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Title: Crying for the Light; Or, Fifty Years Ago. Vol. 3 [of 3]

Author: J. Ewing Ritchie

Release date: July 21, 2011 [EBook #36810]

Language: English

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Transcribed from the 1895 Jarrold and Sons edition by David Price, email [ccx074@pglaf.org](mailto:ccx074@pglaf.org). Many thanks to Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, UK, for kindly allowing their copy to be used for this transcription.

“This is the condition of humanity; we are placed as it were in an intellectual twilight where we discover but few things clearly, and yet we see enough to tempt us with the hope of making better and more discoveries.”

—BOLINGBROKE.

**Crying for the Light  
or Fifty Years Ago**

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J Ewing Ritchie  
Author of ‘East Anglia’

Vol 3

London: Jarrold and Sons  
Warwick Lane E.C.  
1895

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## CHAPTER XXII. AT THE CATTLE-SHOW.

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Again we are at Sloville, on the occasion of the anniversary of the flourishing Agricultural Society of the county—an occasion which fills the town with rosy-faced, ruined British farmers; which blocks up all the leading streets with flocks and herds of oxen and sheep from a thousand hills, and which not a little astonishes and vexes the soul of the true-born son of the soil, as he contemplates new-fangled machinery of every variety and for every purpose; alarms him with ominous forebodings of a time when, Othello-like, he will find his occupation gone, and the rascally steam-engine doing the work, and taking the bread out of the mouth of an honest man. He thinks of Swing and sighs. That mysterious personage had a way of putting down threshing-machines which was satisfactory for a time; but, alas! steam is king, and it is vain to fight with him. It is steam quite as much as the wickedness of the landlord, incredible as it may seem to the Radical politician, which has emptied the country and filled the town. It would be all right if steam would work off our surplus population. Alas! it does nothing of the kind, and each year the labourer finds himself of less account; nor can there be any change for the better till we get the people back on to the land, away from the crowded city with its ever-increasing drudgery and toil. Perhaps when they have settled Ireland our wise men of Gotham may look at home. There is plenty for them to do there. It is high time that we do something for our bold peasantry, once their country's pride.

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It is a fine, bright, sparkling morning, one rare in England, but to be made the most of when it comes. There are no clouds in the sky, and there is scarce a breath of air to bring them down from the vasty deep above. Every hedgerow is bright with flowers, and musical with the song of birds. Overnight there was a shower, which laid the dust and added a touch of freshness to the emerald meadows. On every side ancient oaks and wide-reaching elms cast a grateful shade. What can be dearer than an English landscape on such a day? Even the thatched clay cottage, with its roses and honeysuckle, looks picturesque, and the brown cows suggest more than milk as they lie chewing the cud, apparently at peace with themselves and all below. Here and there amidst the trees is the red-brick manor-house, or the old-fashioned farmhouse, or the gray spire of the village church, where from time immemorial the tribes have repaired. Yesterday, it were, they were teaching there the Mass; now the Mass is unsung, and we have the doctrines and Articles of the Church of England, which seem sadly at variance with one and another. To-morrow what shall we hear there? Who can say? Man and his opinions change only in our villages, the face of Nature remains the same. You travel all the world over, and you come back to your native village to find it ever the same, only a little smaller, that is all.

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From the lodge of a neighbouring hall rides forth a cavalcade; Sir Watkin Strahan, well-mounted, is the leader of the party. A fair girl, the rich merchant's daughter, is by his side; on the other is the rich merchant himself. Behind them follows a groom in livery, perhaps the best rider of the lot. As they leave the gate the keeper hands Sir Watkin an ill-written epistle on a dirty piece of paper, which Sir Watkin indignantly tears to pieces without reading. 'If the contents are of importance,' he says to himself, 'they will come before him in a more legitimate manner.'

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"'Tis that old woman from the workhouse,' says the lodge-keeper to the groom, who gives a knowing smile in reply as he passes out. 'She's a good deal arter the maister,' she replies, 'but he's not one to take up with the likes of her. She's a cool one, at any rate.'

They are now on the turnpike which leads to Sloville, and hence to London itself. The crowd thickens as they near the town. The tenants on the estate are numerous, and Sir Watkin has a word for them all. He inquires after their families; as to the state of their oxen and asses; what kind of a season it has been with them, and how the crops are getting on. The tenants are careful not to reply too cheerily. They are talking to their landlord, and he may put up the rent if they brag too much.

The London merchant is charmed. He has a lot more money than Sir Watkin, but it brings him no gratified courtesies either abroad or at home. He is suspicious even of his chief clerk. Everyone seems to look up to Sir Watkin. There is something in being a landowner, and the bearer of any kind of hereditary title.

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'Why,' he asks himself, 'does not the Queen make baronets of such as himself? Men who add to British wealth, who carry British commerce all over the world; without whom England would never have become mistress of the seas. Infinitely superior is the British merchant to the British landlord. Yet, how much we think of the one, how little of the other. Will it ever be so?' he asks himself. Wise as he is, he fails to anticipate a time when circumstances shall break the power of the landlord, and the produce of Canada and America make the land an unsaleable commodity.

As a matter of theory nothing can be more ideally beautiful than the landed system under which England has become great and flourishing; nor was any other system possible at the time it

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became developed in our midst. The sovereign apportioned the land between his nobles as a reward for their devotion to his service. As they became strong, they acted as a check on the sovereign himself; as the middle class began to grow strong by commerce, they acted as a check on each, and king and noble felt their importance and their power, and were ready to attach them to their side. It is to the credit of our aristocracy that they aimed to be the leaders of the people; that they did not sink into mere courtiers; that they were bold and hardy—ready to take their share in the fighting and adventure which became the necessity of our insular position. It is more to their credit that the relation between them and their tenants was pleasant and mutually advantageous. The great landlord was a power in the land, a centre of civilization, the friend of all within his sphere of influence. His sons served the State—in the army and navy and the Church. The farmer and the labourer had much in common; they worked side by side, ate at the same table, talked the same language, and were equally ready to do the will of their superiors. In time there grew up a different state of things; with that love of money which is the root of all evil, society became revolutionized—the landlord wanted higher rents; the farmer aspired to be a gentleman, and the poor labourer was deprived of his bit of common, of his sports and pastimes; his cottage was pulled down, and he had to end his days in the workhouse or in some city slum; and now Hodge has only the beer-shop or the Primitive Methodist chapel to look to for sympathy and friendship. The man of to-day is the man who makes money, no matter how.

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At the time of which I write, the old tradition in favour of the landlord was still in force, and Sir Watkin was glad to show his City friends how all did him honour as they made their way amidst the ever increasing throng on their way to the cattle-show.

And the young lady—what of her? Her bosom swells, and her eye sparkles with pride. Her only recollection of her grandfather is that of a feeble old man dressed in rusty black, dependent for his bread and cheese on his more vigorous and successful son.

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Sir Watkin had a hall full of the portraits of his ancestors. Some had been great lawyers, some soldiers and sailors—all more or less connected with the State. And, then, what a monarch was a landlord in his domains, almost armed with the power of life and death! How much pleasanter the talk of such a man than of one who was in a counting-house all day, and whose favourite literature was to be found in the money articles of the *Times*! Should she become Lady Watkin? Certainly it would be very nice, if she could not manage to secure a lord. In default of the latter, she made herself very agreeable to her host, who was old enough to be her father, and who, if he was an Israelite, was not altogether without guile.

At length our illustrious friends reach Sloville, or rather the outskirts of the town, where the Agricultural Show is held. Here the sheep are inspected; and then they pass on to the shorthorns and Herefords; and then, very evident in more ways than one were the pigs of Berks and Hants, and other choice breeds. How they were watched by the fat farmers with sympathetic eyes! How the rustic chawbacon doted on them! We hear much of the roast beef of old England, but dearer to the national heart is its roast pork, especially when it comes to us in the shape of roast pig, immortalized by the charming Elia, and the theme—the fitting theme—of one of his most eloquent essays: 'See him,' he writes, 'in the dish—his second cradle—how meek he lieth! Wouldst thou have the innocent grow up to the grossness and indocility which too often accompany maturer swinehood? Ten to one he would have proved a glutton, a sloven, an obstinate, disagreeable animal wallowing in all manner of filthy conversation. From these sins he is happily snatched away.'

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'Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade,  
Death came with timely care.'

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The horses, as the nobler animals, had a field to themselves. It was there the multitude flocked, for every Englishman thinks he knows more of horses and can manage them better than anyone else; all were there, from the Leviathan cart-horses, such as we see in brewers' drays, to the light-built hack on which my lady canters across the park. Here Sir Watkin, as became him, was oracular, as he went from one to the other of the candidates for the honours of the day, looked into his mouth and inspected his teeth, felt his hoofs and prodded his sides, took off his hat and beat a tattoo with his riding-whip in order to get a good idea of the animal's performance, whilst the ostler with a straw in his mouth stood admiring. The farmers were proud, for Sir Watkin was a connoisseur, and knew a thing or two.

Next to the horses, the ladies affected the poultry. Perhaps a time will come when the British farmer will condescend to think of such small fry, and divert into his own pocket the millions we send to France and elsewhere for eggs and poultry. Sir Watkin did not care much about them—nor did the British merchant—so long as he got his fresh egg for breakfast, and his little bit of the breast with a glass of sherry for lunch; but the lady was not to be gainsaid, and so a half-hour was devoted to the noisy neighbourhood of Brahmas and Dorkings and Cochins; while rival cocks—happily far apart—challenged each other to mortal combat, and proudly hurled defiance from the prison walls. A short distance off we the improved ploughs and tumbrels and waggons, and the reaping machines, for which we are indebted to America, and which testify how much may be done by machinery on large farms held by farmers of sufficient means. Here the spectators were of a more select class, high farming not being in everyone's way. Instead of the rosy, stupid, sleek bucolic, you saw men learned in machinery, and with some of the smartness of the town men, bent on improvement and eager to turn science to profitable account. Wheat was threshed and dressed in the most efficient manner. The rustic farmer stared, open-mouthed, questioning whether it were safer to continue as his fathers before him or to give in to machinery

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which promised him such beneficent results. As it was, he seemed to be much exercised in his mind. The elder men shook their heads, the young ones seemed ready for novelty. Perhaps the truth lay between the two. Had we not of late suffered much from potato disease? said the old farmer, and did one ever hear of that before we had the railway? That was a poser, as they thought, which there was no getting over, however plausible the speech of agricultural implement maker or vendor of artificial manure.

As usual, the refreshment booths were the most patronized parts of the exhibition. There the learned and the ignorant, the old-fashioned farmer and the man of the present time, met on an equality. There was to be found the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. The townspeople understood that part of the business as well as the farmer who had come out for a spree; and in a little while the fun was fast and furious.

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The outskirts of the field devoted to the exhibition assumed the aspect of a fair. Here a crowd witnessed that popular domestic drama known as Punch and Judy. There the youths of the district played madly with Aunt Sally. In one quarter champions from London demonstrated the art of self-defence; in another was Mrs. Jarley with her moral wax-works. The peasantry were in great force, as they always are when beer is to be had or anything out of the way to be seen. So dense was the crowd it was a wonder someone was not hurt, as reckless farmers, under the influence of beer, and in order to show off the prowess of their steeds, galloped up and down. Boys, of course, were always in the way. Unfortunately a special providence watched over them.

All at once Sir Watkin Strahan found that he was followed by an old woman in a workhouse garb, who had got out for a holiday, and who had evidently been indulging in liquor to an extent that embarrassed her movements and impaired her forces of speech. It was a very disagreeable situation for him. He was well known to everyone there, and, besides, he had a lady under his escort in whose eye he wished to assume a good figure. As a popular landlord and well-known county man, so far he had succeeded to his heart's content.

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The swells had deferred to his opinion; the farmers had applauded his jokes, whilst their wives and daughters beamed with smiles; and the plebeians had eyed him with reverence from afar. Representatives of leading firms had besought his attention and patronage as they explained the peculiar merits of their own machines. His own part in the show had been very successful. He had won a prize with one of his own bullocks, his sheep were classed in A 1, and his fine porkers, of the real Berkshire breed, had attracted honourable mention; but wherever he went, there was this old hag in his way, making signs to him which he could not or would not understand. All at once he was separated from his friends, and the woman, seeing her opportunity, rushed at him.

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'What the deuce do you want?' said he angrily, holding up his riding-whip as if about to hit her.

'I've got something to say to yer honour.'

'Well, say on,' said he impatiently.

'But I cant say it here,' was the reply.

'I suppose,' said the Baronet, 'you want some money? There is half a crown,' continued he, hastily tossing it her. 'But don't spend it in beer, my good woman; you have had too much already.'

'No, 'tis not money. I can tell yer honour something you would like to know.'

'Much obliged, I am sure; but I fear you are labouring under a delusion.'

'No, no, Sir Watkin.'

'You're drunk, I tell you. Be off, or I'll give you in charge.'

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'Me drunk, Sir Watkin? A poor lone widow as has lived respectable in Sloville for years, though unfortunate, but that is neither here nor there. Me drunk? No, no, Sir Watkin!'

'But I tell you you are, my good woman.'

'Drunk or sober, Sir Watkin, you must listen to me.'

'I'll do nothing of the kind.'

'If you don't hear me, Sir Watkin, you'll be sorry as long as you live.'

By this time the crowd had been attracted to the spot, and the situation was becoming unpleasant to the Baronet, who formed the centre of an amazed group, to whom the annoyance of the Baronet and the tipsy gravity of the woman were more than slightly amusing.

Sir Watkin attempted to move off.

The poor woman endeavoured to stop him. In the attempt she overbalanced herself, and fell prostrate on the earth, to the intense delight of the spectators, who enjoyed the scene amazingly.

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'Sir Watkin, I say,' said his persecutor, rising slowly from her recumbent position; 'Sir Watkin, I say!'

But the baronet was gone, and, instead, the woman found herself being assisted gently off the ground by an efficient policeman, who, seeing a crowd of a peaceful character, thought it

becoming to interfere.

Had the crowd been of a different complexion, and had there been any fighting going on, the chances are the policeman—with the usual instinct of his order for a sound skin or an uncracked skull—would have been looking steadfastly in quite an opposite direction. They all do it, and it is natural.

The man had already asked Sir Watkin if he would have her given in charge, an offer Sir Watkin declined. He had no wish, he said, to be hard on her; he only wished her to leave him alone. That was quite enough.

The crowd naturally sided with the Baronet. He was the great man of the district.

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'What business had a wretched woman like that to interfere with him? Just like her impudence!' said the majority.

One or two, more curious than the rest, followed the woman, with a view to learn further particulars; but she was, for a wonder, reticent. She was not Sall—but Sall's friend and ally. Not if wild horses were to drag her in twain would she disclose her secret. It was one between Sir Watkin and herself alone.

Sir Watkin rejoined his friends, trusting that they had not been eye-witnesses of his adventure.

Just at that moment he had no wish to have scandal or mystery attaching to his name. Hitherto, his appearance had been quite a success, and the British merchant and his daughter were duly impressed with the respect and attention he had everywhere commanded.

'We've missed you much, Sir Watkin,' said the lady in a tone which flattered his vanity and raised his hopes.

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'Yes, the crowd cruelly separated us for a few minutes.'

'A few minutes!' said the lady; 'it seemed to me a long time.'

'You make me proud,' said the Baronet. 'It is something to be missed by one who has always so many admirers.'

'You flatter me, Sir Watkin. But, seriously, what was all the fuss about?'

'Only a tipsy woman.'

'How shocking! But, good gracious, there she is again.'

Sir Watkin looked in the direction pointed out, and, sure enough, there was his old enemy. Conducted off the ground by one gate, she had reappeared by another, and was bearing down, amidst the jeers of the *oi polloi*, straight upon himself.

'Confound her impudence!' he exclaimed. 'I wish I had given her in charge.'

'Sir Watkin, I say! Sir Watkin, hear me! I've something very particular to say.'

'Yes, but you can't say it now, my good woman. Don't you see I am engaged?'

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Again a crowd assembled in full expectation of some fun—an extra entertainment not included in the day's programme.

Again, fortunately, the policeman appeared.

'Now, my good woman,' said he, 'he hoff. Don't you see you are creatin' a disturbance?'

'I am a-doin' w'at?' asked the party addressed.

'You are a-creatin' a disturbance and hinterferin' with the gentry. It is agen the law. You'd best take yourself off.'

'Oh, I am a-goin', but I must speak to Sir Watkin first.'

'Call at the Hall, old gal, and leave your card, and then Sir Watkin will be delighted to see you,' cried one in the crowd. 'The family dine at seven. Don't forget the hour.'

'Yes,' said another, 'Sir Watkin will be pleased to see such a beauty. He'll want you to stop with him a month. Sir Watkin knows a pretty gal when he sees one—no one better.'

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But by this time Sir Watkin and his party were off. His groom had come to the rescue and brought up the horses, and they remounted, leaving the tipsy woman to scream after him in vain.

This time, however, her blood was up, and she refused to be led quietly off. Another constable came to the rescue of his mate, and she was carried off, kicking and struggling all the while. Her cries filled the air and reached the Baronet's party.

'Tis very annoying, but one can't help such things on a public day like this,' said he in an apologetic tone to the lady. 'The poor woman must be cracked, I think.'

'It makes one ashamed of one's sex,' was her reply.

'Such conduct ought not to be allowed. The police aren't half sharp enough,' said the British

merchant. 'What do we pay rates and taxes for, I should like to know, but to prevent such disturbances?'

The British merchant evidently expected the British public to be as subdued and deferential as his clerks in his counting-house, when they appeared in his august and imposing presence, or as his debtors, when bills were overdue.

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The ladies of his party had left the field early—their ears stunned with the noisy scene:

'With the striking of clocks,  
Cackle of hens, crowing of cocks,  
Lowling of cow and bull and ox,  
Bleating of pretty pastoral flocks.'

Sir Watkin and his friend, the British merchant, had stopped to dine at the grand banquet held on the occasion, in the leading hotel of the town. An Englishman can do nothing without a public dinner. Sir Watkin had to take the chair.

'You will excuse me, won't you?' said he to the young lady, as he parted with her.

'Oh, yes!' said she gaily. 'I am quite aware property has its duties as well as its rights.'

'Well, I think it is well to be neighbourly when one has the chance. But I give you my word of honour, I would far sooner ride back with you.'

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'Well, the best of friends must part,' said the lady. 'But you will be home in good time. *Au revoir!* Pray, take care of papa,' said the lady, as she returned to the carriage that was to take her and some other ladies to the Hall, under the care of the vicar of the parish.

Meanwhile, Sir Watkin made his way with his friend to the leading hotel of Sloville, where a heavy dinner of the old-fashioned type—such as was dear to the farmer years ago—was prepared, where the feeding and the drinking were alike trying to the stoutest nerve and the strongest digestion, and where the after-dinner oratory was of a truly bucolic character.

The farmers were delighted to find their landlord in the chair, and listened to him as if he were an oracle. The dinner was a great success. As chairman, the Baronet had especially distinguished himself.

There were fireworks in the evening, and a Bacchanalian orgy such as Sloville had rarely beheld. But the Baronet and his friend did not stop for that, but got back to the Hall in time to finish the day with a ball. The old Hall was gayer that night than it had been for a long time. All the old family plate had been brought forth for the occasion, and everywhere was light and music and laughter—and bright the lamps shone on

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'Fair women and brave men.'

The revelry was loud and long, and hours after the ladies had retired the men had remained in the smoking-room to drink soda and brandy, and to talk of hunting exploits, of horses, of women, and of wine.

The shades of night had passed, and the golden dawn was glittering in the east. The sun was commencing like a giant refreshed to renew his daily course—the simile is old, but it is true, nevertheless. A slight mist—prelude of a hot day—dimmed the valley below the Hall, and marked the line of the little trout stream, where Sir Watkin had loved to fish when a boy. In the grand old trees around, the birds were commencing their morning song of praise, while the heavy rooks were preparing to take their usual flight in search of food. The pheasants were feeding in the surrounding park.

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Not yet had man gone forth to his daily toil, and there was peaceful slumber in the trim cottage and the snug farmhouse alike. Now and then the shrill cry of the petted peacock awoke the woods, or the clamour of the early cock.

Sir Watkin lingered to enjoy the loveliness of the rural scene and the freshness of the morning air. For awhile something even of sentiment filled his heart. What had he done that all that lovely landscape should he his? How could he have lived as he had in London and Paris, in Vienna or Rome? Was it true that there was a God, as they told him in church, and as he had learned on his mother's knee—who had given him all these things richly to enjoy, and would demand, sooner or later, an account of his stewardship? Then he looked at the glass, and was shocked as he saw how bloodshot were his eyes, how dark the skin underneath; how clear were the lines marked by dissipation on his cheek and brow.

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Well, it was time he settled down. He had not behaved well to his first wife, he admitted, but that was no reason why he should not treat his second wife well. Then he was little better than a lad—now he was a man who had seen something of the world and who knew the value of peace and quietness. And so resolving, he dismissed his man and undressed.

Even then sleep was shy in coming. He had a puzzle to distract him to which he could find no answer. What had that old tipsy female at the cattle-show got to tell him?—what was the secret she pretended to have in her possession? Was the mystery ever to be solved? He had seen in her something to remind him of a girl who had once been in his service, but it could not be her.

Surely she had not become what he saw. Sir Watkin forgot that the beauty of a woman, when she takes to drink and low company, is of a very evanescent character. p. 28

Sleep—Nature's restorer, balmy sleep—how hard it is to get when you want it! The morrow was to be an important day. It was to decide his fate. The fair guest had looked lovingly on him as she left the drawing-room. There was something in the way in which her hand lingered in his own that suggested to the Baronet hope. The worldly-minded father was, at any rate, safe, and was prepared to invest handsomely in a titled son-in-law. He, the latter, had been of late in a somewhat shady state; there were many whispers about him in society, and not to his credit. It was clear that in certain transactions, like other young and foolish scions (considering how they are brought up it is almost impossible for them to be otherwise), he had suffered considerable pecuniary loss—or, in other words, been uncommonly well fleeced. Stately dames who ruled in Belgravia did not seem to him as genial as formerly; doors that were once opened freely were now closed. Low Radical newspapers occasionally hinted that he was no credit to the class who neither toil nor spin. It even began to dawn on the Baronet that his career had not been a brilliant one. p. 29

Half sleeping and half waking, there came to him unpleasant thoughts, and dreams equally so—of women whom he had betrayed, of friends who had trusted to him in vain, of splendid opportunities he had missed, of time and strength frittered away on trifles, or what was worse. He must yet be a power in the land—he would yet leave behind him a name—he would yet have the world at his feet. With a title and with money what cannot a man do in this land of ours? asked the Baronet of himself. Fellows of whom he thought nothing, whom he knew as inferiors at Eton or at College—poor, patient, spiritless plodders—had passed him in that battle of life which after all is only a Vanity Fair.

Such thoughts as these kept the Baronet wide awake, much to his disgust. It was the dinner, it was the wine, it was the cigar that kept him awake. Perhaps they did. But there was something else that did so, though the Baronet did not see it—the accusal of a conscience in which he did not believe, the workings of a divine law which he laughed at. p. 30

The next day no one was up early, and no one made his appearance at the breakfast-table save the elderly members of the party. Most of the gentlemen visitors overslept themselves, and the ladies were served in their own rooms. Then came the carriages and the departure of the guests—some to town, some to fashionable health resorts. Business required the presence of the great merchant in London, and he took his daughter with him. Sir Watkin managed to get down in time to see them off, and to promise to follow them next day. The lady left quite content; she knew what was to come, and what would be her reply.

