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, by Guy Thorne**

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By GUY THORNE
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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York and London

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THE SOCIALIST

[Pg ii]

**BY
GUY THORNE**

AUTHOR OF "WHEN IT WAS DARK," ETC



**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1909**

TO
JOHN GILBERT BOHUN LYNCH
SOUVENIR OF FEBRUARY 8TH, 1909

[Pg iv]

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THE SOCIALIST

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I CONCERNING HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF PADDINGTON

There are as many social degrees in the peerage as there are in the middle and lower classes.

There are barons who are greater noblemen than earls, viscounts who are welcomed in a society that some marquises can never hope to enter—it is a question not of wealth or celebrity, but of family relationships and date of creation.

When, however, a man is a duke in England, his state is so lofty, he is so inevitably apart from every one else that these remarks hardly apply at all. Yet even in dukedoms one recognises there are degrees. There are royal dukes, stately figureheads moving in the brilliant light which pours from the throne, and generally a little obscured by its refulgence. These have their own serene place and being.

There are the political dukes, Cabinet-made, who are solemnly caricatured through two generations of *Punch*, massive, Olympian, and generally asleep on the front benches of the House of Lords.

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And every now and then it happens that there are the young dukes.

The fathers of the young dukes have lived to a great age and married late in life. They have died when their sons were little children. For years it seems to the outside public as if certain historic houses are in abeyance. Nothing much is heard of these names, and only Londoners who pay enormous ground rents to this or that Ducal estate office realise what a long minority means.

From time to time paragraphs find their way into the society papers telling of the progress of this or that young dukeling at Eton. The paragraphs become more in evidence when the lad goes to Oxford, and then, like a suddenly-lit lamp, the prince attains his majority.

Paragraphs in weekly papers expand into columns in all the dailies. The public suddenly realises that the Duke of —, a young man of twenty-one, owns a great slice of London, has an income of from one to two hundred thousand pounds a year, and by the fact of his position is a force in public affairs. For a week every one talks about the darling of fortune. His pictures are in all the journals. His castle in Kent, his palace in Park Lane, his castle in Scotland, his villa at Monte Carlo, are, as it were, thrown open to the inspection of the world. The hereditary jewels are disinterred by popular rumour from the vaults at Coutts' Bank. The Mysore Nagar emerald that the third duke brought from India glitters once more in the fierce light of day. The famous diamond tiara that the second duke bought for his duchess (in the year when his horse "Strawberry Leaf" won the Derby and His Grace eighty thousand pounds) sparkles as never

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before. Photographers seek, and obtain, permission to visit the famous picture galleries at Duke Dale, and American millionaires gasp with envy as they read of the Velasquez, the three Murillos, the priceless series of Rembrandt genre pictures, and the "Prince in Sable" of Vandyck, owned by a youth who has in all probability never seen any one of them.

The man in the street has his passing throb of envy, and then, being a generous-minded fellow in the main, and deeply imbued with loyalty to all existing and splendid institutions, wishes his lordship luck and promptly forgets all about him.

What the man *on* the street—a very different sort of person—says, is merely a matter which polite people do not hear, for who heeds a few growls in cellars or curses in a cul-de-sac?

Women are even more generous, as is their dear mission to the world. If your dukeling is a pretty lad, presentable and straight as caught by the obsequious camera, they give him kind thoughts and wonder who the fortunate girl will be. Who shall share the throne of Prince Fortunatus? On whose white and slender neck shall that great Indian emerald give out its sinful Asiatic fire? On whose shining coronet of hair shall rise that crown of diamonds that the brave horse won for the "bad old duke" on Epsom Downs?

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And then all the stir and bother is over. Some newer thing engages the public mind. Another stone is thrown into another pool; the ripples upon the first die away, and the waters are tranquil once more.

Prince Fortunatus has ascended his throne, and the echoes of the ceremonial trumpets are over and gone.

* * * * *

John Augustus Basil FitzTracy was the fifth Duke of Paddington, Earl of Fakenham in Norfolk, and a baronet of the United Kingdom.

His seats were Fakenham Hall, at Fakenham, Castle Trink, N. B., and the old Welsh stronghold, near Conway, known as Carleon, which had come to him from his mother's aunt, old Lady Carleon of Lys.

In regard to his houses, there was, first and foremost, the great square pile in Piccadilly, which was almost as big as the Duke of Devonshire's palace, and was known as Paddington House. There was an old Saxon house near Chipping Norton, in Gloucestershire, which was used as a hunting-box—the late duke always having ridden with the Heythrop. There was also a big blue, pink-and-white villa upon the Promenade des Anglais at Nice—the late duke liked to spend February among the palms and roses of the Riviera, though it was said that the duchess never accompanied him upon these expeditions to the sun-lit shores of the Mediterranean.

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The Duke of Paddington was not a great country nobleman. Fakenham was some three thousand acres, and though the shooting was excellent, as is the shooting of all the big houses which surround Sandringham Hall, the place in itself was not particularly noteworthy. Nor did the duke own coal mines, while no railways had enriched him by passing through any of his properties.

The duke's enormous revenues were drawn from London. He and their graces of Westminster and Bedford might well have contended for a new title—Duke of London. If extent of possessions and magnitude of fortune could alone decide such an issue the Duke of Paddington would have won.

A huge slice of the outer West End—anywhere north of Oxford Street—belonged to him.

His income was variously stated, but the only truth about it, upon which every one was agreed, was that it was incredibly large.

There was a certain modest, massive stone building in the Edgware Road where the duke's affairs were conducted. It was known as the FitzTracy Estate Office, forty clerks were regularly employed there, and only old Colonel Simpson, late of the Army Service Corps, and now chief agent to the duke, knew what the actual income was.

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Possessor of all this,—and it is but the barest epitome,—the duke was twenty-three years of age, had no near relations, and was just finishing his university career at Oxford.

Everything that the human mind can wish for was his; there was hardly anything in the world, worthy or unworthy, that he could not have by asking for it.

The duke was an undergraduate of St. Paul's College, Oxford. Much smaller than Christ Church, Magdalen, or New College, St. Paul's is, nevertheless, the richest and most aristocratic foundation in the university. It was a preserve of the peerage; no poor men could afford to enter at Paul's, and it was even more difficult for the sons of rich vulgarians to do so.

On one dull, cold morning at the end of the October term the duke came out of his bedroom into the smaller of his two sitting rooms. It was about ten o'clock. He had cut both early chapel or its alternative roll-call—necessities from which even dukes are not exempt if they wish to keep their terms.

The duke wore an old Norfolk jacket and a pair of grey flannel trousers. His feet were thrust into a pair of red leather bath slippers. He was about five feet ten in height, somewhat sturdily built, and deliberate in his movements. His head was thickly covered with very dark red hair. The eyes

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were grey, and with a certain calm and impassivity about them—the calm of one so highly placed that nothing can easily affect him; one sees it in the eyes of kings and queens. The nose was aquiline, and thin at the nostrils, the nose of an aristocrat; the mouth was large, and pleasant in expression, though by no means always genial. There was, in short, something Olympian about this young man, an air, a manner, an aroma of slight aloofness, a consciousness of his position. It was not aggressive or pronounced, but it was indubitably there.

In the majority of colleges at Oxford undergraduates have only two rooms. In Paul's, more particularly in what were known as the new buildings, men had three, a bedroom, a dining-room or small sitting-room, in which breakfast and lunch were taken, and a larger sitting-room.

The duke came out of his bedroom into the smaller room. It was panelled in white throughout. Let into the panels here and there were first impressions of famous coloured mezzotints by Raphael Smith, Valentine Green, and other masters. They had been brought from the portfolios at Paddington House, and each one was worth three hundred pounds.

The chairs of this room were upholstered in red leather—a true vermilion, and not the ordinary crimson—which went admirably with the white walls and the Persian carpet, brick-dust and peacock blue colour, from Teheran. A glowing fire of cedar logs sent a cheerful warmth into the room, and the flames were reflected in the china and silver of a small round table prepared for breakfast.

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Although it was November, there was a great silver dish of fruit, nectarines, and strawberries, grapes and peaches, all produced in the new electric forcing houses which had been installed at the duke's place at Fakenham. There was no apparatus for tea or coffee. In some things the duke was a little unusual. He never drank tea or coffee, but took a glass of thin white wine from Valperga. The tall yellow bottle stood on the table now, and by its side was a fragile glass of gold and purple, blown in Venice three hundred years ago.

The duke crossed the room and the larger one that opened out of it. He pushed open the swing door—the heavy outer "oak" lay flat against the wall—and shouted down the staircase for his "scout."

Despite the ineradicable belief of some popular novelists, there are no bells at Oxford, and duke or commoner must summon his servant in the good old mediæval way.

In a minute the man appeared with breakfast. He had previously brought his master a printed list from the kitchens when he called him. Gardener was an elderly, grey-haired man, clean-shaven, and confidential of manner. He had served many young noblemen on staircase number one, and each and all had found him invaluable. He had feathered his nest well during the years, and was worth every penny of ten thousand pounds. A type produced nowhere in such completeness and perfection as at Oxford or Cambridge, he represented a certain definite social class, a class more hated by the working man than perhaps any other—the polite parasite!

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"Beastly weather, Gardener," said the duke in a voice which every one found musical and pleasant, a contented, full-blooded voice.

"It is indeed, sir," said Gardener, as he arranged two silver dishes upon the table—"very dull and cold. I was told that there would be skating on Port Meadow as I came into college this morning."

"Well, I don't think it will tempt me," said the duke. "You understand thoroughly about lunch?"

"Thoroughly, sir, thank you. Do you wish anything else now, sir?"

"Nothing more, Gardener. You can go."

"I thank your grace," said the scout, and left the room. Gardener had brought the art of politeness to a high point. Indeed, he had elevated it to a science. He always made a distinction, thoroughly understood and appreciated by his masters, between himself and the ordinary flunkey or house servant. He called a duke or a marquis "sir" in general address, reserving the title for the moment of leaving the room, thus showing that he did not forget the claims of rank, while he was too well-bred to weary his hearer by undue repetition.

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The duke began his breakfast—a chop and a poached egg. The young man was by no means of a luxurious turn of mind as far as his personal tastes were concerned. Simplicity was the keynote of many of his actions. But he was very punctilious that everything about him should be "just so," and had he dined on a dish of lentils he would have liked them cooked by Escoffier.

There was a pile of letters by his plate. He opened them one by one, throwing most of them on to an adjacent chair for his secretary—who called every day at eleven—to answer.

One of the letters bore the cardinal's hat, which is the crest of Christ Church College, and was from the duke's greatest friend in the university, Viscount Hayle.

This was the letter:

"MY DEAR JOHN,—My father and sister arrived to-night, and, as I supposed, they will be delighted to lunch to-morrow. You said at one, didn't you? I have been dining with them at the *Randolph*, but I have come back to college, as I must read for a couple of hours before I go to bed.

Gerald, Viscount Hayle, was the only son of the Earl of Camborne, who was a spiritual as well as a temporal peer inasmuch as he was the Bishop of Carlton, the great northern manufacturing centre. [Pg 11]

Lord Hayle and the Duke of Paddington had gone up to Oxford in the same term. They were of equal ages, and many of their tastes and opinions were identical, while the remaining differences of temperament and thought only served to accentuate their strong friendship and to give it a wholesome tonic quality.

The duke had met Lord Camborne once only. He had never stayed at the palace, though often pressed to do so by Lord Hayle. Something or other had always intervened to prevent it. The two young men had not known each other during their school days—the duke had been at Eton, his friend at Winchester—and their association had been simply at the university.

Now the bishop, who was a widower, was coming to Oxford for a few days, to be present at a reception to be given to Herr Schmölder, the famous German Biblical scholar, and was bringing his daughter, Lady Constance Camborne, with him.

As he ate his nectarine the duke wondered what sort of a girl Lady Constance was. That she was very lovely he knew from general report, and Gerald also was extremely good-looking. But he wondered if she was like all the other girls he knew, accomplished, charming, sometimes beautiful and always smart, but—stereotyped. [Pg 12]

That was just what all society girls were; they always struck him as having been made in exactly the same mould. They said the same sort of things in the same sort of voice. Their thoughts ran in grooves, not necessarily narrow or limited grooves, but identical ones.

Before he had finished breakfast the duke's valet entered. The man was his own private servant, and of course lived out of college, while there was a perpetual feud between him and old Gardener, the scout.

The man carried two large boxes of thin wood in his hands.

"The orchids have come, your grace," he said. "They were sent down from the shop in Piccadilly by an early train in answer to my telegram. I went to the station this morning to get them."

"Oh, very well, Proctor," said the duke. "Thank you. Just open the boxes and I will look at them. Then you can arrange them in the other room. I sha'n't have any flowers on the table at lunch."

In a minute Proctor had opened the boxes and displayed the wealth of strange, spotted blooms within—monstrous exotic flowers, beautiful with a morbid and almost unhealthy beauty.

The duke was a connoisseur of orchids. "Yes, these will do very well," he said. "Now you can take them out." [Pg 13]

The man, a slim, clean-shaven young fellow, with dark eyes and a resolute jaw, hesitated a moment as if about to speak.

The duke, who had found a certain pleasure in thinking of his friend's sister and wondering if she would be like her brother, had been lost in a vague but pleasing reverie in fact, looked up sharply. He wanted to be alone again. He wanted to catch up the thread of his thoughts. "Well?" he said. "I think I told you to go, Proctor?"

The valet flushed at his master's tone. Then he seemed to make an effort. "I beg your grace's pardon," he said. "I wish to give you my notice."

The duke stared at his valet. "Why, what on earth do you mean?" he said. "You've only been with me for nine months, and I have found you satisfactory in every way. You have just learnt all my habits and exactly how I like things done. And now you want to leave me! Are you aware, Proctor, that you enjoy a situation that many men would give their ears for?"

"Indeed, your grace, I know that I am fortunate, and that there are many that would envy me."

"Then don't talk any more nonsense. What do I pay you? A hundred and twenty pounds a year, isn't it? Well, then, take another twenty pounds. Now go and arrange the orchids." [Pg 14]

"I am very sorry, your grace," Proctor said. "But I do not seek any increase of wages. I respectfully ask you to accept my month's notice."

A certain firmness and determination had come into the valet's voice. It irritated the duke. It was a note to which he was not accustomed. But he tried to keep his temper.

"What are your reasons for wishing to leave me?" he said, asking the direct question for the first time.

"I have been successful with a small invention, your grace. I occupy my spare time with mechanics. It is an improved lock and key, and a firm have taken it up."

"Have they paid you?" said the duke.

"A certain sum down, your grace, and a royalty is to follow on future sales."

"I congratulate you, I'm sure," the duke said, with an unconsciously contemptuous smile, for he shared the not uncommon opinion among certain people that there is something ludicrous in the originality of a servant. "No idea you were such a clever fellow. But I don't see why you should want to leave me. Because you are my servant it won't interfere with you collecting your royalties or whatever they are."

The duke was a kind-hearted young man enough. He did not mean to wound his valet, but he had never been accustomed to think of such people as quite human—human in the sense that he himself was human—and his tone was far more unpleasant than he had any idea of. [Pg 15]

The valet flushed up. Then he did an extraordinary thing. He took two five-pound notes from his pocket and placed them upon the table.

"That is a month's wages, your grace," he said, "instead of a month's notice. I am no longer your servant, nor any man's."

As he spoke the whole aspect of the valet changed. He seemed to stand more upright, his eyes had a curious light in them, his lips were parted as one who inhales pure air after being long in a close room.

The duke's face grew pale with anger. "What do you mean by this?" he said in a voice which was a strange mixture of passion and astonishment.

"Exactly what I say, sir," Proctor answered. "That I am no longer in your service. I have done all that is legally necessary to discharge myself. And I have a word to say to you. You are not likely to hear such words addressed to you again, until your class and all it means is swept away for ever. You sneer at me because I have dared to invent something, to produce something, to add something to the world's wealth and the world's comfort. What have you ever done? What have you ever contributed to society? I am a better man than you are, and worth more to society, because I've worked for my living and earned my daily bread, even though fortune made me your body servant. But I'm free now, and, mark what I say, read the signs of the times, if one in your position can have any insight into truth at all! Read the signs of the times, and be sure that before you and I are old men we shall be equal in the eyes of the world as we are unequal now! There aren't going to be any more drones in the hive. Men aren't going to have huge stores of private property any more. You won't be allowed to own land which is the property of every one." [Pg 16]

He stopped suddenly in the flood of high-pitched, agitated speech, quivering with excitement, a man transformed and carried away. Was this the suave, quiet fellow who had brushed the clothes and put studs into the shirts? With an involuntary gesture the duke passed his hand before his eyes. He was astounded at this sudden volcanic outburst. Nothing, as Balzac said, is more alarming than the rebellion of a sheep.

But as Proctor's voice died away his excitement seemed to go with it, or at any rate long habit and training checked and mastered it. The man bowed, not without dignity, and when he spoke again his voice was once more the old respectful one. "I beg your grace's pardon," he said, "if I have been disrespectful. There are times when a man loses control of himself, and what is beneath the surface will out. Your grace will find everything in perfect order." He withdrew without another word and passed out of his master's life. [Pg 17]

The duke was left staring at the masses of orchids which lay before him on the table.

When Gardener, the scout, entered he found the duke still in the same position—lost in a sort of day-dream.

CHAPTER II

"HAIR LIKE RIPE CORN"

[Pg 18]

The duke was reciting his adventure with the valet to his three guests, but he glanced most often at Lady Constance Camborne.

No, the society journals and society talk hadn't exaggerated her beauty a bit—she was far and away the loveliest girl he had ever seen. He knew it directly she came into the room with Lord Hayle and the bishop, the influence of such extraordinary beauty was felt like a physical blow. The girl was of a Saxon type, but with all the colouring accentuated. The hair which crowned the small, patrician head in shining masses was golden. But it was not pale gold, metallic gold, or flaxen. It was a deep, rich gold, an "old gold," and the duke, with a somewhat unaccustomed flight of fancy, compared it in his mind to ripe corn. Her eyebrows were very dark brown, almost black, and the great eyes, with their long black lashes, were dark as a southern night. Under their great coronet of yellow hair, and set in a face whose contour was a pure and perfect oval, with a skin like the inside of a seashell, the contrast was extraordinarily effective. Her beautiful lips had the rare lines of the unbroken Greek bow, and their colour was like wine. She was tall in figure, even as though some marble goddess had stepped down from her pedestal in the Louvre and assumed the garments of the daughters of men. Some people said that, beautiful as she was in every way, her crowning beauty was her hands. She had sat to Pozzi, at Milan, at the great [Pg 19]

sculptor's earnest request, so that he might perpetuate the glory of her hands for ever. Mr. Swinburne had written a sonnet, shown only to a favoured few and never published, about her hands.

The duke talked on. Outwardly he was calm enough, within his brain was in a turmoil entirely fresh to it, entirely new and unexpected. He heard his own voice mechanically relating the incident of Proctor's rebellion, but he gave hardly a thought to what he said. For all he knew he might have been talking the most absolute nonsense.

He was lost in wonder that one living, moving human being could be so fair!

He felt a sort of unreasoning anger with his friend, Lord Hayle. Why hadn't Gerald introduced him to his sister before? Why had all this time been wasted?—quite forgetting the repeated invitations he had received to stay with the Cambornes.

"Well, what did you do in the end, John?" said Lord Hayle. "Did you kick the fellow out? I should have pitched him down the staircase, by Jove!" [Pg 20]

"As a matter of fact, I did nothing at all," said the duke. "I was too surprised. I just sat still and let him talk; I was quite tongue-tied."

"More's the pity," said the young viscount, a lean, sinewy lad, who rowed three in the 'Varsity boat. "I should have made very short work of him."

"Don't be such a savage, Gerald," Lady Constance answered. "It was very rude, of course; but from what the duke says, the man was not exactly what you would call impudent, and he apologised at the end. And nowadays every one has a right to his own opinions. We don't live in the middle ages any longer."

Her voice was like a silver bell, the duke thought, as the girl voiced these somewhat republican sentiments. A silver bell, was it? No, it was like water falling into water, like a flute playing in a wood at a great distance.

"My daughter is quite a Radical, Paddington," said Lord Camborne, with a smile. "She'll grow out of it when she gets a little older. But I found her reading the *Fabian Essays* the other day; actually the *Fabian Essays*!"—the bishop said it with a shudder. "And she met John Burns at a ministerial reception, and said he was charming!"

"It's all very well for Constance," said Lord Hayle; "a girl plays at that sort of thing, and if it amuses her it hurts nobody else. However much Connie talks about equality, and all that, she'd never sit down to dinner with the butler. But it's quite another thing when all these chaps are getting elected to Parliament and making all these new laws. If it isn't stopped, no one will be safe. It's getting quite alarming. For my part, I wish a chap like Lord Kitchener could be made Dictator of England for a month. He'd have all the Socialists up against a wall and shoot them in no time. Then things would be right again." [Pg 21]

Lord Hayle concluded in his best college debating society manner, and drank a glass of hock and seltzer in a bloodthirsty and determined manner.

The bishop, a tall, portly man, with a singularly fine face and extreme graciousness of manner—he was most popular at Court, and it was said would certainly go to Canterbury when Dr. — died,—laughed a little at his son's vehemence.

"That would hardly solve the problem," he said. "But it will solve itself. I am quite sure that there is no real reason for alarm. The country is beginning to wake up to the real character of the Socialist leaders. It will no longer listen to them. Men of sense are beginning to perceive that the great fact of inequality as between man and man is everywhere stamped in ineffaceable characters. Men are not equal, and they never will be while talent, and talent alone, produces wealth. Democracy is nothing but a piece of humbug from beginning to end—a transparent attempt to flatter a mass of stupid mediocrity which is too dull to appreciate the language of its hypocritical and time-serving admirers. These contemptible courtiers of the mob no more believe in equality than the ruin-bringing demagogues of ancient Athens did. One only has to watch them to see how eager they are to feather their nests at the expense of all the geese that will stand plucking. Observe how they scheme and contrive to secure official positions so that they may lord it over the general herd of common workers. They have their own little game to play, and beyond their own self-interest they do not care a straw. Knowing that they are unfit to succeed either in commercial or industrial pursuits, they try to extend the sphere of governmental regulation. What for? To supply themselves with congenial jobs where they won't be subject to the keen test of industrial and commercial competition, and will be less likely to be found out for the worthless wind-bags that they are!" [Pg 22]

The bishop paused. He had spoken as one having authority; quite in the grand manner, bland, serene, and a little pompous. He half-opened his mouth to continue, looked round to recognise that his audience was a young one, and thought better of it. He drank half a glass of port instead.

The conversation changed to less serious matters, and in another minute or so Gardener entered to say that coffee was ready in the other room. [Pg 23]

The "sitter," to use the Oxford slang word, was very large. It was, indeed, one of the finest rooms in the whole of Paul's. Three tall oriel windows lighted it, it was panelled in dark oak, and there

was a large open fire-place. It was a man's room. Luxurious as it was in all its furniture appointments and colouring, all was nevertheless strongly masculine. The rows of briar pipes, in their racks, a pile of hunting crops and riding switches in one corner, a tandem horn, the pictures of dogs and horses upon the walls, and three or four gun-cases behind the little black Bord piano, spoke eloquently of male tastes.

Though it is often said, it is generally quite untrue to say, that a man's rooms are an index to his personality. Few people can express themselves in their furniture. The conscious attempt to do so results in over-emphasis and strain. The ideal is either canonised or vulgarised, and the vision within is distorted and lost. At Oxford, especially, very few men succeed in doing more than attaining a convention.

But the duke's rooms really did reflect himself to some extent. They showed a certain freshness of idea and a liking for what was considered and choice. But there was no effeminacy, no over-refinement. They showed simplicity of temperament, and were not complex. Nor was the duke complex.

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Lady Constance was peculiarly susceptible to the influences of material and external things. She was extremely quick to gather and weigh impressions—the room interested her, her brother's friend interested her already. She found something in his personality which was attractive.

The whole atmosphere of these ancient Oxford rooms pleased and stimulated her, and she talked brightly and well, revealing a mind with real originality and a gentle and sympathetic wit most rare in girls of her age.

"And what are you going to do in the vacation?" the bishop asked the duke.

"For the first three or four weeks I shall be in town; then I'm going down to Norfolk. I sha'n't stay at Fakenham, Lord Leicester is putting me up; but we are going to shoot over Fakenham. I can't stay all alone in that great place, you know, though I did think of having some men down. However, that was before the Leicesters asked me. Then I am to be at Sandringham for three days for the theatricals. It is the first time I have been there, you know."

"You'll find it delightful," said the bishop. "The King is the best host in England. On the three occasions when I have had the honour of an invitation I have thoroughly enjoyed myself. Where are you staying when you are in town—at Paddington House?"

"Oh, no! That would be worse than Fakenham! Paddington House was let, always, during my minority, but for two years now there have just been a few servants there, but no one living in the house. My agent looks after all that. No, I am engaging some rooms at the *Carlton*. It's near everywhere. I have a lot of parties to go to, and Claridge's is always so full of German grand dukes!"

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"But why not come to us in Grosvenor Street?" said the bishop. "You've never been able to accept any of Gerald's invitations yet. Here is an opportunity. I have to be in town for three or four weeks, at the House of Lords and the Westminster conference of the bishops. You'd much better come to us. We'll do our best to make you comfortable."

"Oh, do come, John!" said Lord Hayle.

"Yes, please come, duke," said Lady Constance.

"It's awfully good of you, Lord Camborne," said the duke; "I shall be delighted to come."

It was a dark and gloomy afternoon—indeed, the electric bulbs in their silver candelabra were all turned on. But suddenly it seemed to the duke that the sun was shining and there was bird music in the air. He looked at Lady Constance. "I shall be delighted to come," he said again.

They chatted on, and presently the duke found himself standing by one of the tall windows talking to his friend's sister. Lord Hayle, himself an enthusiastic amateur of art, was showing his father some of the treasures upon the walls.

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"How dreary it is to-day—the weather, I mean,"—said the girl. "There has been a dense fog in town for the last three days, I see by the papers. And through it all the poor unemployed men have been tramping and holding demonstrations without anything to eat. I can't help thinking of the poor things."

The duke had not thought about the unemployed before, but now he made a mental vow to send a big cheque to the Lord Mayor's fund.

"It must be very hard for them," he said vaguely. "I remember meeting one of their processions once when I was walking down Piccadilly."

"The street of your palace!" she answered more brightly. "Devonshire House, Paddington House, and Apsley House, and all the clubs in between! It must be interesting to have a palace in London. I suppose Paddington House is very splendid inside, isn't it? I have never seen more of it than the upper windows and the huge wall in front."

"Well, it is rather gorgeous," he said; "though I never go there, or, at least, hardly ever. But I have a book of photographs here. I will show them to you, Lady Constance, if I may. So far we've succeeded in keeping them out of the illustrated magazines."

"Oh, please do!" she said. "Father, the duke is going to show me some pictures of the rooms of his mysterious great place in Piccadilly." [Pg 27]

As she spoke there was a knock upon the door, and the scout came in with a telegram upon a tray.

"I thought I had better bring it at once, sir," he said; "it's marked 'urgent' upon the envelope."

With an apology, the duke opened the flimsy orange-coloured wrapping.

Then he started, his face grew rather paler, and he gave a sudden exclamation. "Good heavens!" he said, "listen to this:

"Large portion front west wing Paddington House destroyed by explosion an hour ago. Bomb filled with picric acid discovered intact near gateway. The smaller Gainsborough and the Florence vase destroyed. Please come up town immediately.

"SIMPSON."

There was a dead silence in the room.

CHAPTER III A MOST SURPRISING DAY

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Lord Camborne, Lord Hayle, and Lady Constance stared at the duke in amazement as he read the extraordinary telegram from Colonel Simpson. Lady Constance was the first to speak. "And you were just getting the book of photographs!" she said in a bewildered voice, "the photographs of Paddington House, and now——"

"Read the wire again, John," said Lord Hayle.

The duke did so; it was quite clear:

"Large portion front west wing Paddington House destroyed by explosion an hour ago. Bomb filled with picric acid discovered intact near gateway. The smaller Gainsborough and the Florence vase destroyed. Please come up town immediately.

"SIMPSON."

"The smaller Gainsborough—that's the famous portrait of Lady Honoria FitzTracy," said Lord Hayle suddenly. "Why, it's the finest example of Gainsborough in existence!"

He grew pale with sympathy as he looked at his friend.

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"It isn't in existence any more, apparently," said the duke. "I wish the Florence vase had been saved. My father gave ten thousand pounds for it—not that the money matters—but, you see, it was the only one in the world, except the smaller example in the Vatican."

The bishop broke in with a slight trace of impatience in his voice. "My dear young men," he said, "surely the great question is: Who has perpetrated this abominable outrage? What does it all mean? What steps are being——"

He stopped short. Gardener had entered with another telegram.

"Man arrested on suspicion, known to belong to advanced socialist or anarchist group. Can you catch the fast train up? There is one at six. I will meet you with car.

"SIMPSON."

"Well, here is a sort of answer," said the duke, handing the telegram to the bishop. "It appears that the thing is another of those kindly and amiable protests which the lower classes make against their betters from time to time."

"Just what I was saying," young Lord Hayle broke in eagerly, "just what I was saying a few minutes ago. It's all the result of educating the lower classes sufficiently to make them discontented and to put these scoundrelly socialists and blackguards into Parliament. They'll be trying Buckingham Palace or Marlborough House next! Probably this is the work of those unemployed gentry whom I heard Constance defending just now."

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"It's a bad business," said Lord Camborne gravely; "a very black, bad business indeed. Paddington, you have my sincerest sympathy. I am afraid that in the shock of the news we may have been a little remiss in expressing our grief, but you know, my dear boy, how we all feel for you."

He went up to the duke as he spoke, a grand and stately old man, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Yes, John," said Lord Hayle, "we really are awfully sorry, old chap."

Lady Constance said nothing, but she looked at her host, and it was enough. He forgot the news, he forgot everything save only the friendship and kindness in her eyes.

"I suppose you will go up to town by the six o'clock train?" Lord Hayle said.

"I suppose I must, Gerald," the duke replied. "I must go and get leave from the dean later on. I expect I shall have to stay the night. It's not an inviting day for London, is it?"

"Do you know, duke, that I think you are taking it remarkably well," Lady Constance said with a sudden dazzling smile. "I should have been terribly frightened, and then cried my eyes out about the vase and the picture. And as for Hayle—well, I think I can imagine the way Hayle would have behaved."

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"Well, of course, I'm horribly angry," the duke said, "and such a thing means a great deal more to society in general than its mere personal aspect to me. But I can't somehow feel it very nearly; it seems remote. I should realize it far more if any one were to steal or break anything in these rooms here—things I constantly touch and see, things I live with. I have so many houses and pictures and things that I never see; they don't seem part of one."

"I can quite understand that," said the bishop; "but that will all be changed some day, please God, before very long. You are only on the threshold of life as yet, you know."

He smiled paternally at the young man, and there was a good deal of meaning in his smile. The duke, not ordinarily sensitive about such things, blushed a little now. He was quite aware to what Lord Camborne referred.

The bishop, astute courtier and diplomatist that he was, marked the blush, pretended not to notice it, and was secretly well pleased. He himself was earl as well as bishop, he was wealthy, he was certain of the Primacy. His daughter, whom he loved and admired more than any other living thing, was a match for any one with her rank and wealth and loveliness. He longed to see her happily married also. At the same time, good man as he was, he was by his very nature and training a worldly man.

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If, therefore, the two young people fell in love with each other—well, it would be a very charming arrangement, to say the least of it, Lord Camborne thought. For, far and away above all other fortunate young noblemen, the duke was the greatest *parti* of the day; he stood alone.

"I've got three hours or more before the train goes," said the duke, "and I can dine on board; there's a car, I know. Now, do let's forget this troublesome business. I'm so sorry, Lady Constance, that it should have happened while you were here. Let's shut out this horrid afternoon."

He spoke with light-hearted emphasis, with gaiety even. Despite what had happened he felt thoroughly happy, his blood ran swiftly in his veins, his pulses throbbed to exhilarating measures. Oh, how beautiful she was! How gracious and lovely!

He went to the windows and pulled the heavy crimson curtains over them, shutting out the wan, grey light of the November afternoon.

He made Gardener bring candles—innumerable candles—to supplement the glow of the electric lights. More logs were cast upon the fire—logs of sawn cedar wood which gave flames of rose-pink and amethyst. The noble room was illuminated as if for a feast.

Lord Hayle entered into the spirit of the thing, *con amore*. His spirits rose with those of his friend, and his sister also caught the note, while Lord Camborne, smoking a cigar by the fire, watched the three young people with a benevolent smile.

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Lady Constance had been sitting by the piano. "Do you play, Lady Constance?" the duke asked.

"She's one of the best amateur pianists I've ever heard," said Lord Hayle.

"Do play something, Lady Constance. What will you give us?"

"It depends on the sort of music you like. Do you like Chopin?"

"I am very fond of Chopin indeed."

"I'll tell you what to play, Connie," said Lord Hayle eagerly. "Play that wonderful nocturne, I forget the number, where the bell comes in. The one with the story about it."

"A story?" said the duke.

"Yes; don't you know it, John? Chopin had just come back from his villa at Majorca—come back to Paris at a time when Georges Sand would have nothing more to do with him. He was living close to Notre Dame. He had a supper by appointment, but began to write his nocturne and forgot all about the time. He was nearing the end when the big bell of the cathedral began to toll midnight. He realised how late it was, and forced himself to finish the thing in a hurry. He wove the twelve great 'clangs' into the theme. It's marvellously romantic and Gothic. One seems to see Victor Hugo's dwarf, Quasimodo, upon the tower, drinking in the midnight air."

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Lady Constance sat down at the piano and began the nocturne. The beautiful hands flashed over the keys, whiter than the ivory on which they pressed, her face was grave with the joy of what she was doing.

And as the duke listened the time and place faded utterly away.

The passionate and yet fantastic music pealed out into the room and destroyed its material appeal to the senses. His brain seemed suddenly aware of a larger and more fully-coloured life than he had ever known before, ever thought possible before. He stood upon the threshold of it; it held strange secrets, wonderful chances; there were passionate moments for young blood awaiting!

Here was the agony that lurked in pleasure, the immedicable pain which allured—lights gleamed behind swaying veils.

Clang!

The deep resonance of the iron bell tolled into the dream.

Clang!

The twin towers of Notre Dame were stark and black up in the sky.

Clang!

The dark sky grew rosy, he saw her hands, he saw the light upon her face. It was dark no longer—the bell had tolled away the old day, dawn was at hand, the new day was coming; the dawn of love was rosy in the sky.

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* * * * *

It was four o'clock when the duke's guests went away.

He went with them through the two quadrangles of Paul's to the massive gateway, and saw the three tall figures disappear in the mist with a sense of desolation and loss.

But as he was returning to his rooms to get cap and gown in which to visit the dean of his college, he comforted himself with the reflection that term was almost over.

In a week or so he would be in London, staying in the same house with her! The very thought set his heart beating like a drum!

He was nearly at the door of his staircase when he saw a man coming towards him, evidently about to speak to him. It was a man he recognised, though he had never spoken to him, a man called Burnside.

St. Paul's, as it has been said, was a college in which nearly all the undergraduates were rich men. A man of moderate means could not afford to join it. At the same time, as in the case of all colleges, there were half-a-dozen scholarships open to any one. As these scholarships were large in amount they naturally attracted very poor men. At the present moment there were some six or seven scholars of Paul's, who lived almost entirely upon their scholarships and such tutorial work as they could secure in the vacations. But these men lived a life absolutely apart from the other men of the college. They could afford to subscribe to none of the college clubs, they could not dress like other men, they could not entertain. That they were all certain to get first-classes and develop into distinguished men mattered nothing to the young aristocrats of the college. For them the scholars simply did not exist.

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Burnside, the duke had heard somewhere or other, was one of the most promising scholars of his year, but he wore rather shabby black clothes, very thick boots, and a made-up tie; he was quite an unimportant person!

He came up to the duke now, his pale intelligent face flushing a little and a very obvious nervousness animating him.

"Might I speak to you a moment?" he said.

The duke looked at him with that peculiar Oxford stare, which is possibly the most insolent expression known to the physiognomist, a cultivated rudeness which the Oxford "blood" learns to discard very quickly indeed when he "goes down" and enters upon the realities of life.

The duke did not mean anything by his stare, however; it was habit, that was all, and seeing the nervousness of his vis-à-vis was growing painful, his face relaxed. "Oh, all right," he said. "What is it—anything I can do? At any rate, come up to my rooms, it's so confoundedly dismal out here this afternoon."

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The two men went up the stairs together and entered the huge luxurious sitting-room, with its brilliant lights, its glowing fire, its pictures and flowers. Burnside looked swiftly around him; he had never dreamed of such luxury, and then he began—

"I hope you won't think me impertinent," he said, "but I have just received a telegram from the *Daily Wire*. I occasionally do some work for them. They tell me that part of your town house has been destroyed by an explosion, and that some famous art treasures have been destroyed."

"That's quite true, unfortunately," said the duke.

"And they ask me to obtain an interview with you for to-morrow's paper in order that you may make some statement about your loss." He spoke with an eagerness that almost outweighed, at

any rate, alleviated his nervousness.

"Most certainly not!" said the duke sharply. "I wonder that you should permit yourself to make me such a request. I will wish you good-afternoon!"

The other muttered something that sounded like an apology and then turned to go. His face was quite changed. The eagerness passed out of it as though the whole expression had suddenly been wiped off by a sponge. An extraordinary dejection, piteous in the completeness of its disappointment, took its place. The duke had never seen anything so sudden and so profound before; it startled him.

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The man was already half-way to the door when the duke spoke again.

"Excuse me," he said, and from mere habit his voice was still cold, "would you mind telling me why you seem so strangely disappointed because I have not granted your request?"

A surprise awaited him. Burnside swung round on his feet, and his voice was tense as he answered.

"Oh, yes, I'll tell you," he said, "though, indeed, how should you understand? The editor of the *Daily Wire* offered me fifteen pounds in his telegram if I could get a column interview with you. I am reading history for my degree, and there are certain German monographs which I can't get a sight of in Oxford or London. The only way is to buy them. Of course, I could not afford to do that, and then suddenly this opportunity came. But you can't understand. Good-afternoon!"

For the second time that day the duke was mildly surprised, but he understood.

"My dear sir," he said in a very different tone, "how was I to guess? I am very sorry, but I really am so—so ignorant of all these things. Come and sit down and interview me to your heart's content. What does it matter, after all? Will you have a whisky and soda, or, perhaps, some tea? I'll call my scout."

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In five minutes Burnside was making notes and asking questions with a swift and practical ability that compelled his host's interest and admiration. The duke had never met any one of his own age so business-like and alert. His own friends and contemporaries were so utterly different. He became quite confidential, and found that he was really enjoying the conversation.

After the interview was over the two young men remained talking frankly to each other for a few minutes, and, wide as the poles asunder in rank, birth, and fortune, they were mutually pleased. For both of them it was a new and stimulating experience, and the peer realised how narrow his views of Oxford must necessarily be. Suddenly a thought struck him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I think I have something here that will interest you."

He went to his writing-table, and, after some search, found a letter. It was a long business document from his chief agent, Colonel Simpson.

"I want to read you this paragraph from my agent's last letter," he said.

"... There is another matter to which I wish to draw your grace's attention. As you are aware, the libraries, both at Fakenham and Paddington House, are of extreme value and interest, but since the death of the late librarian, Mr. Fox, no steps have been taken to fill his position. When he died Mr. Fox was half-way through the work of compiling a comprehensive and scholarly catalogue of your grace's literary treasures. Would it not be as well to have this catalogue completed by a competent person in view of the fact that sooner or later your grace will be probably throwing open the two houses again?"

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"Now, wouldn't that suit you, Mr. Burnside, as work in the vacation, don't you know? It would last a couple of years or so probably, and you need not give all your time to it, even if you take your degree meanwhile and read for the Bar, as you tell me you mean to. I would pay you, say, four hundred a year, if you think that is enough," he added hastily, wondering if he ought to have offered more.

The young man's stammering gratitude soon undeceived him, and as Burnside left him his last words sent a glow of satisfaction through him—"I won't say any more than just this, your splendid offer has removed all obstacles from my path. The career I have mapped out for myself is now absolutely assured."

For half an hour longer the duke remained alone, thinking of the events of the day, thinking especially of Lady Constance Camborne. He did not give a thought to the smaller Gainsborough or the Florentine vase, and he was entirely ignorant that he had just done something which was to have a marked and definite influence upon his future life.

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By six o'clock he had wired to Colonel Simpson, had obtained the necessary exeat from the dean, and was entering a first-class carriage in the fast train from Oxford to London.

The fog was thick all along the line, and more than once the express was stopped for some minutes when the muffled report of fog signals, like guns fired under a blanket, could be heard in the dark.

One such stop occurred when, judging by the time and such blurred indications of gaunt

housebacks as he could discern, the duke felt that they must be just outside Paddington Station.

He had the carriage to himself, brightly lit, warm, and comfortable. He sat there, wrapped in his heavy, sable-lined coat, a little drowsy and tired, though with a pleasant sense of well-being, despite the errand which was bringing him to London.

The noise of the train died away and the engine stopped. Voices could be heard talking in the silence, voices which seemed very far away.

Then there was the roar of an advancing train somewhere in the distance, a roar which grew louder and louder, one or two sudden shouts, and then a frightful crash as if a thunderbolt had burst, a shrill multiple cry of fear, and finally the long, rending noise of timber and iron breaking into splinters.

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The duke heard all this, and even as his brain realised what it meant, he was thrown violently up into the air—so it seemed to him—he caught sight of the light in the roof of the carriage for the thousandth part of a second, and then everything flashed away into darkness and silence.

CHAPTER IV

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THE MAN WITH THE MUSTARD-COLOURED BEARD

It was the morning of the day on which part of the façade of Paddington House, Piccadilly, was destroyed by the explosion of a bomb.

London was a city of darkness and gloom, a veritable "city of dreadful night."

The fog was everywhere, it was bitter cold, and all the lights in the shops and the lamps in the streets were lit. As yet the fog was some few yards above the house-tops. It had not descended, as it did later on in the day, into the actual streets themselves. It lay, a terrible leaden pall, a little above them.

In no part of London did the fog seem more dreary than in Bloomsbury. The gaunt squares, the wide, old-fashioned streets, were like gashes cut into a face of despair.

At half-past nine o'clock Mary Marriott came out of her tiny bedroom into her tiny sitting-room and lit the gas. She lived on the topmost floor of a great Georgian house in a narrow street just off Bedford Square. In the old days, before there were fogs, and when trees were still green in the heart of London, a great man had lived in this house. The neighbourhood was fashionable then, and all the world had not moved westwards. The staircase at No. 102 was guarded by carved balusters, the ceilings of the lower rooms were worked in the ornate plaster of Adams, the doors were high, and the lintels delicately fluted. Now 102 was let out in lodgings, some furnished, some unfurnished. Mary Marriott had two tiny rooms under the roof. On the little landing outside was a small gas-stove and some shelves, upon which were a few pots and pans. A curtain screened this off from the stairhead. This was the kitchen. The furniture, what there was of it, was Mary's own, and, in short, she might, had she been so disposed, have called her dwelling almost a flat. Moreover, she paid her rent quarterly—five pounds every three months—and was quite an independent householder.

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Mary was an actress, a hard-working member of the rank and file. She had never yet secured even the smallest engagement in London, and most of her life was spent on tour in the provinces. When she was away she locked up her rooms.

She was without any relations, except a sister, who was married to a curate in Birmingham. Her private income was exactly thirty pounds a year, the interest upon a thousand pounds safely invested. This paid the rent of the rooms which were all she had to call "home," and left her ten pounds over. Every penny in addition to this she must earn by the exercise of her art.

She had been lucky during her four years of stage life in rarely being out of an engagement. She had never played a leading part, even in the provinces, but her second parts had generally been good. If she had come nowhere near success she had been able to keep herself and save a little, a very little, money for a rainy day. It is astonishing on how little two careful girls, chumming together, can live on tour. Managing in this way it was an extravagant week when Mary spent thirty shillings upon her share of the week's bill, and as she never earned less than three pounds she felt herself fortunate. She knew piteous things of girls who were less fortunate than she.

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She came into the room and lit the gas. It was not a beautiful room, some people would have called it a two-penny-halfpenny room, but it was comfortable, there was a gracious feminine touch about all its simple appointments, and to Mary Marriott it represented home.

The chairs were of wicker-work, with cretonne cushions—sixteen-and-six each in the Tottenham Court Road. The pictures were chiefly photographs of theatrical friends, the curtains were a cheap art-green rep, the carpet plain Indian matting—so easy to clean! But the colours were all harmonious, and a shelf holding nearly two hundred books gave a finishing note of pleasant habitableness.

The girl moved with that grace which is not languid but alert. There was a spring and balance in

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her walk that made one think of a handsome boy; for though the lithe and beautiful figure was girlish enough, few girls learn to move from the hips, erect and unswayed, as she moved, or often suggest the temper and resilience of a foil. The simple grey tweed coat and the slim skirts that hung so superbly gave every movement its full value.

She had not yet put on her hat, but her coat would keep her warm while she ate her frugal breakfast and save the necessity of lighting the fire, as she was shortly going out.

Her hair was dead-black with the blackness of bog-oak root or of basalt. She did not wear it in any of the modes of the moment, but gathered up in a great coiled knot at the back of her head.

In shape, Mary Marriott's face was one of those semi-ovals which one has forgotten in the Greek rooms of the Louvre and remembered in some early Victorian miniatures. It was grave, and the corners of the almost perfect mouth were slightly depressed, like the Greek bow reversed.

