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THE DRUNKARD

BY

GUY THORNE

(Cyril Arthur Edward Ranger Gull)

THE DRUNKARD

BY

GUY THORNE

AUTHOR OF "WHEN IT WAS DARK," "FIRST IT WAS ORDAINED,"
"MADE IN HIS IMAGE," ETC., ETC.

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1912

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DEDICATION

TO LOUIS TRACY, ESQUIRE

My Dear Louis:

It is more than a year ago now that I asked you to accept the dedication of this story. It was on an evening when I was staying with you at your Yorkshire house and we had just come in from shooting.

But I discussed the tale with you long before that. It was either—as well as I can remember—at my place in the Isle of Wight, or when we were all together in the Italian Alps. I like to think that it was at that time I first asked your opinion and advice about this book upon which I have laboured so long.

One night comes back to me very vividly—yes, that surely was the night. Dinner was over. We were sitting in front of the brilliantly lit hotel with coffee and cigarettes. You had met all my kind Italian friends. Our wives were sitting together at one little table with Signora Maerdi and Madame Riva Monico—to whom be greeting! My father was at ours, and happy as a boy for all his white beard and skull-cap of black velvet.

Your son, Dick, was dancing with the Italian girls in the bright salon behind us, and the piano music tinkled out into the hot night. The Alpine woods of ilex and pine rose up in the moonlight to where the snow-capped mountains of St. Gothard hung glistening silver-green.

I ask you to take this book as a memorial of a happy, uninterrupted and dignified friendship, not less valuable and gracious because your wife and mine are friends also.

Nil ego contulerim jucundo sanus amico!

Yours ever sincerely,

GUY THORNE.

FOREWORD

The sixth chapter in the third book of this story can hardly be called fiction. The notes upon

which it is founded were placed in my possession by a brilliant man of letters some short time before he died. Serious students of the psychology of the Inebriate may use the document certain that it is genuine.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to the illuminating study in heredity of Dr. Archdall Reed, M.B., C.M., F.R.S.E. His book "Alcoholism" ought to be read by every temperance reformer in Europe and America.

"The Drink Problem," a book published by Messrs. Methuen and written in concert by the greatest experts on the subject of Inebriety, has been most helpful. I have not needed technical help to make my story, but I have found that it gives ample corroboration of protracted investigation and study.

My thanks are due to Mr. John Theodore Tussaud for assistance in the writing of chapter four, book three.

Lastly, I should be ungrateful indeed, if I did not put down my sincere thanks to my secretary Miss Ethel Paczensky for all she has done for me during the making of this tale. The mere careful typewriting, revision and arrangement of a long story which is to be published in America and Europe, requires considerable skill. The fact that the loyal help and sympathy of a young and acute mind have been so devotedly at my service, merits more thanks and acknowledgment than can be easily conveyed in a foreword.

G. T.

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PROLOGUE

PART I

A BOOK OF POEMS ARRIVES FOR DR. MORTON SIMS

"How many bards gild the lapses of time
A few of them have ever been the food
Of my delighted fancy."

—*Keats.*

The rain came down through the London fog like ribands of lead as the butler entered the library with tea, and pulling the heavy curtains shut out the picture of the sombre winter's afternoon.

The man poked the fire into a blaze, switched on the electric lights, and putting a late edition of the *Westminster Gazette* upon the table, left the room.

For five minutes the library remained empty. The fire crackled and threw a glancing light upon the green and gold of the book shelves or sent changing expressions over the faces of the portraits. The ghostly blue flame which burnt under a brass kettle on the tea table sang like a mosquito, and from the square outside came the patter of rain, the drone of passing taxi-cabs, and the occasional beat of horses' hoofs which made an odd flute-like noise upon the wet wood pavement.

Then the door opened and Dr. Morton Sims, the leading authority in England upon Inebriety, entered his study.

The doctor was a slim man of medium height. His moustache and pointed beard were grey and the hair was thinning upon his high forehead. His movements were quick and alert without suggesting nervousness or hurry, and a steady flame burned in brown eyes which were the most remarkable feature of his face.

The doctor drew up a chair to the fire and made himself a cup of weak tea, pouring a little lime-juice into it instead of milk. As he sipped he gazed into the pink and amethyst heart of the fire. His eyes were abstracted—turned inwards upon himself so to speak—and the constriction of thought drew grey threads across his brow.

After about ten minutes, and when he had finished his single cup of tea, Dr. Morton Sims opened the evening paper and glanced rapidly up and down the broad, well-printed columns.

His eye fell upon a small paragraph at the bottom of the second news-sheet which ran thus:—

> "Hancock, the Hackney murderer, is to be executed to-morrow morning in The North London Prison at eight o'clock. It is understood that he has refused the ministrations of the Prison Chaplain and seems indifferent to his fate."

The paper dropped from the doctor's hands and he sighed. The paragraph might or might not be accurate—that remained to be seen—but it suggested a curious train of thought to his mind. The man who was to be hanged in a few hours had committed a murder marked by every circumstance of callousness and cunning. The facts were so sinister and cold that the horrible case had excited no sympathy whatever. Even the silly faddists who generally make fools of themselves on such an occasion in England had organised no petition for reprieve.

Morton Sims was one of those rare souls whose charity of mind, as well as of action, was great. He always tried to take the other side, to combat and resist the verdict passed by the world upon the unhappy and discredited.

But in the case of this murderer even he could have had no sympathy, if he had not known and understood something about the man which no one in the country understood, and only a few people would have been capable of realising if they had been enlightened.

It was his life-work to understand why deeds like this were done.

A clock upon the high mantel of polished oak struck five.

The doctor rose from his chair and stretched himself, and as he did this the wrinkles faded from his forehead, while his eyes ceased to be clouded by abstraction.

Morton Sims, in common with many successful men, had entire control over his own mind. He perfectly understood the structure and the working of the machine that secretes thought. In his mental context correct muscular co-ordination, with due action of the reflexes, enabled him to put aside a subject with the precision of a man closing a cupboard door.

His mind was divided into thought-tight compartments.

It was so now. He wished to think of the murderer in North London Prison no more at the moment, and immediately the subject passed away from him.

At that moment the butler re-entered with some letters and a small parcel upon a tray.

"The five o'clock post, sir," he said, putting the letters down upon the table.

"Oh, very well, Proctor," the doctor answered. "Is everything arranged for Miss Sims and Mrs. Daly?"

"Yes, sir. Fires are lit in both the bedrooms, and dinner is for half-past six. The boat train from Liverpool gets in to Euston at a quarter to. The brougham will be at the station in good time. They will have a cold journey I expect, sir."

"No, I don't think so, Proctor. The Liverpool boat-trains are most comfortable and they will have had tea. Very well, then."

The butler went away. Morton Sims looked at the clock. It was ten minutes past five. His sister and her friend, who had arrived at Liverpool from New York a few hours ago would not arrive in London before six.

He looked at the four or five letters on the tray but did not open any of them. The label upon the parcel bore handwriting that he knew. He cut the string and opened that, taking from it a book bound in light green and a letter.

Both were from his great friend Bishop Moultrie, late of Simla and now rector of Great Petherwick in Norfolk, Canon of Norwich, and a sort of unofficial second suffragan in that enormous diocese.

> "My dear John," ran the letter, "Here is the book that I was telling you of at the Athenæum last week. You may keep this copy, and I have put your name in it. The author, Gilbert Lothian, lives near me in Norfolk. I know him a little and he has presented me with another copy himself.
>
> You won't agree with some of the thoughts, one or two of the poems you may even dislike. But on the whole you will be as pleased and interested as I am and you will recognise a genuine new inspiration—such a phenomenon now-a-days. Such verse must leave every reader with a quickened sense of the beauty and compass of human feeling, to say nothing of its special appeal to Xn thinkers. Some of it is like George Herbert made musical. Lothian is Crashaw born again, but born greater—sometimes a Crashaw who has been listening to some one playing Chopin!
>
> But read for yourself.
>
> Give my regards to your sister when she returns. I hear from many sources of the great mark her speeches have made at the American Congress and I am anxiously hoping to meet Mrs. Daly during her stay over here. She must be a splendid woman!
>
> Helena sends all kind remembrances and hopes to see you here soon.
>
> Yours affectionately,
>
> W. D. Moultrie."

Three quarters of an hour were at his disposal. Morton Sims took up the book, which bore the title "SURGIT AMARI" upon the cover, and began to read.

Like many other members of his profession he was something of a man of letters. For him the life-long pursuit of science had been humanised and sweetened by art. Ever since his days at Harrow with his friend, the Bishop, he had loved books.

He read very slowly the longish opening poem only, applying delicate critical tests to every word; analytic and scientific still in the temper of his mind, and distrusting the mere sensuous impression of a first glance.

This new man, this Gilbert Lothian, would be great. He would make his way by charm, the charm of voice, of jewel-like language, above all by the intellectual charm of new, moving, luminous ideas.

At three minutes to six the doctor closed the book and waited. Almost as the clock struck the hour, he heard his motor-brougham stop outside the house, and hurrying out into the hall had opened the door before the butler could reach it.

Two tall women in furs came into the hall.

The brother and sister kissed each other quietly, but their embrace was a long one and there was something that vibrated deep down in the voices of their greeting. Then Miss Morton Sims turned to the other lady. "Forgive me, Julia," she said, in her clear bell-like voice—in America they had said that her voice "tolled upon the ear"—"But I haven't seen him for five months. John, here is Julia Daly at last!"

The doctor took his guest's hand. His face was bright and eager as he looked at the American woman. She was tall, dressed with a kind of sumptuous good taste, and the face under its masses of grey hair shone with a Minerva-like wisdom and serenity.

"Welcome," the doctor said simply. "We have been friends so long, we have corresponded so often, it is a great joy to me to meet you at last!"

The three people entered the library for a moment, exchanging the happy commonplaces of greeting, and then the two women went up to their rooms.

"Dinner at half past six," the doctor called after them. "I knew you'd want it. We can have a long talk then. At eight I have to go out upon an important errand."

He stood in front of the library fire, thinking about the new arrivals and smoking a cigarette.

His sister Edith had always lived with him, had shared his hopes, his theories and his work. He was the great scientist slowly getting deep down, discovering the laws which govern the vital question of Alcoholism. She was the popular voice, one of the famous women leaders of the Temperance movement, the most lucid, the least emotional of them all. Her name was familiar to every one in England. Her brother gave her the weapons with which she fought. His theories upon Temperance Reform were quite opposed to the majority of those held by earnest workers in the same field, but he and his sister were beginning to form a strong party of influential people who thought with them. Mrs. Daly was, in America, very much what Edith Morton Sims was in Great Britain—perhaps even more widely known. Apart from her propaganda she was one of the few great women orators living, and in her case also, inspiration came from the English doctor, while she was making his beliefs and schemes widely known in the United States.

As he waited in the library, the doctor thought that probably no man had ever had such noble helpers as these two women to whom such great gifts had been given. His heart was very full of love for his sister that night, of gratitude and admiration for the stately lady who had come to be his guest and whom he now met in the flesh for the first time.

For the first part of dinner the ladies were very full of their recent campaign in America.

There was an infinity of news to tell, experiences and impressions must be recorded, progress reported. The eager sparkling talk of the two women was delightful to the doctor, and he was especially pleased with the conversation of Mrs. Daly. Every word she spoke fell with the right ring and chimed, he seemed to have known her for years—as indeed he had done, through the medium of her letters.

Conversation, which with people like these is a sort of music, resembles the progress of harmonics in this also—that a lull arrives with mathematical incidence when a certain stage is reached in the progress of a theme.

It happened so now, at a certain stage of dinner. There was much more to be said, but all three people had reached a momentary pause.

The butler came into the room just then, with a letter. "This has just come by messenger from North London Prison, sir," he said, unable to repress a faint gleam of curiosity in his eyes.

With a gesture of apology, the doctor opened the envelope. "Very well," he said, in a moment or two. "I need not write an answer. But go to the library, Proctor, and ring up the North London Prison. Say Doctor Morton Sims' thanks and he will be there punctually at half past eight."

The servant withdrew and both the ladies looked inquiringly at the doctor.

"It is a dreadful thing," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "but I may as well tell you. It must go no further though. A wretched man is to be executed to-morrow and I have to go and see him."

Edith shuddered.

"How frightful," she said, growing rather pale; "but why, John? How does it concern you? Are you forced to go?"

He nodded. "I must go," he said, "though it is the most painful thing I have ever had to do. It is Hancock, the Hackney murderer."

Two startled faces were turned to him now, and a new atmosphere suddenly seemed to have come into the warm luxurious room, something that was cold, something that had entered from outside.

"You don't know," he went on. "Of course you have been out of England for some months. Well, it is this. Hancock is a youngish man of five and twenty. He was a chemist at Hackney, and of quite exceptional intelligence. He was at one time an assistant at Williamsons' in Oxford Street, where some of my prescriptions are made up and where I buy drugs for experimental purposes. I took rather an interest in him several years ago. He passed all his examinations with credit and became engaged to a really charming young woman, who was employed in a big ladies' shop in Regent Street. He wanted to set up in business for himself, very naturally, and I helped him with a money loan. He married the girl, bought a business at Hackney, and became prosperous enough in a moderate sort of way. He paid me back the hundred pounds I lent him and from time to time I heard that things were going on very well. He was respected in the district, and his wife especially was liked. She was a good and religious woman and did a lot of work for a local church. They appeared to be a most devoted couple."

The doctor stopped in his story and glanced at the set faces turned towards him. He poured some water into a tumbler and drank it.

"Oh, it's a hideous story," he said, with some emotion and marked distaste in his voice. "I won't go into the details. Hancock poisoned his wife with the most calculating and wicked cunning. He had become enamoured of a girl in the neighbourhood and he wanted to get rid of his wife in order to marry her. His wife adored him. She had been a perfect wife to him, but it made no difference. The thing was discovered, as such things nearly always are, he was condemned to death and will be hanged to-morrow morning at breakfast time."

"And you are going to see him *to-night*, John?"

"Yes. It is my duty. I owe it to my work, and to the wretched man too. I was present at the trial. From the first I realised that there must have been some definite toxic influence at work on the man's mind to change him from an intelligent and well-meaning member of society into a ghastly monster of crime. I was quite right. It was alcohol. He had been secretly drinking for years, though, as strong-minded and cunning inebriates do, he had managed to preserve appearances. As you know, Edith, the Home Secretary is a friend of mine and interested in our work. Hancock has expressed a wish to see me, to give me some definite information about himself which will be of great use in my researches into the psychology of alcoholism. With me, the Home Secretary realises the value of such an opportunity, and as it is the convict's earnest wish, I am given the fullest facilities for to-night. Of course the matter is one of absolute privacy. There would be an outcry among the sentimental section of the public if it were known. But it is my clear duty to go."

There was a dead silence in the room. Mrs. Daly played uneasily with her napkin ring. Suddenly it escaped her nervous fingers and rolled up against a tumbler with a loud ringing sound. She started and seemed to awake from a bitter dream.

"Again!" she said in a low voice that throbbed with pain. "At all hours, in all places, we meet it! The scourge of humanity, the Fiend Alcohol! The curse of the world!—how long, how long?"

PART II

THE MURDERER

"Ma femme est morte, je suis libre!
  Je puis donc boire tout mon soûl.
Lorsque je rentrais sans un sou,
  Ses cris me déchiraient la fibre."

—*Baudelaire.*

The rain had ceased but the night was bitter cold, as Dr. Morton Sims' motor went from his house in Russell Square towards the North London Prison.

A pall of fog hung a few hundred feet above London. The brilliant artificial lights of the streets glowed with a hard and rather ghastly radiance. As the car rolled down this and that roaring thoroughfare, the people in it seemed to Morton Sims to be walking like marionettes. The driver in front moved mechanically like a clockwork puppet, the town seemed fantastic and unreal to-night.

A heavy depression weighed upon the doctor's senses. His heart beat slowly. Some other artery within him was throbbing like a funeral drum.

It had come upon him suddenly as he left the house. He had never, in all his life, known anything like it before. Perhaps the mournful words of the American woman had been the cause. Her deep contralto voice tolled in his ears still. Some white cell in the brain was affected, the nerves of his body were in revolt. The depression grew deeper and deeper. A nameless malady of the soul was upon him, he had a sick horror of his task. The hands in his fur gloves grew wet and there was a salt taste in his mouth.

The car left ways that were familiar. Presently it turned into a street of long houses. The street rose steeply before, and was outlined by a long, double row of gas-lamps, stretching away to a point. It was quite silent, and the note of the car's engine sank a full tone as the ascent began.

Through the window in front, and to the left of the chauffeur, the doctor could see the lamps running past him, and suddenly he became aware of a vast blackness, darker than the houses, deeper than the sky, coming to meet him. Incredibly huge and sinister, a precipice, a mountain of stone, a nightmare castle whose grim towers were lost in night, closed the long road and barred all progress onward.

It was the North London Prison, hideous by day, frightful by night, the frontier citadel of a land of Death and gloom and shadows.

The doctor left his car and told the man to return in an hour and wait for him.

He stood before a high arched gateway. In this gateway was a door studded with sexagonal bosses of iron. Above the door was a gas-lamp. Hanging to the side of this door was an iron rod terminating in a handle of brass. This was the bell.

A sombre silence hung over everything. The roar of London seemed like a sound heard in a vision. A thin night wind sighed like a ghost in the doctor's ear as he stood before the ultimate reality of life, a reality surpassing the reality of dreams.

He stretched out his arm and pulled the bell.

The smooth and sudden noise of oiled steel bars sliding in their grooves was heard, and then a gentle "thud" as they came to rest. A small wicket door in the great ones opened. A huge sombre figure filled it and there was a little musical jingle of keys.

The visitor's voice was muffled as he spoke. In his own ears it sounded strange.

"I am Dr. Morton Sims," he said. "I have a special permit from the Home Secretary for an interview with the convict Hancock."

The figure moved aside. The doctor stepped in through the narrow doorway. There was a sharp click, a jingle of keys, the thud of the steel bars as they went home and a final snap, three times repeated—snap—snap—snap.

A huge, bull-necked man in a dark uniform and a peaked cap, stood close to the doctor—strangely close, he thought with a vague feeling of discomfort. From an open doorway set in a stone wall, orange-coloured light was pouring from a lit interior. Framed in the light were two other dark figures in uniform.

Morton Sims stood immediately under the gate tower of the prison. A lamp hung from the high groined roof. Beyond was another iron-studded door, and on either side of this entrance hall were lit windows.

"You are expected, sir," said the giant with the keys. "Step this way if you please."

Sims followed the janitor into a bare room, brilliantly illuminated by gas. At the end near the door a fire of coke and coal was glowing. A couple of warders, youngish military-looking men, with bristling moustaches, were sitting on wooden chairs by the fire and reading papers. They rose and saluted as the doctor came in.

At the other end of the room, an elderly man, clean shaved save for short side whiskers which were turning grey, was sitting at a table on which were writing materials and some books which looked like ledgers.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, deferentially, as Doctor Sims was taken up to him. "You have your letter I suppose?"

Sims handed it to him, and pulling on a pair of spectacles the man read it carefully. "I shall have to keep this, sir," he said, putting it under a paper-weight. "My orders are to send you to the Medical Officer at once. He will take you to the condemned cell and do all that is necessary. The Governor sends his compliments and if you should wish to see him after your interview he will be at your service."

"I don't think I shall want to trouble Colonel Wilde, thank you," said the doctor.

"Very good, sir. Of course you can change your mind if you wish, afterwards. But the Governor's time is certainly very much taken up. It always is on the night before an execution. Jones, take this gentleman to the Medical Officer."

Again the cold air, as Morton Sims left the room with one of the warders. Again the sound of sliding bars and jingling keys, the soft closing of heavy doors. Then a bare, whitewashed hall, with a long counter like that of a cloak-room at a railway station, a weighing machine, gaunt anthropometrical instruments standing against the walls, and iron doors on every side—all seen under the dim light of gas-jets half turned down.

"The reception room, sir," said the warder, in a quiet voice, unlocking one of the doors, and showing a long corridor, much better lighted, stretching away for a considerable distance. The man stepped through with the noiseless footfall of a cat. The doctor followed him, and as he did so his boots echoed upon the stone floor. The noise was startling in this place of silence, and for the first time Sims realised that his guide was wearing shoes soled with felt.

They went down the corridor, the warder's feet making a soft padding sound, the steel chain that hung in a loop from his belt of black leather shining in the gas light. Almost at the end of the passage they came to a door—an ordinary varnished door with a brass handle—at which the man rapped.

"Come in," cried a voice.

The warder held the door open. "The gentleman to see Hancock, sir," he said.

The chief prison doctor, a youngish-looking, clean-shaved man, rose from his chair. "Wait in the passage till I call you," he said. "How-do-you-do, Dr. Morton Sims. We had your telephone message some time ago. You are very punctual! Do sit down for a minute."

Sims sank into an armchair, with a little involuntary sigh of relief. The room in which he found himself was comfortable and ordinary. A carpet was on the floor, a bright fire burned upon the hearth, there was a leather-covered writing table with books and a stethoscope upon it. The place was normal.

"My name is Marriott, of 'Barts'," said the medical officer. "Do take off your coat, sir, that fur must be frightfully hot in here and you won't need it until you leave the prison again."

