarcely look into your face for fear of the record I might find written there. A mother reads the signs that no one else can read. She knows, as no one else can know, the secret potencies within the nature of her child. And knowing what I did of life, I was terrified; and it was because I feared to look I stood aloof, that I shunned even speech with you, that I have shut myself for years within a wall of ice. Arthur, can you forgive me?"

"O my poor mother! it is I who should ask forgiveness, because I did not understand you better."

She stooped to kiss his forehead, and went on relentlessly: "No; I see now that I was wrong. I denied myself to you. I should have given myself to you all the more because I feared for you. But surely I have been punished—punished by the loss of how many moments like this! And I might have had them! What can ever give me back the kisses I have never kissed?"

"Mother, I will not have you talk like that. I have never doubted that you loved me. And I love you all the more for what you have endured for me. Yes, I knew you suffered—I always understood that."

"I suffered—but I have not yet told you the deepest cause. I must tell you that too."

"I don't want to know, mother. I have no right to know."

"Yes; it is your right to know."

There was anguish in her voice now. The yellow rays of the sinking moon, falling on her face, revealed a white, strained contour, as though flame and marble mingled.

"Listen, Arthur. I must go back through the years to the time when I married your father. I was young, gay, inexperienced, and as lighthearted as a girl could be. Your father had a greatness of his own—never think that I doubt that—and when I first met him I thought him the most wonderful man in all the world. No man was ever better calculated to impress the senses of a young girl. I gave him what was almost adoration, unthinking adoration. Of course I knew that I shared only one part of his life, but what did I care? Women are usually content if men love them; they do not care to ask what kind of life the men they trust live when they are away from them. Of the nature of your father's business life I could hardly form a guess. It was not my concern, and I was happy in my ignorance until—until a day came when I had to know.

"I will spare you details, Arthur. I have said enough when I say that the discovery I made was that your father's business was based on merciless chicanery and fraud. I begged him on my

knees to alter it. I told him that I was willing to live anywhere, to do anything, to suffer any privation, rather than eat dishonest bread. At first he argued with me, as one might with a foolish child. He told me he was no worse than other people—all businesses were like that; he was as good as circumstances permitted; and he laughed at what he called my pretty Puritanism. Then, when he saw that I was in earnest, he grew angry.

"'Haven't I given you everything you possess?' he cried.

"'You shall give me no more,' I answered. 'You have taken from me much more than you gave.'

"'What have I taken?'

"'My belief in you, my belief in life,' I answered. And then, in my hot anger, I told him all that I had learned, and how I abhorred to live softly at the price of cruel suffering in others, and refused to profit by the wages of robbery. He turned pale at that, for he saw that I knew something which went beyond legalised dishonesty.

"From that hour our lives were separate. I never again wore my girlish finery; I ate as little as I could; I lived in solitude. I knew that nothing I could say would influence him. I was condemned to futility. It was in that year of our final quarrel you were born. O my boy, can you understand now with what terror I looked at your little innocent face as it lay upon my bosom? For many, many months I wished you dead for fear of what you might become. I have watched the growth of your father's wealth with far deeper alarm than men have ever watched the coming of poverty. I could discern in it nothing but a threat to you. I have wasted myself in tears and prayers for you, all the time telling myself that prayers were in vain. And now—praise be to the God I have insulted!—I find my prayers miraculously answered. Arthur, my son, you have stood the test. Your soul has overcome the forces of your blood. I live to-night, I live for the first time in twenty years, and God restores to me the years that the locust has eaten."

Her impassioned speech thrilled him like the note of rapture in the voice of a saint. And as she spoke, with that pale moonlight lighting her face like a flame, it was as though the saint's halo rested on her brow; she was the creature of a vision, ineffably pure and tender, clothed in the eternal sacredness of motherhood. He had rested his head upon her bosom while he wept; he knelt now, and laid it on her knees.

"O my son, my son," she cried, "I planned for this long before you were born, but I never thought it would come true. It was for this I chastened myself with tears and fasting, hoping that the life I nourished might be freed from the stain I feared. But I had no faith. I could only bring God my timidity; I could only plead my agony; I had no strength to bring to Him. Yet He heard me, and after all the doubting years He has given me the desire of my heart."

"And I never understood," he whispered.

"But you understand now, and I am repaid in full," she answered. "When I saw you go out with your father to-night into the office, I knew the great battle of your life had come, and something told me you would not fail."

"Yet I did fail, mother. He made me feel that I had wronged him."

"I know. He told me."

"He said I had behaved like a bad-hearted little boy. He humbled me to the dust."

"I know that too. That is why I came to you, my dear. I knew that you would need me."

"I do need you, mother. Everything is dark and perplexed to me. It seems that though I have done right, I have done it in the wrong way."

"The great thing is to have done right. That atones for everything with God, I think."

"But I don't see the next step, mother."

"We never do, till we take it. But I can see it. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"Yes, mother."

"It is the step I did not take—that is why I see it so clearly. You must go away. You must take your life into your own hands. You must begin it all over again. Women cannot do that; men can. Only now and then does a woman claim her own personality, and for her the risk is terrible. But a man can do it; he is meant to do it. That is where he finds his greatness."

"But that will be to leave you, mother. How can I do that, especially now, when I know what your life has been?"

"It is the fate of mothers, dearest, and it is a joyous fate. What matter where you go? I shall still live in you. Don't you see, dear, that my life reaches its height to-night, and through you? I have paid twenty years of loneliness and tears for this hour, and I find the price light. Do you

think I grudge a few more years of separation? And they will not be lonely. I have wept my last tears for you. I have triumphed after all, and nothing can rob me of my triumph."

The supreme self-abnegation of that speech was too great to be understood all at once. It came upon him by degrees; perhaps it would be true to say that it was only after many years, when he stood beside his mother's grave, that he understood its full significance. But enough of that significance was felt even now to fill his soul with wonder. He saw only the first page in the sacred gospel of motherhood, but he caught its meaning. To ask nothing, to give everything, to purchase momentary rapture with the grief of years, to toil without reward, to love and be forgotten, to yield flesh and heart for the nurture of the seeds of life in others, to create for them the unparticipated victory—that was the destiny of motherhood, a thing not less sacred than the love that once endured the Cross for man. To find himself so loved was an overwhelming thought. Beneath its weight he lay breathless, in an ecstasy of marvel.

"Yes, you must go away," she continued. "Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes, mother, tell me."

"Because if you stay in London you will never find your freedom. In London the net is drawn so close that individuality is strangled. London insists upon conformity. It grinds men down by slow attrition to a common likeness. I have thought it all over. It is because there are cities like London, full of avarice and pleasure, that the best men grow into criminals without knowing it. Your father might have been a good man if he had never seen London.

"And there is another reason too. Your father, in spite of his anger, will not give you up. He will try to keep you near him, even though you are not his partner in the business. He will bribe you by his generosity, subdue you by his forgiveness. And he is a strong man, remember, who always gets his own way sooner or later. Don't you know that, Arthur?"

"Do you mean that his very love for me is a peril, mother?"

"Yes, that is what I mean, my dear. You don't know what it means to be subject to the constant pressure of a strong man who loves you. But I know. It is that which has reduced my own life to futility. If I had hated your father, my hatred would have given me strength to leave him. But because I loved him, I learned to distinguish between him and his sin. Oh! there have been many times when I have been almost overcome; times when I have said, 'What is the use of struggle?' It were wiser to submit at once, to accept a strong man's love with gratitude, to ask no questions, to become like the rest. I have never really submitted, but I have compromised, and that has meant futility! But you are different. You have your chance to escape, to build your own life. I don't want your life to be futile, as mine has been. It is the torture of all tortures. Arthur, I think I would rather see you dead!"

"But you, mother, how can I leave you?"

"Have I not told you I wish you to go? Do you think I am so selfish, dear, that I would have you stay with me to your loss? That would be my loss too, and a worse loss than any I have yet endured. My heart says, Stay; but see, I pluck the weakness from my heart. Arthur, I command you to go."

She rose as she spoke. The moon had sunk. The first gray gleam of day was in the sky, and suddenly the earliest sunbeam clothed her. In that fuller light he saw her face irradiated.

"I will go," he said.

She drew him to her, and kissed his brow.

"There speaks my own true son," she said.

For some moments a deep silence filled the room. A bird twittered in the dawn-light; London turned like a weary sleeper on a couch of pain; a wind, fresh from the fountains of the day, blew hopefully, with a hint of free seas and far-off lands.

"Promise me one thing, my son."

"What is that, mother?"

"It is that whatever your life may be, it shall be honest. Rich or poor, defeated or successful, accept no gain by violence, win no pleasure by dishonour. O my son, you know why I say this, you know what I mean by it."

"Yes, I know, mother, and I promise."

"And go at once, my dear. I have foreseen this hour and have provided for it. You will not go without money. You need not be ashamed to take it; it is yours. I have saved it, and for you. And now God bless you, my dear, dear son!"

She withdrew herself from his arms and was gone. The full day shone now, and from its shining summits Arthur heard the bugle cry, calling him to distant lands and new life.

PART TWO

THE AMERICAN MADONNA

XI

NEW YORK

If he had been able to earn his living in any conventional and accepted way, he would not have been on his way to join the S.S. *Saurian* as she lay off the landing-stage at Southampton on that bright September morning. The poor must needs learn a trade, because a trade is necessary to mere existence; but it is the tragedy of the rich and the semi-rich that, when once deprived of the artificial security of riches, they are helpless.

Arthur had plenty of time to do battle with this afflicting thought as he travelled down to Southampton. It accompanied him, like a voice of irony, in the rushing wheels; flashed upon him in the sentinel telegraph posts, each bearing aloft its spark of silent fire; saluted him from a hundred fields where men stood bare-armed beside the loaded wains; mocked him in casual glimpses of firm faces behind the glass of signal-boxes, in hurrying porters at the points of stoppage, in groups of labourers leaning lightly on spade or mattock, as the train thundered past. In all these faces, common as they were, there was a look of proud efficiency. In every sight and sound was the vindication of human toil. These men, each in his several way, had solved the problem of life. Each had learned to do something which the world wanted done. They did the work required of them, undistracted by problems and philosophies; asked no questions concerning the structure of society or the nature of life; were content to add their stone to the cairn, to pass on and be forgotten, and to earn the final simple elegy, "home have gone and ta'en their wages."

But Arthur—what did he know of this primeval life of man, which had gone on from the dawn of the world, unchanged by change of dynasties, by the readjustment of nations, by the birth and death of a hundred intricate philosophies, literatures, reforms, social experiments, social reconstructions? He knew less than the humblest child who followed the reapers in the field, or began the perilous process of existence by earning casual pence in the mine or factory. Like so many youths in an age when all forms of hand-labour have lost their dignity, he had learned a hundred things which lent a false glamour to existence, but not one which supplied its vital needs. He had accumulated accomplishments, but had not developed efficiencies, as though one should adorn and decorate a machine in which the works were lacking.

"Let me reckon up my capital," he thought as the train rushed on; "let me ascertain my authentic stock-in-trade. I have some knowledge of Greek literature and Roman history, but it is probable that in all this train-load of human creatures there are not half a dozen who would attach the least value to my knowledge. I can decipher old French chronicles with fair success; I know enough of music to understand the theory of counterpoint, and enough of poetry to construct a decent sonnet; and, so far as I can see, these are not commodities which possess any marketable value. I have thirty pounds given me by my mother; but if my life depended upon my earning thirty pence, I know no possible method by which I might wrest the most wretched pittance from the world's closed fist. I am, in fact, an incompetent, but through no fault of my own. It seems that I have been elaborately trained to do a great number of things which no one wants done, but not one of the things for which the world makes eager compensation. What were mere pastime to the savage is to me an inaccessible display of effort; left alone with the whole open world for my kingdom, it is doubtful if I could build a house, grow a potato, bake a loaf, or secure the barest means of life. Such is my deplorable condition that it is possible—no, entirely certain, that the poorest emigrant in this rushing freight of men and women would scruple to change places with me. That's a pretty situation for a gentleman of England and an Oxford graduate, isn't it?"

He smiled mirthlessly at the thought. Yet while it humiliated him, youth asserted its right sufficiently to extract from it a certain flavour of exhilaration. He was at all events coming to grips with the reality of living. He had been like a boy swimming upon bladders; the bladders were now removed, and a potent and tremendous sea throbbed beneath him. Since he could depend no more on artificial aids to life, it followed that life must needs develop its own latent forces. There surely must be such forces in himself, an elemental manhood which must justify itself. There recurred to him a saying of Hilary Vickars. They had been discussing one night the infinite and elusive question of wherein lay the wisdom of life, when Vickars had abruptly said,

"Practice is the only teacher. You learn to walk by walking, to swim by swimming, to live by living. The child has no theory about walking: he simply walks, at the price of a thousand tears and bruises. In the same way we must make the experiment of living in order to learn how to live. It is the same with religion. We make the experiment of God before we can find God. The particular folly of men to-day is that they think wisdom comes by talking about wisdom. One honest attempt to do something, however blunderingly, is worth a lifetime of discussion about how it should be done."

"Yet Browning held that the great thing planned was better than the little thing achieved," he had responded.

"Browning also was a talker rather than a doer," Vickars had replied. "He misleads men by the very robustness of his talk into the notion that great dreams can take the place of great actions. Don't let him mislead you. Remember what I say, that the great business of life is to live, not to criticise life."

He remembered the words now, and they acquired new significance as he studied the faces of his comrades. There were four men in the carriage with him, one of them middle-aged, the others mere youths. The middle-aged man had a good, plain, country face, with a fringe of gray whisker; two of the youths were clearly country-bred, the third had the alert look and pallor of the city. The middle-aged man sat in stolid silence, with his big knotted hands folded on his knees; the two country youths watched the flying fields with eagerness; the city youth had produced a zither, on which he was strumming hymn-tunes. "Safe in the arms of Jesus," was the tune he strummed.

"Thank you, sir," said the middle-aged man. "It kind of cheers one up a bit to hear that."

"It's the only tune I really know," said the youth apologetically. "You see, I'm only a beginner."

"My little girl used to sing it. Learned it in a Sunday school at Newcastle. She's dead now."

The simple words had the effect of dissolving the reticence of these chance travellers. They began to talk, and very soon each was relating his history. The two country youths had the least to say. They had heard there was work in America with good pay; in that statement their entire history was comprehended. They had not the least idea of the country they were going to; its very geography was as much a mystery to them as the binomial theorem; they were, in fact, staking everything upon a rumour, and Arthur found their very ignorance at once deplorable and wonderful as an expression of the hopeful courage of the human heart. The London youth was more garrulous, and slightly better informed. It seemed he had a relative who had promised him a place in a small business which he managed near Philadelphia.

"I am a clerk, you know. A man who is a good clerk can always get on in any commercial centre. Except in London. There everything's congested, too many people and not enough work to go round. "England," he pronounced oracularly, "is done. Her day's over."

It seemed the younger men endorsed this verdict with surprising unanimity. Each was a fugitive from an unequal battle. Men could not live on the land, because of high rents and exorbitant taxation; neither could they live in cities, because over-population and excessive competition had reduced wages to starvation point; "England was all very well for the rich—let them live in it as they could—but a poor man couldn't, and that was about the size of it."

"But surely you two could live well enough," said Arthur to the country youths.

"Oh, live—yes," said one; "but what is there at the end of it all? Nothing but the workhouse."

"Yes, that's it," said the middle-aged man slowly, "but there's workhouses in the States, too. Don't you be deceiving of yourselves. England ain't no worse than other places."

"And why are you leaving it then, I'd like to know?" said the London youth.

"Because I've had a trouble, young man."

Arthur's heart warmed toward this unwilling exile. The London youth, with his glib denunciation of England, disgusted him; the two country youths could by no stretch of charity be accounted interesting; but this grave, silent man who had "had a trouble" made an instant appeal to his sympathy. He began to talk with him, and little by little drew his history from him. It seemed his name was Vyse; he was a riveter by trade, had worked in the great shipyards of Clydebank, Newcastle, and Belfast, earning excellent wages, and had acquitted himself with industry and honour. Here was a man who had done something tangible and something that endured. Doubtless at that moment the work of his hands was distributed throughout the world; again and again he had stood silent as the vast hull upon which he had toiled trembled on the slips, took the water, and presently disappeared upon the plains of ocean, there to encounter the strangest diversities of fate, to be buffeted by the vast seas of the North Atlantic or the Horn, to be washed with phosphorescent ripples in the heart of the Pacific or among the coral islands of the South Seas, to fight the ice-floes of the Arctic, or sleep upon the waters of the Amazon. Here, thought Arthur, was the very poetry of labour; these disfigured hands held the threads that

bound the world together, and round this plain man lay an horizon as wide as the farthest seas. Unconsciously the man's trade had imparted certain elements of largeness to his mind. He spoke of himself and his prospects with a certain plain dignity and confidence. He knew his value to the world; east or west, he was a needed man, one for whom the gate of labour stood wide open.

"I'll find work, never fear," he said. "I'm not like these boys," he added, with a glance at the two stolid country youths and the London clerk, who still strummed his one tune upon the zither. "They think they'll find life easier in America, and that's all they go for. I would think shame upon myself to emigrate upon such a hope as that. I don't hold with folk as run down England. It's my belief that them as runs down their own country won't be of much good in any other country. I tell you I'm sorry enough to leave England, and I wouldn't do it, except that I have a trouble."

Presently it came out what his trouble was. His wife was dead, and his only son had taken to evil ways. The man could have borne the loneliness of loss, but when the boy robbed and insulted him, proving finally intractable, he made up his mind to start life afresh in a new land where his disgrace could not follow him.

"There's years of work in me yet," he said. "But I can't work properly without a peaceful mind. And there's another thing, I've got to pay back what Charlie took from other folk. I couldn't lift my head up if I didn't. That's right, isn't it, sir?"

"Mr. Vyse," said Arthur, "I wish all of us could show as clean a bill of health as you."

The train was running into Southampton. Beside the landing-stage lay the great ship, which was to receive within a few minutes so many histories and destinies. The steerage was already packed with emigrants, many of them Italians, distinguishable by their gay-coloured clothing. Arthur found, to his delight, that Vyse was billeted with him in a four-berth cabin; the two other tenants were an old horse-dealer from the Western States, and a clergyman's son, going out upon a remittance. The cabin was deep down in the bowels of the ship, dark and airless. He hastened from it to the deck, and found himself in the midst of many farewell groups. Among them was the clergyman's son, who stood superciliously smoking a cigar, with his face averted from his father, who pressed upon him final kindnesses and counsels. "All right, father. It's time for you to go, you know," he said sullenly. "May God bless you, my boy!" said the old man. "Oh, I daresay," said the boy indifferently; and it was so they parted. Some one began to sing "Home, Sweet Home," a singularly inappropriate song in such an hour. A woman shrieking for her husband and her two children was put ashore; it seemed the baby in her arms was afflicted with sarcoma, and was expelled the ship. The brown water showed a sudden strake of white; a soft pulse throbbed somewhere beneath the decks; the screw had made the first of those countless revolutions that would not cease for three thousand miles; and the great vessel glided out upon the long path toward the setting sun.

There are few schools in the world where character can be studied at closer quarters, and certain lessons of life learned more rapidly, than on ship-board. The mere contiguity of a great variety of human creatures is itself a lesson in the real values of life. It was, for instance, an admirable incentive to self-reliance for Arthur to find himself for the first time in a position where he was despised. This incentive was administered daily by groups of gentlemen in ulsters and ladies in elaborate travelling-costumes, who gathered at the rail of the deck above like spectators in a gallery, and gazed down with evident commiseration, and sometimes with sarcastic comment, on the second class passengers. Occasionally these groups would leave their lofty gallery and make excursions through the inferior quarters, with the dainty airs of personally-conducted parties investigating slums, commenting openly as they went upon the manners of the lower deck in a spirit of condescending and cheerful vulgarity. The London clerk, with his eternal zither, was much remarked, and appeared proud of the attention he attracted. On the other hand, men like Vyse received these visits in stolid silence, not wholly free from resentment and contempt. "That's what money does," he said bitterly one day, when a group of these excursionists had retired; and Arthur, reflecting on the circumstance, came to see that the old workman was right in his diagnosis, and that it was a diagnosis shameful to human nature. For it was clear that these people owed their eminence neither to manners nor accomplishments; in solid worth and dignity of character Vyse would have been judged their superior in any equitable court; and, taken man for man, it was merely the better coat and not the better breeding that distinguished the upper from the lower deck.

When it came to kindness, which is the flower of all gentility, the virtues of the lower deck were even more strikingly apparent. On the fourth day out stormy weather was encountered; black, foamless seas rolled in perpetual assault from the north-west; there was an hour when the great ship made but five miles; word went round that the lifeboats were cleared and victualled; and the constant noise of hammers audible in the pauses of the tempest was significant of some damage in the iron walls that lay between them and death. It was then that, amid fear and dreadful discomfort, the virtues of the lower deck displayed themselves. Vyse nursed a sick child with the tenderness of a woman; the cattle-dealer spent the day in telling stories, very far from decorous, it must be admitted, to a group of half-frightened lads, who forgot their fears in their laughter; even the London clerk shone conspicuous with his zither and his eternal "Safe in the arms of Jesus." In the dark and narrow alley-ways, pounded by the threshing seas, whose fearful detonations seemed to fill the air with thunder, the clerk found his mission, and trembling voices sang with pathetic desire of conviction the words that express a faith which lifts the soul beyond the terrors of destruction.

"That is what money does," Vyse had said, and the reflection was inevitable that it did very little after all to benefit character, and not a little to emasculate or degrade it. The people with whom Arthur travelled had no monopoly of virtue, as he was bound to admit; the London clerk in his ordinary mood was a creature at once slight and vain, the horse-dealer was coarse; and so he might have gone through the whole list of his acquaintances, remarking plentiful defect in each. But the qualities were more obvious than the defects. There was a general spirit of helpfulness and kindness; many had grievous accusations, only too authentic, to make against the land from which they fled, but these accusations were rarely made in a spirit of bitterness or envy; all had the cardinal grace of courage, and were willing to believe that at the end of a long road of failure and defeat victory awaited them. It was this unquenchable buoyancy of hope in the crowd of fugitives from an unequal battle which struck Arthur as entirely wonderful and, indeed, heroic. There was not one of them unacquainted with failure in some extreme form; not one who had not heard the bugles of retreat on some disastrous field; yet each, after a brief inspection of the ruined architecture of his life, was ready to begin building anew, each believed himself competent for the task, and each had that rarest form of courage which forgets the past. For one reared as he had been, it was a revelation to be made aware of such virtues lying at the base of very ordinary characters, and a revelation for which he thanked God with devout gratitude. It amounted almost to a discovery of human nature. He had known hitherto little more than a human coterie; he had lived in artificial conditions; and he knew the kind of lives that such conditions bred. Now, for the first time, he touched the primeval; he had joined the company of those whose sole defence and worth lay in their authentic manhood, and he dimly saw that what had seemed a fall in life had been an ascent, for the truly ignoble lay, not below him, but above him. Thus insensibly he drew courage from the fortitude of his companions, and caught from them that spirit of adventure which "street-born" men never know—the spirit which has flung forth the Anglo-Saxon race into every quarter of the globe, and has made them the world's great empire-builders.

On the seventh day out the Atlantic storm-belt, with its miserable monotony of vexed and gloomy seas, was left behind. For a wonder there was no fog upon the Banks; the seas were of an indescribable hue of limpid turquoise, the ship seemed to glide across a far-glimmering floor, and the wind had a tonic sweetness and renewing potency. The blood sang in the veins, the eye took a deeper colour, and among all the fugitives of the lower deck there was not one who did not move with a brisker step. Laughter ran along the deck; a child beating a tin cup with a spoon was the object of general admiration; languid faces smiled, and among the women a fresh ribbon on the hair or a glance of innocent coquettishness in the eye marked the advent of a new zest in life.

Arthur stood against a bulk-head, watching with delighted eyes the bright elusive colours of the sea, varying from the clearest bottle-green where the ship's bulk clove the waters to the deepest purple where a cloud drove its shadow like a chariot across the liquid plain. Vyse stood beside him, his rugged face reddened by the fresh wind.

"Looks cheerful, doesn't it?" he remarked. "The sea somehow makes a man think better of himself."

"Yes," said Arthur. "I feel that too. Life seems larger."

"That reminds me of something I wish to say to you," said Vyse. "You and me's been good friends upon the voyage, and if you won't be offended, I'd like to ask you a question."

"You won't offend me. What is it?"

"I've wondered what you might be going to do when you reached New York."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Vyse, I don't know. I have to begin a new life, but I don't in the least know how."

"I guessed something of the sort. Well, what I wanted to say was this. Men as is Englishmen and has travelled together like you and me should stick together, shouldn't they? Now, I'm only a plain man, and you're a gentleman, but maybe I might help you a bit. I'd like to give you my address. A pal of mine gave it me. And if ever you don't know where to go, come to me, and you'll be kindly welcome."

"I believe I shall," said Arthur simply. "And I thank you from my heart."

The kindness of Vyse touched him more deeply than he could say. It was another evidence of that fine courtesy which exists in all simple natures, and he took it as a fresh assurance of that worth of human nature itself which he had discovered on the voyage.

Two days later Fire Island was passed, the long flat shore of Long Island lay like a yellow line drawn across the water, and in the afternoon the screw ceased from its long labour, and the ship lay at rest off Sandy Hook. The harbour with its green bluffs, studded with lawns and white verandahed houses, opened up; the tremendous battlements of New York bulked against the distant skyline; and in the foreground, like a colossal watcher of the gate, strode the Statue of Liberty.

"Look," said Vyse, nudging Arthur's arm and pointing to the bows, where a multitude of emigrants stood at gaze.

And in truth it was a scene not easily forgotten. Yellow-haired Scandinavians, with something of the old Viking stature and clear resoluteness of eye, watched the unfolding scene; Hungarians in embroidered jackets gathered in a separate group; Danes, Germans, and Russians were there, all silent with an emotion which might have been apprehension or anticipation; but in the foreground, the unconscious centre of all eyes, knelt a group of Italian men and women. They were crossing themselves devoutly, their ecstatic eyes raised to the gigantic figure of Liberty with her lamp.

"What are they doing?" said Arthur, and he found himself whispering as though he waited in some dim cathedral for the elevation of the Host.

"They call that there Statue of Liberty the American Madonna, so they tell me," said Vyse.

The reply thrilled him as the whisper of the oracle might have thrilled the worshippers long since beneath the oaks of Dodona. The American Madonna, the calm-faced Mother standing at the gates of empire with impartial welcome, her uplifted torch lighting her new-found children to the path of novel destinies—there was a sacramental virtue in the thought, and it shone through his mind like a heavenly omen.

"Ave Madonna!" cried the kneeling group, each with eyes fixed upon that lofty brow of bronze, as if they expected instantly the face to quicken with a human tenderness, the head to stoop in condescending grace.

Perhaps it did. In that clear and sunny air the face appeared to smile, and from the outstretched hand there came to each humble suppliant the veritable grace of hope.

And then the moment passed; the ship moved on; from a Titanic structure, pierced with many windows, a babel of voices clashed upon the still air, and in another half hour the ship, her long voyage done, swung slowly to her berth.

XII

MR. WILBUR MEREDITH LEGION

Were a man never so lonely, there is something in a first introduction to a strange city which communicates a spirit of elation. The mere strangeness of what he sees, the novel aspect of things, the touch of the original and unexpected in the buildings, the conformation of the streets, the faces of the hurrying throngs—this new note of life, everywhere audible, is itself so surprising and absorbing that the mind is insensibly withdrawn from the contemplation of private griefs and memories. A more exact examination may reveal the depressing fact that a new world is new alone in name; that men carry their conventions with them wheresoever they travel, and may reproduce upon the loneliest rock of the Pacific or in the heart of the Sahara the complete social counterpart of those narrower forms of civilisation which they might be supposed to have renounced for ever. But even so, it still remains true that the thing which seems new is really new to us, for we live by our sensations as much as by our knowledge. He who cannot yield himself to this illusion of the senses will certainly deny himself the finer pleasures of existence; he will march across the world with the stiff air of the pedant, who sacrifices poetry to precision, declining more and more into a bloomless frugality of life, until at last not alone the outer world but the inner places of his own heart will become arid as a desert.

Arthur was much too young to reject the illusion of the senses, and too essentially a poet to desire to do so. He had his own private griefs, and they were by no means a negligible burden. In the noisy darkness of the long nights at sea, when the clanging of the piston kept him wakeful, he had again and again reviewed these griefs with a self-torturing persistence. Would he ever see his mother again?—and sometimes out of the heart of the black night a voice told him he would not. Would that exquisite but slender bond that held him to Elizabeth withstand the strain of a dateless separation? Would he find the things he sought, have strength to build the life he had had the vision to design, justify himself before the world? These and many cognate thoughts oppressed him; they wrote their abrupt interrogations on the curtain of the night, until he hid his face from them, and could have wept for weakness. But in spite of these oppressions, his spirit had gained both in hope and fortitude upon the voyage. He had begun to find himself blunderingly, as all men must at first, yet with some sincerity and real truth of vision. Two things he had discovered in himself which appeared to him a sufficient base for life, at once a programme and a creed—the one was the fixed determination to be content only with the best kind of life, the other was a faith in the Guiding Hand. From this creed he drew both his inspiration and his courage, and the more he dwelt upon it the more his heart leaped to meet the future, and the less did he regret the dissolution of the past.

And so that first vision of the New World thrilled him with a vague but joyous wonder. New York impressed him as the most superb of all examples of man's will to live. Here, upon a narrow

strip of rock, the most ill-fitted spot in all the world for a city metropolitan, man had compelled nature to his purpose; he had disregarded her intention and had triumphed over it; he had bridged the very seas with ropes of steel, carried his means of locomotion into the upper air, and, unable wholly to escape the limitation of the jealous earth, had invaded the sky with his monstrous fortresses of steel and masonry. The very absence of grace, suavity, dignity in all he saw was itself impressive. Brutal as it was, yet was it not also the assertion of a strength which made for its object with a kind of elemental directness, not only scorning obstacles, but defying in its course the most august conventions of the centuries? The will to live—that was the legend flaunted by invisible banners on each sky-daring tower; the city hummed and sang with its crude music; it was written on every face he met in lines of grim endeavour. And it was a needed lesson for such as he. It struck him like a buffet from a strong hand, roused him like a challenge. To the perpetual oncoming hosts of invaders from an older world, New York spoke its iron gospel, "Man is unconquerable, if he have the will to conquer." And the oncoming host received that stern gospel with acclamation as indeed good news—not the highest gospel, nor the sweetest, but assuredly a needed gospel.

Certainly his situation called for both fortitude and hopefulness, for it was highly precarious. He had left London in such haste that he had had no time to make any plans for the future; he had simply acted on an imperative instinct of the soul to assert its rights, to seize upon immediate freedom. A voice within him had whispered, "Now or never," and in a sudden access of resolution he had broken his bonds. He did not regret its precipitation, but he had begun to perceive its consequences.

The only persons to whom he had confided his intention were Hilary Vickars and Mrs. Bundy. Immediately after the midnight interview with his mother he had gone to Vickars, who listened to his story in grave silence. How every detail of that hour passed with Hilary Vickars stood out in his memory! He could see the face of Vickars, pale and eager, as it bent toward him; he remembered how he noted that the lock of hair that fell across his forehead was newly streaked with gray, and how the veins in the long thin hands showed every intricate reticulation. He recollected how he watched a little patch of sunlight as it crept across the floor, saying to himself with a kind of childish irrelevance, "When it touches the wainscot, I must go." And what length of years or gulfs of immense vicissitude could obliterate the face of Elizabeth, as he saw it through that difficult hour—so pale, so sweet, so intense, her lips parted in surprise, her eyes signalling to him messages of faith and constancy?

"You are doing right," said Vickars, and he had laid the long, blue-veined hand upon his head in benediction; and then Elizabeth had taken Arthur's hand in hers, and kissed it softly, and held it for a moment to her bosom—and both acts had been done so solemnly that they seemed like sacred rites in a religious ceremony.

When he rose to go—it was in the exact moment when the patch of sunlight touched the wainscot—Vickars had offered him some practical advice.

"I wish I could help you," he said. "Let me see, it's New York you're going to, isn't it?"

"Yes—New York."

"Well, there's a man there I know slightly—I met him once over a negotiation for book rights in the States. He had an odd name—probably that's why I remember him—Wilbur Meredith Legion, and he seemed to be a decent fellow. It won't do you any harm to have an introduction to him."

From a pigeon-hole in his desk Vickars produced a card: "Mr. Wilbur Meredith Legion, Vermont Building, Broadway, New York. Literary and Press Agent."