The violet eyes were not hard, but they did not seem quite happy. It was almost a petulance with environment which seemed written there, and, in the words of a great master of English prose, "the eyelids were a little weary." All her face, indeed,—in the general impression it gave,—seemed to have that constant preoccupation that hints at the pursuit of something not yet won.

She might have been four or five-and-twenty. Her face was not the face of a young, unknowing girl—no early morning fruit in a basket with its bloom untouched. Yet it was still possible to imagine that her indifferent loveliness could wake suddenly to all the caresses and surrenders of spring. But the ordained day must dawn for that. Like a sundial, one might have said of her that her message was told only under the serenest skies, and that even then it must come with shadow.

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She lit the stove on the landing to boil some water for her cocoa and egg. Then she took the necessary crockery from a cupboard, together with the loaf and butter she had bought last night.

While the simple meal was in progress her low forehead was wrinkled with thought. A long tour was just over in the fairly prosperous repertoire company with which she had been associated for eighteen months. Usually at this season of the year the company played right through till the spring at those provincial theatres where no pantomimes were produced. This year, however, it had been disbanded until March, when Mary was at liberty to rejoin if she had not meanwhile found another engagement.

This was what she was trying to do, at present with no success at all. She was tired to death of the monotonous touring business. She felt that she had better work within her had she only a chance to show it. But it was horribly difficult to get that chance. She had no influence with London managers whatever. Her name was not known in any way, and as the days went by the hopelessness of her ambition seemed to become more and more apparent.

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This morning the heavy pall which lay over London seemed to crush her spirits. She was so alone, life was drab and cheerless.

With a sigh she strove to banish black thoughts. "I won't give up!" she said aloud, stamping a little foot upon the floor. "I know I've got something in me, and I won't give up!"

When breakfast was over, she swept up the crumbs from the tablecloth, opened the window, and scattered them upon the leads for the birds—her invariable custom. Then she went into her bedroom, made the bed, and tidied everything, for she did all her own housework when she was "at home," though a charwoman came once a week to "turn out" the rooms.

When she had put on her hat and gloves and returned to the sitting-room she found two or three cheeky little London sparrows were chirping over their meal on the parapet, and she stood motionless to watch them. As she did so she saw a new arrival. A robin, with bright, hungry eyes, in his warm scarlet waistcoat, had joined the feathered group. Nearly all the crumbs were disposed of by this time, and, greatly daring, the little creature hopped on to the window-sill, looked timidly round him for a moment, and then flew right over to the table where the bread-latter still stood. With an odd little chirp of satisfaction the bird seized a morsel of bread as big as a nut in his tiny beak and flashed out through the window again, this time flying right away into the fog.

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"Oh, you dear!—you perfect dear!" Mary said, clapping her hands. "Why didn't you stay longer?" And as she went down the several staircases to the hall the little incident remained with her and cheered her. "I shall have some luck to-day," she thought. "I feel quite certain I shall have some luck. One of the agents will have heard of something that will suit me; I am confident of it." And all the time that she walked briskly towards the theatrical quarter of London the sense of impending good fortune remained with her, despite the increasing gloom of the day.

It was with almost a certainty of it that she turned into the district around Covent Garden and crossed the frontier as it were of the world of mimes.

It is a well-defined country, this patch of stage-land in the middle of London. The man who knows could take a map of the metropolis and pencil off an area that would contain it with the precision of a gazetteer. Wellington Street on the east, St. Martin's Lane on the west, Long Acre on the north, and the Strand on the south—these are its boundaries.

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Yet to the ordinary passer-by it is a *terra incognita*, its very existence is unsuspected, and he

might hurry through the very centre of it without knowing that he was there at all.

Mary made straight for Virgin Lane, a long, narrow street leading from Bedford Street to Covent Garden Market—the street where all the theatrical agents have their offices. The noise of traffic sank to a distant hum as she entered it. Instead, the broken sound of innumerable conversations met her ear, for the pavements, and the road itself, were crowded with men and women who were standing about just as the jobbers and brokers do after closing time outside the Stock Exchange.

The men were nearly all clean-shaven, and they were alike in a marked fashion. Dress varied and features differed, but every face bore a definite stamp and impress. Perhaps colour had something to do with it. Nearly every face had the look of a somewhat faded chalk drawing. They shared a certain opaqueness of skin in common. What colour there was seemed streaky—the pastel drawing seemed at close quarters. There was an odd sketchiness about these faces, no one of them quite expressed what it hinted at. The men were a rather seedy-looking lot, but the women were mostly well dressed—some of them over-dressed. But they seemed to wear their frocks as costumes, not as clothes, and to have that peculiar consciousness people have when they wear what we call "fancy dress."

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Mary entered an open door with a brass-plate at the side, on which "Seaton's Dramatic and Musical Agency" was inscribed. She walked up some uncarpeted stairs and entered two large rooms opening into each other. The walls were covered with theatrical portraits, and both rooms were already half-full of people, men and women. A clerk sat at a writing-table in the outer room taking the names of each person as he or she came, writing them down on slips of paper, and sending them into a third inner room, which was the private sanctum of Mr. Seaton, the agent himself.

Mary sent in her name and sat down. Now and again some girl or man whom she knew would come in and do the same, generally coming up to her for a few words of conversation—for she was a popular girl. But most people's eyes were resolutely fixed upon the door of the agent's room, in the hope that he would appear and that a word might be obtained with him. Now and then this actually happened. Seaton, a tall man, with a cavalry moustache, would pop his head out, instead of sending his secretary, and call for this or that person. As often as not there was a hurried rush of all the others and a chorus of agitated appeals: "Just one moment, Mr. Seaton," "I sha'n't keep you a moment, dear boy," "I've something of the utmost importance to tell you."

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And all the time the page-boy kept returning with the slips of paper upon which the actors and actresses had written their names upon entering, and finding out particular individuals. Some few were fortunate. "Mr. Seaton would like to see you at twelve, miss. He has something he thinks might suit you"; but by far the more usual formula was, "Mr. Seaton is very sorry, there is nothing suitable to-day; but would you mind calling again to-morrow."

At last it was Mary's turn. She was talking to a Miss Dorothy French, a girl who had been with her on the recent tour, when the boy came up to her. "Mr. Seaton is very sorry that there is nothing suitable to-day, miss; but would you mind calling again to-morrow."

Mary sighed. "I've been here for two hours," she said, "and now there is nothing after all. And, somehow or other, I felt sure I should get something to-day."

She was continuing to bewail her lot when a very singular-looking man indeed entered the room and went up to the clerk.

He was tall and dressed in loose, light tweeds, a flopping terra-cotta tie, a hat of soft felt, and a turn-down collar. His hair, beard, and moustache were a curious and unusual yellow—mustard colour, in fact. His eyes were coal black and very bright, while his face was as pale as linen.

Directly the clerk saw him he rose at once with a most deferential manner and almost ran to the agent's private room. In a second more he was back and obsequiously conducting the man with the mustard-coloured beard into the sanctum.

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Mary and her friend left the office together and went out into the choking fog, which was now much lower and thicker. Both were members of the Actors Association, the club of ordinary members of their profession, and they planned to take their simple lunch there, read the *Stage* and the *Era*, and see if they could hear of anything going.

As they went down the stairs Mary said, "You saw that odd-looking man with the yellow beard—evidently some one of importance? Well, do you know, Dolly, I can't help thinking that I've seen him before somewhere. I can't remember where, but I'm almost sure of it."

The other girl started.

"What a strange thing, dear," she said. "I had exactly the same sort of feeling, but I thought it must be a mistake. I wonder who he can be?"

"He is a most unusual-looking person, though certainly distinguished— Now I remember, Dolly!"

"Where?"

"Why, at Swindon, of course, on the last week of the tour, and, if I don't forget, on the last night, too—the Saturday night. He was in evening things, in a box, with another man, a clergyman. He

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stayed for the first two acts, but when I came on in the third act he was gone!"

"So it was! You're quite right. Now I remember perfectly. What a curious coincidence!"

They discussed the incident for the remainder of their short walk to St. Martin's Lane, and then, lunch being imminent, and both of them very hungry, they forgot all about it.

Miss French had an appointment after lunch and went away early, leaving Mary alone. There was nobody in the clubrooms that she knew, and she sat down by a glowing fire to read the afternoon papers, fresh editions of which had just been brought in.

She read of the growing distress of the unemployed all over London. She saw that another Socialist had been elected to Parliament at a by-election—neither of which items of news interested her very much. Then she read with rather more interest, and a little shudder, that there had been a bomb explosion in Piccadilly only an hour or two ago, and that part of a great mansion belonging to the Duke of Paddington had been destroyed.

At five o'clock she went out again. The fog was worse than ever, but she knew her London well and was not afraid. She did some modest shopping, and then let herself into the house with her latch-key and went up-stairs.

Another day was over!

Another fruitless day was over, and the robin had not brought her luck after all!

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As she opened her own door and felt for the little enamelled matchbox which always stood on a shelf beside it, her foot trod on something which crackled faintly.

Directly the gas was lit she saw that it was a telegram.

She opened it. It had been despatched from the Bedford Street office at two o'clock that afternoon—while she had been at the Actors' Association. It was from Seaton, the agent, and contained these words:

"Gentleman calling personally on you six to-night with important offer."

In wild excitement Mary looked at the clock. It was ten minutes to six. She lit the fire hurriedly, and urged it into flame with the bellows. Then she lit two candles on the mantelpiece to supplement the single gas jet, and drew the curtain over the window.

At six o'clock precisely she heard rapid steps, light, springy steps, coming up the stairs. There was a momentary hesitation, and then came two loud, firm knocks at her door. She opened it almost immediately, and then started in uncontrollable surprise.

The man who stood before her was the tall man with the mustard-coloured beard and the face pale as linen.

CHAPTER V

"TO INAUGURATE A REVOLUTION!"

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The strange-looking man bowed.

"Miss Mary Marriott, I think!" he said.

"Yes," Mary answered. "Please come in. I have had a telegram from Mr. Seaton, the agent."

"Yes, he sent me here," said the tall man in a singularly fluid and musical voice.

"I had better tell you my name." He entered the room, closed the door, opened a silver cigarette case, and took a card from it which he handed to Mary. "There I am," he said with a smile that showed a set of gleaming white teeth and lit up the pallid face into an extraordinary vivacity.

Mary looked at the card. Then she knew who she was entertaining. On the card were these words: JAMES FABIAN ROSE. The customary "Mr." was omitted, and there was no address in the corner.

Mary was a self-possessed girl enough, but she was unused to meeting famous people. She looked at the card, gave a little gasp, half of wonder and half of dismay, and then recollected herself.

"Please do sit down, Mr. Rose," she said, "and take off your overcoat—oh, and smoke, please, if you want to—I had no idea." [Pg 57]

The tall man smiled. He seemed singularly pleased with the effect he had produced, almost childishly pleased. With a series of agile movements that had no break in them and seemed to be part of the continuous and automatic movement of a machine, he put his soft felt hat on the table, shed, rather than took off his overcoat, produced a box of wooden matches from somewhere, lit a cigarette, and sat down by the fire. He rubbed his hands together and said, "Yes, it is I, what a nice fire you've got"—all in one breath and in his rich, musical voice.

Mary sat down on the other side of the hearth, feeling rather as if she were in some fantastic dream. She said nothing, but looked at the man opposite, remembering all that she had heard of him.

About five-and-forty years of age, James Fabian Rose was one of the most noteworthy personalities of the day. He filled an immense place in the public eye, and it was almost impossible to open a newspaper without finding a paragraph or two about him on any given day. He was so well known that his whole name was seldom or never given in headlines. He was simply referred to as "J. F. R." and every one knew at once who was referred to.

His activities were enormous, and the three chief ones were Socialist leader, dramatist, and novelist. His socialistic lectures were always thronged by all classes of society. His problem plays—in which he always endeavoured to inculcate one or another of his odd but fervent beliefs—were huge successes with cultured people. His novels were only read by literary people, and then merely for their cleverness.

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He was a man whom very few understood. He was, for one reason, far too clever to be credible with the popular mind; for, another, far too aware of his cleverness and far too fond of displaying it at inopportune moments. Fantastic paradox was his chief weapon, and many people did not realise his own point of view, which defined paradox as simply truth standing on its head to attract attention.

When he referred to his own novels, which he often did, he always rated them high above Balzac, Dickens, Thackeray, and Sir Walter Scott. When he spoke in public of his plays—no infrequent occurrence—it was generally with a word of pity for Shakespeare. He was the head of a large and enthusiastic following of intellectual people, and the anathema of all slow thinkers. Apropos of this last, he would quote Swift's saying that the appearance of a man of genius in the world may always be known by the virulence of dunces.

Beneath all his extravagances and pose—and their name was legion—his whole life and earnestness were devoted to the cause in which he believed. One of the most unconventional, and, at the same time, one of the most prominent men of his day, he had two real passions.

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One was to shock the obese-brained of this world, the other to do all he could to leave the world better than he found it.

This was the extraordinary person, genius and buffoon, reformer and wit, who sat laughing on one side of Mary Marriott's little fire.

"I've surprised you, Miss Marriott!" said Mr. James Fabian Rose.

"I saw you at the agent's this morning," she answered, and then—"I think I am not mistaken—I saw you at the theatre at Swindon a few weeks ago."

"Yes, I was there with Peter Conrad, the parson," said Mr. Rose. "I'd been addressing a meeting of the Great Western Railway Company's men in the afternoon—the younger men—trying to teach them that the youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity, and in the evening I came to the theatre. That's why I'm here."

Mary said nothing. She waited for him to speak again, but her heart began to beat violently.

"I took away the programme," Rose went on, "and I put a mark against your name. I was quite delighted with your work, really delighted. I was in a fury at the crass stupidity of the play, and as for the rest of the company they bore about the same relation to real artists as the pawnbroker does to the banker. But you, my dear child, were very good indeed. I kept you in mind for a certain project of mine which was then maturing. It is now settled, and this morning I called at one or two agents to find out where you were. You were not on Blackdale's books, but I found you, or, rather, heard of you, at Seaton's, and so here I am."

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"You want me to——"

"To act, of course. To become a leading lady in a West End theatre, in a new play. That's all!"

For a moment or two Mary could not speak. "But such a thing never happened before," she answered at length in a faltering voice. "It is——"

He cut her short. "My experience of the stage is at least twenty times more profound than yours," he said, "and I have known the thing happen six times within my own experience. Who found Dolores Rainforth? I did. Who found Beatrice Whittingham?—little wretch, she's deserted art and is making a squalid fortune in drawing-room comedy—I did! I could give you many more names. However, that's neither here nor there. I want you for a certain purpose. I know that if I searched the provinces all over I should not find any one who so exactly fits the leading part—my own conception of it!—in my new play as you do. Therefore you are coming to me. And the amusing part of it is that I have actually stormed the citadel of rank and fashion itself. I have gained a stronghold in the hostile country of the capitalists—in short, I and my friends have secured a lease of the Park Lane Theatre!"

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Mary leant back in her chair. Her face had suddenly grown white. She was overwhelmed by all this. And, though she forgot this, her lunch had consisted of a cheap and not very succulent luxury known as a "Vienna steak," a not very nutritious mass of compressed mince-meat, but cheap, very cheap. It was now seven o'clock.

There were those who said that James Fabian Rose was a dreamer. People who knew him intimately were aware that if he was an idealist, he was also practical in the ordinary affairs of life.

"Now, I sha'n't tell you a word more," he said. "They're all waiting for you, and I promised to bring you for dinner. My wife was most insistent about it, and, besides, there are half a dozen people anxious to meet you. In absolute contradiction to all true socialistic principles I've been paying rent for a cab which has been standing outside your front door for ever so long. Put on your hat and come at once."

Mary sat up. "But I can't come like this," she said helplessly, "to dinner!"

Mr. Rose made a gesture of impatience. "The old stupid heresy of Carlyle," he said, "complicated by the fact that if a woman looks nice in one sort of costume she can't realise that she looks nice on whatever occasion she wears it. You must grow superior to such nonsense if we are to enlist you among us! But, come, you'll soon understand, and, besides, I know you are not really the ordinary fluffy little duffer one meets in the stage world."

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She fell in with his humour and quickly pinned on her hat. She knew that she was on the threshold of stimulating experiences, that her chance had come, no matter how strange and fantastic the herald of its advent.

As Rose had said, a hansom was waiting. They got into it and trotted slowly away into the fog towards the great man's house at Westminster.

They arrived at last, though it was a somewhat perilous journey. More than once the driver descended from his seat, took one of the lamps from its bracket, and led his horse through this or that misty welter of traffic. Parliament Street was a broad hurry of confusion, but when they had passed the Abbey on the right and turned into the small network of quiet streets behind the Norman tomb of ancient kings, the house of the Socialist in Great College Street—that quiet and memorable backwater of London—was easily found.

Rose opened a big green door with his latch-key, and at once a genial yellow glow poured out and painted itself upon the curtain of the fog. Mary stood on the steps as a young woman of middle height, pretty and vivacious, came hurrying to the door. "My dear girl!" she cried, "so here you are! Fabian swore that he would find you and bring you. Come in quick out of the cold."

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Then she stopped, still holding the door open—something was going on outside, the not infrequent altercation with the London cabman, Mary thought.

This is what she heard. "Don't be so foolish, my friend"—it was Rose's voice.

"Foolish!" said the cabman. "Bit of oil right ter call me foolish, I don't fink! Nah, I don't tyke no money from you, J. F. R., stryke me Turnham Green, if I do! I've 'eard you speak, I read your harticles, hi do, and it's a fair exchyng. In the dyes ter come no one won't pye anyfink for anyfink. The Styte'll do it all. I've your word for it. I'm a practical Socialist, I am. So long, and keep 'ammering awye at them as keeps the land from the rightful howners, wich is heverybody."

He cracked his whip and disappeared into the fog.

Mr. Rose came into the hall, shut the door, and looked at the half sovereign in his hand with a sigh. His manner seemed a little subdued.

"A little in advance of the future," he said in a meditative voice; "dear, good fellow! And now, Lucia, take Miss Marriott upstairs."

When her hostess took her into the drawing-room Mary found several people there. All of them seemed to expect her, she had the sense of that at once. Her welcome was singularly cordial, she was in some subtle way made to feel that she was somebody. She did not quite realise this at the moment because the whole thing was too sudden and exciting. She perceived it afterwards when she thought everything over.

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The drawing-room on the first floor was large, low-ceilinged, and singularly beautiful. Mary had never seen such a room before. She had a sort of idea that Socialists liked to live in places like the hall of a workhouse, or the class-room of a board school—drab and whitewash places. She did not know till some time afterwards that the room she was in had been arranged and designed for the Roses by William Morris and Walter Crane themselves.

It was, in truth, a lovely room.

The walls were covered with brown paper for two-thirds of their height. A wooden beading painted white divided the warm and sober brown from a plain white frieze. All along one side of the room were shelves covered with gleaming pewter—an unusually fine collection. Here was a seventeenth-century bénitier from Flanders, there a set of "Tappit hens," found in a Scotch ale-house. There was a gleaming row of massive English plates of the Caroline period stamped with the crowned rose. The dull gleam, set thus against the brown background, was curiously effective, and the old Davenport and Mason china upon the white frieze above—deep blues, golds, and old cardinal reds,—the drawings by Walter Crane upon the walls, the tawny orange and reds of the Teheran carpets, and the open brick fire-place, all blended and refined themselves into a delightful harmony.

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Besides the host and hostess three other people were present.

One of them was the Reverend Peter Conrad, the clergyman who had been with Rose in the box at the Swindon Theatre. Mary recognised him at once.

He was tall and thin with a clear-cut and somewhat ascetic face and a singularly humorous mouth. She had heard vaguely of him as a leader among that branch of the party which called itself, "Christian Socialistic," a large and growing group of earnest people, of all sects and shades of Christian opinion, representing every school of thought, but which, nevertheless, united in the endeavour to adapt the literal Socialistic teachings of the Sermon on the Mount to modern life. Christ, they said, was the Master Socialist, and all their aspirations and teachings were founded upon this axiom.

Sitting next to Mr. Conrad was a small, pale-faced man with a rather heavy light moustache and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles. He would have been almost insignificant in appearance had it not been for the high-domed forehead and fine cranial development. This was Charles Goodrick, the editor-in-chief of the great Radical daily paper—the most "advanced" of all the London journals,—and a man with great political influence.

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The third man, Aubrey Flood, Mary recognised at once. He was a young and enthusiastic actor-manager, possessed of large private means, who was in the forefront of the modern movement for the reformation of the stage. He was at the head of the band of enthusiasts who were sworn foes of musical comedy and futile melodrama, and he enjoyed a definite place and *cachet* in society.

When they all went in to dinner, which they did almost at once, Mary found that he was seated at her left. On her right was Mr. Rose himself.

The meal was quite simple, but exquisitely served and cooked. The consommé would not have disgraced Vatel or Carème, the omelette was light as a feather, and, above all, hot! The wild ducks had been properly basted with port wine and stuffed with minced chestnuts and ham. To poor Mary it was a banquet for the gods!

"You see, Miss Marriott," said Rose, with a queer little twinkle in his eye, "we don't eat out of a common trough, though we are Socialists, nor are we vegetarians, as poor, dear Bernard Shaw would like us all to be."

Mary laughed. "I don't think I ever imagined Socialists were like that," she said. "In fact, though it may seem very terrible, I must confess that my mind has hitherto been quite a blank upon the subject."

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"Then it will be all the easier to write the truth upon it," Rose answered.

"Then Miss Marriott doesn't quite know what we want her for yet?" Aubrey Flood asked.

"She only knows that she is going to play lead at the Park Lane Theatre in a new play of mine."

"And that is overwhelming, simply," Mary said with a blush. "It's impossible to believe. But, all the same, I am longing to hear all there is for me to know."

"So you shall after dinner," said Rose, "you shall have full details. Meanwhile, to sum the whole thing up, you are not only going to take a part in a play, but you are going to inaugurate a Revolution!"

CHAPTER VI THE GREAT NEW PLAN

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"J. F. R." had spoken with unusual seriousness, and his manner was reflected in the faces of the other guests as they looked towards Mary Marriott.

The girl's brain reeled at the words. A Revolution! What could they mean—what did it all mean? Was she not in truth asleep in her dingy little attic sitting-room? Wouldn't she wake up soon to find the old familiar things around her—all these new surroundings but a dream, a phantom of the imagination?

Mrs. Rose was watching her, and guessed something of what was passing in the girl's mind. "My dear," she said, with a bright and friendly smile, "it's all right; you really are wide awake, and you shall hear all about it from Fabian in a few minutes. And you haven't come into a den of anarchists, so don't be afraid. Only your chance has come at last, and you are to have the opportunity of doing a great, artistic thing—as great, perhaps, as any actress has ever done—and also of helping England. You may make history! Who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed?" said Charles Goodrick, the editor of the *Daily Wire*. "I hope it will be my privilege to record it in the columns of my paper."

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The dinner was nearly over, but the remainder of it seemed interminably long to the waiting girl. In a swift moment, as it were, her whole life was changed. That morning she was a poor and almost friendless actress of the rank and file. Now she sat at dinner with a group of influential

people whose names were known far and wide, whose influence was a real force in public affairs. And, somehow or other, they wanted her. She was an honoured guest. She was made to feel, and in a half-frightened way she did feel, that much depended upon her. What it was she did not know and could not guess; but the fact remained, and the consciousness of it was a strange mingling of exaltation, wonder, and fear.

At last Mrs. Rose smiled and nodded at Mary and rose from her seat.

"Don't be more than five minutes, Fabian," the hostess said, as she and Mary left the room.

When they were alone together she drew the girl to a big couch, covered with blue linen, and kissed her.

"We are to be friends," she said, "I am quite certain of it." And the lonely girl's heart went out to this winning and gracious young matron.

The four men came into the room, a maid brought coffee, cigarettes were lighted—Mrs. Rose smoked, but Mary did not—and the playwright took up a commanding position upon the hearth-rug.

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Then he began. The mockery which was so frequent a feature of his talk was gone. He permitted himself neither pose nor paradox—he was in deadly earnest.

"For more than a year," he said, "I have searched in vain for an actress who could fill the chief woman's part in my new play. None of the ladies who have acted in my other plays would do. They were admirable in those plays, but this is quite different. I have never written anything like it before. I sincerely believe, and so do those who are associated with me in its production"—he looked over at Aubrey Flood—"that the play is a great work of art. But it is designed to be more, far more than that. It is designed to be a lever, a huge force in helping on the cause in which I believe and to which I have devoted my life—the cause of Socialism. I could not find any one capable of playing Helena Hardy, the heroine of the play. The play stands alone; yet is like no other play; no actress trained in the usual way, and however clever an artist, had the right personality. Then I saw you play. I knew at once, Miss Marriott, that I had found the lady for whom I was searching. Chance or Fate had thrown you in my way. In every detail you visualized my Helena Hardy for me. I am never mistaken. I was, and am, quite certain of it.

"You tell me you know nothing of Socialism. Before you have been associated with us very long you will know a great deal about it. I am sure, if I read you rightly, that when the time comes for you to play Helena you will be convinced of the truth of the words you utter, of the Cause for the service of which we enlist your art. It is the cause of humanity, of brotherhood, of freedom.

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"We cannot go on as we are. These things have not touched your young life as yet, they are about to do so. Realise, to begin with, that England cannot continue as she is at present. Nemesis is one of the grim realities not sufficiently taken into account in the great game of life. Leaden-footed she may be, and often is, but that is only her merciful way of giving the sinner time to repent. There is nothing more certain in the universe than that an injustice done to an individual or to a class, to a nation or to a sex, will sooner or later bring destruction upon the doer. At the present moment England is reproducing every cause which led to the downfall of the great nations of the past—Imperialism, taking tribute from conquered races, the accumulation of great fortunes, the development of a huge population which owns no property and is always in poverty. Land has gone out of cultivation, and physical deterioration is an alarming fact. And so we Socialists say that the system which is producing these results must not be allowed to continue. A system which has robbed Religion of its message, destroyed handicraft, which awards the prizes and successes of life to the unscrupulous, corrupts the press, turns pure women into the streets and upright men into mean-spirited time-servers, must not continue.

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"I'm not going to give you a lecture on Socialism now. But it is absolutely necessary that I should explain to you, at the very beginning of your work, how we look at these things.

"At the present moment three quarters at least of the whole population are called 'workers.' How do these people live? By the wear of hands and bodies, by the sweat of their faces. A 'worker' eats food which is rough, cheap, and harmful in many instances. His clothes are of shoddy, with a tendency to raggedness. He lodges in tiny, ill-ventilated rooms. He works from eight to sixteen hours each day, just so long as his strength is effective. And not only the worker himself—that is the man who is head and support of his family—but his wife and sisters and daughters share the burden of toil. He works among perils and dangers unceasing, accidents with machinery, explosions in mills and mines, dreadful diseases come to him from dangerous trades—unwholesome conditions, vitiated air, poisonous processes, and improper housing. Hardly any of those fortunate ones who impose these tasks upon him take any care to shield him from these evils. He is not so valuable as a horse. He is cheap, there are millions of him to be had, why go to the expense of protecting him? A horse has to be bought, he costs an initial sum down, the worker costs nothing but his wretched keep.

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"You, Miss Marriott, are cultured. You are an artist, you live for your art, and you care for it. You can understand the peculiar horror, I should say one peculiar horror, of the life of the worker which he is himself generally too blind and ignorant to understand. For he has no leisure to look about him, no heart to speculate as to what things might be. Over all his misery and misfortune towers one supreme misery and misfortune—the want of all that makes the pleasure and interest of life to the free man. No genius tells stories, makes music, paints pictures, writes or acts, plays,

builds palaces for the worker. Genius itself would starve at such work, as things are at present constituted. The workers' chief concern is to buy bread. He must let art, that sweetens life, go by. The Graces and the Muses are never shown to him in such a way that he may know and love them for their own sakes."

He stopped suddenly. Colour had come into the pallid face, the rich, musical voice had a vibrant organ note in it, every one in the room was leaning forward, strained to attention, Mary among the rest.

"So much for that," he went on. "I have been saying necessary but obvious things. Now let me point out what we are doing, we Socialists. Our party is growing enormously day by day. Innumerable adherents, great power, fill our ranks and give us weapons. [Pg 74]

"We have an influential press. Monthly reviews and weekly papers preach our message. And one great daily journal, controlled by our brother, Charles Goodrick, reaches every class of society, and hammers in the truth day by day.

"Our political organization is an engine of great power. We have a large pledged party in the House of Commons. Our lecturers are everywhere, our books and pamphlets are being sown broadcast over the kingdom.

"We have a great Religious movement. Mr. Conrad here, together with some half a dozen others, controls the increasing band of Christian Socialists. Men and women of all the churches flock to his banner, differences of opinion are forgotten and lost under the one comprehensive watchword—that Christianity, the faith in Jesus Christ, is a socialistic religion.

"We have two great needs, however. Able as our writers are, they are nearly all essayists or journalists. As yet no great popular novelist has joined us—one of those supreme preachers who wield the magic wand of fiction and reach where no others can reach.

"And lastly, we have never had as yet a socialistic stage! That tremendous weapon, the theatre, has laid ready to our hand, but we have not availed ourselves of it. We are about to do so now. You know, I know, we are both experts, and it is our business to know, that there are hundreds of thousands of people who never read a book or pamphlet, and who are yet profoundly influenced and impressed by the mimic representations of life which they see upon the stage. [Pg 75]

"You are a provincial actress. You have toured in ordinary melodrama. When, after some important act or scene, the characters are called before the curtain, what do you find? You find that some stick of a girl who has walked through the part of the heroine in a simper and a yellow wig is rapturously applauded—not for herself, the public thinks nothing of her acting one way or the other, but for the virtues of which she is the silly and inartistic symbol. The bad woman of the piece, always and invariably the finer player and more experienced artist, is hissed with genuine virulence.

"What is this but the very strongest proof—and there are dozens of other proofs if such were wanting—of the influence, the real and deep influence of the theatre upon the ordinary man and woman?

"It is to inaugurate the new use to which the theatre is going to be put by us that I have invited you to join us. But do not mistake me. We have taken the Park Lane Theatre by design. We are going to begin by showing the idle classes themselves the truth about themselves and their poorer brethren. They will come out of curiosity in the first instance, and afterwards because what we are going to give them is so unique, so extraordinary, and so artistically fine that they will be absolutely unable to neglect it. Then the movement will spread. We shall rouse the workers by this play, and others like it, in theatres which they can afford to attend. We shall have companies on tour—I may tell you that already a vast and detailed scheme is prepared, though I need not go into any of the details of that on this first night. [Pg 76]

"And now, finally, let me tell you, quite briefly and without going into the scope of the plot, something about the first play of all at the Park Lane Theatre—your play, the play in which you are to create Helena Hardy. It is called, at present, *The Socialist*, and it is destined to be the first of a series. Its primary effort, in the carefully-thought-out scheme of theatre propaganda, is to draw a lurid picture of the extreme and awful contrast between the lives of the poor and the rich.

"We are going to do what has never been really done before—we are going to be extraordinarily and mercilessly realistic. It will be called brutal. And our studies are going to be made at first hand. In attacking one class, we are also going to allow it to be known that all our actual scenes have been taken from life. The slums to the north of Oxford Street, all round Paddington, are hideous and dreadful. They all belong to one man, the young Duke of Paddington, a boy at Oxford; incredibly rich. The theatre itself is on his land. Well, we are going to go for this young man tooth and nail, hammer and tongs, because he is typical of the class we wish to destroy. We are going to let it be generally known that this is our object. It will be published abroad that the slum scenes in the play are literal reproductions of actual scenes on the duke's property. Our scene painters are even now at work taking notes. One by one all the members of the cast are going to be taken to see these actual slums, to converse with their inhabitants, to imbibe the frightful atmosphere of these modern infernos. We want every one to play with absolute conviction. I have arranged that a party shall leave this house in two days' time, a county council inspector and a couple of police inspectors are coming with us, in order to do this. You, I beg, Miss Marriott, will come, too." [Pg 77]

He had been speaking for a considerable time with enormous earnestness and vivacity. Now he stopped suddenly and sank into a chair. His face became pale again, he was manifestly tired.

Some one passed him a box of cigarettes. He lit one, inhaled the smoke in a few deep breaths, and then turned to Mary.

"Well?" he said.

She answered him as simply, and many words would not have made her answer more satisfying or sincere. [Pg 78]

"Yes," she said.

"Very well, then, that's settled," Rose replied in his ordinary voice. "Salary and that sort of thing we will arrange to-morrow through Mr. Seaton. I will merely assure you that we regard the labourer as worthy of his hire, and that we shall not disagree upon that sort of thing."

As he spoke a maid entered the room. "Mr. Goodrick is being rung up from the offices of the *Daily Wire*," she said.

"Then there is something important," said the journalist, as he hurried to the telephone in an adjacent room. "When I left at five I said that I should not return to-night unless it was anything big. I left Bennett in sole charge."

He was away some minutes, and the conversation in the drawing-room became general, the high note being dropped by mutual consent.

"By the way," Mr. Conrad said suddenly, "what an odd thing it is that part of Paddington House was blown down this morning!"

"The poor boy will have to take arms against a sea of troubles," said Mrs. Rose sympathetically. "At any rate, we are law-abiding conspirators. It seems dreadful to think that there are people who will go these lengths. I'm sorry for the poor young duke. It isn't his fault that he's who and what he is."

"Of course," Rose replied. "I hate and deprecate this violence. It is, of course, a menace from the unemployed. But my heart bleeds for them. Think of them crouching in doorways, with no shirts below their ragged coats, with no food in their stomachs, on a night like this!" [Pg 79]

He shuddered, and Mary saw, with surprise, another and almost neurotic facet of this extraordinary character.

Charles Goodrick hurried into the room. "I must say good-night," he said, in a voice which trembled with excitement. "A very big piece of news has come in. One of our men has all the details. It will be our particular scoop. No other paper to-morrow morning will have all that we shall."

"But what is it?" Rose asked.

"A big railway accident, but with an extraordinary complication, and—by Jove, what a coincidence!—it concerns the young Duke of Paddington!"

"Is he killed?"

"No. He was stunned for a time. The accident happened in the fog just outside Paddington Station. He was stunned, but soon recovered.

"Then what?" said the journalist.

"Why, the extraordinary thing is that he has totally disappeared!"

CHAPTER VII

KIDNAPPING UPON SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES

[Pg 80]

The Duke of Paddington lay stunned and unconscious beneath the wreck of the first-class carriage.

There had been the period of waiting outside Paddington Station—his own great-grandfather had sold the ground on which it stood to the company—in the black fog of the winter's night.

Then there had come the lengthening roar of the approaching train, the shouts, the horrid crash of impact, the long tearing, ripping, grinding noise—and oblivion.

How long he had been unconscious the duke did not in the least know. He came back to life with that curious growing, widening sensation that a diver has when he is once more springing up through the water towards the surface, air, and light.

Then quite suddenly full consciousness returned—rather, he arrived at full consciousness. Everything was dark, pitch dark. His ears were full of a horrid clamour. A heavy, suffocating weight was pressing upon him.

He lay perfectly still for some moments endeavouring to recollect where he was and what had happened. Finally he remembered and realised that he was actually—he himself—a victim of one of those terrible railway accidents of which he had read so often in the newspapers with a careless word of pity, or perhaps, no emotion at all.

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Another train had crashed into the Oxford express in the fog.

The duke moved his right arm, and found he could do so freely, except above his body, where the heavy something which was lying upon him prevented its passage. He strove to dislodge the weight, but was utterly unable to do so. He was, in fact, pinned beneath a mass of woodwork, which, while not pressing on him with more than a little of its weight, nevertheless kept him rigid upon his back without possibility of movement. His left arm he could not move at all. Curiously enough, the sensation of fear was entirely absent.

"I am in a deuce of a tight place," he thought of himself, and thought about himself in a strangely detached fashion as if he was thinking of another person.

"I am in a deuce of a tight place. What is to be done?"

He tried once more to move the crushing roof. He might as well have tried to push down the Bank of England with an umbrella.

Next there came to him a sudden thought, a realisation that at least one thing was in his favour. As far as he knew he was perfectly unhurt. He felt fairly certain that no limbs were broken, and that he had no severe internal injury. He was cut and bruised, doubtless, and still giddy from the blow of the impact, but, save for this, there could be no doubt that he had been most mercifully preserved.

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The air was full of confused noises, shouts, the roaring of escaped steam, cries of agony. The duke added his clamour to the rest. His voice was full and strong, and echoed and re-echoed in his ears.

Nothing happened, and now for the first time a sickening feeling of fear came to him and his cries sank into silence.

Almost immediately afterwards he heard a noise much nearer than before, much more distinct and individual. It was a crashing, regular noise, some one was working at the débris.

Once more he shouted, and this time an answering hail came to him.

"Is anyone there?"

"Yes," the duke called out. "I am pinned down here by a heavy mass of timber."

"Are you badly injured?"

"I don't think I'm much hurt, only it is impossible for me to move."

"Cheer up!" came back the voice. "We will soon have you out." And then the crashing, tearing noise went on with renewed vigour.

In a few minutes the duke found the pressure on his chest was much relieved and the noise grew infinitely louder. It was as though he was lying shut up in a box, at the sides of which half a dozen stalwart navvies were kicking. He thought that the drums of his ears were bursting. Then there was a chorus of shouts, a last tremble and heaving of the confining mass, a breath of cold reviving air, and strong hands withdrew him from his prison.

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He was carried swiftly to the side of the line and laid down upon a pile of sacking. Immediately he became aware that soft, dexterous hands were feeling him all over, hands which seemed to be definite and separate organisms, so light and purposeful were they.

He realised that a doctor was examining him, and the light of a lantern which some one else was holding showed him that the surmise was correct. A tall young man with a pointed beard, in a long mackintosh, was bending over him.

"You are all right, thank goodness!" said the doctor. "You are not hurt a bit, only you have been stunned, and of course you are suffering from the shock. Now, you just lie here until I come to you again. You must stay still for half an hour. Drink this."

He held a little cup of brandy to the duke's mouth. The fiery liquid sent new life into the young man's veins. Everything became more real and actual to him. Before everything had been a little blurred, as the first image upon the lenses of field-glasses is blurred. Now, the duke seemed to have got the right focus.

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"Now, mind, you are not to move at all till I come back," the doctor said. "You have got a warm coat, and I will put some of these sacks over you. You are not hurt, but if you move now until you are rested a little you may get a shock to the nerves, which will remain with you for a long time. Now I must go to attend to some of the poor chaps who want me far more than you do."

"Is it a bad smash?" the duke asked. They were the first words he had spoken.

"One of the worst smashes for many years," answered the doctor over his shoulder as he was hurrying away. "You may thank your Maker that you have been so mercifully preserved."

The duke lay where he was.

The brandy had revived him, and, to his surprise, he realised that, except for a more or less violent headache, he really felt as well as he had been when he first got into the train. He was not even aware of any bruises or contusions, save only that his left hand had been rather badly cut, and was covered with congealed blood.

He wondered exactly where he was, and he looked around him. The fog was still impenetrably dense, though it was illuminated here and there by glowing fires and moving torches—a strange Dantesque vision of moving forms and red light, dim and distorted, like some mysterious tragedy of the underworld.

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Now and then some sharp and almost animal like cry of agony came to his ears, cutting through the gloom like a knife, horribly distressing to hear.

Nobody was immediately near him. He was outside the radius of the chief activities of the breakdown gang and the doctors. There was nothing for him to do but to wait where he was. The doctor would be certain not to forget him, and, besides, he had not the faintest notion in what direction to move in order to get away from all this horror.

So he lay still.

Presently the brandy, to which he was unaccustomed, began to work within him, and induced a languor and drowsiness. His heavy sable coat, all torn and soiled now, though it had cost him six hundred guineas less than a month before, kept his body warm, and, in addition to it, he was covered by sacking.

His mind wandered a little, and he was almost on the point of dropping to sleep when there was a sound as of approaching footsteps upon gravel or cinders. He heard a muttered and strangely husky conversation, apparently between two people, a quick, furtive ripple of talk, and then something descended upon his mouth, something warm and firm—a man's hand.

In the dark he could see two figures about him. A man had stooped down and brought his hand silently down upon his mouth, so that he could not cry out. Another was bending towards him on the other side, and soon he felt that deft hands were going through his pockets. When the doctor had touched him he had felt nothing but surprise and wonder at the prehensile intelligence of the touch. Now he shuddered.

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He began to struggle, but found himself by no means so strong as he had imagined that he was a quarter of an hour ago.

A harsh voice hissed in his ear: "Now, stow that, or I'll make you!"

In all his life the Duke of Paddington had never been spoken to in such a way, and, ill as he was, the imperious blood leapt to his brain, and he redoubled his exertions.

Suddenly he stopped with a low gurgle of anguish.

His ear had been seized between two bony knuckles and twisted round with a sharp jerk until the pain was frightful.

Then he lay still once more.

He realised what was happening. The accident to the train had occurred on that part of the line some little way out of the station, upon which all sorts of more or less slum houses debouch. Two of those modern brigands who infest London had come, attracted to this scene of suffering and tragedy by the hope of plunder—even as in the old days, after a battlefield, obscene and terrible creatures appeared in the night and nameless deeds were done.

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They had his watch. Sir John Bennett had made it specially for him. It was one of those repeating watches with all sorts of costly additional improvements, which can do almost anything but talk.

He heard the man about him say: "This 'ere's a rich bloke, Sidney; but the ticker's no blooming use except for the case. The—fence wouldn't look at it. Too easy to identify. Ah, this 'ere's better!"

He had found the duke's sovereign purse.

Swiftly, and with the skill born of long practice, the man went through every pocket. When he found the little case of green crocodile skin, in which the duke carried paper money, his cards, and a letter or two, he gave a low whistle of delight.

The duke could hear the little crackle close to his ear as the man counted the five-pound notes.

Almost immediately after this there was a gasp of astonishment.

"Look 'ere!" the other man said, "it's the bloomin' Duke of Paddington himself!"

The duke started, and obviously his captors imagined that he was about to recommence his struggles, for there was a sharp tweak of his ear once more. After that he heard nothing.

The two men had joined heads over his body and were whispering eagerly to each other. It seemed an eternity while he was lying there with the heavy hand upon his mouth, breathing with

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difficulty through his nostrils, though, in actual point of fact, from first to last, the whole thing was of less than two minutes' duration.

The men seemed to have come to some sort of agreement.

They acted with neatness and precision. A filthy and evil-smelling handkerchief was suddenly rammed into the duke's mouth. Another bandaged his eyes before he realised what was happening, and two pair of stalwart arms had him up upon his feet, locked in the London policeman's grip, and half carried, half hustled right away from where he had been lying almost before he realised what was happening.

He heard the click of a gate or door. His feet had left the gravel or cinder upon which they had been walking and were now apparently shuffling over flagstones. Then, by an added chill to the cold air, and a certain echo in the footsteps, he knew that he was being pushed down some sort of alley or cul de sac.

He was twisted from left to right and from right to left with the greatest rapidity, and half the extraordinary journey was not completed before he had utterly lost all idea of his whereabouts.

The noise of the distant rescuers at the scene of the accident sank into a low hum and then died completely away.

He seemed to be rushing along some maze or city of the dead, for no human sound save the noise of his and his captors' movements reached his ears. [Pg 89]

In four or five minutes he was rudely stopped. He heard a knock upon a door, a peculiar and obviously signal knock. There was a sound of a window opening, a low whistle, and he was pushed forward up a few steps and into a house, the door of which was immediately closed behind him.

He was hustled along an evil-smelling passage, down a flight of uneven stone stairs and into a room, a room much warmer than the cold passages which he had traversed, a room in which there were several people, and where a fire was burning.

The cruel grip which had held him like a vice in its strength and ingenuity was a little relaxed.

He was pushed down upon a chair. The air of the room was stifling, his body was wet with perspiration, owing to the sudden transition from cold to heat, the restricted breathing, and the extreme rapidity of his progress.

A hand rested on his cheek for a moment and then plucked the filthy handkerchief from his mouth.

The duke took a deep breath. Foul as the air was in this place it seemed at this moment balmy as those breezes laden with cassia and nard which blow through the Gardens of the Hesperides.

Then a voice spoke: "You will be all right, guv'nor. Sorry to 'ave 'ad to treat you a bit rough like, but, 'pon my sivey, we wasn't goin' to lose a bit-of-orl-right like this. Just for precaution's sake, as you might sye, we'll——" [Pg 90]

The sentence was not concluded, but the duke felt his legs were being tied to the legs of the chair. His arms were suddenly caught up and pressed behind him. He was perfectly helpless.

Then the bandage was removed from his eyes.

He found himself in a place which, in his experience, was utterly unlike anything that he had seen before, or even imagined. As a matter of fact, he was sitting trussed upon a windsor chair in an underground thieves' cellar-kitchen.

A large fire of coal and coke glowed in the white-washed fire-place. There were shelves with crockery and other utensils on each side of the fire. An ancient armchair, covered with torn and dirty chintz, was drawn to the fire, and in it sat a very large fat woman of middle age. She wore heavy gold earrings, bracelets were upon her wrists, and a glinting flash from her fat and dirty fingers showed that the diamonds in her rings were real. No one could have mistaken her for an instant for anything else than a Jewess.

There were five or six men in the room.

As the duke became accustomed to the light of the big paraffin lamp which hung from the ceiling he saw that all these men were singularly alike. They were all clean shaven, for one thing, and they all seemed to have the same expression. Their mouths were one and all intelligent and slightly deferential. Their eyes flickered a good deal hither and thither and were curiously and quietly watchful. There was a precision about their movements. [Pg 91]

"Could they all be brothers?" he wondered idly, for his brain was still weakened by shock, "and could that fat woman with the filthy clothes and the rings be their mother?"