"Thank you, I will," Sims answered, and already his voice had regained its usual calmness, his eyes their steady glow. Anticipation was over, the deep depression was passing away. There was work to be done and his nerves responded to the call upon them. "There is no hitch, I suppose?"

"None whatever. Hancock is waiting for you, and anxious to see you."

"It will be very painful," Sims answered in a thoughtful voice, looking at the fire. "I knew the man in his younger days, poor, wretched creature. Is he resigned?"

"I think so. We've done all we could for him; we always do. As far as I can judge, and I have been present at nine executions, he will die quite calmly. 'I shall be glad when it's over,' he said to me this morning."

"And his physical condition?"

"Just beginning to improve. If I had him here for six months under the second class regulations—I should not certify him for hard labour—I could turn him out in fair average health. He's a confirmed alcoholic subject, of course. It's been a case of ammonium bromide and milk diet ever since his condemnation. For the first two days I feared delirium tremens from the shock. But we tided over that. He'll be able to talk to you all right, sir. He's extremely intelligent, and I should say that the interview should prove of great value."

"He has absolutely refused to see the Chaplain? I read so in to-night's paper."

"Yes. Some of them do you know. The religious sense isn't developed at all in him. It will be all the easier for him to-morrow."

"How so?"

"So many of them become religious on the edge of the drop simply out of funk—nervous collapse and a sort of clutching at a chance in the next world. They often struggle and call out when they're being pinioned. It's impossible to give them any sort of anæsthetic."

"Is that done then? I didn't know."

"It's not talked about, of course, sir. It's quite unofficial and it's not generally known. But we nearly always give them something if it's possible, and then they know nothing of what's happening."

Sims nodded. "The best way," he said sadly, "the lethal chamber would be better still."

There was a momentary silence between the two men. The prison doctor felt instinctively that his distinguished visitor shrank from the ordeal before him and was bracing himself to go through with it. He was unwilling to interrupt such a famous member of his profession. It was an event to meet him, a thing which he would always remember.

Suddenly Sims rose from his chair. "Now, then," he said with a rather wan smile, "take me to the poor fellow."

Dr. Marriott opened the door and made a sign to the waiting warder.

Together the three men went to the end of the passage.

Another door was unlocked and they found themselves in a low stone hall, with a roof of heavily barred ground glass.

There was a door on each side of the place.

"That's the execution room," said Dr. Marriott in a whisper, pointing to one of the doors. "The other's the condemned cell. It's only about ten steps from one to the other. The convict, of course, never knows that. But from the time he leaves his cell to the moment of death is rarely more than forty-five seconds."

The voice of the prison doctor, though very low in key, was not subdued by any note of awe. The machinery of Death had no terrors for him. He spoke in a matter-of-fact way, with an unconscious note of the showman. The curator of a museum might have shown his treasures thus to an intelligent observer. For a second of time—so strange are the operations of the memory cells—another and far distant scene grew vivid in the mind of Morton Sims.

Once more he was paying his first visit to Rome, and had been driven from his hotel upon the Pincio to the nine o'clock Mass at St. Peter's. A suave guide had accompanied him, and among the curious crowd that thronged the rails, had told in a complacent whisper of this or that Monsignore who said or served the Mass.

Dr. Marriott went to the door opposite to the one he had pointed out as the death-chamber.

He moved aside a hanging disc of metal on a level with his eyes, and peered through a glass-covered spy-hole into the condemned cell.

After a scrutiny of some seconds, he slid the disc into its place and rapped softly upon the door. Almost immediately it was opened a foot or so, silently, as the door of a sick-room is opened by one who watches within. There was a whispered confabulation, and a warder came out.

"This gentleman," said the Medical Officer, "as you have already been informed by the Governor, is to have an interview with the convict absolutely alone. You, and the man with you, are to sit just outside the cell and to keep it under continual observation through the glass. If you think it necessary you are to enter the cell at once. And at the least gesture of this gentleman you will do so too. But otherwise, Dr. Morton Sims is to be left alone with the prisoner for an hour. You quite understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"You anticipate no trouble?—how is he?"

"Quiet as a lamb, sir. There's no fear of any trouble with him. He's cheerful and he's been talking a lot about himself—about his violin playing mostly, and a week he had in Paris. His hands are twitching a bit, but less than usual with them."

"Very well. Jones will remain here and will fetch me at once if I am wanted. Now take Dr. Morton Sims in."

The door was opened. A gust of hot air came from within as Morton Sims hesitated for a moment upon the threshold.

The warm air, indeed, was upon his face, but once again the chill was at his heart. Lean and icy fingers seemed to grope about it.

At the edge of what abysmal precipice, and the end of what sombre perspective of Fate was he standing?

From youth upwards he had travelled the goodly highways of life. He had walked in the clear

light, the four winds of heaven had blown upon him. Sunshine and Tempest, Dawn and Dusk, fair and foul weather had been his portion in common with the rest of the wayfaring world.

But now he had strayed from out the bright and strenuous paths of men. The brave high-road was far, far away. He had entered a strange and unfamiliar lane. The darkness had deepened. He had come into a marsh of miasmic mist lit up by pale fires that were not of heaven and where dreadful presences thronged the purple gloom.

This was the end of all things. A life of shame closed here—through that door where a living corpse was waiting for him "pent up in murderers' hole."

He felt a kindly and deprecating hand upon his arm.

"You will find it quite ordinary, really, sir. You needn't hesitate in the very least"—thus the consoling voice of Marriott.

Morton Sims walked into the cell.

Another warder who had been sitting there glided out. The door was closed. The doctor found himself heartily shaking hands with someone whom he did not seem to know.

And here again, as he was to remember exactly two years afterwards, under circumstances of supreme mental anguish and with a sick recognition of past experience, his sensation was without precedent.

Some one, was it not rather *something*? was shaking him warmly by the hand. A strained voice was greeting him. Yet he felt as if he were sawing at the arm of a great doll, not a live thing in which blood still circulated and systole and diastole still kept the soul co-ordinate and co-incident.

Then that also went. The precipitate of long control was dropped into the clouded vessel of thought and it cleared again. The fantastic imaginings, the natural horror of a kind and sensitive man at being where he was, passed away.

The keen scientist stood in the cell now, alert to perform the duty for which he was there.

The room was of a fair size. In one corner was a low bed, with a blanket, sheet and pillow.

In the centre, a deal table stood. A wooden chair, from which the convict had just risen, stood by the table, and upon it were a Bible, some writing materials, and a novel—bound in the dark-green of the prison library—by "Enid and Herbert Toftrees."

Hancock wore a drab prison suit, which was grotesquely ill-fitting. He was of medium height, and about twenty-five years of age. He was fat, with a broad-shouldered corpulence which would have been less noticeable in a man who was some inches taller. His face was ordinarily clean-shaven, but there was now a disfiguring stubble upon it, a three weeks' growth which even the scissors of the prison-barber had not been allowed to correct and which gave him a sordid and disgusting aspect. The face was fattish, but even the bristling hairs, which squirted out all over the lower part, could not quite disguise a curious suggestion of contour about it. It should have been a pure oval, one would have thought, and in the gas-light, as the head moved, it almost seemed to have that for fugitive instants. It was a contour veiled by a dreadful something that was, but ought not to have been there.

The eyes were grey and had a certain capability of expression. It was now enigmatic and veiled.

The mouth was by far the most real and significant feature of the face. In all faces, mouths generally are. The murderer's mouth was small. It was clearly and definitely cut, with an undefinable hint of breeding in it which nothing else about the man seemed to warrant. But despite the approach to beauty which, in another face, it might have had, slyness and egotism lurked in every curve.

. . . "So that's how it first began, Doctor. First one with one, then one with another. You know!"

The conversation was in full swing now.

The doll had come to life—or it was not quite a doll yet and some of the life that was ebbing from it still remained.

The voice was low, confidential, horribly "just between you and me." But it was a pleased voice also, full of an eager and voluble satisfaction,—the last chance of toxic insanity to explain itself!

The lurid swan-song of a conceited and poisoned man.

. . . "Business was going well. There seemed no prospect of a child just then, so Mary got in with Church work at St. Philip's. That brought a lot more customers to the shop too. Fancy soaps, scents and toilette articles and all that. Dr. Mitchell of Hackney, was a church-warden at St.

Philip's and in time all his prescriptions came to me. No one had a better chance than I did. And Mary was that good to me." . . .

Two facile, miserable tears rolled from the man's glazing eyes. He wiped them away with the back of his hand.

"You can't think, sir, being a bachelor. Anything I'd a mind to fancy! Sweet-breads she could cook a treat, and Burgundy we used to 'ave—California wine, 'Big Bush' brand in flagons at two and eight. And never before half-past seven. Late dinner you might have called it, while my assistant was in the shop. And after that I'd play to her on the violin. Nothing common, good music—'Orer pro Nobis' and 'Rousoh's Dream.' You never heard me play did you? I was in the orchestra of the Hackney Choral Society. I remember one day . . ."

"And then?" the Doctor said, gently.

He had already gathered something, but not all that he had come to gather. The minutes were hurrying by.

The man looked up at the doctor with a sudden glance, almost of hatred. For a single instant the abnormal egoism of the criminal, swelled out upon the face and turned it into the mask of a devil.

Dr. Morton Sims spoke in a sharp, urgent voice.

"Why did you ask me to come here, Hancock?" he said. "You know that I am glad to be here, if I can be of any use to you. But you don't seem to want the sort of sympathetic help that the chaplain here could give you far better than I can. What do you want to say to me? Have you really anything to say? If you have, be a man and say it!"

There was a brief but horrible interlude.

"Well, you are cruel, doctor, not 'arf!—and me with only an hour or two to live,"—the man said with a cringing and sinister grin.

The doctor frowned and looked at the man steadily. Then he asked a sudden question.

"Who were your father and mother?" he said.

The convict looked at the doctor with startled eyes.

"Who told you?" he asked. "I thought nobody knew!"

"Answer my question, Hancock. Only a few minutes remain."

"Will it be of use, sir?"

"Of use?"

"In your work—It was so that I could leave a warning to others, that I wanted to see you."

"Of great use, if you will tell me."

"Well, Doctor, I never thought to tell any one. It's always been a sore point with me, but I wasn't born legitimate! I tried hard to make up for it, and I did so too! No one was more respectable than I was in Hackney, until the drink came along and took me."

"Yes? Yes?"—The hunter was on the trail now, Heredity? Reversion? At last the game was flushed!—"Yes, tell me!"

"My father was a gentleman, Doctor. That's where I got my refined tastes. And that's where I got my love of drink—damn him! God Almighty curse him for the blood he gave me!"

"Yes? Yes?"

"My father was old Mr. Lothian, the solicitor of Grey's Inn Square. He was a well-known gentleman. My mother was his housekeeper, Eliza Hancock. My father was a widower when my mother went into his service. He had another son, at one of the big schools for gentlemen. That was his son by his real wife—Gilbert he was called, and what money was left went to him. My father was a drunkard. He never was sober—what you might rightly call sober—for years, I've heard . . . Mother died soon after Mr. Lothian did. She left a hundred pounds with my Aunt, to bring me up and educate me. Aunt Ellen—but I'm a gentleman's son, Doctor!—drunken old swine he was too! What about my blood now? Wasn't my veins swollen with drink from the first? Christ! *you* ought to know—you with your job to know—*Now* are you happy? I'm not a *love* child, I'm a *drink* child, that's what I am! Son of old Mr. Lothian, the gentleman-drunkard, brother of his son who's a gentleman somewhere, I don't doubt! P'r'aps 'e mops it up 'imself!—shouldn't wonder, this—brother of mine!"

The man's voice had risen into a hoarse scream. "Have you got what you came to get?" he yelled. His eyes blazed, his mouth writhed.

There was a crash as the deal table was overturned, and he leapt at the doctor.

In a second the room was full of people. Dark figures held down something that yelled and struggled on the truckle bed.

It was done with wonderful deftness, quickness and experience. . . . Morton Sims stood outside the closed door of the condemned cell. A muffled noise reached him from within, the prison doctor was standing by him and looking anxiously into his face.

—"I can't tell you how sorry I am, Dr. Morton Sims. I really can't say enough. I had no idea that the latent toxic influence was so strong. . . ."

On the other side of the little glass-roofed hall the door was open. Another cell was shown, brilliantly lit. Two men, in their shirt-sleeves, were bending over a square, black aperture in the wooden floor. Some carpenters' tools were lying about.

An insignificant looking little man, with a fair moustache, was standing in the doorway.

"That'll be quite satisfactory, thank you," he was saying, "with just a drop of oil on the lever. And whatever you do, don't forget my chalk to mark where he's to stand."

From behind the closed door of the condemned cell a strangulated, muffled noise could still be heard.

"Not now!" said Dr. Marriott, as the executioner came up to him—"In half an hour. Now Dr. Morton Sims, please come away to my room. This must have been most distressing. I feel so much that it is my fault." . . .

The two men stood at the Prison gate, Sims was shaking hands with the younger doctor. "Thank you very much indeed," he was saying. "How could you possibly have helped it?—You'll take steps —?"

"I'm going back to the cell now. It's incipient delirium tremens of course—after all this time too! I shall inject hyoscene and he will know nothing more at all. He will be practically carried to the shed—Good-night! *Good*-night, sir. I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you again."

The luxurious car rolled away from the Citadel of Death and Shadows—down the hill into London and into Life.

The man within it was thinking deeply, sorting out and tabulating his impressions, sifting the irrelevant from what was of value, and making a précis of what he had gained.

There were a dozen minor notes to be made in his book when he reached home. The changing quality of the man's voice, the ebb and flow of uncontrolled emotion, the latent fear—"I must be present at the post mortem to-morrow," he said to himself as a new idea struck him. "There should be much to be learnt from an examination of the Peripheral Nerves. And the brain too—there will be interesting indications in the cerebellum, and the association fibres." . . .

The carriage swung again into the familiar parts of town. As he looked out of the windows at the lights and movement, Morton Sims forgot the purely scientific side of thought. The kindly human side of him reasserted itself.

How infinitely sad it was! How deep the underlying horror of this sordid life-tragedy at the close of which he had been assisting!

Who should say, who could define, the true responsibility of the man they were killing up there on the North London Hill?

Predisposition to Alcohol, Reversion, Heredity!—was not the drunken old solicitor, long since dust, the true murderer of the gentle-mannered girl in Hackney?

Lothian, the father of Gilbert Lothian the poet! the poet who certainly knew nothing of what was being done to the young man in the prison, who had probably never heard of his existence even.

The "Fiend Alcohol" at work once more, planting ghastly growths behind the scutcheons of every family!

A cunning murderer with a poisoned mind and body on one side, the brilliant young poet in the sunlight of success and high approbation upon the other!

Mystery of mysteries that God should allow so foul a thing to dominate and tangle the fair threads and delicate tissues of life!

"Well, that's that!" said the doctor, in a phrase he was fond of using when he dosed an episode in his mind. "I'll make my notes on Hancock's case and forget it until I find it necessary to use them

in my work. And I'll lock up the poems Moultrie has sent me and I won't look at the book again for a month. Then I shall be able to read the verses for themselves and without any arrière-penseé.

"But, I wonder . . . ?"

The brougham stopped at the doctor's house in Russell Square.

BOOK ONE

LOTHIAN IN LONDON

> "Myself, arch traitor to myself,
> My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
> My clog whatever road I go."

THE DRUNKARD

CHAPTER I

UNDER THE WAGGON-ROOF. A DINNER IN BRYANSTONE SQUARE

> "Le véritable Amphitryon est l'Amphitryon où l'on dine."
>
> —*Molière.*

It was a warm night in July when Mr. Amberley, the publisher, entertained a few friends at dinner to meet Gilbert Lothian, the poet.

Although the evening was extremely sultry and the houses of the West End were radiating the heat which they had stored up from the sun-rays during the day, Mr. Amberley's dining room was deliciously cool.

The house was one of those roomy old-fashioned places still to be found unspoiled in Bryanstone Square, and the dining room, especially, was notable. It was on the first floor, over-looking the square, a long and lofty room with a magnificent waggon-roof which was the envy of every one who saw it, and gave the place extraordinary distinction.

The walls were panelled with oak, which had been stained a curious green, that was not olive nor ash-green but partook of both—the veritable colour, indeed, of the grey-green olive trees that one sees on some terrace of the Italian Alps at dawn.

The pictures were very few, considering the size of the room, and they were all quite modern —"In the movement"—as shrewd Mr. Amberley was himself.

A portrait of Mrs. Amberley by William Nicholson, which was quite famous in its way, displayed all the severe pregnancy and almost solemn reserve of this painter. There was a pastel of Prydes' which showed—rather suggested—a squalid room in which a gentleman of 1800, with a flavour of Robert Macaire about him, stood in the full rays of the wine and honey-coloured light of an afternoon sun.

Upon yet another panel was a painting upon silk by Charles Conder, inspired of course, by Watteau, informed by that sad and haunting catching after a fairyland never quite reached, which is the distinctive note of Conder's style, and which might well have served for an illustration to a grotesque fantasy of Heine.

Mrs. Amberley loved this painting. She had a Pater-like faculty of reading into—or from—a picture, something which the artist never thought about at all, and she used to call this little masterpiece "An Ode of Horace in Patch, Powder and Peruque!" She adored these perfectly painted little snuff-box deities who wandered through shadowy mists of amethyst and rouge-de-fer in a fantastic wood.

It is extremely interesting to discover, know of, or to sit at ease in a room which, in its way, is historic, and this is what the Amberleys' guests always felt, and were meant to feel.

In its present form, and with its actual decorations, this celebrated room only dated from some fifteen years back. The Waggon-roof alone remained unaltered from its earlier periods.

The Publishing house of Ince and Amberley had been a bulwark of the Victorian era, and not without some growing celebrity in the earlier Georgian Period.

Lord Byron had spoken well of the young firm once, Rogers was believed to have advanced them money, and when that eminent Cornish pugilist "The Lamorna Cove" wrote his reminiscences they were published by Ince and Amberley, while old Lord Alvanley himself contributed a preface.

From small beginnings came great things. The firm grew and acquired a status, and about this time, or possibly a little later, the dining-room at Bryanstone Square had come into being.

Its walls were not panelled then in delicate green. They were covered with rich plum-coloured paper festooned by roses of high-gilt. In the pictures, with their heavy frames of gold, the dogs and stags of Landseer were let loose, or the sly sleek gipsies of Mr. Frith told rustic fortunes beneath the spreading chestnut trees.

But Browning had dined there—in the later times—an inextinguishable fire just covered with a sprinkling of grey ash. With solemn ritual, Charles Dickens had brewed milk punch in an old bowl of Lowestoft china, still preserved in the drawing-room. The young Robert Cecil, in his early *Saturday Review* days, had cracked his walnuts and sipped his "pint of port" with little thought of the high destiny to which he should come, and Alfred Tennyson, then Bohemian and unknown, had been allowed to vent that grim philosophy which is the reaction of all imaginative and sensitive natures against the seeming impossibility of success and being understood.

The traditions of Ince and Amberley—its dignified and quiet home was in Hanover Square—had always been preserved.

Its policy, at the same time, had continually altered with the passage of years and the change of the public taste. Yet, so carefully, and indeed so genuinely, had this been accomplished that none of the historic prestige of the business had been lost. It still stood as a bulwark of the old dignified age. A young modern author, whatever his new celebrity, felt that to be published by Ince and Amberley hall-marked him as it were.

Younger firms, greedy of his momentary notoriety, might offer him better terms—and generally did—but Ince and Amberley conferred the Accolade!

He was admitted to the Dining Room.

John Amberley (the Inces had long since disappeared), at fifty was a great publisher, and a charming man of the world. He was one of the personalities of London, carrying out what heredity and natural aptitude had fitted him to do, and was this evening entertaining some literary personages of the day in the famous Dining Room.

The Waggon-roof, which had looked down upon just such gatherings as these for generations, would, if it could have spoken, have discovered no very essential difference between this dinner party and others in the past. True, the walls were differently coloured and pictures which appealed to a different set of artistic conventions were hanging upon them.

The people who were accustomed to meet round the table in 19— were not dressed as other gatherings had been. There was no huge silver epergne in the centre of that table now. Nor did the Amberley at one end of it display his mastery of ritual carving.

But the talk was the same. Words only were different. The guests' vocabularies were wider and less restrained. It was the music of piano and the pizzicato plucking of strings—there was no pompous organ note, no ore rotundo any more. They all talked of what they had done, were doing, and hoped to do. There was a hurry of the mind, inherent in people of their craft and like a man running, in all of them. The eyes of some of them burned like restless ghosts as they tried to explain themselves, display their own genius, become prophets and acquire honour in the heart of their own country.

Yes! it had always been so!

The brightest and most lucent brains had flashed into winged words and illuminated that long handsome room.

And ever, at the head of the long table, there had been a bland, listening Amberley, catching, tasting and sifting the idea, analysing the constituents of the flash, balancing the brilliant theory against the momentary public taste. A kind, uncreative, managing Amberley! A fair and honest enough Amberley in the main. Serene, enthroned and necessary.

The publisher was a large man, broad in the shoulder and slightly corpulent. There was something Georgian about him—he cultivated it rather, and was delighted when pleated shirts became again fashionable for evening wear. He had a veritable face of the Regency, more especially in profile, sensual, fine, a thought gluttonous and markedly intelligent.