Very dull and gloomy seemed the old house as the company one by one departed. Sir Watkin took up the morning papers—there was nothing in them; the society journals—he was better informed than their writers. No novel could interest him in his then state of mind. He had a headache; he would go for a ride, a sovereign remedy for such maladies as gentlemen in his station suffer from. Accordingly the horse was brought round, and he was in the saddle. He would be back before dark, and did not require his groom, and he trotted gaily away from the ancestral Hall under the ancestral oaks, along the gravelled drive through the park, feeling a little fresher for the effort. He would see his steward, and have a talk with him on business matters. p. 31

At the lodge-gate he stopped for a moment to order a general smartening up of that quarter. Alas! on the other side was an objectionable old woman, a friend who had before given him so much trouble. Sir Watkin's disgust was only equalled by his anger. He was in no amiable mood, as the old woman clearly saw. She almost wished she had not come; she felt all of a tremble, as she said, as she asked him kindly to stop and hear what she had got to say. He muttered something very much unlike a blessing on his tormentor. He would have ridden over her had he not stopped his horse, which strongly opposed the idea of stopping. Could that old creature have any claim on him? The idea was ridiculous. And as to listening to her, why, that was quite out of the question for so fine a gentleman. She made an effort to clutch the rein. The high-spirited steed resented the indignity. In the scuffle the Baronet was unseated, and was taken up insensible. p. 32

'Sure 'nough he's dead as a stone,' said the ploughman, who had first noticed him.

'He's nothing of the kind,' said the gate-keeper, who was soon on the spot, 'Get on the horse and ride to Sloville for the doctor,' said he to the ploughman, while he and the other servants bore the body to the lodge-gate, where it was laid upon a bed.

The doctor came. 'No bones broken,' said he, after a cursory examination, 'but a severe concussion of the brain. Draw down the blinds; put ice on his forehead; keep him quiet, and he may yet rally. In the meantime I will telegraph to London for the great surgeon, Sir Henry Johnson. If anybody can save him he can.' p. 33

The hours that day in that low lodge moved very slowly. No wife, no mother, no sister was there. The old mother had left that day for Scotland. Only one sister was alive, and she was with her husband in Italy; only the housekeeper from the Hall was there to sit and watch and sigh, for she had known Sir Watkin from a baby, and was as proud of him as it behoved her to be, never believing any of the scandals connected with his name, and, indeed, scarcely hearing of them, for his wilder life was out of her sight and hearing. At home he was the model English gentleman;

and then, again, when evil things were said of him, she refused to listen.

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'It was not her place,' she said, 'to hear bad spoken of any of the family of which she and hers generations before had been retainers.'

About mid-day came a telegram to say that the great Sir Henry was coming down, and that there was to be a carriage at the railway-station to meet him. In a couple of hours after came Sir Henry himself—a calm, dignified man of science, who lived in a world of which science is god, and was interested in humanity as a subject of dissection or operation. Apart from that, he had a poor opinion of human nature.

'It is a bad case—very bad,' said he to the country doctor, who had explained to him all the particulars of the accident. 'It is a very bad case, but I think science is equal to the emergency. I suppose we must have an operation. I have brought my assistant with me, and my case of instruments. We'd better begin at once.' Turning to look at the insensible patient, the great Sir Henry exclaimed: 'I have come down for nothing; Sir Watkin is dead!'

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## CHAPTER XXIII

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### THE FUNERAL.

'Worldly people,' wrote one of our greatest novelists, 'never look so worldly as at a funeral.' The truth of this was very apparent at the funeral of the deceased Baronet. There was the usual parade of outward grief at the churchyard, and in the town all the blinds were drawn down and the shops shut—with the exception of those set apart for the sale of beer and wine and spirits, which were rather better patronized than usual. It is said grief makes men thirsty. That certainly was the case at Sloville, for the usual toppers of the place had been increased in number by the addition of numerous thirsty souls from all the adjacent country, drawn together not so much by grief as by a pardonable curiosity.

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Heavily tolled the bell of the old-fashioned church, in the gloomy vaults of which slept the family ancestors, whose varied virtues were recorded in marble in all parts of the building, and whose rotting carcasses poisoned the atmosphere of the place, and had done so for many generations.

When are we going to reform this and to cremate our dead, so that we may go to church in safety and with no fear of detriment to our physical well-being? The ancients burnt their dead. Is there any earthly reason why we moderns should not do the same? I know none, except a stupid prejudice unworthy of a generation that loves to think itself enlightened, and that flatters itself it is wiser than any that has gone before. If it is to be talked of after death, surely the urn can be as fitting a remembrance of the departed as the costly and cumbrous marble monument, with its deception and untruth. 'Five languages,' writes Sir Thomas Brown, of Norwich, 'secured not the epitaph of Gordianus. The man of God lives longer without a tomb than any by one visibly interred by angels, and adjudged to obscurity, though not without some marks directing human decency. Enoch and Elias, without either tomb or burial, in an anomalous state of being, are the great examples of perpetuity in their long and living memory, in strict account being still on this side death and having a late part yet to act upon the stage of earth.' In vain is all earthly vanity, but there is no vanity so vain as that connected with the grave. 'Yet man is a noble animal,' as the same writer remarks, 'splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave!'

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And thus it was at the funeral of the deceased Baronet. All the clergy round had come to do him honour, and all the county families had come to put in an appearance—or, at any rate, sent their empty carriages to follow in the procession, which is supposed to be the same as attending one's self. A fashionable undertaker from town had been retained for the occasion, and never did men wear so mournful an expression as he and his many men. I had almost written 'merry' men, for none were merrier when the dismal farce was over and they were back to town—refreshed by stimulants, with which they had been plentifully supplied.

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There was a great crowd in the church—a great crowd in the churchyard, and a great crowd all the way from the Hall. The heir, the deceased's brother, naturally came in for a good deal of criticism, and he was quite equal to the occasion—apparently mourning for the deceased as if he had loved him as much as everyone was aware he had done the reverse. Relatives from all parts were there, hoping against hope that they might find their names put down for something in the will. The tenantry made a decent show, for to many of them the deceased was a man after their own hearts—fond of sport, of racing, of good cheer, of fast living. All the world loves a gay spendthrift more than a sober and careful man who tries to live within his means and to save a little money. The enlightened British workman has, as a rule, an intense hatred for the capitalist, who is, after all, his best friend.

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The peasantry were there in great force, glad to have a show of any kind to relieve the dull monotony of their lives—though feeling that it would make little difference to them who reigned at the Hall, and expecting little: as it had gone forth that the new Baronet was somewhat of a skinflint, and that little was to be expected from the mother and daughters who were in future to take up their residence at the old Hall. It is needless to add that the tradesmen of the town were present in great numbers. They knew on which side their bread was buttered. Tradesmen



generally do. At any rate there was show enough and funereal pomp to give occasion for the county paper of the following Saturday to devote considerable space to the affair, which—so the reporter wrote, with a touch of imagination which did him credit—had saddened the county and made everyone deplore the sudden and untimely decease of one of its most distinguished men.

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The deceased Baronet had been the great man of the district—a leading magistrate, with power to ameliorate the condition of the poor—a power that he had never used. The workhouse was old and unhealthy, yet he had opposed every effort to build a better one; the relieving-officers were drunkards, and generally unable to keep their accounts correctly. The selection of such officers was, in fact, a job in order to make provision for some aged, feeble, drunken bankrupt, a boon companion of the farmers; nor were the medical officers much better. The outdoor paupers were victims of the grossest abuses. The aged were set to eke out their miserable existence by breaking stones on the road, and thus these poor creatures, half-clad, ill-fed, and suffering from rheumatism, had to work on the bleak roadside, exposed to the inclemency of the weather, till they ceased to be a parochial charge at all; and, as a rule, their homes were unfit for human habitation. The vagrants suffered from the grossest ill-usage. One quarter of the workhouse, ill or scarcely provided with bedding accommodation, was appropriated to a class consisting of honest seekers for work, tramps, vagabonds, and thieves of all ages, huddled indiscriminately together, using or listening to the vilest language, initiated in the mysteries of vice and crime, quarrelling and fighting. There were no vagrant wards, and any attempt to introduce them was strenuously resisted, and thus, in spite of the Reformed Poor Law, as it was called, the state of the poor grew more wretched every day.

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Sir Watkin knew all this. A word from him would have inaugurated a better state of things, but he never spoke that word. He was far too busy in his pursuit of pleasure to think of the poor on his estate, or to plead their cause, and the guardians were content to let things slide.

Dr. Chalmers maintained that the one main drawback to the effectual working of the new Poor Law would be the defective attendance at the boards of the landlords, and, as far as Sloville was concerned, the doctor was right. Had the deceased Baronet discharged the duties of his position, and concerned himself about the welfare of the poor, he might have been a blessing to the district. As it was, he was very much the reverse. In his time, as in that of the old Hebrew Psalmist, it might truly be said: 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor.'

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A few days and the astonishment of the town was over, and the sun was gay, and the earth as fair as ever. Nature takes no heed of death; it keeps on all the same its eternal way. The common people had their talk of old scandals, and the lodge-keeper became quite an oracle as he hinted at the appearance of an old woman at the gate, and expressed his wonder at what had become of her. He went so far as to hint at the possession of mysterious knowledge, of which the presumptive heir would be glad to avail himself; but gradually even that form of mild excitement passed away. The public soon got over the event, as it generally does.

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In the gay world, of which Sir Watkin had been a leading figure so recently, things went on much as usual. The old captain in the club, it is true, felt the loss of a man younger than himself, and on whom he had, to a certain extent, leaned. The manager of the Diamond Theatre was inconsolable, as his bills were many in the hands of the Jews, and he looked to the Baronet to take them up as they fell due. A little regret and wonder was expressed that the deceased Baronet did not cut up quite so well as was expected. Well, of course, he was a gentleman, and you can't expect a gentleman to be a good man of business. But a good many who lost by the deceased were not quite so easily consoled. It is pleasant to be able to pay twenty shillings in the pound, but that is not the whole duty of man, nevertheless. If Shakespeare had been unfortunate in business, if Milton had had to make an arrangement with his creditors, we should have thought just as well of them; nor does one think a penny the worse of De Foe, that he was in pecuniary difficulties, or of Dick Steele that he could not make both ends meet, or of Goldsmith that he left two thousand pounds of debt behind him. In the case of Sir Watkin Strahan the estate was strictly settled, and only his debts of honour got paid. As it was, there was little left for the new Baronet to start with.

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And this state of things is the consequence of the law of primogeniture, says the ignorant reformer. It is not so. Our laws of settlement are to be blamed as unfair and unjust. The main causes of agricultural depression, and of continued wrongdoing on the part of landed proprietors, are the laws which allow the owners to make deeds and wills which for many years, and often long after the owners' deaths, prevent the land from being sold, or the estate from being divided, no matter how expedient it may be that it should be sold, or no matter how foolish or extravagant the owner may be. Mr. Kay illustrates this in a case in which he had acted as trustee. This estate, about fifty or sixty years ago, came into the hands of a young nobleman, whom he calls Lord A., when he was twenty-one. He married when he was twenty-two, and the marriage-deed gave him only a life interest in the estate, and settled the property on his children. He had one child, and as soon as that child was twenty-one another deed was made, giving that child only a life interest in the estate, and settling it after his death on the children he might leave in succession. Lord A. was an extravagant and reckless man. He hunted the county; he kept open house; he lived as if his estate were ten times as great as it really was. He gambled and lost heavily. He raised money on his life interest. He finally fled from England deeply in debt, and lived abroad. The remainder of the life interest was sold to a Jew, who knew that he would lose all when Lord A. died, and found his only profit in thinning the woods. That state of things lasted forty years. The farmers had no leases or any security for expenditure. The Jew would not spend a penny, nor would the gentleman who took the mansion, because he could not tell when he

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might be turned out; and the tenantry were prevented from doing fairly to the land or to themselves. There was no one to support the schools or the church, or to look after the labourers on the estate. The farm-buildings fell into decay; the land was not properly drained or cultivated; the plantations were injured, and the mansion was dilapidated. And all this vast extent of mischief was the result of the deeds which the law had allowed the lord and his heir to execute. Nor are such cases isolated. Nor is it possible to over-estimate the wretchedness and poverty they create in rural England. Perhaps, in time, Englishmen will demand the abolition of laws which entail such bitter wrong on the community at large.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE HONEYMOON.

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At that very time—in autumn, when everyone is supposed to be out of town and blinds are drawn down in all Belgravia; when the moors of Scotland and the health resorts of our own highly-favoured land or of the Continent are crammed, and white-winged yachts, like sea-fowl or flakes of snow, bedeck the peaceful waters of the Solent, and sparkle as they shine along our summer seas—a small party might be seen drawing up at the registrar's office somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Strand. No one knew what was going on, and the single brougham at the door attracted little attention. The first to get out was our old friend Buxton, the medical man; then came Wentworth, a little gayer than usual. In another, which followed immediately, were Rose, looking lovelier than ever and perhaps a trifle more serious, and her mother, a quiet old lady, much given to garrulity when she had a chance, and to self-effacement when she found no one wanted to hear her. The poor old soul had no idea of being married at the registrar's. The business was a very simple one—merely to make a declaration before the officer appointed for that purpose that they were to be married, and to sign a declaration to that effect, which was duly witnessed ere it was sent away to be preserved among our national archives. This done and the registrar's fee paid, they drove away as quietly as they came to the Midland Railway Station in the Euston Road, where they had a pleasant lunch; and thence the newly-married couple took the train to the busy city of Liverpool, ever overflowing with a very migratory population. Here to-day, gone to-morrow. Of course they did not stop there long. The next day they left the dark cloud of Liverpool smoke behind for the romantic Isle of Man.

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One of the first things they did was to take a trip round the island, and we will accompany them. For this purpose we step on board the *King Orrey*, as she lies at the Douglas Pier. King Orrey was one of the far-famed Monarchs of the Isle, and is now commemorated in a way of which he could have no idea.

We are off in good time, and as the day is tempting we have rather a numerous company on board, and no wonder, for it is not every day that you can see England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales in the course of a few hours. The legendary history of the Isle of Man at any rate matches that of any of the countries above-named. It is true the scepticism of modern times has dealt hardly with them. No Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, was imprisoned in the old Castle of Peel; no St. Patrick ever resided there, or even ever stepped from Peel to Ireland to Christianize the people there. It is also affirmed, and the candid student who sees the Ireland of to-day must admit there is a good deal in the affirmation, that if St Patrick ever did take that wonderful step, at any rate he was not very successful as regards the main object of his trip. Few people now believe that when the Manx men were fighting the ancient Britons on the other side of the water, St. German raised such a hallelujah as to make the ancient Britons run away. In the same way modern unbelief suspects the story of the Giant who had three legs, and was the terror of the land, or of that floating island which rises in Soderick Bay every seven years, and then remains on the surface thirty minutes, no one yet having had the courage to place a Bible on any part of it, lest in any case of failure the enchanter might cast his club over Mona also. Likewise we may scorn the legend which tells us how St. Trisman's is left incomplete on account of the malice of an evil spirit, who, for want of better employment, amused himself by throwing down the roof every time it was put on, accompanying his achievement with a loud fiendish laugh of satisfaction. As well we might credit the Fenella of 'Peveril of the Peak' as a living reality, and not a wild conception of Sir Walter Scott's busy brain. Indeed, if the tourist to that lovely health resort—lovely I call it, in spite of the holiday-makers and tourists, mostly denominated Lancashire Cotton Balls—believes all he hears, the chances are that he becomes, to quote Sir Walter—

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'Speechless, ghastly, wan,  
Like him of whom the story ran,  
That spake the spectre hound in Man.'

But the captain cries, 'Go ahead,' the last bell rings, and we are off. Apparently it is anticipated that our wants will be numerous. We are expected not to venture to sea without a good supply of 'all round the island sweets;' ragged urchins offer us lucifer matches, aged females freshly-gathered fruits, and apparently it is presumed we cannot enjoy the day without purchasing a guide to the island, or photographs of the principal attractions. Of course the musicians are on board long before we are, as well as a poor fellow who is expected to keep the company on the broad grin all the trip by means of his songs and chaff.

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'Poor fellow, I pity thee somewhat, in spite of thy sons and grandsons. Thy sow, with a litter of eight "poops," as he calls them; 'thy readiness to liquor up and spout nonsense. You're not such a fool as you look, however, and that is a consolation.'

Mountebanks, whether in Church and State, in business, or on the deck of an excursion steamer, generally manage to make their nonsense pay, often better than other men their sense.

'Rose,' says Wentworth, 'let us watch the beauty of Douglas as we steam out of the Bay. In a little while we shall see Snaefell, monarch of Manx mountains. We shall pass the little glen which leads to Laxey, with that wonderful wheel of which we hear so much, and then we are in Ramsey. Leaving Ramsey for the Point of Ayr, a lighthouse familiar to the traders between Barrow and Belfast, we shall note how the aspect of the land is changed, and that a sandy shore has taken the place of the rocks, which, looking across the water, seem to set England and Scotland at defiance. In a little while we shall be off Peel, with its ancient Castle and its hardy fishermen. The further we go, the bolder becomes the scenery. There we shall see a cavern which no one yet has had the courage to explore, but which our captain will tell us leads to Port St. Mary. Then the steam-pipe whistles, and the rocks re-echo the whistle as we float along. Then we come to cliffs white with sea-gulls, who, startled by our approach, flap their heavy wings and fly like snowflakes. As we come to the Calf of Man the picturesqueness of the scene is increased tenfold as the rocks in their wildness guard their native shores. Fain would we linger, but our steamer urges on her wild career, and we must needs go with her. All we can do is to admire from a distance the rough and rugged coast, with its tiny bay, where the swimmer might enjoy his pastime, only disturbed, it may be, by a merman bold, or a mermaid a little bolder, as is the habit of the female, or by a glimpse of the great sea-serpent, which assuredly is to be found, if anywhere, haunting these azure waters, and then we are back in Douglas in time for dinner.'

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'Yes, I know,' said the lady, laughing. 'The dinner you will be thinking of all the while.'

'How unkind of you to say so. We shall have a quarrel if you talk like that.'

'Is it not time?' said Rose, as she turned to him a look more bewitching than she had ever cast upon the buckram hero of the stage.

'Perhaps so. We have been married a week.'

'Good gracious!' said the lady archly; 'only a week! I thought it had been much longer.'

'I am sure you did nothing of the kind. There, I've caught you telling stories already.'

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'But you know we did not get married according to ordinary notions of propriety. We did not go to a fashionable church. We had no fashionable people to see us made one, and there were none to wish us God-speed as we took the cab to the Midland Railway *en route* for Liverpool. So what can you expect?'

'And worst of all,' said Wentworth, laughing, 'we got married—'

'At the registrar's office,' said Rose, shrugging up her shoulders and making a face with a sad expression of horror, adding, after an interval: 'And I don't believe anyone knows it yet.'

'So much the better. What has the world got to do with our private affairs? What to us is the world or the world's laws?'

'Upon my word, Wentworth, you are talking as improperly as ever.'

'Yes. I fear I've got that bad habit, and I don't expect I shall ever get rid of it as long as I live. You and I can talk plainly. We need not try to humbug each other. It is little we have to trouble ourselves about Mrs. Grundy. The law has bound us together, but we are bound together by something stronger than the law, I hope.'

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'Hope, Wentworth, is not the word. You know it,' said Rose, as she lovingly looked into his somewhat grave and worn face.

On board the steamer thus the newly-married couple talked. Marriages are of many kinds. For some we have to thank God, for others, alas! the devil.

Referring to his marriage, William Hutton, the far-famed Birmingham historian, writes: 'I never courted her, nor she me, yet we, by the close union with which we were cemented, were travelling towards the temple of Hymen without conversing upon the subject. Such is the happy effect of reciprocal love.' This reciprocal love generally leads to matrimony, and thus it was Rose and Wentworth had married. A good deal is to be said against the institution. Matrimony is not always a bed of roses. If the roses are there, they are often furnished with an intolerable supply of thorns. There can be no doubt of the fact that in many cases matrimony has led to an immense amount of misery. It has kept in chains men and women who had been better apart. It has made for them life dull, blank, sunless, joyless, a thing only to terminate with death. It is hard that men and women thus ill-mated are not permitted to burst their fetters and be free. Take, for instance, the case of Mehetabel Wesley, the younger sister of the celebrated founder of Wesleyanism. Her heart was sensitive and full of love. We know what the mother of the Wesleys was—a stern, hard woman, whose first duty as a mother, according to her own statement, was to break the wills of her children. The father left his wife's bed because, when he prayed for King William, she would not say amen. None of the girls seemed to have married happily, but this, the youngest and fairest of them all, had a Benjamin's mess of misery. Her father compelled her to suffer the

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brutality of a marriage with a low wretch utterly unfit to be her lord and master. Was not her marriage an immorality? Was it not a shame that society should have compelled her to live with such a man?—so much so ‘that her only hope,’ as she told a friend, was death, ‘because we Methodists always die in transports of joy.’ But what do men and women know of each other, as a rule, before marriage? Very little, indeed. Hence so much of the wretchedness of the wife, of the immorality of the man. I fear that it is the married men who chiefly sustain and create the vices of our great cities. Hence the bitter cry of him—our chief poet—the stern Puritan, who wrote in strains that can never die—

‘Of man’s first disobedience and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world and all our woe,’

on man’s behalf. Hence the earnestness with which he pleaded for relief to him who finds himself bound fast ‘to an image of earth, with whom he looked to be the co-partner of a sweet and pleasant society.’ However, Milton is practically not so much an advocate for divorce as is generally supposed. It is well known that he took his wife back, and they lived happily together till her death, There is generally a *modus vivendi*, unless the husband and wife be altogether foolish. Neither man nor woman in the long run can withstand true love, and it is hard to break a tie which once seemed desirable, and which is easily made bearable, especially when the young ones come and play around the hearth. Fathers and mothers find it hard to leave their offspring, even if in the commerce of life they have found each other out. The children bring with them the old atmosphere of tenderness and love.

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Returning to Douglas, Wentworth found a telegram to the effect that Sir Watkin Strahan had suddenly died of apoplexy.

‘Not very surprising,’ said Wentworth.

Sir Watkin belonged to the past in that respect rather than the present—to the age of port wine drinkers, when men got real port wine, and did not seem to be much the worse for it. The light wines of France had little charm for him, and soda-water and seltzer were equally obnoxious. His medical man had warned him, but Sir Watkin laughed at his warnings. He came of a long-lived family. His father and his grandfather had alike far exceeded their threescore years and ten when they were gathered to their fathers, and Sir Watkin argued that so it would be with him, a blunder which nearly cost him his life.

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A later telegram, however, gave the particulars of the sad accident.

‘This is a sad ending to a pleasant day,’ said Wentworth, as they climbed the rock on which they had pitched their tent. Below was the town, with its noisy merry-makers. Up there, amongst the roses and the myrtles, they were alone. Over there was England, while between them lay a gorgeous ocean, on which scarce a ship was to be seen, blue as the heavens above, save where tinged by the crimson and gold of the setting sun. ‘How pleasant it is here!’ continued Wentworth; ‘no work to do, no friends to bother, no letters to worry.’