"Now, then, guv'nor," said one of the men with perfect politeness, but with a curious under-note of menace in his voice, "we know who your lordship is. It is a fair cop. We've got you 'ere, and of course you are not going away from 'ere unless you makes it nice and heasy for all parties."

The man spoke in a hoarse voice, but, again, a singularly quiet voice. Menace was there, it is true, but there was something cringing also.

Who could these men be? the duke thought idly and as if in a dream. They looked like actors. Yes, they were very much like actors. Was it that he had—

The true explanation burst in upon him. He remembered a certain magazine article he had once read with a curious mixture of disgust and pity, a magazine article which was illustrated by many photographs. These men were alike for a very sufficient reason. A terrible discipline had pressed them into its irremediable mould.

They were all old convicts. They were men who had "done time."

CHAPTER VIII "IN CELLAR COOL!"

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The duke knew perfectly well that he had fallen into the hands of as rascally and evil a gang of ruffians as London could produce. He made no answer to the words of the man who had addressed him.

"You will be better off if you listen to Sidney reasonable, dearie," said the horrible old woman. The words dropped from her lips like gout of oil. "You will be all the better for listening to Sidney! I'm sure nobody wants to do anything unpleasant to you, but folks must live, and you've reely walked in most convenient, as you might sye."

"What do you want?" the duke said at last.

"Well, sir," the man addressed as "Sidney" replied, "we have got you fair. Nobody saw us take you away. You've disappeared from the accident without leaving a trace like." As he spoke, the man's servile, wolfish face was a sheer wedge of greed and cunning. His tongue moistened his lips as if in anticipation of something. "You see, nobody can't possibly know where you've come. They will think you were smashed up, or got up and went away, out of your mind, after the shock. People'll hunt all over London for you, no doubt, but they won't never think of us. Now, we've got your very 'ansom ticker and a few quids, and the gold purse that 'eld them, and there was a matter of forty or fifty pound in notes in the pocket-book when we opened it. It was that, by the wye, as told us who you was. Now, our contention is that them as 'as as much money as you must contribute to them as 'asn't."

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He grinned as if pleased with his own wit, and a horrid little uncertain chuckle went round the room, a chuckle with something not quite human in it.

"Now, wot I says," the man continued, "is this. We will return you the ticker because it won't be of much use to us, except the gold case. We'll keep the chain and the quid box and the quids, and we'll also keep the fi-pun notes. Then, my lord, you'll sit down and write a little note to your bankers and enclose a cheque. I see you have got the cheque-book with you, or I've got it at least. Now, the question is what the amount of this 'ere cheque shall be. You, being a rich man, we cannot put it low, and we hold all the cards. Let's say three thousand pounds. In addition to that you'll give us your word of honour as a gentleman to take no proceedings about this 'ere little matter and say nothing about it to nobody. When that's done, by to-morrow morning, mid-day, say, you can go, and I am sure," he concluded, "with an 'earty hand-shake from yours truly, being a gentleman, as I am sure you will prove, and a lord, too."

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The duke considered.

Three thousand pounds is a large sum of money, though to him it meant little or nothing. At the same time his whole manhood rose up within him—the stubbornness of his race steeled him against granting these miscreants their demand. A flood of anger mounted to his brain. His upper lip stiffened and his eyes glinted ominously.

At last he answered the man.

"I'll see you d—d," he said, "before I give you a single halfpenny! And let me tell you this, that, as sure as you stand here now, you are bringing upon yourselves a sure and speedy punishment. You think, because I am wealthy and you know who I am, you have got a big haul. If you were just a little cleverer than you are you would understand that the Duke of Paddington cannot disappear, even for a few hours, without urgent inquiry being made for him. You will infallibly be discovered, and you know what the result of that will be."

"Not quite so fast," said the man called Sidney, in a smooth, quiet voice. "It is all very well to talk like this 'ere, but you don't know what you are a-saying of. You don't know in whose hands you are. People like us don't stick at nothing. As sure as eggs is eggs, unless you do as we are asking, you will never be seen or heard of any more. You think we run a risk? Well, I'll tell you this—I've had a good deal of professional experience—this is one of the easiest jobs to keep out of sight that I've ever 'ad. Now, supposing there 'ad been a little high-class job in the West End—matter of a jeweller's shop, say—or a house in Park Lyne. In that case we should be pretty certain to have some 'tecs nosing round this quarter, finding out where I or some other of my pals had been the night before. We should be watched, and the fences would be watched, until they could prove something against us. But in this case the police won't have a single idea wot will connect us with your disappearance."

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"I am not going to argue with you, my man," the duke answered calmly. "I am not accustomed to bandy words with anybody, much less a filthy criminal ruffian like you! You can go to blazes, the whole lot of you! I won't give any of you a farthing!"

Even now the man who was the spokesman of that furtive, evil crew did not lose his temper. He smiled and nodded to himself, as if marking what the duke had said and weighing it over in his mind.

"All right," he answered at length. "That is what you say now. You will say different soon. I am not going to make any bones about it, but I'll tell you the programme, and that is this: To-night we are going to tie you up and take you down into a cellar. There's another one below this, and it ain't got no light nor fire, neither. It is simply a hole in the foundations of the house, that is wot it is. And the rats are all-alive-oh down there, I can tell you! Nice, warm, little furry rats with pink 'ands. You will stay down there to-night, and to-morrow morning I'll come and ask you this question again. I should like to get the business settled and over by mid-day. No use wasting time when there's work to be done. I am a business man, I am. Then, if your blooming lordship is fool enough not to agree to our little proposals by that time—well, then, I can only say that—much as I should regret 'aving to do it—we should 'ave to try what a little physical persuasion means—some 'ot sealing-wax upon the bare stomach, or a splinter or two of wood 'ammered between the nail and the finger, or even a good deal worse than that. Well, it'll all depend on you."

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There was something so repulsively insolent in the man's voice that the duke's sense of outrage and anger was even greater than his fear.

He could not, did not, believe that these men would do anything of what they had threatened. His whole upbringing and training had made it almost impossible for him to believe that such a thing could happen to him. It was incredible—perfectly astounding and incredible—that he had even met with this misfortune, that he was where he was. But that the results of his capture would be pushed so far as the man said he was absolutely sceptical. His fierce and lambent sense of anger mastered everything.

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"Don't try and frighten me, you scoundrel!" he said. "I won't give you a penny!"

Still in the same even voice the ruffian concluded his address. The circle of the others had come closer and surrounded the duke on every side, while the old woman in the background peered over the shoulders of two men, looking at the bound victim with a curious, detached interest, as a naturalist might watch a cat playing with a mouse.

"Lastly," said the man, "if you go on being silly, after you've enjoyed a day or two with the pleasant little gymes I've told you of, why, I shall just come down into that 'ere cellar one morning, hold up your chin, and cut your throat like a pig! We sha'n't want to have you about if you stick to what you say, and a little cement down in that 'ere forgotten cellar—which, in fact, nobody knows of at all, except me and my pals here—will soon hide you away, my lord! There won't be any stately funeral and ancestral vault for the Duke of Paddington!"

For the first time a chill came into the duke's blood. He felt also a tremendous weariness, and his head throbbed unbearably. Yet there was a toughness within him, a strength of purpose and will which was not easily to be vanquished or weakened.

In a flash he reviewed the chances of the situation. They were going to put him in a cellar till the morning. Well, he could bear that, no doubt. He might have time to think the whole matter over—to decide whether he should weaken or not, whether he should yield to these menacing demands. At the present his whole soul rose up in revolt against budging an inch from what he had said. His intense pride of birth and station, so deeply ingrained within him, turned with an almost physical nausea against allowing himself to be intimidated by such carrion as these. Should the dirty sweepings of the gaols of England frighten a man in whose veins ran the blood of centuries of rulers?

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He ground his teeth together and looked the spokesman full in the face. He even smiled a little.

"I don't believe," he said in a quiet voice, "that you are fool enough to do any of these things with which you have threatened me, but I tell you that if you do you will find me exactly the same as you find me now. You might threaten some people and frighten them successfully. You might torture some people into doing what you say, but you will neither frighten me in the first instance, nor torture me into acquiescence in the second. You have got hold of the wrong person this time, my man, and what you think is going to be such a nice thing for you and your crew of scoundrels will in the end, if you carry out your threats, mean nothing else for all of you but the gallows. You may kill me if you like. I quite realise that at present I am in your power, though I do not think it at all likely I shall be so for very long. But even if you kill me you will get nothing out of me beyond the things you have stolen already. You have a very limited knowledge of life if you imagine that anybody of my rank and breed is going to let himself be altered from his purpose by such filth as you!"

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There was a low and ominous murmur from the men as the duke concluded. The evil, snake-like faces grew more evil still.

They clustered together under the lamp, talking and whispering rapidly to each other, and the whimsical thought, even in that moment of extreme peril, came to the duke that there was a chamber of horrors resembling in an extraordinary degree that grisly underground room at the

waxwork show in Baker Street, which, out of curiosity, he had once visited. There were the same cold, watchful eyes, the mobile and not unintelligent lips, the abnormally low foreheads, of the waxen monsters in the museum.

There was nothing human about any of them; they were ape-like and foul.

The man called "Sidney" turned round. From a bulging side-pocket of his coat he took out the duke's valuable repeater.

"Ah," he said, "I see that this 'ere little transaction 'as only occupied 'arf an hour from the time when we found you to the present. We came out, thinking we might pick up a ticker or two or a portmanteau among the wreck. We got something a good deal better. Never mind what you say, we will find means to convince you right enough, but there is no time now. We're going to put you down in that there cellar I spoke of among the rats, and you will wait there till to-morrow morning. Meanwhile me and my pals will all be seen in different parts of London, in a bar or talking innocent-like to each other, and we will take jolly good care we will be seen by some of the 'tecs as knows us. There won't be no connecting us with your lordship's disappearance. Now then, come on!"

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His voice, which had been by no means so certain and confident as it was before, suddenly changed into a snarl of fury. The duke heard it without fear and with a sense of exultation. He knew that his serenity had gone home, that his contempt had stung even this wolf-pig man.

As if catching the infection of the note, the unseen ruffian behind the chair, who held his arms, gave them a sharp, painful wrench.

The men crowded round him. His legs were untied from the chair legs and then retied together. His arms were strongly secured behind him, and he was half pushed, half carried to a door at the back of the kitchen.

The leader of the gang went before, carrying a tallow candle in a battered tin holder.

Passing through the door, they came into a small back cellar-kitchen, in which there was a sink and a tap. A large tub, apparently used for washing, stood in one corner. Deft hands pulled this, half-full of greasy water as it was, away from where it originally stood.

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A stone flag with an iron ring let into it was revealed.

A man pulled this up with an effort, revealing a square of yawning darkness, into which a short ladder descended. The leader went down first, and with some difficulty the helpless body of the duke was lowered down after him, though the depth could not have been more than eight feet or so.

When he had been pushed into this noisome hole the duke saw by the light of the candle which "Sidney" carried that he was in an underground chamber, perhaps some ten feet by ten. The walls were damp and oozing with saltpetre. The floor was of clay.

Looking up in the flickering light of the dip he could see where the ancient brick foundations of the house had been built into the ground. He was now, in fact, below the lowest cellar, in an unsuspected and forgotten chamber, left by the builders two hundred years ago.

"Now, this 'ere comfortable little detached residence, dook," said the man, "is where we generally puts our swag when it's convenient to keep it for a bit. Nobody knows of it. Nobody has ever learned of it. We discovered it quite by chance like. That man wot comes round and collects the rents ain't an idea of its existence. This 'ere is Rat Villa, this is. Now, good-night! 'Ope to see your lordship 'appy and 'ealthy in the morning! You will observe we have left you your right arm free to brush the vermin off."

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The duke lay down upon his back, looking up at the sinister ruffian with the candle and the dark stone ceiling of his prison.

Then, with an impudent, derisive chuckle Sidney climbed the ladder, and immediately afterwards the stone slab fell into its place with a soft thud.

The duke was alone in the dark!

CHAPTER IX

MARY MARRIOTT'S INITIATION

[Pg 103]

The morning was not so foggy as the last three terrible days had been.

Dull it was even yet—the skies were dark and lowering—but the acrid, choking fog had mercifully disappeared.

But Mary Marriott thought nothing of this change in the weather as she drove down in a hansom cab to the house of James Fabian Rose in the little quiet street behind Westminster Abbey. It was half-past twelve. The great expedition to the slums of the West End was now to start.

Since that extraordinary day upon which her prospects had seemed so hopeless and so forlorn Mary had been in a state of suspended expectation. Suddenly, without any indication of what was to happen, she had been caught out of her drab monotony and taken into the very centre of a great, new pulsating movement. The conclusion of the day upon which she had again failed to achieve a theatrical engagement was incredibly splendid, incredibly wonderful!

She had had twenty-four hours to think it over, and during the whole of that quiet time in her little Bloomsbury flat, she had lived as if in a dream. [Pg 104]

Was it possible, she asked herself over and over again—could it be true that the man with the mustard-coloured beard—the great James Fabian Rose—had indeed called upon her, had found her preparing her simple evening meal, and had taken her away through the fog to the brilliant little house in Westminster?

And was it true that she was really destined to be a leader upon the stage of the great propaganda of the Socialist party? Was it true that she out of all the actresses—the thousands of actresses unknown to fame—had been picked and chosen for this role—to be the star of a huge and organised social movement.

As the cab rolled down the grey streets of London towards Westminster, Mary found that she was asking herself these questions again and again.

When she arrived at Rose's house she knew that that was no delusion. The maid who opened the door ushered her in at once, and Mrs. Rose was waiting in the hall.

"Oh, my dear," Mrs. Rose said; "here you are at last! Do you know, when Fabian captured you the other night in the fog and brought you here we all knew that you were just the very person we wanted. We were so afraid—at least I was, nobody else was—that you would vanish away and we should not see you any more. Now, here you are! You have come to fulfil your destiny, and make your first great study in the environment, and among the scenes, of what you will afterwards present to the world with all your tragic power. My dear, they are all upstairs; they are all waiting. Two or three motor-cars will be round in about half an hour to take you right away into Dante's Inferno! Come along! Come along!" [Pg 105]

As she concluded Mrs. Rose led Mary up the stairs to the drawing-room and shouted out in her sweet, high-pitched voice: "Fabian! Mr. Goodrick! Peter! She has come! Here she is! Now we're all complete."

Mary followed her hostess into the drawing-room.

There she found her friends of the first wonderful night, augmented by various people whom she did not know.

James Fabian Rose, pallid of face, and with his strange eyes burning with a curious intensity, came forward to greet her. He took her little hand in his and shook it heartily. Aubrey Flood was there also, wearing a grey overcoat, and he also had the intent expression of one who waits.

Peter Conrad, the clergyman, was not in clerical clothes. He wore a lounge suit of pepper-and-salt colour, and held a very heavy blackthorn stick in his right hand. The famous editor of the *Daily Wire*, Charles Goodrick, was almost incognito beneath the thick tweed overcoat with a high collar, from which his insignificant face and straw-coloured moustache looked out with a certain pathetic appeal. [Pg 106]

Mary's welcome was extraordinarily cordial. She felt again as she had felt upon that astonishing night when she had first met all these people. She felt as if they all thought that an enormous deal depended upon her, that they were awaiting her with real anxiety.

On that chill mid-day the beautiful drawing-room, with its decorations by William Morris and Walter Crane, had little of its appeal. It seemed bare and colourless to Mary at least. It was a mere ante-room of some imminent experience.

She said as much to Fabian Rose. "Mr. Rose," she said, "I have come, and here I am. Now, what are you going to do with me? Where are you going to take me? What am I going to see? I am all excitement! I am all anxiousness!"

"My dear girl," Rose answered, "it is so charming of you to say that. That is just the attitude in which I want you to be—all excitement and anxiousness!"

They crowded round her, regarding her, as she could not but feel, as the centre of the picture, and her trepidation and excitement grew with the occasion. She was becoming, indeed, rather overstrained, when Mrs. Rose took her by the arm.

"My dear," she said, "don't get excited until it is absolutely necessary. Remember that you are here to-day simply to receive certain impressions, which are to germinate in your brain; seeds to be sown in your temperament, which shall blossom out in your heart. Therefore do not waste nervous force before the occasion arises. I am not going, you will be the only woman upon this expedition." [Pg 107]

Mary looked round in a rather helpless way.

"Oh!" she said, "am I to be all alone?"

There came a sudden, sharp cackle of laughter from the famous editor.

"My dear Miss Marriott," he said, "all alone?"

Looking round upon the group of people who were indicated by the sweep of the little man's hand, Mary realised that she would be by no means alone.

Then she noticed, as she had not done before, that in the back recesses of the drawing-room were three or four other men, who, somehow or other, did not seem to belong to the world of her companions.

Rose caught the glance.

"Oh," he said, "I must introduce you to the bodyguard!"

He took her by the arm, and led her to the other end of the drawing-room.

There were four people standing there. One was clean-shaven, and wore a uniform of dark blue, braided with black braid, and held a peaked hat in his hand. Two of the others were bearded, very tall, strong and alert. They were dressed in ordinary dark clothes, and Mary felt—your experienced actress has always an eye for costume, and the necessity of it—that these two also suggested uniform. [Pg 108]

The fourth person, who stood a little in the background of the other three, was a man with a heavy black moustache, hair cut short, except for a curious, shining wave over the forehead, and was obviously a strong and lusty constable in plain clothes.

"This is Miss Marriott, gentlemen," Rose said.

The three men in the foreground bowed. The man at the back automatically raised his right arm in military salute.

"These gentlemen, Miss Marriott," Rose said, "are going to take us into the places where we have to go. They are going to protect us. Inspector Brown and Inspector Smith, of Scotland Yard, and Inspector Green, of the County Council."

Mary bowed and smiled.

Then the tallest of the bearded men said: "Excuse me, miss, where we are going it would be quite inadvisable for you to wear the clothes you are wearing now."

He spoke quite politely, but with a certain decision and sharpness, at which Mary wondered.

"I don't quite understand," she said.

"Well, Miss Marriott," the inspector answered, "you see we are going into some very queer places indeed, and as you will be the only lady with us, you had better wear——"

"Oh, I quite forgot," Fabian Rose said. "Of course, you told me that before, Mr. Brown. We have got a nurse's costume for you, Miss Marriott. You see, a nurse can go anywhere in these places where no other woman can go. By the way," he added, as a sort of after-thought, "this must seem rather terrible to you. I hope you are not frightened?" [Pg 109]

Mary smiled. She looked round at the group of big men in the drawing-room, and made a pretty little gesture with her hands.

"Frightened!" she said, and smiled.

"Come along," Rose said, "my wife will fit you up."

In half an hour a curious party had left Westminster in two closed motor-cars, and were rolling up Park Lane. When Oxford Street was reached the car in which the party sat went two or three hundred yards eastward. The car in which the other half were bestowed moved as far to the west.

Every one alighted, and the cars disappeared.

In half an hour after that the whole party, by devious routes carefully planned beforehand, met in a centre of the strange network of slums which are in the vicinity of the Great Western Station of Paddington.

These slums the ordinary wayfarer knows nothing of.

A man may ride down some main thoroughfare to reach the great railway gate of the West and realise nothing of the fact that, between some gin palace and large lodging-house, a little alley-entry may conduct the curious or the unwary into an inferno as sordid, as terrible, and even more dangerous than any lost quarter of Stepney or Whitechapel. [Pg 110]

London, indeed, West End London, is quite unaware that among its stateliest houses, in the very middle of its thoroughfares, there are modern caves in which the troglodytes still dwell which are sinister and dark as anything can be in modern life.

Inspector Brown took the lead.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am going to take you now through some streets which none of you have probably ever seen before, to a certain district about a quarter of a mile beyond Paddington

Station, and where I shall show you exactly what I am instructed to show you. I am sorry to have to make you walk so far, and especially as we have a lady with us, but there is no alternative. We cannot take a cab, or several cabs, to where we are going. A cab has never been seen in the quarter which you are entering with me. Even as we go we shall be known and marked. We shall not be interfered with in any dangerous way because you are with me and my colleagues, but, at the same time, the noise of our arrival will spread through the whole quarter, and I shall only be able to show you the place somewhat dulled of its activities, and, as it were, frightened by our arrival."

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"I see," Aubrey Flood answered. "I see, inspector. What you mean is that the rabbits will all be terrorised by the arrival of the ferret!"

"Well, sir," the inspector answered, "I am sure that is not a bad way of putting it."

"Is that a policeman? Do you mean to say he is a detective?" Mary asked James Fabian Rose. "I thought those people were so illiterate and stupid."

The great Socialist laughed.

"My dear," he answered, "you have so much, so very much to learn. Inspector Brown is one of the most intelligent men you could meet with anywhere. He speaks three languages perfectly. He reads Shakespeare. He understands social economics almost as well as I do myself. If he had had better chances he would have been a leader at the bar or an archdeacon. As it is he protects society without *réclame*, or without acknowledgment, and his emolument for exercising his extreme talents in this direction is, I believe, something under £250 a year."

Mary said nothing. It seemed, indeed, the only thing to do, but very many new thoughts were born within her as she listened to the pleasant, cultured voice of the bearded man, who looked as if he ought to be in uniform, and who led the party with so confident and so blithe a certainty.

They walked through streets of squalor. They progressed through by-ways, ill-smelling and garbage-laden. The very spawn of London squealed and rolled in the gutters, while grey, evil-faced men and women peered at them from doorways and spat a curse as they went by.

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They wound in and out of the horrid labyrinth of the West End slums until the great roar of London's traffic died away and became an indistinct hum, until they were all conscious of the fact that they were in another and different sphere.

They had arrived at the underworld.

They were come at last to grip with facts that stank and bit and gripped.

Mary turned a white face to Fabian Rose.

"Mr. Rose," she said, "I had no idea that anything could be quite so sordid and horrible as this. Why! the very air is different!"

"My child," the great Socialist answered, his hand upon her shoulder, the pale face and mustard-coloured beard curiously merged into something very eager, and yet full of pity. "My child, you are as yet only upon the threshold of what we are bringing you to see. We have brought you to-day to these terrible places so that you may drink in all their horrors, all their hideousness, and all their misery, and transform them—through the alchemy of your art—into a great and splendid appeal, which shall convulse the indifferent, the cruel, and the rich."

"Let us go on!" Mary said in a very quiet voice.

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They went on.

And now the houses seemed to grow closer together, the foetid atmosphere became more difficult for unaccustomed lungs to breathe, the roads became more difficult to walk upon, the faces which watched and gibbered round their progress were menacing, more awful, more hopeless.

They walked in a compact body, and then suddenly Inspector Brown turned round to his little battalion.

He addressed Fabian Rose.

"Sir," he said, "I think we have arrived at the starting point. Shall we begin now?"

Mary heard the words, and turned to Fabian Rose.

"Oh, Mr. Rose!" she said, "what terrible places, what dreadful places these are! I had no idea, though I have lived in London all my life, that such places existed. Why, I—oh, I don't know what I mean exactly—but why should such places be?"

"Because, my dear Miss Marriott," Rose answered—and she saw that his face was lit up with excitement and interest—"because of the curse of capitalism, because of the curse of modern life which we are endeavouring to remove."

Mary stamped her little foot upon the ground.

"I see," she said. "Why, I would hang the man who was responsible for all this! Who is he? Tell me!"

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Rose looked gravely at her.

"My dear," he answered, "the man who is responsible for all this that immediately surrounds us is the man whom we hope to hold up to the whole of England as a type of menace and danger to the Commonwealth. It is the Duke of Paddington!"

CHAPTER X

NEWS ARRIVES AT OXFORD

[Pg 115]

On the afternoon when the Bishop of Carlton, Lord Hayle and Lady Constance Camborne had left the Duke of Paddington's rooms in St. Paul's College, Oxford, they went back to the *Randolph Hotel*, where the bishop and his daughter were staying.

Lord Hayle accompanied them, and the father, his son and daughter, went up to the private sitting-room which the bishop occupied.

The fog—the nasty, damp river mist, rather, which takes the place of fog in Oxford—was now thicker than ever, but a bright fire burnt upon the hearth of the comfortable sitting-room in the hotel, and one of the servants had drawn down the blinds and made the place cheery and home-like.

The Cambornes had only been three days in Oxford, but Lady Constance had already transformed the somewhat bare sitting-room into something of wont and use; the place was full of flowers, all the little personalia that a cultured and wealthy girl carries about with her, showed it. A piano had been brought in, photographs of friends stood about, and the huge writing-table, specially put there for the use of the bishop, stood near the fireplace covered with papers.

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The three sat down and some tea was brought.

"Well, Connie dear," Lord Hayle said, "and what do you think of John? You have often heard me talk about him. He is the best friend I have got in the world, and he is one of the finest chaps I know. What do you think of him, Connie?"

"I thought he was charming, Gerald," Lady Constance answered, "far more charming than I had expected. Of course, I have known that you and he have been friends all the time you have been up, but I confess I did not expect to see anybody quite so pleasant and sympathetic."

"My dear girl," Lord Hayle answered, "you don't suppose I should be intimate friends with anybody who was not pleasant and sympathetic?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that, Gerald," the girl replied; "but, after all, the duke is in quite a special position, isn't he?"

"How do you mean?" said Lord Hayle.

"Well, Gerald, he is not quite like all the other young men one meets of our own class. Of course he is, in a way, but what I mean is that one expected a boy who was so stupendously rich and important to be a little more conscious of it than the duke was. He seemed quite nice and natural."

The bishop, who was sipping his tea and stretching out his shapely, gaitered feet to the fire, gave a little chuckle of satisfaction.

"My dear Constance," he said, "the duke is all you say, of course, in the way of importance and so on, but at the same time, he is just the simple gentleman that one would expect to meet. I also thought him a charming fellow, and I congratulate Gerald upon his friendship."

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The bishop sipped his tea and said nothing more. He was gazing dreamily into the fire, while his son and daughter talked together. All was going very well. There was no doubt that the two young people had been mutually pleased with each other. Rich as the Earl of Camborne and Bishop of Carlton was, celebrated as he was, sure as he was of the Archbishopric when dear old Doctor Arbuthnot—now very shaky—should be translated to heaven, Lord Camborne was, nevertheless, not insensible of the fact that a marriage between his daughter and the Duke of Paddington would crown a long and distinguished career with a befitting *finis*.

His own earldom was as old as the duke's title. There would be nothing incongruous in the match. Yet at the same time it would be a very fine thing indeed. All was well with the world, with the bishop, and the world was still a very pleasant place.

It was now about half-past five.

The bishop, Lady Constance, and Lord Hayle were to dine with Sir Andrew Anderson, a Scotch baronet, who had a seat some eight miles away from Oxford.

The bishop's motor-car was to be ready at half-past six, and they would reach Packington Grange by seven.

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"What a blessing it is," the bishop said, breaking in upon the conversation of his son and

daughter, "that the automobile has been invented. Here we are, sitting comfortably by the fire at half-past five. There is time to change without hurry or disturbance, and by dinner time we shall be at Packington. In my days, my dear Gerald, if one wanted to dine so far away from Oxford one had to get permission from the dean to stay all night. It would have been impossible for me, as an undergraduate, to go back before college gates were finally shut. You are far more fortunate."

"I don't know about that, father," Lord Hayle replied. "As a matter of fact, I should much prefer to stay the night at Packington, as you and Connie may possibly do so. In fact, I know the dean would give me permission at once, especially as I am with you. However, I quite agree with you about the joys of motoring, as I propose to drive the car back to Oxford myself whether you two return or not."

The bishop smiled. He was proud of his bright, handsome son, who had done him so much credit in his University career, and was already becoming a pronounced favourite of society.

"Well, Gerald," he said, "we look at things from a different point of view. Has the duke any motors, by the way?"

"He has lots of motors," Lord Hayle answered, "but only one up here, which he does not often use. In fact, I use it as much as he does. He is a riding man, you know. He sticks to the horses. Now then, father, I must run back to college and change. I will be back in time to start." [Pg 119]

"We had all better change, I think," said the bishop, and smiling at his son he took his daughter by the arm, pinching it playfully, and they left the sitting-room for their respective bedrooms.

As his valet assisted him the bishop thought with a pleasant glow that his daughter had never looked more beautiful.

There was something changed about her. Of that he felt quite certain, and once more he thanked God for all the blessings of his life.

It is a blessed thing, indeed, to be an earl of old lineage, and the bishop of a famous cathedral city, a handsome and portly man, with a beautiful son and daughter, the friend of princes, and designate to the archiepiscopal chair.

Constance, as the maid brushed out that hair like ripe corn, that wonderful hair that so many men had eulogised, so many poets sung of, that hair which was often referred to by the society papers as if it was a national possession, sat thinking over the events of the afternoon.

How charming Gerald's friend was! He seemed so strong and self-contained, yet so simple and so natural. Despite his great position and the enormous figure he made and was to make in the public eye, he was yet the pleasantest of boys. He was unspoiled yet, she reflected, by the whirl and artificial *va et vient* of society. He had not yet taken up his sceptre, as it were, and had none of the manners of princedom. [Pg 120]

The whole scene had etched itself upon her memory. The rich and the sober old college-rooms, the quiet, happy meal, the talk, the music, and then the dramatic telegram announcing the anarchistic outrage to Paddington House in Piccadilly.

How well the duke had taken it all. He had heard that the famous Florentine vase had been destroyed beyond hope of repair, that a picture which the nation would gladly have purchased for a fabulous sum had shown its painted glories to the eyes of the world for the last time.

Yet he had not seemed unduly worried. He had taken the whole thing calmly, and Lady Constance thought it imperative that well-bred people should take everything calmly.

And then, and then—well! he had certainly seemed very pleased to see her. He had been extremely attentive and nice. There had been something in his eyes. She smiled a little to herself, and a faint blush crept into her cheeks. She saw the colour as she looked into the glass and heard the soft swish of the ivory brush as it passed over her tresses.

"I am sure," she thought, "that he is good. He is so unlike the men one meets in society. They all seem to have something behind their words, some thought which is not quite simple and spontaneous, which informs all that they say. Nearly all of them are artificial, but the duke was quite natural and ordinary. I am so glad Gerald has such a nice friend, and he seemed quite pleased to come and stay with us when the term ends. What a good idea it was that we proposed it. It seems odd, indeed, that the poor boy, with his great house in London and all the country seats, should stay at the *Carlton* or the *Ritz* when he comes to town. Really, highly placed as he is, he is quite lonely. Well, we'll do all we can to make him happy." Once more she said to herself: "It must be very nice for Gerald to have such a friend!" though even as she thought it she half realised that this was not precisely the sole spring and fountain of her satisfaction with the events of the afternoon. [Pg 121]

At half-past six Lady Constance and her father met in the hall. In her long sable robe, and with a fleecy cloud of spun silk from China covering her head, she stood by the side of the earl, splendid in his coat of astrakhan and corded hat. All round them, in the hall of the *Randolph*, were people who were dressed for dinner standing and talking in groups.

Many heads nodded, and there were many whispers as the two stood there. Every one knew that here was the famous young society beauty, Lady Constance Camborne, and that the majestic old man by her side was her father, the earl, and the Bishop of Carlton. [Pg 122]

Then, as the swing doors burst open, and Lord Hayle, in a fur coat and a tweed cap, came bustling in, the onlookers whispered that this was the young viscount who would succeed to everything.

The hall porter, cap in hand, came up to the trio.

The car was waiting for his lordship.

The servants grouped around rushed to the doors. The muttering of the great red motor waiting outside became suddenly redoubled as the earl and his children left the hall. There was a little sigh, and then a buzz of talk, as the three distinguished people disappeared into the night opposite the Museum.

The dinner party at Sir Andrew Anderson's was a somewhat ceremonious function, and was also rather dull.

The Scotch baronet was a "dour laird," who had been a member of the last Government, and the visit was one of those necessary and stately occasions to which people in the bishop's position are subject.

Sir Andrew had no son, and his two daughters were learned girls, who had taken their degree at St. Andrew's University, and looked upon Lady Constance as a mere society butterfly, although they thawed a little when talking to Lord Hayle. It was all over about a quarter-past ten, much earlier than the bishop and Lady Constance had anticipated.

The bishop's suit-case had been put into the car, and Lady Constance also had her luggage. Nothing had been decided as to whether the Cambornes should stay the night or not, though the party had assumed that they would do so. As, however, at a little after ten the conversation languished, and everybody was obviously rather bored with everybody else, the bishop decided to return to Oxford with his son, and before the half-hour struck the great Mercedes car was once more rushing through the wintry Oxfordshire lanes towards the ancient City of Spires.

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"Well," Lord Hayle said, "I have never in all my life, father, been to such a dull house, or been so bored. Didn't you feel like that, too, Connie?"

"Indeed, I did, Gerald," the girl answered. "It was perfectly terrible!"

Slowly the bishop replied—

"I know, my dears, that it was not an enlivening entertainment, but Sir Andrew, you must remember, is a very solid man, and is well liked by the country. He will be in the Cabinet when this wretched Radical and Socialistic ministry meets the fate it deserves, and, you know, Hayle, that in our position, it is necessary to endure a good deal sometimes. One must keep in with one's own class. We must be back to back, we must be solid. I have nothing to say against Sir Andrew, except that, of course, he is not a very intellectual man. At the same time, he is liked at court, and is, I believe," the bishop concluded with a chuckle, "one of the most successful breeders of short-horns in the three kingdoms."

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The motor-car brought the party back into civilisation. It rolled up the High, past the age-worn fronts of the colleges, brilliantly illuminated now by the tall electric light standards. They flitted by St. Mary's, where Cranmer made his great renunciation, past the new front of Brazenose, up to the now dismantled Carfax.

As they turned The Corn was almost deserted, in a flash they were abreast of the Martyrs' Memorial, and the car was at rest before the doors of Oxford's great hotel.

The three entered the warm, comfortable hall.

"Good-night, father!" Lady Constance said "Good-night, Gerald, I shall go straight up-stairs!"

She kissed her father and brother, and turned to the right towards the lift.

"I think I will have a final smoke, father," Lord Hayle said, "before I go back to college. There's lots of time yet. Shall we go upstairs, or shall we go into the smoking-room?"

"Oh, well, let us go into the smoking-room," said the bishop. "It's a comfortable place."

They gave their coats to an attendant, and went through the door under the stairs into the smoking-room.

No one else was there, though a great fire burned upon the hearth, and drawing two padded armchairs up before it they sat down and lit their cigarettes.

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"I think," said the bishop, "that I shall have a glass of Vichy. Will you have anything more, dear boy?"

"No, thanks, father," Lord Hayle answered, "but I will ring the bell for you."

He pressed the button, and the waiter came into the room, shortly afterwards returning with the bishop's aerated water.

Lord Hayle was well known at the *Randolph*. He sometimes gave dinners there, in preference to using the *Mitre* or the *Clarendon*. He and the duke sometimes dined there together.

As he was sitting with his father, quietly talking over the events of the day, one of the managers of the hotel came hurriedly into the smoking-room and up to the earl and the viscount.

"My lord," he said, and his face was very white and agitated. "I fear I have very sad news for you."

There was something in the man's voice that made both the bishop and his son turn round in alarm.

"What is it?" said Lord Hayle.

"My lord," the manager continued, "a telegram has just reached us that there has been a terrible railway accident to the six o'clock train from here to Paddington. We are informed that the Duke of Paddington, your friend, my lord, was in the train, and it is feared that his grace has been killed."

CHAPTER XI THE DISCOVERY

[Pg 126]

It really was appalling!

All the others had seen this sort of thing many times, and it did not appeal to them with the same first flush of horror and dismay as it did to Mary Marriott.

She turned to Fabian Rose.

"Oh, Mr. Rose," she said, "it is dreadful, more dreadful than I could ever have thought!"

"There is much worse than this, my dear," he answered in a grave tone, from which all the accustomed mockery had gone. "A painful experience is before you, but you must endure it. At the end of that time——"

Mary looked into the great Socialist's face, and she knew what his unspoken words would have conveyed. She knew well that she was on a trial, a test; that this strange expedition had been devised, not only that her art as an actress might be stimulated to its highest power, but that the very strings of her pity and womanhood should be touched also. Her new friends knew well that when at last she was on the boards of the Park Lane Theatre, acting there for all the rich and fashionable world to see, her work could only accomplish its great mission with success if it came poignantly from her heart.

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"Yes," she said in answer to his look, "I am beginning to see, I am beginning to hear the cry of the down-trodden and the oppressed, the wailing of the poor."

Rose nodded gravely.

"Now, Miss Marriott and gentlemen," said Inspector Brown, "we will turn down here, if you please. I should like to show you one or two tenements."

As he spoke he turned to the right, down a narrow alley. Tall, grimy old houses rose up on either side of them, and there was hardly room for two members of the party to walk abreast. The flags upon which they trod were soft with grease and filth. The air was fœtid and chill. It was, indeed, as though they were treading a passage-way to horror!

The whole party came out into a court, a sort of quadrangle some thirty yards by twenty. The space between the houses and the floor of the quadrangle was of beaten earth, though here and there some half-uprooted flagstone showed that it had once been paved. The whole of it was covered with garbage and refuse. Decayed cabbage leaves lay in little pools of greasy water. Old boots and indescribable rags of filthy clothes were piled on heaps of cinders.

As they came into the square Mary shrank back with a little cry; her foot had almost trodden upon a litter of one-day old kittens which had been drowned and flung there.

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The houses all round this sinister spot had apparently at one time, though many years ago, been buildings of some substance and importance. Now they wore an indescribable aspect of blindness and misery. There was hardly a whole window in any of the houses. The broken panes were stopped with dirty rags or plastered with newspaper. The doors of the houses stood open, and upon the steps swarms of children—dirty, pale, pallid, and hopeless—squirmed like larvæ. A drunken old woman, her small and ape-like face caked and encrusted with dirt, was reeling from one side of the square to another, singing a hideous song in a cracked gin-ridden voice, which shivered up into the cold, dank air in a forlorn and bestial mockery of music.

"What is this?" Mary said, turning round to the police inspector by her side.

"This, miss," said the bearded man grimly, "is called Taverner's Rents. Every room in these houses is occupied by a family; some rooms are occupied by two families. The people that live here are the poorest of the poor. The boys that sell newspapers, the little shoeless boys and girls who hawk the cheaper kinds of flowers about the streets, the cab-runners, the people who come out at night and pick over the dust-bins for food, those are the people that live here, miss. And

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there's a fairly active criminal population as well."

Mary shuddered. The inspector noticed her involuntary shrinking.

"Miss," he said, "you have only seen a little of it yet. Wait until I take you inside some of these places, then you will see what life in London can be like."

The clergyman, Mr. Conrad, broke in.

"You have come, Miss Marriott," he said, "now to the home of the utterly degraded and the utterly lost. Nothing I or anybody else can say or do is possible to redeem this generation. Their brains have almost gone, through filth and starvation. They live more terribly than any animal lives. Their lives are too feeble and too awful, either for description or for betterment. It is, indeed, difficult for one who, as myself, believes most thoroughly in the fact that each one of us has an immortal soul, that each one of us in the next world will start again, according to what we have done in this, to realise that the poor creatures whom you have seen now are human. Come!"

It was almost with the slowness and solemnity of a funeral procession that the party passed up the broken steps of one of the houses and entered what had once, in happier bygone days, been the hall of a mansion of some substance and fair-seeming.

The broken stairs stretched up above. The banisters which guarded them had long since been broken and pulled away. The doors all round were almost falling from their hinges. [Pg 130]

"Come in here, gentlemen," said the sanitary inspector of the London County Council, pushing a door open with his foot as he did so.

They all followed into a large front room.

A slight fire was burning in a broken grate, and by it, upon a stool, sat an immensely fat woman of middle-age. Her hair was extremely scanty and caught up at the back of her head in a knot hardly bigger than a Tangerine orange. Through the thin dust-coloured threads the dirty pink scalp showed in patches. The face was inordinately large, bloated, and of a waxen yellow. The eyes were little gimlet holes. The mouth, with its thick lips of pale purple, smiled a horrid toothless smile as they came in.

All round the walls of the room were things which had once been mattresses, but from which damp straw was bursting in every direction. These mattresses were black, sodden, and filthy, and upon them—covered, or hardly covered as the case might be, with scraps of old quilt or discarded clothing—lay young children of from one year to eighteen months old. These little mites were almost motionless. Their heads seemed to be extraordinarily large, their unknowing, unseeing eyes blazed in their faces.

The fat woman, suffering from dropsy, rose from her seat and curtsied as she saw the sanitary inspector and his colleagues. [Pg 131]

"It is all right, gentlemen," she said in a wee, fawning voice. "There's food on the fire for the little dearies, and they're going to have their meal, bless 'em, as soon as it's boiled up."

She pointed to an iron pot full of something that looked like oatmeal which was simmering upon the few coals.

"That's all right, Mary," the County Council inspector said in a rough but genial voice. "We haven't come to make any trouble to-day. We know you do your best. It is not your fault."

"Thank you, sir," the woman answered, subsiding heavily once more upon her stool. "I have never done away with any children yet, and I am glad you know it. I've never been up before any beak yet, and I does my best. They comes to me when they've got the insurances on the kids, and I ses, 'No,' I ses, 'you take 'em where you know wot you wants will be done. You won't have far to go,' I ses, and so they takes 'em away. 'My bizness,' I ses, 'is open and aboveboard.' I looks arter the kids for a penny a day, and I gives 'm back to their mothers when they comes 'ome, feeding them meanwhile as well as I can."

Mary was standing horror-struck in the middle of the room. She turned to Inspector Brown.

"Oh," she said, "how awful! How terrible! How utterly awful!"

The inspector looked down at her with grave face.

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"You may well say so, miss," he answered. "I am a married man myself, and it goes to my heart. But you must know that all this woman says is absolutely true. She is dying of dropsy, and she looks after these children for their mothers while they are at the match factories in Bethnal Green or making shirts in some Jew sweater's den. She is not what you may call a 'baby-farmer.' She is not one of those women who make a profession of killing children by starvation and cold in order that their parents may get the insurance money. As she goes, this woman is honest."

"But look, look!" Mary answered, pointing with quivering finger to the swarming things upon the mattresses.

"I know," the inspector answered, "but, miss, there are worse things than this that you could see in the neighbourhood."

Suddenly Mary's blood, which had been cooled and chilled by the awful spectacle, rose to boiling

point in a single second. She felt sick, she said, wheeling round and turning to Fabian Rose—she felt sick that all these terrible things should be. "Why should such things be allowed?"

"My dear," Rose answered very gravely, "it is the fault of our modern system. It is the fault of capitalism. This is one of the reasons why we are Socialists."

"Then," Mary said, her eyes flashing, her breast heaving, "then, Mr. Rose, I am a Socialist, too— [Pg 133]
from this day, from this hour."

As she spoke she did not see that Aubrey Flood, the actor-manager, was regarding her with a keen, intense scrutiny. He watched her every movement. He listened to every inflection of her voice, and then—even in that den of horror—he turned aside and smiled quietly to himself.

"Yes," he thought, "Fabian was right. Here, indeed, is the one woman who shall make our play a thing which shall beat at the doors of London like a gong."

Inspector Brown spoke to Mary in his calm official voice.

"Now, what should you think, miss," he said, "this woman—Mrs. Church—pays weekly for this room?"

"Pays?" Mary answered. "Pays? Does she pay for such a room as this?"

The fat woman upon the stool answered in a heavy, thick, watery voice: "Pye, miss? I pye eight shillings a week for this ere room."

Mary started; she could not understand it.

"What?" she said with a little stamp of her foot upon the ground.

"It is perfectly true, miss," the County Council inspector interposed. "The rents of these places—these single rooms—are extremely high."

"Then why do they pay them?" Mary asked.

"Because, miss," the inspector answered, "if they didn't they would have nowhere to go at all, except to the workhouse. You see, people of this sort cannot move from where they are. They are as much tied to places of this sort as a prisoner in gaol is confined in his cell. It is either this or the streets." [Pg 134]

"But for all that money," Mary said, "surely they could give them a decent place to live in?"

"We are doing all we can, miss, on the County Council, of course," the man replied, "and the workmen's dwellings which are springing up all over London are, indeed, a great improvement, but they are taken up at once by the hard-working artisan class, in more or less regular employment. It would be impossible to let any of the County Council tenements to a woman like this. Her income is so precarious, and there are others far more thrifty and deserving who must have first choice."

"Who is the landlord?" Mary asked. She was standing next to the dropsical woman by the fireside as she spoke.

"Oh, missie"—the woman answered her question—"the 'ead-landlord is Colonel Simpson at the big estye orffice in Oxford Street, but, of course, we don't never see 'im. The collectors comes raund week by week and we pyes them. If we wants anythink then we arsts them, and they ses they'll mention it at 'eadquarters, but, of course, nuthink does get done. I don't suppose Colonel Simpson ever 'ears of nuthink."

"It is perfectly true, miss," said the inspector. "It is only when we absolutely prosecute the estate agency for some flagrant breach of sanitary regulations that anything can be done in houses like this, and even then the lawyers in their employ are so conversant with all the recent enactments, and so shrewd in the science of evading them, that practically we can do nothing at all." [Pg 135]

When Mary turned to Fabian Rose he was standing side by side with the Reverend Peter Conrad.

Both men were looking at her gravely and a little curiously.

"Who is this Colonel Simpson?" she asked. "Could not he be exposed in the Press? Could not he be held up to execration? Could not you, Mr. Goodrick," she said, flashing upon the editor, who had hitherto remained in the background and said no word, "could not you tell the world of the wickedness of this Colonel Simpson?"

The little man with the straw-coloured moustache and the keen eyes smiled.

"Miss Marriott," he said, "you realise very little as yet. You do not know what the forces of capitalism and monopoly mean. Day by day we are driving our chisels into the basis of the structure, and some day it will begin to totter; some day, again, it will fall, but not yet, not yet. Mr. Simpson is a mere nobody. He is a machine. His object in life is to get as much money as he can out of the vast properties which he controls for another. He is an agent, nothing more." [Pg 136]

"Then who does this really belong to? Who is really responsible?" Mary asked.