His voice was authoritative but bland, and frequently capable of a sympathetic interest which was almost musical. His love of letters was deep and genuine, his taste catholic and excellent, while many an author found real inspiration and intense pleasure in his personal praise.

This was the cultured and human side of him, and he had another—the shrewd business man of Hanover Square.

He was not, to use the slang of the literary agent, a "knifer." He paid die market price without being generous and he was perfectly honest in all his dealings.

But his business in life was to sell books, and he permitted himself no experiments in failure. A writer—whether he produced good work or popular trash—must generally have his definite market and his more or less assured position, before Ince and Amberley would take him up.

It was distinctly something for a member of the upper rank and files to say in the course of conversation, "Ince and Amberley are doing my new book, you know."

To-night Amberley, as he sat at the head of his table towards the close of dinner, was in high good humour, and very pleasant with himself and his guests.

The ladies had not yet gone away, coffee was being served at the table, and almost every one was smoking a cigarette. The party was quite a small one. There were only five guests, who, with Mr. and Mrs. Amberley and their only daughter Muriel, made up eight people in all. There was nothing ceremonious about it, and, though three of the guests were well known in the literary world, none of these were great, while the remaining couple were merely promising beginners.

There was, therefore, considerable animation and gaiety round this hospitable table, with its squat candlesticks, of dark-green Serpentine and silver, the topaz-coloured shades, its gleaming surface of dark mahogany (Mrs. Amberley had eagerly adopted the new habit of having no white table-cloth), its really interesting old silver, and the square mats of pure white Egyptian linen in front of each person.

In age, with the exception of Mr. Amberley and his wife, every one was young, while both host and hostess showed in perfection that modern grace of perfect correspondence with environment which seems to have quite banished the evidences of time's progress among the folk of to-day who know every one, appreciate everything and are extremely well-to-do.

On Amberley's right hand sat Mrs. Herbert Toftrees, while her husband was at the other end of the table at the right hand of his hostess—Gilbert Lothian, the guest of the evening, being on Mrs. Amberley's left.

Mr. and Mrs. Toftrees were novelists whose combined names were household words all over England. Their books were signed by both of them—"Enid and Herbert Toftrees" and they were quite at the head of their own peculiar line of business. They knew exactly what they were doing—"selling bacon" they called it to their intimate friends—and were two of the most successful trades-people in London. Unlike other eminent purveyors of literary trash they were far too clever not to know that neither of them had a trace of the real fire, and if their constant and cynical disclaimer of any real talent sometimes seemed to betray a hidden sore, it was at least admirably truthful.

They were shallow, clever, amusing people whom it was always pleasant to meet. They entertained a good deal and the majority of their guests were literary men and women of talent who fluttered like moths round the candle of their success. The talented writers who ate their dinners found a bitter joy in cursing a public taste which provided the Toftrees with several thousands a year, but they returned again and again, in the effort to find out how it was done.

They also had visions of just such another delightful house in Lancaster Gate, an automobile identical in its horse-power and appointments, and were certain that if they could only learn the recipe and trick, wrest the magic formula from these wizards of the typewriter, all these things might be theirs also!

The Herbert Toftrees themselves always appeared—in the frankest and kindest way—to be in thorough sympathy with such aspirations. Their candour was almost effusive. "Any one can do what we do" was their attitude. Herbert Toftrees himself, a young man with a rather carefully-cultivated, elderly manner, was particularly impressive. He had a deep voice and slow enunciation, which, when he was upon his own hearthrug almost convinced himself.

"There is absolutely no reason," he would say, in tones which carried absolute conviction to his hearer at the moment, "why you shouldn't be making fifteen hundred a year in six months."

But that was as far as it went. That was the voice of the genial host dispensing wines, entrées and

advice, easy upon his own hearth, the centre of the one picture where he was certain of supremacy.

But let eager and hungry genius call next day for definite particulars, instructions as to the preparations of a "popular" plot, hints as to the shop-girl's taste in heroines,—with hopes of introductory letters to the great firms who buy serials—and the greyest of grey dawns succeeded the rosy-coloured night.

It was all vague and cloudy now. General principles were alone vouchsafed—indeed who shall blame the tradesman for an adroit refusal to give away the secrets of the shop?

Genius retired—it happened over and over again—cursing successful mediocrity for its evasive cleverness, and with a deep hidden shame that it should have stooped so low, and so ineffectually! . . . "That's very true. What Toftrees says is absolutely true," Mr. Amberley said genially, turning to young Dickson Ingworth, who was sitting by his daughter Muriel.

He nodded to the eager youth with a little private encouragement and hint of understanding which was very flattering. It was as who should say, "Here you are at my house. For the first time you have been admitted to the Dining Room. I have taken you up, I am going to publish a book of yours and see what you are made of. Gather honey while you may, young Dickson Ingworth!"

Ingworth blushed slightly as the great man's encouraging admonitions fell upon him. He was not down from Oxford more than a year. He had written very little, Gilbert Lothian was backing him and introducing him to literary circles in town, he was abnormally conscious of his own good fortune, all nervous anxiety to be adequate—all ears.

"Yes, sir," he said, with the pleasant boyish deference of an undergraduate to the Provost of his college—it sat gracefully upon his youth and was gracefully said.

Then he looked reverentially at Toftrees and waited to hear more.

Herbert Toftrees' face was large and clean shaven. His sleek hair was smoothly brushed over a somewhat protruding forehead. There was the coarse determined vigour about his brow that the bull-dog jaw is supposed to indicate in another type of face, and the eyes below were grey and steadfast. Toftrees stared at people with tremendous gravity. Only those who realised the shrewd emptiness behind them were able to discern what some one had once called their flickering "R.S.V.P. expression"—that latent hope that his vis-à-vis might not be finding him out after all!

"I mean it," Toftrees said in his resonant, and yet quiet voice. "There really is no reason, Mr. Ingworth, why you should not be making an income of at least eight or nine hundred a year in twelve months' time."

"Herbert has helped such a lot of boys," said Mrs. Toftrees, confidentially, to her host, although there was a slight weariness in her voice, the suggestion of a set phrase. "But who is Mr. Dickson Ingworth? What has he done?—he is quite good-looking, don't you think?"

"Oh, a boy, a mere boy!" the big red-faced publisher purred in an undertone. "Lothian brought him to me first in Hanover Square. In fact, Lothian asked if he might bring him here to-night. We are doing a little book of his—the first novel he will have had published."

Mrs. Toftrees pricked up her ears, so to say. She was really the business head of the Toftrees combination. Her husband did the ornamental part and provided the red-hot plots, but it was she who had invented and carried out the "note," and it was she who supervised the contracts. As Mr. Amberley was well aware, what this keen, pretty and well-dressed little woman didn't know about publishing was worth nothing whatever.

"Oh, really," she said, in genuine surprise. "Rather unusual for you, isn't it? Is the boy a genius then?"

Amberley shook his head. He hated everything the worthy Toftrees wrote—he had never been able to read more than ten lines of any of the half-dozen books he had published for them. But the Hanover Square side of him had a vast respect for the large sums the couple charmed from the pockets of the public no less than the handsome percentage they put into his own. And a confidential word on business matters with a pretty and pleasant little woman was not without allurement even under the Waggon-roof itself.

"Not at all. Not at all," he murmured into a pretty ear. "We are not paying the lad any advance upon royalties!" He laughed a well-fed laugh. "Ince and Amberley's list," he continued, "is accepted for itself!"

Mrs. Toftrees smiled back at him. "*Of course*," she murmured. "But I wasn't thinking of the financial side of it. Why? . . . why are you departing from your usual traditions and throwing the shadow of your cloak over this fortunate boy?—if I may ask, of course!"

"Well," Amberley answered, and her keen ear detected—or thought that she detected—a slight reluctance in his voice. . . . "Well, Lothian brought him to me, you know."

Mrs. Toftrees' face changed and Amberley saw it.

She was looking down the table to where Lothian was sitting. Her face was a little flushed, and the expression upon it—though not allowed to be explicit—was by no means agreeable. "Lothian's work is very wonderful," she said—and there was a question in her voice "—you think so, Mr. Amberley?"

Bryanstone Square, the Dining Room, asserted itself. Truth to tell, Amberley felt a little uncomfortable and displeased with himself. The fun of the dinner table—the cigarette moment—had rather escaped him. He had got young people round him to-night. He wanted them to be jolly. He had meant to be a good host, to forget his dignities, to unbend and be jolly with them—this fiction-mongering woman was becoming annoying.

"I certainly do, Mrs. Toftrees," he replied, with dignity, and a distinct tone of reproof in his voice.

Mrs. Toftrees, the cool tradeswoman, gave the great man a soothing smile of complete understanding and agreement.

Mr. Amberley turned to a girl upon his left who had been taken in by Dickson Ingworth and who had been carrying on a laughing conversation with him during dinner.

She was a pretty girl, a friend of his daughter Muriel. He liked pretty girls, and he smiled half paternally, half gallantly at her.

"Won't you have another cigarette, Miss Wallace?" he said, pushing a silver box towards her. "They are supposed to be rather wonderful. My cousin Eustace Amberley is in the Egyptian Army and an aide-de-camp to the Khedive. The Khedive receives the officers every month and every one takes away a box of five hundred when they leave the palace—His Highness' own peculiar brand. These are some of them, which Eustace sent me."

"May I?" she answered, a rounded, white arm stretched out to the box. "They certainly are wonderful. I have to be content with Virginian at home. I buy fifty at a time, and a tin costs one and threepence."

She lit it delicately from the little methyl lamp he passed her, and the big man's kind eyes rested on her with appreciation.

She was, he thought, very like a Madonna of Donatello, which he had seen and liked in Florence. The abundant hair was a dark nut-brown, almost chocolate in certain lights. The eyes were brown also, the complexion the true Italian morbidezza, pale, but not pallid, like a furled magnolia bud. And the girl's mouth was charming—"delicious" was the word in the mind of this connoisseur. It was as clear-cut as that of a girl's face in a Grecian frieze of honey-coloured travertine, there was a serene sweetness about it. But when she smiled the whole face was changed. The young brown eyes lit up and visited others with their own, as a bee visits flowers. The smile was radiant and had a conscious provocation in it. The paleness of the cheeks showed such tints of pearl and rose that they seemed carved from the under surface of a sea-shell.

And, as Amberley looked, wishing that he had talked more to her during dinner, startled suddenly to discover such loveliness, he saw her lips suddenly glow out into colour in an extraordinary way. It wasn't scarlet—unpainted lips are never really that—but of the veiled blood-colour that is warm and throbs with life; a colour that hardly any of the names we give to pigment can properly describe or fix.

What did he know about her? he asked himself as she was lighting her second cigarette. Hardly anything! She was a girl friend of his daughter's—they had been to the same school together at Bath—an orphan he thought, without any people. She earned her own living—assistant Librarian, he remembered, at old Podley's library. Yes, Podley the millionaire nonconformist who was always endowing and inventing fads! And Muriel had told him that she wrote a little, short stories in some of the women's papers. . . .

"At any rate," he said, while these thoughts were flashing through his mind "you smoke as if you liked it! All the girls smoke now, Muriel is inveterate, but I often have a suspicion that many of them do it because it's the fashion."

Rita Wallace gave a wise little shake of her head.

"Oh, no," she answered. "Men know so little about girls! You think we're so different from you in lots of things, but we aren't really. Muriel and I always used to smoke at school—it doesn't matter about telling now, does it?"

Mr. Amberley made a mock expression of horror.

"Good heavens!" he said, "what appalling revelations for a father to endure! I wish I had had an inkling of it at the time!"

"You couldn't have, Mr. Amberley," she answered, and her smile was more provocative than ever, and delightfully naughty. "We used to do it in the bathroom. The hot vapour from the bath took

all the smell of tobacco away. I discovered that!"

"Tell me some more, my dear. What other iniquities did you all perpetrate—and I thought Muriel such a pattern girl."

"Oh, we did lots of things, Mr. Amberley, but it wouldn't be fair to give them away. We were little devils, nearly all of us!"

She gave him a little Parisian salute from the ends of her eyelids, instinct with a kind of impish innocence, the sort of thing that has an irresistible appeal to a middle-aged man of the world.

"Muriel!" Mr. Amberley said to his daughter, "Miss Wallace has been telling me dreadful things about your schooldays. I am grieved and pained!"

Muriel Amberley was a slim girl with dark smouldering eyes and a faint enigmatic smile. Her voice was very clear and fresh and there was a vibrant note in it like the clash of silver bells. She had been talking to Mrs. Toftrees, but she looked up as her father spoke.

"Don't be a wretch, Cupid!" she said, to Rita Wallace over the table.

"Cupid? Why Cupid?" Herbert Toftrees asked, in his deep voice.

"Oh, it's a name we gave her at school," Muriel answered, looking at her friend, and both girls began to laugh.

Mr. Amberley re-engaged the girl in talk.

"You have done some literary work, have you not?" he asked kindly, and in a lower voice.

Again her face changed. Its first virginal demureness, the sudden flashing splendour of her smile, had gone alike. It became eager and wistful too.

"You can't call it *that*, Mr. Amberley," she replied in a voice pitched to his own key. "I've written a few stories which have been published and I've had three articles in the Saturday edition of the *Westminster*—that's nearly everything. But I can't say how I love it all! It is delightful to have my work among books—at the Podley Library you know. I learned typewriting and shorthand and was afraid that I should have to go into a city office—and then this turned up."

She hesitated for a moment, and then stopped shyly. He could see that the girl was afraid of boring him. A moment before, she had been perfectly collected and aware—a girl in his own rank of life responsive to his chaff. Now she realised that she was speaking of things very near and dear to her—and speaking of them to a high-priest of those Mysteries she loved—one holding keys to unlock all doors.

He took her in a moment, understood the change of mood and expression, and it was subtle flattery. Like all intelligent and successful men, recognition was not the least of his rewards. That this engaging child, even, knew him for what he was gave him an added interest in her. All Muriel's girl friends adored him. He was the nicest and most generous of unofficial Papas!—but this was different.

"Don't say that, my dear. Never depreciate yourself or belittle what you have done. I suppose you are about Muriel's age, twenty-one or two—yes?—then let me tell you that you have done excellently well."

"That is kind of you."

"No, it is sincere. No man knows how hard—or how easy—it is to succeed by writing to-day."

She understood him in a moment. "Only the other day, Mr. Amberley," she said, "I read Stevenson's 'Letter to a young gentleman who proposes to embrace the career of Art.' And if I *could* write feeble things to tickle feeble minds I wouldn't even try. It seems so, so low!"

Quite unconsciously her eye had fallen upon Mrs. Toftrees opposite, who was again chattering away to Muriel Amberley.

He saw it, but gave no sign that he had done so.

"Keep such an ideal, my dear. Whether you do small or great things, it will bring you peace of mind and dignity of conscience. But don't despise or condemn merely popular writers. In the Kingdom of Art there are many mansions you know."

The girl made a slight movement of the head. He saw that she was touched and grateful at his interest in her small affairs, but that she wanted to dismiss them from his mind no less than from her own.

"But I *am* mad, crazy," she said, "about *other* peoples' work, the big peoples' work, the work one simply can't help reverencing!"

She had turned from him again and was looking down the table to where Gilbert Lothian was sitting.

"Yes," he answered, following the direction of her glance, "you are quite right *there*!"

She flushed with enthusiasm. "I did so want to see him," she said. "I've hardly ever met any literary people at all before, certainly never any one who mattered. Muriel told me that Mr. Lothian was coming; she loves his poems as much as I do. And when she wrote and asked me I was terribly excited. It's so good of you to have me, Mr. Amberley."

Her voice was touching in its gratitude, and he was touched at this damsel, so pretty, courageous and forlorn.

"I hope, my dear," he said, "that you will give us all the pleasure of seeing you here very often."

At that moment Mrs. Amberley looked up and her fine, shrewd eyes swept round the table. She was a handsome, hook-nosed dame, with a lavish coronet of grey hair, stately and kindly in expression, obviously capable of many tolerances, but with moments when "ne louche pas à La Reine" could be very plainly written on her face.

As she gathered up the three women and rose, Mr. Amberley knew in a moment that all was not quite well. No one else could have even guessed at it, but he knew. The years that had dealt so prosperously with him; Fate which had linked arms and was ever debonnair, had greatly blessed him in this also. He worshipped this stately madam, as she him, and always watched her face as some poor fisherman strives to read the Western sky.

The door of the Dining Room was towards Mrs. Amberley's end of the table, and, as the ladies rose and moved towards it, Gilbert Lothian had gone to it and held it open.

His table-napkin was in his right hand, his left was on the handle of the door, and as the women swept out, he bowed.

Herbert Toftrees thought that there was something rather theatrical, a little over-emphasised, in the bow—as he regarded the poet, whom he had met for the first time that night, from beneath watchful eye-lids.

And *did* one bow? Wasn't it rather like a scene upon the stage? Toftrees, a quite well-bred man, was a little puzzled by Gilbert Lothian. Then he concluded—and his whole thoughts upon the matter passed idly through his mind within the duration of a single second—that the poet was an intimate friend of the house.

Lothian was closing the door, and Toftrees was sinking back into his chair, when the latter happened to glance at his host.

Amberley, still standing, was *watching* Lothian—there was no other word which would correctly describe the big man's attitude—and Toftrees felt strangely uneasy. Something seemed tapping nervously at the door of his mind. He heard the furtive knocking, half realised the name of the thought that timidly essayed an entrance, and then resolutely crushed it.

Such a thing was quite impossible, of course.

The four men sat down, more closely grouped together than before.

The coffee, which had been served by a footman, before the ladies had disappeared, was a pretence in cups no bigger than plovers' eggs. Amberley liked the modern affectation of his women guests remaining at the table and sharing the joys of the after-dinner-hour. But now, the butler entered with larger cups and a tray of liqueurs, while the host himself poured out a glass of port and handed the old-fashioned cradle in which the bottle lay to young Dickson Ingworth on his right.

That curly-headed youth, who was a Pembroke man and knew the ritual of the Johnsonian Common Room at Oxford, gravely filled his own glass and pushed the bottle to Herbert Toftrees, who was in the vacated seat of his hostess, and pouring a little Perrier water into a tumbler.

The butler lifted the wicker-work cradle with care, passed behind Toftrees, and set it before Gilbert Lothian.

Lothian looked at it for a moment and then made a decisive movement of his head.

"Thank you, no," he said, after a second's consideration, and in a voice that was slightly high-pitched but instinct with personality—it could never have been mistaken for any one else's voice, for instance—"I think I will have a whiskey and soda."

Toftrees, at the end of the table, within two feet of Lothian, gave a mental start. The popular novelist was rather confused.

A year ago no one had heard of Gilbert Lothian—that was not a name that counted in any way. He had been a sort of semi-obscure journalist who signed what he wrote in such papers as would

print him. There were a couple of novels to his name which had obtained a sort of cult among minor people, and, certainly, some really eminent weeklies had published very occasional but signed reviews.

As far as Herbert Toftrees could remember—and his jealous memory was good—Lothian had always been rather small beer until a year or so back.

And then "Surgit Amari"—the first book of poems had been published.

In a single month Lothian had become famous.

For the ringing splendour of his words echoed in every heart. In this book, and in a subsequent volume, he had touched the very springs of tears. Not with sentiment—with the very highest and most electric literary art—he had tried and succeeded in irradiating the happenings of domestic life in the light that streamed from the Cross.

". . . Thank you, no. I think I will have a whiskey and soda."

CHAPTER II

GRAVELY UNFORTUNATE OCCURRENCE IN MRS. AMBERLEY'S DRAWING ROOM

> "Μιοω μνημονα συμποτην, Procille."
>
> —*Martial.*
>
> —"One should not always take after-dinner amenities au pied de la lettre."
>
> —*Free Translation.*

Toftrees, at the head of the table, shifted his chair a little so that he was almost facing Gilbert Lothian.

Lothian's arresting voice was quite clear as he spoke to the butler. "That's not the voice of a man who's done himself too well," the novelist thought. But he was puzzled, nevertheless. People like Lothian behaved pretty much as they liked, of course. Convention didn't restrain them. But the sudden request was odd.

And there was that flourishing bow as the women left the room, and certainly Amberley had seemed to look rather strangely at his guest. Toftrees disposed himself to watch events. He had wanted to meet the poet for some time. There was a certain reason. No one knew much about him in London. He lived in the country and was not seen in the usual places despite his celebrity. There had been a good deal of surmise about this new star.

Lothian was like the photographs which had appeared of him in the newspapers, but with a great deal more "personality" than these were able to suggest. Certainly no one looked less like a poet, though this did not surprise the popular novelist, in an age when literary men looked exactly like every one else. But there was not the slightest trace of idealism, of the "thoughts high and hard" that were ever the clear watchwords of his song. "A man who wears a mask," thought Herbert Toftrees with interest and a certain half-conscious fellow-feeling.

The poet was of medium height and about thirty-five years of age. He was fat, with a broad-shouldered corpulence which would have been far less noticeable in a man who was a few inches taller. The clean-shaven face was fattish also, but there was, nevertheless, a curious suggestion of contour about it. It should have been a pure oval, and in certain lights it almost seemed that, while the fatness appeared to dissolve and fall away from it. It was a contour veiled by something that was, but ought not to have been, there.