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Rose burst out laughing.

‘Why do you laugh when I try to be poetical?’

‘Because, dear boy,’ was the reply, ‘it is not in your line, and because I see the postman coming up the hill with the letter-bag.’

Away rushed Wentworth to meet him with an ardour by no means consistent with his recent speech. The fact is, however tired of life we may be, however happy in some rural retreat, however absorbed and enraptured with one another a man and wife may be—especially during the idle season known as the honeymoon—there is a mysterious fascination in the appearance of the postman, and we bless the memory of Sir Rowland Hill.

‘There are no end of letters and newspapers. I vote we don’t look at them till after breakfast to-morrow, I will have a cigar, and you can work.’

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‘Yes, that is how you men talk. I am to work like a slave, while you are to lie on the grass smoking. But I suppose I must do as you tell me, for

“Sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.”

I tell you what—if you’re lazy, I will be lazy, too.’

‘Yes, that is what I meant.’

‘Then why did you not say so, sir?’

‘I did. When I tell a woman to work, of course I mean that you are to sit and do nothing.’

‘Yes, but I am not going to do nothing. I am going to read what looks to me a very extraordinary letter. It bears the Sloville post-office mark. It was addressed to London, and here it has followed us all the way from town. I must look at it—it is such a scrawl.’

‘Remember our compact.’

'No, I don't. I must open this letter—I am dying to read it.'

'Oh, the curiosity of woman,' said Wentworth, as he smoked his cigar.

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Presently Rose gave a shriek.

'What is it all about?' asked Wentworth.

'There, read it for yourself,' Rose exclaimed.

It was as follows:

'DEAR MADAME,

'That pore boy as you took from Sloville, is the true son and heir of Sir Watkin Strahan, go to horspittle in the Boro' where a woman named Sally is hill. She can prove it—but she can't live long. Hopin' this will find you in 'elth as it leaves me at this present time, I am yours most respectfully a sincere friend to the pore boy.'

'Wentworth,' said Rose energetically, 'we must leave here by the first boat to-morrow morning.'

'What a bore. I suppose we must. And so fades away love in a cottage,' exclaimed Wentworth, as he went indoors to help his wife to pack up.

## CHAPTER XXV.

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### A REVELATION.

No sooner was Rose in London than she made her way to the hospital indicated in the anonymous note which had been the cause of her and her husband's unwelcome return to town.

She had never been inside a hospital before. There was something bewildering in its vastness and its antiquity. Close by ran swift the current of City life, ever turbid and boisterous. In there all was calm and still. The one thought that brightened and hallowed the spot was the life that had been saved, especially among the poor, to whom our great hospitals are indeed a blessing and a boon.

'I want to see a patient in the women's ward,' said Rose to the porter, as she alighted at the entrance.

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The porter expressed his fear that she had come in vain, unless she had a better clue to identification.

In his despair he sent the lady in the direction of the women's ward, and there her difficulties began anew. There were many poor suffering ones in the women's wards. How could they tell where was the one she sought? As she was waiting, one of the staff came downstairs.

'Good heavens!' he exclaimed; 'Miss Howard, how came you here?'

He knew the actress, and at once rushed to rescue her from the dilemma.

Rose had little to go by. The note had been sent from Sloville. It was clear that someone connected with Sloville was lying ill—perhaps dying—there. Under the guidance of one of the nurses she went softly from one bed to another. One nurse after another was appealed to. At length one was found who had the charge of a case in one of the wards. Her patient had at times spoken of the town in question; but she was ill, very ill, and the nurse was afraid any excitement might be fatal. When the medical man in charge of the case was consulted he shook his head despairingly. The thread of life was nearly worn out. A woman from Sloville had been there to see her, and the little talk between the two had considerably increased the patient's danger. Originally the woman in question had been run over by a cab outside one of the theatres. Her constitution was entirely gone, and the injuries inflicted on the system had been serious. After three months' nursing she had been sufficiently healed to leave the hospital, and had led a more or less wandering life. Then she had gone down hop-picking in Kent; had caught cold; that cold had settled on her lungs. There was no earthly hope for her, and there she lay, wrestling not for dear life, but with grim death. But there was no immediate danger. Good nursing and tender care might lengthen her days for a short season.

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'If Miss Howard would return to-morrow, the doctor would try and get her into a proper state for a little talk.'

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'I would rather see her now,' said the lady.

'Impossible, madam; quite impossible, madam,' said the medico, and Rose had reluctantly to retire.

'Surely I have enough on hand,' said she to herself, 'if all the note hints is true. People said when I left the stage I should find life tame and dull. I have not found it so at present. I believe no life is tame and dull if one is determined to make the most of it. After she had left the stage, Mrs.

Siddons, from the want of excitement, was never happy. I am not a Mrs. Siddons, happily,' said the retired actress to herself.

The morning came, and Rose was again at the hospital. The medical man was there to meet her, and they went together to the patient's bedside. In that emaciated face, purified by disease from its former grossness, few would have recognised 'our Sally.'

We are a merciful people. Let our tramps live as they may, we take good care of them in our hospitals.

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'Father never gives beggars anything,' said a little boy to one of the fraternity in a small country town; 'but he always prays for them.'

We may show a stern face to the tramp; but once inside a hospital we give him something more than prayers—proper food, trained nursing, the best science that can be procured for love or money. Comforts, nay, luxuries, he could never procure for himself. Indeed, in all desirable respects, he is as well off as a millionaire.

But to return to our Sally, lying there calmly in her clean bed, in a long and lofty ward, apparently indifferent to all external things, simply satisfied with life such as it was.

'A lady has come to see you,' said the doctor, in his pleasant tones, 'A lady from Sloville.'

'Take her away. I am that bad I can't speak to her.'

'Are you quite sure you don't want to see her? She says you sent her a letter to come.'

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'No, it warn't me. It was that Sloville woman as was here last week. I told her not to bother, and now she's gone and done it.'

A fit of coughing came, and conversation ceased.

Then the nurse administered a little stimulus, and that revived her.

'Leave us alone,' said the poor woman.

The others withdrew, and Rose stepped forward.

'You've been good to my boy,' said the patient slowly, as if it were hard to talk.

'What do you mean? The boy I took from Sloville?'

'Yes.'

'But someone has written to me to say that he is the heir of Sir Watkin Strahan.'

'Yes, he is. I stole him.'

'Stole him! Why, how could you do such a thing?' asked the actress excitedly.

'For revenge!' exclaimed the poor woman, with all the energy she could collect, and then fell back exhausted. For a time both were silent, and Rose watched with pity the face, stained by intemperance and sensuality and all evil living, wondering what could be the connection between that poor pauper in the hospital and the proud deceased Baronet.

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'Read this paper,' said the poor woman.

'Oct. 187-. Saw my pore boy on a brogham at the theatre. I knowed him at once. His father is Sir Watkin Strahan, and he was on the box of Miss Howard's brogham. I lost him as I was going to speak to him. The peeler told me to be off.'

'Then, it was you that left him at Sloville, where I took him up?'

'Yes,' said the poor woman feebly, adding: 'Come nearer.'

Rose complied with the request.

'I was an underservant in Sir Watkin's house. He was a wicked man. He took a fancy to me. I war young and good-looking, and a fool.'

The old, old story, thought Rose to herself, for the poor woman gave her plenty of time to think, so slowly and feebly did the words come out of her mouth.

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'One day the missus came and caught me in his room. I was turned out into the street, without a character and without a friend. I vowed I'd be even with him, and I run off with his boy.'

'How could you manage that?'

'Oh, that was easy enough. The nursemaid was allus a talking to the sodgers in the park. And an Italian Countess helped me. She had an idea that if she could get rid of the child and the wife she would marry the master.'

'But was no effort made to get the child back?'

'Oh yes! But I managed to get a dead baby, the very moral of his'n. An Italian lady staying in the house helped me. I dressed it in his clothes. The master thought it his own, and had it buried in

the family vault.'

'That was very wrong of you.'

'Perhaps it was. But had not the master and missus both wronged me? Arter that I got married, but me and my husband were always quarrelling about the boy, and that made me take to drink, and then, when I lost my husband, I drank worse and worse.'

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'And then you went on the tramp, and left the boy at Sloville, and I took him.'

'Yes.'

'He is a good boy.'

'He allus was.'

'But why did you not see him righted?'

'I did one day. I had a letter sent to Sir Watkin, and he sent me word it was all a lie, that his boy was dead. Then his lady died, and he went abroad, and—'

'And you never saw him again?'

'Only twice. When I saw him outside your theater and tried to speak to him. But he pushed me into the street, and then I met with my accident. He's a hard un and a bad un.'

'And when again?'

'Not very long ago; when they had the election at Sloville. I was there and he too, but he would not look at me. Oh, he was harder than ever!'

'Speak not of him now—he's dead.'

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'Dead! Oh, dear!' said the woman. 'Do you mean to say he's really dead?'

'Yes,' said the actress, 'he died only a few days since.'

'And I am dying—oh, dear! What a wicked woman I've been! What mischief I've done!'

'What do you mean?'

'Why, I meant to restore the boy.'

'It is too late—the boy has no father now. Is this truth you tell me? It is a strange story.'

'The truth, so help me God.'

Then she sank back utterly overcome. At length she said:

'I've not long to live, have I?'

'I fear not.'

'You'll see me buried decent?'

'Yes, I will.'

'And you'll be kind to the boy and see that he has his rights?'

'If I can.'

'That makes me feel better.'

'I am glad of that.'

'You are kind.'

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'How can I be otherwise? You're but a woman, and I am no more.'

'They're all kind here,' said the woman, sobbing.

'It is because they love God.'

'Ah, so the parson says. Sir Watkin used to tell me the parson told lies.'

'And you believed him?'

'Yes—I don't now.'

'God is our Father, and He loves us all.'

'What, me?'

'Yes, you.'

'What, me, with all my wickedness?'

'Yes, you and I, with all our guilt and sin. His heart pants with tenderness for all. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he should turn to Him and live. He sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to save us.'

'Do you believe that?'

'Yes, with all my heart. I should be wretched indeed if I did not. Daily my prayer is, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."'

'Ah, I like to hear you talk. I've not heard such talk since I was a gal, and then I did not believe it. But it does me good now.'

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'Yes, but I must not talk any longer, or you will be excited and get worse. Try and have a little sleep, and I will go home and pray for you.'

'Thanks, miss,' said the woman gratefully; 'you'll come and see me to-morrow?'

'Yes, I will,' said Rose, as she turned to go home.

But that to-morrow never came. At midnight the summons came, and all that was left of 'our Sally' was a silent form of clay.

Some of us go out of the world one way and some another.

Happy they who can exclaim, with Cicero, 'O preclarum diem,' or with Paul, 'I know in whom I have believed;' or with Job, 'Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.'

Unhappy those who with dim eye, as it restlessly sweeps the horizon of the future, can see no beacon to a haven of light, no pole-star pointing to a land of eternal rest—

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'No God, no heaven, no earth in the void world—  
The wide, gray, lawless, deep, unpeopled world.'

Rose rushed home as rapidly as the cab she hired could carry her. Wentworth was in.

'What am I to do?' she said, as she told him the whole story.

'Better send for the boy,' he said.

'Oh no, not yet. He is comfortable where he is, learning to be a sailor. He's fond of the sea, and it will be a pity to take him from it.'

The fact is, the young waif, as Rose thought him, was placed, at her expense, on board one of the training-ships lying off Greenhithe. They are noble institutions, these training-ships—saving lads who, if left to themselves, might become tempted by circumstances or bad companions into crime, and at the same time supplying us with what we English emphatically require at the present day—English sailors on whom captains can rely on board our merchant ships and men-of-war. There was no difficulty in getting the actress's *protégé* there, and there he was rapidly training into a good sailor and a fine fellow, well-built, obedient to his superiors, handy, and hardy, and sturdy, morally and physically, as all sailors should be.

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The next thing was to talk to a lawyer. In this wicked world lawyers are necessary evils. Sometimes, however, they do a great deal of good. The lawyer recommended Wentworth to call on the family lawyer of the deceased Baronet. He came back looking unhappy and uncomfortable, as people often do when they have interviews with lawyers who are supposed to be on the other side. He found him in comfortable quarters on a first floor in Bedford Row, Holborn, looking the very image of respectability—bald, and in black, with an appearance partly suggestive of the fine old clergyman of the port-wine school, with a touch of the thorough man of the world; a lawyer, in short, who would give an air of plausibility and rectitude to any cause in which he was embarked.

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To him Wentworth apologized for making an intrusion.

'No apology at all was needed, my dear sir. Happy to make your acquaintance. I have not only read your books—very clever, too, Mr. Wentworth—but I heard of you more than once through Sir Watkin Strahan.'

'Perhaps in no complimentary terms?'

'Well, you know the late Baronet was a man of strong passions, and, when annoyed, I must admit that his language was what we might call a little unparliamentary.'

'It is about his business I have called. You are aware there is an heir?'

'Oh yes; Colonel Strahan, the brother.'

'I don't mean him. A son.'

'A son! Impossible. The deceased baronet had only one son, and the fine fellow—'

'Is now alive.'

'Nonsense, my dear sir. He was buried in the family vault, after the doctor and the family were satisfied of his identity, and I was present at the funeral. There was a coroner's inquest held in order to leave no room for doubt.'

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'I think not,' said Wentworth, as he proceeded to unfold the details of his case, to which the lawyer listened at first with a severely judicial air, and then with an incredulous smile.



'Is that all you've got to say?' he asked, when Wentworth had finished his statement.

'Pretty much so,' replied Wentworth.

'Then,' replied the lawyer, with a triumphant air, 'we have little to fear. Sergeant B.—naming a popular advocate of the day—'would laugh the case out of court in a quarter of an hour. You have a quarrel with the deceased. Your good lady has—to put it not too strongly—been insulted and shamefully ill-treated by him. Who would believe that, in promoting this suit—should you be so ill-advised as to do that—you came into court with clean hands? The idea is perfectly preposterous.'

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The worst of it was that Wentworth, as he withdrew, was compelled to own that there was not a little truth in what the lawyer had said.

It was not law but equity that was required in his particular case. In England law and equity, alas! have often different meanings.

## CHAPTER XXVI. THE ITALIAN COUNTESS.

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'How lovely!' said a lady to a gentleman on the deck by her side, as they were drinking in all the beauty of the scene as one of the fine ships of the Orient Company dropped her anchor in the Bay of Naples. 'And look what a swarm of boats have come out to greet us!'

They were a swarm indeed, some of them with divers to exhibit their prowess, some with fruit and flowers, some with the lava ornaments in the manufacture of which the Neapolitans exhibit such exquisite skill, and others with musicians—vocal and instrumental—keeping up for the time quite a serenade. These Neapolitans gain but little, it is to be feared, on such occasions, but the Neapolitans are a frugal people, and make a little go a long way.

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The lady was Rose, the gentleman by her side was her husband.

'Yes; and see, one of the boats has a young girl who has come on deck with flowers, which she is fastening in the gentlemen's coats in hope of a small fee. How pretty she looks!'

The girl approached Rose, to whom she offered a flower.

'Why, it speaks the language of hope,' said Rose. 'I take it as a good omen that here we shall find the Italian lady of whom we have come in search.'

'Let us hope that it may be so. We have no time to lose if we mean to go on shore. The health officer has done his duty, and given leave for the captain to land his passengers. Let us hasten to get on board the steam launch. I see already they have got our luggage. Fortunately for me there is not much of it.'

And in a few minutes they were at the custom-house. The only difficulty was a small box of cigars, on which Wentworth had to pay a most exorbitant duty.

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At the end of the quay they found a crowd of coachmen waiting for hire, shouting and gesticulating in the wildest manner. Rose was quite frightened at their appearance, and with the noise they made. However, they found one who did not charge more than double the ordinary fare to drive them to the hotel. As they drove along they encountered, of course, some of the awful drain smells for which the city has long been famous.

'I don't wonder, now,' said Rose, as they pulled up before a grand hotel, 'at the saying, "See Naples and die." How can people live where such smells are met with everywhere? But if that Italian Countess is alive we may find her. Perhaps she can help us to establish our boy's claim.'

That same morning an Italian Countess came home from her daily drive in a great state of trepidation. She had seen an English face that she remembered but too well—it was that of Miss Howard, the celebrated actress. She had ordered the coachman to keep the lady in sight; but that was impossible, the crowd was too great, and she returned home not a little agitated. Was it fancy or fact? was a question she could not determine.

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What could she do? Well, she drove off to the English Consul next day. Perhaps he could tell her. Alas, he was in utter ignorance of the matter.

There were the hotels; she would drive to them and make inquiries. There were only a few of them, as a rule, patronized by the English. It would be easy to make inquiries. She did so, but she could hear of no Miss Howard at any of them. All day long she was driving up and down the principal streets, but in vain. There is not much to see in Naples itself, it is the country round that is the attraction, and Rose and her husband were out all day long studying the remains of Pompeii, climbing up Mount Vesuvius, sailing to Sorrento or Capri, exploring the ruins of Baiæ, and the grave of Virgil. There was much to see, and they had no intention to let the grass grow under their feet. Daily they returned at a late hour to their hotel, charmed but wearied; and thus they had but little time to spend in the streets, looking at the shops, or studying the manners and

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customs of the people.

The Countess pondered over the matter deeply. She lived a retired life herself; she had few friends; her establishment was on a very moderate scale. There were those who said she was not a Countess, that her title was merely an assumed one. This was unfair, as most of the ladies one meets in Naples are Countesses, and the presumption therefore was in favour of her ladyship's claims. Countess or no Countess, she was in a very troubled state. She had seen a face that reminded her of old times in London—of her intrigue with Sir Watkin Strahan—of her worming herself into the confidence of his lady—of her participation in the abduction of the heir—in fact, of her revenge; and she sighed as she thought how little good she had gained by it. Her ladyship's maid was alarmed. What had come to the Countess it was beyond her power to imagine.

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'Have you anything on your mind?' said her old Italian priest as he sat in the first-floor of one of the villas that looked over Naples on to its lovely bay and the sea beyond, whilst Vesuvius on the left was indicating, in its usual way, that it was suffering a good deal in its inside. The old priest lunched with her ladyship every day.

'Anything on my mind?' said the lady. 'Oh, dear father, no. Why talk to me in this way this bright afternoon, when all nature seems so bright and gay? Ah, it is a beautiful world when one is young—the terraces, the gardens, the flowers, the blue sea, the old castle beneath, the streets with the jewellers' shops, the fine churches with their sacred services and sacred paintings. How I love them all! I could not live away from La Belle Naples. Oh, that I could stay here for ever!'

'That were a foolish wish, daughter,' said the holy man. 'Naples is very fine and its bay is beautiful, but you have something better to look at. See, the crucifix! Behold Who bleeds and suffers there—Who founded the Catholic Church of which I am a humble member, and in whose name I speak. At one time, if I may believe what I hear, you were not quite so fond of Naples as you seem to be now. I have heard that you went to the land of the heretics—that Island of England which has so long denied the faith, but which I am glad to find is abandoning its heresy, repenting of its sin, and returning to the Holy See. When we see the sister of an English Prime Minister find salvation in the bosom of the Holy Church, when our sacred officials are run after in all the highest circles, when they astonish all London by their works of charity and labours of love, by their eloquence and learning and saintly lives; when these Islanders, insolent and haughty as they are to one another, crowd as they do to Rome, and prostrate themselves at Rome's feet as they do, we know that the end is near—that the time of the triumph of the one Catholic and Universal Church, to whom St. Peter committed the care of the keys, is at hand. Pray that that blessed time may soon arrive. I have been to St. Paul's—I know Westminster Abbey—it would rejoice my heart to hear that once more there was performed in them the Holy Service of the Mass.'

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'Holy father, that is my daily prayer.'

'I am glad to hear you say so. But tell me, when you were among the heretics were you always a daughter of the Church?'

'Always, holy father. I fulfilled my mission—you know what that was.'

'I have heard something of it.'

'I should think so,' replied the lady with a smile. 'I had money, and I drew around me its worshippers. I was of an old Italian family, and stood well in the upper London circles. I had beauty—smile not, holy father, though you see me old and yellow and wrinkled—and beauty, as you know, never spreads its net in vain. I believe, also, I had wit, and wit goes far in that land of fogs and foxhunters, of prudish women and milksops, of cant and humbug.'

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'Ah,' said the monk, with a smile of approbation, 'you seem not to have liked those English—those heretics—those lunatic sightseers who, as they never can be happy at home, come to us to forget their sorrows, and who fancy that by doing so they are amusing themselves.'

'Truly no, holy father. How could I? They do not even worship the Virgin Mary!'

The holy father shook his head and sighed.

'I think, daughter, you wished to have a chat with me. There was something on your mind.'

'Holy father, you are right; and as I cannot come to church to make confession I have sent for you.'

'Yes; in the name of the Holy Father, and armed with his authority, I may hear confession and grant, to the truly penitent, absolution. The Apostle Peter had that power, he received it from the great Head of the Church; and our Popes—His true followers—have ever used that power for the cure of poor sinners, for the good of the Church, for the glory of His Blessed Name. We humble ministers hear private confessions. It is a sacred privilege, to be guarded jealously; but I know its value. I have seen how the weak and erring mortal who has confessed to his priest has had a heavy weight taken off his heart, has lost the cares and sorrows which were darkening and shortening his days, has gained joy and gladness as he thus realizes the Divine favour and feels certain that after the pangs of death are over we shall rescue him from the pains of purgatory, and he shall pass away to the mansions of the new Jerusalem, shall walk its golden streets, shall drink of its surpassing joys, shall join in its celestial harmonies, and take his stand with the great

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company of the elect gathered by the labours of the Holy Catholic Church out of every age and country under heaven. This is what we gain by means of the Mass, and yet the heretics scoff at the service and audaciously assert—in this respect only following the arch-heretic, Luther—that the Mass is simply a means for getting money out of the pockets of the people.’

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‘What awful blasphemy!’ said the lady with a shudder, at the same time making the sign of the cross. ‘Glad indeed was I to leave that horrid country. It is full of Free Catholics.’

‘Free Catholics!’ said the priest, in a tone of alarm. ‘What can they be?’

‘Alas, holy father! they are everywhere—in Paris, in Brussels, in London. They are only Catholics in form, but not in heart. In fact, they are no better than Protestants.’

‘Not exactly—if they keep up the forms of the Holy Church they are better than Protestants,’ said the priest, ‘who in denying the form deny the faith, as the holy Apostle says, and are worse than infidels. But, my daughter, time is wearing away.’

‘Ah, truly, holy father, it is luncheon-time. Already I hear by the gong that it is served.’

The father knew the rules of the house, and timed his visit accordingly. Soup, fowl, fish, with cut of roast lamb, a choice bottle of Italian wine—it won’t bear transplanting, nor a sea voyage—a few grapes and green figs, with a cigarette and a demitasse of coffee, were not to be despised. He found alike his piety and his benevolence all the better for such a feast. The Countess kept a cook and a butler, and they were neither of them novices by any means. There has been good eating and drinking on the shores of the Bay of Naples, at any rate since the time of the Romans. Naples owes its fame, and probably its existence, to the superlative loveliness of its situation. As old Sam Rogers sang:

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‘Not a grove,  
Citron or pine or cedar: not a grot  
Seaward, and mantled with the gadding vine,  
But breathes enchantment;’

and thus it was that the *bon vivants* of the old world loved the favoured spot—that Baiæ was the Brighton of the Romans. Between it and Puteoli rolled the Lucrine Lake, over which skimmed the small yachts of fashionable visitors, while around were the oyster-beds for the luxurious tables of Rome. It was there Sergius Orata of blessed memory established the fine oyster-beds which have ever since been a model for all succeeding ages, and a name grateful in the ears of the epicure.