Fabian Rose looked at her very meaningly.

"Once more," he said, "I will pronounce that ill-omened name—the Duke of Paddington."

"Let us go away," Mr. Conrad said suddenly. He noticed that Mary's face was very pale, and that she was swaying a little.

They went out into the hall and stood there for a moment undecided as to what to do.

Mary seemed about to faint.

Suddenly from the back of the hall, steps were heard coming towards them, and in a moment more the face of a clean-shaven man appeared. He was mounting from the stairs that led down into what had once been the kitchens or cellars of the old house.

Just half of his body was visible, when he stopped suddenly, as if turned to stone.

As he did so the bearded Inspector Brown stepped quickly forward and caught him by the shoulder.

"Ah, it is you, is it?" he said. "Come up and let us have a look at you."

The man's face grew absolutely white, then, with a sudden eel-like movement, he twisted away from under the inspector's hand and vanished down the stairs.

In a flash the inspector and his companion were after him.

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"Come on!" they shouted to the others, "come on, we shall want you!"

Rose and Conrad dashed after them. Mary could hear them stumbling down the stairs, and then a confused noise of shouting as if from the bowels of the earth.

She was left alone, standing there with Mr. Goodrick, when she suddenly became aware that the staircase leading to the upper part of the house had become crowded with noiseless figures, looking down upon what was toward with motionless, eager faces.

"What shall we do?" Mary said. "What does it all mean?"

"I am sure I don't know," Goodrick answered, "but if you are not afraid, don't you think we had better follow our friends? I suppose the inspector is after some thief or criminal whom he has just recognised."

"I am not afraid," Mary said.

"Come along, then," he answered, and together they went to the end of the hall and stumbled down some greasy steps.

A light was at the bottom, red light through an open door, and they turned into a sort of kitchen.

There was nobody there, but one man who crouched in a corner and a fat, elderly Jewish woman, whose mouth dropped in fear, and whose eyes were set and fixed in terror, like the eyes of a doll.

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Through an open door in a corner of the kitchen beyond there came strange sounds—oaths, curses—sounds which seemed even farther away than the door suggested that they were.

The sounds seemed to rise up from the very bowels of the earth, from some deeper inferno even than this.

Then Mary, for the first time, began to be in real terror. She clung to the imperturbable little editor.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "What does it all mean?"

The Jewess turned round with an almost crouching attitude and peered fearfully into the dimly lit gloom through the doorway. Then, quite suddenly, without any warning, she fell back against the wall of the kitchen and began to shriek and wail like a lost soul. As she did so, and through her piercing shrieks, Mary heard the distant noises were becoming louder and louder.

She reeled in the hot and filthy air of this dreadful place and pressed her hand against the wall for support. Even as she did so she saw the two police inspectors stagger into the room, bearing a burden between them, the burden, as it seemed, of a dead man.

Then everything began to sway, the place was filled with a louder and louder noise, the whole room grew fuller and fuller of people, and Mary Marriott fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XII

AT THE BISHOP'S TOWN HOUSE

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The library was a noble one for a London house. The late sun of the summer afternoon in town poured into the place and touched all the golden and crimson-laden shelves in glory. From floor to roof the great tomes winked and glittered in the light.

Here the sun fell upon the glazed-fronted cabinets, which held the priceless first editions of

modern authors. There it illuminated those cabinets which confined and guarded the old black-letter editions of the bishop's famous collection of medieval missals. It was a dignified home of lettered culture and ease.

Lord Camborne was sitting in a great armchair of green leather. In his own house he smoked a pipe, and a well-seasoned briar was gripped in his left hand as he leaned forward and looked at his son. On the opposite side of the glowing fireplace, on each side of which stood pots of great Osmunda ferns, which glistened in the firelight as if they had been cunningly japanned, Lord Hayle was sitting. His face was quite white, his attitude one of strained attention, as he listened to the wordy and didactic utterances of the earl.

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"I don't know what to make of it, my dear Gerald," the bishop said. "Upon my soul, I don't know what to make of it! Such a thing has never happened before in all my experience. Indeed, I don't suppose that such an occurrence has ever been known."

"You are quite right, father," Lord Hayle replied; "but that is not the question. The question is: Where is my poor friend? Where is John?"

The bishop threw out two shapely hands with a curious gesture of indecision and bewilderment. "Gerald," he said, "if I could answer that question I should satisfy the press of Europe and put society at rest."

"But it is the most extraordinary thing, father," Lord Hayle said. "Here is John involved in this terrible railway accident. As far as we know—as far as we can know, indeed—he was rescued from the débris of the broken carriage perfectly unhurt. That young Doctor Jenkins was perfectly certain that the man whom he rescued and told to lie down for half an hour, to avoid the nervous effects of the shock, must have been the Duke of Paddington. He has assured me, he has assured Colonel Simpson, he has assured everybody in short that it was certainly the duke! In three-quarters of an hour he goes back to find his patient, and, meanwhile meeting Colonel Simpson, who had come down the line in frightful anxiety about the duke, there—where John had been—was nobody at all! Do you suppose that, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* has hinted, that John was temporarily deranged by the shock and walked away and lost himself? There seems to be no other explanation."

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"But that is impossible," the bishop replied. "If he had done so would he not have been found in an hour or two?"

"I suppose he would," Lord Hayle answered. "I suppose he would, father."

"Then, all I can say," the bishop said, with an air of finality, "all I can say is that the thing is as black and mysterious as anything I have ever known in the whole course of my experience. There we were, you and myself and your sister, lunching at Paul's with the duke, when the news came of the outrage in Piccadilly. The duke went up to town by the six o'clock train. The accident occurred, and now the whole of society is trembling in suspense to know what has happened to your friend. I cannot tell you, Gerald, how it has distressed me; and," the bishop continued, with a slight hesitation in his voice, "your sister also is very much upset."

"Well, naturally, Connie would be," Lord Hayle returned. "But think what it must be to me, father! It is worse for me than for anybody. You have met the duke, Connie has met him; but I have been his intimate friend for the whole of the time we have been up at Oxford together, and I am at a loose end, I am simply heart-broken."

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"My dear Gerald," said the splendid old gentleman from the armchair, with some unctiousness, "God ordains these things, these trials, for all of us; but be sure that, in His own good time, all will come right. We must be patient and trust in the Divine Will."

The young man looked at his father with a curious expression upon his face. He was very fond of his distinguished parent, and had a reverence for his abilities, but somehow or other at that moment the bishop's adjuration did not seem to ring quite true. Youth is often intolerant of the pious complacency of late middle-age!

It was about seven o'clock. At nine o'clock there was a small dinner party. The Home Secretary was to be there.

"I wonder," Lord Hayle said, at length, "if Sir Anthony will have any news?"

"I am sure I hope so," the bishop answered. "I saw him this morning in Whitehall, and he told me that everything that could possibly be done was being done. The whole of Scotland Yard, in fact, is bending its attention to the discovery of the whereabouts of your friend."

"I wish," Lord Hayle returned grimly, "I wish we could have a Johnnie like Sherlock Holmes on John's trek. There don't seem to be any of that sort of people outside the magazines."

At that moment the door of the library opened, and the butler came in. He carried a pile of evening papers upon a tray.

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"These are the latest editions, my lord," he said, bringing them up to the bishop.

The father and son took the papers and opened them hurriedly.

Huge head-lines greeted their eyes. "Where is the duke?" "Has the duke disappeared with intention?" "Last news of the missing duke." "Rumours that the Duke of Paddington has taken a

berth on the *Lucania* under the name of John Smith." "If the duke does not return, what will this mean to the ground-rents of London?" and so forth, and so forth, and so forth.

The bishop put down the papers with a weary sigh.

"The same thing," he said, "my dear Gerald, the same sort of thing."

Lord Hayle looked up at his father.

"Yes," he answered, "what fools these journalists are!"

"No, my dear boy, they are not fools. When they have anything to write about, they write about it rather well. When they haven't, of course they must manufacture."

"A confounded swindle, I call it!" said Lord Hayle.

The bishop did not answer. He remembered how much he owed to the press of London and the provinces for his advancement in the Church.

"Well," Lord Hayle said, "I shall go up-stairs, father, to my own room and have a tub and a pipe, and think the whole thing over. I suppose we may hear something from Sir Anthony at dinner to-night." [Pg 144]

"My dear boy," the bishop replied, "I'm sure I hope so."

Lord Hayle had already risen from his seat, and was walking towards the door of the library when the butler entered once more. He bore a silver salver, upon which was a card, and went straight up to Lord Camborne.

"My lord," he said, "there is a gentleman waiting in the morning-room. He desires to see you upon a most important matter. I told the gentleman that your lordship was probably engaged, but he would not be denied."

"I cannot see anybody," the bishop replied, rather irritably. "Take the card to the chaplain."

"I beg your lordship's pardon," said the butler, "but I think this is a gentleman whom your lordship would wish to see."

The bishop pulled out his single eye-glass—he was the only prelate upon the bench who wore one—and looked at the card upon the tray.

"Good gracious!" he said, with a sudden sharpness in his voice. "This fellow! How dare——"

"Who has come to see you?" Lord Hayle asked.

The bishop's face was flushed. There was indignation in his voice, contempt in his eyes, and angry irritation in his pose.

"Look here, Gerald!" he said, taking the card and holding it out to his son in answer. "Who do you suppose has come to see me? Look!" [Pg 145]

Lord Hayle took up the card.

"By Jove!" he said. "James Fabian Rose! Why, that's the great Socialist Johnny, isn't it, father? The man who writes plays and lectures, and is on the County Council and all that. I think we had him down at Oxford once, and I am not sure that we did not drive him out of the town."

"That is the man," the bishop answered; "one of the most brilliant intellects and unscrupulous characters in London to-day. It is not too much to say, Gerald, that this man is a perfect danger and menace to society, and to our—our order."

"Then what has he come to see you for, father?"

"Goodness only knows!" said the bishop. "I certainly shall not see him."

The butler was an old and privileged family servant. He had said nothing while this dialogue was in progress. Now he turned to his master.

"If you will allow me to say so, my lord," he said, "I think the gentleman should be seen. I don't think that it is an ordinary visit at all. It bears no indication of being an ordinary visit at all."

The bishop snapped his fingers once or twice.

"Oh, well, Parker," he said, "show him in, show him in; but explain that I have only three minutes, and that I am very busy. Gerald, you might as well wait. It might be interesting for you to see this creature." [Pg 146]

In half a minute the butler opened the door and showed in the man with the face as white as linen, the mustard-coloured beard and moustache, and the keen lamp-like eyes.

Rose was dressed in his usual lounge suit, cut with about as much regard to convention as a ham sandwich. His tall figure bent forwards in eagerness, and he was certainly a disreputable note in this stronghold of aristocracy. Yet, nevertheless, his personality blazed out in the room as if some one had lit a Roman candle in the library.

The bishop rose, stately, portly, splendid.

"Mr. Rose," he said, "to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit? I am rather pressed for time."

"Something very important, indeed, my lord," the Socialist answered, in quick, incisive accents. "I should not have intruded upon you unless I had something most special to say."

"I understand that, Mr. Rose," the bishop replied, though the courteous smile with which he said it robbed his remark of something of its sting. "You and I, Mr. Rose, represent two quite different points of view, do we not?"

"I suppose we do," said the great Socialist, with a sudden vigour and amusement in his eyes; "but that is not what I have come here for to-night. May I ask, my lord," he said, looking towards Lord Camborne's son, "may I ask if this is Lord Hayle?"

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"That is my name, Mr. Rose," the young man replied, rather startled at the sudden question.

"Oh, thank you," Rose said. "I have come here specially to see you to-night."

There was a moment's pause.

"Your business, Mr. Rose?" said the bishop once more.

"Is this," Rose rejoined. "The Duke of Paddington has sent me with a very special message to his friend, Lord Hayle. If Lord Hayle was not in London, his grace asked me to see Lord Camborne."

The bishop started violently. "My dear Mr. Rose," he said, in a deep voice, "what is all this? What is all this? The Duke of Paddington! Do you mean to say——"

"The Duke of Paddington, my lord," Rose answered, a subtle mockery becoming somewhat apparent in his voice, "the Duke of Paddington has been discovered!"

"Good Lord!" Lord Hayle shouted out suddenly, in the high-pitched voice of almost uncontrollable excitement. "You have found dear old John! Where is John, Mr. Rose?"

There was something so spontaneous and sincere in the young man's voice that the Socialist turned with a certain brightness and pleasure to the young man.

"Oh, sir!" he said, "the duke is lying at my house in Westminster. He has been kidnapped by criminal ruffians, and, I am sorry to say, has been tortured in order that large sums of money might be extorted from him. The doctors are with him now, and no serious injury has been done, but he is especially anxious to see you. I have a cab waiting, if you care to come at once."

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"I'll have my coat on in a moment," Lord Hayle replied, and left the room.

The bishop went up to James Fabian Rose.

"Sir," he said, "our difference of opinion in social economics and political affairs shall not prevent me from gripping you very heartily by the hand."

CHAPTER XIII

NEW FRIENDS: NEW IDEAS

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It was three days after the strange and dramatic rescue of the Duke of Paddington, and he lay in a bright, cheerful bedroom in James Fabian Rose's house in Westminster. Providence had guided Rose and his companions to the underground cellar in the nick of time. The relentless ruffians who had captured the duke had been as good as their word. They had treated him with indescribable ferocity, though into the details of the horrors in the foundation of the old house it is not necessary to go.

When the police inspectors had brought him up from the deepest hole of all, he was unconscious, and had immediately been taken away to Rose's own house in a horse ambulance which had been summoned from the police headquarters of the district.

The actual discovery had been very simple. Directly the Inspector of Police recognised the man known as "Sidney," he had rushed after him, followed by the others. As it happened, for some time the police had been very anxious to discover the exact whereabouts of this particular convict, to track him to his lair. It was obvious that when the man turned and bolted down the stairs there was something he wished to conceal, and, though there was no actual charge against him at the moment, the policeman had experience enough to know that something illegal was afoot. They had dashed into the kitchen to find it tenanted only by the old Jewish woman, but the door leading into the smaller kitchen was open, and Sidney was leaning over the trap-door in the floor pulling up another member of the gang who had been down in the pit with the victim.

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The man's design had obviously been to get his comrade up, close the trap-door, and push the tub over it before the policemen could enter the kitchen. In all probability there would then have been no discovery at all, though the ruffian himself was by no means sure that the party were not in some way or other upon the track of the actual offence he had committed in kidnapping the duke. His guilty conscience had betrayed him.

When the scoundrel had been caught and handcuffed, and the duke had been discovered and

carried up into the kitchen the man relapsed into a sullen silence. He had gathered at once from the remarks made by his captors that they were quite unaware of the identity of the prisoner. It did not, in fact, occur to any of the party, even to the police, to connect this insensible figure, half-clothed—the face covered with grime and dirt—with the missing peer.

"We will get the poor fellow off to the hospital at once, sir," Inspector Green had said to Rose. "These devils have been working some horrible thing upon him. I expect he is one of their pals who has given them away. I have seen some black things, but this is about as bad as any of them. I should not wonder"—he turned round with his face like a flint, and a voice that cut like a whip—"I should not wonder if this was a swinging job for you, Sidney O'Connor!" [Pg 151]

"He certainly shall not go to the hospital," said Rose. "Not that they won't look after him thoroughly there; but I could not allow anybody whom I discovered myself in such a plight as this to do so. He must go to my house, and my wife and Miss Marriott will nurse him."

"Well, sir," said the officer, "it is only a very little distance farther to your house from here than to Charing Cross Hospital, and I will send the ambulance there if you really wish it. It's very kind of you, Mr. Rose."

"Certainly I do," Rose answered. "It is a duty, of course."

"And I," said Mary Marriott, "will drive back at once if a cab can be found for me, to tell Mrs. Rose that they are bringing this poor man."

"That will be very kind of you, Miss Marriott," Rose answered. "I am sorry that our expedition has come to so unpleasant and dramatic an end, for I do not suppose any of us would care to go on now?"

"No, indeed," said both the clergyman and the journalist in answer, and in a few minutes Mary's first experience of the dark under-currents of London life was at an end. [Pg 152]

When the duke was comfortably installed in Rose's house the doctor pronounced him suffering from shocks and extreme weakness.

"He will be all right in a few days," he said. "He must now have absolute rest and nourishment. The actual harm inflicted upon him by the scoundrels with whom he was found is very slight. There are the merest superficial burns, and the cuts are trivial. It is the weakness and shock that are the most serious. The young man has a splendid constitution. He's as strong as an ox."

The doctor went away, leaving minute directions for the treatment of the patient.

The duke was in a semi-conscious condition. He realised dimly that he was out of the horrible place where he had lain for, so it seemed to him, an eternity. He knew that, somehow or other, he had been rescued, that he was now lying in a comfortable bed. A new life seemed slowly coming back into his veins as the meat jelly dissolved in his mouth. The horror was ended at last!

He had fallen at length into a deep slumber.

The party assembled in the drawing-room, discussing the extraordinary events of the morning, and Mrs. Rose was told every detail. The police and the County Council inspector were not there, but the chief inspector had promised to report later as to anything that should be learned of the truth of the mystery. [Pg 153]

"Well," said Mr. Goodrick, with a little chuckle, "I went out this morning because I wanted to watch Miss Marriott, and because I am interested in the great experiment we are making with her. I had seen all that sort of thing before I knew Miss Marriott; in fact, I began my journalistic career by writing of such places as we have been among; but I never expected that I was going to get a journalistic scoop. This will make a fine column in to-morrow's paper. The junior members of my staff will be jealous of their editor-in-chief going out and bringing in copy! They will regard it as an infringement of their rights!" He chuckled once more, and rubbed his hands together, all the true pressman's delight at exclusive news glowing in his eyes.

"Yes," he went on, "it will be quite a big thing, especially as you were present, Rose—a real sensation! The *Wire* will solve the mystery that is agitating the mind of the public in a most startling fashion!"

A maid came into the room. "If you please, sir," she said to Rose, "Inspector Green is here, and wishes to see you immediately on a matter of great importance."

"Show him up, Annie," said the Socialist, and in a second or two more the inspector burst into the room, his usual calm and imperturbable manner strangely altered. He seemed to be labouring under some deep emotion. [Pg 154]

"What is it, inspector?" Rose said, and instinctively all the people in the room rose up.

"The man," the inspector gasped, "the man we found in the cellar, ladies and gentlemen—it is—it is his Grace the Duke of Paddington himself!"

There was a dead silence. The faces of every one went pale with excitement.

"The Duke of Paddington?" Rose said in a startled and incredulous voice.

"His Grace himself, sir. As you know, his Grace's disappearance has been agitating the whole of

Europe for the last day or two. It seems what happened was this. The duke was lying down on the side of the line after the railway accident. He was almost uninjured, but the doctor who rescued him ordered him to rest for half an hour. The gang of men in the slum hard by, attracted by the accident in the fog and the possibility of plunder, had come through a doorway in the wall which leads upon the line. They rifled the duke's pockets, and from their contents found out who he was.

"The leader of the gang, Sidney O'Connor, is one of the most dangerous and desperate criminals in the country, and, moreover, a man of great daring and resource. He it was who thought it would be an infinitely better stroke of business if he could kidnap the duke and hold him to ransom. Owing to the fog and the proximity of their den—it is one of the duke's own houses, by the way, you will remember—the kidnapping was easily effected, the duke being too weak and stunned by the accident to offer any resistance. It is by the mercy of Providence that we found him when we did. The old Jewish woman who keeps the den has confessed everything. How is his Grace, Mr. Rose?"

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"Much better," said Mrs. Rose, "much better, inspector. The doctor has been here, and says he will be all right in a few days. He is suffering from extreme weakness and shock. He is now sleeping peacefully, and a nurse from the Westminster Hospital is with him."

Mr. Goodrick went up to the inspector. "Now look here, inspector," he said, "promise me one thing, that neither you nor your companions will give any of the details of this affair to the press. I shall see that it is well worth your while, all of you, to be silent until to-morrow morning. Can you answer for your colleague and the plain-clothes man who was with us?"

"Certainly I can, Mr. Goodrick," the inspector answered.

"Well, it will be worth five pounds each to them. And what about the County Council inspector?"

"He has gone back to Spring Gardens now, sir," Green replied, "but I can easily send a message up to him from Scotland Yard to that effect."

"I shall be most obliged if you will do so," said Mr. Goodrick, and then once more he gave a loud chuckle of triumph and rubbed his hands together. "Sensation!" he said in an ecstasy, "why, the *Wire* will have one of the biggest scoops of recent years to-morrow. Oh, what luck! Oh, what splendid luck! No other paper will have anything except the mere statement of the fact that the duke has been discovered under mysterious circumstances. Mrs. Rose, I must say good-bye; I must hurry off. Don't forget, inspector! Absolute secrecy!"

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He made a comprehensive bow, which included all of them, patted Fabian genially upon the back, and rushed away.

"What do you suppose we had better do, inspector?" Rose asked.

"Well, sir, I don't quite know what there is to be done, except, perhaps, to telegraph to the head of the young gentleman's college at Oxford, and to Colonel Simpson, his agent. You see, the duke has no very near relatives, though he is connected with half the peerage. I shall take care, also, that the news is at once conveyed to Buckingham Palace. His Majesty has been most anxious during the last day or two, and inquiries are constantly reaching us. For the rest, I think it will be better that you should wait until his Grace regains consciousness and can say what he would like to be done."

The inspector had disappeared, and Rose, his wife, Mary, and Mr. Conrad, were left alone, looking at each other in amazement. Then suddenly Rose sat down and burst into laughter. The old elfin, mocking expression had returned to his face. The keen eyes twinkled with sardonic humour, the mustard-coloured beard and moustache wagged up and down, as the great man leant back in an ecstasy of mirth.

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"All's well that ends well," he said at length, spluttering out his words. "Good heavens! what a marvellous day it has been! We go to the Duke of Paddington's property, so that Miss Marriott can get ideas for the part of the heroine in the play which is to draw all England to the iniquity of great landlords like the duke, who do nothing, and allow their agents to draw rents for rat-holes. Then we find the duke himself trussed up like a chicken in a gloomy cellar of one of his own filthy properties! What extraordinary tricks Fate does play sometimes! Who would have thought that such a thing could possibly happen? And, what is better still—what is more quaintly humorous than ever—here is the young gentleman with his hundred and fifty thousand a year and his great name and title, here! sleeping in my best bedroom—in the very headquarters of the party which is labouring to destroy monopolies such as his. I wonder what he will say when he wakes up and finds out where he is, poor fellow!"

"If he is a gentleman, as I suppose he is," said Mrs. Rose, "he will say 'Thank you'—not once, but several times, because, you know, Fabian dear, not only did you save his life, in the first instance by chance, but you brought him here instead of sending him to a hospital when you had no idea who he was."

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"And that," Mary broke in, "is what I call practical socialism. Don't you allow, Mr. Rose, that the duke is a brother?"

"Oh, yes," the Socialist replied, "but no more and no less a brother because of his dukedom."

There was a tap at the door. The nurse had sent down a message that the gentleman upstairs was awake, had learned where he was, and would like to see Mr. Rose.

* * * * *

This was what had occurred. For three days the duke had lain in bed, gradually growing stronger. Lord Hayle had visited him constantly, and when he was well enough to be moved he was to go straight to the Camborne's house in Grosvenor Street.

The sun poured into the bedroom—a cold, wintry sun, but still grateful enough after the fog and gloom of the last week. A fire crackled upon the hearth, and the duke lay propped up with pillows, smoking a cigarette. On a chair at the side of the bed sat Fabian Rose, and on a chair on the other side was Mr. Conrad, the clergyman. An animated conversation was in progress.

For the first time in his life the duke had met types to which he was utterly unaccustomed. He had known of Fabian Rose, of course; there was no one in England who did not know the great Socialist's name, and few people of the upper classes who had not, at some time or other, witnessed one of his immensely clever plays. But now the duke was finding that all his ideas were being rudely upset. They were in a process of transition. The man with the white face and the mustard-coloured beard, with the lambent humour, had captivated him. He felt drawn to Rose, though his predominant sensation when talking to his host was one of wild amazement, and as for the clergyman, the duke liked him also, though he was a type that he had never met before.

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It was an odd situation indeed. Here was the great capitalist captured and cornered by two of the most militant Socialists of the day—and here—he was rather enjoying it!

"Well," he said, "I seem fated nowadays to be carried off into the camp of the enemy; but I like this captivity better than the first. All the same, I cannot in the least agree with you, Mr. Conrad, in what you say, that the law of England, as it stands at present, is simply in the interests of the classes with property. Poor people have just as much justice, I have always understood, as any others."

"It is not so," replied Mr. Conrad, shaking his head. "I wish it were. As I see it, as Rose sees it, as we Socialists see it, the law works wholly to protect property and the propertied, and to do whatever injustices the propertied people who control the State require of it."

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"When a hungry man helps himself to the food he cannot pay for, a man in blue introduces him to a man on a bench, and the result of the interview is that the hungry one is put away and locked up for a lengthened time. When the people meet to discuss their miseries and to demand relief men in scarlet as well as in blue beat and cut them to death. The law of England, as it stands at present, is entirely built up upon what John Kenworthy has so aptly described as 'that Devil's Bible, the Codex Romanorum.' Rome built up a property system which asserted and maintained the rights of the selfish and cunning over those whom they cheated and robbed, and we have done precisely the same with similar results. It is just the same in England to-day as it is in Russia, though the English people are not able to assert themselves as their brethren in Russia are doing. Count Tolstoi has said that in both countries—in almost all countries, in fact, authority is in the hands of men who, like all the rest, are ever ready to sacrifice the commonweal if their own personal interests are at stake. These men encounter no resistance from the oppressed, and are wholly subject to the corrupting influence of authority itself. And yet we call ourselves a Christian nation!"

"And so we are, Mr. Conrad," the duke replied. "England is ruled and guided entirely by the Christian faith. If it were not so society would fall to pieces in a day."

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"It is not so, believe me, duke," the clergyman answered; "and if society could but fall to pieces in a day, then indeed there would be a glorious opportunity to reconstruct it on really Christian lines! Jesus left no doubt as to the nature of His mission. He pictured Dives, the rich man, plunged into torment for nothing else than for being rich when another was poor—not, you will observe, only for being rich. He pictures Lazarus, who had not anything, poor and afflicted, as comforted and consoled. For that those evangelical nonconformists the Pharisees, derided the Great Teacher of mankind. Again, by the force of His personality, for it was not the scourge that He held in His hands alone, Jesus drove the usurers out of their business quarters in the Temple and named them thieves. 'Woe,' He said, 'to those who lay up treasures upon earth. Blessed,' He said, 'are the poor!' It is," he concluded, "to reconstruct real Christianity that the Socialists are labouring to-day."

The duke did not answer. He lay back upon his pillows, thinking deeply.

"These are very new thoughts to me," he said, "and you must forgive me if I cannot immediately assimilate them."

"Quite so," Fabian Rose broke in, "but perhaps some day your Grace will get more light upon these subjects. It is impossible for you and us to think alike in any particular. Our whole lives and environment have been entirely different. Some men upon a mountain survey a landscape; others see nothing but a map. I agree with Mr. Conrad to a certain extent, but he would be the very last person to call me an orthodox Christian all the same. As one looks round it really does often seem that when Christ died the religion of Christ died too. Instead of that we have only the 'Christian religion' nowadays. But we must not tire you, you must get up all your strength to-day, for your removal to Lord Camborne's house to-morrow—for your removal out of our lives," he concluded,

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with an unusual sadness in his voice, "for our ways lie very far apart."

"If you will allow me, Mr. Rose," the duke answered, "our ways will not lie very far apart. Thinking differently as we do, looking upon these problems through different pairs of spectacles, nevertheless it would be a grief to me if I thought that we were not to meet sometimes and to remain friends. What you have done for me is more than I can say, and I should be indeed ungrateful if the fact that we were in opposite camps prevented a hand-grasp now and then."

"Well, well," Rose answered, "I am sure it is very kind of you to say so, and we shall see what the future brings forth. At the same time it is only fair to tell you what I have not told you before— that I am organising an active campaign against you in the first instance, as a type of the class we desire to destroy, and for which we wish to substitute another."

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"Dear me!" said the duke, smiling. "That sounds very dreadful, Mr. Rose. Do tell me what is going to happen. Are you going to blow up some more of my house in Piccadilly?"

"Oh, no," Rose replied, laughing. "Those are not our methods, and although they have not found out, I understand, who threw the bomb and destroyed the Florentine Vase, I am sure it was no member of the Socialistic party, to which I belong. We accomplish our ends by more peaceful methods, though infinitely stronger. No, duke, I will tell you frankly what is on the cards."

Mr. Rose paused for a moment, and then in a few sentences told his guest exactly, and in detail, all his plan for educating society to socialistic ideals by means of the theatre.

"And here," he concluded with a smile, as Mrs. Rose knocked at the door and entered with Mary Marriott, who was carrying a bunch of chrysanthemums in her hand, "and here is the girl who is to be the arch offender against your rights! Here is the heroine of the play! The artist whose influence shall be more powerful and far-reaching than a thousand lectures!"

The duke smiled. He was glad to see the beautiful girl whom he had got to know and like during the two or three times he had met her.

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"Well," he said, "if privilege is to be destroyed it could be at no more kindly hands I am sure!"

"I brought you some chrysanthemums, your Grace," Mary said, flushing a little, "a sort of peace offering, because Mr. Rose told me yesterday that he was going to tell you all that we propose to do. I hope your Grace will accept them?"

They left the duke alone after a few minutes further chat, and for the rest of the day he saw no one but the doctor and a new valet who had been engaged for him.

The flowers which Mary Marriott had given him stood upon a table by the bed, and, as he regarded their delicate, fantastic beauty, so instinct with the decorative spirit of the Land of the Rising Sun, he thought a good deal of the giver. To the duke an actress had hitherto always meant some dull wench in a burlesque. On one occasion only had he been to a supper party given to some of these ornaments of the illustrated papers, and he had been so insufferably bored that he resolved the experience should be his last. He had known vaguely, of course, that ladies went on the stage nowadays, but the fact had never been brought home to him before he met Mary Marriott. How graceful she was! As graceful in every movement as any famous society beauty.

Her face was very lovely in its way, he thought, and though of quite a different type, it was almost as lovely as that of Lady Constance Camborne. What a pair they would make! What a bouquet of girls! It would be splendid to see them together, the dark girl and the fair.

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He had much to occupy his mind as he lay alone. The novel which they had brought him lay unheeded upon the counterpane. He had stepped into a new world, of that there was no doubt at all, and had begun to realise how his great possessions and high rank had hitherto set him apart and barred him from much that was vivid and interesting, pulsating with life. He had always been exclusive; it was in his blood to be so, and his training had fostered the instinct. But he saw now that he would never be quite the same again. His curiosity was aroused, and his interest in classes of society of which he had never thought before. He determined to investigate. He would keep friends with Fabian Rose and his circle. If they were going to write a socialistic play, well, let them. It would be amusing to watch it, and, besides, it could not hurt him. He would get to know this Miss Marriott better, and he would ask her about her art, which seemed to be so dominant a purpose in her life. There were many things that he resolved he would do in the future. Then again, there was that young Arthur Burnside. The duke remembered how, during the afternoon before the accident, he had talked with Burnside in St. Paul's College, and had been able to give him the vacant librarianship at Paddington House, which had meant a total change in the young man's prospects. Yes! he would go to Paddington House one day, when he was staying with the Cambornes, and he would see how Burnside was getting on, and have a talk with him. Oh, yes, there were many things that he would do!

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On the morning of the next day, a bright winter's morning, the duke left the hospitable house in Westminster. It was with real regret and with a sense of parting from old friends that he said "Good-bye." Mary Marriott was there. She was now in constant confabulation with Rose every morning, and she formed one of the little group who assembled on the steps of the house in the quiet street behind the Abbey.

A huge motor brougham, with Lord Camborne's coronet upon the panels, was waiting there. A groom in motoring livery stood by the door. The chauffeur took off his hat as the duke came out.

It was not often that such splendour was seen in that quarter. Then the brougham rolled swiftly away, and another page in the young man's life was turned over.

He did not drive straight to Lord Camborne's house, but told the chauffeur to stop at Gerrard's in Regent Street, the florist's, and went into the shop, where the great masses of hothouse flowers made the air all Arabia for him and all comers. His purchase of lilies and roses was so stupendous that even the imperturbable young ladies in that floral temple showed more than their usual interest.

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Indeed, the house of the Socialist would be gay that afternoon, and Mrs. Rose would be surrounded by a perfect garden of the flowers whose name she bore—a delicate thankoffering.

In a few minutes more the duke arrived at Lord Camborne's house in Grosvenor Street.

Both his host and Lord Hayle were out, but Lady Constance received him.

"Now, you are going to be very quiet, and not talk much," she said. "We are going to be most careful of you, after what you have gone through. I cannot tell you, duke, how agitated we have all been about you. Poor Gerald has been nearly mad with anxiety. He is so fond of you, you know. What terrible things you have been through—first the accident, and then that awful horror!" She shuddered.

She was very fair as she stood there, in her simple morning gown, with all the beauty of sympathy added to her supreme loveliness. As the duke was shown to his own rooms he felt once more that throbbing pulsation, that sudden exhilaration, which he had known when Lady Constance had come to lunch at Paul's and he had seen her for the first time. She did not know, nor could he tell her, how star-like she had been in his thoughts during the long, dark hours of his captivity, and how it was the radiant vision of her, etched into his memory, which had given strength to his obstinacy and power to resist the demands of his tormentors.

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CHAPTER XIV AT THE PARK LANE THEATRE

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The Park Lane Theatre in Oxford Street, about two hundred yards east of the Marble Arch, was one of the most successful houses of those many theatres which have sprung up in London during the last few years. Its reputation was thoroughly high-class, and more particularly that of a theatre patronised by Society. It was in fact, the St. James's of that quarter of London. Here was no pit, and the gallery seats were half-a-crown for example.

The long and successful run of a play at the Park Lane had just concluded, and the theatrical journalists were hazarding this or that surmise as to what would be next produced. For some reason or other there seemed to be a sort of mystery. The syndicate which owned the theatre would make no announcements through their manager, save only that the theatre had been let.

Inquiries elicited nothing. This or that well-known *entrepreneur*, when asked the question had denied that he was interested in any forthcoming production at the theatre. There was a good deal of speculation on the point, and the play-going public itself was beginning to be interested.

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Then, one morning, there appeared in the *Daily Wire* a paragraph, displayed in a prominent position, which stated that the theatre had been leased to Mr. Aubrey Flood, the well-known actor-manager, and the paragraph—obviously inspired—went on to hint at a most sensational development, of which the public might shortly expect news in the columns of the great Radical daily.

A few days after the public had been informed of the Duke of Paddington's extraordinary and terrible experiences, Mr. Aubrey Flood sat in his private room at the theatre. It was twelve o'clock noon, and he was dictating some letters to his secretary. The room was large and comfortable, and was reached by a short passage at the back of the dress circle. The walls were hung with framed photographs, many of them of great size, and signed by names which were famous in the dramatic world. There was a curious likeness to each other in all these photographs, when one regarded them closely. Men and women of entirely different faces and figures had all, nevertheless, the same curiously *conscious* look lurking in the eyes and pose. They seemed well aware, in their beauty of face and figure or splendour of costume, that they were there for one purpose—to be looked at.

Here and there the photographs were diversified by valuable old play-bills in gold frames, and close to the door was a page torn out of a ledger, the writing now faded and brown with years. It was a salary list of some forgotten provincial theatre, and the names of famous actors—at the time it was written utterly unknown to fame—were set down there in a thin, old-fashioned script. Heading the list one saw "Henry Irving, £1 10s. 0d.," the weekly salary at that date of, perhaps, the greatest actor England has ever known.

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A huge writing-table was covered with papers, and there were two telephones, one hanging upon the wall, the other resting on its plated stand upon the table. Upon another table, much higher than the ordinary, and standing at one side of the room was a complete model theatre. Carefully executed studies of scenery half a yard square lay by the side of the model, and a complete

miniature tableau had been built up upon the tiny stage, while the characters of the toy drama were represented by the little oblong cubes of wood, variously coloured.

To complete the picture, it should be stated that, by the side of Mr. Aubrey Flood, nearer, indeed, to him than the telephone, stood a square bottle of cut-glass, a tumbler, and a syphon of soda-water.

There was a knock at the door, and the stage door-keeper entered with a card.

"Mr. Lionel C. Westwood, to see you, sir," he said.

"Ask him to come in at once," Flood answered.

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Mr. Lionel C. Westwood had, more or less, created his own profession, which was that of a very special sort of theatrical journalist. He had been tried for dramatic criticism on more than one paper, but had abandoned this form of writing for what he speedily found to be the more lucrative one of collecting early dramatic intelligence. He wrote, too, the column of Green Room Gossip in more than one important paper, and was, indeed, of extreme use to managers who wished to contradict a rumour or to start one.

He came hurriedly into the room—a short, easy, alert young man, wearing a voluminous frock-coat, and with a mixed aspect of extreme hurry and cordiality.

"Oh, my dear Aubrey," he said, shaking the manager's hand with effusive geniality, "so here you are! Directly I saw the paragraph in the *Wire* I wrote to you, asking for fuller information. Now, you won't mind telling me all there is to know, will you?"

"Sit down, Lionel," said the actor. "Will you have a drink?"

"No, thank you," replied the little man, "I never take anything in the morning. Now, what is all this? What are you going to do? What are you going to produce? That's what I want to know. All London is wondering!" He rapped with his fingers upon the table, and his face suddenly assumed a curiously ferret-like look "What is it, Aubrey, dear boy?" he concluded.

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Flood leant back in his chair and lit a cigarette.

"It is a very big thing indeed, Lionel," he said, "and I don't know, dear boy, that I should be justified in letting you into it just yet. Why, we only read the play to the company this afternoon!"

Mr. Lionel C. Westwood's ears seemed positively to twitch as he elicited this first piece of information.

"Oh!" he said, with a sudden gleam of satisfaction. "Well, that is something, at any rate. That is an item, Aubrey."

"I am afraid that is as far as I shall be able to go," the shrewd manager replied.

This little comedy progressed for some twenty minutes, until at last Mr. Lionel C. Westwood was worked up into the right state of frantic curiosity and excitement. Then Aubrey Flood explained dimly the purpose and scope of the new play, hinted reluctantly at the achievement of a new star, a young actress of wonderful power and extreme beauty, who had hitherto been quite unknown in the provinces, and finally, with a gush of friendship, "Well, as it is you, Lionel, dear boy, though I would not do it for anybody else," promised the journalist that he might come to the theatre again that afternoon and form one of the privileged few, in addition to the company itself, who would be present at the reading of the play by its author, Mr. James Fabian Rose.

Mr. Lionel C. Westwood went away more than contented, and Aubrey Flood resumed his correspondence. The train was laid and the match was applied to it. The *Daily Wire*, of course, was at the disposal of the syndicate, and would further its objects in every way through Mr. Goodrick. At the same time, the editor was quite shrewd enough to know that his paper was more particularly read by the middle-classes, and content to sacrifice items of excessive interest concerning the play in order that it might be widely advertised.

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For they were all very greatly in earnest, these people. Even Aubrey Flood himself, while he was business man enough to regard this speculation as an excellent one, and believe that he would make a great deal of money over it, was nevertheless about to produce this epoch-making play from a real and earnest adherence to the doctrines it was to inculcate.

There is a general opinion that your actor-manager and your actor are persons consumed by two inherent thirsts—applause and money. In a sense—perhaps in a very general sense—this is true, but there are still those actors and actresses whose life is not entirely occupied with their own personality and chances of success. In the most egotistical of all occupations there are yet men and women who are animated by the spirit of altruism, and the hope of helping a great movement. Aubrey Flood was one of these men. He was as convinced a Socialist as Fabian Rose himself. He was enlisted under that banner, and he was prepared to go to any length to uphold it in the forefront of the great battle which was imminent. At the same time, Mr. Aubrey Flood saw no reason why propaganda should not pay!

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He was dictating his letters, when once more the stage door-keeper came into the room with another card. It was that of Miss Mary Marriott.

Flood started.

"Show Miss Marriott in at once," he said, and his face changed a little, while a new light of interest came into his eyes.

Your theatrical manager is not, as a rule, a person very susceptible to the charms of the ladies with whom he is constantly associated, though perhaps that is not quite the best way to put it. He is susceptible, but in a somewhat cynical and contemptuous way. The conquests in the world of the limelight are not always too difficult, and a man who pursues them out of habit and inclination very often learns to put a low figure upon achievement. But in the case of Mary Marriott, Aubrey Flood, who was no better or no worse than his colleagues, had felt differently. It does not necessarily mean that when a manager makes love to his leading lady, or to any lady in his company, he necessarily has the slightest real emotion in doing so. It is, indeed, part of the day's work, and half of the day's necessity. That is all.

But Flood had never met any one like Mary Marriott before. He was impressed by her beauty; he recognised her talent; he believed absolutely in her artistic capacities. At the same time he found himself feeling for this girl something to which he had long been a stranger—a feeling of reverence, or perhaps chivalry, would more easily describe it.

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Yes, when he was with her he remembered his younger days when, as a boyish undergraduate from Oxford, he had played tennis with the daughters of the squire on the lawns of his father's rectory. Then all women passably fair and passably young had been mysterious goddesses. Mary Marriott sometimes brought the hardened and cynical man of the world, whose only real passion was for the cause of Socialism, back to the ideals of his youth, and he counted himself fortunate that fate had thrown her in his way.

Mary came into the room. He rose and shook her heartily by the hand.

"My dear Miss Marriott," he said—an intimate of his would have noticed a slight change in his way of addressing her, for to most lady members of his company he would have said "my dear," "to what do I owe this call? I thought we were all going to meet at half-past two to hear the play read! Do sit down."

Mary smiled at him. She liked Mr. Flood. She knew the sickening familiarities of the men who had controlled some of the companies in which she had been.

At first it had been horrible, then she had become a little accustomed and blunted to it. She had endured without any signs of outrage the familiar touch upon the arm, the bold intimacy of voice and manner. It was refreshing now to meet a man who behaved to her as a gentleman behaves to a lady in a society where the footlights are not.

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In fact, everything was refreshing, new, and exhilarating to Mary now, since that day, that terrible day of fog and gloom, when, after her long and perilous search for an engagement she had sat in her little attic flat in Bloomsbury and the mustard-bearded man had knocked at the door with all the suddenness of wonder of the fairy godmother herself to Cinderella.

She sat down, and there was a moment's pause.

"Well, do you know, Mr. Flood," she said at length, hesitating a little, and feeling embarrassed, "I have come to ask you a most extraordinary favour."

All sorts of ideas crossed the swift, cinematographic mind of the manager. It could not be that she wanted an advance of salary, because all the company were to be paid for rehearsals, and directly the contract had been signed with him and Fabian Rose, Mary Marriott's half-salary had begun. It could not be that she wanted more "fat" in the part, because she realised the rigidity of Rose's censorship in such a matter; and, besides, she was too much an artist to want the centre of the stage all the time. What could it be? His face showed nothing of his thoughts. All he said was, "Miss Marriott, I am sure you will not ask me anything that I shall not be able to grant."

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"But I think on this occasion you might have some difficulty, Mr. Flood," Mary answered, with half a smile—the man thought he had never seen such charm and such self-possession.

Her voice was like a silver bell, heard far away on a mountain side. No, it wasn't, it was like water falling into water—like a tiny waterfall, falling into a deep, translucent pool in a wood!

"Go on, Miss Marriott," he replied, with a smile.

"I want to bring some one to the reading of the play this afternoon," she said.

"That is all right," he answered; "but provided, of course, that your friend will not divulge anything about the play more than we allow him to do. Why, I have just given little Lionel C. Westwood permission to come and hear the play read. Of course, Mr. Rose must have a say in the matter. But who do you want to bring?"

"I have asked Mr. Rose," Mary replied. "I saw him this morning, and he raised no objections, provided only that you gave your consent."

"Well, then, it is a foregone conclusion," Flood returned; "but who is it?"

"Well," Mary answered, "it is the Duke of Paddington."

Aubrey Flood looked at her for a moment, his eyes wide with amazement.

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"The man himself! By Jove!" he said, "the very man! Do you think this is wise?"

"He has given me his promise," Mary answered, "that he comes merely as an interested spectator."

"Oh, well, then," Flood answered, "if that is the case, by all means let him come, Miss Marriott. Of course, if Rose does not mind, I am sure I don't; but when you first mentioned his name I had a flitting vision that he was coming for—not at all in a friendly way—in fact, to gather material for a libel action in case his personality is indicated too plainly in the play."

"But it is not, Mr. Flood, is it?" Mary asked.

"Oh, no," the actor answered; "his personality is not indicated at all. We don't caricature people, we indicate types. He is— Well, perhaps I should hardly even have used the word indicate at all—he is merely used as a peg upon which to hang our theories. I have read the play and you have not, and I am sure that what I say is quite correct. At the same time, you know, Miss Marriott, all London will guess at whom we are hitting in the first instance—not so much because he happens to be an individual enemy of the Cause as that he is representative of the army of monopolists we are endeavouring to destroy."

"I am sure he won't mind at all," Mary Marriott said, and Flood noticed with an odd uneasiness that she flushed a little. "I have had the privilege of seeing something of the duke lately, and he really seems to be taking an interest in the socialistic movement, though of course from quite a different point of view to ours."

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"I see," Flood replied slowly. "Miss Marriott, you are trying——" And then he stopped, he thought it better to leave his thought unspoken.

"Very well, then," he replied, "so be it. Bring him, by all means."