The eyes were grey and capable of infinite expression—a fact which always became apparent to any one who had been half an hour in his company. But this feature also was enigmatic. For the most part the eyes seemed to be working at half-power, not quite doing or being what one would have expected of them.

The upper lip was short, and the mouth by far the most real and significant part of the face. It was small, but not too small, clearly and delicately cut though without a trace of effeminacy. In its mobility, its sensitive life, its approach to beauty, it said everything in the face. Thick-growing hair of dark brown was allowed to come rather low over a high and finely modelled brow, hair which—despite a natural luxuriance—was cut close to the sides and back of the head.

Such was Toftrees' view of Gilbert Lothian, and it both had insight and was fair. No one can be a

Toftrees and the literary idol of thousands and thousands of people without being infinitely the intellectual superior of those people. The novelist had a fine brain and if he could have put a tenth of his observation and knowledge upon paper, he might have been an artistic as well as a commercial success.

But he was hopelessly inarticulate, and æsthetic achievement was denied him. There was considerable consolation in the large income which provided so many pleasures and comforts, but it was bitter to know—when he met any one like Lothian—that if he could appreciate Lothian thoroughly he could never emulate him. And it was still more bitter to be aware that men like Lothian often regarded his own work as a mischief and dishonour.

Toftrees, therefore, watched the man at his side with a kind of critical envy, mingled with a perfectly sincere admiration at the bottom of it all.

He very soon became certain that something was wrong.

His first half-thought was a certainty now. Something that some one had said to him a week ago at a Savage Club dinner—one of those irresponsible but dangerous and damaging remarks which begin, "D'you know, I'm told that so and so—" flashed through his mind.

"Are you in town for long, Mr. Lothian?" he asked. "You don't come to town often, do you?"

"No, I don't," Lothian answered. "I hate London. A damnable place I always think."

The other, so thorough a Londoner, always getting so much—in every way—out of his life in London, looked at the speaker curiously, not quite knowing how to take him.

Lothian seemed to see it. He had made the remark with emphasis, with a superior note in his voice, but he corrected himself quickly.

It was almost as though Toftrees' glance had made him uneasy. His face became rather ingratiating, and there was a propitiatory note in his voice when he spoke again. He drew his chair a little nearer to the other's.

"I knew too much of London when I was a young man," he went on with an unnecessarily confidential and intimate manner. "When I came down from Oxford first, I was caught up into the 'new' movement. It all seemed very wonderful to me then. It did to all of us. We divorced art from morals, we lived extraordinary lives, we sipped honey from every flower. Most of the men of that period are dead. One or two are insane, others have gone quite under and are living dreadful larva-like lives in obscene hells of the body and soul, of which you can have no conception. But, thank God, I got out of it in time—just in time! If it hadn't been for my dear wife . . ."

He paused. The sensitive lips smiled, with an almost painful tenderness, a quivering, momentary effect which seemed grotesquely out of place in a face which had become flushed and suddenly seemed much fatter.

There was a horrible insincerity about that self-conscious smile—the more horrible because, at the moment, Toftrees saw that Lothian believed absolutely in his own emotion, was pleased with himself sub-consciously, too, and was perfectly certain that he was making a fine impression—pulling aside the curtain that hung before a beautiful and holy place!

The smile lingered for a moment. The light in the curious eyes seemed turned inward complacently surveying a sanctuary.

Then there was an abrupt change of manner.

Lothian laughed. There was a snap in his laughter, which, Toftrees was sure, was meant to convey the shutting down of a lid.

"I like you," Lothian was trying to say to him—the acquaintance of ten minutes!—"I can open my heart to you. You've had a peep at the Poet's Holy of Holies. But we're men of the world—you and I!—enough of this. We're in society. We're dining at the Amberleys'. Our confidences are over!"

"So you see," the *actual* voice said, "I don't like London. It's no place for a gentleman!"

Lothian's laugh as he said this was quite vague and silly. His hand strayed out towards the decanter of whiskey. His face was half anxious, half pleased, wholly pitiable and weak. His laugh ended in a sort of bleat, which he realised in a moment and coughed to obscure.

There was a splash and gurgle as he pressed the trigger of the syphon.

Intense disgust and contempt succeeded Toftrees' first amazement. So this, after all the fuss, was Gilbert Lothian!

The man had talked like a provincial yokel, and then fawned upon him with his sickly, uninvited confidences.

He was drunk. There was no doubt about that.

He must have come there drunk, or nearly so. The last half hour had depressed the balance, brought out what was hidden, revealed the fellow's state.

"If it hadn't been for my dear wife!"—the tout! How utterly disgusting it was!

Toftrees had never been drunk in his life except at a bump-supper at B.N.C.—his college—nearly fifteen years ago.—The shocking form of coming to the Amberleys' like this!—He was horribly upset and a little frightened, too. He remembered where he was—such a thing was an incredible profanation *here*!

. . . He heard a quiet vibrant voice speaking.

He looked up. Gilbert Lothian was leaning back in his chair, holding a newly-lighted cigarette in a steady hand. His face was absolutely composed. There was not the slightest hint that it had been bloated and unsteady the minute before. Intellect and strength—STRENGTH! that was the incredible thing—lay calmly over it. The skin, surely it *had* been oddly blotched? was of an even, healthy-seeming tint.

A conversation between the Poet and his host had obviously been in progress for several minutes. Toftrees realised that he had been lost in his own thoughts for some time—if indeed this scene was real at all and he himself were sober!

". . . I don't think," Lothian was saying with precision, and a certain high air which sat well upon him—"I don't think that you quite see it in all its bearings. There must be a rough and ready standard for ordinary work-a-day life—that I grant. But when you penetrate to the springs of action——"

"When you do that," Amberley interrupted, "naturally, rough and ready standards fall to pieces. Still we have to live by them. Few of us are competent to manipulate the more delicate machinery! But your conclusion is—?"

"—That hypocrisy is the most misunderstood and distorted word in our mother tongue. The man whom fools call hypocrite may yet be entirely sincere. Lofty assertions, the proclamation of high ideals and noble thoughts may at the same time be allied with startling moral failure!"

Amberley shook his head.

"It's specious," he replied, "and it's doubtless highly comforting for the startling moral failure. But I find a difficulty in adjusting my obstinate mind to the point of view."

"It *is* difficult," Lothian said, "but that's because so few people are psychologists, and so few people—the Priests often seem to me less than any one—understand the meaning of Christianity. But because David was a murderer and an adulterer will you tell me that the psalms are insincere? Surely, if all that is good in a man or woman is to be invalidated by the presence of contradictory evil, then Beelzebub must sit enthroned and be potent over the affairs of men!"

Mr. Amberley rose from his chair. His face had quite lost its watchful expression. It was genial and pleased as before.

"King David has a great deal to answer for," he said. "I don't know what the unorthodox and the 'live-your-own-life' school would do without him. But let us go into the drawing room."

With his rich, hearty laugh echoing under the Waggon roof, the big man thrust his arm through Lothian's.

"There are two girls dying to talk to the poet!" he said. "That I happen to know! My daughter Muriel reads your books in bed, I believe! and her friend Miss Wallace was saying all sorts of nice things about you at dinner. Come along, come along, my dear boy."

The two men left the dining room, and their voices could be heard in the hall beyond.

Toftrees lingered behind for a moment with young Dickson Ingworth.

The boy's face was flushed. His eyes sparkled with excitement and the three glasses of champagne he had drunk at dinner were having their influence with him.

He was quite young, ingenuous, and filled with conceit at being where he was—dining with the Amberleys, brought there under the ægis of Gilbert Lothian, chatting confidentially to the great Herbert Toftrees himself!

His immature heart was bursting with pride, Pol Roger, and satisfaction. He hadn't the least idea of what he was saying—that he was saying something frightfully dangerous and treacherous at least.

"I say, Mr. Toftrees, isn't Gilbert splendid? I could listen to him all night. He talks like that to me sometimes, when he's in the mood. It's like Walter Pater and Dr. Johnson rolled into one. And then he sort of punctuates it with something dry and brown and freakish—like Heine in the 'Florentine Nights'!"

With all his eagerness to hear more—the quiet malice in him welling up to understand and pin down this Gilbert Lothian—Toftrees was forced to pause for a moment. He knew that he could never have expressed himself as this enthusiastic and excited boy was able to do. Ingworth was a pupil then! Lothian could inspire, and was already founding a school . . .

"You know Mr. Lothian very well, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I go and stay with Gilbert in the country a lot. I'm nearly always there! I am like a brother to him—he was an only child, you know. But isn't he wonderful?"

"Marvellous!" Toftrees chuckled as he said the word. He couldn't help it.

Misunderstood as his chuckle was, it did the trick and brought confidence in full flood from the careless and excited boy.

"Yes, and I know him so well! Hardly any one knows him so well as I do. Every one in town is crying out to find out all about him, and I'm really the only one who knows . . ."

He looked towards the door. Thoughts of the two pretty girls beyond flushed the wayward, wine-heated mind.

"I'm going to have a liqueur brandy," Toftrees said hastily—he had taken nothing the whole evening—"won't you, too?"

"Now you'd never think," Ingworth said, sipping from his tiny glass, "that at seven o'clock this evening Prince and I—Prince is the valet at Gilbert's club—could hardly wake him up and get him to dress?"

"No!"

"It's a fact though, Mr. Toftrees. We had the devil of a time. He'd been out all day—it was bovril with lots of salt in it that put him right. As a matter of fact—of course, this is quite between you and me—I was in a bit of a funk that it was coming over him again at dinner. Stale drunk. You know! I saw he was paying a lot of compliments to Mrs. Amberley. At first she didn't seem to understand, and then she didn't quite seem to like it. But I was glad when I heard him ask the man for a whiskey and soda just now. I know his programme so well. I was sure that it would pull him together all right—or at least that number two would. I suppose you saw he was rather off when the ladies had gone and you were talking to him?"

"Well, I wasn't sure of course."

"I was, I know him so well. Gilbert's father was my father's solicitor—one of the old three bottle men. But when Gilbert collared number two just now I realised that it would be quite all right. You heard him with Mr. Amberley just now? Splendid!"

"Yes. And now suppose we go and see how he's getting on in the drawing room," said Herbert Toftrees with a curious note in his voice.

The boy mistook it for anxiety. "Oh, he'll be as right as rain, you'll find. It comes off and on in waves, you know," he said.

Toftrees looked at the youth with frank wonder. He spoke in the way of use and wont, as if he were saying nothing extraordinary—merely stating a fact.

The novelist was really shocked. Personally, he was the most temperate of men. He was *homme du monde*, of course. He touched upon life at other points than the decorous and above-board. He had known men, friends of his own, go down, down, down, through drink. But here, with these people, it was not the same. In Bohemia, in raffish literary clubs and the reprobate purlieus of Fleet Street, one expected this sort of thing and accepted it as part of the *milieu*.

Under the Waggon roof, at Amberley's house, where there were charming women, it was shocking; it was an outrage! And the frankness of this well-dressed and well-spoken youth was disgusting in its very simplicity and non-moral attitude. Toftrees had gathered something of the young man's past during dinner. Was this, then, what one learnt at Eton? The novelist was himself the son of a clergyman, a man of some family but bitter poor. He had been educated at a country grammar school. His wife was the youngest daughter of a Gloucestershire baronet, impoverished also.

Neither of them had enjoyed all that should have been theirs by virtue of their birth, and the fact had left a blank, a slight residuum of bitterness and envy which success and wealth could never quite smooth away.

"Well, it doesn't seem to trouble you much," he said.

Ingworth laughed. He was unconscious of his great indiscretion, frothy and young, entirely unaware that he was giving his friend and patron into possibly hostile hands and providing an opportunity for a dissection of which half London might hear.

"Gilbert's quite different from any one else," he said lightly. "He is a genius. Keats taking pepper before claret, don't you know! One must not measure him by ordinary standards."

"I suppose not," Toftrees answered drily, reflecting that among the disciples of a great man it was generally the Judas who wrote the biography—"Let's go to the drawing room."

As they went out, the mind of the novelist was working with excitement and heat. He himself was conscious of it and was surprised. His was an intellect rather like dry ice. Very little perturbed it as a rule, yet to-night he was stirred.

Wonder was predominant.

Physically, to begin with, it was extraordinary that more drink should sober a man who a moment before had been making exaggerated and half-maudlin confidences to a stranger—in common with most decent living people, Toftrees knew nothing of the pathology of poisoned men. And, then, that sobriety had been so profound! Clearly reasoned thought, an arresting but perfectly sane point of view, had been enunciated with lucidity and force of phrase.

Disgust, the keener since it was more than tinged by envy, mingled with the wonder.

So the high harmonies of "Surgit Amari" came out of the bottle after all! Toftrees himself had been deeply moved by the poems, and yet, he now imagined, the author was probably drunk when he wrote them! If only the world knew!—it *ought* to know. Blackguards who, for some reason or other, had been given angel voices should be put in the pillory for every one to see. Hypocrite! . . .

Ingworth opened the door of the drawing room very quietly. Music had begun, and as he and Toftrees entered, Muriel Amberley was already half way through one of the preludes of Chopin.

Mrs. Amberley and Mrs. Toftrees were sitting close together and carrying on a vigorous, whispered conversation, despite the music. Mr. Amberley was by himself in a big arm-chair near the piano, and Lothian sat upon a settee of blue linen with Rita Wallace.

As he sank into a chair Toftrees glanced at Lothian.

The poet's face was unpleasant. When he had been talking to Amberley it had lighted up and had more than a hint of fineness. Now it was heavy again, veiled and coarsened. Lothian's head was nodding in time to the music. One well-shaped but rather red hand moved restlessly upon his knee. The man was struggling—Toftrees was certain of it—to appear as if the music was giving him intense pleasure. He was thinking about himself and how he looked to the other people in the room.

Drip, drip, drip!—it was the sad, graceful prelude in which the fall of rain is supposed to be suggested, the hot steady rain of the Mediterranean which had fallen at Majorca ever so many years ago and was falling now in sound, though he that caught its beauty was long since dust. Drip, drip!—and then the soft repetition which announced that the delicate and lovely vision had reached its close, that the august grey harmonies were over.

For a moment, there was silence in the drawing room.

Muriel's white fingers rested on the keys of the piano, the candles threw their light upwards upon the enigmatic maiden face. Her father sighed quietly—happily also as he looked at her—and the low buzz of Mrs. Amberley's and Mrs. Toftrees' talk became much more distinct.

Suddenly Gilbert Lothian jumped up from the settee. He hurried to the piano, his face flushed, his eyes liquid and bright.

It was consciously and theatrically done, an exaggeration of his bow in the dining room—not the right thing in the very least!

"Oh, thank you! *Thank you!*" he said in a high, fervent voice. "How wonderful that is! And you played it as Crouchmann plays it—the *only* interpretation! I know him quite well. We had supper together the other night after his concert, and he told me—no, that won't interest you. I'll tell you another time, remind me! Now, *do* play something else!"

He fumbled with the music upon the piano with tremulous and unsteady hands.

"Ah! here we are!" he cried, and there was an insistent note of familiarity in his voice. "The book of Valses! You know the twelfth of course? Tempo giusto! It goes like this . . ."

He began to hum, quite musically, and to wave his hands.

Muriel Amberley glanced quickly at her father and there was distress in her eyes.

Amberley was standing by the piano in a moment. He seemed very much master of himself, serene and dominant, by the side of Gilbert Lothian. His face was coldly civil and there was disgust in his eyes.

"I don't think my daughter will play any more, Mr. Lothian," he said.

An ugly look flashed out upon the poet's face, suspicion and realisation showed there for a second and passed.

He became nervous, embarrassed, almost pitiably apologetic. The savoir-faire which would have helped some men to take the rebuke entirely deserted him. There was something assiduous, almost vulgar, a frightened acceptance of the lash indeed, which immensely accentuated the sudden *défaillance* and break-down.

In the big drawing room no one spoke at all.

Then there was a sudden movement and stir. Gilbert Lothian was saying good-night.

He had remembered that he really had some work to do before going to bed, some letters to write, as a matter of fact. He was shaking hands with every one.

"I do hope that I shall have the pleasure of hearing you play some more Chopin before long, Miss Amberley! Thank you so much Mrs. Amberley—I'm going to write a poem about your beautiful Dining Room. I suppose we shall meet at the Authors' Club dinner on Saturday, Mr. Toftrees?—so interested to have met you at last."

. . . The people in the drawing room heard him chattering vivaciously to Mr. Amberley, who had accompanied his departing guest into the hall.

No one said a single word. They heard the front door close, and the steps of the master of the house as he returned to them. They were all waiting.

When Amberley came in he made a courtly attempt at ignoring what had just occurred. The calm surface of the evening had been rudely disturbed—yes! For once even an Amberley party had gone wrong—there was to be no fun from this meeting of young folk to-night.

But it was Mrs. Amberley who spoke. She really could not help it. Mrs. Toftrees had been telling her of various rumours concerning Gilbert Lothian some time before the episode at the piano, and with all her tolerance Mrs. Amberley was thoroughly angry.

That such a thing should have happened in her house, before Muriel and her girl friend—oh! it was unthinkable!

"So Mr. Gilbert Lothian has gone," she said with considerable emphasis.

"Yes, dear," Mr. Amberley answered as he sat down again, willing enough that nothing more should be said.

But it was not to be so.

"We can never have him here again," said the angry lady.

Amberley shook his head. "Very unfortunate, extremely unfortunate," he murmured.

"I cannot understand it. Such a thing has never happened here before. Now I understand why Mr. Lothian hides himself in the country and never goes about. *Il y avait raison!*"

"I don't say that genius is any *excuse* for this sort of thing," Amberley replied uneasily, "and Lothian has genius—but one must take more than one thing into consideration . . ."

He paused, not quite knowing how to continue the sentence, and genuinely sorry and upset. His glance fell upon Herbert Toftrees, and he had a sort of feeling that the novelist might help him out.

"Don't you think so, Toftrees?" he asked.

The novelist surveyed the room with his steady grey eyes, marshalling his hearers as it were.

"But let us put his talent aside," he said. "Think of him as an ordinary person in our own rank of life—Mrs. Amberley's guest. Certainly he could not have taken anything here to have made him in the strange state he is in. Surely he must have known that he was not fit to come to a decent house."

"I shall give his poems away," Muriel Amberley said with a little shudder. "I can never read them again. And I did love them so! I wish you hadn't asked Mr. Lothian to come here, Father."

"There is one consolation," said Mrs. Toftrees in a hard voice; "the man must be realising what he has done. He was not too far gone for that!"

A new voice broke into the talk. It came from young Dickson Ingworth who had slid into the seat by Rita Wallace when Lothian went to the piano.

He blushed and stammered as he spoke, but there was a fine loyalty in his voice.

"It seems rather dreadful, Mrs. Amberley," he said, quite thinking that he was committing literary suicide as he did so. "It is dreadful of course. But Gilbert *is* such a fine chap when he's—when he's, all right! You can't think! And then, 'Surgit Amari'! Don't let's forget he wrote 'The Loom'—'Delicate Threads! O fairest in life's tissue,'" he quoted from the celebrated verse.

Then Rita Wallace spoke. "He is great," she said. "He is manifesting himself in his own way. That is all. To me, at any rate, the meeting with Mr. Lothian has been wonderful."

Mrs. Toftrees stared with undisguised dislike of such assertions on the part of a young girl.

But Mrs. Amberley, always kind and generous-hearted, had been pleased and touched by Dickson Ingworth's defence of his friend and master. She quite realised what the lad stood to lose by doing it, and what courage on his part it showed. And when Rita Wallace chimed in, Mrs. Amberley dismissed the whole occurrence from her mind as she beamed benevolently at the two young people on the sofa.

"Let's forget all about it," she said. "Mrs. Toftrees, help me to make my husband sing. He can only sing one song but he sings it excellently—'In cellar cool'—just the thing for a hot night. Joseph! do as I tell you!"

The little group of people rearranged themselves, as Muriel sat down at the piano to accompany her father.

"Le metier de poëte laisse a désirer," Toftrees murmured to his wife with a sneer which almost disguised the atrocious accent of his French.

CHAPTER III

SHAME IN "THE ROARING GALLANT TOWN"

—"Is it for this I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom and austere control?"

"'Très volontiers' repartit le démon. 'Vous aimez
les tableaux changeants; je veux vous contenter.'"

—*Le Sage.*

When the door of the house had closed after him, and with Mr. Amberley's courteous but grave good-night ringing in his ears, Gilbert Lothian walked briskly away across the Square.

It was very hot. The July sun, that tempest of fire which had passed over the town during the day, had sucked up all the sweetness from the air and it was sickly, like air under a blanket which has been breathed many times. As it often is in July, London had been delightfully fresh at dawn, when the country waggons were bringing the sweet-peas and the roses to market, and although his mind had not been fresh as the sun rose over St. James' where he was staying, Lothian had enjoyed the early morning from the window of his bedroom. It had been clear and scentless, like a field with the dew upon it, in the country from which he had come five days ago.

Now his mind was like a field in the full sun of noon, parched and full of hot odours.

He was perfectly aware that he had made a *faux pas*. How far it went, whether he was not exaggerating it, he did not know. The semi-intoxicated person—more especially when speech and gait are more or less normal, as in his case—is quite incapable of gauging the impression he makes on others. In lax and tolerant circles where no outward indication is given him of his state, he goes on his way pleased and confident that he has made an excellent impression, sure that no one has found him out.