"You'll find him interesting, at all events," said Vickars, "and he may be able to put you in the way of using your pen."

From Lonsdale Road Arthur had gone to Mrs. Bundy's. That redoubtable woman at once rose to the occasion, and indulged herself in a flight of prophecy which would have done credit to the wildest programmes of Mr. Bundy.

"You'll make your fortune before you're thirty," she exclaimed. "Think of Carnegie."

And thereupon she poured forth a stream of exhilarating and incorrect information, which sounded strangely like excerpts from Bundy's prospectuses, so that it seemed as though a conjurer flung a dozen golden balls of sudden wealth into the air, and kept them flashing and gyrating for some seconds with amazing ingenuity.

"Stop!—stop!" said Arthur, laughing.

"Not a bit of it," she replied. "I only wish you could meet Bundy. He'd be the man to help you."

"Where is Mr. Bundy just now?"

"The last I heard he was in Texas. He was negotiating the purchase of forty thousand acres of

land which he says is the finest in the world. Let me see—why, to be sure, he said he'd be in New York before Christmas. He always stops at the Astor House. No doubt you'll find him there."

"I will certainly look for him," said Arthur.

"Do. If there's any man can make your fortune, it's Bundy." And then, with unremarked inconsistency, she added, "I wish I could give you something, my dear, but it's low water with us just now. Stop, though; here's something that may be useful." After rummaging in a cupboard she produced a small flat bottle, which contained something which bore a strong resemblance to furniture polish. "It's rum and butter, my dear, and let me tell you it's a splendid remedy for sore throat. Those ships are cold, draughty places, and maybe you'll be glad of it. Bundy always takes it with him on a journey. Well, my dear, let an old woman kiss you, and wish you well," whereupon the motherly creature flung her arms round his neck and kissed him heartily. The two Bundy boys, coming in at that moment from the back garden, where they had spent an exhilarating hour in lassoing a collie dog, stared round-eyed at this proceeding, the younger of the two remarking with an air of solemn impudence, "I'll tell father"—whereupon Mrs. Bundy had chased them out of the kitchen with many threats, and it was thus, in a gust of laughter, he had taken leave of his old friend. She had stood at her door till the last moment when he disappeared down the road, waving her hand energetically, and in spite of all that was ridiculous in the scene, Arthur felt a real and deep sadness when she faded from his view.

An introduction to a dubious person called Legion, the frail possibility of a rendezvous with Bundy, and a few pounds in his pocket—it must be admitted this was not an exorbitant equipment for the conquest of a new world; but to this exiguous capital there must be added something not readily assessed—the high and hopeful spirit of liberated youth. He had escaped the strangling grip of circumstance; he was free, and the blood moved in his veins with a novel speed and nimbleness; he was at last upon the world's open road.

His first act was to secure a room at the old Astor House, and make inquiries for Mr. Bundy. He addressed these inquiries to a clerk who was so busily absorbed in the task of picking his teeth with a wooden toothpick that he appeared to resent interruption. When Arthur had twice repeated his question, this youth answered curtly that he didn't know, and turned his back upon him.

"Pardon me, but I have a particular reason for asking. If you are too busy to examine the register, please let me."

The clerk pushed a formidable volume toward him, and went on picking his teeth. There was no Bundy in the long list of recent entries, but there was a wonderful array of places, with strange, exotic names, such as Saratoga, Macon, Fond du Lac, Pueblo, and a hundred others that were musical with old-world memories. Upon that sordid page they shone like gems; they exhaled a perfume of secular romance; Memphis and Carthagena, Syracuse, Ithaca, and Rome, Valparaiso and Paris, jostled each other in the wildest incongruity, as if each bore witness to some ancient mode of life which had helped to form the strange amalgam which called itself American. He was so delighted with this glittering tournament of words that at length the clerk, remarking his interest, condescended to inquire, "Found it?"

"Mr. Bundy? No; he doesn't appear to be here."

"What like was he?"

"An Englishman. A small man, very quick and active; interested in mines, I think."

"Well, why didn't you say he was interested in mines, any way? Then I should have known. He was here six months ago, stayed a week, private lunch every day in Parlour A, floating a syndicate for Texas land. I know him. Wanted me to take shares. Said he'd be back in a month. Hasn't come. Guess he's bust."

"He's expected at Christmas, isn't he?"

"Can't say. If you make out to know Mr. Bundy, like you say, you'd know that it's his pecooliarity not to answer to anybody's expectations. He's a live man, is Bundy. Yes, sir, for a Britisher he's the liveliest man I know."

With this unsolicited testimonial to the liveliness of Mr. Bundy he had to be content.

"I'll let you know when he comes," said the clerk more graciously. "I'll see you don't miss him."

"You don't know his address, do you?"

"Why, let me see. Yes, he left an address. Here it is—Bundy, Curtis House, Oklahoma City; but, you know, he won't be there. You can write and try; the Oklahoma people will trace him for you."

"Thank you, I will do so," said Arthur, and withdrew to his bedroom, where he spent an interested half-hour in studying the uses of a large coil of rope which was conspicuously

displayed near the window, together with minute directions as to what to do in case of fire. He fell asleep that night with the directions in case of fire, and the exotic names he had read, and the remembered rhythm of the steamer piston all singing together in his mind, in an infinite succession of strophes, at the end of which clashed like a cymbal the words Bundy and Oklahoma.

The next morning he sought the office of Mr. Wilbur Meredith Legion. He was whirled rapidly in an elevator to the eleventh floor of a populous and narrow building. When, after some explanations made to an indifferent office-boy, whose jaws appeared to be afflicted with a curious rotary motion, due, as he afterwards discovered, to the mastication of chewing-gum, he was ushered into the presence of the agent. Mr. Legion proved to be a stout, elderly man, clean-shaved, with a high, benevolent forehead, and a most remarkable squint. He had quite a patriarchal air, a manner that might be termed diaconal, and a suave and insinuating voice.

"Ah! you come from my friend, my dear friend, Vickars. A most remarkable man!" But when Arthur mentioned Vickars' latest book, he observed that Mr. Wilbur Legion did not appear to have heard of it.

"We handle such an immense quantity of stuff," he said apologetically. "The world's greatest authors come to us. They are beginning to find out what we can do for them commercially. Have you ever heard of Sampson E. Dodge?"

Arthur confessed his ignorance.

"One of our brightest young men, sir. A man destined to take rank with our greatest writers. You must have seen his story, *The Perambulator with a Thousand Wheels*. It has sold a hundred thousand. Two years ago he was a clerk in a dry goods store, and to-day he is among the most popular of our American authors. You've not heard of him? Well, you are to be excused, sir. We have not yet operated in Great Britain. Great Britain appears to have a prejudice against our great writers. Wilbur M. Legion means to wake Great Britain up, sir. This state of wilful ignorance cannot exist much longer. Great Britain cannot afford, I say, to be ignorant of the work of Mr. Sampson E. Dodge."

"I see that I, as well as Great Britain, have a good deal to learn," said Arthur, with quiet irony.

"You have, indeed. Not to know Mr. Sampson E. Dodge is to argue yourself unknown, as some one on your side of the water once said—Browning, wasn't it?"

"Not Browning, I think."

"Well, it's true just the same. I suppose you don't know our new poets either, do you? Mrs. Mary Bonner Slocum, for example. I am happy to say that I operate all her poetry for her. She writes a poem a day, sometimes three or four, and I place them for her in the magazines and journals of the country. Her *Ode to Washington* has been generally admired. Her little talks with women on the management of the home and the baby are even more popular than her poems. When I first knew her, she was earning nothing, sir; it is a proud reflection that to-day, through my efforts, her income is at least ten thousand dollars a year."

Mr. Legion was evidently prepared to indulge himself at length in personal reminiscences. In the course of ten minutes he had given sufficient biographies of his leading patrons, including not only the details of their earnings, but many particulars of their private lives—such as the fact that Mr. Sampson E. Dodge was not always strictly sober, and Mrs. Mary Bonner Slocum had been twice divorced. And with that amiable American frankness which stands in such marked contrast to the reticence of the British man of business, Mr. Legion proceeded to declare the amount of his own earnings, the number of his children, his fatherly hopes for Ulysses E. Legion, "a smart boy, sir," who was doing well at the high school, together with some account of how he first met Mrs. Legion, and his intentions to take his entire family to Europe, at an early date. He concluded by asking Arthur to lunch with him, and pressed on his notice a box of cigars (the cost of which he named), and a thick handbook, adorned with many portraits, which explained and justified the world-wide operations of Mr. Wilbur M. Legion.

Mr. Legion took him to a kind of club which had its quarters in the top storey of a lofty building, from which a marvellous view of New York was obtained. During the process of lunch, which was excellent, Mr. Legion drew Arthur's attention to a large number of persons, all of whom were described as among the "smartest" men in New York. Mr. Legion appeared to know all about them, and Arthur found himself listening to a vast amount of recondite information concerning their upbringing, their early struggles, their matrimonial adventures or misadventures, and above all, the amount of dollars which each was supposed to possess.

"That is the celebrated Stamford Parker, sir,"—indicating a spare, clean-shaved man. "Sure now, you must have heard of him? What? Not heard of him? The greatest magazine proprietor in America, sir. Raised in Vermont, worked on a farm, telegraph operator at Bangor, Maine, bust twice, made good at last, income half a million, his wife a lovely woman. Ah! he sees me; I think he is coming over to speak to me."

The great man strolled across the room, smoking his cigar, and Arthur was effusively introduced to him as a bright young Englishman, fresh from Oxford, and acquainted with all the

leading English authors of the day.

"Well, not quite all," said Arthur, with a smile.

The great man received his demur without surprise. When he had returned to his table, Legion said, with a shake of his patriarchal head, "Now, you shouldn't have said that, you know."

"Said what?"

"That you didn't know all your leading authors."

"But I don't know them."

"Well, you needn't have said so. Didn't you see how Parker froze at once? But you don't understand our American way, so you must be excused."

"And what is the American way?"

"Always go a little beyond the truth, but on no account below it—people expect it of you. Leave them to make their discount."

This principle, so unblushingly announced, served Mr. Legion for a text, on which he discanted for some minutes, at the end of which discourse Arthur began to acquire some insight into the meaning of the word "bunkum," and was in a position to apply the method of discount to Mr. Legion's own artless superlatives concerning his business methods and success in life.

Mr. Legion was genial, affable, cordial, in a way which no Englishman could have attained toward an entire stranger, and Arthur was disposed to set a high value on these qualities. Nevertheless, he could not but remark that the agent appeared anxious to evade any practical obligations imposed on him by Vickars's letter of introduction. He drew a picture, almost comic in its gross inaccuracy, as Arthur afterwards discovered, of the extreme ease with which fortunes were made in America, and especially by the pen. Magazine writers lived in sumptuous hotels, and successful novelists built for themselves elaborate palaces. It was the age of young men. A man who had not made a reputation at thirty was a "Has-been." The old method of slowly acquired and slowly widening reputation was obsolete. This was the day of literary booms.

"And after the boom the boomerang!" interjected Arthur.

"Very good—very good indeed. I always thought you Britishers had no sense of humour. It's a general belief in the States. But that's quite a smart saying. Sampson E. Dodge might have said it."

Arthur ought to have blushed at this high praise, but instead, he stolidly explained his epigram, and observed further that no literary man who respected himself would connive in a boom. "Hilary Vickars, for example."

"And that's just where Vickars makes his mistake," said Legion. "And what's the result? He isn't known."

"But he has done excellent work."

"You make me tired," answered Legion. "What's the good of doing excellent work if no one reads it? The public doesn't know good work from bad. Some one's got to tell them. An author must be written up. And let me tell you another thing—the best writing in the world won't attract so much attention as half a dozen spicy paragraphs about the writer. Do you know how *The Perambulator of a Thousand Wheels* became so popular?"

"Not having seen the book, it can't be supposed I do."

"Well, I'll tell you. I killed the author three times before his book came out."

"You did what?" asked Arthur, with a shout of laughter.

"Killed him, sir. Once he perished on the Matterhorn in a snow-storm. The next time he was killed in a railway accident in Canada. The last time he was lost in a wreck in the South Sea Islands. By this time every one was talking of him. I received no fewer than four hundred press cuttings the last time headed, 'A Famous Author Lost at Sea.' The name of Sampson E. Dodge became as famous as the President's. Of course, when his book came out every one rushed for it."

"And was he really in Switzerland, Canada, or the South Seas?"

"Certainly not. As safe as you are. Writing his book at a farmhouse in Vermont."

"Do you often practise this method, Mr. Legion?"

"Well, it must be applied judiciously, of course. Dodge writes adventure novels, so I give him adventures. But for quieter authors, you must invent something else. It used to be appendicitis, but that's nearly played out. Total loss of memory through overwork used to take, but I found that

the authors objected to it. Double pneumonia in a lonely shack among the mountains, where he had gone to obtain local colour for his new novel, answers as well as anything else. And that reminds me—didn't you say Vickars had been ill?"

"Yes, he nearly died. Typhoid fever from bad drains."

"And didn't anybody write it up?"

"Not that I ever heard of."

"My! what a blunder! And with a new book coming out, too. I wish I could have had the handling of that 'story.'"

"I don't think Vickars would have liked that."

"No, I suppose not. You Britishers seem to be afraid of publicity. It almost amounts to a disease."

"We are getting over it by degrees. I assure you there are British authors who are quite reconciled to the immodesty of newspaper puffs. But not men like Vickars. He is one of those who stand in proud silence, and is content to wait for his recognition."

"Well, I guess he'll have to wait till there's skating in Hades. The standing apart business is all very well if you've got the dollars and don't care; but if you haven't, it means starvation." He rose from the table, and said, "Shall we go?"

"Well, there's one thing I want to ask you first," said Arthur, "and as you haven't mentioned it, it seems I must. I want to know if you can put me in the way of earning my living in New York?"

"But, my dear sir, I thought you were just travelling through for pleasure."

"I was afraid that you were under that misconception, and I apologise for not undeceiving you sooner. The plain truth is, I have a very little money in my pocket, no particular experience of life, and my bread to earn."

"Dear me!—dear me! That sounds serious."

"It may easily become so."

The older man looked gravely sympathetic. Suddenly, however, he brightened up, as though he had discovered the solution of the whole problem.

"Well, young man, don't be alarmed," he cried. "Remember that you've come to the land of the free and the home of the brave. There are no feudal distinctions to keep you down here, as in your own unhappy country. This great and glorious Republic allows free play to individual exertions. Sir, America bids you rise, and all you have to do is to go out—and Rise!"

"It would be a good deal more to the purpose if you could tell me how and in what way to begin this process of rising."

"Ah! that's another matter. I must think that over. Come to me again in a day or two. And remember my advice to you is, Go out and Rise!"

He went out, too much amused with Legion's valediction to criticise the man very strictly. It was not until he lay a-bed that night, thinking over the curious adventures of the day, that a strong conviction seized him that Mr. Wilbur Meredith Legion was a windbag.

XIII

ADVENTURES OF AN INCOMPETENT

When a youth is thoroughly adrift in a strange city, with no better equipment than a large stock of unapplied aptitudes, he is likely to make many interesting discoveries concerning the real nature of life, the chief of which is that there is no way of living that has not a good deal more in it than meets the eye. By what adroit use of opportunity is the least foothold secured in this crowded world, by what intrigues and stratagems, comparable only with the art which governs battlefields, and less than that art only in the range of its effects! By what quickness of resource, adaptability to circumstance, infinite, weariless plotting and manoeuvering, were only so small a thing achieved as to sell a card of buttons with success! Around this exiled youth jostled the rude, vigorous world of New York, a multitude of men and women each battling toward a certain goal, and not one of whom was not better equipped to win the race than himself.

Certain phrases used by this jostling crowd struck upon his ear continuously, such as "to make good," "to deliver the goods." They implied that nothing was valued in New York save the sort of brute force that trampled its way into attention.

"He has made good, sir," was Legion's verdict on that eminent writer, Mr. Sampson E. Dodge, and the phrase was uttered with an accent of reverence which was undoubtedly sincere.

With Legion ideals and intentions counted for nothing; culture and scholarship were worthless commodities; the one thing he could appreciate was concrete success—"to make good."

The same spirit met Arthur everywhere. He found the newspapers pouring adulation at the feet of men against whom every kind of crime might be alleged; but they had "made good," and therefore were unassailable. He remarked a cheerful disregard of morals, which was less disrespect than light-hearted ignorance; and the most curious thing of all was that the very men who talked as though honesty, faith, and trust did not exist were themselves men of amiable virtues. He found himself quickly and quietly appraised; a keen eye ran over him, reading his deficiencies, and his doom was pronounced with a smile. An insulting word would have been less difficult to bear than that disconcerting smile; but these arbiters of his destiny never failed in courtesy, nor in the sort of kindness which finds its outlet in easy generosity. They would invite him to lunch, introduce him to clubs, allow him to believe that he had made real progress in their friendship and esteem; but when it came to the enunciation of some plan by which he might earn his bread, they became strangely silent. They "gave him a good time," to use another cheerful American phrase—to do so appeared to be part of a definite system of international courtesy; but they were at no pains to conceal their sense that he was a virtual incompetent.

Again and again, in the still hours of the morning, he recounted the rebuffs and misadventures of the previous day with wonder and misgiving. The irony of his position was laughable, if it had not been so serious. He had been told by the eloquent Legion to go out and rise; and certainly it appeared, by the light of conspicuous examples, that he was in a land where multitudes of men had risen from the lowliest to the loftiest positions with a singular celerity. Yet no one believed him capable of rising, nor indeed did he himself venture to assert it with any vigour of conviction. And in such moments there came to him the recollection of his father. For the first time he realised with some approach to adequacy the vital elements in his father's character. He told himself that had his father been flung suddenly into the streaming tides of New York, he would not have lived through twenty-four hours without getting his feet securely planted on the rung of some ladder that led to eminence. And then, with a sudden heat of resolution, he would tell himself that he was his father's son, and he would rise and go forth once more to hammer on the barred gates of chance.

"To-day I will not fail," he would cry.

And when the day closed, recording nothing but defeat, he would still cry, "To-morrow I must succeed," and endeavour to believe it.

The real trouble was that he was assaulting the stern citadel of life with weapons not only imperfect, but nearly useless. He had been taught many things, but not the one thing needful; and he now perceived with humiliation that the humblest human creature who could work a typewriter, keep accounts, hew a stone, or shape a beam, was more efficient than he to wrest a living from the world. This discovery was the first real lesson he had ever learned from life. And it said much for his character, that he accepted it without resentment, without the bitterness and sulkiness of injured pride.

A fortnight after his first interview with Legion, he returned to the office of the literary agent, resolved to act upon his discovery.

The great man received him with friendliness, for it was one of his principles never to offend any one who might prove a valuable client at some future date.

"Ah! so you've come back," he began. "You've been studying our remarkable city, eh? And you've met some of our most remarkable men, no doubt?"

"I've certainly met some remarkable men."

"Yes, sir. New York has more remarkable men to the acre than any other city in the world. Genius has made its abode in Manhattan. 'Westward the course of Empire'—you know the rest. Paris and London must go down—they are old. New York will rule the world. Don't you think so?"

"I am afraid I have not thought upon the subject at all."

"No? Well, no doubt you've been absorbing the atmosphere of our wonderful city. That's a very wise step, for a novelist. Sampson E. Dodge always insisted on atmosphere. Have you written anything yet, any little thing that I can place for you?"

"I have written nothing, and I think I ought to tell you that I am not a novelist."

"Not a novelist! But, my dear sir, why then did your friend Vickars send you to me?"

"I suppose he did it out of consideration for me, Mr. Legion. Will you allow me to say that it is time we understood one another. I am not a novelist, not even a writer in your sense of the term. I am a young man with an excellent education, a good university degree, and a wide assortment of unmarketable knowledge. I believe that exhausts the statement of my assets, unless I add good health and a strong desire to live as honestly as I can. Upon the debit side of the account I must ask you to enter a total ignorance of business, which has been so carefully cultivated that it approaches the dignity of a fine art. I may further add that toward what is generally understood by business I entertain an invincible repugnance."

"Dear me!" interrupted Legion, "that is a most extraordinary statement."

"It has, at least, the merit of truth."

"And are there many young men like yourself in the Old Country, sir?"

"They are an innumerable army, which is constantly recruited by the credulous pride of parents who prefer accomplishments to efficiency. They call the process making their sons gentlemen."

"And what becomes of them?"

"Those who have money spend a vacuous existence in the pursuit of strenuous idleness; those who have no money and some remains of self-respect occasionally emigrate, as I have done. And that brings me to my point, Mr. Legion. I have been long enough in your remarkable city to understand that there is a welcome for the man who can do things, and for no one else. I don't flatter myself that I can do anything of much account, but I am willing to work, and I believe I am willing to learn. To be very plain, I need employment, and I ask you to give it me."

"Well, I like your honesty," said Legion. "But I think better of you than you do of yourself. A man of your splendid education must be able to write. Now, I'll tell you what—you go away and write me a descriptive sketch of your friend Vickars, and if it's the right kind of stuff I'll use it in the papers."

This seemed a feasible project at least. He went away and wrote the essay upon Vickars, and because he wrote in a spirit of genuine love and admiration, he wrote well.

On the following Sunday Legion invited him to his house in New Jersey, where he had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of the Legion family. His most immediate impression was of a Legion shorn of his beams, so to speak: no longer the arbiter of fame for struggling authors, but a singularly humble individual, whose authority in his own household was dubious and disputed. The real ruler of the household appeared to be that exceedingly smart boy, Ulysses E. Legion, whose self-confidence would have done credit to an aged diplomat whose voice had for half a century swayed the councils of kings and statesmen. He talked incessantly, making no scruple to express his views on a great variety of subjects, in such a way as to indicate that his father was mistaken in most of his opinions. At the dinner-table this young gentleman advised his father how to carve the joint, and directed him with unblushing precision toward the special tit-bits which he himself preferred. To see the great literary agent humbly obeying these directions, or listening with extreme docility to the opinions of this young patriarch of twelve, was a striking revelation of the amiability of the American parent. Of the qualities revealed in the child perhaps the less said the better. Yet it was to this young gentleman that Arthur owed a considerable advance in the esteem of Mr. Legion. It is one of the unpleasing characteristics of the American house to dispense with doors between the various living-rooms, and thus many things may be overheard that are not meant for general circulation. The parlour in Mr. Legion's house being divided from the dining-room by nothing more substantial than a flimsy curtain, Arthur could not avoid hearing a conversation which took place between the father and son after dinner.

"Say pop," said the boy, "is he a Britisher?"

"Why, yes, he comes from London."

"We always licked the Britishers, didn't we?"

To which the father replied with the popular mendacity which is taught in all American histories, "Of course, Americans have never been defeated."

"Well, I thought he was American. He looks like an American, any way."

This unsolicited testimonial to his personal appearance evidently impressed Mr. Legion, for when he returned to the dining-room there was a marked increase of geniality in his manner.

"And now let me hear what you've written about your friend," he said.

Arthur produced his manuscript, and began to read. It was an admirable paper, an uncoloured and just statement of his friend's aim and method, which a discerning critic would have readily recognised as excellent writing. It seemed, however, to produce a totally different impression on Mr. Legion. Looking up, Arthur saw the geniality fading from his face, and something like consternation displacing it. The moment he finished the reading, Legion spoke.

"My dear sir," he began, "it won't do—it won't do at all. It might suit your dull old English papers, but for the bright, smart, up-to-date American periodical, it won't do at all."

"What's wrong with it?" said Arthur, with a blush.

"Why, the trouble is, it's all wrong. Our readers don't want to know about the man's books, they want to know something about *him*. Couldn't you tell us how he looks, and what coloured ties he wears, and what he eats and drinks and how much he earns, and something about that interesting daughter of his? That's what our readers like, sir—bright, personal, spicy, snappy details. And look here, you haven't said a word about his having had a fever through bad drains. You might have worked that up, any way—how he lived among the poor on purpose to study their lives, and got the fever doing it, and that sort of stunt. You ought to have made him romantic and picturesque, and worked his lovely daughter in, and then people would have begun to ask about his books."

"I'm sorry, but that's not the English way of writing."

"English—nothing! You're in America now, and you must write the American way. I did hope for something better. You can write—I won't deny that—and you look smart enough to write any way you darn please. My boy Ulysses saw that at once. He said to me, 'Pop, he looks like an American.' And so you do, for my boy Ulysses is rarely mistaken, and yet you haven't got the first idea how to write the American way. What are those old colleges of yours for, any way, if they can't teach you to write livelier stuff that that?"

It was impossible to be angry with the man, for it was clear that his consternation was genuine and unaffected. And it was equally clear to Arthur that he meant well by him. To have argued literary ethics with Mr. Legion would have been the vainest of pursuits. This became evident a moment later, when the literary agent, following the suggestion opened up by the inability of the British colleges to impart the art of smart writing, gave some reminiscences of his own career in that spirit of innocent boastfulness which is common among men who have miraculously achieved positions for which nature never intended them.

"What I can't understand," he remarked, "is why it is you young fellows who have all the chances don't know how to use them properly. Now, look at me. I never had what may be rightly called a chance at all. I've worked for my bread since I was ten years old. I've been all sorts of things, clerk in a store, drummer on the roads, rail-roading, land-speculating, newspaper reporting, more things than I could count on my ten fingers. I never had time to ask what I wanted to do; I had to do what came to me, and do it the way those that paid me wanted it done. There was never anything superior about me, and I knew it. And that's why I've got on. That's why all the writers come to me to-day. They know very well I can't write worth a red cent, not compared with them, that is. But I've lived among the people all my life, and I know what they want. And if you'll take a word of advice from me, you'll just set yourself to find out what people like, and give it 'em hot and strong, and then you'll succeed fast enough."

"It is excellent advice—if one could take it."

"And what's to prevent you?" he cried. "You've got good looks, you've got education, you've got ability. I'll tell you what I'll do. You come to my office for a couple of weeks, and be ready to do what I tell you. I'll pay you what I think just, and if you don't like it, you're under no obligation to remain."

"I'll come with pleasure," Arthur replied; "and whether I please you or not, I shall always be grateful to you for your kindness."

"Oh! that's nothing. I was a young cub myself once, and I shouldn't have been here now if some one hadn't licked me into shape."

It was not exactly a pleasant way of putting things, but Arthur had sense enough to perceive that it was uttered in a spirit of rough kindness. He believed himself quite incapable of moulding his mind to Mr. Legion's pattern, and it was with a sense of ingratitude that he found himself secretly despising that pattern. But a fortnight of New York had taught him this much, that beggars cannot be choosers, and, moreover, Mr. Legion's door was the only door that stood open to him. He could at least try to do what was asked of him, and in the secret of his heart pride whispered that he might even succeed in elevating Mr. Legion's sense of literary merit, and impart to it a dignity which it conspicuously lacked.

He went to the office on the following morning. To his surprise he found himself introduced to a typewriting lady not at all as an unfortunate person who had failed to master the American method of writing, but as "one of our brightest and smartest young men, who is destined to become one of the star writers of our time"; from which it appeared that Mr. Legion had already forgotten his demerits, or had yielded to that spirit of innocent effusiveness which was characteristic of his usual modes of speech. The typewriting lady had heard such phrases too often to attach much importance to them, and received them with a wearied smile. She readjusted the combs in her hair, nodded to him coldly, and went on with her work unmoved by the presence of this bright particular star of Mr. Legion's firmament. Later on, when Mr. Legion had left the office, this inaccessible lady thawed a little, and informed him with a pretty grimace

that she guessed that a good many stars rose and set every month in Broadway.

"You must take no notice of Mr. Legion's superlatives," he replied.

"I don't."

"I am here only as a learner, a kind of apprentice."

"Then I guess you'll get some surprises."

Surprises he certainly did get in plenty in the course of that eventful fortnight. He found, for example, that Mr. Sampson E. Dodge, in common with most of Mr. Legion's authors, always wrote the preliminary press announcements of his novels himself, in which he declared his profound conviction that the present novel was the best he had ever written, ever could write, ever would write, being dramatic in a high degree, racy of the soil, full of vigorous situations, and worthy of the highest traditions of American fictional art. As if this were not enough, Mr. Dodge's humble statements of his own powers were further embroidered with resonant superlatives by the skilled hand of Legion himself, who lavished on him praise that would have sounded excessive had it been applied to Walter Scott or Victor Hugo. The whole thing was so humorous in its gross exaggeration that one day, in a spirit of mockery, Arthur drew up a description of the works of Dodge in which he outdid his model, ending with the statement that the day would come when America would be remembered in history chiefly as the birthplace of the famous author of *The Perambulator of a Thousand Wheels*. This burlesque, left carelessly upon his desk, fell into the hands of Legion, who, to his intense surprise, congratulated him upon it.

"That's what we want," he cried joyously. "I always said you could write, but I really didn't think you'd get hold of the American method so soon."

"But it's pure nonsense—in fact, a burlesque," said Arthur.

"A what?"

"A burlesque, a skit, a satire, if you will."

"You may call it what you like, but it's what I want, and what the public wants, and I'm going to print it."

"I hope you'll do nothing of the kind. You must see it is nonsense, and no one will believe it."

"The American public will believe anything," Legion retorted with grave conviction. "They like being fooled. It is what the papers exist for. And there's no sort of fooling pleases them so much as patriotic fooling. That reference of yours now to America being remembered as the birthplace of Dodge—why, it's a stroke of genius, sir. It may not be strictly true, of course; but it is impressive, and it makes folk feel proud of their native authors, and it sells the books, and that's what we want, isn't it?"

Remonstrance was so clearly useless that Arthur said no more, and in due time read with blushes his unlucky paragraph in the advertising columns of a New York paper, and found that it had been disseminated by the hand of Legion through a hundred inferior papers, where it was duly quoted as the valuable opinion of a celebrated English critic.

This was but one instance among many of the remarkable methods of Mr. Wilbur M. Legion. He pursued mendacity with an ardour which few persons have manifested in the quest of truth. He dwelt in an atmosphere of exaggeration so dense that the real values of things were totally obscured. Words were to him the golden balls of a juggler; he tossed them hither and thither with a sole eye to rapid effect and novel combination. Upon the question of Dodge he was fantastically sincere; he was really in love with the man and his writings; but the language which he used of Dodge was substantially the same language with which he decorated all his authors. It was his boast that he would make the worst book sell by daring methods of advertisement. He once expressed to Arthur with entire gravity the opinion that the true cause for the decay of religion was that the Bible had not been sufficiently advertised; it has been left to preachers instead of being handed over to the press agents. Let him have the handling of it for a month, and he would show them! For it must be noted that Mr. Legion was in his way a respecter of religion, a zealous opponent of heterodoxies, a man of excellent Sunday proprieties, who had won the gratitude of the sect to which he belonged by presenting an organ to his church. If he had been told that his chief achievement in life was to debase the literary currency, he would have been genuinely astonished, for so singular a thing is the mind of man that he actually believed that he had advanced its interests.

Things came to a crisis at last, and, as it happened, over the very article which Arthur had written on Vickars. This article had remained in Legion's hands, and what was Arthur's astonishment when he found it duly head-lined in a sensational journal, and accompanied by a portrait which was certainly not that of Vickars. Here and there he could distinguish some remnants of his own handiwork, but the whole was overlaid by the most extraordinary flamboyant ornament, and abounded in passages which he recognised as pure Legionese. The things which he had said about Vickars in unsuspicious confidence were all remembered, but were twisted with such amazing ingenuity into novel forms that he blushed to recognise them. Vickars was

described as living in a garret, existing upon the most exiguous of earnings, finding his comrades among all kinds of social outcasts, a hero, a saint, and a socialist, assisted in his sacrifice by a lovely daughter, whose personal charms were touched in with the bold hand of a police-court journalist. Arthur's heart flamed as he read the article. He could imagine what Vickars would think of it; what he would think of the pathetic fiction that he had nearly died of a fever caught in nursing a diseased outcast (this was the Legionese improvement on the drain-story), and with what feelings he would regard the exploitation of Elizabeth. It seemed to him that the world must ring with the infamous business; that Vickars would become the laughing-stock of London; and that since the article could be attributed to no one but himself, he would henceforth stand pilloried as a false friend, a liar, and a fool.

The moment Legion appeared in the office, he flung the article upon his desk, and cried in a voice shaken with anger, "Did you write that?"

"Why, what's the matter?" he replied, slowly adjusting his spectacles. "Oh! I see—the Vickars article. I meant to tell you about that. What you wrote was too good to waste, so I worked over it a bit, and I've got quite a satisfactory price for it. I wouldn't wonder if it created quite a demand for Vickars' books, and we ought to communicate with him at once about his new book."

He was going on, in the innocence of his heart, to explain how a Vickars boom might be worked, when Arthur interrupted him with a furious gesture.