"May I telephone?" Mary said, "or, rather would you have a message telephoned to Grosvenor Street, Mr. Flood? The duke is staying with Lord Camborne, and I promised that if it was possible for him to hear the reading of the play I would let him know. If you telephone to him that there is no objection he will arrive here at half-past two o'clock."

"By all means," Flood answered, "I will do it myself. I have had a good many interesting experiences in my lifetime, but this will be the first time that I have talked to a duke over the telephone." He laughed a little sardonically as Mary rose.

"By the way, what are you going to do now?" he said.

"It is nearly one o'clock. I am going home to my flat for lunch," Mary answered.

"No, you are not, Miss Marriott," he answered. "You are coming out to lunch with me, if you please."

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Mary hesitated for a moment, then smiled radiantly, and thanked him. "It is very kind of you," she said. "Of course I will, since you ask me."

Together, a few minutes afterwards, they left the theatre and drove down to Frascati's.

The lunch was bright and merry. Upon the stage the usual conveniences are not observed, because, indeed, it would be impossible that they should be. Apart from them any abuses of stage life, and the danger which belongs to the meeting of youngish men and women without the usual restraints of society, without the usual restraints which society imposes, there is, nevertheless, in many instances a real and true *camaraderie* of the sexes which is as charming as it is without offence.

The girl lunched with the actor-manager, gaily and happily. The simple *omelette, fines herbes*, the red mullet and the grilled kidneys were perfectly cooked, and the bottle of Beaune—well, it was Moulin à Vent, and what more can be said?

They talked over the play from various points of view. First of all it was from the aspect of its probable success. They agreed that this seemed assured. Then they talked eagerly, keenly of the artistic possibilities of it. Mary had read a scene or two—Fabian Rose had given her the typewritten manuscript—but of the play as a whole she had no more than a vague idea. This, to both of them, was the most interesting part of their talk.

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Aubrey was an artist in every way. He was a successful artist and had combined commercial success with his real work, otherwise he would not have been a "successful artist." But he cared very much, nevertheless, for the splendour of what he believed to be the greatest art in the world. He was sincere, as Mary was also, in his belief in the high mission of the stage.

Finally, over their coffee, they talked of what the play—already assumed successful and important—would mean to Socialism.

Mary was but a new convert. Her ideas about the cause to which, in her young enthusiasm, she had pledged herself were nebulous. She had much to learn. She was learning much. Yet her heart warmed up as Aubrey Flood let his words go, and told her of his ambitions that this play should indeed be a great thing for the Cause. He was a clever and well-known actor, a successful manager, under a new aspect altogether. She had met people like Aubrey Flood before, but no single one of them had ever shown her that beneath his life of the theatre lay any deep and

underlying motive, and it uplifted her, she felt that strange sense of brotherhood which those who are united against the world always know. She recognised that Aubrey Flood, beneath his exterior, was as keen and convinced a Socialist as Fabian Rose, or Mr. Conrad. The fact substantiated her own new theories and induced in her the throbbing sense of being an officer in a great army.

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"I wish I had known before," she said to him as they were preparing to leave the restaurant. "I wish I had known before, then, indeed, I might have had an ethical motive in my life, which I now see and feel has been lacking for a long time."

"You are now," he answered, "catching something of our own enthusiasm, and it is by the most extraordinary chain of events that Rose and you, Conrad and myself have come into touch with the Duke of Paddington himself. Conrad, of course, would tell you that Providence had designed it. I cannot go so far as that. I simply say that it is chance. All the same, it is a most marvellous thing. We are going to startle England."

Mary looked at him for a moment. They had just got into the hansom which was to drive them back to the theatre.

"I don't see, Mr. Flood," she said in a quiet voice, "why it is any more easy to believe that something you call 'chance' brings things about than it is difficult to believe that something Mr. Conrad calls 'Providence' should effect the same results."

Flood looked at her in his turn. Here was a most strange young lady of the stage, indeed. He tried to think of something to say, but could not. The simple logic of her answer forbade retort.

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Indeed, why should any one want to gather up "coincidences," call the controlling power of them "chance," and not admit that Providence itself had ordered them?

He could not think beyond that, and he was silent. He remembered his old father at the country rectory. He remembered the simple faith of his father and mother and his sisters, and he realised with a sudden shock of pain that the reason why he strove to call the strange Directorship of the affairs of life by a name which had no especial meaning was because he was not prepared to submit to the teachings and the order of the Faith.

Mary also seemed to realise that her words had struck home to a heart which was not yet entirely atrophied by the rush of life in the world of the stage.

She turned to him and smiled slightly, rather sadly, indeed.

"Mr. Flood," she said, "you and I were both born in the same country but perhaps you have been over the frontier for a long time."

"And perhaps," he answered, and while he did so his voice sounded in his own ears strange and unfamiliar, "and perhaps even a theatrical manager may some day ask for his passport to return."

They drew up at the stage door of the Park Lane Theatre.

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Mary did not go back to Mr. Flood's room. She went straight on to the stage. The curtain was up. The house was swathed in brown holland, and only a faint light came down from the glass dome in the roof, showing the whole place melancholy and bizarre. The stage itself was a great expanse of dirty boards, stretching right away to a brick wall at the back, in which was a huge slit, with two dingily-painted doors covering it, by which scenery was brought into the scene-dock a little behind.

Two or three chairs were set down by the unlighted footlights, and there was a tiny table by one of them. The limits of the scene which would be set one day were marked off by chalk lines upon the boards. Two or three nondescript men in soft felt hats wandered about in the wings, and on the prompt side, up a ladder and standing on the platform above where is the switchboard which controls the stage lights, the electrician—in a dirty white linen coat—was twisting wires from one plug to another, and noisily whistling the last popular song.

It was a scene of drab materialism, and the two or three little groups of people who stood here and there neither added to it nor gave it any animation.

As Mary went "on" the actors and actresses who were waiting there looked at her with curious eyes. One or two she knew—they were often at the Actors' Association. Who her colleagues as principals were she had not been told, and as yet had no idea, save only of course that she was to act with Aubrey Flood himself.

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She saw, however, with a little thrill of pleasure that Dorothy French was there. She herself had obtained a small part for her little friend from Fabian Rose. Dolly came hurrying up to her, the girl's high-heeled shoes echoing strangely upon the boards and sending out a muffled drum-like note into the dim, shrouded auditorium beyond.

"Oh, Mary dear," Dolly whispered, "I am so glad to see you! I have not seen you for such a long time, and it's been so awfully good of you to find a shop for me. But what an extraordinary business it all is! None of us seem to know anything about it. The whole thing is a perfect mystery, and is it really true?" she continued, with a touch of envy, "is it really true, Mary dear, that you are going to play lead?"

Mary sighed a little. "Well," she said, "I suppose it is."

"Then you know all about it?" Dolly answered quickly. "Now, do tell me, Mary, what it is all about. The papers are full of rumours."

Mary realised what she had often realised before in her stage career, that friendships last for a tour, and are spoiled by the first hintings of success. She had always been fond of little Dolly French, pretty little Dolly French; but here at the very first intimation of her own promotion, was Dolly, with a changed voice and a different look in her eyes, wearing an eager, questioning envious look.

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"I know very little, Dolly," she answered rather shortly, "and what I do know I must not tell. Everybody will know soon, of course."

Dorothy looked at her for a moment in silence. Then she said: "Oh, Mary! I see that you are already feeling the responsibilities of being Lead." She tittered rather bitterly, turned away, and rejoined the group from which she had come.

Every one seemed to watch Mary for a few moments—she was standing quite by herself—when there was a noise of footsteps and a group of people came through the pass-door and down the three or four steps which led to the stage itself.

Aubrey Flood was the first, without a hat and in an ordinary lounge suit. James Fabian Rose, carrying a roll of brown paper in his hand, and wearing a tweed overcoat and soft felt hat, followed him.

Behind the two was another man, who walked close to the pioneers, and looked round him with an air of unfamiliarity.

He was a tallish, clean-shaven young man who wore a heavy fur coat.

Mary turned round and went up to the group.

"Yes," Aubrey Flood said; "yes, Miss Marriott, here indeed is his Grace, who has come to hear how we are going to attack him."

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The duke looked at Flood with a half smile, there seemed to be something condescending in it, then he turned eagerly to Mary. "Oh, Miss Marriott," he said, "you cannot think how interesting all this is to me, and how grateful I am to you for enabling me to see it all."

He looked up and round, and there was something in his voice that showed he was alert and aware—aware and curious.

"We shall be about half an hour before we begin to read the play, your Grace," Aubrey Flood said. "Would you like to be shown over the theatre—that is, have you ever been over a theatre from the 'behind-the-scenes' point of view, as it were?"

"No, I have not," the duke answered, "and I should like to very much."

At the same moment the stage manager came hurrying up to Aubrey Flood. The actor turned to the duke and to Mary Marriott.

"Miss Marriott," he said, "would you show the duke something of the theatre? I must talk to Mr. Howard."

Mary and the duke moved away together.

"I don't quite know what to show you," she said, "and will you really be interested in the way we present our illusions?"

"Miss Marriott," the duke answered, "I want to know all sorts of things which I have never known before. I've always been boxed up, so to say. Life has been rather a monotonous procession for me up to the present. Now I am simply greedy and eager for new sensations."

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"Then, come along," the girl answered; "come along, and I will show you the mechanism by which we produce our effects."

"Oh, no," the duke answered, "you cannot show me that, Miss Marriott, at all. You can show me a mere mechanism which surrounds and assists art. That is all you can show me. It will be in the future that you will show me art itself."

She looked at him with a quiet, considering eye, forgetting for a moment who he was: "Do you know," she said, "I think you must be an artist."

The duke looked at her rather strangely.

CHAPTER XV

THE MANUSCRIPT IN THE LIBRARY

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The high wall which shields the great palace of the Dukes of Paddington from the gaze of the ordinary passer-by is broken in its centre by the treble ornamental gates of ironwork. They are

gates with a history, but they are gates which very few Londoners of the present generation have ever seen opened. But about fifty feet to the right of the central entrance there is a little green door set in the thickness of the high brick wall, with a shining bell-push in the lintel. It is through this door that people who have business with the ducal house, now so void and empty of living interest, enter and make acquaintance with the great courtyard in front of the façade.

The big gates during the last few days had been open for several hours each morning and afternoon, while a policeman had been stationed by them. Carts full of building materials had been driven in, while the gap in the wall, which had been made by the bomb, was built up and repaired.

Therefore, Arthur Burnside, in his black bowler hat and unfashionable overcoat, did not trouble to ring the electric bell, which brought the ducal porter to the little door in the wall, but turned in at the main entrance. [Pg 191]

The policeman knew him, and, vaguely recognising him as a henchman of the *entourage*, saluted as the young scholar of Paul's went by. The great front door of the house was closed. Six people lived in the empty palace and kept its solitariness warm, but there was a side entrance which they used, and which Burnside, since Colonel Simpson had confirmed the dukes' appointment, used also.

He went in, walking briskly through the keen air, rang the bell, was admitted by an understeward, and hung up his coat and hat in a small lobby. Then he traversed a longish corridor, pushed open a green baize door at the end of it, and came into the great central hall of the house. As he did so he looked round him, stopped, and sighed.

There was a great marble staircase before him, a staircase of white marble from Carrara, which mounted to a wonderful marble balcony, which ran round the central square of the famous house. Statues, each one of which was known and priced minutely in the catalogues of the connoisseurs, were standing in their cold beauty on the stairway. The celebrated purple carpet from Teheran ran up to the gallery above. All round in the hall were huge doors of mahogany, leading to this or that marvellous *salon*. Another and older carpet of purple, extraordinarily large and woven in Persia for the late duke many years ago, covered the tessellated pavement. There were chairs set about, examples of priceless Chippendale, and little glass-topped tables held collections of miniatures, which were as well known as they were priceless. [Pg 192]

The three pictures which hung in the lower part of the great hall beneath the gallery, and surrounding the door which led to the library, were three Gainsboroughs of riant beauty and incomparable value.

But it was all a dead house, a house where nobody lived, a museum of priceless treasures which nobody ever saw.

As the young man stepped across the heavy carpet, walking upon it as one walks upon a well-trimmed tennis lawn, he shuddered a little to think that all this collection of beauty was crammed together in a dead profusion which appealed to nobody. He said to himself: "How terrible it all is! How terrible it is to think of this huge palace of art, set in the very centre of London, closed and shuttered with no appeal to the world. No one can come and see these lovely and famous things, and I myself, who appreciate each and every one of them, am oppressed, not only by the silence and seclusion of it all, but also by the fact that in this one house there are stored treasures of art so thickly that one has no time to think about *this* before the adjacent *other one* comes and obscures one's comprehension."

He pushed open the vast panelled door which led to the library and entered. The library was a huge place, as big as the central room in the town hall of any flourishing provincial town. The ceiling was designed by Adams, and the supreme genius of that master of plaster-work seemed to burgeon out and down into the place, reminding one always that the great artist had been here. The books, in their glass-fronted cabinets, reached only to a half-height of the walls. On the top of the shelves stood the late duke's well-known collection of Chinese porcelain of the Ming dynasty. [Pg 193]

There were three great fires in the place, and each one of them was glowing now, as the solitary young scholar of Paul's entered and closed the heavy twelve-foot door behind him.

He went up to the largest fireplace of all, where logs were hissing in the hot enveloping flame. He turned his back upon it and surveyed the vast expanse before him. The books in the room were probably worth three hundred thousand pounds. There were the first four folios of Shakespeare, there was a great case which held the Vinegar Bible, the Breeches Bible, and the very earliest black-letter copy of the Scriptures, printed by Schwartz and Pannheim upon the heights of the Apennines in fear of their death should it become known.... It was simply beyond statement, thirty or forty great collections were comprised in this one room. The young scholar's love of books and appreciation of their history thrilled at the sight of all this wealth, thrilled to know that fortune had given him the temporary control of it all. [Pg 194]

Upon a great red leather-covered writing-table, set by the principal fireside, lay his papers and the calf-bound volumes in which, with scrupulous care and accurate knowledge, he was completing the work of cataloguing which the death of his predecessor had left unfinished. He went towards the table, looked at the records of his first fortnight's work for a moment or two, sighed a little, and then sat down and concentrated his mind upon what he had to do.

For several hours he worked steadily—it had been through his great capacity for steady, uninterrupted and concentrated work that this young man had risen from the ordinary Board school to the higher-grade school, and had won the most difficult and brilliant scholarship that the aristocratic college of St. Paul's at Oxford had in its gift.

Here was a young man determined to get on; nothing could stop him, nothing could stand in his way. In temperament he was like a steel drill that, driven by tireless energy, goes lower and lower through the granite rock, and through the quartz, until at last the desired strata is reached and won.

He worked the whole morning with hardly a pause. At one o'clock he took a paper of sandwiches from his pocket and made his simple meal. Then he worked onwards till three. At that time, feeling that he had done his duty, or rather more, by his employer the duke, whom, by the way, he had never seen since his appointment as librarian nor subsequently during the extraordinary ferment that his Grace's disappearance, reappearance, and return to health had occasioned in the Press, he put away the catalogue upon which he was engaged.

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Then he opened a drawer in the great writing-table, a locked drawer, and pulled out a pile of manuscript. He turned it over until the last few pages were displayed. Then, with a puckered forehead and a mouth which was undecided only because it was critical, the shabby young man in the black clothes, surrounded by evidence of incalculable wealth read steadily at what he designed to be a key which should open modern political life to him.

He read on and on, now and again making an annotation with his fountain pen, sometimes waiting for two or three minutes before he scored through a passage or added a few words. Then at last a clock, a great clock which had been brought from Versailles, beat out the hour of four with deep sonorous notes like the voice of an old man.

Burnside pulled his nickel watch from his pocket, saw that it synchronised with the stately time given by the guardian of the library, and hurried away.

He crossed the hall, went down the passage which led to the side door, put on his hat and coat, and disappeared into Piccadilly, quite forgetting that he had left the last pages of his manuscript upon the writing-table.

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It was a fortnight since the duke had been allowed to listen to the reading of the play at the Park Lane Theatre.

When he had heard James Fabian Rose read the work to the company who sat and stood around upon the grey and empty stage the duke had not been very much impressed. He had not been impressed—that is to say—with the actual achievement of Rose's work. He had listened with some bewilderment to the tags, stage directions, and so forth, and now and then he had been caught up into a mental reverie by some biting, stinging paradox or epigram.

As he sat there the duke had been frankly watching Mary Marriott's face as she listened to the author's words. He saw her eyes light up and become intent, or flicker down into a strange gloom. He marked the sudden rigidity of her pose, the relaxation of it when something was afoot in which she was not particularly concerned, the whole careful attention and sympathetic watching of the girl. What all this play meant, he, sitting on a chair on the O.P. side of the stage, could hardly gather. He realised, nevertheless, by watching Mary, and by surveying the other members of the company, that the play was obviously something rather important and out of the usual run of such things.

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To him it conveyed little or nothing, but he had become sufficiently mobile in mind to realise that probably this happening in the grey light of the afternoon and the shabby surroundings of the stage were yet instinct with potentiality, and would become—in their full fruition—something charged with purpose and an appeal to the general world.

After it was all over he had thanked Rose, Aubrey Flood, and Mary Marriott, had got into a cab and been driven back to Grosvenor Street. He was conscious himself at the moment that he had been a little unresponsive and chilly in his manner, but for the life of him he hadn't been able to express himself more pleasantly.

"Thank you so much, Miss Marriott," he had said, "for letting me come here this afternoon. Indeed, Mr. Rose, I think it is most sporting of you to ask me. For my part, I frankly confess I don't realise what it's all about! It's all so new to me, you know, to hear something read in this way, and I cannot grasp it as a whole. At the same time," he concluded with a weary smile, "at the same time, if this is your attack upon me, or, rather, upon people like me, then, my dear Mr. Rose, I think you ought to sharpen your sword."

As he had said this both Aubrey Flood and the great Socialist had chuckled, while the former remarked, "Wait and see, your Grace. Wait and see what we can eventually spin out of such dull ritual on such a grey afternoon as this."

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"I will, Mr. Rose," the duke had answered rather shortly, and gone back to the cheery house in Grosvenor Street.

He had told Lord Hayle and Lady Constance all about his experience of the afternoon. Neither of

them had been very interested, and Lady Constance remarked that all "excursions into *les coulisses* must surely be rather disappointing."

In fact, the Camborne family regarded the whole thing as a rather too amiable weakness on the part of their guest. The bishop, who was always running backwards and forwards at this time from his palace at Carlton to his house in Grosvenor Street, often made a genial jest upon the subject to the young man. "My dear Paddington," he would say, "how is the attack going? Ha, ha! Every day, when I open my newspapers, I find that the general public is being worked up to a perfect froth of excitement about this forthcoming theatrical enterprise. A peer in the pillory! The duke in the dock! How amusing it all is!"

Thus the bishop scoffed on more than one occasion, and his witticisms had no very exhilarating effect upon the duke.

His life in Grosvenor Street was happier with the younger members of the family. His dear friend Gerald was still as sympathetic and vivid as ever. Lord Hayle had passed the test of intimate human association, and come out of it very well. Lady Constance was as ever—beautiful, sweet, and sympathetic—but the duke was finding that in the very splendour of the girl's nature and appearance there was something a trifle cloying. He was deeply in love with her; he knew also that she cared for him, but for the first time in his guarded, shielded life he saw before him times of indecision and of trouble. Life, which had seemed so smooth and stately, so well ordered a thing, was not quite what it had been. The serene repose of his mind was disturbed by all he had gone through.

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Sometimes he went and took tea with Mrs. Rose, and often her husband, Mr. Conrad, and Mary Marriott were there. He never attempted to argue with any of them. He took their shafts of wit with a quiet complaisance, but if they thought that their epigrams had not gone home they were very deeply mistaken.

One afternoon, tired and troubled, the duke bethought himself of his great house in Piccadilly. He walked there from Grosvenor Street, astonished the servants by ringing the bell, and, entering, he moodily surveyed some of his famous possessions.

Then he turned into the library. The three great fires were burning down. It was about six o'clock. He switched on the electric light himself and wandered through the maze of his treasures.

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He came up to a table—a huge writing-table, covered with red leather—and saw upon it five or six sheets of manuscript in careful handwriting. Forgetting exactly what he was doing, thinking nothing of the man he had appointed to be librarian, the duke sat down and began to read.

CHAPTER XVI

ARTHUR BURNSIDE'S VIEWS

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This was the document that the duke read with amazement and growing interest in the great empty library of his palace. It was obviously the peroration of an important work—

"Are we already in the position of ancient Rome? Are we moribund? No barbarians, indeed, stand with menace of conquering at our gates, but it was not the barbarians who overthrew the greatness of the Roman Empire. The greatness had already departed long before the Huns and Goths swept down upon its walls. In her early strength Rome, the capital of the world, would have rolled back her invaders, as a rock resists the onslaught of an angry wave; but Rome, when she fell, was no longer as she had been in her earlier days.

"And we must ask ourselves now whether our own civilisation, with all its wonders, is not tending to a like end? Are we not reproducing in faithful detail every cause which led to the downfall of the civilisations of other days? We are Imperialists, that is to say, we take tribute from conquered races. Great fortunes are constantly accumulated, to the defeat of individuals in our midst. An enormous population is with us, which owns no property, and lives always in grinding poverty. A great portion of the land of the country has gone out of cultivation. The physical deterioration of Englishmen is a well known and most alarming fact, which can be proved over and over again by the statistics of the medical schools. I am not concerned here to prove any statements I make in the last few lines of this book. They have been proved in the earlier portions. This is a summing up.

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"And it is for these reasons that we who are socialists say that the system which is producing such appalling results shall not be allowed to continue. It is a system which has taken from religion much of its natural appeal and consoling power over the hearts and souls of the majority. It is a system which has destroyed, handicapped, and turned the protection of the useful and necessary things of life into a soulless progress of mechanism controlled by slaves. It is a system which awards the palm of success to the unscrupulous, corrupts the press, turns pure women on to the streets, and transforms upright men into mean-spirited time-servers.

"It cannot continue.

"In the end it is bound to work its own overthrow.

"Socialism, with its promise of freedom, its larger hope for humanity, its triumph of peace over war, its binding of the races of the earth into one all-embracing brotherhood, must in the end prevail. Capitalism is the creed of the dying present; Socialism throbs with the life of the days that are to be. Socialism has claimed its martyrs in the past, and to-day, also, it has claimed them. But before long the martyrs in the cause of humanity all will see—let us hope and believe from another and better ordered life—that their efforts have not been in vain.

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"I write, perhaps, in these last words, from a somewhat academic standpoint. I do not think, however, that my readers who have followed me so far will accuse me of pure theorising in the earlier portions of this work. At the same time, experience is merely the lesson learnt by event, and I do not think I shall be unduly ponderous if I again, and finally, draw attention to those stupendous teachings which the student of history draws from the past and applies to the amelioration of the present.

"It cannot be too loudly proclaimed! Academic evolution necessarily goes hand-in-hand with a moral development strictly related to it. Nowadays, broken into the individualistic system, we regard with astonishment the fierce patriotism which inflamed the little cities and republics of antiquity, the States of Greece, the Kingdoms of Italy, and even the larger and less civilised hordes of the North. Yet, if we regard it for a moment, we shall see that this sentiment was merely inspired by the eradicable instinct of self-preservation. In the bosom of the clans, in the heart of the families, interests were consolidated and the fact was realised. And in those days, also, defeat might not only bring ruin and a total loss of comfort and worldly possession, but it would also mean slavery.

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"In those days, indeed, the conqueror, whether barbarian or not, could not fail to appear. He intervened always wherever great wealth was amassed in the hands of a population incapable of defending it. And, taking these lessons of history to ourselves, we can see that, though the whole conditions of society have changed, a conqueror must still appear and throw down the existing system with all its horrors and anachronisms.

"Once more let me point out that England at present is dominated by certain economic facts.

"Although there is plenty of food, clothing, and shelter available in the country, an enormous population of these islands do not obtain enough of any of them to support life properly, or even in the simplest way possible, to secure ordinary health and ordinary enjoyment of existence.

"Again, then, the statistics quoted in the earlier part of this work inevitably show, with all the rigour of hard facts and unassailable statistics, that each year many people die from overwork or want.

"The producers of wealth are poor, miserable, and enslaved, while those who enjoy the wealth thus produced in misery are idle, corrupt, and enervated by their riches. There are more than a million men needing work and wages in England at the present moment, while, at the same time, we keep the land of the country less than one-quarter tilled.

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"As Mr. John Kenworthy has written, in words which re-echo and reverberate in the ears of modern men: 'These accusations are facts as palpable and clear as heaven and earth above us and beneath us; not to be disputed by any person of ordinary sense. Surely we have enough of stupidity and wrong here to certify ourselves a nation not only "mostly fools" but largely knaves also.'

"In truth nobody disputes this state of affairs. You may prove the extremest horrors straight from Government Blue Books. Recently some very full particulars concerning mining industries were put into one of those Government coffins for burying disagreeable truths. One might expect that, after having such particulars of overwork underpaid and murderous housing thrust into their notice, a Parliament which served humanity and not the brood of Mammon would sit night and day until the law had done what law can do to right these wrongs. But no, the six hundred gentlemen of Parliament who play with the mouse-like people in a gentle, cat-like fashion, did—just nothing, as usual! No doubt members of Parliament are filled with good resolutions to do something for the people; but the intentions always go down before the hard fact that doing anything for the people is found to mean, in practice, giving up some right of property.

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"Upon this one issue, the right of property, the whole social question centres. The man who has discovered what the right of property means now, and what it ought to mean, and would mean among good and honest people, may claim to have solved the problem of misery which baffles the nations of the world."

The duke put the manuscript down upon the huge, leather-covered table and looked at it thoughtfully. He saw the neat, careful writing—the writing of a man who had been accustomed to write Greek. He smiled to himself with a dreamy appreciation of the well-known fact that no scholar writes like an ordinary man, and that always the hand which, in youth at a public school, has been inured to the careful tracing of Greek script, betrays itself when writing English by a meticulous care in the forming of each individual word.

Then, quite suddenly, the duke sat down and leaned back in a high-cushioned chair. He had not been in his famous library for a very long time. He felt forlorn and alone in it, and he looked round upon its glories with a sort of wonder. "Does all this belong to me?" he thought. "Of course it does, and yet how little I see of it; how little I know of it! I pay a man merely to catalogue the treasures here."

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The electric lights glowed softly all over the vast place and the young man looked round him with a sigh of perplexity. It did not interest him very much to know that on all sides were books and manuscripts that were absolutely priceless. He felt, as he sat there, that the world was a most perplexing place.

The great mahogany door at the end of the library opened, and the trusted servant in charge of the staff still maintained in the ducal house hurried in.

"Your Grace," he said, as he came up to the duke, "can I bring you anything? Can I do anything?"

The duke had not an idea of the man's name—all these details were arranged by Colonel Simpson for the young man.

"No, no," he said; "I thank you very much but I don't want anything. I shall be leaving the house very soon."

"But, your Grace," the man went on, "you will please allow me to make up the fires?"

"Oh, yes," the duke answered; "you may as well do that, and then you can leave me alone. I will let myself out."

"I thank your Grace," said the man. And, with noiseless footsteps he went away.

In two minutes three men were in the library and the dying fires were revived, until, as the dark came over London, a great red blaze threw odd contrasts of red light and shadow into the rich place.

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The men went away, and when they had gone the duke walked up and down the room for a minute or two, and then discovered, near the door which led into the hall, the switches which controlled the electric lights.

He switched off the whole illumination, save only the one standard lamp upon the writing-table. Then he went back to his seat.

He sat down and looked about him. The ruddy, cheerful light was all around. Below his eyes upon the table the shaded electric-light lamp threw a brilliant circle of light upon the manuscripts which he had been reading. Beyond everything was mysterious.

The duke sighed, and once more took up the manuscript.

"Yes," he said to himself, "if every one was good. That is the whole point. Now I must finish this. But how extraordinary! I meet a man in my own college and make him librarian here, and he, too, turns out to be a Socialist, and to be writing a book upon Socialism. A book which, if I am not very much mistaken, will simply become the bible of all of them. Fabian Rose never told me that he knew Burnside! Of course, that is not very extraordinary, because it would not be in his way to tell me. It would not have occurred to him. But how strange it is! On all sides, on all occasions, Fate or Providence seems to have brought me among the ranks of the Socialists. Well, I'll just finish this."

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The duke took up the manuscript once more. There was no rancour in his heart against the young man who, surrounded by the pomp and luxury of his employer's property, was nevertheless, and at the same moment, writing against people such as the duke was.

The duke did not take the attacks very seriously. The forthcoming play had seemed to him rather futile. All that Rose, Mr. Conrad, and the group of their friends who met at the house in Westminster, had said certainly had opened the young man's mind; but nevertheless he had not felt any of the real force of the attack as yet.

He took up the manuscript and read the remaining pages.

There was a cross-heading upon one, and it was this—

"THE REAL SOLUTION"

"The real solution, let me finally say, is indubitably this: I have hinted at it throughout the pages of this work. I have tried to lead the mind of the reader up towards the discovery of my own conviction. Now I state it.

"If human nature was naturally good, as Jean Jacques Rousseau believed it to be, then

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there would be no social problem. Human nature is not temperamentally good. It is temperamentally bad. Therefore, before we can reorganise Society we must reorganise character.

"And in what way is it possible to do this? Can it be done by Act of Parliament? Can it be done by articles in newspapers and reviews? Can it be done by the teaching of altruism at the hands of university settlements and propagandists? It cannot be done by any of these means.

"There is only one way in which the individual mind can be reached, touched, and influenced so strangely and so completely that the influence will be permanent, and the life of the individual will be changed.

"And that way is the Christian way.

"We must do again, if we are to realise the ideals which burn in our hearts, what the Christian Church did in the old days of the Roman Empire, and was meant to do in all ages, by means of the Old Faith 'once and for all delivered to the saints.' In those dim, far-off days the historian knows that Christianity succeeded actually in creating a new middle-class—just what was needed—of poor men made richer, and rich men made poorer in one common brotherhood. Its motto was: For all who want work, work! For those who won't work, hunger! But for the old and infirm, provision. And this the Church of Christ actually achieved, neither by denouncing nor inculcating dogma, but by insisting on and carrying out in practice its own remarkable dogmas. It is not the denial of the Real Presence at the altar, it is not its affirmation, it is not the question of the validity of the apostolic succession nor the denial of it, which will make it possible for an English world to save itself from the horrors of the present.

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"It will be simply this: That those who believe in Christ as the most inspired Teacher the world has ever seen, as God-made-Man, come into this world on a great mission of regeneration, that we shall see our opportunity.

"Christianity and Socialism are inextricably entwined. Separate one from the other, as so many Socialists of nowadays are endeavouring to do, and one or the other—perhaps both—will fail of their high ideal, their splendid mission.

"Combine them, and success is real and assured. We shall all, in that happy day, begin to realise the kingdom of heaven; to re-echo in this world the dim echo of the heavenly harmonies which may then reach us from the new Jerusalem."

The duke put down the manuscript, and with slow, grave steps left his great library, crossed the famous marble hall, and went up through the enclosure of his gardens into the roar and surge of Piccadilly.

His face was curiously set and intent, as he walked to Lord Camborne's, in Grosvenor Street.

CHAPTER XVII THE COMING OF LOVE

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They were dining quite alone at the Cambornes'—the duke, the bishop, Lord Hayle, and Lady Constance.

When he had changed and came down-stairs the duke went into the drawing-room. There were still a few minutes before dinner would be served. He found himself alone, and walked up and down the beautiful room with a curious physical, as well as mental, restlessness. He felt out of tune, as it were. The tremendous upheaval in his life which he had lately experienced was not likely to be forgotten easily. He realised that, and he realised also—more poignantly perhaps at this moment than ever before—how rude a shock his life had experienced. All his ideas must be reconstructed, and the process was not a pleasant one. From the bottom of his heart he caught himself wishing that nothing had happened, that he was still without experience of the new sides of life, to which he had been introduced by such an extraordinary series of accidents.

"I was happier before," he said to himself aloud. And then, even as he did so, in a sudden flash he realised that, after all, these new experiences, disquieting as they were, were exceedingly stimulating. Was it not better that a man should wake and live, even though it was disturbing, than remain always in a sleep and a dream, uninfluenced by actualities?

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Some men, he knew, held Nirvana to be the highest good. And there were many who would drink of the Waters of Lethe, could they but find them. But these were old or world-weary men. They were men who had sinned and suffered, and so desired peace. Or they were men whose bodies tormented them. He was young, strong, rich, and fortunate. He knew that, however much his newly-awakened brain might fret and perturb him, it was better to live than to stagnate even in the most gorgeous palace in the Sleeping Wood.

The simile pleased him as it came to him. As a little boy *Grimm's Fairy Tales* had been a wondrous treasure-house, as they have been to nearly all the upper-class children of England. He

saw the whole series of pictures in the eye of memory. The happiness was not won until the last scene, when everybody woke up!

In his reverie his thoughts changed unconsciously, and dwelt with an unaccustomed effort of memory and appreciation upon the old Fairy Palace, which he had loved so in his youth. He remembered also that, one day, when of mature age, he had run over to Nice; he had gone with the Grand Duke Alexis and a few other young men to a cinematograph, for fun, after a dinner at the *Hotel des Anglais*.

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"Le Bois Dormant!" How it had all come back! And also, what a wonderful thing a cinematograph was! He remembered the flickering beauty of the girl in the strange mimic representation of the Enchanted Castle! Certainly, then, he had watched the movement of the pictures with the interest and amusement of childhood. It was odd, also, that the whole thing should recur to him now. Was not he also awakening from a sleep, long enchanted for him by the circumstances of his great wealth and rank? And then—the Beauty!

He stopped in his walk up and down the great room, and his eyes fell upon a photograph in a heavy silver frame studded with uncut turquoises, which stood upon a little table. It was one of Madame Lallie Charles's pictures, in soft grey platinotype, and it represented Lady Constance Camborne. The lovely profile, in its supreme and unflawed beauty, came into his mood as the conception of the fantasy.

Here, here indeed, was the Beauty! and no dream story, etched deep into the imagination, was ever fairer than this.

He looked long and earnestly at the portrait, thinking deeply, now, of something which would mean more to his life than anything else.

Since he had been staying at the Bishop's house he had seen much of the beautiful and radiant society girl. And all he had seen only confirmed him in his admiration for her beauty and her charm.

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Curiously enough, though, he remembered that he had found, as he stood there reviewing his experiences, that on some occasions his feelings towards his friend's sister were singularly more passionate than at others. There were times when his blood pulsed through his veins, and his whole being rose up in desire to call this lovely girl his own. There were others when, on the contrary, he admired her from a standpoint which might even be called detached. Why was this? The alterations of feeling were quite plainly marked in his memory. Was it—and a sudden light seemed to flash in his mind—was it that when he had been with Mary Marriott his passion for Lady Constance had cooled for a time? He dismissed the thought impatiently, not liking it, angry that it should have come to him.

Mary was as beautiful in her way as Lady Constance. Her charm was not so explicit, but perhaps it was as great. But, then, Mary Marriott was just an actress, and nobody.

He crushed down the unwelcome thought, for, despite all his new knowledge and experience, the old traditions of his breed and training were strong within him. He was the Duke of Paddington, and his mind must not stray into strange paths!

He was standing in the middle of the room, looking down, and frowning to himself. The subtle scent of the hot-house flowers which were massed in great silver bowls here and there mingled strangely with the sense of warmth from the great fires which had a strangely drowsy influence upon him.

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Once more he was within the precincts of the Château dans le Bois Dormant.

"A penny for your thoughts, duke!" cut into his reverie.

He started and looked up.

Lady Constance stood before him, with her radiant smile and wonderful appeal. She swung a little fan of white feathers from one wrist. She wore a long, flowing black crêpe de chine Empire gown, scintillating here and there with rich passementerie embroideries and jet ornamentations. The dress was rich in its simplicity, graceful and flowing, it possessed the art that concealed art, and showed off to wonderful advantage the wearer's youthful beauty and glorious hair, the whiteness of her neck and arms against the shimmer of the black. It had been made by Worth, and only made more explicit the wonderful coronet of corn-ripe hair, surmounting a face as lovely as ever Raphael or Michael Angelo dreamt of and set down upon their canvases. She made an *ensemble* so sudden in its appearance, so absolutely overwhelming in its appeal, that for one of the first times in his life the duke was taken aback and blushed and stammered like a boy.

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"I really do not know," he said at length. "I was in a sort of brown study, Lady Constance!"

"Well," she replied, "the offer of a penny, or should it be twopence? is still open; but if you are not going to deal, as the Americans say, explain to me the meaning of the words 'brown study.'"

"I am afraid that is beyond me, Lady Constance," he returned, smiling, and feeling at ease again.

Just as he spoke Lord Hayle and the bishop entered, and they all went down to dinner.

They sat at a small oval table, and every one was in excellent spirits. The duke's troubles seemed to have left him. He felt exhilarated and stimulated, and a half-formed purpose in his mind grew

clearer and clearer as the meal went on.

He would ask the radiant girl opposite him to be his wife.

He would ask her that very night if an opportunity presented itself. She was utterly, overwhelmingly charming. There was nobody like her in society. She was as unique among the high-born girls of the day as Ellen Terry was in the height of her charm and beauty upon the stage, when Charles Reade wrote the famous passage about her.

Yes, nothing could be better. She was like champagne to him—she was the most beautiful thing in the world—at the moment she was the most desirable. The ready influence of her talk and laughter stole into his brain. He was captured and enthralled. He thought that this at last was Love.

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For he did not know, being a young man with great possessions, but few experiences, that Love does not come upon the wings of light and laughter, but wears a sable mantle, shot through with fires from heaven. He had never loved, and so he did not know that, when the divine blessing of love is vouchsafed, there is a catch in the throat and the tears start into the eyes.

He talked well and brilliantly, relating his experiences of that afternoon.

"So you see," he said, "I went into my great lonely house by a side door—the butler's door, I believe it is called as a matter of fact, and I found the library very warm and comfortable, and with the man I had appointed to be librarian gone. He apparently had just finished his day's work of cataloguing. He is a scholar of my own college and a very decent chap I have found him. He wanted some paid work during the vacations to help him on towards his career at the bar—he is going to be called as soon as he possibly can. I understand that he is certain for a double first. Already he has got his first in mods. and he will get a first in history, too."

"I know the man," Lord Hayle said. "Poor chap! He does not look too well provided with this world's goods."

"But I thought every one at Paul's," Lady Constance said, "was well-to-do. Is it not quite the nicest college in Oxford?"

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"Oh, yes, Connie," Lord Hayle replied, "but don't you see, there are some scholarships upon the Foundation which make it possible for quite poor men to live at Paul's. They are very much out of it, naturally. They cannot live with the other men, and so they form a little society of themselves. Still, it is a jolly good thing for them, I suppose," he concluded rather vaguely, and with the young patrician's slight contempt for, and lack of interest in people, of the class to which Arthur Burnside belonged.

"Well, I like the man well enough—what I have seen of him," the duke continued. "But I made an extraordinary discovery to-day. Upon the writing-table where he had been working was some manuscript. It was obviously the last chapter of a book, and, by Jove! it was a book of the rankest Socialism!"

"Socialism?" said the bishop. "My dear Paddington get rid of the young man at once. Such people ought not to be encouraged!"

"Such people are very charming sometimes, bishop," the duke replied. "You know that I probably owe my life to the chief Socialist of them all—Fabian Rose."

"Well, well," the bishop replied, "I suppose it would be unfair to deprive this young Mr. Burnside of his opportunity. At the same time, I must say it is extraordinary how these pernicious socialistic doctrines are getting abroad. Fabian Rose, and his friends, however personally charming and intellectual they may be—and, of course, I do not deny that some of them are very clever fellows—are doing an amount of harm to the country that is incalculable."

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"They are clever," the duke returned, in a somewhat meditative voice; "they are, indeed, clever. This manuscript that I read was certainly a brilliant piece of special pleading, and, as a matter of fact, I don't quite understand what the answer to it can be."

"It does seem hard," Lady Constance said with a little sigh, "that we should have everything, and so many other people have nothing. After all, father, in the sight of God we are all equal, are we not?"

The bishop smiled. "In the sight of God, my dear," he answered, "we are certainly all equal. The soul of one man is as precious as the soul of another. But in this world God has ordained that certain classes should exist, and we must not presume to question His ordinance. Our Lord said: 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.'"

"But what I cannot see," the duke broke in, "is why, when wealth is produced by labour, the people who produce it should have no share in it. Don't think, Lord Camborne, that I am a Socialist, or infected in any way with socialistic doctrines." He spoke more rashly than he knew. "But I should like to know the economic answer to the things which Mr. Rose, and Mr. Conrad, and their friends told me when I was ill."

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"The answer," replied the bishop, "is perfectly simple. It is intellect, and not labour, that is the creator of wealth. Let me give you a little example."

As he spoke he placed his elbows upon the table, joined the tips of his fingers together, and

looked at his young audience with a suave smile.

"Let me instance the case of a saw!"

"A saw, father?" Lady Constance said. "What on earth has a saw to do with Socialism?"

"Listen," the bishop replied, "and I will tell you. If a saw had not been invented, planks, which are absolutely necessary for the construction of building, and, indeed, for almost all the conveniences of modern life, must be split up out of the trunks of trees by means of wedges, a most clumsy and wasteful method.

"Your labourer says that he produces wealth which the planks make. This, of course, is an absolute fallacy. Labour alone might rend the trunk of a tree into separate pieces, though, to be sure, it would be a difficult business enough. But only labour, working with tools, could split up the trunk of a tree with wedges, saw it with a saw, or cut it with a knife. Don't you see, my dear Connie, labour makes the noise, but it is intellect which is responsible for the tune. Men move by labour, but they only move effectually and profitably by intellect. Labour is the wind, intellect the mill. Though there is as much wind blowing about now as there was three thousand years ago, some of it now grinds corn, saves time, and increases wealth. This difference is due, not to the wind, but to the wiser utilisation of the wind through intellect.

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"And the same is true of labour. Without the inventions and the improvements of the few, labour would produce a bare subsistence for naked savages. It could not, however, produce wealth, because wealth is essentially something over and above a bare subsistence. A bare subsistence means consuming as fast as producing; and thus, all that labour does when not enabled to be efficient and profitable by the superior intelligence of the few.

"So that the real truth is that wealth, as such, is something over and above a mere subsistence, and, so far from being due to labour, is rather due to that diminution of toil which enables things to be produced more quickly than they are consumed. But such diminution is due to the time-shortening processes, methods, and inventions of the few. The fact is that the general mass of men are of far too dull and clownish a character to do much for real advancement.

"Any forward step which produces wealth is taken by somebody in particular, and not by everybody in general.

"Of course it is easy enough to copy and profit by inventions and improvements after somebody else has made them."

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The bishop stopped, and sipped his glass of Contrexeville, looking with a pleased smile at the young people before him.

No one could talk with a more accurate and sustained flow of English than Lord Camborne. He knew it. The public knew it, and he knew that the public knew it.

From some men such a sustained monologue would have been excessively tedious, even though the people to whom it was addressed were, like Miss Rose Dartle, "anxious for information." In the bishop, however, there was such a blandness and suavity—he was such a handsome old man, and had cultivated the grand manner to such perfection—that he really was able, on all occasions, to indulge in his favourite amusement without boring anybody at all. He was, in short, one of the few men in Europe who could enjoy the pleasure of hearing himself talk at considerable length without an uneasy feeling that, in giving way to his ruling passion, he was not alienating friends.

"I see, father!" Lady Constance said as the stately old gentleman concluded his rounded periods. But there was a slight note of indifference in her voice. The bishop did not hear it, Lord Hayle did not hear it, but the duke detected it with a slight sensation of surprise. His senses were sharpened to apprehend every inflection in the voice of the girl he loved. And he wondered that she, apparently, was a little bored by the bishop's explanation.

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He did not realise, being a young man, and one who had enjoyed a long minority, and had known but little of his parents, that, even though a prophet may sometimes have honour in his own country, his children do not always pay him his due meed of recognition when he is, so to speak, "unbuttoned and at home."

The duke had never heard the story of the angry old gentleman who was threatening two little boys, who had thrown some orange peel at him, with the imminent arrival of a policeman upon the other side of the road. "Garn!" said the little boys in chorus. "Why, that's farver!"

The duke himself was intensely interested in the bishop's logical and singularly powerful exposition of socialistic fallacies.

He had been uneasy for a long time now. He had had an alarming suspicion that the arguments of Fabian Rose and his companions were unanswerable, and, on that very afternoon, he had been specially struck by the vigour and force of the concluding chapter of Arthur Burnside's book.

Now he was reinstated in all his old ideas. His mental trouble seemed to pass away like a dream. The world was as it had been before! The remainder of the dinner passed off as brightly and merrily as it had begun. Lord Camborne was a charming host. He could tell stories of the great people of the Victorian Era, for he had been upon intimate terms with all of them. As a young man he had sat with Lord Tennyson in a Fleet Street chop-house in the first days of the *Saturday*

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Review. He had been in Venice when Browning wrote that beautiful poem beginning—

"Oh, to be in England, now that April's there!"

and had been cynically amused at the poet's steadfast determination to remain in the City of Palaces until the cold weather of his native land was definitely over.

He had been an honoured guest at the wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and many years afterwards he had sat at the hospitable table of Sandringham, and had reminded the King and Queen of the scene of their marriage.

It was very fascinating to the duke to hear these stories told with a delicate point and wit, and with the air which reminded the young man pleasantly of the fact that he, too, all his life, had been of these people, and was, indeed, a leader in England.