But his cunning and self-congratulation quite desert him when he is openly snubbed or reproved. "Was I very far gone?" he afterwards asks some confidential friend who may have been present at his discomfiture. And whatever form the answer may take, the drunkard is abnormally interested in all the details of the event. Born of the toxic influences in his blood, there is a gaunt and greedy vanity which insists upon the whole scene being re-enacted and commented upon.

Lothian had no one to tell him how far he had gone, precisely what impression he had made upon his hosts and their guests. He felt with a sense of injury that Dickson Ingworth ought to have come away with him. The young man owed so much to him in the literary life! It was a treachery not to have come away with him.

As he got into a cab and told the man to drive him as far as Piccadilly Circus, he was still pursuing this train of thought. He had taken Ingworth to the Amberleys', and now the cub was

sitting in the drawing room there, with those charming girls! quite happy and at ease. He, Gilbert Lothian himself! was out of it all, shut out from that gracious house and those cultured people whom he had been so glad to meet.

. . . Again he heard the soft closing of the big front door behind him, and his skin grew hot at the thought. The remembrance of Amberley's quiet courtesy, but entire change of manner in the hall, was horrible. He felt as if he had been whipped. The dread of a slight, the fear of a quarrel, which is a marked symptom of the alcoholic—is indeed his torment and curse through life—was heavy upon Lothian now.

The sense of impotence was sickening. What a weak fool he had been to break down and fly like that. To run away! What faltering and trembling incapacity for self-assertion he had shown. He had felt uneasy with the very servant who gave him his opera hat!

And what had he done after all? Very little, surely.

That prelude of Chopin always appealed to him strongly. He had written about it; Crouchmann had played it privately for him and pointed out new beauties. Certainly he had only met Miss Amberley for the first time that night and he may have been a little over-excited and effusive. His thoughts—a poet's thoughts after all—had come too quickly for ordered expression. He was too Celtic in manner, too artistic for these staid cold folk.

He tried to depreciate the Amberleys in his thoughts. Amberley was only a glorified trades-man after all! Lothian tried to call up within him that bitter joy which comes from despising that which we really respect or desire. "Yes! damn the fellow! He *lived* on poets and men of letters—privileged people, the salt of the earth, the real forces of life!"

And yet he ought to have stayed on and corrected his mistake. He had made himself ridiculous in front of four women—he didn't care about the men so much—and that was horribly galling.

As the cab swung down Regent Street, Lothian was sure that if his nerves had not weakened for a moment he would never have given himself away. It was, he felt, very unfortunate. He knew, as he could not help knowing, that not only had he a mind and power of a rare, high quality, but that he possessed great personal charm. What he did not realise was how utterly all these things fled from him when he was not quite sober. Certainly at this moment he was unable to comprehend it in the slightest. Realisation would come later, at the inevitable punishment hour.

He over-paid his cabman absurdly. The man's quick and eager deference pleased him. He was incapable of any sense of proportion, and he felt somehow or other reinstated in his own opinion by this trivial and bought servility.

He looked at his watch. It was not very much after ten, and he became conscious of how ridiculously early he had fled from the Amberleys'. But as he stood on the pavement—in the very centre of the pleasure-web of London with its roar and glare—he pushed such thoughts resolutely from him and turned into a luxurious "lounge," celebrated among fast youths and pleasure-seekers, known by an affectionate nick-name at the Universities, in every regimental mess or naval ward-room in Great Britain.

As he went down a carpeted passage he saw himself in the long mirror that lined it. He looked quite himself, well-dressed, prosperous, his face under full control and just like any other smart man about town.

At this hour, there were not many people in the place. It would become crowded and noisy later on.

The white and green tiles of the walls gleamed softly in the shaded lights, electric fans and a huge block of ice upon a pedestal kept the air cool. There were palms which refreshed the eye and upon the porphyry counter at which he was served there was a mass of mauve hydrangea in a copper bowl.

He drank a whiskey and soda very quickly—that was to remove the marked physical exhaustion which had begun to creep over him—ordered another and lit a cigarette.

His nerves responded with magical quickness to the spirit. All day long he had been feeding them with the accustomed poison. The strain of the last half hour had used up more vitality than he had been aware.

For the second time that night—a night so infinitely more eventful than he knew—he became master of himself, calm, happy, even, in the sense of power returned, and complete correspondence with his environment.

The barmaid who served him was—like most of these Slaves of the Still in this part of London—an extremely handsome girl. Her face was painted—all these girls paint their faces—but it was done merely to conceal the pallor and ravages wrought upon it by a hard and feverish life. Lothian felt an immense pity for her, symbolic as she was of all the others, and the few remarks he made were uttered with an instinctive deference and courtesy.

He had been married seven years before this time, and had at once retired into the country with his wife where, by slow degrees, he had felt his way to the work which had at last made him celebrated. But in the past he had known the under side of London well and had chosen it deliberately as his *milieu*.

It had in no way been forced upon him. Struggling journalist and author as he was, good houses had been open to him, for he was a member of a well-known family and had made many friends at Oxford.

But the other life was so much easier! If its pleasures were coarse, they were hot and strong! For years, as many a poet has done before him, he lived a bad life, tolerant of vice in himself and others, kind, generous often, but tossed and worn by his passions—rivetting the chains link by link upon his soul—until he had met and married Mary.

And no one knew better than he the horrors of life behind the counters of a bar.

He turned away, as two fresh-faced lads came noisily up to the counter, turned away with a sigh of pity. He was quite unconscious—though he would have been interested at the psychological fact—that the girl had wondered at his manner and thought him affected and dull.

She would much rather have been complimented and chaffed. She understood that. Life is full of anodynes. Mercifully enough the rank and file of the oppressed are not too frequently conscious of their miseries. There is a half-truth in the philosophy of Dr. Pangloss, and if fettered limbs go lame, the chains are not always clanking.

The poor barmaid went to bed that night in an excellent humour, for the two lads Lothian had seen brought her some pairs of gloves. And if she had known of Lothian's pity she would have resented it bitterly.

"Like the fellow's cheek," she would have said.

Lothian, as he believed, had absolutely recovered his own normal personality. He admitted now, as he left the "lounge," that he had not been his true self at the Amberleys'.

"At this moment, as I stand here," he said to himself, "'I am the Captain of my Soul,'" not in the least understanding that when he spoke of his own "soul" he meant nothing more than his five senses.

The man thought he was normal. He was not. On the morrow, when partially recovering from the excesses of to-day, there was a possibility that he might become normal—for a brief period, and until he began to drink again.

For him to become really himself, perfectly clean from the stigmata of the inebriate mind, would have taken him at least six months of total abstinence from alcohol.

Lothian's health, though impaired, had by no means broken down.

A strong constitution, immense vitality, had preserved it, up to this point. At this period, though a poisoned man, an alcoholised body, there were frequent times of absolute normality—when he was, for certain definite spaces of time by the clock, exactly as he would have been had he never become a slave to alcohol at all.

As he stood upon the pavement of Piccadilly Circus, he felt and believed that such a time had come now.

He was mistaken. All that was happening was that there was a temporary lull in the ebb and flow of alcohol in his veins. The brain cells were charged up to a certain point with poison. At this point they gave a false impression of security.

It must be remembered, and it cannot be too strongly insisted on, that the mental processes of the inebriate are *definite*, and are *induced*.

The ordinary person says of an inebriate simply that "he is a drunkard" or "he drinks." Whether he or she says it with sympathetic sorrow, or abhorrence, the bald statement rarely leads to any further train of thought.

It is very difficult for the ordinary person to realise that the mental processes are *sui generis* a Kingdom—though with a debased coinage—which requires considerable experience before it can always be recognised from the ring of true metal.

Alcoholism so changes the mental life of any one that it results in an ego which has *special* external and internal characteristics.

And so, in order to appreciate fully this history of Gilbert Lothian—to note the difference between the man as he was known and as he really was—it must always be kept in mind under what influence he moves through life, and that his steps have strayed into a dreadful kingdom

unknown and unrealised by happier men.

He had passed out of one great Palace of Drink.

Had he been as he supposed himself to be, he would have sought rest at once. He would have hurried joyously from temptation in this freedom from his chains.

Instead of that, the question he asked himself was, "What shall I do now?"

The glutton crams himself at certain stated periods. But when repletion comes he stops eating. The habit is rhythmic and periodically certain.

But the Drunkard—his far more sorrowful and lamentable brother—has not even this half-saving grace. In common with the inordinate smoker—whose harm is physical and not mental—the inebriate drinks as long as he is able to, until he is incapacitated. "Where shall I go now?"

If God does indeed give human souls to His good angels, as gardens to weed and tend, that thought must have brought tears of pity to the eyes of the august beings who were battling for Gilbert Lothian.

Their hour was not yet.

They were to see the temple of the Paraclete fall into greater ruin and disaster than ever before. The splendid spires and pinnacles, the whole serene beauty of soul and body which had made this Temple a high landmark when God first built it, were crumbling to decay.

Deep down among the strong foundations the enemy was at work. The spire—the "Central-one"—which sprang up towards Heaven was deeply undermined. Still—save to the eyes of experts—its glory rose unimpaired. But it was but a lovely shell with no longer any grip upon its base of weakened Will. And the bells in the wind-swept height of the Tower no longer rang truly. On red dawns or on pearl-grey evenings the message they sent over the country-side was beginning to be false. There was no peace when they tolled the Angelus.

In oriel or great rose-window the colour of the painted glass was growing dim. The clear colour was fading, though here and there it was shot with baleful fire which the Artist had never painted there,—like the blood-shot eyes of the man who drinks.

A miasmic mist had crept into the noble spaces of the aisles. The vast supporting pillars grew insubstantial and seemed to tremble as the vapour eddied round them. A black veil was quickly falling before the Figure above the Altar, and the seven dim lamps of the Sanctuary burned with green and flickering light.

The bells of a Great Mind's Message, which had been cast with so much silver in them, rang an increasing dissonance. The trumpets of the organ echoed with a harsh note in the far clerestory; the flutes were false, the *dolce* stop no longer sweet. The great pipes of the pedal organ muttered and stammered in their massive voices, as if dark advisers whispered in the ear of the musician who controlled them.

Lothian had passed from one great Palace of Drink. "Where shall I go?" he asked himself again, and immediately his eye fell upon another, the brilliant illumination upon the façade of a well-known "Theatre of Varieties."

His hot eye-balls drank in the flaring signs, and telegraphed both an impulse and a memory to his brain.

"Yes!" he said. "I will revisit the 'Kingdom.' There is still two thirds of an hour before the performance will be over. How well I used to know it! What a nightly haunt it used to be. Surely, even now, there will be some people I know there? . . . I'll go in and see!"

As Lothian turned in at the principal doors of the most celebrated Music Hall in the world, his pulses began to quicken.

—The huge foyer, the purple carpets, with their wreaths of laurel in a purple which was darker yet, the gleaming marble stairway, with its wide and noble sweep, how familiar all this dignified splendour was, he thought as he entered the second Palace of Drink which flung wide its doors to him this night.

A palace of drink and lust, vast and beautiful! for those who brought poisoned blood and vicious desires within its portals! Here, banished from the pagan groves and the sunlit temples of their ancient glory—banished also from the German pine-woods where Heine saw them in pallid life under the full moon—Venus, Bacchus and Silenus held their unholy court.

For all the world—save only for a few wise men to whom they were but symbols—Venus and Bacchus were deities once.

When the Acropolis cut into the blue sky of Hellas with its white splendour these were the

chiefest to whom men prayed, and they ruled the lives of all.

And, day by day, new temples rise in their honour. Once they were worshipped with blythe body and blinded soul. Now the tired body and the besotted brain alone pay them reverence. But great are their temples still.

Such were the thoughts of Lothian—Lothian the Christian poet—and he was pleased that they should come to him.

It showed how detached he was, what real command he had of himself. In the old wild days, before his marriage and celebrity, he had come to this place, and other places like it, to seize greedily upon pleasure, as a monkey seizes upon a nut. He came to survey it all now, to revisit the feverish theatre of his young follies with a bland Olympian attitude.

The poison was flattering him now, placing him upon a swaying pedestal for a moment. He was sucking in the best honey that worthless withering flowers could exude, and it was hot and sweet upon his tongue.

—Were any of the old set there after all? He hoped so. Not conscious of himself as a rule, without a trace of "side" and detesting ostentation or any display of his fame, he wanted to show off now. He wanted to console himself for his rebuff at the house in Bryanstone Square. Vulgar and envious adulation, interested praise from those who were still in the pit of obscurity from which his finer brain had helped him to escape, would be perfectly adequate to-night.

After the episode at the Amberleys', coarse flattery heaped on with a spade would be as ice in the desert.

And he found what he desired.

He passed slowly through the promenade, towards the door which led to the stalls, and the great lounge where, if anywhere, he would find people who knew him and whom he knew.

In a slowly-moving tide, like a weed-clogged wave, the women of the town ebbed and flowed from horn to horn of the moon-shaped crescent where they walk. Against the background of sea-purple and white, their dresses and the nodding plumes in their great hats moved languorously. Sickly perfumes, as from the fan of an odalisque, swept over them.

Many beautiful painted masks floated through the scented aisle of the theatre, as they had floated up and down the bronze corridors of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus in the far off days of St. Paul. A mourning thrill shivered up from the violins of the orchestra below; the 'cellos made their plaint, the cymbals rattled, the kettledrums spoke with deep vibrating voices.

. . . So had the sistra clanked and droned in the old temple of bronze and silver before the altars of Artemis,—the old music, the eternal faces, ever the same!

A chill came to Lothian as he passed among these "estranged sad spectres of the night." He thought suddenly of his pure and gracious wife, alone in their little house in the country, he thought of the Canaanitish harlot whose soul was the first that Christ redeemed. For a moment or two his mind was like a darkened room in which a magic lantern is being operated and fantastic, unexpected pictures flit across the screen. And then he was in the big lounge.

Yes, some of them were there!—a little older, perhaps, to his now much more critical eye, somewhat more bloated and coarsened, but the same still.

"Good heavens!" said a huge man with a blood red face, startling in its menace, like a bully looking into an empty room, "Why, here's old Lothian! Where in the world have *you* sprung from, my dear boy?"

Lothian's face lit up with pleasure and recognition. The big evil-faced man was Paradil, the painter of pastels, a wayward drunken creature who never had money in his pocket, but that he gave it away to every one. He was a man spoken of as a genius by those who knew. His rare pictures fetched large prices, but he hardly ever worked. He was soaked, dissolved and pickled in brandy.

A little elderly man like a diseased doll, came up and began to twitter. He was the husband of a famous dancer who performed at the theatre, a wit in his way, an adroit manager of his wife's affairs with other men, a man with a mind as hollow and bitter as a dried lemon.

He was a well-known figure in upper Bohemia. His name was constantly mentioned in the newspapers as an entrepreneur of all sorts of things, a popular, evil little man.

"Ah, Lothian," he said, as one or two other people came up and some one gave a copious order for drinks, "still alternating between the prayer book and the decanter? I must congratulate you on 'Surgit Amari.' I read it, and it made me green with envy to think how many thousand copies you had sold of it."

"You've kept the colour, Edgar," he said, looking into the little creature's face, but the words

stabbed through him, nevertheless. How true they were—superficially—how they expressed—and must express—the view of his old disreputable companions. They envied him his cunning—as they thought it—they would have given their ears to have possessed the same power of profitable hypocrisy—as they thought it. Meanwhile they spoke virtuously to each other about him. "Gilbert Lothian the author of 'Surgit Amari'!—it would make a cat laugh!"

One can't throw off one's past like a dirty shirt—Gilbert began to wish he had not come here.

"I ought never to be seen in these places," he thought, forgetting that it was only the sting of the little man's malice that provoked the truth.

But Paradil, kindly Paradil with the bully's face and a heart bursting with dropsical good nature, speedily intervened.

Other men joined the circle; "rounds of drinks" were paid for by each person according to the ritual of such an occasion as this.

In half an hour, when the theatre began to empty, Lothian was really, definitely drunk.

Hot circles expanded and contracted within his head. His face became pale and very grave in expression, as he walked out into Leicester Square upon Paradil's supporting arm. There was a portentous dignity in his voice as he gave the address of his club to the cabman. As he shook hands with Paradil out of the window, tears came into his eyes, as he thought of the other's drunken, wasted life. "If I can only help you in any way, old chap—" he tried to say, and then sank back in oblivion upon the cushions.

He was quite unconscious of anything during the short drive to St. James's Street, and when the experienced cabman pulled down the flag of the taximeter and opened the door, he sat there like a log.

The X Club was not fashionable, but it was reputable and of old establishment. It was fairly easy to get into—for the people whom the election committee wanted there—exceedingly difficult for the wrong set of people. Very many country gentlemen—county people, but of moderate means—belonged to it; the Major-General and the Admiral were not infrequent visitors; several Judges were on the members' list and looked in now and again.

As far as the Arts went, they were but poorly represented. There was no sparkle, no night-life about the place. The painters, actors and writers preferred a club that began to brighten up about eleven o'clock at night—just when the X became dreary. Not more than a dozen suppers were served at the staid building in St. James' on any night of the week.

Nevertheless, it was not an "old fogies'" club. There was a younger leaven working there. A good many younger men who also belonged to much more lively establishments found refreshment, quiet, and just the proper kind of atmosphere at the X.

For young men of good families who were starting life in London, there was a certain sense of being at home there. The building had, in the past, been the house of a celebrated duke and something of comely and decent order clung to every room now. And, more than anything, the servants suggested a country or London house of name.

Mullion, the grey-haired head-porter who sat in his glass box in the hall was a kind and assiduous friend to every one. He was reported to be worth ten thousand pounds and his manners were perfection. He was one of the most celebrated servants in London. His deference was never tinged by servility. His interest in your affairs and wants was delicately intimate and quite genuine. Great people had tried to lure this good and shrewd person from the X Club, but without success. For seventeen years he had sat there in the hall, and, if fate was kind, he meant to sit there for seventeen years more.

All the servants of the X were like that. The youngest waiter in the smoking-rooms, library or dining room wore the face of a considerate friend, and Prince, the head bed-room valet was beloved by every one. Members of other clubs talked about him and Mullion, the head-porter, with sighs of regret.

When Gilbert Lothian's taxi-cab stopped at the doors of the X Club, he was expected. Dickson Ingworth, who was a member also, had been there for a few moments, expectant of his friend.

Old Mullion had gone for the night, and an under-porter sat in the quiet hall, but Prince, the valet, stood talking to Ingworth at the bottom of the stair-case.

"It will be perfectly all right," said Prince. "I haven't done for Mr. Lothian for all these years without understanding his ways. Drunk or sober, sir, Mr. Gilbert is always a gentleman. He's the most pleasant country member in the club, sir! I understand his habits thoroughly, and he would bear me out in that at any time. I'm sure of that! His bowl of soup is being kept hot in the kitchens now. The small flask of cognac and the bottle of Worcester sauce are waiting on his

dressing table. And there's a half bottle of champagne, which he takes to put him right when I call him in the morning, already on the ice!"

"I know he appreciates it, Prince. He can't say enough about how you look after him when he's in London."

"I thoroughly believe it, sir," said the valet, "but it gives me great pleasure to hear it from you, who are such a friend of Mr. Gilbert's. I may say, sir—if I may tell you without offence—that I'm not really on duty to-night. But when I see how Mr. Gilbert was when he was dressing for dinner, I made up my mind to stay. James begged me to go, but I would not. James is a good lad, but he's no memory for detail. He'd have forgot the bi-carbonate of soda for Mr. Gilbert's heart-burn, or something like that—I think that's him, sir!"

Ingworth and the valet hurried over the hall as the inner doors swung open and Lothian entered. His shirt-front was crumpled. His face was white and set, his eyes fixed and sombre.

It was as though the master of the house had returned, when the poet entered. The under-porter hurried out of his box, Prince had the coat and opera hat whisked away in a moment. In a moment more, like some trick of the theatre and surrounded by satellites, Lothian was mounting the stairs towards his bedroom.

They put him in an arm-chair—these eager servitors! The electric lights in the comfortable bed-room were all switched on. The servant who loved him, not for his generosity, but for himself, vied with the young gentleman who loved him for somewhat different reasons.

Both of them had been dominated by this personality for so long, that there was no sorrow nor pity in their minds. The faithful man of the people who had served gentlemen so long that any other life would have been impossible to him, the boy of position, united in their efforts of resuscitation.

The Master's mind must be called back! The Master's body must be succoured and provided for.

The two were there to do it, and it seemed quite an ordinary and natural thing.

"You take off his boots, Prince, and I'll manage his collar."

"Yes, sir."

"Managed it?"

"A little difficulty with the left boot, sir. The instep is a trifle swelled."

"Good heavens! I do hope he's not going to have another attack of gout!"

"I hope not, sir. But you can't ever tell. It comes very sudden. Like a thief in the night, as you may say."

"There! I've broken the stud, but that doesn't matter. His neck's free."

"And his boots are off. There's some one knocking. It's his soup. Would you mind putting his bed-room slippers on, sir? I don't like the cold for his feet."