"What I wrote was truth, and what you have written is lies. Why, even the portrait you have used isn't Vickars!"

"And who cares about that? No one knows any better. It's a good enough portrait, any way."

"I can't argue about it, Mr. Legion. You have done me incalculable harm. You have ruined me with Vickars. As for his ever allowing you to handle his books, let me tell you he wouldn't touch a dirty dog like you with a ten-foot pole."

"What's that?" cried Legion, his face pale with astonishment and indignation. "What was that you said?"

"I say you are a scoundrel, Mr. Legion—a mercenary, lying scoundrel!"

"Oh! come now, you're excited. I can make allowances—you don't know what you're saying."

"I know quite well what I'm saying, and I will repeat it, if you like: you're a scoundrel!"

Even Legion's good temper was not proof against this violence.

"Very good," he said. "I won't tell you what you are. But I'll tell you what's going to happen to you. You are going to starve in the streets of New York, my young friend. You're too darned superior for this country of commonsense business methods. You're the sort that comes to sleeping on the benches in Union Square, and fighting for a place in the bread-line."

"Very possibly," said Arthur. "I'm sure I don't know what sort I am, but I am sure of this, that I am not the sort you want in this office, and I beg to say good-morning."

He put on his hat and coat, and rushed for the door. Perhaps it was because Legion saw how white and drawn his face was, and how wild his eyes, that his heart relented towards him.

"Look here," he said, "hadn't you better think it over? I didn't mean what I said about starving in the streets. I hadn't ought to have said that. Besides, you know, there's some money owing to you. Don't go without that."

But the mention of money, instead of staying his flight, lent it new impulse. He was besmirched enough already without taking the wages of his defilement. He rushed out of the room, and the banging door cut short Mr. Legion's eirenicon.

XIV

HE FINDS A FRIEND

Arthur's first act on regaining his hotel was to terminate his residence therein. He ought to have done this long ago, for these thronged corridors, resounding night and day with the chink of innumerable dollars, was no place for one so poor as he. He had stayed there rather from natural heedlessness and inexperience than from choice; partly also in the hope that the invaluable Bundy would arrive; but now his fears were thoroughly aroused. Legion's phrase about the benches in Union Park and the breadline stuck in his mind. He had heard of such tragedies; he

remembered a story which Vickars had told him of one of the most brilliant poets of the day who, in the course of his early struggles, had been reduced to holding horses at public-house doors for ha'pence in the Strand. It had also been the habit of his father, when he wished to inculcate habits of economy and perseverance on his childish mind, to do so by various realistic versions of the prodigal son, illustrated from the histories of certain men he had known who had not possessed the sense "to know which side their bread was buttered." It seemed that he was well upon the way to become such a prodigal. He was bound for the bread-line. Well, if this were the appointed night when he was to take farewell of respectability, the obsequies should be fitly celebrated. If to-morrow he must starve, to-night, at least, he would eat; he had lost so much that no further loss could make him poor; and from the extreme of fear his mind ran to the extreme of recklessness. From the clerk with the tooth-pick he learned the address of a small hotel near the docks, to which he ordered his trunks to be forwarded; having done which, and distributed various tips with a gentlemanly profusion, he stepped out into the gathering night of New York.

The city hummed and sang like some monstrous wheel, driven by an unseen dynamo. It presented to the eye a riot of life and light; its lofty buildings flared like torches, its shops glowed like jewels, its streets were lanes of fire; and into the upper air, still coloured with the hues of sunset, there rose an immense reverberation, composed of human cries and shouts, wheels pounding on granite roads, wheels groaning on roads of steel, all resolved into a thunderous bass note, the raucous music of the human multitude. There are moods in which such a spectacle is exhilarating, moods in which it is dreadful; but there is another and a rarer mood, when it appears majestic. As Arthur surveyed the scene, it was this aspect of majesty that appealed to him. It overwhelmed his mind with an impression more commonly attributed to astronomy—viz., the entire insignificance of the individual in relation to physical magnitudes. His own particular troubles suddenly assumed dwarfed proportions; his little life appeared a mere bubble floating for an instant on the crest of disappearing waves; the city itself a streaming star-river, flowing out of dark eternities, peopled for an instant by a tribe of eager ants. To what avail the strife, the passion, the disorder of these tiny lives? Yet a little while, a few days it might be, a few years at most, and he would be lost to sight as though he had never been. But the wheel would spin on, with a million new Ixions bound upon its flaming spokes; the magnificent and monstrous city would go on, piling pyramid on pyramid above the bones of its exhausted slaves, and with not one light the less because he did not see it, not one softened moment in its raucous song because his ear was filled with the clods of the valley.

In that moment he understood why men commit suicide, why it may appear the soberest act of reason and of justice to fling away a life which has lost its value in losing its egoism. But over that abyss his thought hovered but an instant, and the horror of that instant produced a swift reaction. The dangerous moment passed, and left him with a new appetite for life. He felt the swift uprisal of faculties of enjoyment in himself such as the convalescent feels when the blood flows nimbly after sickness; and on a sudden he found himself convulsed with laughter. The absurdity of his position moved him like a caricature. He had blundered badly, but of what consequence was it in the vast sum of things? All things continued as they were, the stars still were steadfast in their courses, and from that upper silence fell a voice that made him, and all human perturbations, a vain thing that endured but for a moment. The spirit of derision was upon him, and, still laughing, he plunged into the moving crowd.

Presently he found himself in Sixth Avenue, and his eye recognised the sign of a small Italian restaurant of which he had heard an excellent report. The front of the house was mean and narrow; the door opened on a sanded vestibule, which, in turn, led to a long and crowded room. At its upper end was a daïs, on which an excellent orchestra was seated. As he entered the room, a man with a sweet and powerful tenor voice sang an Italian comic song, the chorus of which was taken up by the diners, who beat time with glasses and knives upon the tables. An extraordinary vivacity characterised this curiously mixed assembly; they appeared to have no cares in life, or, if they had, they were intent upon forgetting them. All types were present, from the city clergyman a little ill at ease in his environment to women of exotic beauty, whose sidelong glances left little doubt of their profession. Yet there was no element of disorder, no impression of vulgarity; there was freedom but no licence, the mingling of human creatures in a catholic amity; each content for the time to forget distinctions that elsewhere might be deemed important, each happy in a transient release from the servitudes of the long day, and perhaps from the memories of misfortune.

Arthur was fortunate in finding a single seat vacant at a narrow table next the wall. Here he took his place, and had already proceeded halfway with his meal before he noticed a man who sat on the other side of the table. He was a cheerful little fellow, with a good face, humorous eyes, and mobile mouth, who was evidently itching for conversation. Some trifling courtesy of the table brought them acquainted, and in a few moments they were deep in talk. It seemed that he was an Englishman, a wandering artist, a man with a wide and cheerful acquaintance with vicissitude, who gave his name as Horner. He had been born and bred in London, in an atmosphere of lower middle-class insularity and ignorance, from which he had escaped into a wider world by the means of art-classes and night-schools. He had thus reached the lower slopes of Parnassus, only to discover that there his progress ended; he had neither the education nor the means to carry him farther; and so he had slowly declined from the production of original work into a kind of Ishmael hanging on the borders of the art-world, an expert restorer of old paintings, and at times an amateur dealer. It is a curious fact that the Englishman, who at home is the most reticent of all human animals, often becomes the most communicative when he meets men of his own nation

abroad. There the freemasonry of race tells, loneliness acts as a solvent of reserve, and the possession of common memories invites immediate intimacy. To hear the familiar Cockney dialect again, with its clipped vowels and reckless distribution of the aspirate, to remark phrases heard nowhere save upon the London streets, is to be transported instantly, as on a magic carpet, to the atmosphere of home, to see again the glitter of the Strand, the midnight throngs in Piccadilly Circus, the dear and dingy purlieus of Soho. The very words have an esoteric significance; they cannot be heard or uttered save with a thrilling heart; and among banished Englishmen they are the symbols of an irrecoverable joy, and constitute an instant bond of brotherhood.

Arthur listened with delight to Horner's narrative of his adventures. It appeared that he knew most of the millionaires who collected pictures, and nearly all the dealers from whom they bought them. In describing these people he had the rare art of the vitalising touch. The millionaires moved before the eye in all their eager ignorance, the dealers in all their duplicity and craft. Manufactories of old masters existed for the sole purpose of meeting the demand of American millionaires. It was a known fact that sixteen thousand Corots had passed the New York Customs House in the last few years, whereas every one knew that Corot could not have painted more than two thousand pictures in a long life of the most unremitting toil.

"Why, I could paint better Corots myself than most of those that hang in American galleries," he remarked.

"Perhaps you've done so," laughed Arthur.

"I won't say I hav'n't," he replied with cheerful impudence. "But I've done with that sort of thing now. And I'll say one thing for myself, I never yet sold a picture that I knew was a fake. But, O Lor', these people are such children! They think they know everything, and on art they are as ignorant as dirt. They carry round little books of nothingness by Professor This and Professor That, and go into raptures over all sorts of rubbish because they're told to. And they won't be told better, that's the trouble. But I mean to tell them some day. Only, you see, I can't write the way it ought to be written. I suppose, now, you're not by any chance a writer, are you?"

"I suppose I'm a sort of writer. At all events, the last thing I did was to write something of which I am heartily ashamed."

"And did they sack you?"

"They did. Or, to be more precise, I sacked myself."

"Well, why shouldn't you and I join forces? Of course I wouldn't think of saying this to any one but an Englishman. I can give you lots of stuff, and you can write it up, you know. We might make a book, don't you think?"

"But I know nothing about art except in an amateur way."

"And what's that matter, I'd like to know? I'll be bound you know lots more than the folk that do the writing here. And as for the collections—oh my, you should see them! Constables done in Soho, and Raphaels painted in Paris; curtains hung over them, if you please, as if they were too precious to see the light; and when you mildly remark, 'But that picture's in Munich or Dresden or Buckingham Palace,' they reply indignantly, 'Oh no! that's the copy—this the original. I have a certificate of genuineness.' And then they produce a written pedigree, with the names of Prince This or Prince That, through whose hands their precious canvas has passed, when any one with half an eye can see that the paint is 'ardly dry upon it."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Much worse, if I told you all."

And thereupon followed story after story, full of rapid etchings of the dupes and the dealers; with amazing biographies of adroit Jews born in garrets who now owned palaces and sported titles; and strange old men in London who hid behind shuttered windows genuine and priceless pictures, and credulous millionaires in New York, who bought what might by courtesy be called pictures by the yard, labelling them with august names, and taking care that the papers duly reported the immense sums they paid for them. It was all highly amusing, a backstairs view of life, so to speak, which somehow bore the stamp of the authentic. The time sped; the music and the company had become less restrained; and the hovering waiter reminded them by his black looks that they had sat too long.

"Where are you staying?" said Homer, as they rose to go.

Arthur mentioned the hotel to which he had sent his trunks.

"Oh my!" said Horner, "but, you know, that won't do. It isn't a safe district, that. What took you there?"

"Poverty, to be frank," said Arthur. "I find it necessary to choose the cheapest lodging I can find."

"But it won't do," said the little man gravely. He meditated for a moment, as if not quite sure of how to express what he wished to say. "Englishmen should stand together, shouldn't they?" he remarked at last. "Now look here, suppose you come to my rooms. You'll be very welcome. I can give you a shake-down of some sort, and to-morrow we'll talk over that book. I really shall be very much gratified if you'll come."

The offer was made with such unaffected kindness that Arthur's heart warmed toward the little man. He had already received a hard lesson in life that day, and it had left his heart sore and bitter. Here was another kind of lesson. A man whom the world had not used generously or perhaps justly, a total stranger, who had seen enough of the seamy side of life to make him reasonably suspicious or even cynical, was ready to share what he had with him on the mere ground of common nationality. "Englishmen should stand together," he had said, and was instantly prepared to act upon that simple ethic, although for all he knew the man to whom he offered hospitality might be a rascal or a thief. Such a lesson at such a moment was calculated to restore faith in human nature, faith in that radical goodness of the human heart which is the base of all decent living.

"Mr. Horner," he said, "I accept your offer thankfully. You don't know how much you've done for me by making it. I shall never forget it."

"Oh! that's all right," said the little man, with a deprecating gesture. "I've only done what I'd like some one to do for me." And he did not seem to be aware that the words uttered so carelessly, as if they expressed nothing more than the most ordinary commonplace, really contained the sum of all religion.

Arthur went home with his new friend, and found that his rooms consisted of a littered studio in one of the older houses of New York.

"When I'm doing pretty well, I always stay in a hotel," said Horner, "but at a pinch one can sleep here."

"Why apologise?" said Arthur. "Why, man, you have something here that the best hotel in New York can't give you. You've an open fireplace. It's like coming home again to see that."

"Yes," said Horner, with a whimsical air of wisdom, "the decay of marriage and the family in America dates from the hot-air register and the steam-heating business. People who never sit round an open fire never get a chance of knowing one another. I never had much of a home myself. I had to start out working pretty early; but there's one thing I never forget, and that's the open fire round which we kids sat on winter nights while mother told us stories. I used to see things in that fire—castles, and sunsets, and burning ships, like most kids do. But I wanted to paint 'em, and if it hadn't been for those times in the firelight I'd never have been an artist. But O Lor', look at these Americans!—the women standing over hot-air registers with their clothes blown out like balloons when they want to get warm, and the men getting as close as they can to a fizzling coil of steam-pipes. I don't call that being civilised, do you? It's a beastly way of living, I call it."

While he was thus delivering his views on the iniquity of steam heating, the little man had lit a fire of wood, which instantly blazed up, and filled the room with ruddy light. Having done this, he attacked with great vigour what appeared to be a wardrobe, tugging at it with might and main, until the whole front suddenly collapsed, revealing a concealed bed. From behind a curtain in a corner of the room he wheeled a small chair-bedstead, and at the same time produced a plate of fruit and a tin of tobacco.

"Now we can be comfortable," he remarked. "It's not exactly in the Waldorf Astoria style, but I guess it'll do. And now let us talk."

If Horner had talked well over dinner in the restaurant, he talked super-excellently well now in this friendly firelight. Arthur had little to do but listen, which he did for the most part with rising admiration. He remarked an unaffected innocence of spirit in the man which was entirely unsubdued by his hard experience of life; he talked like a good-natured, enthusiastic boy who had by some occult means possessed himself of the experience of a world-worn man; he entertained ideals of an almost pathetic impractibility; he had even written poetry, and at that moment, it appeared, designed a prose work on art which should be a magnificent compendium of the wisdom of the ages. Of these great designs he spoke at one moment with the ardent vanity of the amateur; the next, the man of the world popped up, to pour upon them humorous depreciation. The same spirit of contradiction coloured all his judgments. England he should have detested, for it had cast him out; but let a word of justest criticism be uttered of its customs or its manners, and he was in arms at once. America had befriended him, and yet he was more than candid in his apprehension of her faults, and had no word of praise for her institutions. In his judgments of men it was the same. He had seen enough of the baser side of life to fill him with the venom of Diogenes, and yet he spoke with kindliness even of those who had defrauded him. His mind moved in giddy flight among these crags of contradiction; he did not aim at consistency, nor did he value it; yet out of the turmoil of his thoughts there shone unmistakably a generous nature, a kindly disposition, a temperament of light-hearted courage, which made a jest of disadvantage and calamity. Courage was perhaps his most essential quality, and particularly that rare courage which is not depressed by past error; so that listening to him, Arthur thought that many a

preacher he had heard had a much less vital message to declare than this irresponsible but philosophic Bohemian.

Arthur slept soundly that night, and awoke in a glow of spirits he had not known for many days. Horner's talk had given a tonic to his mind which he badly needed, and he awoke with many clear and definite resolutions to repay his debt in the best way he could. But here Destiny took a hand in the game, for no sooner was breakfast over than a telegram was handed in to his host which changed the whole situation.

"My!" he said, "here's a go! I'm wanted at once in Baltimore, and I suppose I'd best go. And just now too, when you and I were going to work together."

"Must you really go?"

"I fear I must. It's important. But look here, you know that need make no difference to you. You can stop here just as long as you like. It'll save you a hotel, anyhow."

"But——" began Arthur.

"No buts," said the little man, with dignity. "I shall be offended if you think of saying No. I know the room isn't all that I could wish to offer to a friend, but if you'll put up with it, it's yours as long as you like. And see here, I'll leave you my papers to run over while I'm gone. It'll be a fine thing for me to have you here, and I count it luck; so we'll take that as settled."

And so, waving aside all remonstrance, the little artist packed his valise, and half an hour later, with a final grip of the hand, disappeared down the narrow staircase, leaving Arthur monarch of all he surveyed.

And then began that period in the experience of our hero which, like the more obscure passages of history, may be passed over in silence, although they contain more of tragedy than many famous battlefields. Emptied of the vivacious presence of Horner, the room seemed singularly desolate, and life at once took a grayer aspect. Perhaps it was helped by the character of the day. The exquisite sky, which had shone brilliant as a jewel for so many weeks, was now filled with heavy clouds; a bitter wind blew, snow had begun to fall, and the city crouched like some frightened animal, waiting for the stroke of the impending blizzard. Arthur's first act was to light the fire, and go over the mass of papers which Horner had confided to him. In the innocence of his spirit Horner had informed him that it was no difficulty for him to write—the really difficult thing was to stop writing; and the fruits of this facility now lay before Arthur in an enormous pile of manuscript. It consisted of pencil jottings on a vast variety of themes, notes on pictures (often pungently sagacious), anecdotes of humorous frauds perpetrated on the credulous, the beginnings of an autobiography as frank as Benvenuto Cellini's, interspersed with fragments of poems, short stories, crude philosophies, and even the draft of a novel.

"What on earth does he expect me to do with all this?" groaned Arthur.

One thing he could see very plainly—viz., that here was a prodigious mine of excellent material for any one who knew how to use it. The storm beat without, the long day passed, and he was still at his task. He struggled through the snow to a cheap restaurant, came back, rekindled the fire, and sat down to reflect for the hundredth time on the strangeness of his position. Here he was, in the room of a man whom he scarcely knew, and, as it appeared, the custodian of his most private memoranda. As he read on and on, there gradually grew before his mind's eye an authentic portrait of the man. He saw him at once shrewd and guileless, sagacious and impractical, full of innocent vanities and idealisms, unworldly as a child, and also, like a child, attaining moments of naïve wisdom, of unintentional philosophic insight; and he suddenly perceived what might be done with this mass of memoranda. There was no doubt what Horner wished to have done; he designed a book of some sort. Why not edit it? And, as if in answer to this question, there came next noon a hurried line from Horner, saying he would be detained in Baltimore for at least a month, and begging him to do anything he liked with his papers, with the fullest discretionary power. Here was an unsought task imposed upon him by what seemed the whim of circumstance. He could take Horner's partly written novel, fill in the gaps from his own abundant autobiographic material, and perhaps succeed in producing a human document that would at least arrest attention by its realistic truth. As for himself, he smiled grimly as he counted the few remaining dollars in his purse. Christmas and the elusive Bundy were six weeks away; he was destined to a hard siege, with the bread-line as a not negligible possibility. Providence had put a roof over his head; here was a task recommended to him by his gratitude, and if it would bring him no financial gain, yet it afforded him an inestimable distraction from the uncertainties of his own situation. It seemed he was predestined to become a writer after all.

Then began a form of life which in after years appeared to him fantastic as a dream. He measured out his money with the strictest parsimony, existed on the cheapest forms of food, and amid the riot of New York lived the life of an anchorite in his cell. The days passed unregarded; he went nowhere, saw no one; and at length there came a night when his task was done. Does the reader recollect a novel called *The Amateur Artist*, by Cyril Horner, which a short time ago became the sensation of the season? That was the book which Arthur finished late one night at Horner's room, and expressed next morning with almost his last penny to the office of Mr. Wilbur M. Legion.

He felt weak and ill, and for the first time a thrill of fear shot through his heart. Toward evening he dined exiguously on a dish of milk and porridge, and remembered hazily a dispute with the waiter on the question of a tip. He went out into the streets. A slender curve of moon rode in a sky of ice, the air was bitter cold, a sharp wind eddied round the corners of the streets, and took him by the throat. He walked on and on, with the illusion of the city slipping past him like a river full of glittering reflections, himself treading upon air. Once he found himself shambling; it horrified him, for it was so that tramps and outcasts walked. A little later he found himself gazing on the bread-line; he stood an instant in fascinated pity, and fled.

About midnight he found himself once more before the doors of the old Astor House, and felt that he could walk no farther. He gathered courage to enter, and blessed the undesigned humanitarianism of America, which makes an hotel lobby an open rendezvous. Here, at least, was light and warmth. A night clerk was at the desk—not he of the toothpick and the supercilious back. He made a shift to ask him if Bundy had arrived.

"When do you expect him?" asked the clerk.

"Hourly."

"Where does he come from?"

"The West—Oklahoma, I believe."

"Then he'll get in at seven on the Pennsylvania, most likely."

"Can I wait for him?"

The clerk eyed him narrowly.

"You used to stay here, didn't you?"

"I was here for a fortnight."

"I don't know but you can," he remarked ungraciously. "But say, you ought to take a room, you know."

"I'd rather not till I know if Mr. Bundy comes."

"Down on your luck?"

"Down on my luck," said Arthur gravely.

The clerk laughed.

"Parlour A. might suit you. Don't let me see you, that's all."

In Parlour A. he took refuge, and was soon asleep, his head bowed upon the table. He woke from time to time with a strong shudder. "Not that, O God—not that!" he moaned, for it was of the bread-line he had dreamed.

He was still asleep when a sudden hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He awoke, and looked into the face of Bundy.

XV

THE MILLIONAIRE

He could hardly believe his good fortune. The mist of sleep and weakness was upon his eyes, hysteric laughter shook him. He rose, trembling. He saw the good-natured night-clerk in the doorway, heard him say, "I guess he's been up against it good and hard," and the next moment found himself sinking through an abyss of coloured lights into an unfathomable darkness. The descent lasted but for an instant; when he opened his eyes again it was to protest that there was nothing whatever the matter with him.

"Been out on the bat," said the clerk laconically.

"Been starving," said another voice.

And then the owner of that second voice grew clear to him—a kindly face of inimitable shrewdness, the gray hair neatly parted in the middle, the gray moustache closely trimmed, and a pair of big, dreamy eyes fixed on him in anxious consideration.

"Poor lad!—poor lad!" said Bundy. "It seems I'm just in time. I got your letter—only a week ago. I got one from home, too—trust Mrs. Bundy for telling a man what his duty is. So I hustled, and came off at once. Now tell me, you aren't ill, are you?"

"I don't think so," said Arthur weakly.

"Case of the last dollar, eh? Well, we'll soon mend that. When you've put yourself outside a sirloin steak ... here, Mr. Squire, send Charlie up at once ... I'll breakfast here—it's my old room.... Now, hurry!" He bustled round in a furious heat of action, flung his fur-coat from him, talking all the while. "Omelette, steak, and special coffee—that'll do for a beginning, Charlie; ... and see here, Mr. Squire"—this to the clerk—"my friend is a distinguished Englishman, and don't you forget it."

"Of course," said the clerk. "I knew he was a friend of yours, or I wouldn't have done what I did for him."

"That's all right, Mr. Squire. But you'd better forget what you said about going out on the bat—he's not that kind. Now, are we ready?"

And with the suddenness of a transformation scene in a pantomime, Arthur found himself seated at a laden table, the meats steaming on the dish, the coffee bubbling in the percolator, the very air fragrant with provocation to his appetite. No wonder men stole for food, he thought; his very nostrils quivered with the lust of meat. The blood sang within his veins as the first drop of liquid warmth thrilled his palate, and his flesh seemed sweeter to him, his whole house of man renewed. Until that hour he had not known how hardly he had used his body, how great the violence he had offered it. Now he entered into the repossession of his own flesh; this was the moment of his reconciliation, and this the sacramental food of a physical atonement.

"And now," said Bundy, when the meal was finished, "tell me all about yourself."

Arthur told his story from the beginning, Bundy meanwhile smoking and watching him with a curious flicker of suppressed humour in his eye. It was a little disconcerting to be so watched; it set Arthur wondering what Bundy really thought of him, and at last he broke out with the remark, "I'm afraid you think me something of a fool, Mr. Bundy?"

"Well, I won't pretend to say that I would have done all that you've done," Bundy answered. "I don't quite get your view-point, especially in what you say about your father. But there's one thing in which I see you have been wise—you've left England, and that was the wisest thing you ever did."

"I've sometimes thought it the most foolish."

"Ah! because you've had a hard time. But that's nothing. I've been stony-broke myself a dozen times, and I've lived to think that these were the moments when I enjoyed my life the most. The great point is, you've shown yourself capable of an adventure. That's the spirit I like to see, and I like you the better for it. Now, my boy, I'd recommend you to get a good sleep. I've a pile of business to attend to. Later on we'll talk over your affairs, and I'll have something definite to say to you."

Great is the power of wealth, greater still, perhaps, the power of reputed wealth and the willingness to distribute it. At the waving of Bundy's magic wand Arthur had become at once a person of consideration; he was the tenant of an admirable suite of rooms, waited on by obsequious bell-boys, remarked by admiring chamber-maids, even sought by adroit reporters. He was a friend of Bundy's—that was the sole explanation of the miracle—for it appeared that Bundy's star was once more in the ascendant. When, late in the afternoon, Arthur left his room and went down into the hotel lobby, it seemed to him that it hummed with the name of Bundy. A constant stream of messenger-boys sought Parlour A.; a succession of automobiles discharged at the hotel door fur-coated men with anxious eyes, all bound for the same goal; the evening papers were full of the portraits and exploits of Bundy. Opening the door of Parlour A., he had a passing glimpse of a Bundy he had never seen before—a wild-eyed, gesticulating Bundy, orating behind a barricade of books and papers to a crowded room, rushing at intervals to the telephone and shouting orders, a man glowing with ardour, on springs with energy, intoxicated with success.

"I'll see you presently," he cried, and went on pouring out what appeared to be a Niagara of figures.

Arthur withdrew silently, went up to his room, and ordered all the papers, from which he proceeded to inform himself on the doings of his friend. The story, divested of a vast accretion of shop-soiled adjectives, reduced itself to this—that Bundy had suddenly enrolled himself among the multi-millionaires, at least potentially.

"The story of Mr. Bundy," began the chronicle, "is one of those romances of sudden wealth which are only possible in this country of unlimited and still undiscovered resources. Born in humble circumstances in the city of London, England, Mr. Bundy has raised himself by his own exertions to a place among the great captains of wealth, whose remarkable careers constitute the epic of human progress, and shed glory on the institutions of this free and enlightened country." Here, it appeared, the journalist's well of rhetoric ran dry, and he condescended to laconic

statement. It was not to be supposed that a plain statement of fact could support all the amiable exaggerations with which the reporter had adorned Mr. Bundy's personal history; but the facts themselves were sufficiently amazing. From them Arthur gathered that Bundy had discovered fresh deposits of gold in the rivers of the Yukon, of undoubted value, and was about to float a dredging company which promised enormous dividends. "As early as 1898," continued the report, "fine-grained platinum was recognised in the black sand obtained along the Tuslin River, Yukon Territory, but until recently no active preparations have been made to recover it. This river drains the Tuslin Lake; its gravel-bed carries gold in paying quantities even by hand-working, throughout its entire length of 120 miles. Mr. Bundy claims that this gravel-bed contains immense quantities of gold, which may be recovered by the simple process of dredging. For thousands of years the erosion of the hills has precipitated gold into the river; the gold has sunk by its specific gravity into the river-bed, and there it remains in incalculable quantities. A good dredger costs about five thousand dollars. It scoops up the river-bed in so thorough a fashion that not a grain of gold is lost. Mr. Bundy has proved by actual experiment that from ten ounces of black sand, taken at random, sixty cents worth of platinum is obtainable, and gold in much larger quantities. Mr. Bundy holds a concession for more than eighty miles of this river. This means that with the most adequate machinery it will take fifty years to dredge the Tuslin. When we reckon the relatively light cost of dredging, it appears probable that Mr. Bundy's proposition means not less than *one thousand per cent.* profit to the fortunate investor."

So this accounted for the wild scene in Parlour A., the rush of automobiles to the door of the hotel, the sudden fame of Bundy. The indefatigable adventurer, who was supposed to be in Texas or Oklahoma, had all the time been scooping gold in handfuls from the lap of the frozen north; Oklahoma had no doubt been used as a blind to cover his tracks; the reports in the papers had been ingeniously engineered; and then, at the precise moment, Bundy had descended on New York in a benignant advent. Arthur's thoughts went back to the shabby house in Lion Row, and he wondered if Mrs. Bundy had heard the news. He saw her preparing for a new apotheosis; fitting on the golden wings, so to speak, which were to waft her to the porticos of palaces; and, remembering her stories of similar hegiras, he wondered how much of truth lay behind this astounding story. Bundy no doubt believed it—it was impossible to doubt his good faith; but Bundy had been deceived before, he might be deceived again. A voice told Arthur that there was something unsubstantial in this glittering edifice; somewhere there was a rotten bolt, which, if plucked out, would result in total ruin. And the same voice told him that his own path did not lie in this direction; that whatever its allurement, it was not for him.

Bundy did not have the promised talk with him that evening, nor all the next day. The man was devoured by his own energy; he ate little, slept not at all, rushed frantically about New York in automobiles, was always the centre of a crowd, himself excited, vociferous, burning with zeal like an apostle. It was not until the third evening that he rushed into Arthur's room, and sank exhausted on the couch.

"I've treated you shamefully," he cried, "but it couldn't be helped. Lad, I've done it. I've pulled it off. Don't speak a word to me about it yet. I believe I've gone the limit. One more question to answer and I'd have a fit."

It was obvious even to an unpractised eye that he spoke the truth. The blood was congested in his cheeks, his breath came unevenly, his hands trembled, an insane frenzy blazed in his eyes.

"Order dinner," he went on hoarsely. "An hour's time—that will do. I didn't know I was so tired. I believe I'll just go to sleep where I am. They won't look for me here."

Arthur turned the lights down, covered him with a travelling-rug, and left him. He might have been a felon hiding from justice rather than a triumphant millionaire, and Arthur could not but reflect upon the strangeness of the spectacle. It was the first time he had looked upon the lust for gold. His father had acquired wealth, but not in this way. It had been won by deliberate siege, by steady, patient pressure which called for high qualities of restraint; if it was a gross passion, it had elicited certain elements of character that in themselves were worthy. But this mode of winning wealth had no dignity. It was a lust. It had the grossness and ferocity of a lust. It took the brain and body of a man and shattered them with its tremendous throb. And it was a lust also that had contagion in it. It was impossible to deny that its subtle virus had already touched his own heart. During those three days he had been as a man deafened by the noise of guns; he had stood in the very heart of the explosion, and had recognised something strong and savage in the scene. It thrilled him, fascinated him, made all ordinary modes of life trite and tame, and left him asking, Was not this life indeed?

And he knew it was not. He had only to think of that prostrate, half-demented man, sunk in the sleep of exhaustion on the couch, only to recollect the brave and lonely woman waiting for him in Lion Row, to know that this was not life. Better, better far, the humblest bread earned in quietness and eaten in peace, than this madness of mere possession. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth"—ah no! *things* are a poor substitute for life, and to forfeit life in the pursuit of things is man's crowning folly.

An hour later there emerged a Bundy clothed and in his right mind, fresh-shaved, fresh-bathed, smiling, easy, tolerant. Dinner was served in Bundy's rooms, and when the meal was over he began to talk freely of his adventures and affairs.

"You'll never know how good civilised food is till you've gone upon a diet of salt-horse and biscuit for four months," he remarked. Little by little he unfolded the story of his travels, a story full of fierce hazards, Homeric toils, adroit strategies, defeats, despairs, surprising victories, ending in the supreme moment when he held his dearly-won concession in his hand, and knew himself master of incalculable spoil. It was the story of Ulysses, master of men, diplomat and fighter, swift, strong, and infinitely cunning, retold not without pride, but with the laconic brevity of the man who counts past hazards things of no importance.

"Well, I've pulled it off," he cried. "I've paid blood and sweat to do it. And now, do you know, about the only thing I've left to wish for is to go to sleep for a month, and wake up in my old bed at home, and smell the eggs and bacon cooking for my breakfast, and hear the old dog barking in the garden at the kids."

"Mrs. Bundy will be glad to hear the news."

"Yes, I guess she will. I didn't ought to have been away so long. It's been hard on her. Tell me, now, how was she looking? Older, I'm afraid, eh?"

And then he fell into a train of tender reminiscence. He talked of how brave and patient his wife had been, and of the long separation, and of the boys of whom he had seen so little.