Since his association with Fabian Rose—an association which pleased and interested him, he had, nevertheless, found a great diminution of his own importance. That sense had been so carefully cultivated from his very earliest years that the loss of it had occasioned him much uneasiness. Now it all seemed restored to him. He was in his own proper *milieu*, and as he looked constantly at Lady Constance Camborne, more and more he felt that here, indeed, was his destined bride. [Pg 226]

Lord Camborne, himself one of the astutest and shrewdest readers of character in England, gathered something of what was passing in the young man's mind. He wanted the duke for a son-in-law. It was all so eminently suitable. The two young people were both exactly the two young people who ought to marry each other. The news of their engagement would, the bishop knew, be very welcome at Court, and society would acclaim it as the most fitting arrangement that could be made.

"If I am not very much mistaken," the old gentleman thought to himself, "the dear boy will ask Connie to marry him to-night. I must see if an opportunity cannot be arranged."

Lord Hayle, as it happened, was going to a bridge-party of young men, which was to be held in one of the card-rooms at the Cocoa Tree Club. He had asked the duke to accompany him, but the duke had already refused.

"I hate cards, my dear Gerald, as you know; and, really, I am not feeling too fit to-night."

"Very well, then," the bishop said, "we will smoke a cigar and have a chat, Paddington, and perhaps Connie will make some music for us? Sir William expressly asked me to see that you did not do too much, and went early to bed, after your terrible experiences, and I am not going to let you spoil your recovery." [Pg 227]

"What a pompous old bore Sir William is," the duke said, laughing. "But I suppose he really does know about what he says."

"The greatest doctor alive at present," said the bishop.

Lady Constance did not leave the table after dessert, as they were all so intimate and at home. The young men were allowed to light their cigarettes, the bishop preferring to go to the library before he smoked.

Suddenly Lady Constance, who had cracked an almond, held out the kernel to the duke.

"Look," she said with almost childish glee, "this nut has two kernels. Now, let us have a phillipine. Will you, duke?"

"Of course I will, Lady Constance," he answered. "We must arrange all about it. I forget the rules. Is it not the first person who says 'phillipine' to-morrow morning who wins?"

"That's it," she answered. "Now, what are you going to give me, or what am I going to give you?"

"Whatever you like," said the duke.

"Well, you choose first," said Lady Constance.

"I don't quite know what I want," said the duke.

The bishop laughed softly. Things were going excellently well.

"Surely, my dear boy," he said, "even you—fortunate as you are—cannot say that there is nothing in the world that you don't want?" [Pg 228]

"I know!" the duke answered suddenly, with a quick flush. "There is one thing which I want very much!"

"Well, then, if it is not too expensive," Lady Constance said, "and if you win, of course, I will give it to you. But what is it?"

"I don't think I will tell you now," the duke replied. "We will wait and see the issues. But what do you want, Lady Constance?"

"Well, I don't know, either," she said. "Oh, yes, I do. I saw Barrett's the other day—the place in Piccadilly, you know—there were some delightful little ivory pigs. I should like a pig to add to my collection of charms. I meant to have bought one then, only I was rather in a hurry, and besides,

your chain charms ought always to be given to you if they are to bring you good luck."

"Very well, then, that is settled," said the duke.

"I don't think it is at all fair, all the same," she said, "not to tell me what your prize is to be if you win."

"My resolution upon that point is inflexible, Lady Constance," he answered.

Then there was a curious momentary silence. Nobody looked at the other. Lord Hayle was thinking of the bridge-party to which he was going. The bishop had realised what the duke meant, and was wondering if his daughter had realised it also. The duke wondered if, carried away by the moment, he had been a little too explicit. Lady Constance? What did Lady Constance wonder? [Pg 229]

The bishop saved the situation, if, indeed, it needed salvage.

"Well," he said, "shall we go into the drawing-room? Gerald, I know, wants to get away, and I and Paddington will be allowed to smoke, as there's nobody else there. Connie won't mind, I know."

"Oh, I sha'n't mind a bit," Lady Constance answered. "Father's disgraceful when we're alone. He smokes everywhere. But the butler has invented a wonderful way of removing all traces of smoke in the air by the next morning. He makes one of the maids put down a couple of great copper bowls full of water, and they seem to absorb it all. Then, we will go."

Laughing and chatting together, they passed out of the dining-room and mounted to the drawing-rooms on the first floor.

Lord Camborne and his guest sat by one of the fire-places and played a game of chess. Lady Constance was at the Erard, some distance away. Her touch of the piano was perfect, and she played brilliant little trifles, snatches from Grieg or Chopin, and once she played a Tarantelle of Miguel Arteaga—a flashing, scarlet thing, instinct with the heat and spirit of the South.

The bishop won the game of chess. He was, as a matter of fact, though the duke did not know it, one of the finest amateurs of the game then living. [Pg 230]

The duke was at his best an indifferent performer.

A minute or two after the game was over Mr. Westinghouse, the chaplain, came into the drawing-room. He had been dining in his own rooms that night, as he was very busy upon some special correspondence for the bishop. It was then that Lord Camborne saw his chance.

"Westinghouse," he said, "I think we had better go through those letters now, because some of them are most important. I am sure, Paddington, you will excuse me for a few minutes? Come along, Westinghouse, and we will get the whole thing done, and then we will come back, and my daughter will sing to us."

Together the two clergymen left the drawing-room.

Lady Constance was still at the piano, playing soft and dreamy music to herself.

The duke was standing in front of the fire looking out upon the great room lit with its softly-shaded electric lights. The harmonies of colour at that discreet and comfortable hour blended charmingly. It was a room designed by some one who knew what a beautiful room should be. The flowers standing about everywhere blended into the colour scheme. It was as lovely a place as could be found in London on that winter's night.

The duke stood there, tall, young-looking, and with that unmistakable aura which "personality" gives—motionless, and saying nothing. His head was a little bowed; he was thinking deeply. [Pg 231]

Suddenly he left the hearth-rug, took three quick steps out into the middle of the room, and then walked up to the piano. He leant over it and looked at the beautiful girl, who went on playing, smiling up at him.

"What are you playing?" he asked.

"It is the incidental music of a little play called *Villon* by Alfred Calmour," she said. "I don't know who wrote the music in the first instance, but it was afterwards collected and welded into a sort of musical pictorial account of the play. You know about Villon, I suppose?"

"He was a French medieval poet, wasn't he? And rather a rascal, too?" the duke said.

"Yes," she replied. "The story is this: Villon lived with robbers and cut-throats, despite all his beautiful poetry. One night he and two friends, called Beaugerac and René de Montigny, decided to rob an old man, who was said to have a lot of money stowed away. His name was Gervais.

"It was a bitter night in old Paris, and people said that wolves would be coming into the streets. The rich man's house was on the outskirts of the town. Villon is to go to the house, knock at the door, and ask for shelter. Then, when he is once inside, he is to make a signal to Beaugerac and Montigny, who are to rush in and kill the old man, tie up his daughter, who lives with him, and take away the money. [Pg 232]

"Villon goes through the snow, and is admitted by the daughter, Marie.

"The old man is there, and asks him to sit down and share their simple supper. Villon does so, and during the meal the old man says: 'What is your name, stranger, who have come to us to share our meal this cold winter's night?'"

"Taken unawares, Villon told the truth. 'I, sir,' he said, 'am one François Villon, a poor master of arts of the University of Paris.'

"'Villon!' says the girl suddenly. 'Villon, the poet!'"

"'None other! At your service, mademoiselle,' he answers, rising.

"'Villon!' said the old man, 'Villon, the poet! who associates with cut-throats and robbers? Begone from my house!'"

"'Sir,' the poet answers, 'I wish you a very good night. Mademoiselle, you have then read my poems?'"

"'Ay, and loved them truly,' Mary answers in a whisper.

"'Begone!' Gervais says once more.

"Villon casts a last look at the girl and goes to the door and opens it. Flakes of snow are driven in by the wind as he does so. There is a sudden snarl of anger, a shriek of pain, and then a low gurgle.

"Beaugerac and Montigny have watched their confederate through the window, sitting at supper, and have come to the conclusion that he has betrayed them. So Villon lies dying on the threshold as they rush away, frightened at what they have done, and the girl bends over him and places a crucifix upon his lips." [Pg 233]

She stopped. "Now then," she said, "I will play you the piece. It is marvellously descriptive of the little story of the play."

Her face, as she looked up at him, was so sweet and lovely, so throbbing with the pity of the little tale, that he could hesitate no longer.

"No," he said, "you shall not play me the music now. Listen, oh, my dear, listen instead to my story, because I love you!"

CHAPTER XVIII A LOVER, AND NEWS OF LOVERS

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Mary Marriott sat alone in her little flat at the top of the old house in Bloomsbury. The new year had begun, bright and cold from its very first day until the present—eight days after its birth.

The terrible fogs and depression of the old year had vanished as if they had never been. On such a morning as this was they seemed but a dim memory.

And yet how much had happened during those weeks when London lay under a leaden pall. For Mary at least they had been the most eventful weeks of her life.

Everything had been changed for her. From obscurity she had been given an unparalleled opportunity of gaining fame—swift and complete—a fame which some of the best judges in London told her was already assured. Nor was this all, stupendous though it was. A few weeks ago she had been as friendless and lonely a girl as any in London; now she had troops of friends, distinguished, brilliant, and fascinating, and among all these kind people she was, as it were, upon a pedestal. They regarded her as a great artist, took her on trust as that; they regarded her also as a tremendous force to aid the victory of the Cause they had at heart. [Pg 235]

And there was more even than this. In the old days her art had always been her one ideal in life. The art of the theatre was everything to her. It was so still, but it was welded and fused with another ideal. Art for art's sake, just that and nothing more, was welded and fused with something new and uplifting. She saw how her art might become a means of definitely helping forward a movement which had for its object the relief of the down-trodden and oppressed, the doing away with poverty and misery, the ushering in—at last—of the Golden Age! She was to fulfil her artistic destiny, to do the work she came into the world to do, and at the same time to consecrate that work to the service of her sisters and brethren of England.

In all the socialistic ranks there was no more enthusiastic convert than this lovely and brilliant girl. She was singing now as she sat in her little room, and the crisp, bright winter sunshine poured into it; crooning an old Jacobite song, though her eyes were fixed upon the typewritten manuscript of her part in the new play at the Park Lane Theatre. Her ivory brow was wrinkled a little, for she was deep in thought over a detail of her work—should the voice drop at the end of that impressive line, or would not the excitement in which it was to be uttered give it a sharper and more staccato character?—it required thinking out. [Pg 236]

The little sitting-room was not quite the same as it had been. Another bookshelf had been added, and it was filled with the literature of Socialism. On the top shelf was a long row of neat volumes

bound in grey-green, the complete works of James Fabian Rose, presented to Mary by the author himself. All over the place masses of flowers were blooming, pale mauve violets from the Riviera, roses of sulphur and blood-colour from Grasse, striped carnations from Nice. Mary had many friends now who sent her flowers. They came constantly, and her tiny room was redolent of sweet odours. The walls of the room now bore legends painted upon them in quaint lettering. Mr. Conrad, the socialistic clergyman, Fabian Rose's friend, was clever with his brush, and had indeed decorated his church with fresco work. He had painted sentences and socialistic texts upon the walls of Mary's sitting-room.

"The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all," was taken from the Book of Proverbs and painted over the door. Upon the board over the fire, painted in black letter, was this quotation from Sir Thomas More: "I am persuaded that till property is taken away there can be no equitable or just distribution of things, nor can the world be happily governed, for so long as that is maintained the greatest and the far best of mankind will be still oppressed with a load of cares and anxieties."

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There were many other pregnant and pithy sayings upon the walls, and Mary, who used to speak of her cosy little attic as her "sanctum" or "nest," now laughingly called it her "Profession of faith."

Mary also was not quite as she had been. A larger experience of life, new interests, new friends, and, above all, a new ideal had added to her grace and charm of manner, given fulness and maturity even to her beauty. More than ever she was marvellously and wonderfully alive, charged with a kind of radiant energy and force, a joyous power of true correspondence with environment which had made Conrad whisper to James Fabian Rose—one night in the house at Westminster: "For she on honey-dew hath fed, and drunk the milk of Paradise." Indeed, her experiences had been strangely varied and diversified during the last few weeks.

Rose and his friends had spared nothing in the effort to make her a very perfect instrument which should interpret their ideas to the world at large. They had found their task not only easy, but full of intense pleasure. The girl was so responsive, so quick to mark and learn, of such an enthusiastic and original temper of mind that her education on new lines was a specific joy, and their first hopes seemed already assured of fruition.

It was now only a few days before the play upon which so many hopes depended was to be produced at the Park Lane Theatre.

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Already the whole of London was in a fever of curiosity about it. Mr. Goodrick had begun the stimulation of public curiosity in the *Daily Wire*, Lionel Westwood had continued the work until the whole Press had interested itself and daily teemed with report, rumour, and conjecture.

Almost everyone in the metropolis knew that something quite out of the ordinary, unprecedented, indeed, in the history of the theatre was afoot. Absolutely correct information there was none. Goodrick was reserving full and accurate details for the day before the production, when the *Daily Wire* promised a complete and authoritative statement of an absolutely exclusive kind.

The three facts which had leaked out in more or less correct fashion, and which were responsible for much of the eager curiosity of London, were the three essential ones. *The Socialist*, which was announced as the title of the play, was known to be the first step in an organised attempt to use the theatre as a method of socialistic propaganda. It was also said that the play was indubitably the masterpiece of James Fabian Rose. This in itself was sufficient to attract marked interest.

Secondly, every one seemed to be aware that a young actress of extraordinary beauty and talent had been discovered in the provinces and was about to burst into the theatrical firmament as a full-fledged star, a new Duse or Bernhardt, a star of the first magnitude.

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Again, there were the most curious rumours afloat in regard to the actual plot of the play. It was said that the whole scheme was nothing more or less than a virulent attack upon a certain great nobleman who owned a large portion of the West End of London and whose name had been much in the public mouth of late. No newspaper had as yet ventured to print the actual name, but it was a more or less open secret that the Duke of Paddington was meant.

Mary had seen but little of the duke, and then she had thought his manner altered. She had met him once or twice at the Roses' house, and he seemed to her to have lost his usual serenity. He was as a man on whose mind something weighs heavily. Restless, and with a certain appeal in his eyes. He looked, Mary reflected upon one of these occasions, like a man who had made some great mistake and was beginning to find it out. She had had little or no private talk with him except on one occasion, and then only for a moment.

One afternoon the duke had taken her and Mrs. Rose to Paddington House in Piccadilly, and showed the two ladies the treasures of the historic place. It was an old-standing promise, dating from the time of his illness at Westminster, that he should do so.

He had called for them in his motor-brougham, and they had noticed his restlessness and depression, both of which seemed accentuated. After a little while the young man's spirits began to improve, and he had not been with them for half an hour when he became bright and animated. In some subtle way he managed to convey to Mary—and she knew that she was not mistaken—a sense that he was glad to see her, glad to be with her, that he liked her.

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When they were in the picture gallery Mrs. Rose had walked on a few yards to examine a Goya,

and the two younger people were left alone for a minute.

"I have secured my box for the first performance of *The Socialist*, Miss Marriott," the duke said.

Mary flushed a little, she could not help it. "I am sure——" she began, and then hesitated as to what she should say.

"You mean that I had better not come," the duke answered with a smile. "Oh, I don't think I shall mind Rose's satire, judging from what I heard when the play was read, at any rate, and, besides, I quite understand that it is not I personally who am shot at so much as that I am unfortunately a sort of typical target. The papers I see are full of it and all my friends are chaffing me."

Mary looked at him, her great eyes full of doubt and musing. There was something in his voice which touched her—a weariness, a sadness. "I don't know," she said, "but I think it very likely that when you see the play as it is now you will find it hits harder than you expect. We are all very much in earnest. I think it is very good of you to come at all. I hope at any rate that you will forgive me my part in it. You and I live in very different ways of life, but since we have met once or twice I should not like you to think hardly of me."

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She spoke perfectly sincerely, absolutely naturally, as few people ever spoke to him.

The duke's answer had been singular, and Mary did not forget it. "Miss Marriott," he said in a voice which suddenly became intensely earnest and vibrated strangely, "let me say this, once and for all, Never, under any circumstances whatever, could I think hardly or unkindly of you. To be allowed to call myself your friend, if, indeed, I may be so allowed, is one of the greatest privileges I possess or ever can possess."

He had been about to say more, and his eyes seemed eloquent with further words, when Mrs. Rose rejoined them. Mary heard him give a little weary sigh, saw the light die out of his eyes, and something strangely like resignation fall over his face.

She had wondered very much at the time what were the causes of the recent changes in the duke's manner, what trouble assailed him. When he had spoken to her in the picture gallery there had been almost a note of pleading in his voice. It hurt her at the time, and she had often recalled it since, more especially as she had seen nothing of him for some time. He had not been to see the Roses, and had, it seemed, quite dropped out of the life of Mary and her friends.

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The girl was sorry, perhaps more sorry than she cared to admit to herself. Quite apart from the romance of their first meeting, without being in any way influenced by the unique circumstances of his rank and wealth, Mary liked the duke very much indeed. She liked him better, perhaps, than any other man she had ever met. It was always a pleasure to her to be in his society, and she made no disguise about it to herself.

Mary put down the manuscript of the play and glanced at the little carriage clock, covered in red leather, which stood on the mantelshelf.

It was eleven o'clock, and she had to be at the theatre at the half hour to meet Aubrey Flood and discuss some details of stage business with him. Then she was to lunch with the Roses at Westminster, after which she would return to the theatre and begin a rehearsal, which, with a brief interval for dinner, might last till any hour of the night.

She put on her hat and jacket, descended the various flights of stairs which led to her nest in the old Georgian mansion, and walked briskly towards Park Lane.

Mr. Flood had not yet arrived, she was told by the stage-door keeper, and thanking him she passed down a short stone passage and pushed open the swing door which led directly on to the stage itself.

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She was in a meditative mood that morning, and as her feet tapped upon the boards of the huge empty space she wondered if indeed she was destined to triumph there. Was this really to be the scene in which she would realise her life-long dreams or—— She put the ugly alternative away from her with a shudder and fell to considering her part, walking the boards and taking up this or that position upon them in solitary rehearsal.

The curtain was up and the enormous cavern of the auditorium in gloom, save only where a single pale shaft of sunlight filtered through a circular window in the roof. The brown holland which covered all the seats and gilding seemed like some ghostly audience. To Mary's right, on the prompt side of the proscenium, a man stood upon a little railed-in platform some eight feet above the stage-floor level. He was an electrician, and was busy with the frame of black vulcanite, full four feet square and covered with taps and switches of brass. From here the operator would control all the lights of the stage as the play went on. A click, and the moon would rise over the garden and flood it with soft, silver light; a handle turned this way or that, and the lights of the mimic scene would rise or die and flood the stage with colour—colour fitted to the emotion of the moment, as the music of the orchestra would be fitted to it also—science invoked once more to aid the great illusion.

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Mary looked up at the man and the thought came to her swiftly. Yes, it was illusion, a strange and dream-like phantasma of the truth! She herself was a shadow in a dream, moving through unrealities, animated by art, so that the dream should take shape and colour, and the others—the real people—on the other side of the footlights should learn their lesson and take a forceful

memory home. It was a strange and confusing thought, remote from actuality, as her mood was at that moment. She looked upwards into a haze of light, far away among the network of beams and ropes and hanging scenery of the "grid."

A narrow-railed bridge crossed the open space nearly forty feet above her. Two men in their shirt-sleeves were standing there talking, small and far away. They seemed like sailors on the yard of a ship, seen from the deck below.

The girl had seen it all a thousand times before, under every aspect of shifting light and colour, but to-day it had a certain unfamiliarity and strangeness. She realised that she was not quite herself, her usual self, this morning, though for what reason she could not divine. Perhaps the strain of hard work, of opening her mind to new impressions and ideals, was beginning to tell a little upon her. Life had changed too suddenly for her, perhaps, and, above all, there was the abiding sense of waiting and expectation. Her triumph or her failure were imminent. One thing or the other would assuredly happen. But, meanwhile, the waiting was trying, and she longed for the moment of fruition—this way or that. [Pg 245]

Her reverie was broken in upon. With quick footsteps, quick footsteps which echoed on the empty stage, Aubrey Flood came up to her. He was wearing a heavy fur coat, the collar and cuffs of Persian lamb. His hat was of grey felt—a hard hat—for he had a little farm down at Pinner, where he went for week-ends, and affected something of the country gentleman in his dress.

Mary was glad to see him at last, not only because she had been waiting for him to discuss business matters, but because a friendly face at this moment cut into her rather weary and dreamy mood, and brought her back to the life of the moment and the movement of the day.

"Oh, here you are!" she said gladly. "I've been waiting quite a long time, and I've been in the blues, rather. The empty theatre, when one is the only person in it, suggests horrible possibilities for the future, don't you think?"

He answered her quickly. "No, I don't think anything of the sort. Mary, you are getting into that silly nervous state which comes to so many girls before the first night, the first important night, I mean. You must not do it, I won't allow it, I won't let you. You're overstrained, of course. We're all very much over-strained. So much depends upon the play. But, all the same, we all know that everything is sure and certain. So cheer up, Mary." [Pg 246]

Flood had called her by her Christian name for two weeks now. The two had become friends. The celebrated young actor-manager and the unknown provincial actress had realised each other in the kindest fashion. The girl had never met a cleverer, more artistic, nor more chivalrous man in the ranks of her profession, and Flood himself, a decent, clean-living citizen of London, had not grasped hands with a girl like Mary for many months.

Mary Marriott sighed. "Oh," she said, "it's all very well for you to talk in that way. But you know, Mr. Flood, how all of you have poured the whole thing on to me, as it were. You have insisted that I am the pivot of it all, and there are moments when it is too overwhelming and one gets tired and dispirited."

"Don't talk nonsense," he answered quickly.

"All right, then, I won't," she replied. "Now let's go into the question of that business in the second act. My idea is, that Lord Winchester should——"

He cut her short with a single exclamation. "That's a thing we can talk over later," he said. "At the moment I have something more important to say."

Mary stopped. Flood's voice was very earnest and urgent. She felt that he had discovered some flaw in the conduct of the rehearsals, that some very serious hitch had occurred. [Pg 247]

Her voice was anxious as she said that they had better discuss the thing immediately. "I hope that it's nothing very serious," she said, alarmed by the disturbance in his voice. "I am going to lunch with the Roses, and as you're late I ought to be off in a few minutes. But what's gone wrong?"

"As yet," he replied, "nothing has gone wrong at all."

"I hope nothing will," she said, by now quite alarmed by his tone. "Please tell me at once."

"I can't tell you here," he replied. "Would you mind coming into my room?"

She followed him, wondering.

They went into Flood's private room. It faced west, and the winter sun being now high in the heavens did not penetrate there at this hour. The fire was nearly out, only a few cinders glowed with their dull black and crimson on the hearth.

"How cheerless!" Mary said as she came into the room.

With a quick movement Aubrey Flood turned to the wall. There was a succession of little clicking noises, and then the electric light leaped up and the place was full of a dusky yellow radiance.

"That's better," he said in a curiously muffled voice, "though it's not right. Somehow I know it's not right. No, I am sure that it's not right!" [Pg 248]

His voice rang with pain. His voice was full of melancholy and pain as he looked at her. Never, in all his stage triumphs in the mimic life he could portray so skilfully and well, had his mobile, sensitive voice achieved such a note of pain as now.

Suddenly Mary knew.

"What do you mean, Mr. Flood?" she said faintly.

He turned swiftly to her, his voice had a note of passion also now. His eyes shone, his mobile lips trembled a little—they seemed parched and dry.

"Mary," he said, "I love you as I have never loved any one in the world before, and I am frightened because I see no answering light in your eyes, they do not change when you see me."

He paused for a moment, and then with a swift movement he caught her by the hands, drew her a little closer to him, and gazed steadily into her face. His own was quite changed. She had never seen him like this before. It was as if for the first time a mask had been suddenly peeled away and the real man beneath revealed. He had made love to Mary during rehearsals, he was her lover in the play of James Fabian Rose—but this was quite different.

He spoke simply without rhetoric or bombast. He was a man now, no longer an actor.

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"Oh, my dear!" he said, "I have no words to tell you how I love and reverence you. I am not playing a part now, I'm not a puppet mouthing the words of another man any longer, and I can't find expression. I can only say that my whole heart and soul are consumed by one wish, one hope. It is you! Ever since I first met you at Rose's house I have watched you with growing wonder and growing love. Now I can keep silence no longer. Dear, do you care for me a little? Can you ever care for me? I am not worthy of one kind look from your beautiful eyes, I know that well. But I am telling you the truth when I say that I have not been a beast as so many men in the profession are. You know how things sometimes are with actors, every one knows. Well, I've not been like that, Mary; I've kept straight, I can offer you a clean and honest love, and though such things would never weigh with you, I am well-to-do. My position on the stage, you know. I am justified in calling it a fairly leading one, am I not? We should have all the community of tastes and interests that two people could possibly have. We love the same art. My dear, dear girl, my beautiful and radiant lady, will you marry me? Will you make me happiest of living men?"

His urgent, pleading voice dropped and died away. He held her hands still. His face shone with an earnestness and anxiety that were almost tragic.

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Mary was deeply moved and stirred. No man had ever spoken to her like this before. Her life had been apart from anything of the kind. All her adult years had been spent upon the stage and touring about from one place to another in the provinces. She had always lived with another girl in the company, and had always enjoyed the pleasant, easy bohemian *camaraderie* with men that the touring life engenders. Men had flirted with her, of course. There had been sighs and longings, equally, of course, and now and then, though rarely, she had endured the vile persecution of some human beast in authority, a manager, or what not. But never had she heard words like these before, had seen an honourable and distinguished gentleman consumed with love of her and offering her himself and all he had, asking her to be his wife. He was saying it once more: "Mary, will you be my wife?"

She trembled as she heard the words, trembled all over as a leaf in the wind. It was as though she had never heard it before, it came like a chord of sweet music.

In that moment dormant forces within her awoke, things long hidden from herself began to move and stir in her heart. A curtain seemed to roll up within her consciousness, and she knew the truth. She knew that it was for this that she had come into the world, that the holy sacrament of marriage was her destined lot.

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Yet, though it was the passionate pleading of the man before her which had worked this change and revealed things long hidden, it was not to him that her heart went out. She thought of no one, no vision rose in her mind. She only knew that this was not the man who should strike upon the deep chords of her being and wake from them the supreme harmonies of love.

She was immensely touched, immensely flattered, full of a sisterly tenderness towards him. Affection welled up in her. She wanted to kiss him, to stroke his hair, to say how sorry she was for him. She had never had a brother, she would like a brother just like this. He was simple and good, true, and in touch with the verities of life—down under the veneer imposed upon him by his vocation and position upon the stage.

She answered him as frankly and simply as he had spoken to her; she was voicing her thoughts, no more, no less. Almost instinctively she called him by his Christian name. She hardly knew that she did it. He had bared his soul to her and she felt that she had known him for years and had always known him.

"It's not possible in that way, Aubrey," she said. "I know it isn't, I can't give you any explanation. There is no one else, but, somehow, I know it within me. But, believe me, I do care for you, I honour and respect you. I like you more than almost any one I have ever met. I will be your friend for ever and ever. But what you ask is not mine to give. I can only say that." The pain on his face deepened. "I knew," he answered sadly, "I knew that is what you would say, and, indeed, who am I that you should love me? But you said"—he hesitated—"you said that there was no one else."

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She nodded, hardly trusting herself to speak, for his face was a wedge of sheer despair. "Then," he said suddenly, more to himself than to her, "then perhaps some day I may have another chance." He dropped her hands and half turned from her. "God bless you, dear," he said simply, "and now let us forget what has passed for the present and resume ordinary relations again. Remember that both for the sake of our art, our own reputations, and the cause we believe in, *The Socialist* has got to be a success."

In a minute more they were both eagerly discussing the technical theatre business which was the occasion of their meeting. Both found it a great relief.

Almost before they had concluded Flood was called away, and Mary, looking at her watch, found that she might as well go down to Westminster at once, for though the Roses did not lunch until a quarter before two there was no object in going back to her flat. She went out into the surging roar of Oxford Street at high noon, momentarily confusing and bewildering after the gloom and semi-silence of the empty theatre. Her idea had been to walk through the park, but when she began she found that the scene through which she had passed had left her somewhat shaken. She trembled a little, her limbs were heavy, she could not walk.

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She got into a hansom and was driving down Park Lane, thinking deeply as she rolled easily along that avenue of palaces. She knew well enough that in a sense a great honour had been done her. There was no one on the stage with a better reputation than Aubrey Flood. He was a leading actor; he was a gentleman against whom nothing was said; he was rich, influential, and charming. Sincerity was the keynote of his life. Hundreds of girls, as beautiful and cleverer than she was—so she thought to herself—would have gladly accepted all he had to offer. She was a humble-minded girl, entirely bereft of egotism or conceit, and she felt certain that Aubrey Flood might marry almost any one for choice.

She had always liked him, now she did far more than that. A real affection for him had blossomed in her heart, and yet it was no more than that. Why had she not accepted him? She put the answer away from her mind; she would not, dare not, face it.

There are few people with sensitive minds who take life seriously, who value their own inward and spiritual balance, that have not experienced—at some time or another—this most serious of all sensations recurring within the hidden citadel of the soul.

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A thought is born, a thought we are afraid of. It rises in the subconscious brain, and our active and conscious intelligence tells us that one thing is there. We are aware of its presence, but we shun it, push it away, try to forget it. We exercise our will and refuse to allow it to become real to us. It was thus with Mary now.

Mrs. Rose met her in the hall of the beautiful and artistic little house in Westminster. She kissed the girl affectionately.

"I shall be busy for half an hour, dear," she said; "household affairs, you know. Fabian is out; he went to breakfast with Mr. Goodrick this morning to discuss the Press campaign in connection with the play. But he'll be back to lunch, and he'll go with you to the rehearsal this afternoon. Take your things off in my room and go into the drawing-room. The weekly papers have just come, and there are all these. I will send the morning papers up, too."

Mary did as she was bid. The beautiful drawing-room was bright and cheery, as the sunlight poured into it and a wood fire crackled merrily upon the hearth.

She sat down with a sigh of relief. Unwilling to think, yet afraid of the restful silence which was so conducive to thought, she took up one of the morning papers and opened it. Her eyes fell idly upon the news column for a moment, and then she grew very pale while the crisp sheet rustled in her hands.

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She saw two oval portraits. One was of the Duke of Paddington, an excellent likeness of the young man as she knew him and had seen him look a thousand times.

The second portrait, which was joined and looped to the first by a decoration of true lover's knots, was that of a girl of extraordinary and patrician beauty. Underneath this was the name, "The Lady Constance Camborne."

She read: "We are able to announce the happy intelligence that a marriage has been arranged ——" when the paper fell from her fingers upon the carpet.

Mary knew now. The hidden thought had awakened into full and furious life. Her pale face suddenly grew hot with shame and she covered it with her hands. When she eventually picked up the paper and finished the paragraph she found that the duke's engagement had been a fact for a month past, but was only now formally announced.

CHAPTER XIX TROUBLED WATERS

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The Duke of Paddington was walking up the broad avenue of St. Giles's at Oxford, going towards

"The Corn." The trees of the historic street were all bare and leafless in the late winter sun.

To his right was the Pusey House, headquarters of the High Church Party in the Church of England.

To his left was the façade of St. John's College, while beyond it was the side of Balliol and the slender spire of the Martyrs' Memorial. Farther still, as a background and completion of the view, was the square Saxon tower of St. Michael's. It was a grey and sober loveliness that met his eye, a vista of the ancient university which came sharply and vividly to the senses in all the appeal of its gracious antiquity, unmingled with those sensuous impressions that obtain when all the trees are in leaf and the hot sun of summer bathes everything in a golden haze.

The Duke had been to see Lord Hayle, who was lying in the Acland Home with a broken leg. Lord Camborne's son had been thrown from his horse on Magdalen Bridge—a restive young cob which had been sent up from the episcopal stables at Carlton, and been startled by the noisy passage of an automobile.

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Term was in full swing again, and the viscount lay in the private hospital, unable to take any part in it, while the visits of the duke and others of his friends were his only relaxation.

The duke was dressed in the ordinary Norfolk jacket and tweed cap affected by the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge. He was smoking a cigarette and walking at a good pace. Once or twice a man he knew passed and nodded to him, but he hardly noticed them. His forehead was wrinkled in thought and his upper lip drawn in, giving the whole face an aspect of perplexity and worry.

Probably in the whole university there was not, at that moment, a young man more thoroughly out of tune with life and with himself than he was. He was probably the most envied of all the undergraduates resident in Oxford. He was certainly placed more highly than any other young man, either in Oxford, or, indeed, in England. Save only members of the Blood Royal, no one was above him. He was, to use a hackneyed phrase, rich beyond the dreams of avarice. His health was perfect, and he was engaged to the most beautiful girl in the United Kingdom.

He presented to his friends and to the world at large the picture of a youth to whom the gods had given everything within their power, given with a lavish hand, full measure, pressed down and running over.

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And he was thoroughly unhappy and disturbed.

His friends, the young aristocrats of Paul's, had long noticed the change in him. It had become an occasion of common talk among them, and no one was able to explain it. The general theory—believed by some and scouted by others—was that the duke was still suffering from the shocks of the terrible railway accident outside Paddington Station and his torture and imprisonment at the hands of the vile gang in the West End slum.

It was thought that his mind had not recovered tone, that his hours of melancholy and brooding were the result of that. Men tried to cheer him up, to take him out of himself, but with poor success. His manner and his habits seemed utterly changed. The members of the gang who had kidnapped and imprisoned the duke had been tried at the sessions of the Central Criminal Court and were sentenced to various lengthy terms of imprisonment. The duke had gone up from Oxford to be present at the trial. When he returned he refused to speak of it, but his friends learnt from the daily papers that the ringleader of the criminals had been sent into penal servitude for no less than twenty years, and that, by special permission of the judge, the duke had spent several hours with the prisoner directly sentence had been pronounced.

Such a proceeding was so utterly unlike the duke, and his reticence about it was so complete, that every one was lost in wonder and conjecture.

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And there was more than this: during term the duke hardly entertained at all. His horses were exercised by grooms, and he took no part in social life. And worse than all, from the point of view of his Oxford friends, he began to frequent sets of whose existence he had hardly been aware before. This shocked the "bloods" of the 'Varsity more than anything else. It was incredible and alarming. Had the duke been a lesser man he himself would have been dropped. Few outsiders are aware of, or can possibly realise, the extent to which exclusiveness and a sort of glorified snobbery prevails in certain circles at Oxford. Social dimensions are marked with a rigidity utterly unknown elsewhere. Even the greater Society of the outside world is not so exclusive.

It was known that the duke was in the habit of taking long walks alone with a poor scholar of his own college. The man was of no birth at all, a "rank outsider," called Burnside. The duke was constantly being seen with this man and with others of his friends—fellows who wore black clothes and thick boots and never played any games. It was nothing less than a scandal!

Now and then men who went to the duke's rooms would find strange visitors from London there, people who might have come from another world, so remote were they in appearance, speech, and mode of thought. And the worst of it all was that the duke kept his own counsel, and nobody dared to comment upon the change in his hearing. There was a reserve and dignity about him, a sense of power and restrained force which chilled the curiosity of even intimate friends. They all felt that something ought to be done; nobody knew how to set about it. Then, unexpectedly, an opportunity presented itself. Lord Hayle was thrown from his horse and was taken to the private hospital with a broken leg. As soon as it was allowed all the men of his set—the exclusive set to

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which he and the duke belonged—paid him frequent visits. Lord Hayle himself had noted with growing dissatisfaction and perplexity the marked change in his future brother-in-law. He saw that John was moody and preoccupied, seemed to have some secret trouble, and was changing all his habits. This distressed and grieved him, but he had said nothing of it to his sister or any one else, hoping that it was but a passing phase. Moreover, he had only seen the commencement of the change. Away from everything in the hospital he had not been able to witness the full development.

His friends enlightened him; they told him everything in detail, and urged him to remonstrate.

"It will come better from you than from any one else, Hayle," they said. "You are Paddington's closest friend, and he's going to marry your sister. It really is your duty to try and bring him back to his old self and to find out what really is the matter with him."

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Lord Hayle had taken this advice to heart, and on this very afternoon he had opened the whole question.

His remarks had been received quietly enough—the two men were friends who could not easily become estranged—but the interview had been by no means a satisfactory one. "It's perfectly true, Gerald," the duke had said. "I am going through a period of great mental strain and disturbance. But I can't tell you anything about it. It is a mental battle which I must fight out for myself. No one can possibly help me, not even you or Constance. All I can tell you is that there is absolutely nothing in it that is in any way wrong. I am in no material trouble at all. Let me go my own way. Some day you shall know what there is to know, but not yet."

The duke walked down the busy "Corn" towards Carfax and the entrance to the "High"—the most beautiful street in Europe. He was on his way to his rooms in Paul's. The interview with Lord Hayle had disturbed him. It had brought him face to face with hard fact, insistent, recurring fact, which was always present and would not be denied.

His mind was busy as a mill. The thoughts churned and tossed there like running water under the fans of a wheel. There was no peace anywhere, that was the worst of all.

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And to-day, of all days, was important. It was the early afternoon of the evening on which the play called *The Socialist* was to be presented at the Park Lane Theatre. He had obtained special permission to go to town by the evening train—there would be no accident this time—and he knew that to-morrow, whether the play was a success or a failure, his name would be in every one's mouth.

All Oxford, all London, all Society was talking about the play that would see light in a few hours. The public interest in it was extraordinary; his own interest in it was keen and fierce, with a fierceness and keenness a thousand times more strenuous than any one knew. He did not fear that he, as a typical representative of his class and order, would be caricatured or held up to economic execration. Even if it were so—and he was aware of Rose's intention—he did not care twopence. He feared nothing of that sort. He feared that he might become convinced.

For it had come to that.

A complete change and *bouleversement* of opinion and outlook is not nearly so long a process as many people are apt to suppose. To some natures it is true that conviction, or change of conviction, comes slowly. In the case of the majority this is not so. With many people a settled order of mind, a definite attitude towards life, a fixed set of principles, are the results of heredity or environment. A man thinks in such-and-such a way, and is content with thinking in such-and-such a way simply because the other side of the question has not been presented to him with sufficient force. A Conservative, for example, hears Radical arguments, as a rule, through the medium of a Conservative paper, with all the answers and regulations in the next column.

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It had been thus with the Duke of Paddington. He had lived a life absolutely walled-in from outside influences, Eton and Oxford, an intensely exclusive circle of that society which surrounds the Court. He had been shut away from everything which might have turned his thoughts to the larger issues of life.

Enlightenment, knowledge, had come suddenly and had come with irresistible force. Reviewing the past weeks, as the duke sometimes did with a sort of bitter wonder, he dated the change in his life from the actual moment when he was crushed down into the swift unconsciousness when the railway accident occurred outside Paddington Station. Since then his mental progress had been steady and relentless. James Fabian Rose, Mr. Goodrick, Peter Conrad, the parson, were all men of extreme intellectual power. Arthur Burnside also was unique in his force and grip, his vast and ever-increasing knowledge. And Mary Marriott—Mary, the actress!—the duke thought as little of Mary Marriott as he possibly could—she came into his thoughts too often for the peace of a loyal gentleman pledged irrevocably to another girl.

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All these forces, the cumulative effect of them, had been at work. The duke found himself at the parting of the ways. Day by day he deserted all the friends of his own station and all the amusements and pleasures which had always employed his time before. For these he substituted the society of Burnside. He went for long walks with the scholar. He drove him out in his great Mercedes automobile; they talked over coffee during late midnights.

An extraordinary attachment had sprung up between the two young men. They were utterly different. One was plebeian and absolutely poor, the other was a hereditary peer of England and

wealthier than many a monarch. Yet they were fast friends, nevertheless. Nothing showed more completely the entire change of the duke's attitude than this simple fact. All his prejudices had disappeared and were overcome. Regardless of the opinions of his friends, forgetful of his rank and state, he was a close friend of Burnside.

Their relations were peculiar. The duke had offered his companion anything and everything. He proposed to make the scholar independent of struggle for the rest of his life. He pressed him to accept a sum of money which would for ever free him from sordid cares and enable his genius to have full play.

Burnside had absolutely refused anything of the sort. He was delighted to accept the sum which the duke was paying him for his work as librarian of Paddington House. It meant everything to him. But he worked for it; he knew that his work was valuable, and he accepted its due wages. [Pg 265]

Apart from that, apart from a mutual attraction and liking which was astonishing enough to both of them, and which was, nevertheless, very real and deep, the relations of the two were simply this: the poor young man of the middle classes, the man of brilliant intellect, was the tutor.

The duke was a simple pupil, and day by day he was learning a lesson which would not be denied.

The duke arrived at St. Paul's College and crossed the quadrangle into the second quad., where the "new buildings" were. He went up the oak stairs to his rooms.

His scout, Gardener—the discreet and faithful Gardener!—was making up the fire in the larger of the two sitting-rooms as the duke came in.

"The kit-bag and the suit cases are already packed, sir," he said. "The valet asked me to say so. You will remember that you have given him the afternoon off. Wilkins will be at the station ten minutes before the train starts. Will you kindly tell me where you will be staying, sir, so that the porter can send the late post letters up to reach you at breakfast?"

"Oh, I shall be at the *Ritz*," the duke answered, "but you'd better send the letters on to me yourself, Gardener." [Pg 266]

"At the *Ritz*? Very good, your Grace," the privileged old servant replied. "I saw in the *Telegraph* that Lord Camborne and her ladyship were down at Carlton, so I thought as you'd be staying at a hotel, sir. But I'm sorry to say that I must leave the matter of the letters to the porter, because, your Grace, I have leave of absence from the bursar to-night, and I am going to London myself."

"Oh, well, I hope you'll enjoy yourself, Gardener," the duke answered. "If you go to the writing-table you will find a pocket-book with five five-pound notes in it. You can take one, and it will pay your expenses. You're going on pleasure, I suppose?"

Gardener went to the writing-table, expressing well-bred thanks. "Certainly your Grace is most kind," he said. "I hardly know how to thank you, sir. You've been a very kind master to me ever since you've been up. I don't know if you'd call it pleasure exactly, but I'm going up to London to see this abominable play, begging your pardon. I'm going to do the same as your grace is going to do. I'm going to see this here *Socialist*. In a sense I felt it a kind of duty, sir, to go up and make my bit of a protest—if hissing will do any good—especially so, sir, since all the papers are saying that it's an attack upon your Grace."

The duke was about to reply, somewhat touched and pleased by the old fellow's interest, when Burnside came into the room, walking very quickly and with his face flushed. [Pg 267]

"I beg your pardon," he said, "for bursting in like this, but I think you arranged to walk to Iffley with me, didn't you? and I have some specially extraordinary news to tell you!"

The old scout, who did not in the least approve of poor scholars of Paul's becoming the intimate friends of dukes, withdrew with a somewhat grim smile.

"What is it, Burnside?" the duke said. "You seem excited. Good news, I hope?"

"Tremendously good!" said the young man in the black clothes, his keen, intellectual face lit up like a lamp. "An uncle of mine, who emigrated to Canada many years ago as quite a poor labourer, has died and left a fortune of over three hundred thousand pounds. I never knew him, and so I can't pretend to feel sorry for his death. To cut a long story short, however, I must tell you that I am the only surviving heir, and that I have heard this morning from solicitors in London that all this money is absolutely mine!"

The duke's face became animated, he was tremendously pleased. "I'm so glad," he said. "I can't tell you how glad I am, Burnside. Now you will be quite safe. You will be able to complete your destiny unhampered by squalid worries. And you won't owe your good fortune to any one."

"I'm so glad that you see it in that way," Burnside replied. "Three hundred thousand pounds! Think of it, if money means anything to a man of millions, like you. Why, it will mean everything to the cause of Socialism. Fabian Rose will go mad with excitement when I put the whole lot into his hands to be spent for the cause!" [Pg 268]

CHAPTER XX

THE DUKE KNOWS AT LAST

The duke went to the theatre early.

The play was announced for nine o'clock, but he was in his box, the stage box on a level with the stalls, by half-past eight. A whole carriage had been reserved for him from Oxford to London, and a dinner basket had been put in for him. He wished to be entirely alone, to think, to adjust his ideas at a time of crisis unparalleled in his life before.

A motor-brougham had met him at Paddington and taken him swiftly down to the *Ritz* in Piccadilly. There he had bathed and changed into evening clothes, and now, as the clock was striking eight, he sat down in his box.

The curtains were partially drawn and he could not be seen from the auditorium, though he knew that when the theatre filled all Society would know where he was, even though he was not actually visible.

At present the beautiful little theatre was but half lit. There was no pit, and the vista of red-leather armchairs which made the stalls was almost bare of people. There was a sprinkling of folk in the dress-circle, but the upper circle, which took the place of gallery and stretched up to the roof, was packed with people. It was the only part of the aristocratic Park Lane Theatre that was unreserved.

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The fire-proof curtain was down, hiding the act-drop, the orchestra was a wilderness of empty chairs, and none of the electric footlights were turned on. Now and again some muffled noises came from the stage, where, probably, the carpenters were putting the finishing touches to the first scene, and a continuous hum of talk fell from the upper circle, sounding like bees swarming in a garden to one who sits in his library with an open window upon a summer day.

The duke sat alone. He was in a curious mood. The perplexity and irritation with life and circumstance which had been so poignant during the afternoon at Oxford had quite left him. He was quite placid now. His nerves were stilled, he remained quietly expectant.

Yet he was sad also, and he had many reasons for sadness. The old life was over, the old ideas had gone, the future, which had seemed so irrevocably ordered, so settled and secure for him, was now a mist, an unknown country full of perils and alarms.