Prince hurried to the door, whispered a word or two to whoever stood outside, and returned with a tray.

"Another few minutes," said Prince, as he poured the brandy and measured the Worcester sauce into the silver-plated tureen; "another few minutes and he'll be beautiful! Mr. Gilbert responds to anything wonderful quick. I've had him worse than this at half past twelve, and at quarter to one he's been talking like an archdeacon. You persuade him, sir."

"Here's your soup, Gilbert!"

"*It's all nothing, there's nobody, all nothing—dark—*," the voice was clogged and drowsy—if a blanket could speak, the voice might have been so.

The boy looked hopelessly at the valet.

Prince, an alert little man with a yellow vivacious countenance and heavy, black eye-brows, smiled superior. "When Mr. Gilbert really have copped the brewer—excuse the expression, sir—he generally says a few words without much meaning. Leave him to me if you please."

He wheeled a little table up to the arm-chair, and caught hold of Lothian's shoulder, shaking him.

"What? What? My soup?"

"Yessir, your soup."

The man's recuperative power was marvellous. His eyes were bleared, his face white, the wavy hair fell in disorder over his forehead. But he was awake and conscious.

"Thank you, Prince," he said, in his clear and sweet voice, "just what I wanted. Hullo, Dicker! You here?—I'll just have my soup. . . ."

He grasped the large ladle-spoon with curious eagerness. It was as though he found salvation in the hot liquid—pungent as it was with cognac and burning spices.

He lapped it eagerly, coughing now and again, "gluck-gluck" and then a groan of satisfaction.

The other two watched him with quiet eagerness. There was nothing horrible to them in this. Neither the valet nor the boy understood that they were "lacqueys in the house of shame." As they saw their muddy magic beginning to succeed, satisfaction swelled within them.

Gilbert Lothian's mind was coming back. They were blind to the hideous necessity of their summons, untouched by disgust at the physical processes involved.

"Will you require me any more, sir?"

"No, thank you, Prince."

"Very good, sir. I have made the morning arrangements."

"Good-night, Prince."

The bedroom door closed.

Lothian heaved himself out of his chair. He seemed fifteen years older. His head was sunk forward upon his shoulders, his stomach seemed to protrude, his face was pale, blotchy, debauched, and appeared to be much larger than it ordinarily did.

With a slow movement, as if every joint in his body creaked and gave him pain, he began to pace slowly up and down the room. Dickson Ingworth sat on the bed and watched him.

Yet as the man moved slowly up and down the room, collecting the threads of his poisoned consciousness, slowly recapturing his mind, there was something big about him.

Each heavy, semi-drunken movement had force and personality. The lowering, considering face spelt power, even now.

He stopped in front of the bed.

"Well, Dicker?" he said—and suddenly his whole face was transformed. Ten years fell away. The smile was sweet and simple, there was a freakish humour in the eyes,—"Well, Dicker?"

The boy gave a great gasp of pleasure and relief. The "gude-man" had come home, the powerful mind-machine had started once more, the house was itself again!

"How are you, Gilbert?"

"Very tired. Horrible indigestion and heartburn, legs like lumps of brass and a nasty feeling as if an imprisoned black-bird were fluttering at the base of my spine! But quite sober, Dicker, now!"

"Nor were you ever anything else, in Bryanstone Square," the young man said hotly. "It *was* such a mistake for you to go away, Gilbert. So unnecessary!"

"I had my reasons. Was there much comment? Now tell me honestly, was it very noticeable?—what did they say?"

"No one said anything at all," Ingworth answered, lying bravely. "The evening didn't last long after you went. Every one left together—I say you ought to have seen the Toftrees' motor!—and I drove Miss Wallace home, and then came on here."

"A beautiful girl," Lothian said sleepily. "I only talked to her for a minute or two and she seemed clever and sympathetic. Certainly she is lovely."

Ingworth rose from the bed. He pointed to the table in the centre of the room. "Well, I'm off, old chap," he said. "As far as Miss Wallace goes, she's absolutely gone on you! She was quoting your verses all the way in the cab. She lives in a tiny flat with another girl, and I had to wait outside while she did up that parcel there! It's 'Surgit Amari,' she wants you to sign it for her, and there's a note as well, I believe. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dicker. I can't talk now. I'm beautifully drunk to-night . . . Look me up in the morning. Then we'll talk."

The door had hardly closed upon the departing youth, when Lothian sank into a heap upon his chair. His body felt like a quivering jelly, a leaden depression, as if Hell itself weighed him down.

Mechanically, and with cold, trembling hands, he opened the brown paper parcel. His book, in its cover of sage-green and gold, fell out upon the table. He began to read the note—the hand-writing was firm, clear and full of youth—so he thought. The heading of the note paper was

embossed—

"The Podley Pure Literature Institute.

Dear Mr. Lothian:

I am so proud and happy to have met you to-night. I am so sorry that I had not the chance of telling you what your poems have been to me—though of course you must always be hearing that sort of thing. So I will say nothing more, but ask you, only, to put your name in my copy of "Surgit Amari" and thus make it more precious—if that is possible—than before.

Mr. Ingworth has kindly promised to give you this note and the book.

Yours sincerely,

Rita Wallace."

The letter dropped unheeded upon the carpet. Thick tears began to roll down Lothian's swollen face.

"Mary! Mary!" he said aloud, "I want you, I want you!" . . .

"Darling! there is no one else in the world but you."

He was calling for his wife, always so good and kind to him, his dear and loving wife. At the end of his long foul day, lived without a thought of her, he was calling for her help and comfort like a sick child.

Poisoned, abject, he whined for her in the empty room.

—She was sleeping now, in the quiet house by the sea. The horn of a motor-car tooted in St. James' Street below—She was sleeping now in her quiet chamber. Tired lids covered the frank, blue eyes, the thick masses of yellow hair were straying over the linen pillow. She was dreaming of him as the night wind moaned about the house.

He threw himself upon his knees by the bedside, in dreadful drunken surrender and appeal.

—"Father help me! Jesus help me!—forgive me!"—he dare not invoke the Holy Ghost. He shrank from that. The Father had made everything and had made him. He was a beneficent, all-pervading Force—He would understand. The Lord Jesus was a familiar Figure. He was human; Man as well as God. One could visualise Him. He had cared for harlots and drunkards! . . .

Far down in his sub-conscious brain Lothian was aware of what he was doing. He was whining not to be hurt. His prayers were no more than superstitious garrulity and fear. Something—a small despairing part of himself, had climbed upon the roof of the dishonoured Temple and was stretching trembling hands out into the overwhelming darkness of the Night.

"Father, help me! Help me *now*. Let me go to bed without phantoms and torturing ghosts round me! Do not look into the Temple to-night. I will cleanse it to-morrow. I swear it! Father! Help me!"

He began to gabble the Lord's Prayer—that would adjust things in a sort of way—wouldn't it? There was a promise—yes—one said it, and it charmed away disaster.

Half-way through the prayer he stopped. The words would not come to him. He had forgotten.

But that no longer distressed him. The black curtain of stupor was descending once more.

"'Thy will be done'—what *did* come after? Well! never mind!" God was good. He'd understand. After all, intention was everything!

He scrambled into bed and instantly fell asleep, while the lovely face of Rita Wallace was the first thing that swam into his disordered brain.

In a remote village of Norfolk, not a quarter of a mile from Gilbert Lothian's own house, a keen-faced man with a pointed beard, a slim, alert figure like an osier wand and steely brown eyes was reading a thin green-covered book of poems.

Now and then he made a pencil note in the margin. His face was alive with interest, almost with excitement. It was as though he were tracing something, hunting for some secret hidden in the pages.

More than once he gave a subdued exclamation of excitement.

"It's there!" he said at last to himself. "Yes, it is there! I'm sure of it, quite apart from what I've heard in the village since I came."

He rose, put the book carefully away in a drawer, locked it, blew out the lamp and went to bed.

Three hundred miles away in Cornwall, a crippled spinster was lying on her bed of pain in a cottage by the sea.

The windows of her room were open and the moon-rays touched a white Crucifix upon the wall to glory.

The Atlantic groundswell upon the distant beaches made a sound as of fairy drums.

The light of a shaded candle fell upon the white coverlet of her bed, and upon a book bound in sage-green and gold which lay there.

The woman's face shone. She had just read for the fifth time, the poem in "Surgit Amari" which closes the first book.

The lovely lines had fused with the holy rapture of the night, and her patient soul was caught up into commune with Jesus.

"Soon! Oh, soon! Dear Lord," she gasped, "I shall be with Thee for ever. If it seemeth good to Thee, let me be taken up on some such tranquil night as this. And I thank Thee, Dear Saviour, that Thou hast poured Thy Grace into the soul of Gilbert Lothian, the Poet. Through the white soul of this poet, which Thou hast chosen to be a conduit of comfort to me, my night pain has gone. I am drawn nearer to Thee, Jesus who hast died for me!

"Lord, bless the poet. Pour down Thy Grace upon him. Guard him, shield him and his for ever more. And, Sweet Lord, if it be Thy will, let me meet him in Heaven and tell him of this night—this fair night of summer when I lay dying and happy and thinking kindly and with gratitude of him.

"Jesus!"

CHAPTER IV

LOTHIAN GOES TO THE LIBRARY OF PURE LITERATURE

> "I only knew one poet in my life:
> And this, or something like it, was his way."
>
> —*Browning.*

The Podley Library in West Kensington was a fad of its creator. Mr. John Podley was a millionaire, or nearly so, and the head of a great pin-making firm. He was a public man of name and often preached or lectured at the species of semi-religious conversations known as "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons."

Sunday afternoon in England—though Mr. Podley called it "The Sabbath"—represented the pin-maker's mental attitude with some fidelity. All avenues to pleasure of any kind were barred, though possibly amusement is the better word. A heavy meal clogged the intellect, an imperfectly-understood piece of Jewish religious politics was made into an idol, erected and bowed down to.

Mr. Podley had always lived with the fear of God, and the love of money constantly before his eyes. "Sabbath observance" and total abstinence were his watchwords, and he also took a great interest in "Literature" and had pronounced views upon the subject. These views, like everything else about him, were confined and narrow, but were the sincere convictions of an ignorant, pompous and highly successful man.

He had, accordingly, established the Podley Free Library in Kensington in order to enunciate and carry out his ideas in a practical way. What he considered—and not without some truth—the immoral tendency of modern writers, was to be sternly prohibited in his model house of books.

Nothing should repose upon those shelves which might bring a blush to the cheeks of the youngest girl or unsettle the minds of any one at all. "Very unsettling" was a great phrase of this good, wealthy and stupid old man. He really was good, vulgar and limited as were all his tastes, and he had founded the Library to the glory of God.

He found it impossible—when he became confronted by the task—to choose the books himself, as he had hoped to do.

He had sat down one day in his elegant private sanctum at Tulse Hill with sheets of foolscap before him, to make a first list. The "Pilgrim's Progress" was written down immediately in his flowing clerkly hand. Then came the novels of Mrs. Henry Wood. "Get all of this line" was the pencilled note in the margin. Memories of his youth reasserted themselves, so "Jessica's First Prayer," "Ministering Children" and "A Peep Behind the Scenes" were quickly added, and then there had been a pause.

"Milton, Shakespeare and the Bible?" said Mrs. Podley, when consulted. "They're pure enough, I'm sure!" and the pin-maker who had never been to a theatre, nor read a line of the great poets, wrote them down at once. As for the Bible, it was God's word, and so "would never bring a blush" etc. It was Mr. Podley's favourite reading—the Old Testament more than the New—and if any one had scoffed at the idea that the Almighty had written it Himself, in English and with a pen, Podley would have thought him infidel.

The millionaire was quite out of date. The modern expansions of thought among the Non-conformists puzzled him when he was (rarely) brought into any contact with them. His grim, uncultured beliefs were such as exist only in the remote granite meeting houses of the Cornish moors to-day.

"I see that Bunyan wrote another book, the 'Holy War,'" said Mr. Podley to his wife. "I never heard of it and I'm a bit doubtful. I don't like the name, shall I enter it up or not?"

The good lady shook her head. "Not knowing, can't say," she remarked. "But if it is the same man who wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress' then it's sure to be pure."

"It's the 'Holy' that puzzles me," he answered, "that's a papist word—'Holy Church' 'Holy Mary' and that."

"Then I should leave it out. But I tell you what, my dear, choosing these books'll take up a lot of your valuable time, especially if each one's got to be chose separate. You might have to read a lot of them yourself, there's no knowing! And why should you?"

"Why, indeed?" said Mr. Podley. "But I don't see how——"

"Well, I do then, John. It's as simple as A. B. C. You want to establish a library in which there shan't be any wicked books."

"That is so?"

"Yes, my dear. Pure, absolutely pure!"

"Well, then, have them bought for you by an expert—like you do the metal for the pins. You don't buy metal yourself any more. You pay high wages to your buyers to do it. Treat the books the same!"

"There's a good deal in that, dear. But I want to take a *personal* interest in the thing."

"Now don't you worry, John. 'Tis right that we should all be conscientious in what we do, but them as has risen to the head of great businesses haven't any further call to trouble about minor details. I've heard you say it many a time. And so with this library. You're putting down the money for it. You've bought the land and the building is being erected. You've got to pay, and if that isn't taking a personal interest then I'm sure I don't know what is!"

"You advise me?—"

"To go to the best book shop in London—there's that place opposite the Royal Academy that is the King's booksellers. See one of the partners. Explain that you want the library furnished with pure books, state the number you want, and get an estimate of the cost. It's their business to know what books are pure and what aren't—and, besides, at a shop like that, they wouldn't sell any wicked books. It would be beneath them."

Podley had taken his wife's advice. He had "placed an order" for an initial ten thousand pure volumes with the firm in question, and the thing was done.

The shop in Piccadilly was a very famous shop indeed. It had all the *cachet* of a library of distinction. Its director was a man of letters and an anthologist of repute. The men who actually sold the books were gentlemen of knowledge and taste, invaluable to many celebrated authors, mines of information, and all of them trained bibliophiles.

"Now look here, Lewis," the director said, to one of his assistants, an Oxford man who translated Flaubert and wrote introductions to English editions of Gautier in his spare time, "you've got to fill a library with books."

Mr. Lewis smiled. "Funny thing they should come to us," he said; "I should have thought they would have bought them by the yard, in the Strand. What is it, American millionaire? question of bindings and wall-space?"

"No, not quite," said the director. "It's Mr. Podley, the pin millionaire and philanthropist. He's founding a public library of 'pure literature' in Kensington. The only books he has ever read, apparently, are the books of the Old Testament. He was with me for an hour this morning. Take a week and make a list. He wants ten thousand volumes for a start."

The eyes of Mr. Lewis gleamed. "Certainly!" he said. "It will be quite delightful. It seems almost too good to be true. But will the list be scrutinised before the books are actually bought? Won't this Podley man take another opinion?"

The director shook his head. "He doesn't know any one who could give him one," he answered. "It would only mean engaging another expert, and he's quite satisfied with our credentials. 'Pure books'! Good Lord! I wonder what he thinks he means. I should like to get inside that man's head and poke about for an hour. It would be interesting."

Mr. Lewis provided for the Kensington Institute exactly the library he would have acquired for himself, if he could have afforded it. The result, for all real lovers of books, would have been delightful if any of them had known of it But the name frightened them away, and they never went there. Members of the general public were also deterred by the name of the Institute—though for quite different reasons—and folk of Mr. Podley's own mental attitude were too illiterate (like him), to want books—"pure" or otherwise—at all.

Podley, again after consultation with his wife, appointed a clerk from the Birmingham pin works as chief librarian. "It won't matter," that shrewd woman had pointed out, "if he knows anything about literature or not! His duties will be to supervise the lending of the books, and a soft job he'll have too!"

A Mr. Hands had been elected, a limpet-like adherent to Podley's particular shibboleth, and a person as anæmic in mind and body as could have been met with in a month of search.

An old naval pensioner and his wife were appointed care-takers, and a lady-typist and sub-librarian was advertised for, at thirty-five shillings a week.

Rita Wallace had obtained the post.

Hardly any one ever came to the library. In the surge and swell of London life it became as remote as an island in the Hebrides. Podley had endowed it—it was the public excuse for the knighthood he purchased in a year from the Liberal Party—and there it was!

Rita Wallace had early taken entire charge and command of her nominal superior—the whiskered and despondent Mr. Hands. The girl frightened and dazzled him. As he might have done at the foot of Etna or Stromboli, he admired, kept at a distance, and accepted the fact that she was there.

The girl was absolute mistress of the solitary building full of beautiful books. Sometimes Hands, whose wife was dying of cancer, and who had no stated times of attendance, stayed away for several days. Snell and his wife—the care-takers—adored her, and she lunched every day with them in the basement.

Mrs. Snell often spoke to her husband about "Miss Rita." "If that there Hands could be got rid of," she would say, "then it would be ever so much better. Poor silly thing that he is, with his face like the underside of a Dover sole! And two hundred a year for doing nothing more than what Miss Rita tells him! He calls her 'Miss'—as I'm sure he should, her being a Commander's daughter and him just a dirty Birmingham clerk! Miss Rita ought to have his two hundred a year, and him her thirty-five shillings a week. Thirty-five shillings! what is it for an officer's daughter, that was born at Malta too! I'd like to give that old Podley a piece of my mind, I would!"

"In the first place he never comes here. In the second place he's not a gentleman himself, so that don't mean nothing to him," Snell would say on such occasion of talk.

He had been at the Bombardment of Alexandria and could not quite forget it. . . . "Now if it was Lord Charles what had started this—'—Magneta—' library, then *'e* could 'a' been spoke to—Podley!"

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of the day after the Amberleys' dinner-party. Hands was away, staying beside his sick wife, and Rita Wallace proposed to close the library.

She had just got rid of the curate from a neighbouring church, who had discovered the deserted place—and her. Snubbed with skill the boy had departed, and as no one else would come—or if they did what would it matter?—Rita was about to press the button of the electric bell upon her table and summon Snell.

The afternoon sunlight poured in upon the books from the window in the dome.

The place was cool and absolutely silent, save for the note a straying drone-bee made as his diapason swept this way and that.

Even here, as the sunlight fell upon the dusty gold and crimson of the books, summer was calling. The bee came close to Rita and settled for a moment upon the sulphur-coloured rose that stood in a specimen-glass upon her writing-table.

He was a big fellow, and like an Alderman in a robe of black fur, bearing a gold chain.

"Oh, you darling!" Rita said, thinking of summer and the outside world. She would go to Kensington Palace Gardens where there were trees, green grass and flowers. "Oh, you darling! You're a little jewel with a voice, a bit of the real country! I believe you've actually been droning over the hop-fields of Kent!"

She looked up suddenly, her eyes startled, the perfect mouth parted in vexation. Some one was coming, she might be kept any length of time—for the rare visitors to the Podley Library were generally bores.

. . . That silly curate might have returned!

The outer swing doors thudded in the hall, there was the click of a latch as the inner door was pushed open and Gilbert Lothian entered.

The girl recognised him at once, as he made his way under the dome towards her, and her eyes grew wide with wonder. Lothian was wearing a suit of grey flannel, his hair as he took off his straw hat was a little tumbled, his face fresh and clear.

"How do you do," he said, with the half-shy deference that came into his voice when he spoke to women. "It was such a lovely afternoon that I thought I might venture to bring back your copy of 'Surgit Amari' myself."

Rita Wallace flashed her quick, humorous smile at him—the connection between the weather and his wish was not too obvious. But her smile had pleasure of another kind in it also—he had wanted to see her again.

Lothian laughed boyishly. "I wanted to see you again," he said, in the very words of her thought.

The girl was flattered and delighted. There was not the slightest hint of self-consciousness in her manner, and the flush that came into her cheeks was one of pure friendliness.

"It is very kind of you to take so much trouble," she said in a voice as sweet as singing. "I was so disappointed when you had to go away so early from the Amberleys' last night."

She did not say the conventional thing about how much his poems had meant to her. Girls that he met—and they were not many—nearly always did, and he always disliked it. Such things meant nothing when they came as part of ordinary greetings. They jarred upon the poet's sensitive taste and he was pleased and interested to find that this girl said nothing of the sort.

"Well, here's the book," he said, putting it down upon Rita's table. "And I've written in it as you asked. Do you collect autographs then?"

She shook her head. "Oh, dear me no," she answered. "I think it's silly to collect anything that isn't beautiful. But, in a book one values, and with which one has been happy, the author's autograph seems to add to the book's personality. But I hate crazes. There are lots of girls that wait outside stage doors to make popular actors write in their books. Did you know that, Mr. Lothian?"

"No, I didn't! Little donkeys! Hard lines on the actors. Even I get a few albums now and then, and it's a fearful nuisance. I put off writing in them and they lie about my study until they get quite a battered and dissipated look."

"And then?"

"Oh, I write in them. It would be impolite not to, you know. I have an invaluable formula. I write, 'Dear Madam, I am very sorry to say that I cannot accede to your kind request for an autograph. The practice is one with which I am not in sympathy. Yours very truly, Gilbert Lothian!'"

"That's splendid, Mr. Lothian, better than sending a telegram, as some one did the other day to an importunate girl. They were talking about it last night at the Amberleys' after you left. I suppose that's really what gave me courage to send 'Surgit Amari' by Mr. Dickson Ingworth. Mr. and Mrs. Toftrees said that they always write passages from their novels when they are asked."