"Sometimes it seems as if it wasn't worth it. It's only a short time folk have to live together any way, and I've been away from home most of my life. I don't know but what I'd have been a sight happier if I'd have lived like other folk, and gone to church Sundays with the kids, and earned my bit of money in the city, and just had a home. That's the thing I've never had—a home."

It was a singular confession for a man to make who had just attained the summit of success. He spoke with an extraordinary simplicity and tenderness, as if unconscious of an auditor, obedient only to some tide of memory that rose and swelled within his bosom.

"It's queer, the way we're made," he went on. "Here am I telling you what I've got by leaving England, and yet, if you're like me, you'll never have a happy day till you get back again. There's a house me and Mrs. Bundy lived in when we were first married: it was out Epping way, and it had a bed of mignonette under the window, and a hay-field just beyond the garden-wall; and I can smell that mignonette now, and the hay, and up there in the Yukon I'd wake in the mornings with that smell in the air, though there wasn't a flower in sight for God knows how many miles. I don't believe I could bear to see that house again. Yet if I could just go back, and be young again, I guess I'd give all the gold in the Yukon to do it—and then repent my bargain, and go off to get some more. Well, that's the way we're made. We don't know what we want, and with all our trying we get the wrong thing after all, most like."

He ended abruptly.

"I oughtn't to be talking like this. I guess it's mere foolishness. Well, let us come to business. There's something I want to say to you. It's about your father. Now, did Mrs. Bundy ever tell you that your father once helped me when I was in difficulties?"

"Yes, she told me that."

"She did, eh? Well, I've never forgotten it. Of course I've paid the money back long ago, but you can't pay a debt like that with money. I've always wanted to do more than that, and now the chance has come to me. I can't do anything for your father, but there's something I would like to do for you."

"You've already done a great deal, for which I am deeply grateful," said Arthur.

"Ah, that's a bagatelle! I mean something permanent. Now, how would it suit you if I made you secretary to my Dredging Company? You could draw five thousand dollars a year for a beginning, and I'd assign you shares in the company besides."

It was a splendid offer which might well dazzle a youth who a week ago had been acquainted with starvation. Had it come on that night when he shuddered at the bread-line, he would have snatched it as a starving dog flies upon a bone. But he had had time to recapture his self-control. He had been fed with good meat, he had slept, and once more the physical machine ran sweetly. And he had also had a terrifying glimpse of what the lust of gold meant, he had just heard Bundy's own expression of innocent regret, he had before him the man himself. Did he envy him? Something half-heroic in those Homeric labours he could recognise, but what about their object? And it came to him with the vividness of a revelation that there were elements in his own nature that responded all too eagerly to the bribe held out to him; that if he yielded now he would go the way of multitudes whose only god is wealth; that if he resisted now he might preserve those higher ideals of life so intimately dear and sacred to him, and only thus could they be retained. No, it must not be. The die was cast in silence, and the golden phantom vanished.

"Mr. Bundy," he said in a low and trembling voice, "you have made me a munificent offer. You have spoken to me your own intimate thoughts. Will you now let me speak mine with equal frankness?"

"Surely."

"Don't think me ungrateful, but I must refuse your offer."

"Why?"

"For reasons, some of which you have supplied, some of which lie in my own character. To be quite frank, I am not strong enough to resist the fascination of wealth. Some men know how to set a boundary to their desires, to stop there, and say, 'I will go no farther.' I do not believe I am one of these. If I once took the road of wealth, I should push on to the utmost limit. I might not become avaricious, but the fascination of the game would absorb me, and God only knows whether I might not become cruel and hard in course of time. Well, I dare not risk it, and that is the truth, the humiliating truth, if you like. The life I have always planned for myself is a life of quiet toil, simple, content—books, a garden, a home: I cannot let it go. My only anchorage in life lies there; without it I know not whither I might drift."

He ended. He had not noticed Bundy's face as he spoke; he had been too absorbed in his own confession. He saw that face now—pale, eager, and with tears upon the cheek. To his immense surprise, Bundy sprang up and flung his arms about his neck.

"My dear fellow," he cried, "I understand. Ah, you little know how you've torn the veil from my own heart! I once had all those thoughts. I would have entered the Church; I don't know why I didn't. I took another road—the wrong road, I suppose, and here I am.... Well, well! it can't be altered now.

"You're the best and kindest man I ever knew," cried Arthur. "And I know some one else who would say so too—Mrs. Bundy."

"Ah! that's because she loves me too much to see my faults. But I can see them. Well, well!" He turned his head away, his good honest face bowed in his hands. Then he recovered himself briskly, turned round, and said, "Well, that's done with. Now we'll start out afresh upon a new tack. I've *got* to help you, don't you understand? And I'm going to. Let me think a moment."

Presently he said, "Now I think I've got it. Sit down and light a fresh cigar. That's right. Now I believe I know the kind of life you want. Shall I take it for granted you don't mean to return to England?"

"No; there is no place for me there, at present."

"Well, there's one point settled, and let me say I agree with you. Now for another point. You want an outdoor life?"

"Yes, I prefer it."

"Very good. Now, let me paint you a picture. A country of wooded hills and snow mountains, a lake, a log-house, and let us say a hundred acres of cleared land with seventy-five apple trees to the acre. Do you know what that means? I'll tell you. An apple tree in bearing means from five to ten dollars. An orchard of only fifty acres therefore means—here, hand me that paper-pad."

And straightway he fell to work, with all the recovered ardour of the speculator, adding and re-adding interminable lines of figures, until he announced the surprising result that the man who owned fifty acres of land in this most desirable of valleys might count upon a yearly income of $18,750, and in due time twice or thrice that sum.

"It's better than a gold-mine," he cried inconsistently. "And it's safe—it's absolutely safe!"

"But how am I to buy it?"

"You're not going to buy it. Don't you understand? It's already yours. Here, wait a moment."

There was another series of swift calculations, and then Bundy communicated this result: that the money Archibold Masterman had lent him years before had been really worth to him thrice its value, for it had set him on his feet; that morally therefore he owed £2,000 to Archibold Masterman; that the price of this excellent fruit ranch, by a strange coincidence, was exactly £2,000; and that finally it was his fixed determination to make the ranch over to Arthur, as an act of gratitude.

"There's the life you want," he cried enthusiastically.

"But, Mr. Bundy——"

"Now don't object, for I won't hear of it. I'm only too glad you made me think of this. Why, if I were younger and hadn't got the Dredging Company on my hands, I'd go there myself, like a shot. There's no credit to me in giving it you. I'm rich; and besides, it's yours morally. God bless you, my boy! and if ever things go wrong with me, keep a room for poor old Bundy on the ranch. And now let us go to bed."

And, as if to prevent all further discussion, he swiftly switched the lights off, and

incontinently vanished.

XVI

KOOTENAY

The train was climbing slowly to the summit of the Crow's Nest Pass. To the northward rose an extraordinary mountain, deeply tinted at its base with greens and purples, and capped with a dazzling crown of snow and ice. Around the glowing base, like children gathered at the knees of a monstrous mother, rose seven inferior monoliths, pillars of rock which in the morning light flamed like torches. All around were mountains, some flat-topped and hooded, some broken spires as of a vast cathedral ruined; beneath them wild gullies yawned, intricate defiles, deep canyons to whose sides the pines clung in an agony of effort; and so far below that it appeared but a thread of silver ran a silent river. Into these defiles the train moved timorously; now hanging for an instant on a wall of precipice, now suspended on a groaning trestle-bridge over depths of air, but ever moving on, like a living creature animate with the unconquerable energy of man. How good this mountain air, chill and clear and bright; how welcome this irregularity of form, passing through every grade from the exquisite to the magnificent, after the long, barren monotony of the plains! It was the transition from prose to poetry, from barbarian prose to lyric music. It was with a sinking heart that Arthur had remarked the long unfolding of the plains. They oppressed the mind, they lay like a weight upon the eyes, they breathed a savage and a hostile spirit. The scattered towns had an air of dereliction; the very houses seemed frozen to the soil, and around them was a silence, like the silence of death. But here once more Nature became a living thing, a hospitable and kindly mother. And to Arthur, who had never seen a mountain, this sudden revelation of grandeur and magnificence came with a shock of exquisite pain. His eyes filled with happy tears, his nerves tingled with delight, he drank long draughts of crystal air, he could have sobbed and shouted. For the first time he knew the bliss of being alive.

On that long westward journey he had had time to reflect on many things. New York had already sunk into the past like a disordered dream. Legion and Horner were alike unsubstantial figures, shapes that had moved for an instant on a tinted cloud and had disappeared. But Bundy travelled with him; the spirit of the man still warmed his heart like a cordial. He saw his honest features wet with tears as he recalled his home; heard his reverberating eloquence in Parlour A.; was subdued and reverent before the generosity and ardour of the man. He had parted with him two days after that memorable midnight conversation. He was now upon his way to England—and Mrs. Bundy. If Arthur could have chosen, he would have wished to be the sole architect of his own fortunes. That had been his proud dream, and he had been slow to relinquish it. His pride had struggled to the last against Bundy's generosity, until remonstrance seemed ungracious and insulting. He saw now that that pride was the least worthy thing about him. The refusal to accept generosity was scarcely less base than the refusal to confer it. God had not designed man to stand alone; He had surrounded him with a network of obligations and relationships; total independence was impossible in a world where all living creatures existed by a dependence on each other. He had been in peril of becoming an Ishmael by renunciation of the social bond; Bundy had re-created that social bond for him.

And, strangely enough, Bundy's generosity owed itself to a similar generosity in his father—the father whom he had deserted. There was plentiful food for irony in that thought. He had condemned his father's mode of life, applied to him unsparing judgments, fled from him; and here, six thousand miles away, he was travelling toward an opportunity that would not have existed but for a quality of goodness in Archibold Masterman. He had refused partnership with his father in London; here, in a strange and distant land, he was still the partner of his father's deeds. The thought sensibly softened his heart toward his father. He had long ago ceased to think of him with anger; enmity he had never felt; now there came to him a gush of tender recollection, and with it the power of truer comprehension. He saw that no man is either wholly good or wholly bad; that character cannot be limned in plain black and white; that a thousand delicate gradations separate yet unite the two extremes; and that the final verdict on any man lies beyond the human mind. Man must be taken as he is; he is at all times a contradiction, an enigma, a creature that exceeds his category. To see this is to become human; to miss this vision is to remain a Pharisee, whose cardinal defect is inhumanity. And it was this wider and more charitable temper that came to birth in him as he reflected on the new course his life had taken.

From his pocket he took a bundle of letters, and re-read them slowly. The latest in date was from Elizabeth, and it closed with a phrase that had clamoured in his memory through all that week of journeying—"Well I know my true knight will not fail me." No emotional utterance could have moved his so deeply. It was the affirmation of a vow which he knew would endure as long as time, and after. It braced his spirit to repeat it; he accepted with a swelling heart its brave implication, and wore it like a badge of honour.

The longest letter was from Vickars. It was the last letter he had received before he left New

York, and he had read it so often that he almost knew it by heart. "I have shot my arrow in the air," he wrote, "and God alone knows where it may fall. My book is out, and there are some signs that it may succeed. You know what I mean by that. The only success I crave is to influence other minds in right directions. Men have called me a dreamer, perhaps you yourself have thought so too; but I know, and I think you know, that I have dreamed true. We are moving toward a revolution. It is impossible that the present system can endure much longer. My message is for the day after the revolution is accomplished. Then will begin the reconstruction of life again from the base upward, a simpler and an ampler life. It is for that day I write, and my bones will thrill to it even in the grave. As for me, I am like Balaam; I shall see it, but not now; I shall behold it, but not nigh. Even so, I am content." There followed a fuller expression of his social ideals, and the whole closed with this paragraph—"Your mother came to see us last week. It was a great but very happy surprise. Can you guess what we talked of? Of you, Arthur. For we three know you as no others do, and we love you, and believe in you. She kissed Elizabeth at parting, and said, 'Some day——' and then stopped; but we knew what she meant. Well, you must work on toward that some day. Poor lady! Deal tenderly with her. I think she has sore wounds in her heart, and remember it was harder for her to part from you than for you to go. By so much her quiet sacrifice is greater than yours. She is the tarrier by the stuff, a harder lot, I think, than his that goes down into the battle."

Tears filled his eyes as he read the words. There came to him a sudden vision of the London he had left—the vast tribes of toiling men, the blind pain and suffering of so many millions, the silent agonies that hid beneath those gray skies and congregated roofs. And then, looking from the windows, the eye dwelt again upon this magnificent heritage that bore the flag of England, and he marvelled why men fought for bare life in cities when an empty empire called for them. Surely some day the wizard's spell would break, and London would pour its wasted tribes into this land of fertility and beauty. To reconstruct life from the base upward, that could never be done there; it might be done here. Here the simpler, ampler life was possible. Ah! if he could not fight by Vickars' side in London, he was still fighting for him here, and was it not better to create the new than to rebuild the old?

The mountain peaks were gradually receding. The train crawled slowly round the walls of precipice, hung suspended for a giddy instant, and then, with a tumult of squealing brakes and hissing steam, plunged into the abyss, doubling on itself a score of times, till it reached the valley and the roaring river. It was past noon when the train stopped beside a placid lake. Immense forests rose on every side; an immemorial silence lay on all things, broken only by the gentle ripple of the waters. A steamer lay beside the landing-stage; an hour later he was afloat.

There were not many passengers, and what there were seemed uncommunicative. They were for the most part long-limbed, sturdy men, ranchers, traders, lumber-jacks, their faces bronzed with outdoor life. They eyed him narrowly and critically. He knew quite well what their criticism implied. He was a greenhorn, and no doubt looked like one. As long as the light lasted he took no notice of them; he was too absorbed in the unfolding beauty of the lake, and in curiosity as to what it would reveal for him. Somewhere on the lake lay his small estate, and he found himself studying with eager interest the wooded shores, in the hope of discovering something that gave a hint of human habitation. There was very little to reward his gaze. Twice he saw a blue curl of smoke rising from the forest; once a rude hut, whose one window glittered like a gem in the setting sun; beyond this nothing met the eye but a shore of snow, the black bare poles of charred trees rising above the living pines, and the solitary sky. The scene was sombre; the silence so profound that the churning stern-wheel sounded like the passage of an army. Night fell swiftly. It was seven o'clock when a lighted hillside met the eye, and he was told that it was Nelson.

He slept that night at a small hotel near the shore, and rising early next morning was quite unprepared for the beauty of the scene that awaited him. The distant hills of snow were touched with rosy fire, the lake was like a turquoise, and the town surprised him by its sober aspect of prosperity. He scarce knew what he had expected in this remote outpost of the Empire, but certainly not what he saw—broad streets, buildings of hewn stone, substantial shops and warehouses, all gathered round a curve of lake so exquisite that few places could surpass it in its natural loveliness. The hotel was kept by an Englishman, who made haste to cultivate his acquaintance. He was a lightly built, bearded fellow, with a shrewd eye and a perpetual smile, one of the numerous family of Smith.

"So you're going up the lake?" he inquired.

"Yes. I want a ranch called Bundy's."

"Bundy. Let me see. I don't know of any Bundy here."

"He isn't here. It's his ranch I want to find."

"Did he tell you where it was?"

"Poplar Point."

"Ah! now I know. If you'll come with me, I think I can show you whereabouts it is." He took him to the landing-stage, and pointed out a deep fold in the hills. "You make for that," he said. "Unless I disremember, Bundy's ranch is there or thereabout. But people are always going and

coming here. These 'ere ranches are always changing hands. Young fellows like you come out, and get tired of the work at the end of the summer, and sell out. They're the plague of Nelson. Quitters, we call 'em. I hope you ain't a quitter."

"I don't think I am. I've come here to live."

"Well, sir, you've come to a good place. But let me give you a word of warning. It's only hard work that pays here, and you'll have to work hard and wait long if you want to do anything in fruit. This is no place for quitters."

He went on to give him many brief histories of the obnoxious tribe of quitters. They were all looking out for a soft job—that was what was the matter with them. Mamma's darlings—that's what they were. Did he know what it was to handle an axe. No, he thought not. Land had to be cleared—did he know what that meant?

"But mine is cleared," Arthur interrupted. "At least, fifty acres are."

At this he looked puzzled.

"I never heard of fifty acres of cleared land anywheres near Poplar Point," he observed.

There happened to come along the landing-stage at that moment a somewhat extraordinary-looking old man. He wore blue jeans, a red wool sweater, and a battered felt hat. His hair and beard were unkempt, and both were gray. A beggar could not have been worse dressed, and yet there was about him something of the dignity that marks the open-air man.

"That's Jim Flanagan," remarked Smith; "he ought to know. Here, Jim, I want to speak to you."

The old man came towards them in silence.

"Jim, do you know a ranch at Poplar Point called Bundy's? You know most of the places up and down the lake, don't you?"

"Yes, I know it. It lies back a quarter of a mile or so, on a bench."

"Cleared, is it?"

"Not much. It was once, but most of it's growed up again."

"Well, this gentleman's going there. Maybe you could give him pointers."

"Going to live there?" asked Flanagan.

"Yes, I'm going to live there," said Arthur.

"Well, I don't know but what you can. There's a pretty good log-house. I'm living not far away myself."

"Can't you row me over?"

"No, I can't do that. It wouldn't be no good if I did. You can't live there without a good bit of preparation. There ain't no shops at Poplar Point, and there ain't no hotel," he remarked with a grin.

"Now I'll tell you what I would do, if I was you," said the landlord. "You just let Jim give you some pointers. He'll treat you right, will Jim."

"I'll be glad to do anything I can," said the old man. "I've got an hour to spare, any way."

Arthur took Flanagan up to the hotel with him, and was soon interested in his strange preceptor. It seemed he was an old hunter and prospector, a man of infinite adventures, with a dislike of civilisation, which was perhaps his most marked characteristic. There was no remote solitude of the surrounding woods with which he was not acquainted.

"As for this ranch of yours, I guess you've been expecting too much," he remarked. "It's good enough land, that I believe. And I won't say but what it has been planted all right once. But it's been let grow up. I kind of remember a man called Bundy bought it—took it for a debt, 'twas said. But he's never been here, not a£ I remember. And I've been here and hereabout a matter of a dozen years."

So it appeared that Bundy had let the light of his imagination gild Kootenay Lake with a delusive splendour, as it did all those "propositions" which engaged his ardent rhetoric. But Arthur was in no mood to judge his benefactor critically. The land was there—that was something; and it would go hard with him if he could not make it all that Bundy had imagined it. He might have known that Bundy had never seen it for himself. The story of his having taken it for a debt had the accent of truth. The mouth of the gift-horse must not be too closely examined, but at least he was a veritable beast. And in spite of the passing shadow of disappointment,

Arthur's spirits rose at the menace of unexpected difficulty.

"Well," said Flanagan. "I must be getting along. When will you be coming out?"

"Immediately. Some time this afternoon."

"In that case you'll have to get a move on. You've a lot to do."

Flanagan thereupon sat down again and gave him a series of elaborate instructions. He must first of all buy a boat; he'd need one, any way. There was a boat he knew of that might be had second-hand for twenty dollars. Then he'd want to buy an axe or two, a grub-hoe, a sack of flour, sugar, rice, tea, coffee, tinned milk, and may be a side of bacon and a case of eggs. That would do for a beginning.

The boat was duly bargained for upon the wharf. It was an interesting ruin: the paint had long since disappeared, it had no rudder, and it leaked like a sieve. Its owner, remarking Arthur's innocence, wished to raise the price, but Jim kept him to the twenty dollars.

"That or nothing," he said sternly. "And put a couple of baling-tins in. They'll be needed."

Arthur looked upon this ancient tub with frank dislike and with some dismay. The beauty of the rose-tinted morn was over; the sky was gray, and a rising north-west wind was making more than ripples on the lake.

"How far is Poplar Point?" he asked.

"Five miles," Jim answered. "But I guess you'll do it. You look strong."

"It isn't myself I'm thinking of; it's the boat. Do you think she can do it?"

"I've seen worse," said Jim. "Not many of them, though. But she'll do it, never fear. That there old boat have been on the lake ever since I knowed it."

Which, under the circumstances, was scarcely a recommendation.

By one o'clock, somehow or other, Arthur had got through his preparations. His story had got about; he found himself stared at in the streets as a greenhorn; but every one had shown him civility, and some a rough kindness. At the bank a great surprise awaited him. He found that Bundy had telegraphed a considerable sum of money to his credit, more than enough to give him a fair and even generous start. Willing hands helped him to pack his goods. They were all there—the axes, the grub-hoe (with whose uses he was totally unacquainted), the sack of flour, and the various provisions. His valise was shoved under the stern seat, and with it half a dozen pamphlets on fruit-growing which he collected in the town. Flanagan had gone two hours earlier, with the promise that he would look out for him at Poplar Point.

"Keep your eye on the gap in the hills," was his final instruction, "then push up the creek to the left; and if it's dark, I'll burn a flare."

He had no sooner left the landing than he began to feel the force of the wind. It blew with a steady and increasing violence, dead ahead; pull as he would, he made little progress, and, to add to his discomfiture, he had to be continually baling. The moment he stopped to bale, the boat swung round or was driven backward. His hands were soon blistered, his muscles ached, yet toil as he would the far-off gap in the hills seemed no nearer. The water ran black and foam-flecked in short, choppy waves; the sky had darkened rapidly, and presently a cutting hail fell. In ordinary circumstances he would have turned back, but he had a lively recollection of Smith's stinging phrases, and had no mind to be written down a mamma's darling or derided as a quitter. This was, in its way, his first test, and to succumb would be to lose nerve for future difficulties. He was now in the very centre of the lake, and a thrill of apprehension seized him as he saw how small an object this crazy boat appeared in that loneliness of angry water. Black water, black forests, and on the upper hills pale rays of watery sunset—that was what he saw, and himself scarcely more noticeable than a bird, buffeted by the impending storm. But he toiled on, and at last got a little shelter from the shore. More than three hours had passed since he left Nelson; and in this deep fissure of the hills the night had already camped. The darkness deepened rapidly. It was five o'clock when he rounded the point of the creek. Here the water was smoother, and he could pull more leisurely; but it was now quite dark. All his hopes were fixed on Flanagan. For another hour he searched the shores eagerly for any sign of light. Nothing met his eye but the tiny twinkling of a lamp here and there in the window of some unseen house. At last, just when he had made up his mind to spend the night upon the lake and wait for dawn, a sudden shaft of red flame soared up not a hundred yards away. A voice hailed him, and never did a human voice sound sweeter. Ten minutes later Flanagan's hand grasped his, and he stepped ashore.

"The old boat's done it, then," said Flanagan. "I rather guessed she would. Now you come right along with me."

"So it was only a guess, was it?"

"Well, most things in this world are a sort of guess," said the old man. "The only thing sure is that men don't die till their hour's come." He turned away gruffly, and at once began to shoulder Arthur's goods.

"But you can't carry all that," cried Arthur, as the old man hoisted the sack of flour upon his shoulders.

"Needs must when the devil drives," he said grimly. "There ain't no hotel hereabouts, didn't I tell you? You've got to get all your goods into the shack to-night. That wind's bringing up snow, and the sooner we get this job done the better."

Arthur grasped his valise, and such impedimenta as Flanagan would let him carry, and followed the old man.

The snow was deep and soft, in spite of the cold wind. The darkness was like a solid wall on either side of the thin ray that fell from Jim's lantern. Through the wood there ran a perpetual ghostly murmur, a sound of sighing, groaning, struggling, as the branches beat to and fro and rubbed against each other. Suddenly a long and terrible cry rose above the noises of the forest, a cry of infinite pain, despair, melancholy, and Arthur started back, shouting, "What's that?"

"Why, that's only a coyote," said Jim—"just an old dog coyote. Bless you! he won't hurt you."

Arthur said no more, but he was glad that no one could see the colour of his face. He struggled breathlessly in the steps of his guide. The hill was steep, the foothold uncertain; more than once he waded to his knees in a hidden bog-hole. And yet, in spite both of his discomfort and his fear, he was conscious of a gradual heightening of his spirits. There was something wild and savage in these black walls of forest that encompassed him, in the mystery and solitude of this primeval place, something that exhilarated while it awed him. He was conscious of the falling from him of the trappings of a discarded civilisation. He had come to a place where the artificialities of life had no significance; where the natural man stood front to front with the stubborn earth, with no weapons to subdue her but his own thews and muscles, his own right of domination, and his unconquerable will.

The ground was easier now, and they moved more swiftly on a level narrow trail. At last the darkness thinned a little; they had reached a small clearing, and a light shone brightly.

"Here we are," said Jim. "And not sorry to get here either."

He pushed open the door of a log-hut. It was perhaps fourteen feet square; a stove burned red-hot in the centre of the hut; on one side was a long bunk built of red cedar.

"I done my best to clean it up," said Jim. "Maybe there's a rat or two around, and perhaps a porcupine, but they won't hurt you. It's dry, that's one thing. And now I'll say good-night."

He tramped off into the wood. Arthur stood a long time listening, but Jim's footsteps were soon lost amid the groaning of the trees. The long, melancholy cry of the coyote again thrilled the air. Arthur shut the door.

And it was so that he came into his heritage.

XVII

THE NEW LIFE

He contrived to make himself some coffee, and after a while extinguished the lamp and crawled into the bunk. The red-hot stove filled the hut with a dim light, and he fell asleep.

An hour later he woke in a sweat of terror. The fire in the stove had died down, the hut was bitterly cold, and he was in total darkness. The darkness was like nothing he had known before; it closed round him with a pressure that was almost tangible, and it seemed alive. There was a horrible sense of something hostile in it; he could have thought it moved stealthily, with a faint rustling of unseen robes, that it breathed and palpitated, that it was a presence inimical to life. A rat ran across his bed, and on the roof there was a long grating sound. Outside, in the wide night, he could recognise the melancholy cry of the coyote; but there were other cries and sounds which he could not recognise. Close to the door of the hut there was audible what seemed like deep, stertorous breathing, deepening into a human groan. From the depth of the wood came a fearful wail, as of a woman in distress. He sprang from the bunk, rushed to the door, and opened it. There was a soft flutter of wings, and the groaning ceased; but the wailing in the woods went on, upon a scale of rising agony. There was nowhere any sign of life. The moon had risen, and the snow-laden trees rose pure and mystic in the silver light. They were like a cohort of silent watchers round his lonely hut, and he welcomed them as comrades. Slowly his fears subsided. It

was not until the next day he learned from Flanagan that the soft groaning at the door proceeded from nothing more alarming than a mountain owl, and that the wailing in the forest was merely a mountain lion in search of prey.

This unforgetable night was his first and last occasion of terror. It is only when the causes of phenomena are hidden from us that the phenomena themselves are terrible. When we know that the tapping in the wainscot is caused by an innocent insect, the movements in the forest to be the work of wind or frost, the breathing in the dark to be a sleeping owl, the mind at once regains the equipoise of reason. Perhaps if we knew what really lay behind the mystery of death, we should fear it as little as we do the commonplace phenomena of birth and life.

The morning came at last in floods of living light, and as Arthur once more stood at the cabin door, he thought that he had never looked upon a scene so exquisite. Pale rays of colourless and pure fire spread like a fan along the eastern sky; they deepened into momentary purple, throbbed as with a pulse, and suddenly were quickened with a flood of scarlet. The distant peaks of snow one by one caught the elemental splendour, the higher summits topped with flame, the lower stained with rose; and across the dim and quiet lake, from an open gateway of the hills a shaft of light shot, slender as a spear and vibrating with the joy of speed. A gust of air shook the forest, and the ice-clad boughs tinkled like a chime of bells. There was no other sound except the little song of water, running underneath its roof of ice. All around rose the still and solemn woods. The miniature plains of snow gathered at their feet glittered like a floor of diamonds. And from sky and lake and forest came an air inimitably virginal, the cold and taintless air of unviolated Nature, infinitely pure and strong and vital.

He stood for some moments quite silent, in that intense clarity of dawn, scarcely conscious of himself, his whole being drawn out in a kind of effortless and sacred awe. He had an inward sense of lustration and release: the soul rose clean as from a bath of fire; the will, so often misdirected, was modulated to the perfect harmony of this external world. Such moods lie beyond reason, and are therefore beyond the explication of the reason. The pivots upon which life moves consist of a few rare and exquisite moments; for one man a sunrise, for another a strain of music heard at midnight, for yet another the sudden, arrowy fragrance of violets in a wood, and behold! life is changed, something has been withdrawn from it and something added—a new element, wholly authentic, yet wholly indefinable. It was such a moment with this solitary exile. The dawn came to him as an omen and a challenge. It was the porch of a new life, and he entered it with willing feet.

He returned to the cabin, and breakfasted in haste after a fashion which would have provoked pity and derision in the bosom of the British house-wife. His coffee was boiled in a discarded meat-tin; bread he had none; and his effort to fry eggs was probably among the least successful of all recorded operations known to culinary science. In the midst of his crude performance Jim Flanagan arrived, surveying him from the doorway with a smile of irony.

When the meal was over, Jim began to talk in his slow, caustic way. Like many men who have passed their lives in the open air and solitude, Jim had acquired a certain rude philosophy, the fruit of much silent thinking, experience, and observation. He had worked in lumber-camps, mines, and on the railroads, but only by necessity; no sooner had he acquired a little money than he had always gone off into solitude again. Carrying all his scant possessions with him, he would disappear into the forests and mountains, and would be lost to sight for many months. What was he doing? Hunting, prospecting for gold and copper, and loafing. He would return from these expeditions not a penny piece the richer, a little raggeder, and with deeper lines upon his face, having often suffered great privations, yet at the first opportunity he would resume them. For all settled ways of life he had a positive aversion, and not all the gold of Golconda could have bribed him to reside in cities. This was the more remarkable because he had spent his childhood and early youth in Liverpool, from which dim and dreary city he had been thrust out by chance and poverty into the Canadian wilderness. Till he landed in Canada he had never seen a forest or a mountain, had scarcely looked upon a flower, and had breathed only the tainted air of slums; but on his first view of the wooded heights of Montreal, something woke in his heart, a dumb love of Nature, a passion for freedom, an appetite for solitude. Friends he had none, and if he ever had relations, he had long ago forgotten them. Thus left wholly to himself, he had fashioned his own way of life with neither memory nor obligation to restrain him; had considered his debt to civilization cancelled; had become a wanderer upon the face of the earth, a taciturn but contented nomad, whose feet had traversed the breadth of a mighty continent, and penetrated a hundred savage solitudes where none but he had trodden. Thus, in his own way, he had solved the problem of existence; he had achieved freedom, and had enrolled himself among the humble Argonauts of Empire.

The greatness of this half-discovered empire was his chief thought, and upon this theme he was always ready to speak.

"England don't know what she's got in Canada," was a frequent sentiment of his, often expressed with biting scorn. "She sends her worst out here," he would continue—"dumps her rubbish on us." He made this remark now, to which Arthur replied with a laugh, "I hope you don't consider me rubbish, Jim."

"No, you're young, and I guess you're strong. But there's lots of hard work ahead of you, and I've seen many a chap like you fly the tracks."

"I wish you'd tell me what I've got to do."

"Well, I ain't no fruit-rancher myself," said Jim. "But maybe I can teach you. Suppose you and me take a look round."

They went out together into the keen air. Around the cabin for a space of several acres the snow lay deep, its pure surface broken only by black tree-stumps. Farther back was a tangle of young wood, and beyond this the primeval forest. At a distance of fifty yards from the cabin the snow was discoloured, and Arthur recognised the bog-hole into which he had stumbled on the previous night.

"There seems a lot of bog, and I don't see any apple-trees," he remarked.

"That there bog's the best land you've got," Jim answered, "but it's got to be drained. The apple-trees are in the bush somewheres; didn't I tell you they've got growed up? You've got to start slashing that bush. It's a job that must be done. And I don't see how you're to do it all alone."

"Neither do I," said Arthur. "But if you'd help me, Jim, I think I could soon learn."

"I ain't no fruit-rancher," he began again.

"Unless I'm mistaken, you're just what you choose to be," said Arthur. "Name your own wage, Jim, and be my teacher."

"Well, I'll consider it," said the old man.

A couple of days passed, during which Arthur saw nothing of Jim. On the afternoon of the third day Arthur saw his boat moving toward the landing.

"I've been getting some things we'll want," said Jim. "You'll find 'em put down to your account. I may as well tell you I've been drunk. Maybe you won't want me now," he added with a grin.

"I'll take my chance on that, Jim."

"It's a thing what has to be," said the old man with a solemn roll of his gray head. "I ain't no drunkard, understand. I'd think shame of being that. But an occasional booze hurts no one, and is a necessity of life. It kind of limbers up one's wits."

"We'll let it go at that," laughed Arthur.

And thus the articles of this strange partnership were settled.