The duke was a young man who was always completely honest with himself. As he sat alone in the box waiting for what was to ensue he knew three things. He knew that something of tremendous importance was going to happen to him on that night. He knew that he could no longer regard his enormous wealth and high rank from the individualistic point of view. And he knew that he had made a horrible, ghastly, and irremediable mistake in asking Lady Constance Camborne to be his wife.

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It was the most hideous of all possible mistakes.

It was a mistake for which there was no remedy. Carried away by a sudden gust of passion, he had done what was irrevocable. He had found almost at once that he did not love her, that he had been possessed by the power of her beauty and charm for a moment; but never, under any circumstances could he feel a real and abiding love for her.

A knock came at the door of the box, and a second afterwards James Fabian Rose entered. The gleaming expanse of shirt-front only accentuated the extreme pallor of his face, and beneath the thatch of mustard-coloured hair his eyes shone like lamps.

Rose was nervous and somewhat unlike his usual self. He was always nervous on the first nights of his plays, and lost his cool assurance and readiness of manner. To-night he was particularly so.

"I thought I would just come in and say 'how-do-you-do,'" he said, shaking the duke heartily by the hand. "They told me that you were in the house."

The duke was genuinely glad to see his celebrated friend, and his face reflected the pleasure that he felt. The visit broke in upon sad thoughts and the ever-growing sensation of loneliness. "Oh! do sit down for a minute or two," he said. "It's most kind of you to look me up. I suppose you're frightfully busy, though?"

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"On the contrary," Rose replied, "I have nothing on earth to do. Everything is finished and out of my hands now. If you had said that you supposed I was frightfully nervous, you would have been far more correct."

The duke nodded sympathetically. "I know," he said. "I'm sure it must be awful."

"It is; and, of course, it's worse to-night than ever before. I am flying right in the face of Society and all convention. I'm putting on a play which will rouse the fierce antagonism of all the society people, who will be here in a few minutes. I'm going tooth-and-nail for your order. And, finally, I am introducing an unknown actress to the London stage. It's enough to make any one nervous. I'm trying to preach a sermon and produce a work of art at one and the same moment, and I'm afraid the result will be absolute failure."

The duke, for his part, had never expected anything else but failure for the venture until this very evening. But to-night, for some reason or other, he had a curious certainty that the play, would not fail. It was an intuition without reason, but he would have staked anything upon the event.

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His strange certainty and confidence was in his voice as he answered the Socialist.

"No," he said, "it is going to be a gigantic success. I am quite definitely sure of it. It is going to be the success of your life. And more than that, it is not only going to be an artistic triumph, but it will be the strongest blow you have ever struck for Socialism!"

Rose looked at the young man with keen scrutiny. Then a little colour came into the linen-white cheeks, and he held out his hand with a sudden and impulsive gesture.

"You put new confidence into me," he said, "and the generosity of your words makes me ashamed. Here I am attacking all that you hold dear, attacking you, indeed, in a public way! And you can say that. I know, moreover, from your tone, that it isn't mere Olympian indifference to anything I and my socialistic brethren can do against any one so fortified and entrenched, so highly placed as you are. It is fine of you to say what you have said. It is fine of you to be present here to-night. And it is finer still of you to remain friends with me and to shake me by the hand."

The duke smiled rather sadly and shook his head.

"No," he said; "there is nothing fine in it at all, Rose. You say that I am fortified and entrenched. So I was, fortified with ignorance and indifference, entrenched by selfishness and convention. But the castle has been undermined though it has not fallen yet. Already I can hear the muffled sound of the engineers in the cellars! I am not what I used to be. I do not think as I used to think. You are responsible, in the first instance, for far more than you know or suspect."

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Rose had listened with strange attention. The colour had gone again from his face, his eyes blazed with excitement. The lips beneath the mustard-coloured moustache were slightly parted. When he replied it was in a voice which he vainly tried to steady.

"This is absolutely new to me," he said. "It moves me very deeply. It is startling but it is splendid! What you have said fills me with hope. Do you care to tell me more—not now, because I see the theatre is filling up—but afterwards? We are having a supper on the stage when the show is over—success or not—and we might have a talk later. I didn't like to ask you before."

"I shall be delighted to come," the duke answered. "I have spoken of these things to a few people only. Arthur Burnside has been my chief confidant."

"Splendid fellow, Burnside!" Rose said, with enthusiasm. "A brilliant intellect! He will be a power in England some day."

"He is already," said the duke, with a smile. "He has inherited three hundred thousand pounds from a distant relative, who made a fortune in Canada, and has died intestate. He tells me he is going to devote the whole of it to the socialistic cause."

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Rose gasped. "Three hundred thousand pounds!" he said. "Why it will convert half England! You spring surprise after surprise upon me. My brain is beginning to reel. Upon my word, I do believe that this night will prove to be the crowning night of my career!"

"I'm sure I hope so," the duke answered warmly. "But isn't it fine of Burnside! To give up everything like that."

"It is fine," Rose answered; "but there are many Socialists who would do it—just as there are, of course, plenty of Socialists who would become individualists within five minutes of inheriting a quarter of a million! But Burnside will not give it all up; I shall see to that."

"But I thought——"

"Many people fail to understand that we don't want, at any rate, in the present state of things and probably not for hundreds of years, to abolish private property. We want to regulate it. We want to abolish poverty entirely, but we don't say yet that a man shall not have a fair income, and one in excess of others. I shall advise Burnside, for he will come to me, to retain a sufficient capital to bring him in an income of a thousand pounds a year. If the possession of capital was limited to, say, thirty thousand pounds in each individual case, the economic problem would be solved. But I must go. The world arrives, the individualists and aristocrats muster in force!"

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"What are you going to do? Why not sit here with me?"

Rose smiled. "I never watch one of my plays on the first night," he said. "It would be torture to the nerves. I am going to forget all about the play and go to a concert at the Queen's Hall. I shall come back before the curtain is rung down—in case the audience want to throw things at me! Au revoir, until supper—you've given me a great deal to think about."

With a wave of his hand, Rose hurried away, and the duke was once more alone.

The theatre was filling up rapidly as the duke moved a little to the front of the box and peeped round the curtains.

Party after party of well-dressed people were pouring into the stalls. Diamonds shimmered upon necks and arms which were like columns of ivory, there was a sudden infusion of colour, pinks

and blues, greens and greys, wonderfully accentuated and set off by the sombre black and white of the men's clothes.

A subtle perfume began to fill the air, the blending of many essences ravished from the flowers of the Côte d'Azur. The lights in the roof suddenly jumped up, and the electric candelabra round the circle became brilliant. There was a hum of talk, a cadence of cultured and modulated voices. The whole theatre had become alive, vivid, full of colour and movement.

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And, in some electric fashion, the duke was aware that every one was expecting—even as he was expecting—the coming of great things. There was a subtle sense of stifled excitement—apprehension was it?—that was perfectly patent and real.

Everybody felt that something was going to happen. It was not an ordinary first night. Even the critics, who sat more or less together, were talking eagerly among themselves and had lost their somewhat exaggerated air of nonchalance and boredom.

The duke saw many people that he knew. Every one who was not upon the Riviera was there. Great ladies nodded and whispered, celebrated men whispered and nodded. A curious blend of amusement and anxiety was the keynote of the expression upon many faces.

To-night, indeed, was a night of nights!

The duke had not written to Lady Constance Camborne to say that he was going to be present at the first night of *The Socialist*. She had made some joking reference to the coming production in one of her letters but he had not replied to it. He had kept all his new mental development from her—locked up in his heart. From the very first he had never known real intimacy with her.

As Society took its seats he was certain that every one was talking about him. Sooner or later some one or other would see him, and there would be a sensation. He was sure of it. It would create a sensation.

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For many reasons the duke was glad that neither Lord Hayle, the bishop, nor Constance were in the theatre. Gerald, of course, was in hospital at Oxford, the earl and Constance were down at Carlton.

Even as the thought came to his mind, and he watched the stalls cautiously from the back of the darkened box, he started and became rigid. Something seemed to rattle in his head, there was a sensation as if cold water had been poured down his spine.

The Earl of Camborne and his daughter had entered the opposite box upon the grand circle tier.

The duke shrank back into the box, asking himself with fierce insistence why he felt thus—guilty, found out, ashamed?

At that moment the overture ended and the curtain rose upon the play.

Then the duke knew.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE STAGE BOX AT THE PARK LANE THEATRE

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The curtain rose upon a drawing-room scene, perfectly conceived and carried out, an illusion of solid reality, immense and satisfying to eye and intelligence alike.

Here was a silver table, covered with those charming toys, modern and antique, which fashionable women collect and display.

There was a revolving book-shelf of ebony and lapis lazuli which held—so those members of the audience who were near could see—the actual novels and volumes of *belles lettres* of the moment; the things they had in their own drawing-rooms.

The whole scheme was wonderfully done. It was a room such as Waring and Liberty, assisted by the individual taste of its owner, carry out.

Up to a certain height the walls—and how real and solid they appeared!—were of pale grey, then came a black picture rail, and above it a frieze of deep orange colour. Black, orange, and grey, these were the colour notes of all the scene, and upon the expanses of grey were rows of old Japanese prints, or, rather, the skilful imitation of them, framed in gold.

The carpet was of orange, carrying a serpentine design of dead black, two heavy curtains of black velvet hung on either side of a door leading into a conservatory, softly lit by electric lights concealed amid the massed blossoms, for it was a night scene that opened the play.

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There was a low murmur of applause and pleasure from the crowded theatre, for here was a picture as complete and beautiful as any hardened playgoers had seen for many years. Then the sound died away. The new actress was upon the stage, the unknown Mary Marriott; there was a great hush of curiosity and interest.

As the curtain rose the girl had been sitting upon a Chesterfield sofa of blue linen at the "O. P."

side of the stage. For a moment or two she had remained quite motionless, a part of the picture, and, with a handkerchief held to her face, her shoulders shaking convulsively.

She was dressed in an evening gown of flame-colour and black.

In front of her, and in the centre of the stage, two odd and incongruous figures were standing.

One was a shabby, middle-aged woman, pale, shrinking, and a little furtive among all the splendours in which she found herself. She wore a rusty bonnet and a black cape scantily trimmed with jet.

By the woman's side stood a tall girl in a hat and a cheap, fawn-coloured jacket. The girl held a soiled boa of white imitation fur in one restless hand. She was beautiful, but sullen and hard of face.

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Not a word was spoken.

It might have been a minute and a half before a word was said. The only sound was that of the sobbing from the richly-dressed woman upon the couch and the timid, shuffling feet of the two humble people—mother and daughter evidently—who stood before her.

Yet, curiously enough—and, indeed, it was unprecedented—not a sigh nor sound of impatience escaped the audience. One and all were as still as death. Some extraordinary influence was already flowing over the footlights to capture their imaginations and their nerves.

As yet they hadn't seen the face of the new actress, of whom they had heard so much in general talk and read so much in the newspapers.

A minute and a half had gone by and not a word had been spoken.

They all sat silent and motionless.

Suddenly Mary jumped up from the sofa and threw her handkerchief away.

They saw her for the first time; her marvellous beauty sent a flutter through the boxes and the stalls, her voice struck upon their ears almost like a blow.

Never was a play started thus before. Mary—upon the programme she was Lady Augusta Decies, a young widow—leapt up and faced the two motionless figures before her. Tears were splashing down her cheeks, her lovely mouth quivered with pain, her arms were outstretched, and her perfect hands were spread in sympathy and entreaty.

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"Oh, but it shan't be, Mrs. Dobson! It can't be! I will stop it! I will alter it for you and Helen and all of you!"

These were the first words of the play. They poured out with a music that was terribly compelling.

There was a cry of agony, a hymn of sympathy, and a stern resolve. An audible sigh and shudder went round the theatre as that perfect voice swept round it.

"What was this play to be? Who was this girl? What did it all mean?"

Some such thought was in the mind of every one.

Such a voice had not been heard in a London theatre for long. Sarah Bernhardt had a voice like that, Duse had a voice like that—a voice like liquid silver, a voice like a fairy waterfall falling into a lake of dreamland. Most of the people there had heard the loveliest speaking voices of the modern world. But this was as lovely and compelling as any of them, and yet it had something more. It had one supreme quality—the quality of absolute conviction.

The new player—this unknown Mary Marriott—was hardly acting. It was a real cry of anguish straight from the heart itself.

Every one there felt it, though in different ways and according to the measure of their understanding.

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To one man it came as a double revelation; it came with the force and power of a mighty avalanche that rushes down the sides of a high Alp, sweeping forests and villages away in its tremendous course.

The duke knew that here was one of the very greatest artists who had ever come upon the boards, and he knew also—oh, sweet misery and sudden shame!—that this was the woman he had loved from their first meeting—had loved, loved now, hopelessly, for ever and a day!

In that moment he lowered his head and prayed.

He sent up an inarticulate prayer to God, a wild, despairing ejaculation, that he might be given power to bear the burden, that he might be a man, a gentleman, and keep these things hid.

From where he sat in the shadow of the box he could see Lady Constance Camborne opposite. Both she and the bishop were leaning forward with polite attention stamped upon their faces. There was the girl who was to be his wife. He was bound to her for always, but she didn't know—she never should know! Above all, he must be a gentleman!

Never did play have such an extraordinary beginning, one only possible to an artist of consummate ability and knowledge, to a playwright of absolute unconventionality and daring in art.

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In ten minutes the whole attention of the house was engrossed, after the first quarter of an hour the audience was perfectly still.

But this was curious. Throughout the whole of the first act there was hardly any applause—until the fall of the curtain. What little clapping of hands there was came from the huge upper circle, which combined in itself the functions of pit, upper circle, and gallery in the Park Lane Theatre.

But it was not a chilling silence; it was by no means the silence of indifference, of boredom. It was a silence of astonishment at the daring of the play. It was also a silence of wonder at, and appreciation of, the supreme talent of the writer, and the players who interpreted him.

There were many Socialists in the house, more especially in the upper tiers, but these were in a large minority.

Rose and Flood had allowed but few tickets to be sold to the libraries and theatre agents for the first three nights.

They had laid their plans well; they wanted Society to see the play before other classes of the community did so.

The "boom" which had been worked up in the general Press of London, more especially owing to the skilful direction of it by that astute editor, Mr. Goodrick, of the *Daily Wire*, had been quite sufficient to ensure an enormous demand for seats.

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The manager of the box office had his instructions, and as a result the theatre was crammed with people to whom socialistic doctrines were anathema, and who sat angry at the doctrine which was being pumped into their brains from the other side of the footlights, but spellbound by the genius that was doing it.

Yet the plot of the play was quite simple. It seemed fresh and new because of the subtlety of its treatment, yet, nevertheless, it was but a peg on which to hang an object lesson.

Mary, the heroine, represented a woman of the wealthy class which controls the "high finance." Her late husband had left her millions. As a girl she was brought up in the usual life of her class, shielded from all true knowledge of human want, the younger daughter of an earl, married at twenty to a gentlemanly high priest of the god Mammon, who had died five years after the marriage, leaving her with one child, a boy, and mistress of his vast fortune. At the period when the play opened she was engaged to the young Marquis of Wigan, a peer, also immensely wealthy. She was deeply in love with him—real love had come to her for the first time in her life—and he adored her. They were soon to be married. They lived in a rosy dream. They knew nothing of the outside world.

It was at her first real contact with the outside world, at terrible, stinging, and bitter truths, which were told her by an ex-kitchenmaid whom she had employed in the past but never seen, which struck the keynote of the play.

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It was a play of black and white, of yellow and violet—of incredible contrasts.

No such brutal and poignant thing had been seen upon the stage of a West End theatre before. In all its shifting scenes and changes there was a hideous alternation.

The perfection of cultured luxury, of environment and thought, was shown with the most lavish detail and fidelity. No scenes in the lives of wealthy and celebrated people had ever been presented with such entire disregard of cost before.

The pictures were perfect. They were recognized by every one there—they lived in just such a way themselves.

But the other scenes?—the hideously sombre pictures—these struck into the heart with chilling horror and dismay.

Every one knew in a vague sort of way that such things went on. They had always known it, but they had put the facts away from themselves and refused to recognize them.

They were trapped now.

They had to sit and watch a supremely skilful imitation of real life in the malign slums of London. They had to sit and listen to dialogue which burnt and blistered, which seared even the most callous heart, truths from the hell of London forced into their ears, phrases which lashed their soft complacency like burning whips.

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The act-drop came down in absolute silence after the last scene of the first act, a scene in an East-End sweater's den, so cruel and relentless in its realism that dainty women held handkerchiefs of filmy lace to their nostrils as if the very foul odour and miasma of the place might reach them.

There was a long sigh of relief as the horror was shut out. The dead, funereal silence was continued for a moment, and then everybody suddenly realized something.

The whole audience realized that they had been witnessing an artistic triumph that would always be historic in the annals of the stage.

Mary Marriott had done this thing. The fire of her incarnate pity and sorrow had played upon their heart-strings till all of them—wishful, greedy, worldly, sensual—were caught up into an extraordinary emotion of gratitude and sympathy.

A burst of cheering, a thunder of applause absolutely without precedent, rang and echoed in the theatre. The evening pedestrians upon the pavements of Oxford Street heard it and halted in wonder before the façade of the theatre.

High up in the "grid" the distant stage carpenters heard it and looked at each other in amazement. Up stone flights of stairs in far-away dressing-rooms members of the company heard it and gasped.

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Mary Marriott and Aubrey Flood came before the curtain and bowed.

The full-handed thunder rose to a terrifying volume of sound, and the Duke of Paddington, forgetful of all else, leaned forward in his box and shouted with the rest.

The tears were falling down his cheeks, his voice was choked and hoarse. As she retired Mary Marriott looked at him and smiled a welcome!

* * * * *

There were only three acts.

In the course of the plot, simply but ingeniously construed, the Marquis of Wigan and Lady Augusta Decies were taken into the most awful and hopeless places of London. There was a third principal character, a cynical cicerone with a ruthless and bitter tongue, who explained everything to them and was the chorus of their progression.

In Doctor Davidson, a prominent socialistic leader, every one recognized a caricature of James Fabian Rose by himself, put before them to ram the message home!

The struggle in the woman's mind and heart was manifested with supreme art. Piece by piece the audience saw the old barriers of caste and prejudice crumbling away, until the culminating moment arrived when the young marquis must choose between the loss of her and the abandonment of all his life theories and the prejudices of race.

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The end came swiftly and inevitably.

There was a great culminating scene, in which the girl appealed to her lover to give up almost everything—as she herself was about to do—for the cause of the people, for the cause of brotherhood and humanity. He hesitates and wavers. He is kindly and good-hearted, he wants her more than anything else, but in him caste and long training triumphs.

There is a final moment in which he confesses that he cannot do this thing.

With pain and anguish he renounces his love for her in favour of his order, the order to which she also belongs.

Even for her he cannot do it. He must remain as he has always been; he must say good-bye.

The last scene is the same as the first—it is Lady Augusta's drawing-room. Everything is over; they say farewell at the parting of the ways.

But she holds the little son by her first husband up to him.

"Good-bye, dear Charles!" she says. "You and I go different ways for ever and a day. God bless you! But this little fellow, with the blood of our own class in his veins, shall do what you cannot do. Good-bye!"

As the last curtain fell a tall and portly figure came into the Duke of Paddington's box.

"John," said the Earl of Camborne and Bishop of Carlton, "I have known that you were here for the last hour. Constance has gone back to Grosvenor Street, but I want to speak to you very seriously indeed."

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The duke looked up quickly, his voice was decisive.

"I didn't know that either you or Connie were in London," he said. "I understood from Gerald that you were both down at the palace. I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid we shall have to postpone our talk until to-morrow morning. I'll turn up at Grosvenor Street at whatever time you wish. To-night, however, now, as a matter of fact, I am very particularly engaged indeed."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SUPPER ON THE STAGE

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The success of the play was beyond all question. It was stupendous, overwhelming and complete.

For ten minutes the house shouted itself hoarse and Mary Marriott was recalled over and over again. Great baskets of flowers had made their appearance as she stood bowing for the tenth time, and were handed up to her till she stood surrounded by a mass of blossom.

Hundreds of opera glasses were levelled at her, eager, critical and admiring faces watched this lovely and graceful girl who stood before them, quietly and modestly, and with a great joy shining in her eyes.

For she had stirred them, stirred them by the depths of her art and the passion of her playing. They knew that in one night a great artist had suddenly appeared. However much they might disagree and dislike the doctrines preached in *The Socialist* they knew that the play was a work of genius, and had been interpreted with supreme talent. Aubrey Flood they were fond of. He was a popular favourite, he had acquitted himself well upon this eventful night. He had received his meed of praise.

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But for Mary Marriott there was a reception so whole-hearted and magnificent that the tears might well come into the young girl's eyes and the slim, flower-laden hands tremble with emotion as she bowed her gratitude.

James Fabian Rose had to make a little speech.

He did it with extraordinary assurance and aplomb, and he was received with shouts of applause and good-natured laughter. He had amused and pleased society, and that was enough. The few mocking and brilliant epigrams he flung at them were taken in good part. The deep undercurrent of seriousness seemed but to harmonise with the electric, emotional influences of the moment.

For a minute or two—until they should be seated at supper in the smart restaurants, clubs, and houses—they were all Socialists!

And the fact that their convictions of the truth would vanish with the first plover's egg and glass at Pol Roger, by no means affected their butterfly enthusiasm as the famous author talked to and at them.

The Duke of Paddington watched it all with a strange sense of exhilaration and joy. Lord Camborne had given him an appointment in Grosvenor Street for the morrow, and had hurried away in the most marked perplexity and annoyance.

Lord Hayle had been writing to his father, the duke saw that at once, but he was not perturbed. He had made his resolve. He was master of his own fate, captain of his own soul—what did anything else matter? What was to be done was to be done, come what might. One must be true to oneself!

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As the weary, excited audience began at last to press out of the stalls and boxes, there was a tap upon the door of the duke's, and Mr. Goodrick, the editor of the *Daily Wire*, entered. The little man's face was flushed with excitement, and he was smiling with pleasure.

Yet even under these conditions of animation he still seemed a quiet, insignificant little person, and did not in any way suggest the keen, sword-like intellect, the controller of a vast mass of public opinion that he was.

"Rose has sent me to say that supper will be ready in ten minutes," he began, "and Mary Marriott especially charged me to tell you how grateful she is that you have come here to-night. What a success! There has never been anything like it! All London will go mad about the thing to-morrow! I had three members of the staff here to-night—Masterman, who does the dramatic criticism, purely from the standpoint of dramatic art, don't you know; William Conrad, the parson's younger brother, who is one of our political people; and old Miss Saurin, who does the society and dress. They're all three gone down to the office in cabs in a state of lambent enthusiasm and excitement. We shall have a fine paper to-morrow morning!"

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"I'm sure you will, Mr. Goodrick," the duke answered. "Perhaps finer than you know."

The little man laughed as he lit a cigarette and offered the case to his companion. "Yes," he said, "but this time it won't be a 'scoop' as it was when I first had the pleasure of meeting you. Good heavens! what a boom that was for the *Wire*. I shall never forget it as long as I live! We were absolutely the only paper in the kingdom to publish the full details of your disappearance and recovery. You don't know how much we owe you, your Grace, from the journalistic point of view. Such things don't come twice, more's the pity!"

"I'm not so sure of that, Mr. Goodrick," the duke replied slowly. "Perhaps to-night, within an hour or so, I am going to provide you with a 'scoop' as you call it, to which the first was a mere nothing!"

The editor stiffened as a setter stiffens in the stubble when the birds are near. "Your voice has no joking in it," he said. "There is meaning in your Grace's words—what is it?"

As he spoke a waiter came into the box. "Supper is prepared upon the stage, your Grace," he said. "Miss Marriott, Mr. Rose, and Mr. Aubrey Flood request the honour of your Grace's presence."

"Come along, Mr. Goodrick," the duke said, laughing a little. "You see you will have to wait an event like any one else in this world! But I promise you the 'scoop' all the same!"

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They went out of the box, the waiter leading the way to the sliding iron "pass door," which led directly on to the stage. For the first few steps they were in semi-darkness, for a boxed-in screen had been hurriedly set by the carpenters to make a supper-room. Then, pushing open a canvas door, they came out into the improvised supper-room.

Some forty people were standing upon the stage in groups, talking animatedly to each other. In the background were flower-covered tables gleaming with glass and silver and covered with flowers, among which many tiny electric lights were hidden.

Mary Marriott stood in the centre of a laughing happy group of men and women. She wore a long tea-gown of dark red, made of some Indian fabric, and edged with a narrow band of green embroidery upon a biscuit-coloured ground. She wore dark-red roses in the coiled masses of her marvellous black hair, the paint of the theatre had been washed from her face, and her eyes were brighter, her cheeks more lovely, than any art could make them. She was a queen come into her own on that night! An empress of her art, throned, acknowledged, and wonderful.

To her came the duke.

It was a strange and almost symbolic meeting to some of the quick-wits and artists' brains there. Here was a real prince of this world, a prince who had suffered the hours of a keen and bitter attack with fine dignity and chivalry—James Fabian Rose had not spared words—and there was a princess of art, who from nothing had made a more enduring kingdom, a more splendid realm, than even the long line of peers, statesmen, and warriors had bestowed upon the young man before her.

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Yet they were both royal, they looked royal, there was an emanation of royalty as the duke bowed over the hand of the actress and touched it with his lips.

"*Hommage au vrai Art*," he murmured, quoting the words which a king had once used as he kissed the hand of the greatest French actress of his time.

"It was so good of you to come," she said, and he thought that her voice sounded like a flute. "It is kinder still of you to be here now. But they are sitting down to supper. I believe we are placed together; shall we go?"

She took his arm, and his whole being thrilled as the little white hand touched his sleeve and her gracious presence was so near.

They sat down together in the centre of one of the long tables. The duke sat on one side of Mary, James Fabian Rose upon the other.

The waiters began to serve the clear amber consommé in little porcelain bowls; the champagne, cream and amber, flowed into the glasses.

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Every one was in the highest spirits—actors, authors, journalists, socialistic leaders—every one.

It was an odd gathering enough to the casual eye. The ladies of the stage were radiant in their evening gowns and flowers, some of the ladies in the ranks—or rather upon the staff—of the Socialist army were in evening frocks also, others, hard-featured, earnest-eyed women, with short hair and serviceable coats and skirts, were scattered among them, grubs among the butterflies, scorning gay attire.

The men were the same, though the majority of them were in conventional evening clothes. Yet, sitting by Mrs. Rose, charming in pale blue, and with sapphires upon her neck, sat a man in a brown suit with a turn-down collar of blue linen, a grey flannel shirt, and a red tie. It was Mr. William Butterworth, the great Socialist M.P. for one of the Lancashire manufacturing towns, who had never worn a dress suit in his life, and never meant to, on principle. Such contrasts were everywhere apparent, but to-night they were mere superficial accidents.

Every one was rejoicing at the immense success of *The Socialist*, every one realised that to-night a new and hitherto undreamed of weapon had been forged.

An artery was beating in the duke's head—or was it his heart?—beating with the sound of distant drums. He was speaking to Mary in a low voice, and she was bending a little towards him. "Oh, it was far more wonderful and moving than you yourself can ever know!" he said. "I have seen all the great players of our day. But you are queen of them all! There has never been any one like you. There never will be any one like you."

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He stopped, unable to say more. The drumming within gathered power and sound, became imminent, near, a mighty crescendo, a tide! a flood!

"It is sweet of you to say such things," she answered in her low, flute-like voice, "but of course they are not true. I am only a very humble artist indeed. And no one could have helped playing fairly well in such a play as this, especially when the cause it advocates has become very dear to me. I am a Socialist heart and soul now, you know." She sighed, hesitated for a moment, and then went on: "I hope you were not hurt to-night by anything upon the stage. I could not help thinking of you. I knew you were in the box, and it was, by the very nature of it, aimed so directly at you, or rather the class to which you belong and lead. Since I have been converted to Socialism I have tried to put myself into the place of other people—to imagine how they see things. And I know how subversive and outrageous all our ideas must seem to you."

"Then you were really sorry for me?"

"Really and truly sorry." Perhaps the lovely girl's voice betrayed her a little, its note was so strangely intimate and tender. [Pg 299]

He started violently, and a joyful, wonderful, and yet despairing thought flashed into his mind. He was silent for some seconds before he replied.

"No, I wasn't hurt a bit," he said at length. "Not in the very least. I have something to tell you, Mary"—he was quite unconscious that he had called her by her Christian name. She saw it instantly, and now it was her turn to feel the sudden, overwhelming stab of joy and wonder—and despair!

"Tell me," she said softly.

"I was not hurt," he answered, "because all my ideas are changed also. I, too, have seen the light. The mists of selfishness and individualism have vanished from around me. The process has been gradual. It has been terribly hard. But it has been inevitable and sure, and it dates from the day on which I first saw you by my bedside in the house of James Fabian Rose. To-night you and he together have completed my conversion. With a full knowledge of all that this means to me, I still say to you that from to-night onwards I am a Socialist heart and soul!"

She looked at him, and the colour faded out of her flower-like face, and her great eyes grew wide with wonder. Then the colour came stealing back, pink, like the delicate inside of a shell, crimson with realisation and gladness.

"Then——" she began. [Pg 300]

"You will hear to-night," he answered, and even as he did so Aubrey Flood, flushed with excitement, and his voice trembling with emotion, rose, and in a few broken, heart-felt words proposed the health of Mary Marriott and James Fabian Rose.

The toast was drunk with indescribable enthusiasm and *verve*. The high grid of the stage above echoed with the cheers. The very waiters, forgetting their duties, were caught up in the swing and excitement of it and shouted with the rest.

It was some minutes before the pale man with the yellow beard could obtain a hearing. He stood there smiling and bowing and patting Mary upon the shoulder.

Then he began. He acknowledged the honour they had done Mary and himself in a few brief words of deep feeling. Then, taking a wider course, he told them what he believed this would mean for Socialism, how that the theatre, a huge educational machine with far more power and appeal than a thousand books, a hundred lectures, was now their own.

A new era was opening for them, and it dated from this night. Everything had been leading up to it for years, now the hour of fulfilment had come.

He took a letter from his pocket.

It was from Arthur Burnside, and had arrived from Oxford, during the course of the play. He had found it waiting for him when he returned to the theatre as the curtain fell on the last act. [Pg 301]

He told them the great news in short, sharp sentences of triumph, how that on this very night of huge success a great fortune was placed in their hands for the furtherance of the great work of humanity.

When the second prolonged burst of applause and cheering was over Rose concluded his speech with a sympathetic reference to the duke's presence among them.

As he concluded the duke leaned behind Mary's chair and whispered a word to him.

Immediately afterwards the leader rose and said that the Duke of Paddington asked permission to speak to them for a moment.

There was a second's silence of surprise, a burst of generous cheers, and the duke was speaking in grave, quiet tones the few sentences which were to agitate all England on the morrow and alter the whole course of his life for ever and a day.

Mr. Goodrick had a notebook before him and a pencil poised in his right hand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the duke, "what I have to say shall be said in the very fewest words possible. My friend Mr. Rose has said in his kind remarks about my presence here that to-night I must have felt like a Daniel in a den of lions, or a lion in a den of Daniels—he was not sure which. I felt like neither one nor the other. Miss Marriott said to me just now that she hoped I was not hurt by the attack upon that class of the community which I may be thought to represent. Miss Marriott was wrong also. I have gone through experiences and learnt lessons which I need not trouble you with now. There stands my master in chief"—he pointed to Mr. Rose—"and there have been many others. I came to the theatre to-night as nearly a Socialist in heart and mental conviction as any man could be without an actual declaration. At this moment I announce and avow myself a true and convinced Socialist. I am with you all heart and soul! Allow me a personal reference. I am extremely wealthy. I have great estates in London and other parts of England. Some of these are entailed upon my heirs, and I only enjoy the emoluments during my own [Pg 302]

lifetime. The rest—and owing to past circumstances and my long minority the more considerable part—are mine to do with as I will. They are mine no longer. I give them freely to the Cause and to England. I join with my friend, Arthur Burnside, in renouncing a vast property in favour of the people. I shall retain only a sufficient sum to provide for me in reasonable comfort. All the details will be settled by the Central Committee of our party—it will take many months to arrange them, but that is by the way. And I offer myself and my work, for what they are worth, to the Cause also. I have no more to say, ladies and gentlemen."

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He sat down in his chair, swayed a little, and as Mary bent over him and every one present rose to their feet, he swooned away.

Mr. Goodrick stole out from his seat, rushed down the passage to the stage door, clasping his note-book, and leaped into a waiting cab.

"A sovereign if you get me to the offices of the *Daily Wire*, in Fleet Street, in half an hour!" said Mr. Goodrick.

CHAPTER XXIII

[Pg 304]

POINTS OF VIEW FROM A DUKE, A BISHOP, A VISCOUNT, AND THE DAUGHTER OF AN EARL

The rain was pouring down and it was a horribly gloomy, depressing morning.

The rain fell through the drab, smoke-laden air of London like leaden spears, thrown upon the metropolis in anger by the gods who control the weather.

The duke woke up and through the window opposite the foot of his bed saw the rain falling. He was in the same guest-room in the house of James Fabian Rose to which he had been carried when the exploring party had found him in the hands of the criminals of the West End slum. How long ago that seemed now, he thought, as he lay there in the grey, dreary light of the London morning.

When he had fainted on the night before he had been carried into Aubrey Flood's dressing-room, and speedily recovered consciousness.

His swoon was nothing more than a natural protest of the nerves against an overwhelming strain. It could hardly have been otherwise. One does not undergo weeks of mental strain and dismay without overtaxing the strength. One does not go through a night in which conviction of truth comes to one, the knowledge of love, the certainty that, in honour, that love could never be declared, the solemn and public renunciation of almost everything is realised and declared, without collapse.

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He had found Mrs. Rose and Mary Marriott—ministering angels—by his side when he came back to the world.

Rose had entered, and would not hear of the duke's return to the *Ritz*. A messenger had been sent home for his things, and now he woke in the old familiar room upon this grey, depressing morning.

He was feeling the inevitable reaction. He could not help but feel it. It was eight o'clock he saw from his watch, the same watch which had been taken from him by force on the night of the railway accident.

The morning papers were out. One of these papers he knew would be even now having a record sale. The *Daily Wire* was having a huge boom. The general public were already learning of his renunciation. Before mid-day all society would know of it also. His hundreds of relations and connections would be reading the story. It would be known at Buckingham Palace and at Marlborough House. Lord Camborne would know of it, the news would reach Lord Hayle on his sick-bed at Oxford. Lady Constance would know it.

Before lunch he had to go to Grosvenor Street. He must keep his appointment with his future father-in-law.

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And he was fearing this interview as he had never feared anything in this world before. What was going to happen he didn't know. But he was certain that the meeting would be terrible. He felt frightfully alone, and there was only one little gleam of satisfaction in the outlook. Constance would stand by him. The beautiful girl who was to be his wife had often expressed her sympathy with the down-trodden and the poor. He could rely on her at least.

He did not love her. He could never love her. He loved some one else with all his heart and soul, and believed—dared to believe—that she loved him also.

That was a secret for her and for him for ever and ever. The thing might not be. He had to keep his word inviolable, his honour unstained. They both had duties to do—he and Mary! They must live for the Cause, apart, lonely, but strong.

He was pledged to Constance Camborne, and hand in hand, good comrades, they would work

together for the common weal.

The joy of life must be found in just that—in the "stern lawgiver" Duty. The other and divinest joy was not for him, and he must face the fact like a man of a great race.

"So be it," he muttered to himself with a bitter smile. "Amen!" Then he rose and plunged into the cold bath prepared for him in an alcove of the bedroom. [Pg 307]

He breakfasted alone with James Fabian Rose. Mary Marriott was staying in the house but both she and Mrs. Rose were utterly exhausted and would not be visible for many hours.

The duke was quite frank with his host. He unburdened himself of the "perilous stuff" of weeks to him; he laid everything bare, all the mental processes which had led to his absolute change of view. He spoke of the future and reiterated his determination to become a leader in the new Israel. He even told Rose of his fear and terror at the approaching interview with Lord Camborne, but of the most real and deep pain and distress he said never a word.

He did not mention Mary Marriott, he said nothing of Lady Constance Camborne. Rose appeared to him then in a new light.

The apostle of Socialism, the caustic wit, the celebrated man of literature was as gentle and tender as a child. He seemed to know everything, to enter into the psychology of the situation with an intuition and understanding which were as delicate and sure as those of a woman. He said no single word to indicate it, but the duke felt more and more certain as the meal went on that this wonderful man had penetrated, more deeply than he could have thought possible, to the depths of his soul.

Rose knew that he loved Mary Marriott and must marry Constance Camborne. Twice during breakfast a swift gleam of sardonic but utterly kindly and sympathetic amusement flashed into the dark eyes of the pallid man. It was a gleam full of promise and understanding. But the duke never saw it, he did not see into the immediate future with the unerring certainty that the writer of plays and student of human life saw it. [Pg 308]

The duke had no hint of his own deliverance, but the elder man saw it clear and plain, and he would say nothing. A martyr must undergo his martyrdom before he wins his proper peace, it is the supreme condition of self-sacrifice, and James Fabian Rose knew that very well.

* * * * *

The duke stood waiting in the bishop's library at Grosvenor Street.

"His lordship will be with you in a moment, your Grace," the butler said, quietly closing the door of that noble room. It might have been imagination, but the young man thought that he saw a curious expression flit over the man's face, the half-compassionate, half-contemptuous look with which callous intelligence regards a madman.

"Ah!" he thought to himself, "I suppose that sort of look is one to which I must become familiar in the future, it is part of the price that I must pay for living up to the truth that is in me. Very well, let it be so, I can keep a stiff upper lip, I believe. I must always remember the sort of people from whom I am descended. Many of them were robbers and scoundrels, but at least they were strong men." [Pg 309]

It was in this temper of mind that he waited in the splendid library, among all the hushed silence that a great collection of books seems to give a room, until the bishop should arrive.

The duke had not long to wait.

The distinguished and commanding old man entered, closed the door behind him, and walked straight up to him.

The bishop's face was very stern and the lines of old age seemed more deeply cut into it than usual. But there was a real pain in the steadfast and proud red eyes which added a pathos to his aspect and troubled the duke.

"John," Lord Camborne began, "when I saw you last night at that wicked and blasphemous play I trembled to think that most disquieting news which had reached me was true."

"And what was that, my lord?"

"Suffer me to proceed in my own way, please, and bear with me if I am prolix. I am in no happy mind. I went to that play as a public duty, and I took my daughter that she might see for herself the truth about the Socialists and the godless anarchy they preach. You had made no mention of your intention to be present, and I was glad to think that you would be quietly at Oxford. I had heard from Gerald—than whom you have no greater friend—that you were associating with disreputable and doubtful people, forsaking men of your own class and living an extraordinary life." [Pg 310]

"It was a lie," the duke answered shortly. "Gerald has been ill in bed, he has been misinformed."

"It was not only Gerald," the old man went on, "but letters reached me from other sources, letters full of the most disturbing details."

"Do you set spies upon my actions, Lord Camborne?"

"That is unworthy of you, John," the bishop answered gently, "unworthy both of you and of me. You are well aware that I could not stoop to such a thing. Do you forget that in your high position, with all its manifold responsibilities to God, to your country, and to yourself, your movements and dispositions are the object of the most wise and watchful scrutiny on the part of your tutors?"

"I am sorry I spoke wrongly."

"I make allowances for you. The word was nothing, but it is a far harder task to make allowances for you in another way. You seem to have committed yourself irrevocably."

The old man's voice had become very stern. The duke saw at once that he had read the *Daily Wire*. He said nothing.

"You have been a traitor to your order," the pitiless voice went on. "You have publicly blasphemed against the wise ordinances of God. A great peer of England, pledged to support the Throne, you have cast in your lot with those who would destroy it. I say this in the full persuasion that the report of what occurred last night is correctly set forth in that pestilent news-sheet, the *Daily Wire*."

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"It is perfectly true," said the duke.

"You intend to abide by it?"

"Unswervingly. My reason is convinced and my honour is pledged."

The bishop turned and strode twice up and down the library, a noble and reverend figure as he struggled with his anger.

"I have seen Constance," he said at length, speaking with marked difficulty. "Of course any idea of your marriage is now out of the question."

The suddenness of the words hit the duke like a blow.

"And Constance?" he said in a faint voice; "she——"

"She is of one mind with me," Lord Camborne answered. "The blow has been terrible for her, but she is true to her blood. An announcement that the marriage will not take place will be sent to the papers to-day."

"May I see her?"

"You may see her, John," the bishop said brokenly. "Oh, why have you brought this shame and public disgrace upon us? I did not intend to make an appeal to you, but I knew your father, I have loved you, and there is my dear daughter. Is it too late? Cannot you withdraw? Can it not be explained as a momentary aberration, a freak, a joke, call it what you will? There would be talk and scandal, of course, but it would soon blow over and be forgotten. It could be arranged. I have great influence. Is it too late? Remember all that you are losing, think well before you answer."

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There were tears in the bishop's voice.

There were tears in the duke's eyes as he answered. "Alas!" he said, "it is too late, I would not change even if I could, I must be true to myself."

"God help you, preserve you, and forgive you," Lord Camborne replied with lifted hand. "And now good-bye, in this world we shall not meet again. I will send Constance to you. Do not keep her long. Remember that you have an old man's blessing."

With his hand over his eyes the bishop went from the room. More than once he stumbled in his walk. He was weeping.

It was awful to see that high and stately old man stricken, to see that white and honourable head bowed in sorrow and farewell.

Lady Constance came into the room. She was very pale, her eyes were swollen as if she also had been weeping.

She went straight up to the duke, tall and erect as a dart, and held out her hand to him.

"John," she said. "I've come to say good-bye. Father has allowed me five minutes and no more. Father is terribly shaken."

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He held her hand in his for a moment. She was very beautiful, very patrician, a true daughter of the race from which she had sprung.

"Then it is really all over, Constance?" he said with great sadness.

"It must be all over for you and me," she answered.

"Tell me this, dear. Is what you say said of your own free will, or is it said because of your father's authority and pressure? He has been very kind to me, kinder than from his natural point of view I can ever deserve. But I must know. I am ready and anxious. I am putting it horribly, but the situation is horrible. Constance, won't you marry me still?"

"You are not putting it horribly," she said with a faint smile. "You are putting it chivalrously and like a gentleman. Let us be absolutely frank one with another. We come of ancient races, you and

I. We have blood in us that common people have not. We are both of us quietly and intensely proud of that. 'Noblesse oblige' is our creed. Very well, I will not marry you for three reasons. First of them all is that you do not love me. No, don't start, don't protest. This is our last real meeting, and so in God's name let's be done with shame. You admire me, you have a true affection for me. But that is all. We were both dazzled and overcome by circumstances and the moment. You wanted me because I am beautiful, of your rank, because we should get on together. I was ready to marry you because I am very fond of you and because I know and feel that it is my destined lot in life to make a great marriage, to lead Society, always to be near the throne. The second reason that I won't marry you is that by your own act you have deprived yourself of those material things that are my right and my destiny, and the third reason is that my father forbids it. John, I think I honour and like you more than I have ever done before for what you are doing. You have chosen your path, find peace and joy in it. I pray that you will ever do so, and I know that you are going to be very happy."

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"Very happy, Constance?"

"Very happy, indeed. Oh, you foolish boy, did I not see your face at the theatre last night! Oh, foolish boy!"

She wore a little bunch of violets at her breast.

She took them and held them out to him. "Give them to her with my love," she said.

She bent forward, kissed him upon the forehead, and left the room without even looking back.

A noblewoman always.

CHAPTER XXIV

"LOVE CROWNS THE DEED"

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The duke stood on the pavement outside Lord Camborne's house in Grosvenor Street.

It was still pouring heavy drops of rain, which beat a tattoo upon his umbrella.

He glanced back at the massive green-painted door which the butler had just closed behind him. Never again would that hospitable door open for him! He would see none of his kind friends any more. Gerald, who had been as a brother to him for so long, would never shake him by the hand again—he knew Lord Hayle's temperament too well to expect it.

Constance, beautiful, frank, and stately, had vanished from his life. The earl, a prince of the Church and a princely old man, would never again tell him his genial and courtly stories of the past.

The duke stood there alone. Alone!—the word tolled in his ears like a bell, making a melancholy accompaniment to the rain.

He began to walk towards Bond Street in a shaken and melancholy mood.

How swift and strange it all was! How a few months had altered all his life, utterly and irrevocably! An infinitesimal time back he had not a care in the world. He was Prince Fortunatus, enjoying every moment of his life and position in a dignified and becoming fashion.

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And what was he now?

He laughed a small, bitter laugh as he asked himself the question. He was still the Duke of Paddington, the owner of millions, the proprietor of huge estates, perhaps the most highly-placed young man in England. Even now it was not too late to undo much of what he had done. Everything would be condoned and forgiven to such a man as he.

He could buy a great yacht, go round the world for a year with a choice society of friends of his own standing, and when he returned Court and Society would welcome him with open arms once more—all this he understood very well.

He had but to say a few words and all that was now slipping away from him would be his own once more.

Struggles against conscience and convictions are either protracted or very short. The protracted struggle was over in his case. He had fought out the battle long before. His public action on the night before had been the outcome. But there was still the last after-temptation to be faced, the final and conclusive victory to be won.

It was not far from Lord Camborne's town house to Bond Street, but during the distance the battle within the young man's mind raged fiercely.

He must not be blamed. The whole of his past life must be taken into consideration. It must be remembered that he had just been enduring a succession of shocks, and it must also be taken into account that no one feels the same enthusiasm on a grey, wet morning, when he is alone, as he does in a brilliant, lighted place at midnight, surrounded by troops of friends and

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sympathisers.

A tiny urchin, wet and ragged, with bare feet, came pattering round the corner. Under his arm he held a bundle of pink papers in an oil-skin wrapper. In front of him, as a sort of soiled apron, was the limp contents-bill of an evening paper.