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The lady and her guest had coffee served up in an adjoining apartment. The lady lit up her cigarette, the gentleman did the same. It is wonderful how tobacco quickens the conversational powers. High-born dames, as well as Irish fish women, in this respect own the influence of the seductive weed.

‘Ah, father,’ said the Countess, ‘you have known me long. I have confidence in you.’

‘Yes; I have known madame long—friend of the good cause, a supporter of the true Church—liberal with her money and her time, strict in the observance of holy days. What would you, my daughter?’

‘Ah, father,’ said the lady with a sigh; ‘it was not always so—I have lived.’

‘Yes; many of us who now pose as saints can say as much,’ said the holy father. ‘What a blessed thing it is to be able to find out what is true life, what are true joys—the ecstasy of being lost in the Divine Being, of being waited on by angels, hasting to guide one the way to Paradise, of appealing to the sweet Virgin Mary, of having her as an intercessor night and day for our sins in the court of Heaven! Compared with these things, what are the pleasures of sense and sin—which are soon vanished, and always leave a sting behind?’

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‘Oh yes, father; I can feel and realize all this, but I am not happy. I am in great anxiety—I have a great weight on my mind. My medical man tells me to avoid excitement, that I suffer from disease of the heart, that any day I may have an attack which may be attended with fatal consequences.’

‘Oh, dear madame, calm yourself. You look well—madame speaks and walks well. There is assuredly little serious to contemplate. These doctors, who are they?—ignorant quacks who, for their own selfish ends, make us believe that we are on the way to death when in reality we are in the enjoyment of health and strength. Remember how, in a cholera year, Death met the Devil as he was on his way to Vienna. “I shall slay twenty thousand people,” said Death. In a day or two they met again. “Ah!” said the Devil, “only ten thousand died of cholera.” “Ah,” said Death, “that is true.” “How, then,” asked the Devil, “did you make up your number?” “Easy enough,” was the reply; “ten thousand were killed by the cholera and the other ten died of fright!” Ah, these doctors, they do a lot of mischief! They are also, I fear, men of science—that is, men of no religion. It is dangerous for one’s soul to have them about us. It is the priest, your ladyship, who is the true friend of all in sickness or adversity, or doubt or sorrow.’

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‘Oh, father, I believe you. And now to business.’

‘With all my heart.’

‘There is no one who is likely to overhear us?’

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'None. The house is silent as the grave,' of which it really reminded one with its funereal embellishments, its ghastly pictures of saints and martyrs—the work of old masters they said, horrible to look on—and crucifixes of every kind. In some parts of Italy this show is supposed to indicate the possession of true piety, and that, like charity, covers a multitude of sins.

'Well, father, let me state a case in which I am interested.'

'I am all attention.'

'In the fair city of Florence there was a girl, fair in person, a fine figure, a sunny face, a gift of song. She was the child of pious parents in the neighbouring mountains. The father was an officer in the Pope's army. When all Europe dashed its armies, not in vain, against the holy rock of St. Peter's, the father died as a brave man should. The mother lived on on her small estate on the mountains. The girl loved the city, and the museums, and the gardens, and the picture galleries. She would not go back to the solitude of her country home; in fact, she ran away, and one morning she met an English milor. He was rich, he was handsome, he was well-born; he told her he loved her to distraction—she would always be happy with him. In a foolish hour the silly girl went on board milor's yacht, that was lying in the bay—just as the yachts of milors lie there to-day.'

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'Ah! that was bad,' said the priest.

'Yes, it was indeed, holy father,' continued the lady. 'The girl remained there; she believed in the milor; she learnt his language; she amused his idle hours. He did not know his own mind; she did not know hers, and both thought they were happy.'

'It was bad,' said the priest. 'Evil came of it. You need tell me no more. Evil always comes of such liaisons. Where the Church does not bless, the great enemy of souls, like a roaring lion, comes in.'

'But there is a good deal more to be told.'

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'Proceed, madam, I am all attention.'

'The milor was lost sight of. The lady appears in London. Socially, she had kept her reputation untouched; she assumed an Italian title of nobility. There are only too many in London, especially among rich parvenues, who throw open their doors to anyone with a foreign title, whether real or assumed.'

'So I have heard, madam.'

'The Italian lady in this way made many acquaintances and some friendships. Amongst the latter was a lady in weak health, and in great trouble of body and mind. The Italian lady was interested in her; she seemed so sad and sorrowful—almost as sad and sorrowful as herself. The lady had many confidences to make. She was the wife of the rich milor; she was about to present him with a child—a son and heir it was to be hoped. She dreaded the event, she was so weak and sad.'

'"What will you?" said the Italian lady to the English one. "That you come and stay with me—that you be my companion and friend. Everything shall be placed in your hands." The Italian lady was delighted. In the first place it would give her an opportunity to meet her English milor again; perhaps to regain her old authority over him. Alas! she was mistaken.'

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'And it was quite as well, too,' said the priest. 'Her better part was that of a penitent; it was only thus the ministers of the Church could absolve her of her sin.'

'Milor had lost all interest in the Italian woman who had given up to him her youth, her love, her innocence, and her life. Milor felt no pleasure at once more recognising her as established in his grand house in town as the friend and companion of his wife.'

'Was this madame, this Italian Countess, this friend of yours, very much distressed, was she broken-hearted?' asked the priest with a quiet smile.

'Not exactly. Her idea was to take a grand revenge.'

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'Ah! that is more the way of Italians. But what was that revenge? Did she stab the milor? did she poison his wife?'

'Neither the one nor the other. As one of the household—as its mistress as it were for the time being—she saw how she could revenge herself in a better way.'

'Revenge! Ah, that is sinful, I fear,' said the priest. "'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." Hear David, "O Lord, to whom vengeance belongeth, show Thyself." Ah, it may be sweet for a time,' said the priest, as he shook his head.

'Holy father,' replied the lady, 'you are right, as you always are. We women have not men's heads, we have only hearts, and those hearts often fill us with bad passions.'

'I fear that is too true,' said the priest. 'But pray proceed with your narrative.'

'Well, her plans were artfully laid. The servants were her creatures. The medical man was her dupe. She had sole command of the mansion. The poor dying wife had begged her to take the trouble off her hands. Milor fancied she was his slave; he in reality was her dupe. She made him believe that his child was dead. She did more, she paid some women to take care of a child

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which she pretended, with strict injunctions to secrecy, was the heir. Gold did it all. At that time the lady had plenty of gold.'

'Which might have been better spent in the service of the Holy Catholic Church, which needs the treasures of the faithful, and gives them interest for the money, which will yield rich fruit through the countless ages of eternity.'

'Ah, my friend did not think of such things. She was in the world and of it. There, in that island of heretics, she had given up her religious observances, and had almost lost her religious faith. Oh, how much better it is for the woman to stop in the land where the poetry of youth ripens and matures, till in her old age she has all the ardour and the blessedness of a devotee.'

'You speak truly and well,' said the priest, with an approving smile; and though he did not often smile, his smile, when it did appear on his marble face, was encouraging.

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'My father,' said the penitent, weeping, 'I can keep up the deception no longer—I speak of myself!'

'I thought as much,' he replied. 'I am afraid you have done a great wrong. But what has become of the child?'

'I know not; and the father is dead.'

'Oh,' said the priest, 'you should have brought him to Italy and placed him in the school of the Monastery of St. Joseph.'

'Yes, holy father, I ought to have brought him up in the true faith. I hear his father is dead; I hear they believe there is no heir; I hear the brother and his family are now in possession of the estate. I know all about them. They are of the Low Church school which hates our faith, abuses its priests, and even the Holy Father—'

'Hush!' said the priest, 'do not sully your lips with the foolishness and wickedness of these poor Protestants. I have heard them talk their blasphemies in Naples, and even at Rome itself. It is the holy Inquisition that we need to put a stop to such vile calumnies.'

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'I had my revenge; but I know not what became of the boy. If we could gain his rights we could make a Catholic of him. I am no longer a penitent, holy father. I feel as if I had been a mighty instrument in paving the way for the return of the true religion to that unhappy land. Here,' placing in the priest's hand a handsome casket, 'are the documents which will establish his claim. You go to London. You will see the lawyer of the family; he cannot deny the claim. Oh, I feel so joyful! I've gained my revenge! and is it not a sanctified one, as it is for the good of the Church?'

'Daughter,' said the priest, 'I would fain say in the language of the Holy Book, "Many daughters have done well, but thou hast surpassed them all." Still, it seems to me so marvellous, I can scarcely understand it.'

'The mystery is being cleared up. I saw an English actress in the street yesterday, who I believe can help us in the matter. But in the meanwhile let us see these documents. We shall have done a great work for the Church if we can take these documents, find the child, establish his claims in a court of law, and secure him as a true son of the Church. Ah, that will be grand!' said the Countess joyfully. 'I gain a son for the Church.'

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'Heaven will reward you, daughter,' said the priest; 'but hasten and fetch the casket.'

The Countess left the room to find it. In a little while she returned with it in her hands.

'There it is,' said she, as she handed it to the priest.

'What a lovely casket!' said the priest.

'Ah, one thinks of what it contains,' said the lady; 'a title—an estate—a life, which will all be handed over to the Church.'

With a trembling hand the priest opened it; the Countess in an equally excited state looking on.

In the casket was an official-looking wrapper.

'It is all right,' said the Countess; 'break the seal and master its contents.'

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'All in good time,' said the priest. 'Don't agitate yourself; be calm.'

'I am,' said the Countess; 'but delay not. Secure the prize; the hour has come.'

Suddenly the priest turned red and white. 'In the name of the Holy Father,' he said, 'what have we here?'

'Why, documents of the highest importance.'

'Nothing of the kind,' exclaimed the priest in a rage. 'Nothing but an old English newspaper,' as he threw it on the ground, with something that sounded like a rather expressive Italian oath.

The lady shrieked and nearly fainted away, only she thought better of it. The situation, it occurred to her, would be neither interesting nor picturesque. Alas! she had no help for it. That

English maid-servant, of whom she fancied she had made a dupe, was more than a match for her after all, and had tampered with the documents she had carefully sealed and religiously guarded these many years.

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All she could do was weep, and weep she did, till she nearly wept herself to death, failing of her long-treasured scheme of revenge. Of her servant she had lost all trace. To find her was out of the question; her only hope was in Miss Howard.

But they never met. The Countess and the priest could do nothing; and Rose and her husband soon tired of the fruitless search and returned, to remember in after years the delights of the Bay of Naples—'the most beautiful spot in the world,' writes George Eliot. Everything takes us back to the past. It was in the bay that pious Æneas landed. Caligula, and Nero, and Tiberius, all loved the spot. The grotto of the Sybil was near, too; the tomb of Virgil is yet shown in that neighbourhood. Capua, famed for its luxury and ease, was not far off. No wonder the world flocks to the Bay of Naples. I stay at the Hotel de Vesuve, kept by Mr. Mella, well-known to English members of the Coaching Club, and where I find excellent accommodation. And he tells me 80,000 visitors pass through his hotel in the course of a year. It is a classical education to stop in Naples for a while. I love it best in the summer, when you can revel on green figs, and apricots, and peaches, and oranges for a song. In the winter there are fogs and snow at times. But there is this drawback in the summer, and that is its intense heat, which drives everyone away. From the deck of the steamer the view is charming, as Naples with its terraces, and castles, and hills rises before you; and at night, when all is still, and the gas-lamps glitter all round the bay for miles, it looks like fairyland.

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In Naples itself there is little to see, with the exception of the museum, which, when Garibaldi was Dictator, was thrown open to the public, and in which some, or rather all, the most precious works of art discovered in Pompeii are preserved. It is not enough to go to Pompeii—you must visit the museum in Naples as well. But the brasses and the marbles in the museum are especially fine, such as the Farnese Bull, and the Farnese Hercules, and the Roman Emperors. In the churches there is little to see, and nothing to admire. There are showy shops in the Toledo, and at the end, as you enter, an arcade as handsome as is to be found anywhere in Europe. There are good public gardens where you may hear excellent music on a summer night, and no city has better tramcars, and more civil drivers and conductors. I have no fault to find with the cabs, except that their drivers never leave you alone, and lie in wait for you at your going out and coming in. It is in its crowded and bustling streets that the charm of Naples consists. Surely there never was a people who lived so much in the open air, and drank so much water flavoured with lemon. The Neapolitans are a sober people, and industrious as well. They are fearfully taxed, and, with their scanty wages, how they manage to make both ends meet is a mystery. They are much given to sleep in the summertime anywhere, on the broad street or the sea-wall; and of a Sunday afternoon they are much given to crowd into some rickety old cart, and tear along as fast and far as the horse can go.

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There is very little beauty among the common people, and you have plenty of scope for observation, as women dress their back hair in the broad streets, and the babies are washed in the same public manner. Nor can you wonder that this is so, as you contemplate the dingy streets and high houses, divided by narrow lanes, just like Yarmouth Rows, where no fresh air can enter, nor ray of sunlight can shine. What strikes a stranger especially is the awful noise. There is an everlasting clatter of wheels and cracking of whips, and braying of donkeys—and in Naples they bray louder than anywhere else; and how the hawkers shout! and they are numerous, and seem to supply everyone. It is amusing to see them transacting business. The customer is high up in the balcony, suspended in mid air. She needs a bit of fish, and she lets down a basket to the hawker below. That gives rise to a good deal of talk, as the Neapolitans are a much-gesticulating people. If a bargain is struck, the basket is hauled up with the fish inside.

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An old French writer complained of the English people that they were very ignorant, as they never spoke French. In a similar spirit the ignorance of the Neapolitans struck me. None of them could speak a word of English.

There are others who call it the City of Flowers. This is nothing but a mistake. But the cactus grows everywhere, and thus, wherever you go—on the rail, or by the villa, or the flat-roomed cabin where the poor peasant lives—you have a good display of green; and in the public gardens the palm-tree grows luxuriantly, and you are reminded of the tropics at every step; and thus the hot hours glide peacefully on, while the retailers of lemon and water do a roaring trade, and the ragged who have no money curl themselves in the dark arches, met with at every corner, and sleep the sleep of the just. All Naples is asleep in the middle of the day, and even the policeman nods. Happily he has little to do, as, ignorant and priest-ridden as the people may be, they never get drunk. At night the city is gay, as families, old and young, rush off to the music-hall, or to hear the bands play, or to navigate the peaceful waters by the light of Chinese lanterns. I suppose they fancy they cool themselves. The fact is, Naples is always hot in summer. All day long the burning sun bakes up the streets and the shops, and the old bits of rocks, all built over; and the heat seems to me to radiate from them all night long. If it were not for the tramcars, which are numerous and cheap, and the conductors of which are uncommonly civil and well-behaved, locomotion would be impossible. There are no flags more trying than those of Naples, and as the cabs drive all over the road you are never safe. People who are deaf, who are old and infirm, are in constant danger, in spite of the thundering crack of the cabman's whip, or the ear-splitting note of the conductor's horn. Motion seems to begin about five, and still the tumult rages as I retire to rest.

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After all, the chief fault I find with the people is the way they work their horses and donkeys. The latter, at any rate, have a hard time of it, as they drag the heavy load on a cart of two long poles with beams laid across of the most primitive order. I fancy the old country cart remains as it was in the time of the Romans. Sometimes a horse or mule or bullock is harnessed on one side; but the patient ass, who does the chief of the work, no one seems to pity.

On a hot day it also stirs my indignation to see a horse dragging a cart with fourteen or fifteen strapping men inside, and on a Sunday everyone seems to drive, and as fast as he can. The swell and the costermonger all tear along at a frightful pace, and thus secure—what in England some good people are trying to insure—a pleasant Sunday afternoon.

## CHAPTER XXVII. IN BRUSSELS.

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‘Of course, this is a plant, my dear.’

‘Really, Colonel,’ said the lady addressed, ‘I wish you would not use such improper language; children so easily pick up slang. You ought to be very careful. It is too bad, just as we are about to move to England, where you will take your rightful place in county society as head of our ancient family.’

‘You’re right there,’ said the Colonel to his lady in a laughing tone; ‘you’re right there, I believe. We are one of the oldest families in the country. It was one of them who was with Noah in the ark. You recollect the old epitaph—

“Nobles and heralds, by your leave,  
Here lies what once was Matthew Prior,  
The son of Adam and of Eve,  
Can Bourbon or Nassau go higher?”

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‘Colonel,’ said the lady, ‘I am ashamed of you.’

‘What for, dearest?’

‘For quoting such a worldly poet. We were not allowed to read him in school. I am sure many of his poems are highly improper.’

‘Oh, then you’ve looked into him, have you?’

‘Certainly not,’ said the lady, with an affected shake of her head.

‘Then how can you condemn him?’

‘Easily enough. He was of the world. His was an unsanctified genius. He had no part or lot in the one thing needful.’

‘At any rate,’ replied the Colonel, ‘he’s buried in Westminster Abbey.’

‘The more’s the pity.’

‘And he was the friend of the clergy.’

‘Yes, of the carnal and unregenerate. There are too many of such, alas, in the Church of England—wolves in sheep’s clothing.’

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The lady was an Evangelical of the bitterest type.

‘Well, dear, we won’t discuss the question,’ said the Colonel meekly. ‘What am I to reply to this letter?’

‘What, the letter from London, from Mr. Wentworth? Short and sharp. Say the idea is perfectly ridiculous. We can hear of no compromise. It is quite out of the question for us to give up our rights just as Providence has opened to us a means of extended usefulness. Mr. Wentworth is only a newspaper writer, a man of no position in society, and I am told his wife was actually an actress.’

‘Yes, I believe so,’ said the Colonel. This was enough. The Colonel’s lady was one of the elect—a model in a certain section of society of holy living. Yet, under a sanctified exterior, she was as hard, and bitter, and selfish, and uncharitable as it was possible for any woman to be, and the beauty of it was, that she thought herself, and was considered by her friends, to be in a state of exalted spiritualism, living in close communion with God.

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Such people are by no means uncommon, the creatures of a self-deception of a most odious kind. Their language is full of Scripture phraseology; they delight in pious hymns; all their reading is confined to pious biographies, especially religious diaries, the morbid revelations of which record at nauseous length their diseased state of mind, which they assume to be the direct results of a Divine inspiration and tokens of a Divine love. When they are in distress, it is not the natural

result of the circumstances in which they are placed, or the conditions of ordinary life, but the Divine will and purpose. If they neglect the laws of health, and are ill in consequence, it is the Lord's doing. If they lose their money owing to imprudence in trusting it in rotten companies, it is the Lord's doing. If trade is bad and creature comforts fail, or they live beyond their means and are in embarrassed circumstances, it is the Lord's doing, to wean them from the world and its sinful vanities, and to lead them back to Himself.

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There are no mysteries to them; all is clear, and their knowledge of the Divine way is only equalled by their thorough acquaintance with those of His great adversary the devil. In them, peace of mind is the result of this knowledge. To the carnal mind their self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction is amusing. It is almost beautiful, the smile with which they listen to one another, and the calm contempt with which they regard everyone not of their way of thinking. By the side of them an iceberg is genial, and their power is as great as their faith. All the artillery of heaven is in their hands. Peace is theirs, but it is truly a peace that passeth all understanding; they are not as other men are. To the outer world their cry is, 'Procul este, profani!'

But let us return to the Colonel's lady.

She continues:

'We are not wealthy, you see,' she was wont to say to the kind-hearted Belgian ladies, when they called on her for a subscription. 'We are, I may say, living quite up to our income, and we have got our duty to do to the family, and the Colonel keeps the money-bags so tight that I can never get a franc. But what I can do I do, and, after all, it matters little—the contemptible dross of the world—if I can give to the needy the riches, that never fade nor pass away, of the Divine Word.'

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And thus the lady excused to herself, as so many of us do, her lack of true charity.

'Well,' said the Colonel, 'what shall I say to this Wentworth?'

'Take no notice of him. Refer him to your lawyer in London. The path of duty is very clear. We find ourselves, by a merciful interposition of Providence, restored to our rightful position in society. You to take your place as the head of one of the old county families, I to still labour for my blessed Master in a sphere of increased usefulness. You owe it to your family to at once take possession of the title and estate, and not to have a moment's delay.'

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'But,' said the Colonel, 'if there should be a grain of truth in this cock-and-bull story it might be awkward. I should like to have an inquiry made about this boy.'

'Pray, do nothing of the kind. You only open the way to fraud and imposition. Your late brother never treated us fairly. He was often positively rude to me, and his son—if this boy is such—has no claims on us.'

'Well,' said the Colonel, 'I should not like to behave shabbily.'

'What do you mean, Colonel?' said the lady indignantly. 'I am not the one to recommend you to do that. The boy is no concern of ours. We take what the law gives us. It is a duty we owe to society to do that. I am aware,' added the lady, 'that Sir Watkin had a son, that the infant was stolen, and that the dead body was placed in the family vault. Not all the lawyers in London, and they are bad enough, can upset that.'

'But suppose the wrong child was buried?'

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'Fiddle-de-dee!' said the lady. 'We know better than that. The estates are fairly ours, and we return to England as soon as we can to take our rights. Mr. Wentworth and his wife between them have concocted this villainous story, which no decent person would ever think of believing.'

Wentworth and his wife were quite aware of that; they believed in the boy, who was—to judge from the family portraits—a striking representation of the deceased Baronet at his time of life. But would the world believe it? that was the question to be asked.

Poor Sally on her deathbed had no inducement to tell a lie. Unfortunately, she had kept her secret too long. She had hoped to have made a harvest of the boy, but death had come to her, and all her hopes had ended in the grave. As is often the case, she was too clever by half.

Wentworth and his wife had an unpleasant time of it. Indeed, the family lawyer had intimated in a genial mood that he might possibly feel it his painful duty to place them in the dock, on a charge of conspiracy to defraud—a situation for which neither of them had any fancy. Their best friends seemed to regard the story with suspicion. What jury would be convinced by the testimony of 'our Sally,' whose head was generally fuddled with drink, and whom they could not even produce in court? It was true that the lad very much resembled the deceased Baronet. It was quite within probability that the latter was his father, but that did not legally make him the son and heir. It was felt that they had better talk over the matter with the lad himself, who was then an officer on board one of the floating hotels plying between Liverpool and New York.

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Accordingly, Rose undertook the task of interviewing him in one of those sumptuous hotels for which Liverpool is famed. The boy had never heard of Sir Watkin, nor were his recollections of the deceased Sally of a very decided character. He had, however, never believed that she was his mother, and from her mysterious hints when under the influence of drink he had come to the conclusion that he had been stolen, though when or why he could not make out.

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It is true there was an old woman at Sloville, a pal of Sally's, the one who had written to Rose, who had the identical dress which the baby wore when it was stolen, but it was felt that the production of the article in question in court would not much advance matters. She had not stolen the baby. She could only say that the deceased Sally had asserted she had, and had bidden her be quiet, as one day or other she would astonish everybody by the wonderful revelation she had it in her power to make. It was true that Sally had been suspected, and the more so that she was no more to be seen, having been clever enough to put the detectives on the wrong scent.