From that day began a life of furious and unremitting toil. Days and weeks passed unremarked in those Homeric labours; Arthur worked in blinding sweat, with aching muscles; rose early in the biting cold, plied the axe from morn to eve, and no sooner ate his rough evening meal than he was fast asleep. A hundred times it seemed as if no human organism could sustain the immense fatigue which he endured. As the snow melted, his task became the heavier. There were tree-stumps to be blasted, and the fumes of the blast left him with a splitting headache. There was the bog to be drained, and he worked for hours to his knees in water. There were trees to fell, to cut up into lengths for building, and the rest to be burned. Yet amid it all he was conscious of a growing sanity of mind and body. His hands, at first torn and wounded by his toil, hardened to their task; his shoulders broadened, his muscles grew supple, and on his cheek was the glow of health. A curt word of praise from Jim seemed the superlative of approbation; to hear him say, "Well, I guess you ain't no quitter," warmed him like a draught of wine. And the mental transformation was not less definite than the physical. The immediacy of his work, the constant need of patience, caution, and alertness, the mere brute vigour of his life, drove from his mind a hundred haunting ghosts. He had no time to debate on thin-spun theories of the universe and life, and even social problems sunk into insignificance. To see that a tree fell rightly, to disengage a fertile soil from the neglect of ages, to drain the bog—these were his problems, and he found them sufficiently absorbing. He had got back to the primeval; work and sleep and work again, all slowly issuing in a visible success—was not this the oldest and the one divine task of man, pursued through countless centuries, and furnishing the one solid base on which all human domination rested?

It might have been supposed that such a hard insistency of toil would have dulled the finer faculties. In so far as these faculties depended for their nourishment on books, no doubt they suffered; but they found a new and more vital food in the scenes which surrounded him. The inexhaustible surprise of sunrise and of sunset, the music of the forest, perpetual as the music of the sea, the blue expanse of lake, the wide array of snow-clad mountains—these and a hundred lesser things, such as the magic wrought by shafts of light in the deep shadows of the wood, trees glittering in a sheath of ice, moonlight upon snow, fascinated and absorbed him. He had never guessed how wonderful the world was. The laborious exercises of the human mind in quest of beauty seemed a tedious absurdity compared with this opulence of loveliness that met him everywhere. And he saw too that there is a kind of wisdom deeper than any that is found in books, which flows in upon the spirit which is in accord with Nature. Flanagan, with all his

crudity and ignorance, had something of this wisdom. He moved at ease in his environment, envied no man, coveted no man's goods, brought to each returning day a strength precisely equal to his task; and Arthur asked himself if either religion or philosophy could produce a form of life more admirable or more efficient. In these daily toils Jim was his sole companion. They worked and ate together, and in the long evenings sat in the warm cabin talking endlessly. To his surprise, he found that the old man was an indefatigable reader, but of not more than half a dozen books. The Bible he knew with thoroughness, and upon it had built up theories of life which would have surprised the theologians.

"Them Jews were like us," he would declare. "They stole a country and drove the other people out. Like us with the Injuns, I guess. A dead Injun is the only kind of Injun I've got any use for. Them Philistines was a kind of Injun, by all I make out."

One story which he loved to discuss was the desire of Israel to have a king. "What did they want a king for?" he would cry. "They'd got on well enough without one, and they never had no luck after they'd got one. They should have stuck to Samuel." And then he would go on to recount all he knew about the wickedness of kings. "They'd never been no good. They just sucked the people's blood, that's what they did. Why, they wer'n't even soldiers, not nowadays—just dressed-up dolls. Some day the world would get rid of them, and the sooner the better, so said he. A pretty thing indeed that decent folk should pay taxes to support such a rotten lot as they were."

The one poet whom he knew was Burns. He carried with him in the pocket of his ragged coat an old leather-bound copy of Burns, with a brass clasp, closely printed in blinding type upon a page nearly destitute of margins. It was a tiny book, in size about three inches by two, published within a few years of the poet's death. It bore signs of hard usage: the cover was stained and polished by the touch of hands that long since were dust; doubtless it had been carried in the pockets of a race of humble men, read in swift glimpses behind the plough, as like as not, within sight of the very hills the poet loved, or pored over by eager eyes round peat fires in solitary clachans. It was safe to say that a book so humble had never known the touch of hands polite; its pages had been turned by clumsy fingers hardened with excessive toil, and the faces that had stooped above it were plain and homely faces, roughened with wind and weather. To this forgotten race of men it had doubtless brought gaiety and hope, the brief vision of things lovely and eternal, and above all the message of that inward liberty which man never loses save by his own cowardice or folly. From the soiled pages Jim Flanagan drew the same inspiration. They breathed into him the pride of freedom, fed his fierce joy of independence, helped him, as they had helped ten thousand others, to walk upright in a world where an innumerable host of men bend their backs to the unjust yoke and learn to cringe and crouch. As Jim recited the well-remembered verses in this lonely hut at night, his voice trembled, his eyes glowed, and all aspects of meanness and commonness fell from him, leaving something that was intrinsically fine and great. That a man so crudely ignorant as Flanagan should have anything to teach a youth like Arthur appears absurd; yet so it was. What that teaching was it would be difficult to state in words, but its effect was clear. By its quiet assertion of undeniable qualities where they might be least expected, a general sense of the worth of mankind was produced, an essential worth, which was wholly independent of outward circumstance.

As time went on, Arthur discovered also that his life was not nearly so isolated as he had supposed. Scattered along the shores of the lake were other men, like himself, engaged on a daring experiment of life. One or two were sullen, unapproachable, apparently afraid lest their dignity should be compromised by chance acquaintanceships, the kind of men who carry into a new world all that is socially most narrow and petty in the old. But these were the exceptions; among the rest there was a real and kindly sense of community. Many of them were persons interesting in themselves and in their histories. There were ex-army officers, public-school and university men, even a musician—all, for some cause or other, fugitives from the vain strifes of civilised life. They never complained, they never thought of going back, they were all full of hope about the future. They talked with buoyant faith of the day when Kootenay Lake would be as well known as Geneva or Lucerne, and when its shores, now clothed with darkling forests, would become one of the gardens of the world. They pointed out how each year marked the growing invasion of the orchard on the forest. And, whatever the hard tasks of their life, they were clearly in love with it, desired no better, and would not have exchanged it for anything that cities could have offered them.

He found among these settlers a disposition toward mutual service, notable in itself, and unique in his experience. A man thought nothing of giving a day's service to a neighbour, of loaning him a team, or helping him to build his house. Being all engaged on the same tasks, each relied upon the other, expecting and assuming that the help given to-day would be loyally returned when his own occasion came.

And, besides this, there was much mutual visiting, concerts, suppers, dances—a free and simple hospitality, without elaboration or pretence. The concerts might not have satisfied a Queen's Hall audience, and the dances were but feebly illumined with the grace of woman; but all was homely, honest, and sincere. And then the walk back along the narrow trail, with the moon riding overhead, or beneath a roof of stars, each keenly bright, and the fresh lake-breeze moving through the forest in low-breathed symphonies—ah! this was life indeed! Often and often, as he walked that trail at night, he opened his lungs to drink in the crystal air that seemed a draught of life itself, and he thought with commiseration of the herded life on city pavements, and thanked God for his deliverance.

The spring came with melting snow and soft winds, and he began to realise some progress in his work. When the new growth was cleared away, he discovered a few hundred apple-trees of five years' growth.

"You're luckier than I thought," said Jim. "They're Spitzenbergs. You'll get something from them this year, I guess."

Then June came with a rush of heat and light. A long procession of days followed, the sky exquisitely bright, the hills clad in living green, the lake sparkling like a floor of amethyst. And then the winter once more, with its wonder of snow, and skies full of unearthly splendour.

So two years passed, and at their close he saw the triumph of his labour. The forest was pushed back by many acres; where the dense undergrowth had thrived, there spread the level fields, with long rows of budding trees; and the bog was a fertile garden. He had built himself another house, more commodious than the first rude cabin. Upon its walls hung the ranchman's usual pictures, coloured prints from magazines; there was also a goodly shelf of books, and the photographs of those he loved. Here he sat and meditated in the long summer evenings. From Vickars he had received many letters, keen, witty, sad; it seemed he was famous, after a London fashion, but his constant complaint was that no one really listened to his message. Elizabeth had written him even more frequently, and each letter had strengthened the implicit bond between them. Love-letters they could not be called, for love was rarely mentioned in them; but they were letters that only love could write—they exhaled the very perfume of her heart. From his father and his sister he had heard not a word. Latterly even his mother's letters had become irregular, and he sometimes thought he could discern in them an effort at concealment, as if she purposely avoided something which her whole nature urged her to say.

He sat thus, thinking over all the past, upon a summer's evening, when he heard Jim's tread upon the wood-path. Jim had been into Nelson upon some errand in the afternoon, and had hurried back, contrary to his custom, for there was some heavy work to be done upon the morrow.

"Well, Jim, any news?"

"Not as I know of. But I've got you a paper. It's the English *Daily Mail*. You're always glad to see that."

"All right, Jim. Thank you. I'll look at it to-morrow."

Jim moved off to his own shack, and Arthur went into the house. It was quite late, it seemed hardly worth while to light the lamp, and he was about to get into bed in the dark, when the white outline of the paper lying on the table attracted his eye.

"I may as well look at that," he thought; "I'm not sleepy."

He lit the lamp, and unfolded the paper. His eye wandered casually over the crowded columns, finding little that was interesting. Then, with a sudden chill of apprehension, his eye caught the name of Masterman.

"The Affairs of the Amalgamated Brick Co.," the paragraph was headed. "It has been long suspected that the affairs of this company were not as prosperous as could be wished, but no serious complications were expected until the close of last week. There were various unpleasant rumours on the Stock Exchange late on Friday afternoon, and the stock dropped rapidly. On Monday morning it became known that serious frauds were charged against the company. The nature of these charges is not yet ascertained, but we understand that warrants have been issued for the arrest of Archibold Masterman, the chairman of the company, and Elisha Scales, its secretary. If the allegations made against the company are at all such as rumour represents them, very sensational developments may be anticipated."

The blood rushed back into his heart as he read. His very being was suspended.

"My God!" he cried. "I must go home at once!"

And in that cry all the old loyalties awoke, and, chief of all, the son's loyalty to his father.

PART THREE

FATHER AND SON

XVIII

THE AMALGAMATED BRICK CO.

The offices of the Amalgamated Brick Co. were situated within a stone's-throw of the Mansion House. London throbbed and roared around them; on every side spread an intricate confusion of narrow and ancient streets, inhabited by a host of nomadic men, who camped in them for a few hours each day, filled them with clamour, and fled at nightfall. The invasion began with the earliest light; then might be seen the scouts of the advancing army, mere boys, whose fresh faces had not yet acquired the London pallor or lost the mischievous vivacity of boyhood; youths immaculately dressed in well-brushed common clothes; narrow-shouldered men in shabby overcoats; oldish men, who walked with eyes fixed upon the pavement, as if bowed with some unforgetable humiliation, and, here and there, women, some mere girls, treading briskly, others shawled and shapeless figures with battered bonnets, charwomen, office scrubbers, and the like, all passing in an endless stream, and swallowed up at last in these dim byways of the city. Later on came another class of men, wearing better clothes, but whose eyes were anxious; then well-fleshed and confident persons, who walked upright with an air of authority; last of all, the magnates, fur-coated and wearing diamond pins and studs, smoking cigars or cigarettes, arriving in cabs or carriages, who were received in these crowded offices with the silence which awaits the passage of kings. With their advent began the real business of the day. At their glance every pulse beat faster, every brain grew more alert, and the great wheel of business revolved with electric speed, humming, throbbing, tumultuous, till the very walls shook with its reverberations, and the whole city became clamorous as a cave into which a fierce sea thunders. By noon the tide was at its height; at four o'clock the ebb began; with the earliest stars the invading host began the process of dispersal till, by the time midnight had arrived, Tadmor in the wilderness was not more silent or more solitary than this deserted city.

For centuries this daily invasion had gone on, and who shall say what uncounted multitudes had fallen on the field of battle! For centuries more it would go on, and always with the same history. Here was achieved a perpetual immolation of mankind, a hopeless and unatoning sacrifice. To this battlefield youth brought its energy, manhood its virtue and its strength, womanhood its humble patience. To what delusive trumpet-music had they marched, beneath what visionary banners, with what far-off thrilling glimpses of golden heights which they would never scale! To these thronged recruits in the regiments of Mammon, experience brought no caution, age no wisdom. For the story was always the same, the issue unvarying: first the baseless hope of youth, then the long unfruitful patience of laborious manhood, lastly the miserable despair of age. Happy those who fell early in the struggle; they had the consolation of a might-have-been whose absurdity was not detected, and they were spared the worst. Most miserable those who lived on, until hope failed, each year became a new disability, and at last they found themselves superseded, thrust out by a new generation, discarded, and left alone with the spectres of want, sickness, and the workhouse. A few survived, of course, and their histories, passed from lip to lip, became the stimulus for fresh hosts of foredoomed toilers. By luck, by fraud, by adroit use of opportunity, by unscrupulous ability, by cruel and ruthless stratagem, these few rose, climbed upon a holocaust of victims into power, and became the battle lords of this inglorious field. None saw in them a warning, multitudes offered them adulation; and they thus became new lures for ignorant ambition. And so the endless martyrdom went on; ever fresh hosts clamouring to sacrifice flesh and brain upon these ignoble altars, with a fervour of fanaticism never equalled in the most sacred causes of freedom or religion. Ah! not upon the snows of Russia, the plain of Waterloo, or the heights of Gettysburg are found the most dreadful battlefields of earth! The bloodiest of all battlefields are in the heart of cities.

Archibold Masterman was one of those who had risen, especially since the successful launching of the Amalgamated Brick Co. He had become a personage sought for at civic dinners, known at clubs, and surrounded by a clamour of more or less sincere flattery. From the windows of his office he could see the gray roof of the Mansion House, and he never looked that way without elation. Why should he not reign there? What was there to prevent him moving at the height of civic glory? The kingdoms of the world—his world—were spread before him, and the glory of them, and he was eager to inherit them. Lord Mayor of London, Member of Parliament for the city, knighthood, baronetcy—so ran his dream, and he knew that it was not a foolish dream. Men less able than himself had won these prizes. And he meant to have them in good time. The truly great period of his life was just beginning. He had got the world beneath his feet at last, and he meant to keep it there.

Extreme prosperity had had a softening influence upon the man; a harsh critic might have called it a disintegrating influence. The mental force was not abated, the alertness of his eye was not dimmed; but he went with a looser rein. He rose later, sat longer at the table, and had learned to rely upon subordinates. His suspicion, that sixth sense of the man of business, was relaxed. The strong opiate of self-sufficiency had begun to work in his veins. He was the conscious conqueror, walking with uplifted head, and no longer closely watchful of the way he trod.

With him Elisha Scales had risen too. The clerk, with his mean face and crafty eyes, had proved himself indispensable. Masterman's dislike for him remained, but use and contiguity had

worn down much of his original prejudice. He could not but admit his ability. Beyond that, however, he did not care to go. He knew him to be adroit, patient, obsequious, daring; but the inner springs of his character remained inscrutable.

It was Scales who had really engineered the Brick Trust. The purchase of the Leatham brick-yard had been but the first of a great number of similar transactions. No sooner was the Amalgamated floated than it achieved a miraculous success. There was a fortnight of frantic buying by the public; gold poured into the treasury; the financial papers, duly subsidised by copious advertisement, pushed the boom; and at the end of three months the name of Masterman was enrolled among the great magnates of modern commerce. His portrait appeared in the journals. The story of his early struggles was adorned with legendary marvel. Due stress was laid upon his piety: was he not the deacon of a church, a man of strict morals, a man who might be safely trusted, a man of solid character? And of all the baits that drew the public, perhaps this was the most successful. The small investor rallied to him. Humble folk in remote religious communities learned his name, discussed his doings, and struggled for the chance to lay their savings at his feet. If any word of warning reached them, it was disregarded. Six per cent. is so much more attractive than four, that, when it is guaranteed by the piety and genius of a Masterman, the voice of prudence speaks in vain.

A few months of secret campaigning, a month of deafening publicity, and behold the result—Scales flourishing in a house of new and expensive furniture, the possessor of a carriage; Masterman enthroned in spacious offices, from whose windows he beholds all the vanities of earth—sheriffship, mayoralty, knighthood, and the like—moving steadily towards him in a golden pageant.

Has the reader ever seen a balloon of paper, with a tiny light burning in its centre, soar into the evening air? It is a pretty spectacle. One wonders how so frail a thing can hold so perilous a force as flame. We watch with astonishment its little lamp borne aloft, carried hither and thither like a starry feather on the delicate tides of air, yet always moving higher. Watch it long enough, and you will see something else. Sooner or later there comes a flash of fire, a dim red spark, visible for an instant, and where is the balloon? Its very fragments are undiscoverable, and it is seen no more.

Masterman's balloon soared bravely in those first six months. Then something happened which no sagacity could predict—a wind of war arose suddenly, and the lamp showed dangerous flickerings.

When war happens to a nation it at once becomes the supreme interest. And this was no common war. From insignificant beginnings, at which the nation smiled in proud contempt, it grew into a devastating struggle. Troops were poured to the front, until the martial resources of the nation were exhausted. There was a cry for volunteers; and city offices and warehouses were depleted by whole battalions of heroic youth. All business was arrested, and sank into narrow channels. The daily crash of bankruptcy filled the air. And, since the last thing men do at such a time is to extend their premises and build houses, it came to pass that there was no demand for bricks. The Brick Trust ruled the market; but, when there is no market, this appears a hollow boast. And yet there were dividends that must be paid, for they were guaranteed; there was an appearance of prosperity which must be maintained at all costs. There came at last a day when a chill apprehension began to spread through the offices of the Trust. It was at first but a tiny cold wave, but it crept higher, for a whole sea lay behind it. Masterman, sitting in his office, heard the lapping of the rising tide, and saw it carrying away the broken gauds of the pageant of which he had dreamed.

"The war will end in a month!" he cried. But it did not end. "It will end in three months," he prophesied; "and then will come a marvellous prosperity." But the prophecy proved false. On lonely veldt and behind unassailable kopjes a daring and sullen foe held on. "It looks as if it will go on for ever!" he exclaimed at last, in the bitterness of his heart. And the day when he said that brought with it something the strong man had never known before—a sudden loosening of the bonds of all his vigour. For weeks he had slept little; he had grown gaunt and nervous; and now there came this thrill of weakness, this collapse of force. In the gray winter dawn he rose and dressed as usual, but his strong hands trembled, and his head swam. A newsboy, racing past his house, shouted, "Another British defeat!" That was the last stroke. He sank helpless to the ground. When he woke he was in bed.

"I must go to the city!" he cried.

"You cannot!" said the voice of Dr. Leet. "If you don't obey my orders now, you will never go to the city again."

"A million of money is at stake!" he groaned.

"So is your life," said the doctor.

He lay quiet a long time after that. It was a new and terrible thought, and he found it hard to adjust his mind to it. "His life"—he had always assumed that that at least was his own unforfeitable possession. He had never known the moment when eager nerve and artery and brain-cell had not leapt to obey his will. And now it seemed his whole house of life was in revolt.

His will, that iron captain-general of all these servile forces, was deposed. Well, he simply would not die. If he must obey the doctor, he must. And, after all, to a man tired in brain and body this restfulness of soft pillows, this utter quietness and shaded light, was sweet. Anything was better than that horrible thrill of weakness, that loosening of each intimate joint and muscle—anything!

He turned his face from the light, and fell asleep.

Toward evening he was told that Scales insisted on seeing him. He would have seen him; but the doctor was present, and interposed his fiat. The most that the doctor would allow was that Scales should send him a written message.

The message came: "What are we to do?"

It was accompanied by no explanation, but the words were ominous. He made an effort to grasp their meaning, but it escaped him.

"Do what you will," he wrote.

Then the blind wave of stupor overwhelmed him again. Why should he trouble? It was all right—everything was all right. It was a hard thing that a man who had worked all his life couldn't get one day's rest. He wasn't going to worry. Let Scales do the worrying; that was what he was paid for. Everything was all right—it must be all right ... and Scales was no fool. So he fell asleep again, and the black night settled on the city, and he heard no more the voices wailing in the darkness, "Another British defeat!"

If his eyes could have followed the clerk, he would have seen a face paler than his own, with puckered, blinking eyes, and jaw set in grim determination. As Scales drew nearer to his own house, it was as though he smoothed out his face by some magic of dissimulation. Perhaps it was the mere spectacle of the house that turned the scale of destiny for him that night. How could he give up that house? It was the outward symbol of his social apotheosis. He had bought it but a year ago. And since then how much had he spent on it! What delighted chafferings he had had with decorators and upholsterers! There was the dining-room, all panelled in oak, with beautiful red walls, and a Turkey carpet; and the little library, with its bookcases—all mahogany; and the drawing-room, with its white stucco decorations, and its white wooden partitions, which every one admired; and the billiard-room, with its French windows opening on the little lawn; why, even the servants' bedrooms were done in white and gold! There was never a completer house—every one had said so. He had never grown tired of explaining its unique conveniences to his less fortunate friends; and on Thursday afternoons, when Mrs. Scales "received," she had usually closed the function by taking her more intimate acquaintances all over her house, never even omitting the kitchens. And he was to give this up? He was to sink back again into a "semi-detached," with iron railings and a strip of garden, and rooms with cheap wall-papers? And he was to sell his horse, which he had bought from an alderman, and get rid of that adorable victoria, in which he aired his greatness on Saturday afternoons before envious suburban eyes—and perhaps come back again to the indignity of cheap trams and 'buses? Well, not if he knew it! He knew a trick worth two of that. Masterman had told him to do as he liked; and an evil spirit whispered at his ear as he went up the steps of the house, and told him quite distinctly what it was that he must do.

Mrs. Scales met him in the hall, plump, smiling, robed in yellow satin; and somehow that yellow satin angered him like an insult. He regarded it with distinct aversion. He felt a rising wave of disgust against his wife, merely because she looked so cheerful and proud, while he endured secret tortures—she could wear yellow satin, while his mind wore crape. That was like women—they had nothing to do but eat and drink and dress, while their men-folk were on the rack. Talk about the fine discernment of women! Why, they hadn't any! You might live with a woman for years, and she would never guess what you, endured and suffered. So he let his ill temper against his wife smoulder; for it is a habit common with persons of the Scales variety to treat a wife as a kind of lightning-rod, which conveniently receives the discharge of their superfluous wrath.

This wrath accumulated violence in the course of an uncomfortable dinner. The poor woman had but one theme of perennial interest—her house and her servants.

"I've thought of a new improvement," she began joyously. "What do you think of it? I'm going to have a little conservatory opening from the library window. The builders' men were here this afternoon, and they say it can be done quite easily, and won't cost more than about two hundred pounds."

"Ah! that's like you!" he retorted, with a vicious snarl. "Always planning and plotting to spend my money, aren't you? Do you think I'm made of money? Do you think I've nothing to do but pay for your whims? I'd have you know I'm master in this house! And I'll have no builders' men coming here when I'm out!"

"But Elisha, I thought you'd be pleased——"

"Then you'd no business to think? I won't have you doing things without consulting me! No, I don't want any more dinner! I've other things to think of besides conservatories!"

And he flung off from the table in a rage, leaving behind him tears and consternation.

"What's the matter with father?" asked young Benjamin.

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied.

"He's getting mighty ill tempered."

But at that the instinctive woman's loyalty flew to his defence.

"I expect he's worried. Your father has so much to think of. Sometimes I think we were happier before we had all this money."

"I don't," grinned the son. "That's all nonsense, mother. Money is about the only thing I know that's worth having in this world."

With which admirable sentiment he took himself off to the billiard-room, where he remained till bed-time, smoking innumerable cigarettes, and playing a sullen game of pool. He also helped himself somewhat plentifully to whiskey, for what was the use of money if you couldn't get all the drink you wanted with it? The creed that money was the one thing in the world best worth having had not found a conspicuous justification in Benjamin Scales. He was not an amiable youth, as we have already seen; under no circumstances could he have achieved manly virtues; but, whereas poverty might have kept him in a straight course by the mere pressure of deprivation, money had set wide for him the gateway of easy vices and destructive pleasures.

The dark night sped on; and, in the little library with the mahogany bookshelves, Scales devised his scheme. It was by no means novel; it had often been achieved before, and sometimes with success; it was simply the last throw of the commercial gambler. Dividends must be paid; and, when the entire credit of a great concern depends upon their instant payment, why not pay them out of capital? It was a risk, of course—the kind of risk which a hundred petty thieves run every day when they back horses with money stolen from their master's till, in the firm belief that they can pay it back before suspicion is aroused. Scales was not constitutionally a brave man; he would have fled from physical peril promptly and without the least sense of shame; but one form of courage he had, the courage of the rat that fights desperately when it is at bay. He saw with terrifying vividness what stood at the end of the road he proposed to travel—a judge in a red gown, with a face of inimitable sternness, warders in blue coats with brass buttons, and the doors of a prison. Nevertheless, he resolved to take the risk. Masterman had taken the same risk years before in that matter of the bogus cheque. And he was proud of the transaction; he had boasted of it many times; it had been the beginning of all his greatness. Providence had removed Masterman from the area of the present crisis; and perhaps it was as well, for since his rise into notoriety he had shown himself more and more eager to obey the safe traditions of society. But, in the mind of the clerk, that early and successful piece of trickery was not forgotten, and he used it now for his own justification. Masterman, at all events, would have no right to grumble at the repetition of his own trick, but upon a far wider scale and for a greater prize.

And, besides, the risk was more apparent than real. This long run of ill luck to the British army in South Africa was something that went beyond the natural chances of the game. It must end; and, when it ended, it would be suddenly. A single sweeping victory, and the tide of prosperity would roll back. Hadn't some pious person said that it was always darkest before the dawn? If that were true, the dawn was close at hand—it was more than probable, it was inevitable. And what a fool he would be if, after holding on to the Amalgamated through all these weeks of darkness, he let it sink just when the first gleam of gold was in the sky!

So Scales argued with himself through that long night in the solitary library. In such arguments it is inclination that supplies the final bias. When a man argues with himself upon a question of right and wrong, it is never right that wins.

And during that same long night Masterman slept peacefully, ignorant of the Tragic Angel that stooped above his pillow. If the Angel could have spoken, he would have told the story thus. "Years ago a man did wrong, and was not punished for it. He was elated by his immunity, and boasted of it. He succeeded in life, as men count success. He climbed to a place of honour, from which he saw a new world opening at his feet. Then he would have been glad to forget that early deed of wrong. He did forget it, as far as he could. But there is a general memory in the world which forgets nothing. It goes about with a searchlight, raking over the gutters of the past, and making discoveries. This sleepless memory found the thing which he was now anxious to forget; gave it to another, who turned it round and round like a precious talisman; and, last of all, this other used the talisman both for the ruin of himself and of the man who had shown him how to use it. And this other man did not know that the talisman had lost its magic. Still less did he suspect that it was a fatal and malignant gift. Who are we to suppose that we can divorce the present from the past? Words live, deeds live—they live eternally. We cannot lose them at will. They are seeds which are carried far away upon the wind, but they always find some soil in which they spring up. They are dead, we say. Thou fool, nothing is dead which man has ever said, thought, or done. It only waits its hour, and it always springs up at last."

A month later the financial journals remarked with ardent approbation that in spite of the wide depression of trade, produced by this calamitous war, the Brick Trust had paid its full

dividends. Such a circumstance reflected great credit upon the management of the Trust, especially on its president, Mr. Masterman, whose financial genius had thus received an extraordinary vindication. If the investor had ever had the least doubt of the stability of this great commercial venture, his doubts should be set at rest for ever by this remarkable achievement. They regretted to add that Mr. Masterman had been seriously ill, as the result of his indefatigable labours on behalf of the Trust. He was now, however, quite himself again, and those who had recently seen him reported him in the best of health.

This announcement created a new boom in the stock of the Trust. At the same time news came of what appeared to be the first wave of final triumph in South Africa. Bells were rung, rockets soared, and shouting multitudes filled every street. Masterman, from his rooms at Brighton, saw the passing of the shouting crowd, and the tumult went to his head like wine.

"We are past the worst!" he cried. "I feel years younger. To-morrow I will wire for Scales, and get into harness again."

And, as he spoke, the face kindled with its old fire of vigour, his eyes flashed, and his form had its old erectness.

He also believed himself to have won another battle, and the pageant of his ambitions once more moved steadfastly before him.

XIX

THE FEAR

Another month had passed, and Masterman was back in his office. Outwardly he appeared little changed by his illness. The superb frame had suffered a shock, but there was no sign of vital injury. The eye was as keen as ever, the face as firm in outline, the expression of the lips as masterful.

Nevertheless, there were changes of a more subtle character which were obvious to a critical observer. He had hours of languor when he would sit with folded hands, dreamily gazing out of the window, entirely careless of business. His temper had grown fitful and capricious. There was no longer the old steady dominance; there was swift assertion, gusty, violent energy, soon spent, and followed by periods of sullen inaction. His clerks approached him with trepidation, and often fled from him in dismay. They never knew what to expect. Sometimes they were received with brutal and unjust reproaches for faults they had not committed, or for faults so slight that a generous mind would have disregarded them. At other times they were welcomed with familiarity, treated as equals, and perhaps invited to listen to long boastful talks which had neither purpose nor coherence. And then, for a few days, as though some obstruction in the brain were suddenly dissolved, another man would appear, firm, sagacious, capable of swift decision, a human driving force of incomparable energy—the Masterman whose marvellous efficiency was the legend of the city.

One feature of his conduct in these days was very marked—he avoided Scales. He had to meet him every day, but such intercourse as existed was approached uneasily, hurried through, and dismissed with visible relief. The truth was, that at the back of his mind lay a great fear which he dared not even formulate to himself. There was a question always on his lips which he ached to ask, yet he dared not ask it: "What was it Scales had done to save the credit of the Trust?" It appears incredible that he should not have satisfied his curiosity. A single hour of scrutiny would have put him in possession of the truth. But it was precisely because he already guessed too accurately what that truth was, that he refused to hear it uttered. It is easy enough to walk with boldness in the dark, ghost-haunted room, if you undoubtedly believe there is no ghost. But if you do—if you have heard the rattling chain and stealthy sigh, and have felt your blood stiffen at the moving shadow—then what? The easiest plan is the child's old game of make-believe. You will invent some fantastic reason why you should look no closer. And that is what Masterman was doing. He played at make-believe, haunted by the single terror that the ghost was real.

He would sometimes skirt the edge of the thought that was consuming him, begin a sentence boldly, and then let it trail off into a kind of hurried whisper, or turn it to another end.

"All going well?" he would begin interrogatively, as Scales entered his private room. "Ah! there are some things I wanted to talk over with you, Scales—important things, you know."

For a moment his eyes would search the crafty face of the clerk, and then he would add, "But it doesn't matter, just now. I'm busy to-day—very busy. Another time will do."

"I'm at your service whenever you like," Scales would say, with a kind of half-defiant

obsequiousness.

"No, no; not now. I'm too busy to-day. Another time." And then he would rustle the papers on his desk, with a great pretence of business, and drop his gaze, and go on muttering aimlessly, "Another time, Scales, when I'm a little stronger, you know."

When Scales left the room he would sit quiet for a long time, and gaze out of the window, his eyes always falling at last on the gray roof of the Mansion House.

He never looked in that direction without receiving a new impulse to his ambition. From the silent doors of that great house he saw himself issuing forth triumphant, the conqueror of circumstance, seated in a golden carriage drawn by noble horses, with the applauding crowd thronging at his wheels. He adorned his triumph with new features day by day, wearied his invention to create them, and dwelt upon them with a childish ardour of delight. There were even moments when they ceased to be imaginary; they had the glow and substance of reality, and he could hear the beating of the horses' hoofs upon the asphalt, the crash of music, and the raucous shouting of the crowd.

Then a cold, gray cloud obscured the vision, a gust of cold air set him shivering, and he was alone once more with his silent fear.

In his own home his conduct was marked by the same contradictions. He would arrive from the city at nightfall, enter the house in a fierce bustle of energy, talking eagerly, laughing loudly; and then, as like as not, in the midst of dinner, would relapse into a heavy silence. The chief subject of his talk on these occasions, was the things he meant to do with his increasing wealth. He had engaged a firm of architects to plan a country house for him, although the site was not yet found nor the estate bought. He would spend hours over the details of this house. It would be such a house as was never built before. It should have a marble swimming-pool, electric ovens, and a vast palm-garden. For its decoration he would import marble fireplaces from Italian palaces, tapestries from France, oak carving from Holland. Of course it would have a picture-gallery—every gentleman had that. He would employ an expert to collect the pictures. And of course there would be a great library, and vast stables, and a private golf-course, and sheets of ornamental water, and extensive gardens.