The duke saw his own name upon it. He realised that by now, of course, the early editions of all the evening papers were on the streets, and that they had copied the news from the *Daily Wire*.

"Pyper, m'lord!" said the urchin, turning up a shrewd and dirty face to the duke, who shook his head and would have passed on.

"Yer wouldn't sye no, m'lord, if yer noo the noos!" said the child. "'Ere's a bloomin' noo hactress wot's goin' to beat the bloomin' 'ead orf of all the other gels, just a cert she is! And there's a mad dook wot's gone and give all is oof to the pore! P'raps I shell get a bit of it—I don't fink!—'ave a pyper, sir?"

The impish readiness of the boy amused the duke, though his words stung. Yes! all the world was ringing with his name. The knowledge, or rather the realisation of what he had known before, acted as a sudden tonic. In a swift moment he set his teeth and braced himself up. A mad duke, was he?—*au contraire*, he felt particularly sane! The past was over and done—let it be so. The future was before him—let him welcome it and be strong. If he was indeed mad, then it should be a fine madness—a madness of living for humanity!

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He looked at the pinched and anxious face of the boy. A sudden thought struck him. He would begin with the boy.

"Hungry?" he said.

"Not 'arf!" said the boy.

"Father and mother?"

"Old man's doin' five years, old woman's dead—Lock Orspital."

"Home?"

"Occasional, as you might sye," said the imp reflectively; "but Hadelphi Harches as hoften as not—blarst 'em!"

"Very well," said the duke. "Now you're going to have as much as you like to eat, good clothes, and a happy life if you come with me. I'll see you through."

"Straight?—no bloomin' reformatory?"

"Come along with me, you little devil," said the duke genially. "Do you think I'm going to let you in? If you do—scoot!"

"I'm on," said the child, much reassured at being called a little devil. "Carn't be much worse off than nah, wotever 'appens."

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Two cabs were found at the corner.

"Jump in that one," the duke said, pointing to the last. "Follow me," he said to the driver, getting into the first cab as he did so, and giving the address of Rose's house in Westminster.

The two cabs started without comment or question.

There was something very authoritative about his Grace of Paddington sometimes.

The two cabs drove up to the little house in Westminster just as the rain cleared off, and a gleam of sunlight bursting through the clouds shone on the budding trees which topped the high wall of the Westminster sanctuary and jewelled them with prismatic fires. High above, the towers of the Abbey seemed washed and clean, rising into an air purged for a moment of grime and smoke, while the wet leaden roof of the nave shone like silver.

James Fabian Rose was on the doorstep of his house, and in the act of unlocking the door with his latchkey.

"Hallo!" he said. "So you're back, duke—home again! The ordeal is over, then!"

"Yes, it's quite over," the duke answered.

"Who's this ruffian?" said Rose, smiling at the little newsboy.

"A recruit!" the duke said. "I'm responsible for him for the future. And meanwhile he's confoundedly hungry."

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"So I bloomin' well am," said the imp—though "blooming" was not the precise word he used.

Rose took the urchin by the ear.

"Come along, embryo Socialist," he said; "there's lots to eat inside—I'll take him to the kitchen, duke, and meet you in a moment in my study. My wife's in the kitchen helping the cook. She'll see to this youngster."

The duke paid the cabmen. As he gave half-a-crown to the second man, the fellow leaned down from his box and said, "God bless you, my lord. I knew you as soon as you got into my cab. It'll be many years before you know the good you done last night. People like us know wot you done and are goin' to do. I arst you to remember that."

He gave a salute with his whip and clattered away.

The duke went into the house.

As the door closed behind him and he stood alone in the narrow hall, the final revelation, the complete realisation came to him.

Mechanically he took off his wet overcoat and bowler hat, hanging them upon the rack. He put his dripping umbrella in the stand and went upstairs to the first floor.

Rose's study was on the first floor, facing the drawing-room.

He opened the door and went in.

The room, lined with books, a working-room, was rather dark. It did not face the newly-arrived sun. [Pg 321]

But a dancing fire burned upon the hearth, and in a chair by the side of it Mary Marriott sat alone.

Her face was pale, she wore a long, flowing tea-gown, round her feet were scattered the innumerable daily papers in which she had been reading the extraordinary chorus of praise for her triumph of the night before.

She was leaning back in a high-backed armchair covered in green Spanish leather, looking like one of Sargeant's wonderful portraits that catch up eye and heart into a sort of awe at such cunning and splendour of presentation.

The duke stopped upon the threshold for a second—only for a second. He had known what he had come to do directly he was in the house—immediately he had entered the house and felt the influence which pervaded it.

He went quickly up to her and sank on his knees beside her chair.

He took her white hands in his—things of carved ivory, with a soul informing them. An hour ago he had held another pair of hands as beautiful as these.

Her face flushed deeply, her eyes grew wide, her lips parted. She tried to draw her hands away.

The words burst from her lips as if she had no power to control them. Her soul spoke, her heart spoke; it was an absolute avowal. But conscience, her sense of right and duty, her high thought for him and for herself spoke also. [Pg 322]

"No, no! It is dishonourable, you are vowed!"

He held her fast, the strong male impulse dominated her, she was sick to death with surrender.

"But you love me, Mary?"

"Yes!—oh, what am I saying? God help me!—go, for you are a gentleman, and must preserve our hearts unstained!"

"Darling!" he cried, "God is with us. I break no troth! All that is over and done—I am free, I am yours."

He had her little hands in his, tight, close—ah, close!

Swift, passionate words come from his lips, fierce loving words caught up in sobs, broken with the hot tears of happiness in that he is so blessed and she so dear!

Her face, in its supreme loveliness, its tenderness, its joy, is turned full to his now.

The river of his speech rushes down upon her heart, surging over her. His words catch her up upon their flood, her will seems to her merged in his, she swoons with love.

For her! For her—this wonder is for her! It is an echo from the love of the august parents in the sweet garden of Eden.

Gone is the world, the world in which she has always moved. Gone are ideals and causes, gone are art and triumph, homage and success! Gone—vanished utterly away—while her own lover holds her hands in his. [Pg 323]

She bent her lovely head. No longer did she look up into her lover's face with happy eyes. A deep flush suffused her face and the white column of her neck.

"So you see, dearest—best, I had to tell you. This is the moment when the love that throngs and swells over a man's heart bursts all bonds of repression and surges out in a great flood. Oh! darling! there has never been any one like you—there will never be any one like you again! My love and my lady, dare I ask you to be mine? Oh, I don't know—I can't say! I kneel before you as a man kneels before a shrine. I wonder that I have even words to speak to you, so peerless, so

gracious, and so beautiful!"

His voice dropped and broke for a moment. He could say no more. Mary said no word. The firelight made flickering gleams in the great masses of dead-black hair. The wonderful face was hidden by the white hands which she had withdrawn from his.

His own strong hands were clasped upon her knees.

They shook and trembled violently.

What was she thinking? How did she receive his words?—his winged and fiery words. He knelt there in an agony of doubt.

Then, in one swift access of passion, his mood changed to one of greater power.

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She was a woman, and therefore to be won! The clear, strong thought came down upon him like fire from heaven. He knew then that he was her conqueror, the man she must have to be her mate, her strength, her lover!

His strong arms were round her. They held her close. "Darling!" he whispered, "my arms are the home for you. That is what the old Roman poet said. Horace said it in the vineyards and the sun. I say it now. See, you are mine, mine!—only mine! You shall never break away, my own, incomparable lady and love!"

The whole world went away from her and was no more. She only knew, in a super-sensual ecstasy, that his kisses fell upon her cheek like a hot summer wind.

She found a little voice, a little, crushed, happy voice.

"But you are a duke, you are so much that is great! I am only Mary Marriott, the actress!"

"You are only the supreme genius of the stage. I am the greatest man in the world because you love me. Mary, it is just like that—and that is all."

She kissed him. He knew the supreme moment. All life, all love, all nature were revealed to him in one flash of joy for which there is no name.

Both of them heard an echo of the harps that the saints were playing in another world.

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The whole heavenly orchestra was sounding an accompaniment to their story.

"Love!"

"Love!"

"Husband!"

"Wife!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Please, miss," said the housemaid, "lunch is ready. Mr. Goodrick has come, your Grace. And the downstairs rooms are full of gentlemen of the press. And there's men with photographic cameras, too. I've asked the master what I am to do, but he only laughs, miss! I can't get anything out of him. But lunch is ready!"

"Sweetheart," the duke said, "lunch is ready! There's a *fact!* Let's cling to it! And if Rose is laughing, let's laugh, too, and dodge the journalists!"

"It will be a very happy laughter, John," she said.

As the couple came into the luncheon-room—which was full of the leaders of the socialistic movement—Mr. Goodrick cast a swift glance at the duke and Mary, and then left the place with an unobtrusive air.

The *Daily Wire* had no evening edition.

But it had an extraordinary reputation for being "first there" with intimate news at breakfast time.

EPILOGUE

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Upon the Chelsea Embankment there is a house which, for some months after its new occupants had taken possession of it, was an object of considerable interest to those who passed by.

People used to point there, at that time, and tell each other that "That's where the Socialist duke and his actress wife have gone to live. The Duke of Paddington—*you* know!—gave up all his possessions, or nearly all, to be held in trust for the Socialists. They say that he's half mad, never recovered from being captured by those burglars on the night of the big railway smash on the G.E.R."

"Silly Juggins!" would be the reply. "Wish *I'd* have had it. You wouldn't see *me* giving it all up—not half!"

But for several years the house has been just like any ordinary house and few people point to it or talk about it any more.

There have been hundreds of sensations since the duke and his wife settled down in Chelsea.

* * * * *

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon.

The duke sat in his library in Cheyne Walk. It was a large and comfortable room, surrounded by books, with a picture here and there which the discerning eye would have immediately seen to be of unusual excellence, and, indeed, surprising in such a house as this. A barrister earning his two thousand a year, a successful doctor not quite in the first rank, a county court Judge or a Clerk in the Houses of Parliament would have had just such a room—save only for the three pictures.

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The duke had changed considerably in appearance during the past five years.

The boyishness had departed. The serenity and impassivity of a great prince who had never known anything but a smooth seat high upon Olympus had gone also.

The face, now strong with a new kind of strength, showed the marks and gashes of Experience. It was the mask of a man who had done, suffered, and learned, but it was, nevertheless, not a very happy face.

There was, certainly, nothing of discontent in it. But there was a persistent shadow of thought—a brooding.

Much water had flowed under the bridge since the night at the theatre when he had made a public renunciation of almost everything that was his.

Life had not been placid, and for many reasons. There had been the long and terribly difficult breaking away from his own class and order, for he had not been allowed to go into "outer darkness" without a protracted struggle.

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All the forces of the world had arrayed themselves against him. The wisest, the most celebrated, the highest placed, had combined together in that they might prevent this dreadful thing.

He was not as other men.

Hardly a great and stately house in England but was connected with him by ties of kindred. His falling away was a menace to all of them in its opening of possibilities, a real grief to many of them. There had been terrible hours of expostulation, dreadful scenes of sorrow and recrimination.

Compromise had assailed him on every side. His wife would have been received everywhere—it was astonishing how Court and Society had discovered that Mary Marriott was one of themselves after all—a "Mem-Sahib." He could do what he liked within reason, and still keep his place.

A prime minister had pointed out to him that no one at all would object to his countenance of the Socialistic party. He might announce his academic adherence to Socialism as often and as loudly as he pleased. It would, indeed, be a good thing for Socialism, in which—so his lordship was pleased to say—there was indubitably a germ of economic good. All great movements had begun slowly. These things must ripen into good and prove themselves by their own weight. But it was economically wrong, and subversive of all theories of progress, that a sudden and overpowering weight should be put into one side of the scale by a single individual.

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"It will disturb everything" said the Prime Minister. "And any one who, from an individual opinion, disturbs the balance of affairs is doing grave, and perhaps irreparable, harm."

In short, they would have allowed him to do anything, but give up his PROPERTY. They would have let him marry any one if he did not give up his PROPERTY.

For all of them had won their property and sovereignty by predatory strength throughout the centuries, or the years. Landowners of ancient descent, millionaires of yesterday, all knew the power of what they held and had. All loved that power and were determined to keep it for themselves and their descendants.... And, all had sons, young and generous of mind as yet, to whom the duke's example might prove an incentive to a repetition of such an abnegation.

They were very shrewd and far-seeing, all these people. Collectively, they were the most cultured, beautiful, and charming folk in England. They were the rulers of England, and by birth, temper, and inheritance he was one of them. The pressure put upon him had been enormous, the strain terrible.

A resolution made in a moment of great emotion, and an enthusiasm fostered by every incident of time and circumstance, seems a very different thing regarded dispassionately when the blood is cool, and, so to speak, the footlights are lowered, the curtain down, the house empty.

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Once, indeed, he had nearly given in. He had been sent for privately to the Palace, and some wise and kindly words had been spoken to him there by A Personage to whom he could not but listen with the gravest and most loyal attention.

Compromise was once more suggested, he was bidden to remember his order and his duty to it. He was again told that his opinions were his own, that short of taking the irrevocable step he might do almost anything.

Nor does a young man whose inherited instincts are all in fierce war with his new convictions listen unmoved to gracious counsel such as this from the Titular Head of all nobility, for whose ancestors his own had bled on many a historic field.

He had stood quite alone. Mary Marriott, his wife that was to be, had given him no help. Tender, loving, ready to marry him at any cost, she nevertheless stood aloof from influencing his decision in the hour of trial.

He tried hard to get help and support from her, to make her love confirm his resolution, but he tried in vain. With the clear sanity of a noble mind, the girl refused to throw so much as a feather-weight into the scale of the balance, though in this she also suffered (secretly) as much as he.

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Then he went to the others, sick and sore from the buffetings he was receiving at all hands—from his own order and from the great public press they influenced, from the great solid middle-class of the country which, more than anything else perhaps, preserves the level of wise-dealing and order in England. The others were as dumb as the girl he loved. It was true that a section of the Socialist party, the noisy, blatant—and possibly insincere—big drum party, hailed him as prophet, seer, martyr, and Galahad in one. But there was a furious vulgarity about this sort of thing which was more unnerving, and made him more wretched than anything else at all. Such people spoke a different language from his own, a different language from that of Fabian Rose and his friends. They said the same thing perhaps—he was inclined to doubt even that sometimes—but the dialect offended fastidious ears, the attitude offended one accustomed to a certain comeliness and reticence even in the new life and surroundings into which he had been thrown. Both the Pope and General Booth, for example, serve One Master, and live for Our Lord. But it is conceivable that if the Bishop of Rome could be present at a mass meeting of the Salvation Army in the Albert Hall, he would leave it a very puzzled and disgusted prelate indeed.

Rose and his friends avoided influencing the duke, of set purpose. They were high-minded men and women, but they were also psychologists, and trained deeply in the one science which can dominate the human mind and human opinion.

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They wanted the Duke of Paddington badly. They wanted the enormous impetus to the movement that his accession would bring; they wanted the great revenues which would provide sinews of war for a vast campaign. But they knew that nothing would be more disastrous than an illustrious convert who would fall away. The duke had been left alone.

For a month after the few words he had addressed to the people at the theatre supper, the struggle had continued. His name was in every one's mouth. It would not be too much to say that all Europe set itself to wonder what would be the outcome. The journals of England and the Continent teemed with denunciation, praise, sneers. Tolstoi sent a long message—the thing fermented furiously, and, instructed by the journalists, even the man in the street recognised that here was something more than even the renunciation of one man of great possessions for an idea—that it would create—one way or the other—a disintegrating or binding force, that a precedent would establish itself, that vast issues were involved.

After a week of it, the duke disappeared. Only a few of his friends knew where he was, and they were pledged not to say. He was fighting it out alone in a little mountain village of the Riviera—Roquebume, which hangs like a bird's nest on the Alps between Monte Carlo and Mentone, and where the patient friendly olive growers of the mountain steppes never knew who the quiet young Englishman was who sat in the little *auberge* under the walls of the Saracen stronghold and watched the goats and the children rolling in the warm dusk, or stared steadfastly out over the Mediterranean far below, to where the distant cliffs of Corsica gleamed like pearls in the sun.

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He came back to England, his decision made, his first resolve strengthened into absolute, assured purpose. The ruffians who had kidnapped him on the night of the railway accident had been unable to torture him into buying his freedom. For what to him would have been nothing—a penny to a beggar—he might have gone free. And yet he had nearly died rather than give in. Save for the chance or Providence which brought his rescuers to him in the very last moment, he would have died—there is no doubt about it.

Now again, he was firm as granite. His mind was made up, nothing could alter it nor move it. His hand had been placed upon the plough. It was going to remain there, and he left the palms and orange groves of the South a man doubly vowed. He had married at once. Mary Marriott became a duchess. Several problems arose. Should he drop his title—that was one of them. He refused to do so, and in his refusal was strongly backed up by the real leaders of the movement. "You were born Duke of Paddington," said Rose, "and there is no earthly reason why you should become Mr. John something or other. It would only be a pretence, and if you do, I shall change my own name to James Fabian Turnip! and as I have always told you Socialism never says that all men are equal—true Socialism that is. It only says that all men have equal rights! At the same time some of our noisy friends will go for you—though you won't mind that!" They did "go for" him. Despite the fact that he had given up everything—his friends and relatives, his order, his tastes, there was not wanting a certain section of the baser socialistic press which spoke of "The young man with great possessions" who would give up much but not all; like all professional sectarians, rushing to the Gospels in an extremity to pick and choose a few comfortable texts from the

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history of One whom they alternately held up as the First Great Socialist, and then denied His definite claims to be the Veritable Son of God.

The duke minded their veiled sarcasms not at all; an open attack was never dared. But the attitude gave him pain, and much material forethought. They were always quoting "The Christ," "The Man Jesus." They continually pointed out—as it suited them upon occasion—that private property, privilege, and monopoly were attacked by Jesus, who left no doubt as to the nature of His mission.

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They said, and said truly enough, that "He pictured Dives, a rich man, plunged into torment, for nothing else than for being rich when another was poor; while Lazarus, who had been nothing but poor and afflicted, is comforted and consoled. For that, those Evangelical-Nonconformists, the Pharisees, who were covetous, derided him. By the force of His personality (it was not the scourge that did it!), He drove the banking fraternity (who practised usury then as they do to-day) out of their business quarters in the Temple, and named them thieves. 'Woe to you rich, who lay up treasures, property, on earth,' He cried. And 'Blessed are ye poor, who relinquish property and minister to each other's needs,' He cried." And yet, in the same breath with which they spoke of this Supreme Man they denied His Divinity, trying to prove Him, at the same moment, an inspired Socialist, and what is more a very *practical* One, and also a Dreamer who spoke in simile of His claims to Godhead, or, and this was the more logical conclusion of their premisses, a conscious Pretender and Liar.

"He was," they said, "a Seer, as the ancient prophets were, as John, Paul, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Swedenborg, Fox, and Wesley, were. Such men, modern Spiritualists and Theosophists would call 'mediums.' So great was He in wisdom and power of the spirit, that in His own day He was called 'the Son of God,' as well as 'the Son of Man,'—that is, the pre-eminent, the God-like, Man."

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Who need dispute over the stories of the "miracles" wrought by Him and His disciples? To-day, no scientific person would say they were impossible; we have learned too much of the power of "mind" over "matter," for that, by now. There were well-attested marvels in all ages, and in our own living day, which were not less "miraculous" than the Gospel miracles. Therefore, they would not reject the story of Jesus because He was affirmed to have worked many signs and wonders.

The Sermon on the Mount, therefore, was a piece of practical politics which was epitomised in the saying "Love one another." The clear and definite statements which Jesus made then ought to obtain to-day in their literal letter. The equally clear and definite statements which Jesus made as to His own Divine Origin were the misty utterances of a "medium"! The Incarnation was not a fact.

"Love one another" was the supreme rule of conduct—which made it odd and bewildering that the young man who had given up everything should be covertly assailed for holding fast to the name in which he had been born. But the duke steeled himself. He honestly realised that class hatred must still exist for generations and generations. It was not the fault of one class, or the other, it was the inevitable inheritance of blood. Yet he found himself less harsh in spirit than most of those who forgot his sacrifices, and grudged him his habits of speaking in decent English, of courteous manner, of taste, of careful attention to his finger nails. To his sorrow he found that many of them still hated him for these things—despite everything they hated him. For his part he merely disliked, not them, but the absence in them of these things. But from the first he found his way was hard and that his renunciation was a renunciation indeed. He threw himself into the whole Socialistic movement with enormous energy, but his personal consolations were found in the sympathy and society of people like the Roses, and their set—cultured and brilliant men and women who were, after all was said and done, "Gentlefolk born!"

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After his marriage, months had been taken up with the legal business, protracted and beset with every sort of difficulty, by which he had devised his vast properties to the movement.

He was much criticised for retaining a modest sum of two thousand pounds a year for himself and his wife—until James Fabian Rose with a pen dipped in vitriol and a tongue like a whip of steel neatly flayed the objectors and finished them off with a few characteristic touches of his impish Irish wit.

Then—would he go to court?—a down-trodden working-man couldn't go to court. If he was going to be a Socialist, let him be a Socialist—and so on.

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For this sort of thing, again, the duke did not care. The only critic and judge of his actions was himself, his conscience. He went to court, Mary was presented also. They were kindly received. High minds can appreciate highmindedness, however much the point of view may differ.

Mary was two things. First of all she was the Duchess of Paddington. It was made quite plain to her that, though perhaps she was not the duchess for whom many people had hoped, she was indubitably of the rank. Gracious words were said to her as duchess. Even kinder words were said to her upon another and more private occasion, as one of those great artists whom Royalty has always been delighted to honour—recognising a sovereignty quite alien to its own but still real!

As for the duke, he had a certain privilege at the levées. It belonged to his house. It was his right to stand a few paces behind the Lord Chamberlain, and when any representatives of the noble family of — appeared before the Sovereign, to draw his court sword and step near to the King—

an old historic custom the reasons for which were nearly forgotten, but which was still part of the pomp and pageantry of the Royal palace.

Upon one occasion after his renunciation, he appeared at St. James's and exercised his ancient right. There was no opposition, nothing unkind, upon the faces of any of the great persons there. The ceremony was gone through with all its traditional dignity, but every one there felt that it was an assertion—and a farewell! The duke himself knew it at the time, and as he left St. James's he may be pardoned if, for a moment, old memories arose in him, and that his eyes were dimmed with a mist of unshed tears as the modest brougham drove him back to his house in Cheyne Walk. How kind they had all been! How sympathetic in their way, *how highly bred!* Yes! it was worth while to be one of them! It was worth while to live up to the traditions which so many of them often forgot. But one could still do that, one could still keep the old hereditary chivalry of race secret and inviolable in the soul, and yet live for the people, love the poor, the outcast, the noisy, the vulgar, those whom Our Lord, who counselled tribute to reason, loved best of all!... These things are an indication, not a history of the events of the first eighteen months after the Duke of Paddington's marriage.

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The story provides a glimpse into some of his difficulties, that is to say, difficulties which were semi-public and patent to his intimate circle of friends, if not, perhaps, to all the rest of the world. Nevertheless, giving all that he had given, he found himself confronted with yet another problem, which was certainly the worst of all. He had married Mary, he loved her and revered her as he thought no man had ever revered and loved a girl before. She loved and appreciated him also. Theirs was a perfect welding and fusion of identity and hopes. But she was an actress. Her love for her Art had been direct and overwhelming from the very first. She had given all her life and talent to it. For her it had all the sacredness of a real vocation. She was, and always would be, a woman vowed to her Art as truly and strongly as an innocent maiden puts on the black veil and vows herself to Christ. Nor is this a wrong comparison, because there are very many ways of doing things to the glory of God, and God gives divers gifts to divers of his children. And so this also had to be faced by the duke. Since the night upon which her great opportunity had come to her, Mary had never looked back.

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Her success, then, had been supreme and overwhelming, and, apart from all the romantic circumstances which had attended it, her position upon the stage had grown into one which was entirely apart from anything outside her Art.

The world now—after five years—still knew that she was a duchess—if she chose, that was how the world put it—but the fact had little or no significance for the public. She was just Mary Marriott—their own Mary—and if she so often spent her genius in interpreting the brilliant socialistic plays of James Fabian Rose—well, what of that? They went to see her play in the plays, not, in the first instance, to see the play itself. And even after that, Rose was always charming—there was always a surprise and a delightfully subversive point of view. One went home to Bayswater and West Kensington "full of new ideas," and certainly full of enthusiasm for beautiful Mary Marriott. "What a darling she is, mother!" ... "Charming indeed, Gertie. And do not forget that she is, after all, the Duchess of Paddington. Of course the duke gave up his fortune to the Socialists some years ago, but they are still quite wealthy. Maud knows them. Your Aunt Maud was there to an afternoon reception only last week. Every one was there. All the leading lights! They have renounced society, of course, but quite a lot of the best people pop in all the same—so your Aunt Maud tells me—and, of course, all the leading painters and actors and writers, and so on. And, of course, they can go anywhere they like directly they give up this amusing socialistic pose. They're even asked down to Windsor. The King tolerates the young duke with his mad notions, and of course Miss Marriott is received on other grounds too—like Melba and Patti and Irving, don't you know. Nothing like real Art, Gertie! It takes you anywhere." Such statements as these were only half true. Every one came to the duke's house who was any one in the world of Art. But they came to see his wife, not to see him. And despite the rumours of Bayswater his own class left him severely alone by now. The years had passed, his property was no longer his, he had very definitely "dropped out." The duke did not care for "artistic" people, and he knew that they didn't care for him. He could not understand them, and on their part they thought him dull and uninteresting. There was no common ground upon which they could meet. Many of the people who came were actors and actresses, and when it had been agreed between Mary and her husband that she was to continue her artistic career, he had not contemplated the continual invasion and interruption of his home life which this was to mean. He had a prodigious admiration for Mary's talent; it had seemed, and still seemed, to him the most wonderful thing in the world. His ideal had been from the first a life of noble endeavour for the good of the world. He had given up everything he held dear, and would spend the rest of his life in active service for the cause of Socialism. Mary would devote her supreme art to the same cause. But there would also be a hidden, happy life of love and identity of aim which would be perfect. They had done exactly as he had proposed. His enthusiasm for the abstract idea of Socialism had never grown less—was stronger than ever now. Mary's earnestness and devotion was no less than his. In both of them the flame burned pure and brightly still.

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But the duke knew by this time that nothing had turned out as he expected and hoped. His home life was non-existent. His work was incessant, but the Cause seemed to be making no progress whatever. It remained where it had stood when he had just made his great renunciation.

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The vested interests of Property were too strong. A Liberal and semi-socialistic government had tried hard, but had somehow made a mess of things. The House of Lords had refused its assent to half a dozen bills, and its members had only smiled tolerantly at the Duke of Paddington's fervid

speeches in favour of the measures which were sent up from the Lower House. And worse than this, the duke saw, the Socialists saw, every one saw, that the country was in thorough sympathy with the other party, that at the next general election the Conservatives would be returned by an overwhelming majority. And there was one other thing, a personal, but very real thing, which contributed to the young man's general sense of weariness and futility of endeavour. He loved his wife with the same dogged and passionate devotion with which he had won her. He knew well that her own love for him was as strong as ever. But, as far as she was concerned, there was so little time or opportunity for an expression of it. She was a public woman, a star of the first rank in Art and in affairs. Her day was occupied in rehearsals at the theatre or in public appearances upon the socialistic platform. Her nights were exercised in the practice of her Art upon the stage.

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Sometimes he went to see his wife act, but his pride and joy in her achievement was always tempered and partly spoiled by a curious—but very natural—*physical* jealousy which he was quite unable to subdue. It offended and wounded all his instincts to see some painted posing actor holding *his* own wife—the Duchess of Paddington!—in his arms and making a pretended love to her. It was all pretence, of course; it was simply part of the inevitable mechanism of "Art" ("Oh, *damn* Art," he would sometimes say to himself very heartily), but it was beastly all the same. He had to meet the actor-men in private life. First with surprise, and then with a disgust for which he had no name, he watched their self-consciousness of pose, their invincible absorption in a petty self, their straining efforts to appear as gentlemen, their failure to convince any one but their own class that they were real human beings at all—that they were any more than empty shells into which the personality of this or that creative genius nightly poured the stuff that made the puppets work. No doubt his ideas were all wrong and distorted. But they were very real, and ever present with him. Nor was it nice to know that any horrid-minded rascal with a few shillings in his fob could buy the nightly right to sit and gloat over Mary's charm, Mary's beauty. It was a violation of his inherited beliefs and impulses, though, if it had been another man's wife, and not his own, he would probably not have cared in the least!

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* * * * *

So the Duke of Paddington sat in the library of his house in Chelsea. It was a Saturday afternoon. There was a *matinée*, and Mary had rushed off after an early lunch. The duke felt very much alone. He had no particular engagement that afternoon. His correspondence he had finished during the morning, and he was now a little at a loss how to occupy his time. At the moment life seemed rather hollow and empty, the very aspect of his comfortable room was somehow distasteful, and, though he did not feel ill, he had a definite sensation of physical mis-ease.

"I must have some exercise," he thought to himself. "I suppose it's a touch of liver."

He debated whether he should go to the German gymnasium for an hour, to swim at the Bath Club, or merely to walk through the town. He decided for the walk. Thought and pedestrianism went well together, and the other two alternatives were not conducive to thought. He wanted to think. He wanted to examine his own sensations, to analyse the state of his mind, to find out from himself and for himself if he really *were* unhappy and dissatisfied with his life, if he had made a frightful mistake or no. It was late autumn. The weather was neither warm nor cold. There was no fog nor rain, but everything was grey and cheerless of aspect. The sky was leaden, and there was a peculiar and almost sinister lividity in the wan light of the afternoon.

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He walked along the Embankment dreamily enough. The movement was pleasant—he had certainly not taken enough exercise lately!—and he tried to postpone the hour of thought, the facing of the question.

When he had crossed the head of the Vauxhall Bridge road, and traversed the rather dingy purlieus of Horseferry, he came out by the Lords' entrance to the Houses of Parliament. The Victoria Tower in all its marvellous modern beauty rose up into the sky, white and incredibly massive against the background of grey. The house was sitting, so he saw from the distant, drooping flag above; but it was many months now since he had ventured into the Upper Chamber. As he came along his heart suddenly began to beat more rapidly than usual, and his face flushed a little. A small brougham just set down the Archbishop of Canterbury as the duke arrived at the door—the man whom in the past he had known so well and liked so much, Lord Camborne, to whose daughter the duke had been engaged—Lord Camborne, older now, stooping a little, but no less dignified and serene. Time had not robbed the bishop and earl of any of his stateliness of port, and the Primate of All England was still one of the most striking figures of the day.

He turned and saw the duke. The two men had never met nor spoken since the day upon which the younger had told of his new convictions. The archbishop hesitated for a moment. His fine old face grew red, and then paled again; there was a momentary flicker of indecision about the firm, proud mouth. Then he held out his hand, with a smile, but a smile in which there was a great deal of sadness.

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"Ah, John!" he said, shaking his venerable head. "Ah, John! so we meet again after all these years. How are you? Happy, I hope?—God bless you, my dear fellow."

A pang, like a spear-thrust, traversed the young man's heart as he took that revered and trembling hand.

"I am well, your Grace," he said slowly, "and I'm happy."

"Thank God for it," returned the archbishop, "Who has preserved your Grace"—he put a special and sorrowful accent upon the form of address the younger man shared with him—"for His own purposes, and has given you *His* grace! as I believe and hope."

And then, something kindly and human coming into his face and voice, the ceremonial gone from both, he said: "Dear boy, years ago I never thought that we should meet like this—as duke and as archbishop. I hoped that you would have called me father! And since dear Hayle's death ... Well, I am a lonely old man now, John. My daughter has other interests. I am not long for this world. I spend the last of my years in doing what I can for England, according to the light within me. As you do also, John, I don't doubt it. Good-bye, good-bye—I am a little late as it is. Pray, as I pray, that we may all meet in Heaven."

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And with these last kindly words the old man went away, and the Duke of Paddington never saw him again, for in five months he was dead and the Church mourned a wise and courtly prelate.

The duke went on. Melancholy filled his mind. He never heard a voice now like that of the man he had just left. It brought back many memories of the past. He wasn't among the great of the world any more. The people who filled his house in Chelsea were clever and charming no doubt. But they weren't *his* people. He had departed from the land of his inheritance. He was no longer a prince and a ruler among rulers and princes. The waters of Babylon were not as those of Israel, and in his heart he wept.

... It was to be an afternoon of strain and stress. As he went up Parliament Street towards Trafalgar Square he met a long line of miserable sandwich men. Upon their wooden tabards he saw his wife's name "KING'S THEATRE—MISS MARY MARRIOTT'S HUNDREDTH NIGHT," and so forth. And as he turned into Pall Mall—for half unconsciously his feet were leading him to a club in St. James's Street to which he still belonged—he received another shock.

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A victoria drove rapidly down the street of clubs, and in it, lovely and incomparable in her young matronhood, sat the Marchioness of Dover, Constance Camborne that had been, now the supreme leader and arbitrix of Vanity Fair. She saw him, she recognised him, and he knew it. But she made no sign, not a muscle of her face relaxed as the carriage whirled by. Once more the duke felt very much alone.

* * * * *

He went into the club—it was the famous old Cocoa Tree—sat down and began to read the evening papers. He lay back upon the circular seat of padded crimson leather that surrounds the central column of the Tree itself. Few people were in the club this afternoon, and as he glanced upwards to where the chocolate-coloured column disappears through the high Georgian ceiling, a sense came to him that he was surrounded by the shades of those august personalities who had thronged this exclusive place of memories in the past—Lord Byron, Gibbon; farther back, Lord Alvanley, Beau Brummell, and the royal dukes of the Regency. Their pictures hung upon the walls—peers, statesmen, royalties, they all seemed crowding out of the frames, and to be pressing upon him now. Stately figures all and each, ghostly figures of men who had lived and died in many ways, well or ill, but all people who had *ruled*—men of his own caste and clan.

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He was overwrought and tired. His imagination, never a very insistent quality with him, was roused by the physical dejection of his nerves to an unusual activity. And in the back of his brain was the remembrances of recent meetings—the meeting with the Primate who might have been his father-in-law; the meeting with the radiant and high-bred young woman whose husband he himself might have been.

... A grave servant in the club's livery came up to him, with a pencilled memorandum upon a silver tray.

"This has just come through by telephone, your Grace," he said. "The telephone boy did not know that your Grace was in the house, or he would have called you. As it was the boy took down the message." This was the message:

"Hoping to see you Bradlaugh Hall, Bermondsey, to-night. Slap-up meeting arranged, and a few words from you will be much appreciated. To-night we shall bump if not much mistaken. Wot O for the glorious cause.

"SAM JONES, M.P."

The duke folded up the message and placed it in his pocket.

Yes! he was now little more than the figurehead, the complacent doll, whose jerky movements were animated and controlled by Labour Members of Parliament, captains of "hunger marchers" brigades and such-like "riff-raff"—no! of course "salt of the earth!"

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Struggling with many conflicting thoughts—old hopes and desires now suddenly and startlingly reawakened, strong convictions up and arming themselves in array against inherited predisposition, a tired and not happy brain, at war with itself and all its environment—he rose from his seat and passed out of the room through the huge mahogany doors. He walked by the tiny room where the hall porter sits, and mounted the few stairs which lead to the lobby in front of the doors of the dining-rooms. The electric "column printer" machines were clicking and ticking, while the long white rolls of paper, imprinted in faint purple with the news of the last hour, came pouring slowly out of the glass case, while a much-buttoned page boy was waiting to

cut up the slips, and paste them upon the green baize board under their respective headings.

The duke went up to one of the machines, and held up the running cascade of printed paper. As he did so, this was what he saw and read:

3.30. MR. ARTHUR BURNSIDE, THE BRILLIANT YOUNG BARRISTER, SOCIALIST M.P., AND A TRUSTEE OF THE DUKE OF PADDINGTON'S PROPERTY SHARING SCHEME, HAS BEEN RUN OVER BY A MOTOR OMNIBUS. THE INJURED GENTLEMAN WAS AT ONCE TAKEN TO THE HOUSE OF MR. JAMES FABIAN ROSE BEHIND THE ABBEY.

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LATER. MR. BURNSIDE IS SINKING FAST. SIR FREDERICK DAVIDSON GIVES NO HOPE. MR. ROSE AND ALL OTHER LEADERS OF SOCIALIST PARTY ARE AWAY IN MANCHESTER EXCEPT DUKE PADDINGTON, WHOSE WHEREABOUTS ARE UNCERTAIN.

The duke dropped the paper. The machine went on ticking and clicking, but he did not wish to read any more.

So Burnside was dying!—Burnside who had been the impulse, the ultimate force which had finally directed his own change of attitude towards life and its problems, his great renunciation.

Quite as in a dream, still without any vivid sense of the reality of things, the duke turned to the left, entered the lavatory, and began to wash his hands. He hardly knew what he was doing, but, suddenly, he heard his conscious brain asking him—"Is this symbolic and according to a terrible precedent? Of *what* are you washing your hands?"

Then, putting the thought away from him, as a man fends off some black horror of the sleepless hours of night by a huge effort of will he went out of the place, found his hat and stick and got into a cab, telling the driver to go to Westminster as if upon a matter of life and death!

* * * * *

Burnside lay quite pale and quiet in that very bedroom where the duke had once lain in pain and exhaustion—how many years ago it seemed now! how much further away than any mere measure of time as we know it by the calendar it really was! A discreet nurse in hospital uniform was there, sitting quietly by the bedside. A table was covered with bandages and bottles, there was a faint chemical fragrance in the air—iodoform perhaps—and a young doctor, left behind by the great ones who had departed, moved silently about the place.

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Burnside was conscious. He turned eyes in which the light and colour were fading towards the new arrival.

"Ah!" he said, in a voice which seemed to come from a great distance. "So there is some one after all! You opened the door to me in the past, duke. And it is strange that you have come here now, after all this time, to close it gently behind me again."

"My poor old fellow," the duke said. "It's heartbreaking to find you like this—you from whom we all hoped so much! But what ... I mean, I wish Rose and all the rest of them could be here."

"Never mind, duke, you're here. And Some One Else is coming soon."

The duke did not understand the words of the dying man. But he sat down beside the bed and held a hand that was ice-cold and the fingers of which twitched now and then. The duke felt, dimly, that there ought to be a clergyman here. In his own way he was a religious man. He went to church on Sundays and said "Our Father," and such variations of the prayer as suggested themselves to him, quite frequently.

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Of the constant Presence of the Supernatural or Supernormal in the life of the Catholic Church, the duke knew nothing at all. His spiritual life had never been more than an embryo; he was surrounded by people, in the present, many of whom were frankly contemptuous of Christianity, some of whom avowedly hated it, others who called Jesus the Great Socialist, but denied His Divinity. He had never discussed religious matters with his wife, except in the most casual and superficial way. Much as he loved her, certain as he was of her love for him, their lives were lived, to a certain extent, apart. Her Art, his work for Socialism, kept them busy in their own spheres—and her Art, also, had become a most powerful weapon of the socialistic crusade—and left them tired at the close of each crowded day. There was never time or opportunity for talk about religion—for confidences. The duke had known—had always had a sort of vague idea—that Burnside was what some people call "A High Churchman." He knew that his friend belonged to the Christian Social Union, was a friend of the Bishop of Birmingham, lived by a certain rule. But Burnside had never obtruded the Christian Social Union upon that larger and more militant, that *political* socialism with which the duke was chiefly connected. Burnside had always known that the time was not yet ripe for that. The duke had never realised at all the quietly growing force within the English Catholic Church.

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... He held the hand of the dying man, and a singular sense of companionship, identity of feeling came to him, as he did so. It seemed to be stronger even than his grief and sorrow, and much as he had always liked and appreciated Burnside, he now experienced the sensation of being *nearer* to him than ever before.

Burnside moved his head a little. "You can talk," he said. "Thank God, my head is quite clear, and I am in hardly any pain. I have several hours yet to live, the doctors tell me. Something will

happen to me in four or five hours, and I shall then pass away quite simply. Sir William, God bless him, didn't tell me any of the soothing lies that doctors have to tell people. He saw the case was hopeless, and he was good enough to be explicit!"

There was something so calm and certain in the barrister's voice, that the other man's nerves were calmed too. He saw the whole situation with that momentary certainty of intuition which comes to every one now and then, and which is a habit with a great soldier or doctor—a Lord Roberts or Sir William Gull.

"Yes, let's talk, then," he answered in a calm, even voice. "I need hardly tell you, old fellow, what this means to me, and what it means to the movement." [Pg 356]

"You're getting very tired of the movement, duke!" the thin voice went on.

The duke started; the nurse held a cup of some stimulant to the lips of the dying man. There was a silence for a minute.

"I don't quite understand you, Burnside."

"But I understand *you*, though I have never said so before. After all your splendid and wonderful renunciations, you are beginning to have doubts and qualms now. Tell the truth to a man who's dying!"

The duke bowed his head. At that moment of mute confession, he knew the deep remorse that cowards and traitors know—traitors and cowards for whom circumstances have been too strong, who are convinced of the cause they support, but have been, in action or in thought, disloyal to it.

Burnside spoke again.

"But don't be faint-hearted or discouraged," he said. "The truths of what we call Socialism are as true as they ever were. But only a few Socialists, as yet, have realised the only lines upon which we can attack the great problem. All of us have a wonderful ideal. Only a small minority of us have found out the way in which that ideal can be realised. And there is only one way...."

Suddenly Burnside stopped speaking. He raised himself a little upon his pillow, some colour came into his face, some light into his eyes. The front door bell of the house could be heard ringing down below. [Pg 357]

The young doctor withdrew to a side of the room, and sat down upon a chair, with a watchful, interested expression on his face. The nurse suddenly knelt down. Then the door of the bedroom opened, and a tall, clean-shaven man in a cassock and surplice came in, bearing two silver vessels in his hand. Instinctively the duke knelt also. Some One Else had indeed come into the room. And in the light of that Real Presence many things were made clear, the solution of all difficulties flowed like balm into the awe-struck heart of the young man who had surrendered great possessions.

God and Man, the Great Socialist, was *there*, among them, and a radiance not of this visible world, was seen by the spiritual vision of four souls.

* * * * *

It was evening as the duke walked home to Chelsea. The clergyman who had brought the Blessed Sacrament to Burnside walked with him. Father Carr had remained by the bedside till the quiet end—a peaceful, painless passing away. The duke had remained also, and his grief had become tempered by a strange sense of peace and rest, utterly unlike anything he had ever known before. It was his first experience of death. He had never seen a corpse before, and the strange waxen thing that lay upon the bed spoke to him—as the dead body must to all Christians—most eloquently of immortality. This shell was not Burnside at all. Burnside had gone, but he was more alive than ever before, alive in the happy place of waiting which we call Paradise. [Pg 358]

The duke had asked the priest—who, as it happened, had no other engagement—to come home and dine with him, and as they walked together by the river, Father Carr told him many things about the dead man—of a secret life of holiness and renunciation that few knew of, the simple story of a true Socialist and a very valiant soldier of Christ.

"He saw very far indeed," said Father Carr. "I wish that all Socialists could see as far. For, as Plato pointed out long ago, we shall never have perfect conditions in this life until character is perfected. Burnside knew that as well as an imaginary and revolutionary Socialism, there is also a *moral*, that is, a *Christian* Socialism. Christianity paints no Utopias, describes to us no *perfect* conditions to be introduced into this world. It teaches us, on the contrary, to seek perfection in another world; but it desires at the same time to help us to struggle against earthly care and want, so that the kingdom of God, and therewith the true kingdom of man, embracing as it does not only his spiritual but also his material life, may come upon earth and prosper."

"These aspects are new to me," said the duke. "I must hear more of this." [Pg 359]

"I can send you books," replied Mr. Carr, "and you might come to some of the meetings of the Christian Social Union also. You will find all your present doubts and difficulties solved if you examine our contentions. As you have just told me, you are as convinced as ever as to the truth of a moderate and well-ordered Socialism. But you see, little progress being made and you are uneasy in your environment. I am a convinced Socialist also, but I see the truth—which is simply

this. The nearer we all get to our Lord Jesus Christ, the nearer we get to Socialism. There is no other way."

It was late when Mr. Carr left the house in Chelsea, and the two men had talked long together. The duke sat in his study alone, waiting for his wife's return from the theatre—on matinée days she did not return home for dinner. He was filled with a strange excitement, new and high thoughts possessed him, and he wanted to share them with her.

At last he heard the sound of her key in the lock and the jingle of her hansom as it drove away. He went out into the hall to meet her. A small round table with her soup and chicken had been placed by the library fire, and as she ate he told her of Burnside's death, and with eager words poured out the ferment of thought within him.

"I don't know if you quite see all I mean yet, dear," he said, "and, of course, it's all crude and undigested with me as yet. But we must make more knowledge of it together." [Pg 360]

An unconscious note of pleading had come into his voice as he looked at her. She sat before him tired by the long day's work, but radiant in beauty and charm, and he saw so little of her now!—this, and the most priceless boon of all, it seemed that he must surrender for the good of the Cause. Then, suddenly, she left her seat and came to where he was, putting her arms round his neck and kissing him.

"Darling!" she said. "*Together*, that is the word. We have not been enough together of late years. But I had to do my work for the Cause just as you had. But now we shall be more together and happier than ever before. In a few weeks I shall leave the stage for ever. I shall have another work to do."

"You mean, darling——"

"I also have something to tell you"; and pressing her warm cheek to his, with sweet faltering accents, she told him.

He held her very close. The tears were in his eyes.

"Oh, my love!" he whispered. "At last!"

THE END

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