It was hinted that an Italian lady had been mixed up in the matter. The world said there had been an intrigue between the Baronet and a fair Italian, and that thus she had revenged herself for his throwing her overboard.

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'Actresses,' continued the Colonel's lady, 'are not particular sort of people, and newspaper writers are not much better, I believe. I can't think how old county families can be civil to them. In my young days such an idea would have been scouted, and I must say then they knew their place. My papa helped the local printer to start a paper on condition that it was to support Church and State. Occasionally my papa had the man up in the Castle, and would sit down to a bottle of port with him, but he never took any notice of him elsewhere, nor ever introduced him to his family. I believe the man was a very respectable tradesman. He was regular in his attendance at church, and always stood by our family in election contests; but the modern literary man gives himself the most ridiculous airs, fancies he is a genius because he can scribble, and that he can wield the destinies of the nation because he is connected with some low paper. I hear he belongs to clubs, and goes into society just as if he were a gentleman. Every time,' added the lady piteously, 'every time that I take up an English newspaper, I see the country going to the bad, the people more intolerant of good government, the upper classes more careless as to the future, recklessly acting in accordance with the motto, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The Sunday is desecrated by all classes, and the Lord will have no pity in the day of His wrath for Sabbath-breakers. The philosophers are in favour of Godless education, and now they tell me there are people who argue that Atheists have a right to sit in a Christian Parliament. Oh dear! the vials of God's wrath will soon be flung down upon that unhappy country. The signs of the times tell us that we have reached the beginning of the end. There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and the day of the Lord shall come.'

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The gallant Colonel was accustomed to that sort of thing, and took it calmly. Whether he believed what his wife said I don't know. He always acted as if he did; never contradicted her, as he had found that to be no use; attended her to church, sat out with well-bred polish the dreary minutes devoted to staring the domestics out of countenance called family prayers. He was always ready at his wife's bidding to attend Bible-readings for the select few, and when joked on the subject by his chums, if he had any at his club, never gave railing for railing, but took it as if it was a cross laid on him to bear.

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That he was a sincere believer no one, however, who caught him apart from the presiding influence of his wife believed for a moment. He swore too much for that, and occasionally he had been heard, when sentimental and under the influence of wine, to refer to Cremorne, to Evans's and the Cider Cellars, to the Closerie du Lilas, to the Mabilles, and other places in London and Paris where wicked people, in old times, were wont to enjoy themselves after their kind. Beneath his frosted exterior there was a good deal of the old Adam yet.

Once upon a time, according to William of Malmesbury, a merchant named Swelf had been in the habit of calling on the holy St. Wolstan once a year, to receive his advice in the healing of his spiritual ailments. After giving the needed absolution, the prelate observed:

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'You often repeat the sins which you have confessed, because, as the proverb goes, opportunity makes the thief. Wherefore, I advise you to become a monk, which if you do, you will not long have the opportunity for these sins.'

Upon this, the other rejoined that he could not possibly become a monk, because he found it so difficult to bring his mind to it.

'Go your ways,' said the bishop, in somewhat of a passion: 'a monk you will become, whether you choose it or not, but only when the appliances and means of vice have waxen old in you;' which fact, adds the historian, 'we afterwards witnessed, because when now broken down by old age, he betook himself to our monastery.'

It was the decay of nature rather than the growth of grace which made that man a monk. What we lack in old age is the power to sin. The body ceases to be the servant of the senses. We lead a better life possibly, from a conventional point of view, but is it not often terribly against the grain? A man gives up a dissipated career because his strength is not equal to its demands. His vitality has been prematurely exhausted.

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The conversation referred to took place in the breakfast-room of one of the attractive residences lining the route to the Bois du Cambre, which all my readers know is one of the fairest suburbs of Brussels, and of which, as most of them have gone there, I doubt not, to spend a happy day, I need say no more. The family did not reside there, but far away in the suburb, where rents and wages and provisions were alike cheap. The Colonel had gone abroad to educate his daughters more cheaply than he could in London, and the plan had so far succeeded that the young ladies had managed to read a good many French novels, the perusal of which not a little interfered with

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the enjoyment of family prayers, Bible-reading, and religious conferences, to which they were invariably taken by their mamma, and other means of grace. The family funds had been rather restricted, and at Brussels the mamma had assured herself that there was an exceptionally attractive Evangelical ministry in the Church of England, under the special license of the Bishop of London, and that was enough for her, the Colonel merely considering he could vegetate more cheaply in Belgium than in London. But they were all quite ready to leave for England; the Colonel to strut as a baronet and landed proprietor, the young ladies with a view to the matrimonial market—for, alas! they had met with few eligibles in Brussels—and the mamma that she might carry on on a larger scale and with increased success the missionary operations of which she had been the centre in Brussels. If she had not done much good among the people, she had—and that was her one great reward—managed considerably to annoy the priests, who glared at her with evil eyes as they watched her sallying forth daily with her bag of tracts. Money it was hard to get out of the Colonel's lady, even in the most urgent cases; but no one was more ready with her tracts.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A COUNTRYMAN IN TOWN.

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'What has brought you to town?' asked Wentworth one morning, as they were sitting in Clifford's Inn, to a visitor who had just put in an appearance. His garb denoted his profession. He was the Presbyterian minister who had acted as Wentworth's friend at the time of the election.

'Well, I've come on rather important business. There is an old woman in the workhouse who maintains that the deceased Baronet has left a son who is heir to the title and estate. And thus I came up to London; but I have been run off my legs. I give you my word of honour, you won't catch me in a hurry in London again.'

'How is that?' asked Wentworth.

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'Well, the fact is, London is the last place in the world for anyone to visit. It is too big, too crowded, too noisy, too fatiguing, and at every step you are surrounded with danger. The omnibus and the cab ever threaten one with annihilation, and the pickpocket is always on the watch. The bicycle is a terror by night, as is the irrepressible youngster who converts every quiet corner into a skating-rink. As to the air you breathe, it is full of microbes; your daily bread is white with alum. A wise man will also avoid its milk and cream and water. Yet all of us have to go to London more or less, and there are people who can live nowhere else. Human nature can easily assimilate itself to the conditions which surround it. Fortunately, there is a good deal of indiarubber in all of us. Of this the Londoner avails himself, and thinks himself the finest, smartest, cleverest fellow in the world, though he sees Brother Jonathan shutting him out of his markets, and opens his doors to foreign paupers, whom not a Government under heaven save his own would tolerate for a moment.'

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'Well, you're right there. But what is your particular grievance?'

'Grievances, you may say. They are like the hairs on my head; which, by-the-bye, are not so numerous as they were once.'

'So I see,' said Wentworth with a smile.

'To make the most of a short visit to London,' continued the speaker, 'you must arrange your plans, and I did mine. My first object was to find out a gentleman who had written to me. Before leaving home, I had written to say that I would call on him on the Tuesday at his chambers in Pall Mall. When in due time I got there, I found he had gone to Scotland for ten days, but that his son had opened my letter and had waited for me till twelve o'clock, when he had started for an estate which his father was laying out with a view to building operations. Accordingly, I resolved to follow him, and then my troubles began. I started on an omnibus for Euston station; arrived there, I partook of luncheon, having twenty minutes to wait. "How do the trains run to Bushey?" I asked of an official. "There is one at twenty minutes to two, and another at the quarter," was the reply; and I learned on the same reliable authority that the quarter to two train got there first. Accordingly, I waited for it, and when the guard came round to inspect the tickets, he confirmed what the official in the hall had said; adding that I was to change at Harrow. It was thus with a light heart I started, and left the train at Harrow, feeling sure that in a few minutes I should be landed at my destination. Alas, the train had gone, and I had to wait, sad and solitary, for an hour. At Bushey, a woman on whom I called informed me that her husband and the gentleman of whom I was in search had gone to the Board School. It is needless to add that they had done nothing of the kind. In the dust and under a blazing sun, I made my way to an estate which was being cut up into building ground. No Mr. T.—the man I sought—was to be seen; but it was the land I sought. "Was there any more of it?" "No," said a workman, "that was all." I felt he was wrong, that there must be more; but I tramped over the ground and made my way back to the station, to wait another dreary half-hour. In time, passengers for London began to assemble on the platform. Two of them passed me. One of them, I suppose, remembered me, as he spoke to his companion, a much younger man, who came up to tell me he was the one I sought. "Had I seen the estate?" "Yes." "What did I think of the view opposite the hall?" I explained I had

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never been there. The workman it appeared, had led me wrong, and as it was essential that I should see it, it was agreed that I must have a fly and view the ground. I did so; and got back to town about eight, feeling that unnecessarily I had lost the greater part of the day.

‘The next day I rose betimes to carry out my well-arranged plans. I slept in the City, that I might better carry them out. In the first place I made my way to see a gentleman in Fenchurch Street. He was out. Then I made my way to a great manager’s office in Bishopsgate Street; he had not arrived. Then I made my way to the great doctor in Manchester Square. I have a liver; it had gone wrong, and I knew, such is my experience of the doctor, that he would set it right in the twinkling of an eye. Alas! the doctor had gone out, and that meant running up there again the next day, and that meant my not being able to hear Henry Melvill’s Golden Lecture; a thing on which, in the country, I had set my heart. However, I had a little consolation in reserve. An editor in Paternoster Row owed me a small sum of money. All the years I had known him I had never found him absent from his post. I would call on him, and he would give me a cheque. I did call, and he had gone down to Bournemouth for a week. Close by was another friend, the chairman of a well-known literary club that dine together every Friday evening. I had never dined with them, though repeatedly invited. I would be in town on Friday, and I would spend the evening dining with the club. It is rather dull work sitting in the smoking-room of a hotel of a night. Accordingly, I called on my friend to inform him of my intention to accept his proffered hospitality, and you can imagine my disappointment when the doorkeeper at my friend’s place of business informed me that he was at Folkestone. In my disappointment, I wrote to an old friend living on the Brighton Parade, that I would run down the next day in time for dinner, and pass the night under his hospitable roof. There was much we had to say to each other, as he was a retired Colonial, with whom I wished to talk over Colonial affairs. As soon as the train had arrived at London-super-Mare, I made my way joyfully to his house, feeling sure of a hearty welcome. All the blinds were suspiciously drawn down. After ringing the bell twice an aged housekeeper came to the door; the family had gone to town for the season. I turned away to a hotel, where the accommodation was moderate; but fortunately the charge was the same. On the Friday, back to town with an empty purse, I made my way to an office where I knew I could get the needful. Alas! the gentleman I wanted to see was out. For the first time in his life, I believe, Mr. W. was away—gone to the Handel Festival.’

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‘Well, you seem to have been rather unfortunate.’

‘And oh, the terrors of that night! I could not get a wink of sleep. The room was so sultry and confined. I opened the window, and then the noise of cabs at all hours kept me awake. Then I got nervous, and wondered what I should do in case of a fire; and sleep that night was out of the question; in fact, I’ve been wonderfully seedy all the time I have been in town. But I have more to say if you care to listen.’

‘Pray proceed,’ said Wentworth. ‘I am all attention.’

‘Let me record two other experiences. I have a friend who keeps a boarding-house in a certain square not a hundred miles from Holborn. He had often asked me to stay a night with him; he could help me with materials for an article I wanted to write; I would spend my last night there. Of course, I found him out, and the house so full that any bed there was out of the question. One little incident in the course of my troubles is rather amusing and characteristic. A West-End swell lately forced himself on my acquaintance. His talk is all of lords and ladies and people in high life, in whom I take no interest whatever. I even am sick of the woeful tittle-tattle of the newspapers, and never read it. But I met my fine gentleman accidentally. He was delighted to see me, inquired most politely after the welfare of my family, hoped I would manage to run up to a certain fashionable exhibition—the most pleasant lounge in town of a summer evening—and then bade me good-morning as coolly as if he had never gone out of his way to beg me to make his house my home the next time I was in London. And this is London life, and a fair illustration of how a countryman gets on when there, and of the utter impossibility of accomplishing anything there in a reasonable time. It is wiser—better far—to stay at home and get your business done by writing. Londoners love writing. There is a difficulty I have with a limited liability company in a matter of five shillings, and we are as far from getting it settled as ever, though we have been corresponding on it for half a year. But London, with its worrying days and sleepless nights, is to be avoided by any who regards his health or temper or pocket. I have quite made up my mind that I will never visit London again—at any rate, not till the next time. And there is another thing that disgusted me. I was at a public dinner last night, and had to sit for three hours listening to awful speeches.’

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‘Well, they are generally tedious,’ said Wentworth. ‘I have had to attend a good many at one time or other.’

‘Yes, but there was such a waste of time; all sorts of irrelative toasts obviously introduced merely for the purpose of affording mediocre aldermen and M.P.’s a chance of airing their vocabulary. But worst of all,’ said the minister, ‘was the awful amount of guzzling and feeding. Everyone seemed only intent on getting as many of the good things on his plate as he could. And as to the champagne, the gentlemen, as they called themselves, seemed as if they had never tasted any before, and as if they would never have the chance again. Many of them were quite drunk, and the whole affair soon resolved itself into a drunken orgy. I was quite disgusted with my species. No one who would wish to think well of humanity ought to attend a public dinner. The wine being provided, they seemed as if they could not have enough of it. It was positively sickening.’

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‘And yet Thomas Walker advocates the public dinner. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that to

ensure good parochial government, good dinners should be provided for the authorities. The aim should be, he tells us, to procure the best services at the cheapest rate, and in the most efficient way, and there is no system so cheap or efficient as that of the table. The Athenians, in their most glorious days, rewarded their citizens who had deserved well of the State by maintaining them at the public expense in Prytaneum or Council Hall. The table also is a mode of payment for services to be performed which goes further than any other, and will command greater punctuality, greater attention, and greater regularity. When properly regulated it is the bond of union and harmony, the school for the improvement of manners and civilization, the place where information is elicited and corrected better than anywhere else; and I believe, after all,' said Wentworth, 'old Walker was right.'

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'And pray who was Walker?'

'Thomas Walker was the author of "The Original," a book highly popular with our forefathers and well worthy to be read by their sons. Walker was a police magistrate in London. "The Original" appeared in twenty-nine parts. Since then it has been republished in a volume. The first number appeared in May, 1835. He was ill when he commenced it, and died before it was completed. Almost his last essay in it was on "The Art of attaining High Health." It is curious to reflect that it was written by a man at whose door death was already knocking. He died suddenly in Brussels, the early age of fifty-two. By all means, I repeat, read Walker.'

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'So I will. I am quite aware there are two sides to every question.'

'According to Walker, City feasting has many advantages. He is of opinion that it creates a good deal of public spirit; as long as men are emboldened by good cheer, they are in no danger of becoming slaves. The City Halls, with their feasts, their music, their associations, are, he says, so many temples of liberty; and I believe that after all Walker was right I speak from experience; and yet there are evils connected with the system.'

'Evils!' exclaimed indignantly his ascetic friend, 'I believe there are. And last night I saw what I never saw before, and never wish to see again: men dressed in evening costume—respectable people, apparently—all eating and drinking to excess. I hope they all got home, but they could scarcely find their way after dinner to the room where tea and coffee were served up; utterly unable to take a part in any rational conversation.'

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'Ah, again let me quote Walker!' exclaimed Wentworth. "'Anybody can dine, but few know how to dine so as to ensure the greatest quantity of health and enjoyment." I am coming to believe that aristology, or the art of dining, has yet to be discovered. When ladies are admitted to these banquets there will, at any rate, be less of that eating and drinking to excess which so disgusted you last night.'

'Well, the sooner that good time comes the better,' said Wentworth's friend; 'but we have female feasts in Sloville which do a great deal of harm.'

'You amaze me,' said Wentworth. 'What do you call the feast?'

'The Dorcas. It is a society made up of ladies who belonged to the congregation, and who worked at useful articles to be distributed among the poor, the ladies paying half a crown each to buy the material, and putting threepence into the plate handed round at each meeting, to be devoted to the same purpose. On the night when my wife attended, there was an unusually large attendance. The grocer's wife believed in a good cup of tea, and butter which was not margarine, and in other dainties which her guests were not slow to appreciate. To her credit be it said that at no other house had the members such a really good tea. On these occasions a good deal of talk took place.'

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'Said one, "Where is that Jane Brown?"'

"'Oh," said another, "she said she could not leave her mother."

"'A pretty excuse," said another. "I'll be bound to say that if there was any entertainment going on she could manage to leave her mother for that."

"'Ah!" said another old lady, with a shake of her head, "girls are not what they used to be. I don't know what we are coming to."

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"'Oh, you may well say that," said the deacon's wife. "We are living in sad times. It quite grieved me to hear our minister say on Sunday that people believed in Christ. They never did, and they never will. The world will always hate Christ, because of its wickedness. It is only the elect that can be saved. The world, or rather the carnal heart, is always at enmity with God."

"'Yes, dear," repeated the old lady, "you are right there; the wicked won't come to Christ. It is not to be expected as they should."

'Then another interrupted with the remark: "That girl Smith is never seen in the chapel now."

"'Oh no! she takes herself off to Church. She says her mother has been very poor and bad, and no one came near her but the Rector and his wife, who were very kind."

"'Ah, there it is again," said the old lady; "the loaves and fishes."

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"'For my part, I think we're well rid of such people. We don't want 'em, and the Church is quite welcome to 'em. There's that man Brown, who fell off the ladder when he was at work. The

Rector called on him, and sent him a bottle of wine and some cold meat, and he has never been to meetin' since. And now I hear he has sent his children to the Church Sunday-school."

"Well, what can you expect?" replied the old lady. "It is my opinion that that man Brown never had the root of the matter in him at all, and yet I can remember when he used to come to meetin' regular. It is very shocking when people behave like that. The men in the town are getting worse and worse. They tell me there is a lot of low Sunday papers from London come into the town, and the men read 'em all day long."

"Yes," said a gushing girl who was present, and who could keep silence no longer, "that's quite true. When I go round with the tracts they refuse to take them in; and such nice tracts too, it quite breaks my heart. And then there is our new supply; he takes the men's part. He took up one of my tracts the other day and asked me if I really thought working men could stand such reading. I asked him if he read the tracts, and he said no; he thought he could employ his time much better."

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"And yet," said the old lady, "our dear old minister used to say one tract may save a soul; but lor', the young men they send us from the colleges, as they call them, think very little of saving souls."

"I fear that's too true," said the deacon's wife. "People don't preach the Gospel as they used to."

'And that is true,' said the Presbyterian parson to Wentworth. 'They say I am a Unitarian; but the orthodox certainly are much nearer to me than they were. It did them good to hear damnation dealt out to others who did not think as they did. God the Father, Christ the Elder Brother, were little in their thoughts. It was God the Angry Judge, it was Christ saying, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting torment," of whom it did them good to hear. They quite relished the torments—the endless torments of the lost. Not to dwell on them in a sermon was not to preach the Gospel. Hard, stern, unforgiving were these ladies of the Dorcas. It is to be hoped that their charities at Christmas-time to the poor of the meeting, in the shape of flannel and other garments, did good. Charity covers a multitude of sins, and if they talked scandal, why, do not others do the same? A sister with more brains than the rest, and of equal piety, does now and then make a sensible remark. But at any rate, my wife said she would never go to one of their meetings again.'

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'I have heard of it,' said Wentworth; 'but I have never attended one.'

'Be thankful you have not.'

'Why, I thought, in my ignorance, they were gatherings of benevolent ladies, to work for benevolent ends!'

'Ah, that is what they pretend to be, but things are not what they seem. Believe me, Mr. Wentworth, that the Dorcas as it is conducted in country towns is a mockery, a delusion and a snare.'

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Wentworth shook his head and groaned.

'Yes, that is so; my wife went to one, as I have said. It was her first attendance and her last. The professed object was work for the poor, the real one scandal. The women talked of all the other women in the town; how this one went on when her husband was away; how forward was one young miss, and how sly another; how mean was this man, how extravagant that. There was a good deal more talking than working, and the over-righteous were the worst of all, and the most uncharitable. Never was there a more unpleasant display of feminine littleness. But, bless me, I am gossiping myself, when I came here on a very pressing occasion. And now, after this preliminary remark, let us proceed to business. It is one which you can help most materially.'

'Pray proceed,' again remarked Wentworth.

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'It is one that requires a good deal of thinking about.'

'So much the better. I always love to have a nut to crack.'

'We have an old woman in Sloville Workhouse who says there is an heir to the Strahan estates.'

'I know it,' said Wentworth.

'Well, this old woman has told her story all over the town, and everyone believes it.'

'But why did she not tell her story before?'

'Well, her explanation is that the other woman got her to conceal it, with the view of making money, but their difficulty was how to tell a story which would not incriminate themselves. Once or twice she sent an anonymous letter to the late Baronet, but he took no notice of it; and then she tried to speak to him, but he would not let her; and she was terribly afraid of him, as she says he was such a hard, arbitrary, imperious sort of man.'

'Well, we all know he was that,' said the other. 'He certainly was not a man to stick at anything where his passions, or his prejudices, or his interests were concerned. But where is the woman now?'

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'In the workhouse. She says she had quite lost sight of the other one, till she found her in a London hospital, where she went to see her. But the poor thing was too far gone to be of any

good, and now she says they have both been made fools of, and they had better have let the child alone, so far as making any money out of the transaction.'

'Was the new Baronet told of it?'

'He was. I wrote to him on the subject.'

'And what did he say?'

'Virtually that it was like my impudence, and that he hoped he should never hear from me again.'

'Well, that was not encouraging.'

'Then I wrote again.'

'And so did I,' said Wentworth, 'and this was the reply.'

Wentworth read as follows:

"SIR,

"In reply to yours of the 19th inst., I have only to say that I consider your letter founded on complete misapprehension of the facts of the case. The deceased Baronet had no heir but myself, and any attempt to set up a claim on behalf of another will be firmly resisted. Trusting that this is an end of the matter, and that I shall be troubled with no further communications on the subject,

"I am, yours truly,  
"HUGH ROBERT STRAHAN."

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'Now hear the wife. She adds a P.S. as follows:

"I have been informed that you are a writer for the newspapers. Let me hope that you are not one of the Sadducees against whom our Lord warned His disciples. Please read carefully the General Epistle of Jude. If I had the means I should like to see it hung up in all our newspaper offices. Possibly you have met with some of my little tracts. I am not proud of my literary talents. All boasting is unbecoming, and the true humble Christian feels that he is an unprofitable servant after all; but I am constrained to add that with the Lord's blessing they have been made useful in bringing many who were in darkness and sitting in the valley of the shadow of death into His own marvellous light. Be assured that at the throne of grace this morning I particularly remembered the case of your poor *protégé*, who is much to be pitied. Oh, it grieves me to the heart to see how much we all make of wealth and rank! What is gold but dust and ashes? What are titles but less than the small dust of the balance in the eyes of the Lord?"

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'Well, did Sir Watkin ever hear the story?'

'I don't know. The woman told me she left a note for him at the lodge, of which, however, he took no notice.'

'I should think not.'

'And once, she says, she tried to stop him; but he was angry and threatened her, and the police took her off. It was at the time of our last show, when Sir Watkin had, as you can remember, a grand party at the Hall. I never saw him in better spirits. It seemed as if he was going to marry a young lady with what he always wanted particularly—a lot of money.'

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'That's the case, I fear, with most of us.'