"Have you done anything more about the new house?" Helen would ask, as she fluttered up to him with a perfunctory kiss.

"Not to-day. It's been a busy day in the city. But we'll have a look at the plans presently."

And then the plans would be unrolled, and the details once more discussed, and new features added.

"I'm tired of this old house," Helen would cry, with pretty petulance. "I don't see the good of being rich if you've got to live here."

"And you won't live here much longer. Wait till the war is over, and then you shall take your place with the greatest ladies of the land."

And then Helen would blush with pleasure, her light mind inflated with pride, her imagination picturing a bright butterfly flight through all kinds of glittering scenes. Mrs. Masterman, silent as ever, took no part in these conversations. They were to her a source of pain; but to Helen they were the breath of life. In the future she pictured to herself her mother had no part. But she saw herself with singular distinctness moving on a high plane of circumstance and pleasure, and she made it her aim to foster her father's vanity as a means of gratifying her own.

"Father's easy enough to manage," she often told herself. And yet there were many occasions when her boast was rudely falsified. Did she never notice the sudden shadow that fell across her father's face? Did she never ask why it was he would angrily sweep the plans of his new house aside, crying that, maybe, he would never want them after all, and would stalk off in gloomy silence to his own room, where he sat alone until long after the midnight hour had struck? No; she never guessed the cause of these explosions. But her mother did, and trembled.

And amid all these aberrations, perhaps the most curious was that his mind appeared to have received a new bias toward religion.

There was a certain Sunday evening when Mrs. Masterman surprised him, reading in his office. The house was very still, and he was reading aloud in a grave and solemn voice.

He looked up as she entered, and, instead of frowning on her intrusion, motioned her to silence, and went on reading.

"Listen to this," he said. "I thought I knew the Bible, but here's something I've never met before. The man that wrote this was a wise fellow.

"*'What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All*

those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a host that hasted by; and as a ship that passeth over the waves of the water, which, when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the pathway of the keel in the waves; or, as when a bird hath flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found, but the light air being beaten with the stroke of her wings, and parted with the violent noise and motion of them, or passed through, and therein afterwards no sign where she went is to be found; or like as, when an arrow is shot at a mark, it parteth the air, which immediately cometh together again, so that a man cannot know where it went through: even so we in like manner, as soon as we were born, began to draw to our end.'

"There's a lot of truth in that," he remarked. "As soon as we are born we begin to draw near to our end. That's mighty true. It kind of makes a man feel small, though, as if nothing mattered. It makes a man feel as though God laughed at him. And it makes me feel, too, as if it would be rather a good thing to be done with it all. If I could be a boy again I wouldn't say. I believe I should think it worth while being kicked and beaten again, just to feel as I did then. But, by the time a man is going on for sixty, he's about tired of it all. Doesn't seem worth while doing anything then, except to get into bed and go to sleep."

He paused a moment, as if to swallow some choking bitterness, and then went on again in the same low tone:

"There's few men that ever had a harder time than I did when I was a boy. You never knew my father? No, and a good job too. There's no question he was a brute. But somehow, when I heard that he was dead, it came to me what it all meant. He'd never had a fair chance, never had his real share in life, never had enough of anything, except, maybe, drink, and of that he'd had too much. Well, that day when I pictured him lying there all white and quiet, I kind of understood what the drinking meant too. He was in a rage against life, wanted to forget the way he'd been treated, and that's why he drank. I reckon that's why most men drink, just to forget. And I said to myself, 'Well, I don't want to forget. I'll remember everything the world did to him, and I'll pay it back, blow for blow, and bruise for bruise. I'll get my fingers into the world's throat before I've done, and I'll get what I want.' And I've done it too. And now the queer thing is, it doesn't somehow seem worth while. Things you've wanted all your life don't seem what you thought 'em when once you've got them. Seems as if you'd paid too dear for them, and been cheated after all. Your good time is when you want 'em, and can't get them, and, when you've got them, you wonder what made you want 'em. That's what I meant when I said it seemed as though God laughed at us. I believe I'd laugh myself if I could see it far enough off. All the fuss and bother, and rampaging up and down, and then a quiet old fellow puts his hand on your shoulder, and says, 'What hath pride profited us?' and goes on to tell you all you've done don't amount to a row of pins, and you know it's true, too. That's the thing that hurts—it's true, and you know it, and feel like the worst kind of fool."

He spoke musingly, in a voice of extraordinary softness and sad deliberation. His wife listened wonderingly. The passage he had read, whose sombre wisdom contradicted every purpose of his own conduct, the impression it produced of the vanity of life, and his own entire gravity, tenderness, and sincerity, as he read the solemn words, wrought in her complete amazement. In all her long knowledge of her husband she had never known him in this mood. A woman whose habitual thoughts moved on a more earthly level would have found the mood ominous; she would have shuddered in every fibre of her affection, and have imagined the slow beating of the wings of death upon the quiet air. But, for her, all that was ominous in the scene was eclipsed by an overmastering sense of spiritual gratitude. Through long years she had prayed for such an hour, and prayed against hope. Had it come at last, this hour of wisdom, this impartation of a higher light, this sudden softening and sweetening of a nature whose harsh earthiness had been to her a cause of unspeakable distress?

"O Archie," she cried, "how glad I am to have you speak like that! Let the world go, Archie dear, before it lets you go. Let us go from this hateful life, you and I. If we could only be poor again, and live in some quiet place, we could be happy yet. You've never got any happiness yet out of all your money that I can see, and you never will. Can't we start again, dear, and won't you forgive Arthur, and have him back?"

She was on her knees beside him, her head bowed, or she would have seen the swift hardening of his face.

"Don't be a fool!" he said harshly.

"Is it folly?" she cried.

"Yes, the silliest of folly. A man can't turn back if he would, and I don't really want to. He must go on to the end of things."

"Ah! the end—what will that be, Archie?"

"God knows. But there's one thing I know, and that is, that a man doesn't fight all his life to get something, just to throw it away upon a whim. I'd think shame of myself if I didn't fight my battle out to the last stroke. You and me have never agreed, and we don't agree now."

"If you'd only forgive Arthur," she persisted.

"I never forgive fools. I reckon God doesn't do that either. He forgives sinners, but not fools. Arthur's a fool!"

He closed the Book with a bang, and rose. His face was dark and troubled. His wife left the room without another word. From the church across the road there came the soft music of the evening hymn. He listened, with dilated eyes, keeping time to the familiar rhythm with extended finger. He breathed a long sigh as it ceased. "It's a queer thing to think about, that in fifty years' time not one of those folk will be alive," he reflected. "All gone like—how did the words run?—like a ship on the water that leaves no trace. I wonder where Scales will be? Nowhere near where I am, I hope. Scales is a beast!"

And then once more The Fear returned. He saw it like a dark-winged phantom, pale-faced, threatening, gliding up the road, standing at his gate.

It stood there a long time, and he wondered if the people coming out of church could see it too. The wings trailed the ground, and it wore a black hood. The face beneath the hood he could not see, but he could hear the words softly uttered, "What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us?" And the evening hymn, which had ceased, seemed to begin again, attenuated like a whisper from some organ in the air, a frail, slow, unearthly melody:

> Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
> Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
> Change and decay in all around I see...

Just then a door clanged, Helen's light, laughing voice was heard in the hall, and the whole phantom sunk out of sight. He took hold of gross reality again, and saw his path, hard and lucid like a line of burnished gold, leading on to a bright shining ridge, on which arose the long colonnades of a great house, round which a multitude of people buzzed, and held out golden wreaths to him.

In the reaction of emotion which ensued there came to him a new virility of purpose. To come so near those golden heights and miss them was a thing impossible. Once let him scale them, stand visibly triumphant—and then? Well, it would be time enough then to meditate upon the deep sad words of this old philosophic thinker which had so strangely moved him.

Nevertheless, this softened mood did not wholly leave him all this Sabbath evening. The memory of his father had evoked also the memory of his son. For the first time a faint suspicion crossed his mind that, after all, Arthur might have chosen a form of life which promised greater happiness than his own. Through all the many months of absence he had rarely mentioned Arthur's name; if he had done so, it had been with a frowning brow. Now, to the surprise of both mother and daughter, he asked for Arthur's letters, took them with him into the office, and there read them quietly.

"If he only had not gone away!" he said.

And with that thought his sense of injury returned. It was a hard thing for a father to condone the implied condemnation of that flight. And the only rehabilitation of his pride lay in some visible success which even Arthur must respect. There was a lot of good that might be done with money. It was expected nowadays of rich men that they should be public benefactors. Here was an untried field which he might conquer; and what a fine irony it would be if Arthur should return to England some day to find the name of the father he had despised mentioned with general respect as a public benefactor! It was strange that he had not thought of that before. It would afford him a new interest in life, and be an exquisite revenge.

He rose next morning full of this new plan. He had already done more than his fair share in subscribing to various charities, but from this hour he began to develop what appeared a reckless generosity. In reality it was the entire reverse of reckless; it was governed by the most deliberate strategy. He had no idea of not letting his left hand know what his right hand gave. He gave only in such a way as to attract immediate attention. His greatest act was a subscription of £10,000 to a patriotic fund for the equipment of army hospitals at the seat of war. His generosity was much applauded; the example of his public-spiritedness was quoted far and wide; it was even mentioned in a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, and in the "religious press" there were many pleasing homilies on the wise use of money. From these new forms of homage his pride drew fresh strength. He moved with a firmer step, was conscious of increased physical vigour, and became again the Masterman of the old days, eagle-eyed, daring, despotic.

"You're giving away a lot of money," said one of his friends at the club to him one day. "I suppose it's part of your policy," he added ironically.

"A man ought to give in times like this," he answered.

"I suppose so," said his friend. "There never was a time when money could buy so much. Probably because most of us have so little of it."

He did not appreciate the gibe. But in the bottom of his heart he knew what men called his generosity was, after all, just what his candid friend had called it—policy. And it was good policy too. It gave fresh prestige to the Trust. It was a good investment. To be remarked for public spirit and generosity led to all sorts of things in England. England might make pretence to many virtuous and fine ideals, but there, as in every other country, money could buy anything. It must not be done openly, of course. But it was done all the same, only a little less flagrantly than in those franker days when men sold their votes, and it was said that members of Parliament looked beneath their dinner-plates for Bank of England notes before they decided what their views were on questions of disputed legislation.

And at length he had his reward. There came one day to his office a large official envelope, containing cautious inquiries, whether, under certain circumstances, which were deftly indicated, he would be prepared to accept a knighthood. There was, of course, a grave reference to his public services, especially in his large gifts to patriotic causes, which had no doubt stimulated the generosity of the public, and had attracted the attention and gratitude of the Government.

He sat still for a long time with his eyes fixed upon the letter. So it had come at last, the long-expected, the unavoidable, the supreme prize of his existence! No: not the supreme; this was but the beginning. He meant to have more, much more than this.

He resolved that he would say not a word about it, except by way of proud hint to his family. He would surprise them with it; and he pictured himself announcing the news. The final letter which conferred the dignity would come by the morning mail most probably; he would distinguish it at once by the large official envelope; but he would be in no haste to open it. He would do what children do with sweetmeats, keep the best to the last. And then, just when Helen kissed him as he left the house, and said "Good-bye, father!" he would turn round with a grave smile, and say, "Sir Archibold Masterman, if you please." And she would say, "What new joke is this, father?" And he would answer with a calm voice, as though he spoke of a matter of the least possible importance, "It's not a joke ... read that!" And his wife would stand behind Helen, trembling a little; and, far away in Canada, Arthur would get the news, and would be sorry he had not valued such a father.... It was a delightful vision, and he thrilled to it with the ardour of a boy.

He replied at once, expressing his appreciation and his gratitude. Then he fell to wondering how long it took to get the matter settled. There were no doubt forms and preliminaries, and all that sort of thing, but surely a week would be long enough. A week passed, a month—still no answer came. He tortured himself with fears of what might have happened. Had he expressed himself foolishly in his reply, shown himself too eager perhaps, or had his letter miscarried?

He would go to Brighton. This strain of waiting was intolerable. No, he would go to Paris. The man who was to collect the oak and marbles for his projected country house lived there, and it would divert his thoughts to meet him.

He went by the afternoon express from Charing Cross. As he entered his compartment, he noticed a neatly dressed inconspicuous man who appeared to be observing him closely. The man looked at him strangely, passed by him and entered the same train. He saw him again upon the boat. When he reached the Gare du Nord the same man passed by him again, just as he was ordering a carriage, and disappeared into the crowd.

"Some pressman, I suppose. Well, he'll know me again," he said to himself, and thought no more about it.

The next day he met the dealer he had come to see. He proved to be a most interesting fellow, shrewd, adroit, and a master in the art of persuasion. One thing led to another, and a couple of days passed in the inspection of the stock. Each night he came back quite tired out to the hotel. Each morning he began his quest for art treasures with renewed ardour. He had no other occupation. He had left no address at the office, and no mail reached him. It was a new and delightful method of taking a holiday, and he wondered he had not thought of it before.

As he left the dealer's one day for lunch, he saw the same neatly dressed inconspicuous man crossing the street just ahead of him. The man turned back, stopped at a shop-window, and, as he passed, looked him squarely in the face. When he reached his hotel that night the same man was sitting quietly reading in the foyer. This time the man did not look at him.

On the fourth day he had completed his business with the dealer. The longed-for letter must have come by this time. He resolved to return to London by the nine o'clock train next morning.

In the evening, as he was packing his valise, there was a knock at the bedroom door. He opened it, and found the man standing outside.

"You are Mr. Masterman, I believe?"

"Yes, my name is Masterman."

"I want a word with you, if you please."

"You must be quick then. I'm busy—I leave to-morrow morning for London."

"I also leave to-morrow morning. We might travel together."

"What do you mean, sir? I don't know you, and I don't in the least desire your company."

"Very few people do," said the man, with a quiet smile. There was something in that smile indefinitely stealthy, hostile, menacing; it sent an icy thrill through the heart and curdled the marrow in the bones. "Mr. Masterman," the man went on, in a low, firm voice, "I'm sorry to cause you personal inconvenience. You will understand that I have a duty to perform. You must go with me, sir."

"Why, what ... what ... do you mean you arrest me?"

"That is my duty, sir. There are grave charges against you, which I for one shall be glad if you can disprove, for I've heard of lots of good you've done. Mr. Scales was arrested two days ago. I take it you'll come quietly."

"Scales arrested? For what, pray?"

"The charge is fraud. I am not at liberty to say more."

"Ah! And so——" But speech failed him. He appeared to be losing his grip upon reality as he had done on that Sunday evening when he saw The Fear.... There was a sound of organ music, rolling in soft surges, faint, solemn, sad—"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day."

And a figure with dark wings that trailed the dust, and hooded head, very silent. The hood slowly lifted, and he saw the face at last—a face with a quiet smile, authoritative, inscrutable, indefinitely hostile. He had seen it at Charing Cross; it had followed him through the streets of Paris; he saw it now, a kind of white patch on the darkness, the hard whiteness of flame which nothing could quench.

Then the phantasm faded out, as it had done before. The horrible truth went crashing through his brain. He knew now why his letter had not been answered.... So they had heard things ... and never, never now would he be Sir Archibold Masterman. They had heard things ... and, while he waited for honour, they were plotting his dishonour. God! how they must have laughed! It was the supreme irony.

A wave of bitter laughter began to rise in his own heart; but something warned him, if he laughed just then, he would go mad.

He clutched at his leaping nerves as a man might clutch the reins of a runaway horse. All at once he attained complete sad composure. He was walking on a bleak high tableland among the stars, from which he looked down, and saw the world and all that was therein as a very little thing. Honour, dishonour, wealth, poverty—all were alike trifles, the blowing up and down of a little dust.... "*As a ship that passeth over the waves of the water, which, when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found.*"

He was quite calm now. He turned toward the man, who still stood with his inscrutable quiet smile, unavoidable as destiny, watching him narrowly.

"I will go with you," he said. "I give you my word, I will go quietly."

XX

THE RETURN

Through the soft summer seas the great ship moved into the mouth of the English Channel. The early dawn had revealed the faint mist-folded promontories of the Cornish coast well to westward. Red-sailed fishing-boats hung like a flight of birds upon the lucid floors of ocean; coasting steamers snorted past with an air of insular importance; here and there a white-sailed brig glimmered in the early sunlight; and, coming after the long loneliness of open seas, these signs of life impressed the mind like the stir and tumult of a city. Plymouth would be reached by noon.

Letters, telegrams, and papers had already come aboard with the pilot—the first friendly overtures of a land slowly rising out of the thinning morning bank. Men and women, with laughing eyes and gladdened faces, stood in little groups reading their correspondence, exchanging jests, commenting upon scraps of news which they had gathered from the papers. It seemed the tide of war had turned at last. It was to a madly joyous land the great ship made its slow approach. Suddenly upon the deck the band clashed with the animating music of the National Anthem. The English stood uncovered as the first familiar bar vibrated on the quiet air; the Americans watched them with a half-sympathetic amusement; even the steerage passengers,

foreigners for the most part, without part or lot in British victories, smiled cheerfully. So joyous was the hour that private grief appeared a contradiction, an impertinence.

There was neither telegram nor letter for Arthur, and he had been unable to secure a paper. To him England extended no welcome.

During the long trans-continental journey, and the longer ocean voyage, he had beaten out all the conditions of his situation with an iteration that had finally exhausted the possibilities of vehement emotion. It is happily not within the power of the human organism to feel and suffer intensely except for short periods; agony begets lethargy. It is one of the mercies of pain that it thus dies of its own excess, that in its intensity it becomes coma. Arthur had reached the point of moral coma. The red-hot iron had ploughed through his soul, but it had also seared it into brief insensibility.

In his first extremity of consternation it had seemed a thing impossible to survive the horror that possessed him. The image of his father rose before him, sad-browed, accusing, spent with mortal struggle, pale with immortal defeat—it travelled with him like a face painted in the air. It evoked in him an anguish of commiseration, and even of remorse. He remembered every slighting thought that he had cherished, as men recollect wrongs done to the dead, magnifying errors into cruelties, faults into crimes. With a sudden burning of the blood he had realised how singular and strong is that bond of flesh which unites the parent to the child, how sacred and how incapable of all annulment. At the root of his own life lay a force stronger than justice, stronger than religion, a thing bare, irrational, primeval—the awful sanctity of kinship. And he knew in that moment that, for good or ill, his place was beside his father. There he must needs stand, even though it were at the gallows' foot. Whatever burden crushed those strong shoulders he must share, even though the load were shameful. From that obligation there was no discharge.

From New York he had cabled both to his father and to Bundy, but no reply had come from either. He had had to wait two days for the sailing of a ship, the first of which was a day of infinite misery, aimless wandering, languid revisitation of familiar scenes. On the second day he met Horner. He found the little artist re-established in his studio, and from him received a boisterous welcome.

"Have you seen my book?" he cried.

"What book?"

"Well, I like that. Didn't you write it for me? And don't you recollect we were to share profits? Look at those"—and he pushed toward him an immense bundle of press-cuttings.

From these it appeared that the book had achieved notoriety, if not fame.

"You didn't let me know where you went, and you've never written me, or I would have posted these things to you. Ripping, aren't they?"

"They appear excellent."

"And there's something else that's still better. Read that!"

It was a letter bearing the well-known office address of Mr. Wilbur M. Legion, and enclosing a substantial cheque.

"It only came yesterday. I guess we'll cash it. Half of it is yours, you know, and if you're going to England it may come in handy."

Arthur looked up at that, fixing his eyes on Horner's cheerful face with a long, searching gaze.

Did Horner know the miserable truth about his father? But of course he did. It was being shouted round the world. And this reference to the money being handy on a voyage to England was no doubt the little artist's indirect, and indeed delicate, way of communicating his knowledge.

"O Horner!" he cried. "I am very miserable!" And he bowed his head upon his hands, and wept the first tears he had shed since the blow had fallen on him.

There was a kindly arm round his shoulders in a moment. "Why, look 'ere, what's the matter?" And before he knew it he was telling Horner everything.

"Well," said Horner, when he finished. "I guess things aren't as bad as you think. They never are, you know."

"They couldn't be much worse."

"Oh yes, they could," he went on philosophically. "The jury hasn't convicted yet, and perhaps they won't. But that's neither here nor there. The thing you've got to do is to buck up. And look 'ere, about this cheque—you take it all. I don't want it. I'm in funds. And, besides, there's more to come."

"No, I can't do that."

"Yes, you can, and you will. Call the half of it a loan, if you like, but you've got to take it. You know my motto, 'Englishmen ought to help each other,' and you've just got to let me help you."

Once before in his extremity Horner had saved him from starvation; now he saved him from despair. The little artist was not a person of exacting virtues, he made no pretence to religion, and would have appeared a strange sheep indeed in the folds of the elect; but he possessed a simple faith in kindness not always found among persons of immaculate behaviour, and, what is more, he practised his belief. He filled the studio with the echoes of his cheerful laughter, waited on Arthur with a watchful tenderness that was almost womanly, refused encouragement to grief, and finally insisted on a good dinner at Delmonico's, in the pious hope which is common to all Englishmen that the ugliest troubles of the brain are erased by due attention to the stomach. It was Horner who insisted that this should be no second-class voyage on a slow boat; it was he who engaged a berth on a famous liner, drove with Arthur to the dock, and waved a cheerful hand to him as the great ship swung off upon the gray water. When the true apocalyptic books, which record the unknown kindnesses of man, are opened, it is not impossible that the name of this little hare-brained artist may stand higher than the name of kings and conquerors—perhaps also than the names of certain saints, who in their earthly days were less remarkable for warm sympathies than for icy propriety, and a strict attention to the main chance.

And now the voyage was done; the white shaft of the Eddystone lay astern, and the exquisite green bosom of Mount Edgecumbe swelled from the sun-flecked water. The passengers streamed down into the tender, and a few minutes later he stood in the long Custom House sheds of Plymouth.

Here at last he got a daily paper, and the first thing that met his eye was a long account of the Masterman trial.

At the same moment a telegraph-boy went shouting through the crowd, "Masterman! Any one of the name of Masterman?"

He took the telegram in silence, conscious of many eyes suddenly turned toward him. It was from Bundy, and read, "Will meet you at Paddington." He was eager to take immediate refuge in the railway carriage. He was conscious that even the telegraph-boy was looking at him curiously. Suddenly he saw moving toward him through the crowd another figure that he thought he recognized—O joy! it was Vickars!

"Vickars!"

"Yes, I learned from Bundy by what boat you'd come. I've a compartment reserved for you. Let us get into it at once."

"O Vickars! that we should meet like this!"

"Come, come, my fellow—no hysterics. You were always brave. Be brave now."

He put his arm through Arthur's, and moved through the crowd with erect head. They were scarcely seated in the carriage when the train began to move.

"And now," said Vickars, "we can talk. In the first place, let me ask you how much do you know of this unhappy business?"

"Nothing but what the papers tell me. I see the trial is to-day."

"This is the third day. By the time we reach London the verdict may be expected."

Arthur turned eagerly, with a flushed face, to the pile of papers he had purchased.

"I wouldn't trouble over those just now, if I were you," said Vickars. "Suppose you just let me tell you all about it. That is what I came for, you know."

He spoke with such entire calmness that it might have been supposed that what he had to say was of no importance. And this note of calm communicated itself to Arthur, as he meant it should. He knew that the great thing just now was to invigorate the boy's strength, and this must be done by the suppression of active sympathy.

"Very well," said Arthur, "I am ready."

And then Vickars told his story, to the soft thudding accompaniment of the rushing wheels.

The substance of the story was this. The strong point made by the defence was that Masterman had not been aware of the frauds committed by Scales. There was no doubt whatever that Scales would be convicted; but, since the trial began, a great deal of public sympathy had gone out to Masterman. It was proved that he had been too ill to have any knowledge of what Scales was doing. This might be called criminal negligence; it would depend largely on what view the judge took. It was proved that he had not absconded, as was at first supposed; his flight to Paris was an accident. From the hour of his arrest, those who were most inclined to judge him

harshly could not but admit a certain magnanimity in his behaviour. He had sacrificed his entire private fortune to his creditors, and as for the Brick Trust, it was very likely indeed that it would weather the gale. The near close of the war was creating a boom in all business. And then, amid the general joyousness, there was perhaps a tendency to lenient judgment; even jurymen were not wholly insensitive to such a tendency.

"Then you don't think father will be convicted?"

"I don't think so. But of course he will be ruined. You know what I have thought of your father's business methods, and my opinion is unchanged. But I have learned more charitable judgments than I used to have. I see now that men may be criminals without the least suspicion that they are acting criminally. When a man has done wrong for a long course of years, he gets to believe that his wrong is right—the light that is in him becomes darkness. He simply steers his life by an untrue compass, and no one is more amazed than himself when shipwreck happens. That is your father's case, I honestly believe. He is the victim of the force that he has helped to create."

"But you say he has not been dishonest in this affair?"

"No, not explicitly—perhaps not implicitly. That is something which no one will ever know. The fault lies deeper. It lies in greed. A man wants more than he has a just right to have, is not content with honest returns for honest work, becomes unscrupulous, comes to believe that business is warfare, in which the spoils are for the victor, and by the time he reaches this point his sense of right and wrong is fatally confused. He does not really know what is his and what is another's. And the worst of it is that the world in which he moves is no wiser. He finds himself applauded for acts which in a juster system of society would cover him with shame. Ah, Arthur! 'beware of covetousness'—no deeper word than that was ever uttered."

He spoke with a certain sad quietness, very different from his old clamant vehemence. Arthur could not but notice it, and he found himself looking with a kind of wonder on the face of his friend. The face seemed to have taken on a new aspect. It was paler and thinner, with an increased loftiness of brow; there were new lines round the mouth, deeper shadows underneath the eyes, and the lock of hair that fell across the forehead was almost white; but the most striking thing was that a certain subtle fire that once lit the face had disappeared. The keen prophetic look was still there, but it was veiled, dulled, no longer edged with expectancy; a prophet's face, but no more the face of a prophet who saw the morning. And in the slow, quiet voice there was an accent of wearied hope, almost of despair.

Vickars caught the look of wonder on Arthur's face, and said, "Ah! I see you are surprised that I should speak so tolerantly. I used to say that I could make the world a paradise if I were sole despot of the world for a single year, didn't I?

"And now?"

"Now I see that I spoke foolishly. The world is not so easily transformed."

"Is it you that are transformed?"

"Yes. I used to hate men for being evil; and the only weapon I had to attack them with was hatred. I have come to see that hatred is the wrong weapon. You must love men, if you are to change them. You must love even the vile, and those most bitterly opposed to you. You cannot even understand them unless you love them. I hated your father once, because I did not understand the kind of temptations he endured. Now I have come to understand these temptations, and I find it in my heart to pity him."

"O Vickars!" cried Arthur. "You are teaching me a hard lesson. I also have hated.... I have never made allowances. I have indulged contempt, I have behaved like the worst kind of prig. But do you know, since this happened ... well, how can I put it? ... I have seen my father in a new light. And now it seems to me a wonderful thing that he is as good as he is."

"Yes, that is precisely true, and not only of your father, but of all men. The truly divine thing about man is that he is always better than you might expect him to be. It is not the depravity of human nature that is its outstanding feature—it is the goodness. And you find the goodness in the very heart of the depravity, like the pearl in the oyster. But I'm preaching—it's an old habit of mine: forgive me."

"It's a sermon I much needed," said Arthur humbly.

"We all need it, and those who think themselves the best need it most." And then, with a touch of the old whimsical humour, he added, "Whenever you hear a man preaching very earnestly against a vice, you may be sure he has it. I am a case in point."

After that there was little said for a long time. Arthur sat gazing from the window at the flying scroll of country, the dear desirable green land, with its ancient parks, clear shallow streams, trim cottages, level lawns, and wealth of flowers—all so different from that majestic, half-barbaric vastness which he had left. The tears filled his eyes, as they have filled the eyes of many a returning exile. Why did men ever leave it, this land which in every detail was a finished

picture, created by the art of centuries? Where else could they expect to find such "haunts of ancient peace," dreamy nooks, gray towers and spires, leisurely, modest happiness, infinite, calm security? And, as he looked, there came to him again the old thought that the only life worth living was one remote from cities. Had his father lived here, earning modest competence, how different the story! It was the city that had snared him, killed the best in him, infected him with its fierce, unnatural greed. O damnable, dreadful London! how many hast thou slain, thou Harlot of the Nations, with thy skirts full of blood! And yet men went on building new and even worse Londons, undeterred by past warnings—New York, with its roaring tides of greed and clang of gold; Chicago, with its naked barbarism, the pure seas evermore polluted, the fair landscapes blackened, the skies stained with pestilence. O! it was horrible! If he could but save his father from this—it might not yet be too late. And there sprang up in his mind that pathetic fallacy, so often asserted by religion, but so seldom true, that all suffering purifies; that from wounded pride and overthrown ambition there must needs come the nobler heart: whereas every one knows that suffering more often has its issue in bitter stoicism, and injured pride clamours for revenge, and there is no more deadly force than defeated ambition, which draws a new strength from rage.

It was a hard problem for a youth of twenty-three to grapple: no wonder that he failed.

But that desirable green land spoke its message all the same. "*Man walketh in a vain show and disquieteth himself in vain*"—so ran the message. Even Vickars had found that message true. He had beaten himself weary against the strong bastions of the world, and in vain. Had he also learned the difficult lesson that the most one man can do is to live his own life the best way he can, satisfied that nothing really perishes in the vast sum of things, content if he can add his insignificant unit of effort to a growing righteousness? Perhaps he had. Perhaps also that was the only real lesson life had to teach us.

He was aroused from his reverie by the hand of Vickars on his shoulder.

"My dear fellow," he said, "there's something else I have to say to you, something I find it very difficult to say."

"About my father?"

"No; I have told you all there is to tell. Believe me, I have kept nothing back."

"What then?"

"Have you thought of what this calamity has meant for others beside your father? Have you thought what effect it might have upon your mother?"

"She is not ill?"

"No," said Vickars solemnly, "she is not ill. She is ill no longer. She is at rest."

"O Vickars!—not dead?"

"Let us use a better word—at rest. She is where she has wished to be these many weary years."

"And I did not know it. O mother!—mother!"

Vickars turned his face away from that sacred grief. After a few moments he said, "Can you bear that I should tell you about it?"

"Yes. Tell me."

"I think she was never the same after you left, Arthur. I told you she came to see us, didn't I? After that first visit she came often. She honoured us with her confidence. Little by little we learned her story—the story of a saintly heart at war with circumstance. I believe the one supreme force that enabled her to live was the purpose to redeem you from the kind of life that threatened you. She summed herself up in that purpose. When it was once achieved, her hold on life gradually relaxed. She had no wish to live longer, composed herself for the grave, and spoke cheerfully of her departure. Let this be your great comfort, my dear boy—she was absolutely sure of you, of your ability, I mean, to live the high life she had always coveted for you. Her joy in dying was that you were safe."

"When ... when did it happen?"

"On the day your father was arrested. She never knew that, God be thanked. She went quite quietly, without pain. She simply slept, and woke—somewhere else."

"O my poor father!"

"Yes. It is right you should think of him. All his life fell at one blow. There is a sweetness in your grief—you had been the one happiness of her closing years; but think of the bitterness that was in his."

"Why was I not told?" he cried fiercely.

"You had enough to bear. We knew you would come home, and we waited."

"But you terrify me. How much more are you keeping back? Is Elizabeth safe? Is there any other cup that I must drink?"

"Hush! hush! I give you my word I have told you everything. Don't make it hard for me, Arthur. It sounds a poor thing to say that I have acted for the best, but it is the only thing left to say."

"Forgive me. I know you have."

So that inner voice which had told him that he would see his mother's face no more had spoken truly. How vividly he recalled that night of moonlight, that earnest pleading voice, that solemn farewell! But, as the anguish of the shock subsided, he found nothing left but softened thought, and the beginnings of a sad pathetic gratitude. She had never known the worst, for which he, too, could say, "God be thanked!" One significant phrase of Vickars vibrated through his mind like a chord of music—"she composed herself for the grave." He could see the tired hands meekly folded, the threads of life dropping one by one from the weary fingers, a holy softness on her face, the first wave of the Eternal peace rippling round the heart. That was not death—no, mere rest. And there came to him, too, like a sudden revelation, a thought which he was never to forget, the divine essential sacrifice in the lives of all good women. To live not only for others but in others, to toil and be forgotten, to be content that something fashioned from her own mind and flesh by prayer and tears and humble renunciation would live when she was gone, a flower drawing strength and loveliness from her own buried life—that was woman's lot, a thing divine as the Cross itself, and like the Cross, the expression of the eternal sacrifice of self.