"Perhaps that's a good plan," Lothian answered, listening to the "viols in her voice" and not much interested in the minor advertising arts of the Toftrees. What rare maiden was this with whom he was chatting? What had made him come to see her after all?—a mere whim doubtless—but was he not about to reap a very delightful harvest?

For he was conscious of immense pleasure as he stood there talking to her, and there was excitement mingled with the pleasure. It was as though he was advancing upon a landscape, and at every step something fresh and interesting came into view.

"I *did* so dislike Mr. Toftrees and his wife," Rita said with a mischievous little gleam in her eyes.

"Did you?" he asked in surprise. "They seemed very pleasant people I thought."

"I expect that was because you thought nothing whatever about them, Mr. Lothian," she replied.

He realised the absolute truth of the remark in a flash. The novelists had in no way interested him. He had not thought about these people at all—this maiden was a psychologist then! There was something subtly flattering in what she had said. His point of view had interested the girl, she had discovered it, small and unimportant though it was.

"But why did you dislike poor Mr. Toftrees?" he said, with an eminently friendly smile—already an unconscious note of intimacy had been sounded, he was interested to hear why she disliked the man, not the woman.

"He is pompous and insincere," she replied. "He tries to draw attention to his great success, or rather his notoriety, by pretending to despise it. Surely, it would be far more manly to accept the fact frankly, and not to hint that he could be a great artist if he could bring himself to do without a lot of money!"

Lothian wondered what had provoked this little outburst. It was quiveringly sincere, that he saw. His eyes questioned hers.

"It's such dreadful appalling treacle they write! I saw a little flapper in the Tube two days ago, with the Toftrees' latest book—'Milly Mine.' Her expression was ecstatic!"

"For my part I think that's something to have done, do you know, to have taken that flapper out of the daily tube of her life into Romance. Heaven with electric lights and plush fittings is better than none at all. I couldn't grudge the flapper her ecstasy, nor Mr. Toftrees his big cheques. I should very much like to see the people in Tubes reading my books—it would be good for them—and to pouch enormous cheques myself—would be good for me! But there must be Toftrees sort of persons now that every one knows how to read!"

"Well, I'll let his work alone," she answered, "but I certainly do dislike him. He was trying to run your work down last night—though we wouldn't let him."

So the secret was out now! Lothian smiled and the quick, enthusiastic girl understood. A little ripple of laughter came from her.

"Yes, that's it," she cried. "He did all he could."

"Did he? Confound him! I wonder why?"

Lothian asked the question with entire simplicity. Subtle-minded and complex as he was, he was incapable of mean thoughts and muddy envy when he was not under the influence of drink.

Poisoned, alas, he was entirely different. All the evil in him rose to the surface. As yet it by no means obscured or overpowered the good, but it became manifest and active.

In the case of this fine intellect and splendid artist, no less than in the worker in the slum or the labourer in the field, drink seemed an actual key to unlock the dark and secret doors of wickedness which are in every heart. Some coiled and sleeping serpent within him, no less than in them, raised its head into baleful life and sudden enmity of good.

A few nights ago, half intoxicated in a club—intoxicated in mind that is, for he was holding forth with a caustic bitterness and sharp brilliancy that had drawn a crowd around him—he had abused the work of Herbert Toftrees and his wife with contemptuous and venomous words.

He was quite unconscious that he had ever done so. He knew nothing about the couple and had never read a line of their works. The subject had just cropped up somehow, like a bird from a stubble, and he had let fly. It was pure coincidence that he had met the novelists at the Amberleys' and Lothian had entirely forgotten that he had ever mentioned their work at the club.

But the husband and wife had heard of it the next day, as people concerned always do hear these things, and neither of them were likely to forget that their books had been called "as flat as champagne in decanters," their heroines "stuffy" and that compared to even "—" and "—" they had been stigmatised as being as pawn-brokers are to bankers.

Lothian had made two bitter enemies and he had not the slightest suspicion of it.

"I wonder why?" he said again. "I don't know the man. I've never done him any harm that I know of. But of course he has a right to his own opinions, and no doubt he really thinks——"

"He knows nothing whatever about it," Rita answered. "If a man like that reads poetry at all he has to do it in a prose translation! But I can tell you why—Addison puts it far better than I can. I found the passage the other day. I'll show you."

She was all innocent eagerness and fire, astonishingly sweet and enthusiastic as she hurried to a

bookshelf and came back with a volume.

Following her slim finger, he read:—

> "There are many passions and tempers of mankind, which naturally dispose us to depress and vilify the merit of one rising in the esteem of mankind.
>
> All those who made their entrance into the world with the same advantages, and were once looked on as his equals, are apt to think the fame of his merits a reflection on their own deserts. Those, who were once his equals, envy and defame him, because they now see him their superior; and those who were once his superiors, because they look upon him as their equal."

The girl was gazing at him in breathless attention, wondering whether she had done the right thing, hoping, indeed, that Lothian would be pleased.

He was both pleased and touched by this lovely eager little champion, so unexpectedly raised up to defend him.

"Thank you very much," he said. "How kind of you! My bruised vanity is now at rest. I am healed of my grievous wound! But this seems quite a good library. Are you here all alone, does nobody ever come here? I always heard that the Podley Library was where the bad books went when they died. Tell me all about it."

His hand had mechanically slipped into his waistcoat and half withdrawn his cigarette case. He could never be long without smoking and he wanted a cigarette now more than ever. During a whole hour he had not had a drink. A slight suspicion of headache floated at the back of his head, he was conscious of something heavy at his right side.

"Do smoke," she said. "No one minds—there never is any one to mind, and I smoke here myself. Mr. Hands, the head librarian, didn't like it at first but he does what I tell him now. I'm the assistant librarian."

She announced her status with genuine pride and pleasure, being obviously certain that she occupied a far from unimportant position in public affairs.

Lothian was touched at her simplicity. What a child she was really, with all her cleverness and quickness.

He smoked and made her smoke also—"Delicious!" she exclaimed with pretty greediness. "How perfectly sweet to be a man and able to afford Ben Ezra's Number 5."

"How perfectly sweet!"—it was a favourite expression of Rita's. He soon got to know it very well.

He soon got to know all about the library and about her also, as she showed him round.

She was twenty-one, only twenty-one. Her father, a captain in the Navy, had left her just sufficient money for her education, which had been at a first-class school. Then she had had to be dependent entirely upon her own exertions. She seemed to have no relations and not many friends of importance, and she lived in a tiny three-roomed flat with another girl who was a typist in the city.

She chattered away to him just as if he were a girl friend as they moved among the books, and it was nearly an hour before they left the Library together.

"And now what are you going to do?"

"I must go home, Mr. Lothian," she said with a little sigh. "It has been so kind of you to come and see me. I was going to sit in Kensington Palace Gardens for a little while, but I think I shall go back to the flat now. How hot it is! Oh, for the sea, now, just think of it!"

There was a flat sound in her voice. It lost its animation and timbre. He knew she was sorry to say good-bye to him, rather forlorn now that the stimulus and excitement of their talk was over.

She was lonely, of course. Her pleasures could be but few and far between, and at twenty-one, when the currents of the blood run fast and free, even books cannot provide everything. Thirty-five shillings a week! He had been poor himself in his early journalistic days. It was harder for a girl. He thought of her sitting in Kensington Gardens—the pathetic and solitary pleasure the child had mapped out for herself! He could see the little three-roomed flat in imagination, with its girlish decorations and lack of any real comfort, and some appalling meal presently to be eaten, bread and jam, a lettuce!

The idea came into his mind in a flash, but he hesitated before speaking. Wouldn't she be angry if he asked her? He'd only met her twice, she was a lady. Then he decided to risk it.

"I wonder," he said slowly.

"What are you wondering, Mr. Lothian?"

—"If you realise how easy it is to be by the sea. I know it's cheek to ask you—or at least I suppose it is, but let's go!"

"How do you mean, Mr. Lothian?"

"Let's motor down to Brighton now, at once. Let's dine at the Metropole, and go and sit on the pier afterwards, and then rush home under the stars whenever we feel inclined. Will you!"

"How splendid!" she cried, "now! at once? get out of everything?"

"Yes, now. I am to be the fairy godmother. You have only to say the magic word, and I will wave my wand. The blue heat mists of evening will be over the ripe Sussex cornfields, and we shall see the poppies drinking in the blood of the sinking sun with their burnt red mouths. And then, when we have dined, the moon will wash the sea with silver, the stars will come out like golden rain and the Queen Moon will be upon her throne! We shall see the long, lit front of Brighton like a horned crescent of topaz against the black velvet of the downs. And while we watch it under the moon, the breeze shall bring us faint echoes of the fairy flutes from Prospero's enchanted Island —'But doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange—' And then the sea will take up the burthen 'Ding-dong, ding-dong bell.' Now say the magic word!"

"There is magic in the Magician's voice already, and I needs must answer. Yes! and oh, yes, YES a thousand times!"

"The commandments of convention mean nothing to you?"

"They are the Upper Ten Commandments, not mine."

"Then I will go and command my dragon. I know where you live. Be ready in an hour!"

"How perfectly, *perfectly* sweet! And may we, oh, may we have a lobster mayonnaise for dinner?"

CHAPTER V

"FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE WAS GOING TO HAVE A GIRL FRIEND"

"Across the hills, and far away
  Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day
  The happy princess followed him."

—*Tennyson.*

Lothian went back to his club in a taxi-cab, telling the man to drive at top speed. On the way he ordered a motor-car to go to Brighton and to call for him within twenty minutes.

He was in a state of great exhilaration. He had not had such an adventure as this for years—if ever before. A girl so lovely, so clever, so young—and particularly of his own social rank—he had never met, save for a short space of time and under the usual social conditions which forbade any real intimacy.

Even in the days before his marriage, flirtations, or indeed any companionship, with girls who were not of his class had not attracted him. He had never, unlike other men no less brilliant and gifted than himself, much cared for even the innocent side of Bohemian camaraderie with girls.

And to have a girl friend—and such a girl as Rita Wallace—was a delightful prospect. He saw himself responding to all sorts of simple feminine confidences, exploring reverently the unknown country of the Maiden mind, helping, protecting; unfolding new beauties for the young girl's delight. Yes! he would have a girl friend!

The thing should be ideal, pure and without a thought of harm. She understood him, she trusted herself to him at once and she should be repaid richly from the stores of his mind. None knew better than he what jewels he had to give to one who could recognise jewels when she saw them.

He changed his hat for a cap and had a coat brought down from his bedroom. Should he write a note to Mary at home? He had not sent her more than two telegrams of the "All going splendidly, too busy to write," kind, during the five days he had been in London. He decided that he would write a long letter to-morrow morning. Not to-night. To-night was to be one of pure, fresh pleasure. Every prospect pleased. Nothing whatever would jar. He was not in the mood to write home now—to compose details of his time in Town, to edit and alter the true record for the inspection of loving eyes.

"My darling!" he said to himself as he drank the second whiskey and soda which had been brought to him since he had come in, but there was an uncomfortable feeling in the back of his mind that the words did not ring true.

More than ever exhilarated, as excited as a boy, he jumped into the motor-car when it arrived, and glided swiftly westwards, congratulating himself a dozen times on the idle impulse which had sent him to Kensington. He began to wonder how it had come.

The impulse to bring the book himself had been with him all day. It had taken him till lunch time at least to put himself in any way right—to *appear* right even. With a sick and bitter mind he had gone through the complex physical ritual necessary after the night before—the champagne at eight, the Turkish bath, the hair-dresser's in Regent Street where fast men slunk with hot and shaking hands to have the marks of their vices ironed out of their faces with vibrating hammers worked by electricity.

All through the morning, the bitter, naked, grinning truth about himself had been horribly present—no new visitor, but the same leering ghost he knew so well.

Escape was impossible until the bestial sequence of his morning cure had run its course. Coming down the bedroom stairs into the club there was the disgusting and anxious consciousness that his movements were automatic and jerky, the real fear of meeting any one—the longing to bolt upstairs again and hide. Then a tremendous effort of will had forced him to go on. Facial control was—as ever—the most difficult thing. When he passed the waiters in the smoking room he must screw his face into the appearance of absorbed thought, freeze the twitching mouth and the flickering eyes into immobility. He had hummed a little tune as he had sat down at a table and ordered a brandy and soda, starting as if from a reverie when it was brought him, and making a remark about the weather in a voice of effusive geniality which embarrassed the well-trained servant.

By lunch time the convulsive glances in the mirror, the nervous straying of the hand to the hair, the see-saw of the voice had all gone. Black depression, fear, self-pity, had vanished. The events of the night before became like a landscape seen through the wrong end of a telescope, far away, and as if they concerned some one quite other than himself.

He had not exactly forgotten the shame of his behaviour at the Amberleys' house. But, as he always did after events of this sort, and they were becoming far more general than he realised, he had pushed the thought away in some attic of the brain and closed the door. He would have these memories out some day—soon. It would not be pleasant, but it must of course be done. Then he would put everything right with himself, destroy all these corpses, and emerge into the free sunlight for ever more.

But not to-day. He must put himself *quite* right to-day. When he *was* right then he wouldn't have another drink all day. Yes! then by to-morrow, after a quiet, pensive night, he would throw off all his habits as if he were throwing an old pair of gloves over a wall. He knew well what he could do! He knew himself better than any one else knew him.

But not to-day. "Inshallah Bukra!"—"Please God, to-morrow!"

It had all seemed perfectly natural, though it happened over and over again, and to-morrow never came.

He did not know that this was but one more definite symptom of his poisoned state, as definite as the shaking hand, the maudlin midnight invocations of God, the frequent physical nausea of the morning, even.

And if the man is to be understood and his history to become real in all its phases, then these things must be set down truly and without a veil.

It was a joy to watch her pleasure as they swung out of London in the twenty-horse power Ford he had hired.

She did not say much but leant back on the luxurious cushions by his side. There was a dream of happiness upon her face, and Lothian also felt that he was living in a dream, that it was all part of the painted scenes of sleep.

The early evening was still and quiet. The Western sky, a faint copper-green with friths and locks of purple, was as yet unfired. In the long lights the landscape still retained its colour unaltered by the dying splendours of sunset. The engines of the car were running sweetly in a monotonous and drowsy hum, the driver sat motionless in front as they droned through the quiet villages and up and down the long white ribands of the road. It was an hour of unutterable content.

Once they stopped in a village and drew up before the inn. It was a lovely place. A bell was tolling for evensong in the grey church and they saw the vicar pass under the lych-gate with slow footsteps. One of the long, painted windows was caught by the sun and gleamed like a red

diamond. The road fell to a pond where green water-flags were growing and waxen-white water-lilies floated. Beyond it was a willow wood.

The driver sat on a bench before the inn and drank his beer, but Gilbert and Rita passed through it into a garden that there was. The flowers were just beginning to cense the still air and the faint sound of a water-wheel down the river came to them—*tic, tac, lorelei!*

She would have milk, "Milk that one cannot get in London," and even he asked for no poison in this tranquil garden.

Clematis hung the gables like tapestry of Tyrian purple. There were beds of red crocketed hollyhock and a hedge of honeysuckle with a hundred yellow trumpet mouths. At their feet were the flowers of belamour.

"Men have died, trying to find this place which we have found," he said.

A red-admiral floated by upon its fans of vermilion and black as Gilbert quoted, and a faint echo from the water-mill answered him. *Tic—tac—lorelei!*

"Magician! half an hour ago we were in London!"

"You are happy?"

"I can't find anything to say—yet. It is perfect."

She leant back with a deep sigh and closed her eyes, and he was well content to say nothing, for in all the garden she seemed to him the most perfect thing, rosa-amorosa, the queen of all the roses!

It was as a flower he looked at her, no more. It was all a dream, of course. It had come in dream-fashion, it would go in the fashion of a dream. At that moment she was not a warm human girl with a lovely face. She was not the clever, lonely, subtle-simple maiden in the house of books. She was a flower he had met.

His mind began to weave words, the shuttle to glide in the loom of the poet, but words came to him that were not his own.

"Come hither, Child! and rest;
  This is the end of day,
Behold the weary West!

"Now are the flowers confest
  Of slumber; sleep as they!
Come hither, Child! and rest."

And then he sighed, for he thought of the other poet who had written those lines and of what had brought him to his dreadful death.

Why did thoughts like these come into the flower garden?

How true—even here—were the words he had put upon the title-page of the book which had made him famous—

"*Say, brother, have you not full oft
  Found, even as the Roman did,
That in Life's most delicious cup
  Surgit Amari Aliquid!*"

The girl heard him sigh and turned quickly. She saw that her friend's face was overcast.

It was so much to her, this moment, she was so happy since she had stepped from the hot streets of the city into fairyland with the Magician, that there must be no single shadow.

"Come!" she said gaily, "this is perfect but there are other perfect things waiting. Wave your wand again, Prospero, and change the magic scene."

Lothian jumped up from his seat.

"Yes! on into the sunset. You are right. We must go before we are satisfied. That's the whole art of living—Miranda!"

Her eyes twinkled with mischief.

"How old you have grown all of a sudden," she said, but as they passed through the inn once more he thought with wonder that if six years were added to his age he might have been her father in very fact. Many a man of forty-one or two had girls as old as she.

He sent her to the motor, on pretence of stopping to pay for the milk, but in the little bar-parlour he hurriedly ordered whiskey—"a large one, yes, only half the soda."

The landlord poured it out with great speed, understanding immediately. He must have been used to this furtive taking in of the fuel, here was another accustomed acolyte of alcohol.

"Next stop Brighton, sir," he said with a genial wink.

Lothian's melancholy passed away like a stone falling through water as the car started once more. He said something wildly foolish and discovered, with a throb of amazement and recognition, that she could play! He had never met a girl before who could play, as he liked to play.

There was a strain of impish, freakish humour in Lothian which few people understood, which few *sensible* people ever can understand. It is hardly to be defined, it seems incredibly childish and mad to the majority of folk, but it sweetens life to those who have it. And such people are very rare, so that when one meets another there is a surprised and delighted welcome, a freemason's greeting, a shout of joy in Laughter Land!

"Good heavens!" he said, "and you can play then!"

There was no need to mention the name of the game—it has none indeed—but Rita understood. Her sweet face wrinkled into impish mischief and she nodded.

"Didn't you know?"

"How could I possibly?"

"No, you couldn't of course, but I never thought it of *you*."

"Nor I of you," he answered. "I'll test you. 'The cow is in the garden.'"

"'The cat is in the lake,'" she answered instantly.

"'The pig is in the hammock?'"

"'What difference *does* it make?'" she shouted triumphantly.

For the rest of the drive to Brighton their laughter never stopped. Nothing draws a man and a woman together as laughter does—when it is intimate to themselves, a mutual language not to be understood of others. They became extraordinary friends, as if they had known each other from childhood, and the sunset fires in all their glory passed unheeded.

Although he could hear nothing of what they said, there was a sympathetic grin upon the chauffeur's face at the ringing mirth behind him.

"It's your turn to suppose now, Mr. Lothian."

"Well—wait a minute—oh, let's suppose that Mr. Podley once wrote a moral poem—you to play!"

Rita thought for a minute or two, her lips rippling with merriment, her young eyes shining.

A little chuckle escaped her, her shoulders began to shake and then she shrieked with joy.

"I've got it, splendid! Listen! It's to inculcate kindness to animals.

> "I am only a whelk, Sir,
> Though if you but knew,
> Although I'm a whelk, Sir,
> The Lord made me too!"

"Magnificent!—your turn."

"Well, what will the title of the Toftrees' next novel be?"

"'Cats' meat!'—I say, do you know that I have invented the one *quite* perfect opening for a short story. You'll realise when you hear it that it stands alone. It's perfect, like Giotto's Campanile or 'The Hound of Heaven.'"

"Tell me quickly!"

"Mr. Florimond awoke from a deep sleep. There was nobody there but the Dog Trust."

"You are wonderful. I see it, of course. It's style itself! And how would you end the story? Have you studied the end yet?"

"Yes. I worked at it all the time I was in Italy last year. You shall hear that too. Mr. Florimond sank into a deep sleep. There was nobody there but the Dog Trust."

. . . He told her of his younger days in London when he shared a flat with a brother journalist named Passhe.

"We lived the most delightful freakish lives you can imagine," he said. "When we came into breakfast from our respective bedrooms we had a ritual which never varied. We neither looked at each other nor spoke, but sat down opposite at the table. We each had our newspaper put in our place by the man who looked after us. We opened the papers and pretended to read for a moment. Then Basil looked over the top of his at me, very gravely. 'We live in stirring times, Mr. Lothian!' he would say, and I used to answer, 'Indeed, Mr. Passhe, we do!' Then we became as usual."

"How perfectly sweet! I must do that with Ethel—that's the girl I live with, you know—only we don't have the papers. It runs up so!" she concluded, with a wise little air that sent a momentary throb of pain through a man who had never understood (even in his poorest days) what money meant; and probably never would understand.

Poor, dear little girl! Why couldn't he give her—

"We're here, Mr. Lothian! Look at the lights! Brighton at last!"