'Yes,' said the other. 'In this respect we are most of us on an equality. But I must say this for Sir Watkin, that he would not make money, as some people make it nowadays, by feathering his nest at the expense of the public. It is to his credit that he lent his name to no doubtful speculation, though he was often asked to do so. He never was a company promoter.'

'Well, but about this woman's story?'

'I tell you as she told it me.'

'I know it all,' said Wentworth, 'and have known it long. The Colonel, who claims the entailed estate, is in London. Let us go and see him;' and away they went to hunt him up at a swell military club of which he was a member.

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The new heir was barely civil. When he heard what they had to say, he replied:

'I am sure the family are much obliged to you; but look here, Mr. Wentworth, I am not a lawyer, but I am, I trust, a humble Christian. My wife and I have made this subject a matter of prayer. I have taken it in my closet to the Lord. My conscience approves of the course I take. I am in the path of duty. I have the interests of my family to think of. I don't talk to you as a man of the world. There was a time, I own, when I did belong to that class, but then I knew no better. But I ask you, as a Christian man, how can I act otherwise?'

'Why, you might come and hear what the poor woman has got to say for herself,' said the Presbyterian parson. 'You might follow the clue she might give you. You might save yourself

from what seems to me the commission of a cruel wrong. You might act fairly to a lad who I believe has a better title to the estate than you have. In short, you might do to others as you would have others do to you.'

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'You can quote Scripture, then.'

'Yes, I can; but it seems to be of little use.'

'You are right, sir. We are told the devil can quote Scripture. To the carnal heart the Scripture is a sealed book. It is only as the Spirit opens the eyes of the believer that he can read aught.'

'I thought, on the contrary,' said Wentworth, 'Scripture was so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein. But I did not come to discuss such questions. I have to ask you, sir, to pause before you take possession of the estate.'

'Well, sir,' said the new heir, 'you have come and you have asked me.'

'Yes, and you will pause?'

'Not for an instant. Why should I? By these distressing visitations of Providence, I have come into the possession of property and a title. It is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in my eyes. I never sought this nor expected this.'

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Wentworth looked at the speaker. There seemed no particular reason why the Lord should have interfered in this matter on his behalf, he thought; but then Wentworth was not of the elect, and knew little as to what the Lord was about.

## CHAPTER XXIX. THE COLONEL.

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Society was startled in the autumn of the year to which these events relate by the announcement that Colonel, otherwise Sir Robert Strahan had been shot in a duel on the Belgian frontier. The world wondered why he had to fight a duel. He had the reputation of being an austere and strait-laced man, a great stickler for the proprieties, a strict observer of conventional forms, regular in his attendances on Church ordinances, and very ready to judge harshly of the failings of others. In all the land there was none so proud and priggish, and his wife rejoiced greatly at the work of her hands in transforming a man of the world into a Christian of the regulation pattern.

There were, it is true, many of his fellow-officers and former companions who wondered at rather than admired the change, who questioned its genuineness, and believed, in heart, the Colonel was still the same as when, in his younger days, he played somewhat notoriously the part of a man about town; but then the world is always uncharitable, and its men and women are of a sceptical turn of mind, and ready to doubt people who affect to be superior to their neighbours; and now their hour of triumph had arrived.

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This saintly Colonel was no better than other people. In Brussels, unknown to his wife, he had gambled heavily and incurred great losses. In the public dining-hall of the ancient Spartans there was a notice to the effect that no one was to repeat outside the conversation that took place within. In the club of which the Colonel was a member a similar law of honour prevailed, and as the place was outwardly respectable, and was situated in the most respectable *quartier*, and as its members were men who moved in the first circles on the Continent, it was assumed, of course, that nothing took place but what was respectable. And it was presumed that if its members kept late hours the fact was due to the interesting conversations of the men on the political and other stirring questions of the times. In reality the place was a gambling den of the worst description, where the losers were far greater in numbers than the winners; and amongst the former was our pious Colonel, who had immense faith in his own play, as in everything else that he did, and whose occasional gains, only by confirming his own good opinion of himself, helped him further into the mire.

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Then all at once it became known that the worthy Colonel had other children than his legitimate ones. In certain quarters he passed under a feigned name—as Captain Smith—and children learned to know him under that alias. It was a pleasant retreat for the good man when the old Adam was rather strong and seemed ready to crush the renewed man; and thus he led, as many do, a double life.

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Most men have their weak moments, their time of temptation, and too often they succumb, but then the falling off is only for a time. But in the Colonel's case it had unfortunately grown into a settled habit.

My lady little dreamt of what was passing. She had other things to think of than her husband or his doings. She was active—perhaps, rather too active—in her sphere, in good works. The bluest Evangelical blood was in her veins, and when in London no one was a more frequent visitor to the country houses of pious bankers and brewers than herself. In them she was a diamond of the purest water, shining with every Christian grace and virtue. She had addressed drawing-room meetings, she had aided in many a crusade against Popery and Ritualism and other evil things. If

any Liberal and devoted clergyman was to be persecuted for trying to elevate the people by Christian ideas not in accordance with her own, she was the first to raise the cry of heresy, to rouse up sleepy bishops, to raise the cry of 'Treason in the sanctuary!' to alarm the warders at the gate, to flood the land with cheap tracts and pious newspapers. At Exeter Hall, during the May meetings, there was no more ardent attendant; and her life in Brussels was much the same, though on a smaller scale.

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Once, at Louvain, I saw a statue in the cathedral to the memory of Dr. Stapleton. I could not make out who Dr. Stapleton was, or why he was thus honoured. Baedeker and Murray knew him not. Accidentally one day turning over the pages of Froude—certainly one of the most graceful of historians—I discovered that Dr. Stapleton, living at Louvain, was the means of communication, in the 'spacious times of Queen Elizabeth,' between the Pope on the one side and the Roman Catholics in England on the other. At Brussels her ladyship acted in a similar way, though on a smaller scale. It was she who kept alive the communication between the Belgian and the English Evangelicals, and helped to circulate among the former the goody-goody literature in which the latter greatly rejoiced. Her activity in the matter was intense. She was always writing to England for supplies—which were sent her without any cost to herself—and in her continental drawing-room, and at her receptions, sleek divines and elect ladies were not few, ever ready to bewail the degeneracy of the times, the growth of Popery and Republicanism and Atheism.

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Perhaps it was they who frightened the Colonel away. At any rate it is manifest that he would have been a better husband had she been a better wife. When the news came of his brother's death it is needless to say that the Colonel was quite ready for a change of life and scene. Indeed, Belgium was getting too hot for him. The lady who passed as Mrs. Smith had discovered the real name and status of her protector. One of the boys—the result of this domestic arrangement—had gone to a Protestant meeting, and there on the platform, and as one of the speakers, was Captain Smith—announced to the meeting as Colonel Strahan. It was not long before his mother learned the news, nor was it long before she turned that news, as far as her pecuniary resources were concerned, to uncommonly good account.

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The little domestic arrangement which had been so pleasant at first was now very much the reverse. To shake off the woman was now impossible, and her silence could only be secured at an extravagant price. She had threatened to follow him to Sloville, and it required all his ingenuity to keep the matter a secret.

Already he had made up his mind to stand for the county division; already his name had been ostentatiously paraded as president or vice-president of certain famous religious societies, whose headquarters were London. Already, under the auspices of my lady, the Hall had become the headquarters of the Low Church party.

It was hinted to the Baronet that if he could win the county at the election he might possibly be made a peer. And now this Belgian woman had found him out and rendered his life insupportable. What was he to do? He could not for the life of him tell. There was no one to advise, no one to whom he could tell his trouble. The spirit of a man can sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? One thing he did do, which he had better not have done—he went over to Brussels again to see what could be done. He had better have kept away.

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And there was another matter, too, which gave him trouble. The reputation of the Bank was in danger. At the death of his brother unpleasant rumours respecting its stability had been put in circulation. The late Baronet had, as it was well known, an unpleasant habit of making ducks and drakes of his money. It was the hope of the new one that by his own reputation in pious circles he should be able to live down the evil rumours, and to revive the credit of the Bank. In this way his wife had done him good service, and thus he had secured continued confidence in some quarters and large advances in others. But there were people in the money market who had their suspicions as to the investments of the Bank and the way in which it was managed. More than one capitalist had withdrawn his deposit, and the working partners were growing anxious. Indeed, on the morning of his departure for Brussels they had an interview with Sir Robert on the rather shaky position of affairs. They had lost money on the London Stock Exchange. Some of the mining speculations in which they were engaged had proved disastrous. A great contractor whom they had financed had come to grief. It was true that their London agents had come to their rescue, not that they were over-confident as to the Bank's affairs, but that they feared the panic its suspension would create. But it was believed that the temporary embarrassment might be tided over. Trade was reviving, and already some of their worst investments were taking a hopeful turn. Hope told a flattering tale, and at any rate there was no occasion for despair. Much was expected from the reputation of the new head of the firm in religious circles; much from a more careful conduct of its officers; much from the improved condition of the money market. Still the Baronet was not happy, and it was with anything but a light heart that he set out for the Belgian capital. His wife offered to accompany him, but he declined the offer. In reality she had no wish to go, or she would have gone, you may be sure of that.

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Thus it was in no amiable mood the Baronet once more found himself in his old quarters, in the gay and pleasant city which the clever diplomacy of Lord Palmerston helped to raise to the dignity of a European capital and the seat of a monarchy, which if not ancient is at any rate very respectable. His first object was to keep Mrs. Smith quiet, which, at a considerable cost, he succeeded in doing. Then he dined at the club, drank heavily, played high, lost his money and his temper, and became so insulting to one of the barons with whom he played, that when he got back to the hotel he found there a challenge awaiting him to fight a duel. This was rather more

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than he had bargained for, but he could not help himself. As an officer—though a retired one—he felt that he could not refuse. A hot-headed Irishman acted as his second, and was so charmed with the idea of the *éclat* of having to do with a duel, though only in the capacity of a second, that instead of doing all that he could to put it off, he did all that was in his power to promote it. Accordingly it was arranged that the aggrieved parties should meet in an obscure village on the French frontier, where they would be sure to be unobserved. The Belgian baron's aim was deadly, and Sir Robert Strahan was no more. Short, very short had been his reign, and now it was all over. Speedily was the news telegraphed to the Hall, where everyone was shocked at the unexpected catastrophe. Her ladyship grieved deeply, the girls were in despair. It was hard, just as Providence was opening up a way for their good, and they had conquered the difficulties of a continental exile—it was hard to have all the bitterness of the hated past revived. In due time the body was brought back, and there was another stately funeral and another nine days' wonder. At first everyone attributed the Baronet's death to an accident. Such was the version which it seemed wise for many reasons—family, religious, and commercial—to circulate. But in time the real truth leaked out, first in private letters and then in the society journals; and there came a run on the Bank, which the partners were not prepared to meet, and which they could not have met had they been prepared. And there was no alternative but to put up the shutters and to close the doors.

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Deep and dire was the consternation spread all over Sloville when it was known that the Bank doors were shut. Sloville was a rising place. Some spirited individual or other was always introducing new industries or putting up new buildings. Speculation was rife; and the leading tradesmen had all large accounts at the Bank, as well as the leading hotel-keepers. All the farmers of the district, as their fathers before them, banked in an establishment so ancient, so well-connected, so renowned.

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'They ha' got £500 of my money,' said an angry agriculturist, as he banged away, and banged in vain, at the doors, on which a notice was posted to the effect 'that in consequence of a temporary difficulty the Bank had suspended business for a few days.'

'They might ha' given a fellar a hint,' exclaimed another aggravated individual.

Every minute the crowd increased. Of widows who had put into the Bank their little all—many of them in tears—and of many who had overdrawn their accounts and trembled at what the result might be to themselves, never had there been got together a more excited crowd. Would the Bank open its doors again? Was it possible that they were actually shut? If the Bank were bankrupt, what would be the dividend to be paid? It was the one great topic of discourse at the market, or in the streets, or in the shops and hotels; indeed wherever man met man, even at church doors.

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The Church was hit rather hard, for the money had been nearly raised for the erection of a new church, and all the money subscribed for the purpose had been placed in the Bank. The funds of all the working men's societies had also been placed there, and they were gone—all the hard-earned savings of a life, all the wise provision of the small tradesman or the thrifty operative against a rainy day. Everywhere was grief and disappointment and despair. It was a sorry sight to see the manager, whom everyone in the town regarded as a friend. Never was man more popular or trusted. He always wore a smile upon his face; that smile was gone—vanished as the last rose of summer. He shut himself up, and was to be seen in the streets no more. He had no conception of what was to happen till there came to him a telegram, as he was sitting down to breakfast with his smiling wife and ruddy, fat-cheeked little ones, that he was not to open the Bank doors. And they were never opened again, with the result that many other doors were closed as well, that millowners had to stop, that their workmen had to be discharged, that for many a poor widow had to resort to the workhouse, and that when matters came to be inquired into closely, it was found that the family at the Hall had been the main cause of the calamity which had suddenly overwhelmed the town and neighbourhood.

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Bitter were the denunciations made against them. It was unpleasant. The widow and her daughters wisely fled. They had not been to blame; they were utterly ignorant of the matter—had nothing to do with it in any way, but the public of Sloville regarded them as the worst of robbers, nevertheless. Her ladyship felt that her influence was gone, and she and the young ladies moved to a more congenial neighbourhood, where her ladyship's Christian graces flourished more than ever, and where she was deemed by the select few who gathered at her ladyship's dreary parties as one who had been deeply tried in the furnace of affliction, and who had come out of it as refined gold. It was held, however, as a matter of regret, that on her ladyship's daughters the painful visitation of Providence produced no such hallowed and sanctifying effect. To make matters worse, one of them betook herself to a convent, where, as she told her friends—some of whom, however, rather doubted her statement—she found a peace and happiness she had never known before.

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In due time there was a sale at the Hall, at which all the townspeople attended, glad to run up and down from one room to another, to tread the antique stairs, the stately corridors, and to seat themselves on seats and on sofas, some of which were as old as the days of Queen Anne. Jews from Wardour Street came down in shoals, to pick up articles of bijoutry and vertu, to get hold of the old-fashioned ancestors in enormous waistcoats and knee-breeches and full-bottomed wigs, to do duty elsewhere. Filthy hands dogs'-eared the choice books in the library, while snobs bought the deceased Baronet's carefully-selected stock of wine at absurdly extravagant rates. Everything went to the hammer—carriages and horses, and all the outdoor effects, all the

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farming and agricultural stock. The sale lasted a week, and brought so many people from far and near as to give quite a stimulus, and to give to the place somewhat of its former gaiety. Shopkeepers and hotel-keepers once more began to smile, and thus, in time, the effect of the sad disaster seemed to pass away.

The only thing to be regretted was that the old Hall was doomed. No gentleman would buy it, as it was too near to the town, and no townsman was rich enough to buy such a place to live in. Further, as the Hall was in a tumble-down state, and required a good deal of repair of an expensive character, it was pulled down, and the material distributed all over the county. In time a manufactory occupied the site of the old Hall, and long rows of dull red cottages grew up where once there were velvet lawns, and gravel walks, and beds of roses.

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And thus there vanished for ever from the face of the earth another of

‘The stately homes of England—  
How beautiful they stand  
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,  
Through all the pleasant land.’

It is not always that the stately home is the scene of domestic felicity. It is not true that it is unknown in the humble workman’s home. It is to be believed that, as the workman’s home is elevated, it will be redolent not merely of manly virtues—the ability to fight the battle of life and win—but of the graces which at one time the upper ten seemed to consider as their exclusive privilege; and thus, if the cottager waxes strong, we need not deplore that the stately home with all its high-born associations has passed away.

At Sloville there passed away not only the stately home, but the family that lorded it long. Thus time changes and we change with it. Thus old things pass away and all things become new. Thus we may look for a new heaven and earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness—a righteousness inconsistent with a civilization that pampered the rich and depressed the poor, that desolated the cottage to add to the splendour of the hall. It is of the many, not of the few, that we have to think in these democratic days.

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And the young heir, what became of him? He was little disappointed when it was hinted to him that he was heir to a bankrupt estate and a dishonoured name. He was young, active, healthy, stout-hearted, perfectly willing to fight the battle of life to the best of his ability. He was fond of his profession, had been successful in it, and was in no hurry to relinquish it. He had seen a little of aristocratic life at a distance, and he was not enamoured of it; it seemed to him unnatural and mischievous. They had many lads from our public schools and men from our universities on board ship, and it seemed to him that they were extravagant, thoughtless, fond of pleasure, frivolous, and useless, and brought up in an altogether wrong way. If they did nothing else he held that they smoked and drank and ate more than was good for them, that they wasted a good deal of time in gambling and dissipation, in reading French novels, in the music-hall and the theatre. He did not believe that society was in a good state when the few were born rich and the many poor. All healthy life seemed to him to be founded on hard work; the curse had been changed into a blessing, and man was only happy and kept out of mischief as he lived by the sweat of his brow. A lazy life had no charm for him, even though he lived in a fine mansion, had servants to wait on him, was clad in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. A gentleman in the conventional sense of the term he could never, and would never, be; that, at any rate, was clear.

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‘Well, my boy,’ said the actress, as they met in Liverpool, where they had both come on purpose, ‘what do you think? Would you like to be a gentleman, and lead such a life as your father?’

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‘Certainly not.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because I like hard work. I am comfortable as I am. I am fond of the sea, and if I live to be a captain my utmost ambition will be fulfilled. I have seen a good many gentlemen, on board ship and when I have been to the theatre, and they seem to be a poor, helpless lot, as if they did not know what to do with themselves, with their eyeglasses and their high collars.’

‘But they don’t all wear high collars and eye-glasses.’

‘No, but most of them do.’

‘Think of what you give up—the society of high life—your position in the county.’

‘I have, and I don’t care about it. Swells don’t suit me, and I shan’t suit them. I don’t want to be a landlord where the farmers cannot afford to pay any rent. I don’t want to be bothered with a lot of servants who will be most respectful in my presence, and who will laugh at me behind my back. I don’t want to be stuck up as a mark for needy adventurers and fawning parasites. I cannot believe that society in England will last long in its present position; that the wealth of the country shall be in the hands of the few, who toil not, neither do they spin, and that the men who make that wealth, without whom it could not exist, shall be stowed away in unhealthy cities to live, and breed, and die in such bitterness of poverty as can be found nowhere else. Does not James the Apostle tell the rich man to go to and howl? and I believe that end is near; that is, as soon as the working man has his political rights—a boon that now cannot be long delayed. No,

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property of the kind you speak of has no charms for me; rather give me

“A life on the ocean wave,  
A home on the rolling deep.”

It is thus I can carry out the mission of the age, to break down the barriers created by the prejudices and ignorance of nations, to make men realize by means of international commerce that we are members one of another, and that God has made of one blood “all nations that dwell on the face of the earth.””

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‘Why, my dear boy,’ said the actress, ‘you are quite a Radical, and a philosopher as well. Where did you get your ideas from? From the newspapers?’

‘Not a bit.’

‘Where from then?’

‘From the Book of Books—the Bible. I have loved to think of such things in the watches of the night as I have been alone on deck.’

‘Well, you have thought to some purpose,’ said the actress. ‘Wentworth will be delighted. I am sure you will fall in with our plan.’

‘What is that?’

‘I’ll tell you as soon as I have seen Wentworth.’

‘You’ll hear from me soon,’ said the actress, as she seated herself in the train, and glided along the iron road till London was reached in safety and in good time. Nor were Wentworth and his wife sorry at his decision. They infinitely preferred him as he was, and thus the matter was allowed to drop, to the infinite regret of a sharp firm of City lawyers, who were quite ready to do battle for the lad’s right, with a chance of making money out of the case somehow before they had done with it. The family lawyers were quite content to let things remain as they were. They had lost money by the family, and had no more wish to trouble themselves about their concerns. There was no chance of anyone coming forward to claim the family honours, and the name of Strahan was dropped out of the book of the baronetage of England for ever.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

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### ROSE RETIRES FROM THE STAGE.

‘I think,’ said Rose to her husband that night, ‘I shall give up the stage. I have been without an engagement long; I have refused everything of the kind.’

‘Yet, darling, you are not growing old.’

‘No, it is not that.’

‘But what?’

‘That I care less and less for the artificial atmosphere of the stage. We lead such a conventional life and breathe such a conventional air; there is so much of insincerity. “Suppose any given theatre,” writes Mr. Thomas Archer in one of his clever essays, “suppose any given theatre suddenly turned into a Palace of Truth, and all the members of the company forced to state their true opinion of each other’s performances, the Palace of Truth would be a pandemonium.” And then there are other considerations.’

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‘For instance?’

‘Well, to begin with, the atmosphere of self-consciousness in which the actor lives and moves and has his being. Mr. Henry James tells us the artist performs great feats in a dream; we must not wake him up lest he should lose his balance. The actor, alas! has always to be wide awake—to think of the applause to be won. I am sure too much of that sort of life cannot be good for anyone.’

‘And I have long been expecting you to say as much.’

‘But you are not sorry, are you?’

‘On the contrary; it is the very thing I have been looking for all along. It is nice to feel when the public applaud an actress that she is your own; but how much nicer to feel as I do now,’ said Wentworth, with a loving caress, ‘that she is all my own! You were happy on the stage; you will be ten times happier off it.’

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‘Ah, that I know well enough.’

‘I fancy you little people of the mimic world are rather inclined to overrate your importance. By the side of it the editorial “we” is modesty itself. You actors and actresses are not such great folk after all. Admired one day, forgotten the next! As I think of all the men and women I have known

upon the stage, who were lions of their day, for whom the public went into fits of madness, and then see how completely they are forgotten, it has always seemed to me that to illustrate the vanity of life and the nothingness of human applause I should point to the stage.'

One morning there came the manager of the theatre.

'No, I shall never go back to the stage,' replied the actress.

'Why not, my dear?' said the manager, a gentleman of showy manners, and suspected of being rather over-sweet.

'Because I don't like the life behind the scenes.'

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'I am surprised to hear that. If you knew how young ladies of really good position bother me to give them a trial!'

'Ah, they are ignorant.'

'Yes,' said the manager; 'remember the old lines:

"Where ignorance is bliss,  
'Tis folly to be wise."

'Folly or not,' replied Rose, 'my eyes have been opened by experience. Once I was ignorant as they, and thought how delightful the life behind the scenes must be; but now I know better. I only wish I could have a quiet chat with some of those stage-struck girls, and warn them before it is too late. The life is only possible for the children of parents who are on the stage. It is the atmosphere in which they have been brought up. But as to other girls, the stage is the last thing they should think of if I had my way.'

'But what do you object to?'

'Why, to everything: the language one is obliged to hear; the dresses, which are often actually indecent; the way in which one is persecuted by men supposed to be gentlemen—the free-and-easy way in which they attempt familiarities is decidedly unpleasant. No, I have been behind the scenes; I have no more illusions on that score. I have done with the whole affair. I am off the boards, and I have no wish to reappear on them again.'

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'No money will tempt you?' said the manager.

'None,' was the reply.

'You will be exposed to no inconvenience, you know.'

'That is true; but I should have to give my sanction to much that I disapprove of. You must reform what goes on behind the scenes.'

'Oh, that is impossible.'

'That's what I fear.'

'Well, as you've made up your mind, it is no use, I fear, discussing the subject any longer.'

His appeal was in vain.