"God help me to be worthy of such a sacrifice," he prayed. "But there never yet lived a man who was worthy of what a mother does for him. God help me to remember, and to see in all women something holy, for her dear sake."

The train was rapidly nearing Paddington. The blue sky was tinged with smoky grayness, the green fields were discoloured, and long rows of mean, shabby houses took the place of white cottages under hanging woods.

"And now, pull yourself together," Vickars said. "God help you in the next few hours."

"I think He will," said Arthur simply.

"I forgot to tell you, Bundy expects you to stay with him. He has a kind of palace somewhere in Kensington, I believe."

"I don't think I can do that."

"No, I don't think I would. You should be with your father to-night."

"If..." and the rest he dared not utter.

"You mustn't think of that. I feel morally sure that he will be acquitted. And then he will want you badly. You understand?"

"Yes. I understand."

The train glided into Paddington. Bundy saw him at once as he stepped from the train. His honest face was flushed, his eyes bright with excitement.

"I have a carriage ready!" he cried. "Be quick!"

"Where are we going?"

"To the Old Bailey. The jury are now considering their verdict. If we drive fast, we shall be just in time."

XXI

THE VERDICT

The carriage rolled out of Paddington into the familiar London streets. The gaiety of summer clothed the city. High white clouds sailed in a sea of blue, houses were gay with window flowers, women in bright clothing, themselves like flowers, gave colour to the streets. In Oxford Street flags were flying, the signals of a recent victory in Africa. There was an indescribable sense of resurrection in the air, as if not alone the earth, but the hearts of men and women had won

release from some deep grave of fear. Arthur watched the scene with dull, unseeing eyes; and to his morbid sensitiveness it seemed as though London laughed in mockery of his grief.

Vickars sat beside him in silence; Bundy watched the two anxiously, his eyes full of tears. He wished to say something comforting; and from time to time made some casual remark, but uttered it hesitatingly, with an apologetic smile. It was precisely like the action of a good friendly dog, who lays his warm head on his master's unresponsive hand, and watches him with wistful eyes, delicately fearful of intrusion on a grief he cannot comprehend. It was evident, however, that Bundy had something which he really wished to say, and at last it came.

"You'll be wondering, after what I said to you in New York, why I haven't helped your father?"

"No. I've never thought about it, except to know you would be as good as your word."

"And so I would have been. But——"

"You needn't explain. There is too much love between us for that."

"But I must. And I would rather do it at once and get it over. Your father refused all help. You, know his pride, and he's prouder now than ever he was. One might almost suppose it pleased him to stand alone, to fight with his back to the wall, to defy the world to do its worst on him. And I believe that is what he really does feel."

"I think I can understand."

"Then you'll understand why I could not help him, why no one could. I offered him anything he liked to ask, and this is what he said: 'No, Bundy; I've brewed the cup, and I'll drink it. I don't want any sugar in it. No one shall ever say that Archibold Masterman was a coward.' That was what he said to me, and he said it like a fallen emperor. It was foolish, but there was something great in it too. I felt that it was great."

"I think so too."

"It was great." The phrase was a portrait—vital, indubitable, convincing. During all these miserable days and nights Arthur had laboured to fashion some portrait of his father. He had seen him bent, shame-stricken, prematurely aged; had imagined him leaning on his young strength for succour, acknowledging his errors, voluble in explanation, perhaps fierce in accusation of those who had failed him or betrayed him; had, in fact, seen him in every attitude but the real one; and now, as though a curtain lifted, he saw his father painted at a touch, with an instinctive penetration, an absolute veracity. He was a fighter, and would fight to the last. His pride fed upon defeat. Calamity had given him nerves of steel. He would drink the cup that he had brewed, and drink it with a smile. "No sugar"—that phrase said everything. Pity, sympathy, help, consolation—he was above them, beyond them, indifferent to them; a man who bared his breast to the flight of arrows, thrust his hand in the flame without a shudder, challenged the thunderbolt, upheld while the flame consumed him by a scorn more potent than his anguish. Yes, it was great—a Promethean greatness, which defies the heart-eating vulture. He might have known so much, if he had thought about it. In a sense, he had always known it, for he had always, even as a boy, felt the element of greatness in his father. But now, for the first time, he really measured it, and his heart quailed before it, foreseeing elements in this imminent meeting with his father which he had not so much as guessed.

They had driven fast. The carriage passed rapidly by the old Church of St. Sepulchre, and under the walls of Newgate, stopping at last at the mean, insignificant doors of the Old Bailey.

The pavements were thronged. From the court a great crowd was pouring out. And already, from the neighbouring newspaper offices, men and boys were racing breathlessly, shouting "Verdict!" Above the clamour of the street the shrill cry rose, "*Verdict! Verdict!*"

Bundy leapt from the carriage, and plunged into the throng. He came back a moment later, waving an evening paper.

"What is it?"

"Scales five years; Masterman acquitted!"

"Thank God!"

And then the tension broke. Arthur found himself sobbing, with the arm of Vickars round his neck.

"Take me to my father at once," he said. "I wish to go home with him."

"Very well," said Bundy. "Wait here till I find him."

The crowd rapidly thinned, till, in a few moments, where a roaring torrent of life had run, but an insignificant ripple flowed and eddied. The tragic bubble, so long watched by thousands of eager eyes, had burst; it was a thing of the past, to be speedily forgotten. The carriage moved unimpeded now to the doors of the court. A few stragglers still hung around, in the hope of

seeing once more the protagonists in the finished drama.

A long black van with a grated door at the back drew up against the curb. Two policemen came out of the court-house, looked warily up and down the street, and disappeared again. The man who drove the van nodded to them, and went on reading his evening paper.

The policemen reappeared, with a man walking between them. The man's head was bowed, his coat-collar turned up, his hat drawn down over his eyes.

Arthur had a brief glimpse of a face yellow as wax, a pair of shifty, bloodshot eyes, and he shuddered. It was Scales. The door of the van closed, and, through the barred window, that yellow, awful face looked out, in a last glimpse at liberty. A long, terrible look, gathering up and flashing to the memory things that would be seen no more, unforgetable things that would become the torture of sleep and dreams, little things, such as sunlight flashing on a pool of water, sparrows in the gutter, a broken flower lying in the road, a girl's languorous face turned toward her lover, a beggar gazing into the window of a cook-shop—and then the lids fell upon the bloodshot eyes, and the van rolled away.

"And that might have been my father," thought Arthur. And with the thought came a pang of pity for the man in the black van. Not a good man, not even a lovable man; without grace, without charm, inherently mean-natured—yet, were he a thousandfold worse than he was, to be pitied as a creature going to the torture. And, after all, who should judge even a Scales with justice, who declare how far he was a victim of the evil system which had inflamed his avarice—the victim, too, perhaps of some potency of evil in his own blood, some ghostly hand stretched out of the illimitable past, from whose predestined clutch he could not escape? Ah, God! who should judge?

And now at last he saw him—his father. Archibold Masterman stood in the doorway of the court-house. He came down the steps with a firm tread, looking up and down the street with a calm, defiant glance, his lips compressed in scornful challenge. Yet scorn could not conceal the ravage wrought in him by his misfortunes. The face had lost its colour, it was drawn and haggard, and the hair was nearly white. He was talking with Bundy, and he smiled as he talked. He drew near the waiting carriage, opened the door, and stepped in.

"Father!"

"Ah, Arthur!"—no other word.

There was a hard grip of the hand, a sudden heat that flushed the haggard face, and then iron-cold composure.

"Won't you come to my house, Masterman? If only for to-night," pleaded Bundy.

"No; I want to go home.... To such a home as I've got," he added bitterly.

"Well, God bless you, my friend!" said Bundy softly.

"I'm not asking anything of God that I know of, and you needn't ask anything for me. I reckon I can look after myself. Tell the driver, Eagle House, Highbourne Gardens."

And the carriage moved off.

They reached the house, and entered it in silence. Masterman went at once to his room—the room in which his wife had died—and remained there. What memories, what remorses met him there, who can say? Arthur, passing that closed door at midnight, could hear his father walking up and down like a caged lion. He stood listening to that slow, continuous footfall; but he dared not knock upon the door. He went downstairs again, knowing sleep impossible, and sat in the deserted dining-room, still pursued by that inevitable footfall. A dreadful thought possessed his mind—his father might be contemplating suicide. When, for an instant, the footfall ceased the sweat of fear stood upon his forehead and his flesh crept. When it commenced again he drew a long breath of relief. So the brief summer night passed, sleepless for both father and son, and at last, through the unshuttered window, the first ray of dawn stole in.

The house appeared both deserted and dismantled. The pictures and much of the furniture had disappeared. Instead of the array of smiling servants, a single sour old woman occupied the kitchen. From her, Arthur learned that the pictures and the more valuable furniture had been sold at some auction rooms in the city; and that Helen had left the house upon the day of her mother's funeral, and had not returned. Did she know where she had gone? To some friend—so she said. But no one knew.

The father and son met at breakfast next morning. It was a miserable meal, ill-cooked and coarsely served—very different from the generous luxury of other days. The cloth was stained and torn, the china broken, the food wretched. Masterman appeared to notice none of these things. He drank the straw-coloured tea and ate the burned toast with complete indifference. He seemed indifferent even to the presence of his son.

When the meal was over, he said, with a mocking abruptness, "So you've come home to pity me, I suppose? Well, you and me have got to have an explanation. As well now as later."

"I came home to help you, father—if I could."

"Ah! did you?" he sneered. "Well, let me tell you I want no man's pity and no man's help. You think I'm done for, don't you? So does everybody. But I'm not. The world has cheated me, but I'm going to get even with the world. I'm going to get my revenge. I've years of work in me—years of work—and I've a dozen schemes for success."

And then he began to talk in a loud, scornful, hectoring voice. Failure? Only fools talked of failure, and they failed themselves because they were fools. He was going to start again. He would start that very day. No sensible man would think the worse of him for what had happened. There were scores of men in the city who had come much nearer a prison than he had; and what were they now? They were rich, honoured, respected. They had succeeded, and no one reminded them of past misfortunes. The very men who had tried to ruin them were now licking their boots. Well, he'd have the world licking his boots, too, before he died. Only he'd kick their lying faces in when the time came, that's what he'd do. He'd teach them. He'd let them know what kind of man Archibold Masterman was.

There was much more of the same kind, a loud outrageous monologue, to which Arthur listened with a sinking heart. It was obviously useless to interrupt or interfere. It was the fierce outcry of a man in torment, the immedicable torment of an injured pride. And, as Arthur looked upon that coldly furious face, he began to suspect, what was indeed the truth, that his father's mind hung upon the verge of madness.

And this impression was confirmed when, without warning, the gust of rage ceased, and was replaced by a pathetic weak humility.

"I somehow don't feel well this morning. I didn't sleep last night. Perhaps I'd better wait a day or two and get my strength built up. O Arthur! I've had lots to try me. I've had a hard life, with very little in it but toil and trouble. And I'm a man that's had sorrows. Your mother's dead. They buried her while I was in gaol. They wouldn't give me bail at first. Did I tell you that? When they let me out on bail, she'd gone. They'd buried her in Highbourne Cemetery. They showed me her grave. And Helen wasn't pleased with me. I did everything I could to please the girl. And yet, when my trouble came, she flew at me like a cat. And she's gone away too—I don't know where. I reckon she thinks me a poor kind of father. Well—well—I'm a man that's had sorrows. And I suppose you'll be going away too? Eh?"

"Father, father, you know I won't go away. I love you, and you used to love me. Don't you love me still?"

"Well, I don't know, Arthur. I don't know that I love any one. It doesn't seem much good loving people, does it? They always go away. Well—well——"

And then he relapsed into a gloomy silence, from which nothing could arouse him. So he sat for hours, gazing out of window, until he fell asleep in his chair.

This scene was but a sample of many similar scenes. Sometimes he would rouse himself, dress, and go down into the city, full of all kinds of schemes to rehabilitate his fortunes. From these excursions he would return late at night, weary, but full of impossible hopes. He would try the Stock Exchange. That was where fortunes were made. Hard work didn't pay; it was the gambler who got both the luck and the money. He had had a tip from some one who knew; such and such a stock was bound to rise. And then, with pen and paper, he would work out his illusory profits, his hands trembling, his face glowing, and reach the most surprising and incredible conclusions.

"If I only had the money!" he would cry. "I would buy upon a margin. Bruce and Whitson would be proud to do business for me, for old times' sake. Masterman isn't forgotten in the city, I can tell you. Not by a long chalk. All I want is a chance, just a little money to begin with."

"I have a hundred pounds, father," Arthur replied to one of these appeals. "You can have that."

"A hundred pounds! Yes, that would be enough." And then, with a sudden flare of the old pride, he exclaimed, "No, no. That wouldn't do at all. I'm not sunk so low as to be a pensioner upon my children. I'll get what I want out of the world yet, and I'll get it by myself. I'm not very well yet, but wait till I get my nerve back, and I'll show you. Don't you be afraid about me. I'm playing a waiting game, and I'm going to win—you mind that!"

So a month passed, marked by tragic incalculable alternations of temper in his father. No one came near the house. Bundy had called twice, but Masterman had refused to see him. The church people appeared to have forgotten his existence. When the Sundays came, Masterman drew down the blinds, and sat alone in his office. If Arthur left the house it was but for the briefest absence. He would go round to Lonsdale Road, exchange a few words with Vickars, taste a raptured moment with Elizabeth, and return in haste and often in fear. For he could not calculate his father's moods, he did not know what he might be tempted to do, and he dared not leave him solitary.

And yet, all the time, Masterman's mind was slowly recovering its poise. His anger still

burned, but it was now with smouldering rather than with active flame. His boastfulness declined. There were moments, not only of humility, but of extreme gentleness, like the gentleness of a sick child. They were but moments, often followed by gusts of bitter speech. In the bitter moments Arthur was to him the prodigal son who had deserted him; in the tender moments the only human creature on whose love he might repose. It was Arthur's lot to listen in silence to a hundred hurting comments on his conduct, uttered with sardonic scorn, and all the talent for invective which a disordered brain and wounded heart could contrive. And then, just when he was goaded almost beyond endurance, the mood would change, the black squall of rage would pass, and an inimitable softness, like the softness of a rain-washed sky, succeed it.

"I begin to think I'm a fool," he said once, after one of these explosions. "Well, you must forgive me. I'm a new kind of Job, and, like Job, I speak foolishly. I never could make out why they called Job patient. The thing I admire in Job is that he wasn't patient. He let himself rip. He cursed himself tired. Well, that's like me. I've got to do it, or burst."

"But Job trusted God through it all, father. Can't you?"

"Did he? Well, if he did at first, he didn't in the middle, any way. And I'm in the middle of the mess. And, besides, I don't see what God's got to do with it. As I understand it, a man's got to go through with things to the end, and the only satisfaction he'll get out of it is that he hasn't squealed."

It was a poor enough philosophy no doubt, but there was no denying the tonic virtue in it. And perhaps it was the only kind of medicine for this mind diseased, as Arthur came to see. For a nature of such stubborn fibre the commonplaces of religion had no efficacy. And with that stubbornness there was allied a certain indomitable honesty, which perceived their essential falsity. Let it stand to Masterman's credit that he was unwilling to blame God for his own misdoings, or to ask for a release to which he knew he had no right. He would bear his own burden, simply because, in the long run, that was what all men had to do, religion notwithstanding. And, whereas the attempt to shift his burden upon God would have fed his weakness, the very effort to bear it alone increased his strength.

One evening, when the gentler mood was on him, he drew from Arthur his story of his own doings since the day he left London. Up to this time he had not manifested the least interest; it was a subject he had purposely avoided. When Arthur described the life upon the ranch, he had many questions to ask.

"Then you worked with your hands, did you?"

"Of course, father. No day labourer ever worked harder."

"And you liked it?"

"Yes, I liked it. It was hard enough at first; but I soon got used to that, and I liked it."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it if you hadn't told me. It seems sort of queer when you come to think about it."

"What's queer about it?"

"Why, this. I never meant that you should do anything of that kind, schemed to avoid it—sent you to Oxford, made a gentleman of you, as the saying is; and why did I do it? Because I'd had a hard life, and didn't want you to have it. And here you go and do just what I did at your age—work like a common labourer. Seems a kind of destiny in it, as if it had to be."

"Then destiny has been kind, father, for I have never been so truly happy as at Kootenay. I would a thousand times rather work with my hands, and eat the fruit of my labour, than get the softest job a city could offer me."

"Don't you get thinking that living in a city is a soft job, for it isn't. But I know what you mean. There's a kind of satisfaction in working out of doors with your hands; that's what you mean, isn't it? Well, I used to feel that way—once. I can mind how I used to whistle at my work, and had a jest for my mates, and got more real pleasure out of a pot of ale and a plate of bread-and-cheese than I've ever had since, in fine living.... I don't know but what that was the happiest time of my life, after all; though of course I didn't think so then. I can mind the little house I lived in, and the patch of garden. I'd be working in that garden by five o'clock on a summer morning, and again late at night, after work. Seems to me, as I look back, that in those days I hadn't got a real care. It's a queer thing to think about. Makes you feel as if life had fooled you after all. But I reckon that's about what life is for most of us—kind of game of blind hookey. Well, I've lost the game, that's evident; and it seems as if you'd won it."

It was a curious confession from such a man. Arthur recollected that Bundy had said much the same thing. He also had spoken of a little house with mignonette under the window, with its unforgetable memories of content and peace, and had summed up his life in one little bit of dearly bought wisdom—"We don't know what we want, and, with all our trying, get the wrong thing after all." Had his father also made that sad discovery, and made it too late?

All that evening Masterman was very quiet and subdued. He talked at intervals, and in snatches, of various things in his own past life, speaking of them with ironic sad composure, as of things which lay a long way off, in which he had ceased to be interested. And yet there appeared to be some method in this vague reminiscent talk, some point toward which his thoughts were working, something that he found it difficult to say.

At last he reached his point. "When you and me parted—" He stopped, as though swallowing something bitter, and began again. "When you went away, do you remember you said something to me? You said I was dishonest. You didn't ought to have said that."

"O father! don't speak of that!"

"I reckon it's got to be spoke of. I want to know what you think of me now."

"Father, you have no need to defend yourself to me."

"Haven't I? Well, I suppose that's kindly meant, and I ought to be grateful. Only I'm not; and I'll tell you why. Do you know why I'm sitting in this empty house, feeding on the pig's swill that old lady in the kitchen calls food? Perhaps you think I like it? Well, I don't. Do you know why there's no furniture in the rooms? Do you know why I'm a beggar? Do you know why the men I knew in the city turn their faces away when I pass, why the men I used to lunch with won't speak to me and are too busy to see me when I call? Well, I'll tell you. It's just because I've been too honest. I had no call to give my fortune to the creditors of the Amalgamated. They hadn't a pretence of right to it. It was mine, every penny of it. But I did it, just because I was honest, and proud of my honesty. There's not half a dozen men in the city would have done that. Those jeering scoundrels who pass me in the street as if I was dirt, and laugh and whisper to one another, 'That's poor old Masterman, poor old bankrupt Masterman; and lucky he ain't in gaol'—there's not one of them as would have done it. But bankrupt Masterman did it, and he knew he had no call to do it. He was too proud to let any man call him a thief. If he hadn't done it, he'd be riding in his carriage now, and folk would ha' said, 'Mighty smart man, that Masterman,' and they'd have thought the better of me. Well, that's what I want you to remember. No, I don't want you to answer me. I'm not concerned to know what you think about it. I know I'm down, but I've got my pride still, and I don't care what people think about me. I've been robbed of almost everything, and I needn't have been but for this—that I'm honest!"

He spoke with extraordinary heat, striding up and down the room, his face dark and harsh. He was again the Masterman of the old days, full of fierce passion, proud, strong, not to be contradicted. But amid all the harshness of that strong face there shone something new, something never seen there before, like light flashed fitfully through dark clouds—an element of dignity that was almost nobleness. Arthur gazed upon that spectacle in a sort of silent wonder. And once more the sense of elemental bigness in his father came to him with vivid force. Here was a nature that overtopped his own at all points. It was great even in its faultiness, and who could estimate its crude astounding virtues?

There was no return of this mood. The next day Masterman spent several hours out of doors, coming home late at night, weary and silent.

On the morning following, Arthur heard him moving up and down a little-visited garret of the house.

He was there a long time. Presently he called, "Arthur!"

Arthur obeyed eagerly, his ever-active fear that his father might be tempted to some dreadful act giving wings to his feet.

He found his father kneeling beside a common deal box, the contents of which were flung upon the floor. These contents appeared to consist of old discarded clothing, among which were discernible a blue cloth cap, a rough jacket, and a pair of stained corduroy trousers.

"Do you know what these are, Arthur?"

"No. What are they, father?"

"They're the clothes I used to wear when I was a workman. I've always kept them by me—sort of souvenir, you know. Well, I'm going to wear them again."

"But, father, I don't understand,"

"Don't you?" he said grimly. "Well, I'll tell you. I'm going to work again. Going back to what I was forty years ago. It's as good as a story, isn't it?"

"But you're not going to be a common workman. You surely don't mean that, father."

"That's just what I do mean. You can work with your hands, and so can I. I reckon it's our destiny. Grimes has given me a job—you remember Grimes, don't you? He's a bit of a builder at Tottenham nowadays, and calls himself a contractor. Well, he's given me a job, sort of foreman, at two quid a week, and good pay, too. It's a sight more than I'd have done for an old bankrupt

fellow, close on sixty. I'm going to work for Grimes. I begin to-morrow, and you'll have to put up with the fact the best way you can that your father's no longer Archibold Masterman, Esq., as might have been Sir Archibold, but just a common workman."

XXII

MRS. BUNDY PHILOSOPHISES

"I can't see what your father wanted to do it for. He had no call to do it. It's a most extraordinary piece of perversity."

The speaker was Bundy, and the scene was his new house in Kensington. After his many wanderings and adventures, Bundy appeared to have found permanent anchorage at last. His final apotheosis had begun, and a prophetic eye perceived that it was likely to include all the elements of eminent British respectability. He had begun to collect pictures again, was planning a library, drove daily in the park, was already known as a generous patron of many well-intentioned charities, and had even lectured in a parish-room on the wonders of the Yukon. There was ground to believe that in course of time he might even become a churchwarden, and it was only a total fluidity of opinion on local politics which denied him a seat upon the Borough Council.

Even the boys had suffered a transformation into something rare and strange. They no longer lassoed dogs upon the plains of Texas in the back-garden, and their interest in Indians had declined. They wore white collars which were fresh every morning, practised a difficult propriety, and walked gravely to church on Sundays, top-hatted and circumspectly clothed. There could be no manner of doubt that the short-lived glory of irresponsible poverty was fast fading into the light of common day, and that shades of respectability were closing round these growing minds.

And as for Mrs. Bundy—dear, slovenly, warm-hearted Mrs. Bundy—the historian relates with sadness that even she was tamed. Her force of speech remained, her sincerity, her lovableness; to the end of her days she would remain the sort of woman who addresses angry umbrella-emphasised allocutions to drivers who flog their horses, who gives hospitality to stray dogs, and opens her impulsive heart to the sorry fabrications of every histrionic beggar. But she had returned to unoccupied woman's first love, which is dress. Exiled from her kitchen, she had plunged recklessly into the study of fashion-papers. To hear her disputing with dressmakers, upholsterers, and house-decorators, to follow her in her many animated controversies with servants and a long succession of nefarious butlers, gave assurance that the wonted fires still burned ardently in her veins. But she was tamed. Wealth had riveted upon her golden fetters. She submitted to them, not without reluctance. Perhaps, if the entire truth was told, she was much happier as the mistress of the kitchen in the old house in Lion Row than as the mistress of a mansion in Kensington.

It was in the library of this house at Kensington that Arthur sat discussing the situation with his old friends. It was a spacious room, furnished after a plan which a celebrated firm had described as mediæval. The mediævalness of the room appeared to consist mainly in an imitation stucco ceiling, and in modern oak-panelling which declared its newness by uncanny loud explosions, as the wood cracked under the influence of heat. Before the open hearth Bundy stood oracular, with his hands behind him spread out to the warmth; and Mrs. Bundy sat at the table, mending socks—an example of the survival of primeval instincts.

"No, I don't see it at all," said Bundy. "Your father's wasting himself. There are plenty of men who would have helped him to recover his position. I would have given him anything he liked to ask, and been glad of the chance."

"I know you would," said Arthur. "And he knows it too."

"Then, why won't he let me?"

"I suppose because, as you say, he's too proud. But there's something else too, something deeper, I think."

"And what's that, pray?"

"Well, I don't know how to describe it, but it's more than mere pride and perversity. I think it's a kind of return to type. He began life as a workman, and he's gone back to it. It's his way of showing the world he doesn't care what it does to him."

"And what's that but pride?"

"Perhaps so," said Arthur wearily. "I've long ago given up judging my father. I only know that I never thought so well of him as I do now."

"Well done!" cried Mrs. Bundy. "That's what I think too."

"Well, I can't see it," said Bundy. "Tell me again how he's living."

"He's taken a small house at Tottenham, almost a cottage. Grimes gives him two pounds a week. He works from six in the morning till six at night. Next week I'm going to live with him."

"Yes, that's the worst part of it!" cried Bundy. "Your life is to be sacrificed too. With your splendid education you ought to be making a figure in the world. At all events you ought to be back upon your ranch, if that's the kind of life you mean to live. You must know that."

"Yes, I know it. But I can't go back as long as father lives. I have to make amends to him for past unkindness. And, remember, he has no one left but me."

"What about Helen?" said Mrs. Bundy.

"That's one of the things I came over to tell you about. I have a letter from her. You had better read it."

The letter was dated from Paris, and read as follows:

"DEAR ARTHUR:

"I hear that you are back in London, so you know all about the *mess* father has made of his affairs. You were lucky to be out of it, for it was a dreadful disgrace. I thought I should have *died* of shame. Just, too, when he was going to be knighted, for that's come out since, you know. He must have known all about it—I mean the disgrace—long before it came. And yet he never told me one word, but let me think things were all right, and was always talking to me about the house he meant to build, and the place in society I was to have. I can see now that it was all lies, and I will never forgive him. I suppose you will say I ought to sympathise with him, and all that kind of *rot*: you always did pretend to be so mighty good. Well, I don't, and I won't forgive him. And I dare say you'll say I ought to have stayed with him, and all that kind of thing. A pretty idea! As if I could have put my head out of doors, with everybody talking about us, and father's name in all the papers. I did go out once, and the Collinson girls, *proud, conceited things*, cut me dead, though I went to school with them. I wasn't going to stand that, so, after mother's funeral, I went away to one of my *true* friends in Paris. I didn't tell her what had happened, you may be sure. And she doesn't read the English papers, *thank God*. Her name is Adèle Siedmyer. She went to school with me, and her father is rich. She gave me a good time, I can tell you, and not a word said. The Siedmyers live in a beautiful house, much better than that *old* Eagle House, which I always detested. Well, now, I've something to tell you, which is quite *important*. There was a nice old gentleman who used to come to dinner at the Siedmyers', and I soon saw that he was very fond of me. They told me he was seventy, but he doesn't look more than *fifty*, for these Frenchmen know how to dress and keep young, which Englishmen never do. He told me all about his life—he'd been twice married, but his wives had treated him *abominably*—and I felt very sorry for him. I forgot to say he's something in the Stock Exchange—the Bourse, they call it here—and the Siedmyers thought no end of him. Well, I dare say you'll guess the rest. He asked me to marry him. I thought he put it so *cleverly*; he said it was the *entente cordiale*. I laughed at first, and then I cried a good deal; for it seemed hard that I should have to marry an old man, even if he is only fifty and a *good figure*. But what was a poor girl to do? Adèle and the Siedmyers persuaded me, and really it did seem to me quite *providential*, just in the midst of this disgrace; and it's not as though he didn't love me, for he's perfectly *infatuated* over me. I know you'll sneer, you always were good at that. But I don't care. There's one thing I *always* made my mind up to—it was that I wouldn't be poor. And, as I said, it did really seem quite *providential*, just when I couldn't hope to marry well in England, because of father's *wickedness*, that M. Simon—that's his name—should fall in love with me. I was dreadfully afraid at first that he'd ask awkward questions about father, but he never did, though he must have known *something*. Of course I didn't tell him—not likely. So the upshot of it is that we were married last week. So now you know. I thought I ought to tell you, and you can tell father, if you like. You needn't expect me *ever* to come to London again—horrid, hateful city! If you like to come over to Paris some time, of course I'll see you; but I won't see father! I draw the line at that. And I am sure he won't expect it after all the *cruel* wrong he's done me. I should think he would be too *ashamed*. If you can find any of my little knick-nacks in my drawers I wish you would pack them up and send them over. But I dare say they're gone—very likely the servants took them; and it doesn't *really* matter, for I've everything I need. Thank God, I shall not be poor now, in spite of father's *wickedness*.

"Your sister,
"HELEN.

"P.S.—We are living at the Hotel Continental, *for the present*. If you were only sensible I would say come over, and meet Adèle Siedmyer. She will have lots of money when her father dies. But I suppose you prefer *digging* like a labourer in that *nasty* Canada. There's no accounting for tastes, is there?"

Arthur, who, of course, was familiar with the letter, turned his face away while Mrs. Bundy read it, for he was heartily ashamed of it. Its complete selfishness and shallowness, its spite, its rancour, its hard worldliness, above all, its nauseous pietism, had filled him with disgust. He was surprised therefore when Mrs. Bundy put it down, with the exclamation, "Poor child!"

"Why do you say that?" he cried. "A letter like that puts its writer beyond pity."

"Ah, Arthur! I see you've not yet got out of the bad habit of judging people harshly. My laddie, don't let your heart grow hard against your sister, even though she is to blame. I'm not saying that that isn't a bad letter, and it comes from a hard, cruel heart. But I mind Helen as a little girl, as sweet and bright a child as you might meet in a day's march. It wasn't her fault that she was shallow; that's the way she was made. Yes, she was shallow, and only meant to sail in shallow waters, and when the deep waters overtook her, she was frightened to death. That's the letter of a poor, terrified girl who doesn't know what she's saying."

"I didn't think of it like that."

"No; it wasn't to be supposed you could. It isn't a boy that understands the heart of a poor, terrified girl."

"But it's the meanness of it—no word about my father but cruel accusation."

"Yes, it's mean; fear makes weak people mean."

"That's right," interjected Bundy. "I've seen a man, when thoroughly frightened, pour out all the black things in his heart, without the least idea of what a cad he looked to other people."

"Ah! and that's not all," went on Mrs. Bundy. "You think she's beyond pity. Why, she never had a better right to pity than now. She's sold her youth to that old Frenchman—I never did believe in Frenchmen—and she's got to pay for her folly, and it'll be a hard, long price before she's through with it, be sure of that. December and May—I never did know any good come of that kind of marriage yet. No, no. Your father's to be pitied, but he's got his pride; and you are to be pitied, but you've got your youth and freedom; but, if you ask me who is to be pitied most, it's that poor motherless girl. She may have a hard heart, but it can bleed; yes, and life will make it bleed before long, I doubt."

And so from Mrs. Bundy Arthur once more learned that lesson in life which he had found so difficult to master, the lesson always difficult to youth, and perhaps the most difficult of all to those whose ideals are highest—the lesson of charity, of tolerance, of lenient judgment toward the faulty. Mrs. Bundy had once before shown him the better road, when she had made him acquainted with virtues in his father which he had ignored; he had learned something of what charity meant from Vyse upon the *Saurian*, and Horner in New York, each with his catholic axiom that Englishmen ought to stand by one another; he had remarked Vickars's altered attitude to life, his sense of life's complexity, and his allowance for faults in men, for which their own will was but partially responsible: four times the Angel of Charity had stood beside him, and each time he had turned his face away. He had not allowed Mrs. Bundy's plea; he had accepted Horner's kindness, but without any accurate conception of the rarity and real beauty of his character; he had heard Vickars's confession, and in his utmost heart had thought him an apostate prophet. And now the same test met him again in the case of his sister. He saw her hardness and shallowness with more than sufficient accuracy; what he had not seen was her weakness, her terror under sudden disaster, and the tragic folly to which she had been driven by her terror. It was left to Mrs. Bundy to show him that. Suddenly he saw it; and he saw much besides. He saw that there is a vision of the mind and a vision of the heart; that the one is judging vision, the other sympathetic vision; that the one sees the surface only, the other the depth; and that therefore the vision of the heart is the only true vision. Of the four persons who had instructed him, three were quite simple persons, without the least claim to intellectual superiority; the other a man of genius, who had become humble by contact with human sorrows. And there was a fifth—there was Bundy himself, an adventurer whom he had secretly despised and ridiculed, but from whose hand had come salvation in his own hour of direst need. And the bond between these persons was quite simple; they had warm, human hearts, and in the difficult hours of life they were governed by warm impulses. Ah! that had been his error; he had looked at life with the mind, rarely with the heart. He had set himself up to judge others, and now he was judged. He had not pitied his sister; it was left for a stranger to do that; and in that moment he saw, as clearly as though expressed in tongues of heavenly flame, the divine grace resting on the head of Mrs. Bundy, and himself standing in the dark shadows cast by his own proud egoism.