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She did not want money, she did not care for applause; she had plenty of excitement in real life. She wanted time to think, and read, and feel. Behind the footlights every night, what time has actor or actress to realize the great ends of life as something real, and not a show with its pretended tragedy or farce?

'In fact,' said the lady, 'I wish to live and not to act.'

'And then return to the stage when you are getting old,' said the manager in dismay. 'Well, the public are indulgent, I admit. A favourite is a favourite, whether old or young. There are old men and women now on the stage who ought to have retired years ago. They cannot act decently; with all their making up they are scarcely presentable. Their memory and their power are gone, or something very like it, still the public applaud. They do not understand what failures the poor creatures have become, and they praise them as liberally as when they were in their prime and could act. One cannot much wonder that under the circumstances the veteran actor lags superfluous on the stage.'

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'But are they not afraid of the newspaper critics?'

Here the manager laughed.

'Excuse me—that is too ridiculous. Who cares for theatrical criticism? Of course, we managers are civil to the critics, who give themselves amusing airs, and have a high opinion of their own abilities, and we get an advertisement gratuitously, which, of course, is an advantage. But a theatrical critic always swims with the stream—applauds what the public applaud, and blames what they blame. The public don't care a rap for the theatrical critic. I often wonder newspaper editors take the trouble to print what they write. That no one reads it, except on a wet Sunday, they know as well as I. But you will come back to us soon?' said the manager, with his most beseeching air.

'No, I think not,' said the lady. 'The life is too exciting to be healthy, either for the heart or the head. It is all very well for a little while, but not for long. I have been happy on the stage, but I believe I shall be equally happy off. Let the younger ones have a chance. Every dog has his day.'

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And the manager departed, thinking that the lady had made a great mistake, that perhaps she only needed a little more pressing. At any rate, he said, as he bowed himself out:

'Madame, you shall hear from me again.'

'It is no use,' was her reply.

'I am glad you have come to such an opinion. I also have obtained my freedom,' said Wentworth. 'My work at the newspaper office is done. It has been rather unpleasant of late. The proprietors depend on the Liberal Government; the Liberal Government fancy that to me it is due that a Tory was returned for Sloville. It was hinted to me that I was too independent—too negligent as to the interests of the party; that I was not severe enough on the sins of the opposition; that, in short, I was not enough of a party hack. Our manager is a keen party man; indeed, he expects one of these days to be knighted. And now I am free, and so are you, and we can set about a work I have long had in contemplation. You and I have often talked of Southey's and Coleridge's pantisocracy—I believe the time has come for some such an enterprise. It is true they never carried it out, it is true that when Robert Owen tried to do something of the kind it failed; but that is no reason why we should fail.'

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'Of course not,' said Rose. 'Yes, let us emigrate. Let us leave Sodom and Gomorrah to their fate. The sooner we are off the better.'

'Let us have old Buxton down to talk over the matter,' said Wentworth, making a signal by applying the poker to the ceiling.

In a moment or two he was in the room, a big burly man, with a big head and a big beard—given to the immoderate use of tobacco; averse to wearing new clothes, and not overfond of soap and water; rather inclined to be lazy; ready to say with Lord Melbourne, when reforming action was proposed: 'Why can't you leave it alone?' Such men have their uses in a land where fussy people—as much with a view to their own personal gratification as to the welfare of the public—are always putting themselves forward; attempting to wash the blackamoor white, to have the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots.

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'What's up now?' said he as he shuffled in. 'You look uncommonly grave.'

'Listen to me,' said Wentworth. 'You have read my article in this morning's paper?'

'Not a line.'

'Read it then.'

Buxton shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

Wentworth continued:

'Listen to my ideas, which I have published in the paper.'

'By all means.'

'If in the multitude of counsellors there is safety, the England of to-day has little to fear, in spite of the undeniable facts that she is losing her trade and commerce, that her national debt seems impossible of payment, that her expenditure increases as her income declines, and that the unemployed and pauper class threaten, like the lean kine Joseph saw in his dream, to swallow up all the rest. As long as I can remember I have heard statesmen, and clergymen of all denominations, and politicians of all creeds, say something must be done; and they are still saying it in the most hopeless of tones, and with air the most dejected. We have not had our French Revolution yet. At the worst, the hungry mobs have contented themselves with an occasional raid on an unfortunate butcher or baker, or on some imprudent jeweller, whose attractive windows have proved too strong a temptation for the horny-handed. In the meanwhile, people of a hopeful turn of mind tell us—and truly—that the working classes were never better off, better paid, or better fed. But still, somehow or other, it is apparent that outside of the hopeless pauperism which the idiotic legislation of our fathers has called into existence—outside the depraved, whom drink and dishonesty have removed from the ranks of labour, to swell the bitter cry which ever ascends from city slums, where all foul things congregate, and where decent life is impossible—there are hundreds, nay, thousands, who are ready to work, but for whom, though to seek it they rise early and sit up late, no work is to be had. Is there any hope for such? Are they to be uncared for till they have lost all heart, and sink down to the pit of misery and despair, never more, till death comes to them as a friend, to rise again? Is it not time that we think of them? In Ireland, a hundred patriots would have rent the air with the story of their wrongs. In England, we take small note of them. Yet they are our flesh and blood, with honest hearts and hands. A scheme has been devised for their benefit. That it is worth a trial, few who can examine it can doubt.'

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'The idea of this new remedy is that, now when agricultural land is to be had for next to nothing, farms should be bought on which home colonies may be planted, and labour provided sufficient for self-support.'

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'The fact is,' said Wentworth, 'we have rather a grand scheme in view. A gentleman is ready to purchase land in America or Canada or one of the Colonies; to plant it with poor people who can find no work at home, nor are likely to do so, if they stop here all their lives. And he wants me to go out as manager; I am quite ready to do so. And Rose is anxious for the experiment to be tried—indeed, far more so than myself.'

'That is a matter of course—novelty has always charms for woman.'

'And woman,' said Rose, 'is always ready to lend a helping hand to any philanthropic scheme.'

'Well, it requires a good deal of thinking about.'

'And we have thought about it long,' said Wentworth; 'and the more we think about it the better we like it. But we want you to accompany us.'

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'In what capacity?'

'As medical man.'

'And you think I would turn my back on London, and give up my easy life, to undertake all this responsibility?'

'Well, I don't see why you should not,' said Wentworth. 'You are not doing much good here, you know.'

'And why should I, when everyone is fussing about doing good and in the meantime doing a great deal of mischief, interfering with the working of the unalterable laws of the universe, washing blackamoors white, trying to make empty sacks stand upright?'

'Yes, but we are going to do nothing of the kind. We are only finding homes and work for men and women who can find in the old country neither the one nor the other—to save them from sinking into hopeless pauperism, to help them to live happy and healthful lives. What have you to say against our scheme?'

'Really, now I think about it, I can't say anything against it, supposing that you have a proper site for the experiment, that you take proper people, and that you have sufficient capital to make a fair start.'

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'Oh, as to that, everything has been provided for. Each colonist will have a bit of ground, which he will pay for in time by his labour. We intend working on the old lines, not to be led away by communistic ideas. Each man will do the best he can for himself, and in so doing will be best for all. What do you think, Buxton, of the scheme?'

'Why, like all her ladyship's ideas, it is excellent.'

'Pretty flatterer!' said Rose.

'He wants to cut me out,' said Wentworth. 'He was always envious of my superior abilities.'

'As he had every reason to be,' said Rose.

'Come, that's too bad,' said Buxton, turning to Rose, 'after the way in which I buttered you up just now. Two to one ain't fair. But to return to business.'

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'Hear, hear,' said Wentworth.

'If I had a family—which, thank Heaven, I have not—I would not stop in England a day. If I had a lad to plant out in the world as you have, I'd send him off to America or the Colonies to-morrow.'

'Because?'

'Because it's all up in old England in the first place; and in the second place, because if it were not so, the New World offers better opportunities for a young fellow than the old. May I dwell upon these topics?'

'Certainly, by all means.'

'Well, I have met a good many Americans lately, and they have put new ideas into my head—'

'Not before they were wanted!' said Wentworth.

'Speak for yourself, sir, if you please,' said Buxton, with an assumed offended air.

'Oh, I beg pardon! Pray proceed.'

'I was going to say,' said Buxton, 'until interrupted in this unmannerly manner, you are enthusiasts, I am not. I doubt the dream of a new heaven and a new earth. It has done good in its time, I admit. It was the thought of the Messiah that was to come that nerved the heart of the Jew as he sat by the waters of Babylon and wept as he remembered Zion. Paul and the Apostles expected the new heaven and the new earth before they laid down their lives as martyrs for their inspiring faith. Upheld by the same living hope, tender and delicate maidens have gone to the grave exulting, and have glorified God at the stake or in the dungeon or on the scaffold. "The end of all things is at hand," is ever the cry of the churches. It was that of Luther in his day, and is that of the Evangelicals in ours, who, if an earthquake destroys a town, or a deluge sweeps over the land, or the cholera breaks out in the East, or there are wars and rumours of wars, tell

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us these are the dread signs to mark the coming of the Son of Man with His saints to judge the earth. I feel rather inclined to believe with old Swedenborg that that day is past. The talk of a Millennium makes me sick. It is a delusion and a sham. Such men as Dr. Cumming, with their long array of dates and their wild dreams of the fulfilment of prophecy, make men like myself sceptics. It is clear to us that the odds, at any rate, are against the Christian.'

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'I don't know,' said Rose. 'But this is a business scheme. We are not in search of the Millennium.'

## **CHAPTER XXXI. CHIEFLY ABOUT THE LAND.**

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For three months an Englishman sits in sackcloth and ashes. The matter-of-fact reviewer will tell me this is not so; and he is right and so am I.

London is not a place to live in in winter; there is, unfortunately, no place in England that is. People talk of the weather. They cannot help themselves. In his old age Dr. Johnson wrote, 'I am now reduced to think and am at last content to talk of the weather.' That was a sign that the Doctor at last had fallen low. As Burney writes: 'There was no information for which Dr. Johnson was less grateful than for that which concerned the weather.' If any one of his intimate companions told him it was hot or cold, wet or dry, windy or calm; he would stop them by saying: 'O-oh, O-oh! You are telling me of that of which none but men in a mine or a dungeon can be ignorant. Let us bear with patience or enjoy in quiet elementary changes either for the better or the worse, as they are never secrets.' Nevertheless, the state of the weather continues in all circles an unailing theme. Bad weather affects the spirits by depressing them, fine raises them. We are attuned to every action of the outer atmosphere. Our suicides in November are known all the world over. It is scarcely possible to be cheerful on a dull, cold, raw, foggy day. I wonder people who can afford to go away and have no pressing claims at home do not rush off to the Riviera in search of its blue sky, its summer suns, its wealth of flowers, its richer life for the delicate, or the infirm or old.

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'We must get out of England,' said Wentworth to his wife, one dull wintry morn, when the raw cold seemed to fill every apartment in the house, and the outlook into the busy street only revealed half-starved figures in all their wretchedness. 'We must get out of England, and the sooner the better.'

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'Yes, I've long been thinking so; but the question is, where to go. We have got to think of other people besides ourselves, and of other affairs than our own. But with our tastes and habits we can live cheaply anywhere, and I have no wish to go where we shall meet a lot of idle rich people only seeking to guard themselves from the English winter and spending life in frivolous indulgence. Let us take the question seriously.'

'That is just what I am trying to do,' was the reply. 'We are not too old for a grand experiment.'

'But are you prepared to give up journalism?'

'Yes, I am. I see a new spirit abroad, one which I detest.'

But one thing remained to Wentworth of the teaching of his early years: a love of Liberal principles; an enthusiasm for humanity; a deep yearning for the mental and moral elevation of the people—ideas deeply cherished in the Nonconformist families of the past generation. In every home the struggle for reform, the hatred of slavery, the desire to give the Roman Catholics fair play, the struggle for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the need of a national and unsectarian system of education, were held to be objects of paramount importance, and were the subjects of daily converse. In every rural village meetings were held at the chapels in their favour, and if there were no great orators to attend them, what was said at them sank into prepared soil, and bore a rich harvest. It was in East Anglia as it was all over England. The agitation went from one chapel to another. A line of communication was thus established, wrote William Hazlitt, whose father was a Unitarian minister in Shropshire, by which the flame of civil and religious liberty is kept alive, and nourishes its smouldering fires, unquenchable like the fires in the Agamemnon of Æschylus, placed at different stations that waited for ten long years to announce with their blazing pyramids the destruction of Troy. It was from such centres came the soldiers who were to win the people's victories in spite of the nominees of Tory lords and rotten borough-mongers, of pensioners and place-men, of time-serving priests and fawning courtiers who then ruled the land, and who fattened on the taxes wrung from an unrepresented and oppressed and a discontented—and a justly discontented—nation. Young hearts burned within them as they listened to Liberal orators, or read the speeches of such men as Henry Brougham or Dan O'Connell, or studied Liberal newspapers; and they longed for the time when they, too, should gird on the shield and buckler and do battle for the Right. In vain timid ministers and aged deacons uttered warning voices and shook their heads at the new spirit which was abroad, quoted Scripture about obeying them that have rule over you, hinted at the danger to spirituality of life and feeling by mixing in the rough warfare of the political world. As well might they scream to the stormy blast. The current was too strong: they had to swim with it or be drowned.

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It was a grand time of awakening. The world has seen nothing like it since. To Wentworth it was a baptism, the effect of which was never to pass away. Buxton, as usual, continued his morning smoke.

'Hear me,' said Wentworth, as Rose rushed out of the room, declaring that she knew all he had to say. Wentworth continued: 'As long as I can remember, the "condition of England question," as Carlyle called it, or, as we term it, in more sensational phraseology, "the bitter cry of the outcast," has afforded painful matter of reflection to the statesman, the philanthropist, the philosopher, and the divine. It is always coming to the front, and it will always be coming to the front, even if you hang all the bad landlords and jerry-builders, get rid of the bloated capitalist, and divide the estates of the aristocracy and the millions of the capitalists among the poor of the East-end. The working classes are not to be confounded with the men and women who herd like beasts in the wretched dens of the east. Underneath the lowest of them there is a conservative residuum whom it is impossible to get rid of, whose condition it is appalling to contemplate. They are the men who won't work; who won't go where work is to be had; who come to London when they should never have left their country home; who sell their manhood for a pot of beer: casuals who, born in a poor-house or a prison, children of shame from the first, mostly spend their lives alternately tramping the streets and in the workhouse or the gaol. As London increases in population, so do they. We have seen such men offered fair work by hundreds, but they prefer filth and laziness, with the chance of an appeal to the humane. "Pull down the rookery," and the rooks won't fly away. Burn all the fever and vice laden dens of the outcast, and there he is still, a disgrace and shame—not so much, as sensational writers pretend, to our civilization and religion as to our common manhood. Ever since we have known anything of the churches—whether Established or Free—it seems to us that they have aimed as much at the temporal as the spiritual improvement of the outcast. We have yet to learn that it is a disgrace to our civilization that it does not interfere with God's law, that the wrong-doer must pay for his wrong-doing, whatever that may be—that if you lose your chance, another will take it—that it is too late to go harvesting in winter; that the victory is to the strong, that he that will not work shall not eat—those who forget this, who idle away the precious moments, are soon sitting in the outer darkness of the outcast, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

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'It amuses us, or would, were not the subject so awful—for it may be taken as a sober truth that outside the bottomless pit there is no such utter damnation as is to be found among the outcast—to find clever writers talking of the constant neglect of the last hundred years, and to ponder over the remedies. It is now the fashion to recommend better houses to be built at the expense of the community. If we were to get free trade in land, more will be done to remove the congestion in our great cities than by the erection of improved dwellings, which will rather intensify the evil. The more society does for the outcast the more will their number and their poverty alike increase. The remedy is worse than the disease. Every halfpenny you give to the undeserving is so much taken from the deserving. Every benefit you confer on the pauper is at the expense of the honest, respectable poor, who have a prior claim. Against State action the argument is still stronger. In the first place, the State cannot deal honestly and fairly by the people. What it does is ill done, and at double expense. The people who pay the taxes are often as badly off as those for whose benefit they are spent. A slight addition to the taxation of a wealthy peer or capitalist will not deprive him of a single luxury, but it may send a small, struggling tradesman into the *Gazette*. We are a nation of shopkeepers, and it is easy to perceive that a time may come when our heavy taxation may cripple us in our trade with foreign competitors, when they will supply the markets, on which we have hitherto depended, when, in fact, we shall have little left to us but our National Debt.'

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'Go on,' said Buxton. 'You are getting rather prosy, but if it relieves your feelings, pray proceed.'

'Well, then,' said Wentworth, 'I will. A gentleman sends me a scheme of a cooperative home colony, which will give the settlers three good meals a day, a house, a full suit of clothing every year, education for their children, and an allotment of half an acre of land, which shall be entirely at the disposal of the head of the family so long as he makes a good use of it and renders proper service during the regular working hours. For the purchase of fuel or tea and coffee, and such things as cannot be grown in this climate, the director will sell in the public market any surplus produce such as eggs, butter and poultry, far too much of which we get from abroad. One-sixth of the harvest and other produce will be sold to pay the salaries of director and foremen. A farm of three hundred and forty acres in the Isle of Sheppey, for instance, can be had if it be deemed desirable. If we get a population of five hundred on it, fifty acres of wheat will supply the settlement with all the bread that can be eaten there. If the cows were stall-fed, one hundred acres of land would keep over a hundred head of cattle, and such a herd would supply all the requisite milk, cheese, butter, beef and hides every year in abundant quantities. Flax could be cultivated and linen woven. A flock of sheep could be tended on the estate sufficient to yield five pounds of wool every year per head of the population. There would be no expense for manure, as the settlement would provide it all. Are you weary?' said Wentworth.

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'Not particularly. Pray proceed. But why not try it—why not begin a scheme of the kind at once?'

'All we have to do is to get the people back to the land. By the establishment of such home colonies work will be offered in rural districts to men and women who would otherwise be driven into our great cities to increase the pauperism which threatens our whole social edifice. The scheme, if carried out, will encourage habits of industry and thrift—unlike the work given in our workhouses, which demoralizes and degrades the recipients; it will help the societies instituted



to distribute charity, as it will offer strong men and women healthy labour rather than doles, which they are ashamed to accept, which they do not ask for, and which, when taken, have a tendency to break down that spirit of independence and self-reliance which lies at the foundation of all decent manhood; and lastly, and this is an immense benefit, it would prevent land now in cultivation from becoming a desert. It seems to me this of itself is no common recommendation of the plan, when farmers are giving up farming, and their farms either allowed to run to waste or farmed by the landlords at a heavy loss. Our great Free Traders never dreamt of this when they got Parliament and the people to destroy Protection, yet such are the facts we have to face.'

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'And yet there are people who believe in Cobden still,' said Buxton.

'I knew him well,' said Wentworth, 'and a better man never lived. He was right in the main, though his enthusiasm led him astray, and no wonder. Let me, in the language of Goldsmith remind you—

"How wide the limits stand  
Between a splendid and a happy land."

Buxton laughed when Wentworth had finished his rhapsody. Buxton was given to laughter. He was not a man who took life very seriously. Perhaps he would have done better had he done so as far as his own personal interests were concerned. As Swift said of Arbuthnot, it might be said of him, that he knew his art better than his trade.

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'Wait a moment,' he said, as he rushed out of the room to his own den, whence he returned with an old faded handbill, which was as follows:

#### SPENCE'S PLAN

for Parochial Partnerships in the Land  
is the only effectual remedy for the  
distress and oppressions of the people.  
The Landholders are not Proprietors-in-Chief;  
they are but the *Stewards* of the Public,  
for the LAND IS THE PEOPLE'S FARM.  
The expenses of the Government do not cause the  
misery that  
surrounds us, but the enormous exactings of those  
*Unjust Stewards*,  
Landed monopoly is indeed equally contrary  
to the benign  
Spirit of Christianity, and destructive of  
the Independence and Morality of Mankind.  
'The Profit of the Earth is for all.'  
Yet how deplorably destitute are the great mass of the  
People!  
Nor is it possible for their situations to  
be radically amended but  
by the establishment of a system  
founded on the immutable bases of  
Nature and Justice.  
Experience demonstrates its necessity, and the  
Rights of Manhood  
require it for their presentation.

To obtain this important object by extending the knowledge of the above system, the Society of Spencean Philanthropies has been established. Further information of its principles may be obtained by attending any of its sectional meetings, where subjects are discussed calculated to enlighten the human understanding; and where, also, the regulations of the society may be procured, containing a complete development of the Spencean system. Every individual is admitted free of expense who will conduct himself with decorum.

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'I never heard of Spence,' said Wentworth.

'Of course not,' said Buxton. 'In these days of boasted progress we know nothing of what has been. Radicals always ignore the past. You really need a little enlightenment. Shall I enlighten you?'

'By all means.'

'It was in 1775 Mr. Spence began his public career. Like most original thinkers, he commenced in the country. His political opinions were first pronounced in the form of a lecture read before the Newcastle Philosophical Society in 1775, and printed immediately afterwards, from which time, he says, he went on continually publishing them in some shape or other. They are fully explained in his "Constitution of Spensonia: a Country in Fairy Land Situated Somewhere between Utopia and Oceana." According to his scheme, the land belongs to the people, and individuals should rent the land from their respective parishes, the rent constituting the national revenue, and the surplus, after all expenses were paid, was to be divided equally amongst all the

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parishioners. The larger estates were to be let for one-and-twenty years, and at the expiration of that term relet by public auction, the smaller ones by the year, and the larger ones sub-divided according to the increase of population. The legislative power was to be vested in an annual Parliament elected by universal suffrage, women voting as well as men. The executive was to be in the hands of a council of twenty-five, half of which was to be renewed annually. Every fifth day there was to be a Sabbatical rest, not a Sabbath, for no provision was made for public worship, and in the new world no mention was to be made of parsons, though the constitution was to be proclaimed in a more or less religious form. At the end of the pamphlet, as it was published, was an epilogue, intimating the flight of poverty and misery from this lower world, and there was an appeal:

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“Let us all join heart and hand  
Through every town and city,  
Of every age and every sex,  
Young men and maidens pretty,  
To haste this golden age’s reign  
On every hill and valley,  
Then Paradise shall greet our eyes  
Through every street and alley.”

‘Ah,’ said Wentworth, ‘I see there is nothing new under the sun.’

‘But the taxes?’ said Buxton. He continued: ‘This scheme was published long before the French Revolution broke out. Up in the north there had risen a solitary and original thinker who advocated female voting, universal suffrage, annual Parliaments, and had got hold of the idea—which has led many of our modern apostles to fame and fortune—that the land lay at the root of the Condition of England question, that all private property in land must be destroyed, and that it must be done at once.’

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‘Spence, then, was, to use the cant of the present day, a Progressist. To him belongs the honour of having first presented the land question in all its bearings to the general public. What was his reward?—a Government prosecution with a fine of £20 and a year’s imprisonment at Shrewsbury. Well might a nobleman, as Wilberforce tells us, show him the picture of crucified Christ, and bid him mark the end of a Reformer.’

‘One cause of Spence’s failure is obvious—he tried to do too much. “When I began to study,” says he, “I found everything erected on certain unalterable principles. I found every art and science a perfect whole. Nothing was in anarchy but language and politics. But both of these I reduced to order; the one by a new alphabet, the other by a new constitution.” Of what he called his natural or philosophical orthography we know but little, save that one of his works was printed in it. Had he aimed at less he would have accomplished more. He was no vulgar demagogue; that trade was not a paying one when Spence proclaimed himself “the unpaid advocate of the disinherited seed of Adam.” “This, gentlemen,” he exclaimed when on his trial—he was too poor to retain attorney or counsel for his defence—“this, gentlemen, is the Rights of Man; and upon this Book of Nature have I built my commonwealth, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” He added, as well he might: “I solemnly avow that what I have written and published has been done with as good a conscience and as much philanthropy as ever possessed the heart of any prophet-philosopher or apostle that ever existed.”

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‘It was all in vain. The Government of the day feared the result of his teaching. Had he set up for a philosopher and clothed his ideas in mystic language, perhaps he might have been overlooked; but he published what he called “Pig’s Meat” for the people, and that made him dangerous. He had no friends and became an easy prey. He was poor, he stood alone, and was generally held to be little better than a lunatic; even the professed friends of liberty kept aloof from him. Well might he exclaim, as he did before his judges, “Perhaps, my lords, I have entertained too high an opinion of human nature, for I do not find mankind very grateful clients.” After his trial and imprisonment Spence became an itinerant vendor of books and pamphlets, chiefly his own works, which he carried about in a vehicle constructed for the purpose. He died somewhere about 1812, while Britons were hard at work on sea and in every land in Europe setting right public matters according to their fashion—paying foreigners to fight for their own independence, singing all the while that they never would be slaves.’

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‘We are wiser now,’ said Wentworth.

‘Perhaps,’ was the cynical reply. ‘You are everlastingly talking,’ he continued, ‘of an outcast London; but, after all, it is on outcast London that the chief blame of its misery lies. Let us have an Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and at once, in outcast London, where boys and girls become fathers and mothers before they are out of their teens, and when they have no chance of earning a living, and know not and care not for the little ones they bring into the world. In respectable London a man does not marry till he fancies he can keep a wife. In outcast London it is the reverse. In such a case population represents the thoughtlessness of the nation. In many cases it represents the most brutal selfishness. Men and women can’t complain if they reap what they have sown; but have not we a right to say a word on behalf of the children? For men and women to bring up their children in the way in which it is done in outcast London is a crime. To bring a baby into the world to lead a diseased and wretched life where it can never get a mouthful of wholesome food, a ray of sunlight, a particle of fresh air, to curse a young life that God meant to be so full of bliss, is a crime so awful that we can see no fitting punishment. To

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improve outcast London the first thing is to stop the supply. There is no remedy if reckless pauperism is to be allowed to grow rampant in our midst.

'One word more,' said Wentworth. 'Suppose we think more of the decent poor, and less of the outcast. Suppose we give the respectable working man as much sympathy as we give his good-for-nothing brother. Suppose we take the sober operative as much by the hand as we do the inebriate. Suppose we act on the idea that industry is honourable, and that the men who live by it are men to be honoured; that the world with all its blessings is for the worker, whether he tills the soil or ploughs the deep, whether he builds the loftiest viaduct or burrows in the deepest mine.'

## CHAPTER XXXII. CONSULTATION.

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They were sitting one morning at breakfast—that pleasantest of meals, unless you have to be up at an unusually early hour to catch the train and be off to London. Modern life is not such an improvement on that of the past as we are apt to fancy. The breakfast was the one meal at which people could meet and discuss matters—private, local, political, literary, or religious, in an informal way. We have no pleasant breakfast in these more ostentatious days, when society is too large to admit of friendship; but it seems to me that in my younger days we got a good deal more pleasure out of life. No wonder, then, that we sigh for the good old times, and long for their revival; that we have Queen Anne furniture, and houses built in what is called the Elizabethan style, and an effort to do away with the rail, and to revive the far-famed coaches with four horses which were the delight of the nation in the Georgian days.

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I can call well to mind the time when I held the coachman of a certain Royal Mail, which made its appearance in our benighted village about breakfast-time, to have been one of the most eminent men of the day, and felt at least a foot taller when, as was his wont, he gave me, boy as I was, a friendly nod of recognition. As to seeing the horses changed, that was a scene I would not have missed on any account. How we all stood admiring as the panting steeds, which had galloped gloriously their stage, were led sweating away, and the fresh team, with cloths on, and their hoofs newly-cleaned, and everything about them bright and shiny, took the vacant places! What a pleasure it was to see them as they stood pawing the ground, impatient to be off! How glad we were when the coachman, as he climbed up into his lofty seat, and gathered up the reins in his capacious hand, gave the signal, 'Let 'em go!' How beautiful it was to us lads to see the coach bound off like a thing of life, while the guard blew a farewell flourish on his horn, and the horses settled down steadily to their work after a playful flourish or two!

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Woe is me! I, and other miserable sinners like unto me, come to town through tunnels, and over the tops of houses, or along cuttings in which one gets an unlovely view of the backs of dirty houses and slovenly yards, in a closely-packed railway carriage, where we can neither talk, nor hear, nor read, and grow nervous as the engine screams and shrieks on all occasions, while the railway porters close the doors with a bang sufficient to send one into a fit. Life in our railway age is hard for us all.

Wentworth and his wife were at breakfast, as I have said. London had been disturbed by rumours as to the claim to the titles and estates of the deceased Baronet. Newspapers were not so full of twaddle as they are now; that spawn of the press, the newspaper interviewer, had not as yet sprung into existence. But still then, as now, there was a great deal of unmeaning gossip that did manage to find its way into the columns of the weekly and daily journals. It has ever been so. Apparently, it seems as if it ever will be so. The fashion originated in the servants' hall. 'A chambermaid to a lady of my acquaintance,' writes Dean Swift, 'when talking with one of her fellow-servants, said: "I hear it is all over London already that I am going to leave my lady."' In this respect she resembled the footman who, being newly married, desired his comrade to tell him freely 'what the town really thought of it.' From the servants' hall the habit spread to Grub Street, and thence to the West-End, to become the leading feature in journals only written for men, or gentlemen, or ladies, as circumstances required. We laugh at the old divine who wrote a threepenny pamphlet against France, and who, being in the country, hearing of a French privateer hovering along the coast, fled to town and told his friends that they need not wonder at his haste, which he accounted for from the fact that the King of France, having got intelligence of his whereabouts, had sent a privateer on purpose to carry him away. How ridiculous was good Dr. Gee, Prebendary of Westminster, who wrote a small paper against Popery! Being ordered to travel on the Continent for his health, he disguised his person and assumed another name, as he fancied he would be murdered, or put into the Inquisition. But are we less ridiculous, or rather has not that ridiculous exaggeration of the personal, which is the foundation of newspaper twaddle, become more of a nuisance than ever?

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Again, we all of us think too much of money and money-making. Is it not time that we utter a word of warning in the matter? It is inconvenient to have no money, most of us know by practical experience; but the possession of much of it is not after all a guarantee of respectability of character, or individual capacity. We call ourselves a Christian people, we profess to be actuated by Christian principles. The Master was a poor man—a carpenter's son—His disciples were poor

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men. If any class are particularly referred to in the New Testament as far from the kingdom, they are the rich. All modern society is based on the opposite idea. We give the rich man the chief place in the synagogue. The society journals delight to do him honour. He has even made church-going the fashion. This is no age of poor geniuses. Our artists, our poets or teachers are all of the well-to-do. A Burns, or a Bloomfield, would be thought nothing of in our time. The modern woman is impossible in a poor community. When a lady writer is described in our magazines and newspapers, the writer dwells at painful length on the costliness of her surroundings; her dresses, her parties, the expensiveness of her furniture, and the signs of wealth she everywhere displays. The millions—how they toil and how miserably they live! The rich—what an idle life they lead! And then think of the way in which that wealth, which is often a curse to them, is obtained! Far away indeed is the new heaven and the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness; infamous as are the means by which the wealth we envy and admire is obtained, how ready we are to do homage to its possessor, poor as he may be in spirit, and unclean and unlovely in his life! Wentworth saw, as we all do, this unsatisfactory side of all human affairs. The time had come, he thought, for an effort for something better, for a state in which the wealth earned by the labourer should be more equitably distributed. There was a divine order in life, he believed, which had been lost sight of, and forgotten, and the result was unmitigated poverty and wretchedness. For this society was responsible, and especially its rulers, who had increased the sufferings of the poor, who had trampled on the weak, who had played into the hands of the rich and the strong; he did not believe, as some of our modern lights do, that the masses were always right and the classes always wrong. It seemed to him that there were good and bad amongst them all, that circumstances were such, that there was little hope of change for the better. Circumstances were too strong for the individual to conquer. Take intemperance, for instance, the main cause of England's wretchedness; how is it possible to grapple with that in society, where intoxicating drink is deemed, in most circles, a daily necessity of life?

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'You must form new social conditions,' said Buxton as he entered: 'I have just left,' he said, 'a friend of mine. We were fellow students. He was the leader in all the classes, and graduated with high honours. He took his doctor's degree and then became a clergyman, acquired great popularity, was the means of drawing together a large congregation, became one of the ornaments of the temperance platform, was for awhile a power in Exeter Hall, had everything that heart could wish, a charming wife, a comfortable income, a large family; and now he has become a sot and a drunkard, and I see no hope for him as long as he lives. I can only believe that he was born with a hereditary taint—and that after fighting against it all his life, it has broken out at last and proved his master.'

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'Then you think drunkenness is a disease, and that a man is not responsible for it?'

'In many cases I do, and I smile when I hear the parson denounce him as guilty of a heinous sin, or the judge brand him as a criminal offender. Examine the drunkard's body after death, and you see in the stomach, in the liver, in the heart and brain signs of a diseased condition. At the same time, I am ready to admit that there are many who drink out of mere cussedness or who are so wretched that they take to it for temporary relief; or who just drink because they live in a drunken set, and like to do as others around them do. Whatever the immorality, the vice, or the sin of drunkenness, in a very large number of cases the drunkard is more to be pitied than blamed, as the subject of disease. If you get him to take the pledge, the chances are that he will break it, and that the last state of that man will be worse than the first.'

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'Ah! that helps me to what I have been long thinking of,' replied Wentworth.

'What is that—a community planted where no drink can be had? That is all very well; but while you are about it, you may as well go a step further. There are other hereditary diseases besides drunkenness: why permit them? Man is an animal,' said Buxton. 'I am, of course, speaking only from a medical point of view. What do we do with animals? Why, we stamp out the disease, and thus we get a new generation. It is thus we battle with lung disease in bullocks, swine fever and glandered horses. We must stamp out disease in men and women as we stamp it out of other animals.'

'And then pay compensation to the owner. That would be rather a costly matter.'

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'No; I would put it the other way. Take, for instance, a consumptive couple in humble life. They marry early. The mother has a large family. The father dies of consumption before he has reached middle age, after being in a hospital for months, supported at the public expense, and he leaves his children, if they live, to be supported by the parish. If there is to be compensation, it is not the State that ought to be asked to pay it. If drink be one cause of poverty, surely hereditary disease is another. In a perfect community neither should be allowed to exist. Think of such awful things as epilepsy and insanity, and cancer and scrofula, none of which science can cure! Why not ask society to stamp them out? It is downright wickedness to allow them to be propagated in our midst.'

'Public opinion would never consent to that.'

'No,' replied Buxton; 'I am quite aware of that; but I would create a public opinion that would regard such marriages with horror, and then they would gradually become rare. Men and women have duties to society, and have to think of something else than the gratification of selfish passion or mere animal instinct. It is thus hereditary disease may disappear, and the nation be all the stronger and happier and richer. I know there are good people who look upon such

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afflictions as the result of the Lord's chastening hand, and as they bury wife, or husband, or son, or daughter, learn to kiss the rod—as they call it—and to thank the Lord that He thus is weaning them from the world, and preparing them for a better world, whither they tell us their loved ones are already gone. I have no sympathy with that state of mind. It seems to me almost blasphemous, as the bereavements they rejoice in for their supposed sanctifying effects are simply the natural result of their own folly and imprudence and disregard of natural law. In the days of ignorance how did we treat the insane? Why, they were regarded as victims of Divine wrath, and the priest was called in—and of course well paid—to exorcise the evil spirit. That we do not do so now is a proof that we are a little wiser than our fathers—that, in fact, we are not quite such thundering fools; but we have a good deal yet to learn, nevertheless.'

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'The fact is,' said Wentworth, 'a man must learn to deny himself for the public good. Rather a difficult task that. If the victim of hereditary disease refuses to marry and have children, hereditary disease will die out. Is not that asking too much of human nature?'

'There we must appeal to the law for the protection of the general public. The community is of more importance than the individual.'

'But there is no law that cannot be evaded.'

'Exactly so. Laws against drunkenness are constantly broken, but they have a beneficial effect nevertheless. A prohibitory liquor law goes too far. To act on the idea that a glass of claret, or beer, or cider does mischief to anyone is absurd. Walter Mapes was right when he wrote in praise of drink. As the old monk writes—

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“A glass of wine amazingly enliveneth one's internals.”

'You are right there,' replied Wentworth. 'Last summer I was at a seaside watering-place. There had been a regatta there, and I had written a description of it for our paper. In a day or two after the event was celebrated by a grand dinner at the leading hotel, to which I was invited. Unfortunately, on the day of the dinner I was desperately ill. My head was splitting; my skin was as tough as the hide of a rhinoceros; I ached in every limb. I went to the medical men of the district; there were two of them in partnership. No. 1 made me believe that I was in a bad way; No. 2 made me out worse. "Could I go to the dinner?" I asked. "By no means," was the reply. "Take this medicine, go home and go to bed, and we will come and see you in the morning." Ill as I was, I went to the dinner. It was a very jovial one, and I sat drinking champagne till late. I went home, slept like a top, and woke up as well as I ever was in my life. The next morning the doctor came. "Ah," he said, "I see you look all the better for my medicine." I said, "I did not take a drop of your medicine. I went to the dinner, drank champagne all night, and it was that which cured me." "Very strange that," said the doctor. "The very things we think poison have often quite a contrary effect." My own opinion is that if I had taken the medicine I should have been ill for a week at least. I don't take wine as a daily drink, because I can't afford it, for one reason, and for another because I believe, taken daily, it has a mischievous effect. But there are times when it does good, and life is not so joyous that we can afford to dispense entirely with the pleasant stimulus of wine. I would not prevent its manufacture. No society has ever existed without the winecup for its feasts and holidays. I would not put down the liquor traffic. I would only shut up the drink shops. It is they that cause the drunkenness which does so much mischief, and there is no need for their existence at all.

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'But let us hear what her ladyship has to say,' said Buxton.

'What are you talking about?' she said.

'A regenerated State.'

'Ah, there is need for it,' she said. 'But how are you to get it? That is the question.'

'Oh, nothing is easier. Buy a farm in Essex and form there a model society.'

'With a cheap train to take your people to London in an hour or two? That will never do.'

'Well, then, let us go to Canada and plant our Utopia there.'

'And fail, as others have done,' said she.

'But we shall take picked men and women, and with them we cannot fail.'

'But they are not immortal.'

'Happily,' said Buxton, 'none of us are that. We've all got to die and make room for the new generation.'

'And can you answer for the new generation?' asked Rose, 'that they will remain shut up in your Utopia to labour, not each for himself, but for mutual benefit; that they will conform to your ideas as regards drinking and matrimony; that no selfish passion will run riot; that no serpent will come into that paradise to tempt another Eve; that the new Adam will be wiser than the old one?'

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'Why, I thought you were in favour of the idea,' said her husband.

'But I am a woman.'

'And therefore have a full right to change your opinion,' added Buxton.

'Of course, there must be some failures. It is by them we learn how to succeed,' replied Wentworth. 'We learn from the failure of past organizations the way to form better and more successful ones. Are there not successful Shaker settlements in America?'

'You make me laugh,' said the lady.

'This is no laughing matter. We are very much in earnest.'

'Well, if you are in earnest, let me have the selection of the candidates for the new society.'

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'Very good; but I am afraid you will only pass the good-looking ones, and forget the old time-honoured maxim that "handsome is as handsome does."'

'A maxim I laugh to scorn.'

'Of course you do.'

'Well, you want healthy men and women, don't you? And good looks are only to be found with physical health. It is by over-eating and over-drinking and over-working that you get a diseased and ugly race. Go to our east coast seaside resorts and see what fine men and women there are there. Contrast them with the operatives of the mine and factory. They scarcely seem to belong to the same race. A good-looking girl is happier than a plain one. You men are all for good looks. A fine physical organization indicates something more desirable. Nor do I blame them. "The soul is form, and doth the body make." The homage we pay to beauty in man or woman is but rational. What made Alcibiades a power in Athens but his good looks? Did not Jew and Greek alike agree in doing honour to Adonis? The outward form indicates the inner disposition. If men are to have a brighter world we must people it with brighter people. But I think on the whole you had better stop where you are. Society in one way does improve. Progress is slow—but institutions are hard to remove, bad habits harder still. Why go out into the wilderness to teach people to be content with an agricultural life? Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay. Better to bear the ills we have than fly to those we know not of.'

p. 241

'Your ladyship is poetical!'

'Not a bit of it—only practical, as we women always are when you men are up in the clouds. I believe, as soon as the peasant has got back to the hind, we shall have a new era for England, I believe the agricultural labourer who is helped to emigrate to Canada can better his condition at once. But I am not an agricultural labourer. I have no wish to pass my days in milking cows and rearing poultry; I have no wish to pass my days thousands of miles away from London, or Paris, or Rome. Am I not the heir of all the ages underneath the sun? I am for stopping at home and doing all the good I can. I do not feel called upon to dress like a guy, as the Shaker women do; nor do I see how you can make any settlement that can last. It may succeed for a time, if the conditions are favourable, and you select the men and women whom you take out. But as the old ones die off and the young people grow up there will be all sorts of difficulties. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge had similar dreams. It was fortunate for them and the world that they were unable to carry them out. They did much better work at home. As long as human nature remains what it is we must build on the old lines.'

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'How then, would you regenerate society?'

'By the regeneration of the individual. What is society but a collection of men? Save the man and the mass are saved. Buxton believes in science; Wentworth, you believe in politics. Well, both are means to an end; but more is required.'

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'And that is?'

'Christ in the heart.'

'Rather an exploded idea in these enlightened times. Why, you take us back to the dark ages!' said Buxton.

'Dark ages, indeed! At any rate they were ages of faith—when men believed in God, and did mighty works. Alas! we have no such men now.'

'And why not?'

'Because this is the age of material organization, of mechanical progress, of the exaltation of the mass over the individual, of an artificial equality; an age that has lost faith, an age of despair, when the rich man cries "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" when the statesman recklessly legislates, believing "After me the deluge;" when the people "feed on lies." "The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehendeth it not."'

p. 244

'Nevertheless,' said Wentworth, 'I feel inclined to make a start in Canada. Rose, I know, will come after a little pressing; and if you will come with us, I have a friend who has placed some land at my disposal. I have found some men and women of the right stamp who are ready to emigrate. They live in unhealthy homes, they have bad food, and are diseased in consequence. They are surrounded by evil companions, and that leads them into crime. Man is, to a certain extent, the creature of circumstance.'

'Yes, that is too true,' replied Buxton; 'but what do you propose as the remedy?'

'Well, that is what I am coming to. Remove the pauper, place him in a new world, and with

better surroundings, and he will become a better man. My friend is quite prepared to do so; he is ready to help the poor to emigrate to the colonies or America.'

'But if the colonies or America will not have them, what are you to do? They may object—in fact, they do object to the poor of this country being thrown destitute and helpless on their shores.'

'That is true; but my friend is resolved to send out only deserving men and women whose characters will be carefully inquired into, and to send them out under competent guides. He proposes to buy a large estate in some eligible part of the world, where land is cheap, where the climate is healthy, and where all that is wanted to develop the fruits of the earth, and to ensure health and happiness to the people, is human labour. Of course, he does not propose to deal with the masses; but he has an idea, that if he makes an attempt and it succeeds, other wealthy and benevolent men will follow his example, and thus the amount of crime, and misery, and poverty in England may be diminished.'

'But why not try such a scheme in England?'

'The expense is too great; the rates and taxes are too heavy, and the difficulties created by land-laws and lawyers are too great. Besides, there would always be the danger of the men breaking away in sudden fits of ill-humour and discontent, and getting back to their old bad habits and evil companionship. They must leave all the evils of the old world behind them and start clear. You will come with us, Buxton?'

'With all my heart,' was the reply.

## CHAPTER XXXIII. THE FINAL RESOLVE.

The following letter was addressed to her *protégé* in Liverpool by Rose immediately after the consultation already described:

'MY DEAR BOY,

'Wentworth and I have formed a scheme for the future in which we hope you will unite.

'We propose to establish a co-operative self-supporting community on the other side of the Atlantic.

'Old England is played out. It may be that there is a new England to arise out of the ashes of the old, but it seems rather that—like Rome, and Athens, and Tyre, and India, and Babylon, and Corinth, and Carthage—its glory has passed away. The democracy will rule the land, and that means the separation of Ireland and England, the ruin of the landlords and of the capitalists, who in their turn will be sacrificed to the popular demand for a theoretical right. A member of Parliament will simply have to be the mouthpiece of his constituents; he will be imposed on them, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, by an assembly of wealthy, ambitious men, prepared to do anything to retain their hold of power.

'Parliament or the State will have to interfere between fools and the results of their folly. The wretch who gets drunk and starves his wife and children will have to be taken under the care of the State. The lazy loafer, who cannot and will not work, will have to be maintained by the community. There is to be no coercion and no compulsion, and everybody is to be allowed to drive to the devil in the way most convenient. Economic law is to be set aside to gratify the demands of the people who want to be known as patriots, and who will thus put into men's heads ideas they would never have dreamed of. Probably a fierce Communism will ravage the land, and by destroying the wealthy increase tenfold the hardships of the poor. It is because England has been the reverse of all this—because it has been the land of men who have preferred to do their duty rather than talk of their rights; who have gained with the strong arm and the manly heart victory over the earth and all it holds, that England has been the home of as noble a race—mixed, as it may be, of Celts and Saxons—as ever sailed the ocean or ploughed the land.

'What has England now to fall back on but a rapidly-exhausting coal supply, an overwhelming debt, establishments—civil, and naval, and military—preposterous in good times, wicked now when our trade is declining everywhere, and the number daily increases of people who have no work to do? Shutting their eyes to all the dangers of the situation, we see the State split up into two parties—the one in possession of power clinging to it at whatever cost of principle or consistency, and the outs equally ready to pay the same price to get in.

'And then we have a Church which is a sort of half-way house to Rome, and a conventional form of worship by thousands who call themselves Christians, but are really heathen at heart; and hence a growing class of men who delight to call themselves Atheists, and who fancy that they are more enlightened than other men

because they refuse to bow the knee to a supreme Being. We are weary of all this. On the other side of the Rocky Mountains, where the Pacific, with its warm wind, sweeps up the slopes of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, we have secured a large tract of country, with mines, and fertile valleys, and rivers abounding with fish. The region is romantic. The country is fertile, and it is far from the Old World, with its sin, its sorrow, its difficulty of living, and its corroding care. There, freed from the icy conventionalisms of the Old World, we shall lead happy and useful lives—all engaged in remunerative labour that shall leave abundant time for the cultivation of the mental powers, and where none will be exhausted by overwork, either of body or of mind. And we hope you will join our party.'

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THE END.

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