"O Mrs. Bundy!" he cried, "I have been wrong—quite wrong; you have made me see it!"

And, having no mother, he was not ashamed to turn to this motherly heart for comfort. He knelt before her, and laid his head upon her lap, as he had often done in childish troubles; and her kind hands were upon his head, and her kind voice soothed him.

"There, there, laddie, that's all right. You've been badly hurt yourself, and you've been very brave over it. It's not easy to keep sweet-tempered when you're hurt—you know that, don't you, Bundy? Many's the time and oft I've said hard things I didn't mean, because my heart was bleeding. We all do it sometimes. But I think God turns His head away and doesn't listen. Perhaps

He couldn't go on loving us if He did. And you know what the prayer says: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' I never understood anything about theologies, and that kind of thing; but I know *that's* true. It's true because we can't go on living without it. So that's over, my dear, and don't you think any more about it."

And so she drew the bitterness out of his heart, and kissed him, and finally laughed at him through her tears, calling herself a foolish old woman to be supposing she could teach a big, clever fellow like him, until they were both laughing into one another's eyes like a pair of lovers.

"Well, now, we'll write Helen, and wish her joy. And, Bundy, you're going to Paris next week, aren't you? You will go to see her, of course. And we must send the poor child a present. It's a mercy, after all, she hasn't got into worse mischief than getting married to an old Frenchman. And perhaps he may make her a good husband, there's no telling—even though he is a Frenchman. And now I've a surprise for you. What do you think it is?"

"Something pleasant, no doubt."

"Well, it ought to be. Vickars and Elizabeth are coming to lunch. And you must stay, of course. And after lunch you can talk to Elizabeth, and we old folk will go away and talk about you, and see what can be done for you."

"Yes," said Bundy. "It's all very well for your father to work for Grimes; but you have to get to work too. Ah! there's the bell. That'll be Vickars, so we'll postpone that business."

It was a delightful lunch. For the first time since his return to England Arthur attained a real cheerfulness. In this atmosphere of warm affection it was impossible to think too urgently of past griefs. And it did seem as if the black shadow was at last rolling off, like a rain-cloud with trailing skirts edged with pure light.

Vickars, to his surprise, took quite a cheerful view of Helen's marriage.

"What Helen always needed was *duties*," he remarked. "Duties give poise and ballast to life. I suppose, ever since she left school, she has had no real duties to fulfil, and nothing makes people so selfish as a total absence of some kind of daily duty. If marriage does nothing else, it does impose duties on men and women. It takes them out of themselves, makes them look outward instead of inward, which is always a great thing."

"Then you don't think she has made a mistake?" said Arthur.

"No one can know that. But there's a kind of instinct in people which often guides them to what is right for them, though to an outsider their actions may appear quite foolish and incomprehensible. They unconsciously know what's good for them, just as animals know the kind of food that suits them best. Not a very complimentary analogy, is it?" he added, with his whimsical smile.

"No; but I see what you mean, I think."

"It doesn't need much seeing, for it meets us everywhere. Have you ever watched a dog in a field? He knows exactly what grasses are good for him, and he finds them. We don't know in the least the principle of his discrimination. Well, it's like that with men and women. They make their own choice, and it often seems to us a matter of folly or caprice. But, in nine cases out of ten, if they are left to themselves, they do somehow manage to choose what's best for them."

"And you would apply the same principle to my father?"

"Precisely. He is probably doing the only thing that was left for him to do. He knows what is the best medicine for his wound, and no one else knows anything at all about it."

"Poor father! At this moment, while we are feasting, he is working in bitterness of heart."

"Well, you don't know that. Very likely he is forgetting his bitterness of heart in his work, and if he were here he would remember it."

"And what about yourself?" cried Arthur. "If men really guide themselves by instinct, and do it with efficiency, there's a poor occupation for the man who sets out to reform them."

"I know it, my boy. Didn't I tell you I've given up thinking that I am competent to guide the world? Don't remind me of an old vanity of which I am ashamed. I guide the world! Why, God Himself appears to do that with difficulty."

"Can one man do nothing then for another?"

"Of course he can. But he won't do it by shouting in the market-place. The only thing he can really do is to live in such a way that other people see that his way of living is better than their own. Let him live—not just talk about living."

"And what about reform, all that bright dream of a reconstruction of society which——?"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. And my answer is, that reform comes by example, too. One man who shows others how to live by living accomplishes more than all the books that were ever written."

"You needn't think father means to stop writing, for he doesn't," said Elizabeth, with a smile.

"No, I shall write, because that's my *métier*—the grass that suits me best. But there's this difference. I used to think, when I had written a book, that I had done all that was required of me. Now I see I must live my books. There's far too much writing in the world, and far too much preaching; there's never been enough living."

"I'm sure you've discussed that point long enough," said Mrs. Bundy. "Come and look at my new conservatory. Do you know I've turned orchid-grower? I really prefer roses; but Bundy wants orchids, just because they're expensive. It's a terrible thing to be rich, because you've got to have what other people want, instead of what you want."

They went into the conservatory, and presently, under the skilful management of Mrs. Bundy, Arthur found himself alone with Elizabeth. They sat there a long time, hand in hand, in sympathetic silence. For these two had reached that most perfect union of spirit, which is quite beyond the common mediations of language. Love for them had found its rarest form, a complete repose. From the first they had rested on each other, and, by a kind of spiritual clairvoyance, had read the deepest secrets of each other's thought. They had no need to reiterate the lover's hungry question, "Do you love me?" Such a question implies dubiety, and they had no doubts. Elizabeth's hand, laid in his, said everything; her lips, yielded willingly to his, would have been profaned by speech. And in those long sacramental silences there was something holy—an ardour of the spirit, for which language had no symbols.

They returned at last into the library, where they found Vickars and Bundy engaged in conversation.

"You have quite made your mind up to live with your father?" asked Bundy.

"Yes. I could not leave him alone."

"Very well, then. No doubt you're right. Well, listen. I once asked you to be secretary to the Dredging Company in New York, and you refused. I want you now to act as my private secretary for a few hours every day. In that way you will be earning something, and you can go on living with your father as long as you think fit."

"And I cheerfully accept," said Arthur.

"Then we'll take that as settled. And if you can persuade your father to come back to the life which I think he is better fitted for, why do. He may count on me."

"I don't think he will ever do that. But I am sure he will be glad to know you thought of it."

"Poor fellow," said Bundy, his eyes full of tears. "The world has used him hardly. It somehow doesn't seem fair that I should be here and he there." And then, with a trembling voice, came the old sentiment. "But it's great, all the same, the way he takes things. Your father's a great man."

"I think so too," said Arthur. "He's the greatest man I ever knew, and you are the best."

XXIII

THE LAST HOME

The summer passed in heavy, brooding heat; the autumn brought long days of diminished sunshine; and at last the winter came, with rain and fog. London looked its worst, dull, drab, dishevelled, and nowhere was its grim squalor more distressing than in Tottenham.

A district of mean streets, formless and chaotic, sprawling aimlessly in a sea of mud; houses gray and dingy, exuding dirt; other houses, new and cheaply built, already overtaken by decay, huddled in shivering wretchedness along roads deep in mire; churches with the paint peeling from their doors; paltry ill-stocked shops visibly struggling for existence; a few smoke-stained trees; a smoke-stained sky; and tribes of men and women moving to and fro dejectedly, with backs hunched against the driving rain, or faces showing pallid in the fog,—such is Tottenham. It is a district without grace, without charm, with no interruption in its uniformity of dullness. The disparities caused by social rank, which elsewhere give some semblance of external variety, are not found here. Poverty sees itself reduplicated at every turn; it looks into its own face, and sees no other. A district no man chooses; into which he may be thrust by dire misfortune, in which he may dwell with resentment, with a heart swollen with regret, with a mind embittered; but which

excites in him no respect and no affection. London, with its glories and adventures, shines afar; it shines splendid and contemptuous. For here there are no adventures; memories, but no prospects; life without ardour; struggle without hope; toil without release.

It was in this district that Masterman had chosen to live. Its tragic dreariness presented a subtle correspondence with his own temper. Having sought wealth for so many years with a fierce intensity of passion, he now embraced poverty with an equal ardour. The world had humiliated him, and, as if to show how little he cared for the world's verdict, he added to his humiliation features which the world had not intended. He hungered for renunciation, not as saints have hungered, but with the bravado of a broken heart. He would show himself unsubduable; that was his main thought. And in what more striking way could he do this than by a complete indifference to the world's opinion, a voluntary descent into indignity? To toil in harsh labours, to eat poor food, to live in the meanest way, without complaint, without visible resentment,—this was his challenge to the world, by which he declared his complete contempt for the world's judgment and opinion.

This had been his sole motive for rejecting the proffered generosity of Bundy. And there were others beside Bundy, the friends and acquaintances of his prosperity, who would gladly have given him a helping hand. But, since he could not wholly recover his old position, he scorned a partial reclamation. To move before the eyes of these former friends shorn of his power, narrowed, limited, perhaps pitied, was a thing impossible. Better far to leave the arena for ever, and leave it with a proud disdain. Exile was less painful than toleration. The exile may at least keep his pride; but what pride is possible to the broken supernumerary who "lags superfluous on the stage"?

"No," he said, when Bundy pressed him to accept his help, "I can't do it. I know you mean it kindly; but I can't."

"But why not?"

"You wouldn't understand if I told you."

"I understand you're the most obstinate man I ever met," said Bundy, with a touch of indignant heat.

"Obstinate? Well, p'raps so. We'll let it go at that. Yes, I'm obstinate."

And his smile was so grim and tragic that Bundy said no more.

It was one of the curious features of his situation that the house he chose to live in at Tottenham was a triumph of architectural mendacity; the same kind of house, in fact, as those with which he himself had disfigured London, but some grades lower than his own flimsiest performances. The doors were badly hung and would not close; the wainscots, fashioned of green wood, were already shrunken; the window frames rattled and let in the cold air; the chimneys smoked; the ceiling plaster was already in process of disintegration; there was nothing in the house that was not eloquent of fraud. Perhaps he had been moved by the spirit of irony in the selection of such a house as his final habitation. He might have lived elsewhere; but nowhere else could he have gratified his perversity with such completeness. Grimes employed him; well, let him live in one of Grimes's houses too; in doing so he anticipated the world's laughter by laughing himself.

"He's a holy terror, is Grimes," he would remark. "I thought I knew how to build a thirty-pound house myself pretty well; but Grimes beats me hands down. He can give me points every time."

And then he would recapitulate with sardonic skill all the building tricks of which Grimes had been guilty, specifying each with bitter humour.

"I did sometimes use sand in my mortar; but Grimes uses mud—mere road mud at that. And I did put down drains of some sort; but Grimes beats me there—he don't appear to have heard of drains. And his party-walls, holy Moses! I believe if I spat at them they'd fall down."

When Arthur came home in the evening, he would meet him at the door with ironic warnings.

"Here, mind you shut that door quietly. If you bang it, it's my belief the whole gimcrack will be about your ears. And be careful you take your boots off before you go upstairs. Those stairs weren't meant for boots. And, whatever you do, don't you be leaning against the walls. They kind o' shake every time a fly walks over them. I guess it wouldn't need much of a Samson to pull *them* down. He wouldn't need to touch 'em; I reckon a sneeze would do the trick."

"Father, I can't bear to see you so bitter."

"Bitter? Oh no, I'm not bitter. I'm amused, that's all."

"I wish you wouldn't live here, father. There's no need. Let me find another house. Between us, we've money enough."

"Well, Arthur, you see I kind of like living here. It's exciting. You never know what's going to happen. And, besides, it's instructive. I'm studying the methods of my friend Grimes, in case I should want to start again presently as a contractor. I'm learning every day. There's more than meets the eye in this contracting business; and, since I've worked for Grimes, I begin to think I never knew a thing about it."

Remonstrance was so clearly useless that after a time Arthur ceased to attempt it. He accepted his father's bitter humour, thankful for the humour, if hurt by its bitterness. He even contrived to laugh at times when his father grew increasingly sarcastic over the iniquities of Grimes; but it was the kind of laughter that was more painful than tears.

More than once he tried to persuade his father to leave London altogether. He pictured to him the life at Kootenay, the quiet, the freedom, the exhilarating sense of triumph over crude nature, with all the skill and eloquence at his command. At times his father would listen with interest, asking many questions, but always at the end he would say, "No, no; it's too late for that. I'm a have-been. I can't begin again. And, besides, it would look like running away, and I won't do that. A man has to take his medicine, and I'm going to take mine."

At times a strange religious vein showed itself in his conversation. He never went to church now, and, indeed, entertained a strong rancour against what he called "church-folk." Scales had been an officer in the church, and was a rascal. The church-folk had all deserted him in his downfall. Clark, indeed, had called upon him, but had nothing to say. It was all a kind of play-acting, very pleasant if you'd nothing better to do, and that was all. "Churches are meant for comfortable people. All very well while you've money in your pocket, and a good coat upon your back, but they aren't for the like of me," was one of his sayings. "The Church don't know anything about real life," he would remark, "and it doesn't want to. If it once saw things as they are, it would be frightened out of its wits. So it draws the blind down, and won't look. It's like folk sitting round a good fire on a winter night, and when the rain's coming down and a gale's blowing. The more the gale blows, the more comfortable you are. What's the good of looking out of the window? Why, they might see some poor wretch like me, and that would make them unhappy. Better not look. Stir the fire up, and forget all about it."

"I don't believe the church-folk think like that, father."

"Oh yes, they do. I've done it myself, and I know."

And then, amid these bitter criticisms and confessions, that curious authentic religious vein would struggle into light. He would often sit up late reading those portions of the Scripture most characterised by melancholy wisdom.

"Listen to this," he said on one of those occasions: "*'He that buildeth his house with other men's money is like one that gathereth himself stones for the tomb of his burial.... Weep for the dead, for he hath lost the light; and weep for the fool, for he wanteth understanding; make little weeping for the dead, for he is at rest; but the life of the fool is worse than death.'* The man who wrote that knew something about life now, if you like. Couldn't pay his mortgage, as like as not; been a bankrupt, I guess. Just wanted to die, and be done with it all—like me. Yet God let him have a hand in writing the Bible—queer thing that, isn't it? And God must have known the kind of fool he was. That's what I like about the Bible; it don't shirk things—tells you the truth every time. It's a big thing is the Bible—big as a rock; and the Church is just a little limpet sticking on it. Don't see how big it is; probably can't see it." And then, with a sudden pale illumination on the strong worn face, "Well, I guess God's got to put up wi' me. He's big enough to understand the sort I am. And I'm not for apologising to Him. I reckon He don't want me to."

Gradually there seemed to settle on him a languor, which expressed itself in a kind of patience which Arthur found infinitely pathetic. He went to his work before daylight, came home weary, and often wet through, ate his coarsely cooked meal in silence, but made no complaint. He had ceased to take interest in the outer world. He received the news of Helen's marriage without remark, and displayed no curiosity. Once only he was roused to any interest in her. Bundy, in one of his numerous journeys to Paris, insisted on taking Arthur with him, and Arthur told his father that he would no doubt see Helen.

"Paris, did you say? Ah! I was there once. It was there they took me. So she's living in Paris, is she?"

He left the room and went upstairs. Arthur could hear him moving to and fro for a long time. When he came down, he held a little parcel in his hand.

"I suppose my creditors ought to have had this," he said. "Only they didn't get it."

"What is it, father?"

He slowly undid the parcel, and put upon the table a small gold watch.

"It didn't rightly belong to the creditors, either," he said in a low voice. "It was hers."

"Whose, father?"

"Your mother's. The first thing I gave her after we'd begun to get on a bit. I can mind how pleased she was. Lord! it seems like yesterday. And then her face kind of clouded over, and she said, 'But can you afford it?' That was just like your mother—always afraid I couldn't afford things."

He became silent, and stood with wide intent eyes, as if he saw that far distant past limned upon the air. He had never spoken of his dead wife before. The mention of her name invoked God knows what sweet and painful memories.

"Thought I couldn't afford it," he repeated softly. "Put it away in a drawer, didn't like to wear it, thought it too good for her. Some women are like that—not many, though. I guess Helen isn't like that...." And then, with a sudden lifting of the head, as though he emerged from a sea of dreams, "Well, I want you to give the watch to Helen. I haven't given her a wedding-present. That's about all I have to give. I hope she'll value it."

In due course Arthur gave the watch to Helen. She glanced at it with an air of insolent depreciation. "It isn't likely I'm going to wear an old thing like that!" was her sole remark. She also put it in a drawer, where it was forgotten. When she left the Hotel Continental, a year later, it was lost. She never missed it.

It was on his return from this journey to Paris that Arthur noticed for the first time a distinct physical change in his father. The big frame remained, but the flesh was shrunken.

"Aren't you well, father?" he asked.

"Oh yes, I'm well—a bit thinner, that's all. I'd begun to run to fat, you know, sitting about in offices. There's nothing like hard work to take your flesh down."

That night, as they sat beside the fire, he talked with an interest he had never shown before about Arthur's prospects in life. He drew from him a particular account of his work upon the ranch, the scenery, the business possibilities in fruit-growing, and so forth.

"I suppose now men get rich out there pretty quick, don't they?"

"A few."

"But there's gold and copper in those hills, isn't there?"

"So they say. There are old men who have been looking for it all their lives, though, and they haven't found it."

"But you might find it, eh? You've education, and that counts for a lot anywhere. And you've brains—you could organise things. I wouldn't wonder if you were rich some day."

"I don't want to be rich, father. The rich people appear to me the unhappiest people in the world."

"Ah, that's true, too! It's the same everywhere. You see, if a man's *born* rich, he grows up to it, and knows how to behave. But when he *gets* rich, he generally makes a mess of things. Isn't used to it, and it goes to his head like wine." A long pause—and then, "What's the verse about choosing the better part? Well, I reckon you've chosen the better part. I didn't think so once, but I've begun to see a lot of new things of late, and that's one of them."

"Then you forgive me for going away, father?"

"Oh! I don't know about that. Isn't it enough if I say that I think you did the wise thing? It's pretty hard for me to say that, and you must be content with it."

He talked on for an hour or so, in a quiet, musing voice, recalling the histories of men he had known, most of them dead. He recalled their struggles, their ambitions, their infrequent victories, their frequent defeats, their occasional rise into social eminence, and the domestic infelicities that poisoned their success. It was a sorry record, a kind of epitome of modern covetousness, through which wailed the sombre note of the Hebrew moralist, *Vanitas Vanitatum*! Arthur could not but notice that he spoke no longer as a participant in the strife, but as a mere spectator. He saw the frantic whirl of men in pursuit of gold as something far off, unimportant, inherently mean and despicable. And he himself spoke as a man completely disillusioned, a derider and a mocker, whose dominant temper was ironic pity.

"Poor Sandy Macphail—I knew him when he earned a pound a week." And then would come a caustic sketch of Sandy, lying for his life in some crisis of his fortunes, "eating dirt," as he put it, to creep into a big man's favour, dragging with him into social light a wife who was the laughing-stock of unfamiliar drawing-rooms, and his cubs of boys, who took to drink or gambling—ending with the grim comment, "Spent his last years wheeled about in a chair, did Sandy—paralysed, you know."

Or it would be, "There's Steiner, South African millionaire, you know. I met him once in my great days. Poor wreck of a man, nerves all gone, took drugs, so they said. Committed suicide, did Steiner."

It was a long, almost involuntary unfolding of the filaments of memory. Man after man appeared in that phantasmagoric vision, foolish, pitiable, misguided, and sank out of sight pierced by the shaft of some ironic phrase.

"Well, I'm out of it all, and a good job, too," he concluded. "They'll be saying the same things about me when I'm dead. My! it's twelve o'clock! An old bankrupt fellow that works for Grimes ought to ha' been a-bed long ago. These are no hours for the British working man."

The next day was Sunday. To Arthur's surprise his father appeared after breakfast clothed in the fashion of his former life. The worn serge suit and low hat were laid aside; they were replaced by a black frock coat, a white waistcoat, and a top hat. He looked once more the city magnate—rather faded. And in some subtle way the better clothes had affected the physical aspect of the man. He no longer stooped; he stood erect, held himself well, had something of his former air of command.

"I've a fancy for a walk," he said. "Do you care to come?"

It was one of those mild and exquisite days which are the stars in the dreary firmament of winter. A soft wind blew out of the south-west, soft clouds moved across a blue-gray sky, and the air was pure and sparkling. Even Tottenham was touched with the spirit of a brief vivacity. The normal cloud of dinginess was miraculously dissolved, the sunlight glittered on the rain-pools, and a Sabbath calm lay upon the streets. It was the kind of day which the country-man calls "a weather-breeder"; which the less wise Londoner hails as the first pledge of returning summer.

They wandered forth, apparently without aim, but steadily moving westward. They reached Hyde Park, where they sat for some time watching the gaily dressed people who flowed past like a coloured river. Here and there Masterman discerned a known face, and made brief comments on it. From Hyde Park they turned toward the city. Through the mitigated clamour of the Strand, and the almost total silence of Cheapside, they passed, till they came to the network of lanes and alleys round the Mansion House. They were strangely hushed. Where, day by day, so many thousands passed, driven by eagerness and haste, in an unnoticeable throng, a single footfall now roused clamant echoes.

"It's a queer thing, but I've never been in the city on a Sunday before," Masterman remarked. "I couldn't have believed it was so silent. It's like going to sleep in a thunderstorm, and waking up in a vault, with the coffin-lid nailed over you."

He paused at last before the high narrow building where he had had his offices.

"Wonder whether the caretaker's here. Let us see."

A little dark man answered the door.

"Why, it's Mr. Masterman!" he cried in astonishment. "Come in, sir!"

"So you remember me, Perkins?"

"Of course, sir. And there's no one sorrier than me for what has happened."

"Who's got my offices now?"

"They're still to let, sir. P'raps you'd like to see them."

"Yes, I should."

They went up into the rooms. Masterman's name was still upon the glass door of the outer office. The desk that he had used was in its place beneath the window. But there was dust upon the furniture, dust upon the windows, and a kind of ghostly loneliness in the deserted rooms.

"I've a fancy for sitting at that desk again, Arthur."

He sat quite silent, his hat tilted back, his fingers drumming on the elbows of the chair.

"Let us go, father. It's too lonely."

"Yes—lonely," he said in a low voice. "The place that knew you knows you no more for ever. It's a queer sensation. No more—for ever!"

They left the room, went downstairs; and Arthur noticed with astonishment that Masterman gave the obsequious Perkins a sovereign.

"Oh! you needn't look like that," said Masterman. "I can afford it. And if I couldn't afford it I should do it. Perkins still has his illusions concerning me, and it isn't worth while destroying them. He very likely thinks I'm going to rent the offices again. Well, let him think it."

They left the city and turned northward. The evening had fallen when they reached Highbourne Gardens. The church shone with lighted windows, and on the misty air there floated out the sound of hymn-music. Eagle House reared a dim bulk through the mist. A white-painted

board, just beside the gate, informed the public that the house was to be sold.

"Come away," said Arthur. "I can't bear it!"

For at last he saw that in this aimless wandering there had been an aim; his father was revisiting old scenes to take farewell of them.

"Hush!" said Masterman. "Listen!"

As they listened, the hymn-music became recognisable.

> Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
> Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
> Change and decay in all around I see...

The hymn ceased.

"Give me your arm, Arthur; I feel a little faint. That's right. Now let us go back."

The rain had begun to fall, and the wind was rising. It was nine o'clock when they reached Tottenham, and both were wet through.

The next day he went to his work as usual. The weather was miserable. A raw north-east wind blew, bringing with it snow. The snow became sleet, and the wind changed to the south-east, bearing on its wings continuous rain. After the rain came black, impenetrable fog. Tottenham was submerged beneath the clammy vapour.

On the Thursday, when Arthur returned from Bundy's, he found his father huddled over the fire, coughing violently.

"Are you ill, father?" he asked in alarm.

"Oh! just a cold. Nothing to be troubled over."

But the next morning he did not rise from his bed. Bronchitis had declared itself. A local doctor, hastily called in, hinted at some injury to the lungs, and spoke guardedly of a possible weakness of the heart. From that hour Arthur never left his father's bedside.

Mrs. Bundy no sooner heard the news than she flew to the rescue. The astonished street beheld a carriage with prancing horses at the door, from which emerged a lady in a long sealskin jacket, who entered the humble house, and did not return. She had established herself as Masterman's nurse, glad to exchange the idle trivialities of Kensington for these hard duties of helpful service. Bundy sent his own physician, a famous specialist, who took Arthur aside, and asked him gravely what his father's habits of life had been. When Arthur told him who his father was, and how he had lived since he came to Tottenham, he became yet more grave.

"I think I see," he said. "You won't mind my saying that a sudden change of life at your father's age was a great mistake."

"My father would have it so."

"I understand."

"Is there any danger?"

"There is always danger where there is serious illness. I ought to tell you, your father's condition is precarious. There is such a thing as a man's loosening his grasp on life—doing it purposely, I mean. Against that condition the best medical skill is useless."

"Then you think he will die?"

"Yes; his troubles are nearly over."

Arthur returned to the sick-room with a sinking heart. It seemed an inconceivable thing that that strong frame, the vehicle of so many energies, should be in process of dissolution. It had fulfilled the intention of its Maker for so many years, borne heat and cold, the strain of struggle and fatigue, with such a perfect adaptation, with such indefatigable vigour, its every atom mutely obedient to the guiding will; and now it must be numbered with the spent forces of creation. It must return to the womb of Nature from which it sprang, and become part of the innumerable dust of perished generations. Such was the law of waste that ruled the world—an awful thought to a son beside a father's death-bed. And against the certain working of that law, what had man to place but frail and feeble hopes; what, at best, but the solemn asseveration of a faith daily contradicted by the incontrovertible realities of physical dissolution, by the stark facts of departure, disappearance? ... An awful thought, indeed, before which the stoutest hearts have trembled.

His father lay quite silent. He had not spoken for many hours. There was no sound but the soft hissing of the steam in the bronchitis kettle, and the dropping of a cinder on the hearth.

Towards dawn he spoke.

"Well... well! ... Seems as if it was all a mistake.... A-striving and a-struggling, and nothing come of it. Folk'll laugh.... Him as had the city at his feet, working for poor old Grimes. It's a poor end!—a poor end!"

"Father, don't you know me?"

"It isn't Helen, is it? No, she went away. Poor little girl!"

The mind pursued its own sad communings.

"Well, I guess God's got to put up wi' me. He's big enough to understand. He don't want apologies. I am what I am."

The grayness of the dawn filled the room.

Suddenly he raised himself slightly on his pillow. He grasped Arthur's hand. There came into the tired eyes a new light, a long, intense wonder-look.

"*Mary!*"

It was his wife's name.

Then the strong face grew slowly empty of expression, the eyes closed.

Archibold Masterman had laid himself down to rest among the generations of the dead, and all his love and hatred had perished with him, neither had he any more a portion in anything that is done under the sun.

XXIV

THE NEW WORLD

Against the main-line platform of Waterloo Station the special boat-train was drawn up. It was half-past eight in the morning. Almost momently suburban trains arrived, discharging their crowds of workers, who passed in long files toward the portals of the station, and were swallowed up, like so many tiny streams, in the great sea of London. Some of them turned their eyes curiously, perhaps a little yearningly, toward the boat-train; but for the most part these arriving throngs passed on with sedate, indifferent faces. The boat-train represented liberty—it was the symbol of things free and large; but their thoughts did not go so far as that. For them, life offered no release; there was no discharge in their warfare; to the end of their days they would tread the city streets, push their humble fortunes as they best could amid its clangour, and sink into rest at last beneath its gray skies.

Yet this morning the skies were not gray. The magic of June lay upon the city. The toil-worn metropolis had dressed itself in shining raiment, as if it would fain remind its departing sons that it also could be fair; as if it meant that this last vision of its fairness should be for them a rebuke and a torturing memory through all the years of absence.

A man and a woman crossed the platform, closely observing the labels on the windows of the carriages.

"Ah! here it is! 'Masterman and party,'" said Bundy.

"They should be here by this time, shouldn't they?" said Mrs. Bundy.

"No, there's plenty of time—nearly half an hour."

They stood beside the train, talking in eager tones.

"You ordered flowers for their cabin, didn't you?"

"Yes; and I've done something else. I've got a suite of rooms for them. But they won't know that till they get aboard."

"Ah! I'm glad of that! I suppose it's the last thing we can do for them."

"Pray don't be melancholy," said Bundy, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "They're going to be

very happy. Let us see them off with smiles."

"Ah! it's very well to talk. But these partings make me miserable. I couldn't have loved Arthur more if he'd been my own son. But he won't want me any more now. He'll have Elizabeth."

"Well, aren't you glad of it?"

"Oh yes, I'm glad. It was a beautiful wedding. And she is a sweet girl. But there's nothing makes you feel so old as weddings, somehow. They make you realise how much of life lies behind you."

This intimate talk was interrupted by the increasing crowd that thronged the platform.

"Well, cheer up! Here they come!" said Bundy.

And Mrs. Bundy, instantly superior to grievous meditations, ran to meet the little group, with smiles and tenderness. She made no scruple of kissing Arthur openly, embraced Elizabeth with fervour, wrung Vickars's hand, to the last moment bought them books, papers, and magazines, and whispered various occult directions for the attainment of health and happiness into Arthur's ear, much as she had done years before when he went to school for the first time. And then came the crowded sensations of the moment when the shrill whistle sounded, the wheels moved, and the train sped into the spacious sunshine.

For Arthur, newly married, was leaving the city of so many tragic memories for ever; Vickars also had decided to accompany Arthur and Elizabeth to Kootenay. Each felt that with the death of Masterman the last tie to England was snapped.

As the train flashed on past trim suburban villas, into the greenness of the open country, they talked in hushed tones of the life that lay behind them.

"One feels a little like a recreant at leaving it all," said Vickars. "It is such a big thing, this London. And, when all's said and done, there's far more heroism packed into those struggling, drudging London lives than is found in a thousand battlefields."

"You've done your part, father. You, at least, need have no compunctions," said Elizabeth.

"I've done a little—how little! You didn't think, when I was speaking of heroism, that I meant myself, did you, my child?"

"I only meant what I said, father. You have done your part."

"Ah! an easy part," he said meditatively. "I have sat apart, aloof and sheltered, writing books. That is but an easy and little thing."

He was silent for some moments, watching the green unfolding of the country, the quiet farms and cottages, the ancient churches lifting gray towers above their guardian elms, the bright water-courses, the level roads and sun-washed fields.

"It comes to me," he said presently, "that there's another kind of life which I have never fully understood. A man comes to London, young, strong, eager, and is speedily infected with a passion for success. He is exposed daily to a hundred gross temptations. If he had some original fineness of nature, it is soon blunted by the conditions of his life. He fights for standing-room because that is the first law of his existence. He then fights for conquest, and he conquers. At last he receives a fatal wound. But his courage does not fail him. He stands lonely and weak, fighting to the last. In the hour of his adversity he is wholly unconquered. That is real heroism. The final virtue of life is courage. He has this courage, and it is so great that it eclipses the memory of his faults."

"You are thinking of my father?" said Arthur, in a low voice.

"Yes. I who sat apart, criticising the world, am the sham hero. He who endured the crucifixion of the world is the real hero. Suffering does not necessarily ennoble men; but to suffer bravely is always noble. Ah, Arthur! when I think of that lonely grave which lies behind us, I say, not 'what bitterness is hidden there!' but 'what fortitude!' With all its faults, the life hidden in that grave may teach us all a lesson."

And that was the epitaph of Archibold Masterman.

The train sped on. The ancient towers of Winchester rose and sank; and were not they also the memorial of a Life not alone pure and gentle, but of a divine courage? ... And in that Life, as in multitudes of soiled and human lives, was not the final efficiency found in the fortitude that endures?

"That is the real heroism," said Vickars. "At least it is clear that without this fortitude no kind of heroism is possible."

Through the trees the gray hospice of St. Cross was visible for a transient moment. The high chalk downs succeeded, the green marshland, the broad estuary with its tossing boats and wide

glimmering waters.

An hour later a great ship loosed her moorings, and turned her bows toward the wider waters and the New World.

THE END

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