Rita had been whisked away by a chambermaid and he was waiting for her in the great hall of the Metropole. He had washed, reserved a table, and swallowed a gin and bitters. He felt rather tired physically, and a little depressed also. His limbs had suddenly felt cramped as he left the motor car, the wild exhilaration of their fun had made him tired and nervous now. His bad state of health asserted itself unpleasantly, his forehead was clammy and the palms of his hands wet.

No champagne for him! Rita should have champagne if she liked, but whiskey, whiskey! that was the only thing. "I can soon pull myself together," he thought. "She won't know. I'll tell the fellow to bring it in a decanter."

Presently she came to him among the people who moved or sat about under the lights of the big, luxurious vestibule. She was a little shy and nervous, slightly flushed and anxious, for she had never been in such a splendid public place before.

He gathered that from her whispered remarks, as with a curious and pleasant air of proprietorship he took her to the dining rooms.

There was a bunch of amber-coloured roses upon her plate as she sat down at their table, which he had sent there a few minutes before. She pressed them to her face with a shy look of pleasure as he conferred with the head waiter, who himself came hurrying up to them.

Lothian was not known at the hotel, but it was always the same wherever he went. His wife often chaffed him about it. She said that he had a "tipping face." Whether that was so or not, the result was the same, he received immediate and marked attention. Rita noticed it with pride.

He had been, from the first moment he entered the Library in his simple flannel suit, just a charming and deferential companion. There had been no preliminaries. The thing had just happened, that was all. In all her life she had never met any one so delightful, and in her excitement and pleasure she had quite forgotten that he was Gilbert Lothian.

But it came back to her very vividly now.

How calmly he ordered the dinner and conferred with the wine-man, who had a great silver chain hanging on his shirt front! What an accustomed man-of-the-world air there was about him, how they all ran to serve him. She blushed mentally as she thought of her simple confidences and girlish chatter—and yet he hadn't seemed to mind.

She looked round her. "It is difficult to realise," she said, as much to herself as to her host, "that there are people who dine in places like this every day."

Lothian looked round him. "Yes," he said a trifle bitterly, as his eye fell upon a party of Jews who had motored down from London,—"people who rule over three-quarters of the world—and an entire eclipse of the intellect! You can see it here, unimportant as it is, compared to the great places in London and Paris—'the feasting and the folly and the fun, the lying and the lusting and the drink'!"

Rita looked at him wonderingly, following the direction of his eyes.

"Those people seem happy," she said, not understanding his sudden mood, "they are all laughing and they all seem amused."

"Yes, but people don't always laugh because they are amused. Slow-witted, obese brained people —like those Israelites there—laugh very often on the chance that there is something funny which eludes them. They don't want to betray themselves. When I see people like that I feel as if my mind ought to be sprinkled with some disinfecting fluid."

As a matter of fact, the party at the other table with their handsome Oriental faces and alert, vivacious manner did not seem in the least slow-witted, nor were they. One of them was a peer and great newspaper proprietor, another a musician of world celebrity. Lothian's cynicism jarred on the pleasure of the moment. For the first time the girl did not feel quite *en rapport*, and was a little uneasy. He struck too harsh a note.

But at that moment waiters bustled up with soup, champagne in an ice pail, and a decanter of some bright amber liquid for Lothian. He poured and drank quickly, with an involuntary sigh of satisfaction.

"How I wanted that!" he said with a frank smile. "I was talking nonsense, Miranda, but I was tired. And I'm afraid that when I get tired I'm cross. I've been working very hard lately and am a little run down," he added, anxious that she should not think that their talk had tired him, and feeling the necessity of some explanation.

It satisfied her immediately. His change of voice and face reassured her, the little shadow passed.

"Oh, I *am* enjoying myself!" she said with a sigh of pleasure, "but what's this? How strange! The soup is *cold*!"

"Yes, didn't you know? It's iced consommé, awfully good in hot weather."

She shook her head. "No, I didn't," she said. "I've never been anywhere or seen anything, you know. When Ethel and I feel frightfully rich, we have dinner at Lyons, but I've never been to a swagger restaurant before."

"And you like it?"

"It's heavenly! How good this soup is. But what a waste it seems to put all that ice round the champagne. Ice is so dreadfully expensive. You get hardly any for fourpence at our fishmongers."

But it was the mayonnaise with its elaborate decoration that intrigued her most.

Words failed at the luscious sight and it was a sheer joy to watch her.

"Oh, what a pig I am!" she said, after her second helping, with her flashing, radiant smile, "but it was too perfectly sweet for anything."

The champagne and excitement had tinted her cheeks exquisitely, it was as though a few drops of red wine had been poured into a glass of clear crystal water. With little appetite himself, Lothian watched her eat with intense pleasure in her youth and health. His depression had gone, he seemed to draw vitality from her, to be informed with something of her own pulsing youth. He became quite at his best, and how good that was, not very many people knew.

It was his hour, his moment, every sense was flattered and satisfied. He was dining with the prettiest girl in the room, people turned to look at her. She hung on his words and was instantly appreciative. A full flask of poison was by his side, he could help himself without let or hindrance. Her innocence of what he was doing—of what it was necessary for him to do to remain at concert-pitch—was supreme. No one else knew or would have cared twopence if they did.

He was witty, in a high courtly way. The hour of freakish fun was over, and his shrewd insight into life, his poetic and illuminating method of statement, the grace and kindliness of it all held the girl spellbound.

And well it might. His nerves, cleared and tempered, telegraphed each message to his brilliant, lambent brain with absolute precision.

There was an entire co-ordination of all the reflexes.

And Rita knew well that she was hearing what many people would have given much to hear, knew that Lothian was exerting himself to a manifestation of the highest power of his brain—for her.

For her! It was an incredible triumph, wonderfully sweet. The dominant sex-instinct awoke. Unconsciously she was now responding to him as woman to man. Her eyes, her lips showed it, everything was quite different from what it had been before.

In all that happened afterwards, neither of them ever forgot that night. For the girl it was Illumination.

. . . She had mentioned a writer of beautiful prose whom she had recently discovered in the library and who had come as a revelation to her.

"Nothing else I have ever read produces the same impression," she said.

"There are very few writers in prose that can."

"It is magic."

"But to be understood. You see, some of his chapters—the passages on Leonardo da Vinci for instance, are intended to be musical compositions as it were, in which words have to take the place and perform the functions of notes. It has been pointed out that they are impassioned, not so much in the sense of expressing any very definite sentiment, but because, from the combination and structure of the sentences, they harmonise with certain phases of emotion."

She understood. The whole mechanism and intention of the writer were revealed to her in those lucent words.

And then a statement of his philosophy.

"In telling me of your reading just now, you spoke of that progress of the soul that each new horizon in literature seems to stimulate and ensure for you. And you quoted some hackneyed and beautiful lines of Longfellow. Cling always to that idea of progress, but remember that we don't really rise to higher things upon the stepping stones of our dead selves so much as on the stepping stones of our dead opinions. That is Progress. *Progress means the capability of seeing new forms of beauty.*"

"But there are places where one wants to linger."

"I know, but it's dangerous. You were splendidly right when you bade me move from that garden just now. The road was waiting. It is so with states of the soul. The limpet is the lowest of organisms. Movement is everything. One life may seem to be like sunlight moving over sombre ground and another like the shadow of a cloud traversing a sunlit space. But both have meaning and value. Never strike an average and imagine you have found content. The average life is nothing but a pudding in a fog!"

Lothian had been talking very earnestly, his eyes full of light, fixed on her eyes. And now, in a moment, he saw what had been there for many minutes, he saw what he had roused.

He was startled.

During this delightful evening that side of their intercourse had not been very present in his mind. She was a delightful flower, a flower with a mind. It is summed up very simply. *He had never once wanted to touch her.*

His face changed and grew troubled. A new presence was there, a problem rose where there had been none before. The realisation of her physical loveliness and desirability came to him in a flood of new sensation. The strong male impulse was alive and burning for the first time that night.

A waiter had brought a silver dish of big peaches, and as she ate the fruit there was that in her eyes which he recognised, though he knew her mind was unconscious of it.

In the sudden stir and tumult of his thoughts, one became dominant.

It was an evil thought, perhaps the most subtle and the most evil that can come to a man. The pride of intellect in its most gross and devilish manifestation awoke.

He was not a vain man. He did not usually think much about his personal appearance and charm. But he knew how changed in outward aspect he was becoming. His glass told him that every morning at shaving time. His vice was marking him. He was not what he was, not what he should and might be, in a physical regard. And girls, he knew, were generally attracted by physical good-looks in a man. Young Dickson Ingworth, for instance, seemed able to pick and choose. Lothian had often laughed at the boyish and conceited narratives of his prowess. And now, to the older man came the realisation that his age, his growing corpulence, need mean nothing at all—if he willed it so. A girl like this, a pearl among maidens, could be dominated by his intellect. He knew that he was not mistaken. Over a fool, however lovely and attractive by reason of her sex, he would have no power. But here . . .

An allurement more dazzling than he had thought life held was suddenly shown him.

There was an honest horror, a shudder and recoil of all the good in him from this monstrous revelation, so sudden, so unexpected.

He shuddered and then found an instant compromise.

It could not concern *himself*, it never should. But it might be regarded—just for a few brief moments!—from a detached point of view, as if it had to do with some one else, some creation of a fiction or a poem.

And even that was unutterably sweet.

It should be so, only for this night. There would be no harm done. And it was for the sake of his Art, the psychological experience to be gathered. . . .

There is no time in thought. The second hand of his watch had hardly moved when he leant

towards her a little and spoke.

"Cupid!" he said. "I think I know why they used to call you Cupid at your school!"

Just as she had been a dear, clever and deferential school-girl in the Library, a girl-poet in the garden, a freakish companion-wit after that, so now she became a woman.

He had fallen. She knew and tasted consciousness of power.

Another side of the girl's complex personality appeared. She led him on and tried to draw back. She became provocative at moments when he did not respond at once. She flirted with a finished art.

As he lit a cigarette for her, she tested the "power of the hour" to its limit, showing without possibility of mistake how aware she was.

"What would Mrs. Lothian think of your bringing me here to dinner?" she said very suddenly.

For a moment he did not know what to answer, the attack was so direct, the little feline thrust revealing so surely where he stood.

"She would be delighted that I was having such a jolly evening," he answered, but neither his smile nor his voice was quite true.

She smiled at him in girlish mockery, rejoicing!

"You little devil!" he thought with an embarrassed mental grin. "How dare you." She should pay for that.

"Would you mind if my wife did care," he asked, looking her straight in the eyes.

"I ought to, but—I shouldn't!" she answered recklessly, and all his blood became fired.

Yet at that, he leant back in his chair and laughed a frank laugh of amusement. The tension was over, the dangerous moment passed, and soon afterwards they wandered out into the night, to go upon the pier "just for half an hour" before starting for London.

And neither of them saw that upon one of the lounges in the great hall, sipping coffee and talking to the newspaper-peer Herbert Toftrees was sitting.

He saw them at once and started, while an ugly look came into his eyes. "Look," he said. "There's Gilbert Lothian, the Christian Poet!"

"So that's the man!" said Lord Morston, "deuced pretty wife he's got. And very fine work he does too, by the way."

"Oh, that's not his wife," Toftrees answered with contempt. "I know who that is quite well. Lothian keeps his wife somewhere down in the country and no one ever sees her." And he proceeded to pour the history of the Amberleys' dinner-party into a quietly amused and cynical ear.

The swift rush back to London under the stars was quiet and dreamy. Repose fell over Gilbert and Rita as they sat side by side, repose "from the cool cisterns of the midnight air."

They felt much drawn to each other. Laughter and all feverish thoughts were swept away by the breezes of their passage through the night. They were old friends now! An affection had sprung up between them which was to be a real and enduring thing. They were to be dear friends always, and that would be "perfectly sweet."

Rita had been so lonely. She had wanted a friend so.

He was going home on the morrow. He had been too long away.

But he would be up in town again quite soon, and meanwhile they would correspond.

"Dear little Rita," he said, as he held her hand outside the door of the block of flats in Kensington. "Dear child, I'm so glad."

It was a clear night and the clocks were striking twelve.

"And I'm glad, too," she answered,—"Gilbert!"

He was soon at his club, had paid the chauffeur and dismissed him. There was no one he wanted to talk to in either of the smoking rooms, and so, after a final peg he went upstairs to bed. He was quite peaceful and calm in mind, very placidly happy and pleased.

To-morrow he would go home to Mary.

He said his prayers, begging God to make this strange and sweet friendship that had come into his life of value to him and to his little friend, might it always be fine and pure!

So he got into bed and a pleasant drowsiness stole over him; he had a sense of great virtue and peace. All was well with his soul.

"Dear little Rita," were the words he murmured as he fell asleep and lay tranquil in yet another phase of his poisoned life.

No dreams disturbed his sleep. No premonition came to tell him whither he had set his steps or whither they would lead him.

A mile or two away there was a nameless grave of shame, within a citadel where "pale Anguish keeps the gate and the Warder is Despair."

But no spectre rose from that grave to warn him.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK

BOOK TWO

LOTHIAN IN NORFOLK

"Not with fine gold for a payment,
   But with coin of sighs,
But with rending of raiment
   And with weeping of eyes,
But with shame of stricken faces
   And with strewing of dust,
For the sin of stately places
   And lordship of lust."

CHAPTER I

VIGNETTE OF EARLY MORNING. "GILBERT IS COMING HOME!"

"Elle se repand dans ma vie
   Comme un air imprégné de sel,
Et dans mon âme inassouvie
   Verse le goût de l'éternel."

—*Baudelaire.*

The white magic of morning was at work over the village of Mortland Royal. From a distant steading came the thin brazen cry of a cock, thin as a bugle, and round the Lothians' sleeping house the bubble of bird-song began.

In the orchard before the house, which ran down to the trout stream, Trust, the brown spaniel dog, came out of a barrel in his little fenced enclosure, sniffed the morning air, yawned, and went back again into his barrel. White mist was rising from the water-meadows, billowed into delicate eddies and spirals by the first breeze of day, and already touched by the rosy fingers of dawn.

In the wood beyond the meadows an old cock-pheasant made a sound like high hysteric laughter.

The house, with its gravel-sweep giving directly on to the unfenced orchard, was long and low. The stones were mellowed by time, and orange, olive, and ash-coloured lichens clung to them. The roof was of tiles, warm red and green with age, the windows mullioned, the chimney-stack, which cut deep into the roof, high and with the grace of Tudor times.

The place was called the "Old House" in the village and was a veritable sixteenth century cottage, rather spoilt by repairs and minor extensions, but still, in the silent summer morning, with something of the grace and fragrance of an Elizabethan song. It was quite small, really, a large cottage and nothing more, but it had a personality of its own and it was always very tranquil.

On such a summer dawn as this with the rabbits frisking in the pearl-hung grass, on autumn days

of brown and purple, or keen spring mornings when the wind fifed a tune among the bare branches of the apple-trees; on dead winter days when sea-birds from the marshes flitted against the grey sky like sudden drifts of snow, a deep peace ever brooded over the house.

The air began to grow fresher and the mists to disperse as the breeze came over the great marshes a mile beyond the village. Out on the mud-flats with their sullen tidal creeks the sun was rising like a red Host from the far sea which tolled like a Mass bell. The curlews with their melancholy voices were beginning to fly inland from the marshes, high up in the still sky. The plovers were calling, the red-shanks piping in the marrum grass, and a sedge of herons shouted their hoarse "frank, frank" as they clanged away over the saltings.

Only the birds were awake in this remote Norfolk village, the cows in the meadows had but just turned in their sleep, and not even the bees were yet a-wing. Peace, profound and brooding, lay over the Poet's house.

Dawn blossomed into perfect morning, all gold and blue. It began, early as it was, to grow hot. Trust came out of his barrel and began to pad round his little yard with bright brown eyes.

There was a sound of some one stirring in the silent house, and presently the back door, in the recess near the entrance gates, was flung wide open and a housemaid with untidy hair and eyes still heavy with sleep, stood yawning upon the step. There was a rattle of cinders and the cracking of sticks as the fire was lit in the kitchen beyond. Trust, in the orchard, heard the sound. He could smell the wood-smoke from the chimney. Presently one of the Great Ones, the Beloved Ones, would let him out for a scamper in the dew. Then there would be biscuits for the dog Trust.

And now brisk footsteps were heard upon the road outside the entrance gates. In a moment more these were pushed open with a rattle, and Tumpany swung in humming a little tune.

Tumpany was a shortish thick-set man of fifty, with a red clean-shaven face. He walked with his body bent forward, his arms hanging at his sides, and always seemed about to break into a short run. It was five years since he had retired even from the coast-guard, but Royal Navy was written large all over him, and would be until he tossed off his last pint of beer and sailed away to Fidler's Green—"Nine miles to windward of Hell," as he loved to explain to the housemaid and the cook.

Tumpany's wife kept a small shop in the village, and he himself did the boots and knives, cleaned Gilbert's guns and went wild-fowling with him in the winter, was the more immediate Providence of the Dog Trust, and generally a most important and trusted person in the little household of the Poet.

There was an almost exaggerated briskness in Tumpany's walk and manner as he turned into the kitchen. Blanche, the housemaid, was now "doing" the dining-room, in the interior of the house, but Phoebe, the cook—a stalwart lass of three and twenty—had just got the fire to her liking and was giving a finishing touch of polish to the range.

"Morning, my girl!" said Tumpany in a bluff, cheery voice.

Phoebe did not answer, but went on polishing the handle of the oven door.

He repeated the salutation, a shade less confidently.

The girl gave a final leisurely twist of the leather, surveyed her work critically for a moment, and then rose to her feet.

"There are them knives," she said shortly, pointing to a basket upon the table, "and the boots is in the back kitchen."

"You needn't be so short with a man, Phoebe."

"You needn't have been so beastly drunk last night. Then them knives wouldn't want doing this morning. If it hadn't been for me the dog wouldn't have had no food. If the mistress knew she would have given you what for, as I expect your missis have already if the truth were known."

"Damn the mistress!" said Tumpany. He adored Mary Lothian, as Phoebe very well knew, but his head burned and he was in the uncertain temper of the "morning after." The need of self-assertion was paramount.

"Now, no beastly language in my kitchen," said the girl. "You go and do your damning—and them knives—in the outhouse. I wonder you've the face to come here at all, Master being away too. Get out, do!"

With a very red and sulky face, Tumpany gathered up the knives and shambled away to his own particular sanctum.

The ex-sailor was confused in his mind. There was a buzzing in his head like that of bees in a hive. He had a faint recollection of being turned out of the Mortland Arms just before ten o'clock the night before. His muddy memories showed him the stern judicial face of the rather grim old

lady who kept the Inn. He seemed to feel her firm hands upon his shoulders yet.

But had he come back to the Old House? He was burning to ask the cook. One thing was satisfactory. His mistress had not seen him or else Phoebe's threat would have meant nothing. Yet what had happened in his own house? He had woke up in the little parlour behind the shop. Some one had covered him with an overcoat. He had not dared to go upstairs to his wife. He hoped—here he began to rub a knife up and down the board with great vigour—he did hope that he hadn't set about her. There was a sick fear in the man's heart as he polished his knives.

In many ways a better fellow never breathed. He was extremely popular in the village, Gilbert Lothian swore by him, Mary Lothian liked him very well. He was a person of some consequence in the village community where labourers worked early and late for a wage of thirteen shillings a week. His pension was a good one, the little shop kept by his wife was not unprosperous, Lothian was generous. He only got drunk now and then—generally at the time when he drew his pension—but when he did his wife suffered. He would strike her, not knowing what he did. The dreadful marks would be on her face in the morning and he would suffer an agony of dull and inarticulate remorse.

So, even in the pretty cottage of this prosperous and popular man—so envied by his poorer neighbours—*surgit amari aliquid*!

. . . If only things had been all right last night!

Tumpany put down his knife with a bang. He slipped from his little outhouse, and slunk across the orchard. Then he opened the iron gate of the dog's kennel.

The dog Trust exploded over Tumpany like a shell of brown fur. He leapt at him in an ecstasy of love and greeting and then, unable to express his feelings in any other way, rolled over on his back with his long pink tongue hanging out, and his eyes blinking in the sun.

"Goodorg," said Tumpany, a little comforted, and then both he and Trust slunk back to the outhouse. There was a sympathetic furtiveness in the animal also. It was as though the Dog Trust quite understood.

Tumpany resumed his work. Two rabbits which he had shot the day before were hanging from the roof, and Trust looked up at them with eager eyes. A rabbit represented the unattainable to Trust. He was a hard-working and highly-trained sporting dog, a wild-fowling dog especially, and he was never allowed to retrieve a rabbit for fear of spoiling the tenderness of his mouth. When one of the delicious little creatures bolted under his very nose, he must take no notice of it at all. Trust held the (wholly erroneous) belief that if only he had the chance he could run down a rabbit in the open field. He did not realise that a dog who will swim over a creek with a snipe or tiny ring-plover in his mouth and drop it without a bone being broken must never touch fur. His own greatness forbade these baser joys, but like the Prince in the story who wanted to make mud pies with the beggar children, he was unconscious of his position, and for him too—on this sweet morning—surgit amari aliquid.

But life has many compensations. The open door of the brick shed was darkened suddenly. Phoebe, who in reality had a deep admiration for Mr. Tumpany, had relented, and in her hand was a mug of beer.

"There!" she said with a grin, "and take care it don't hiss as it goes down. Pipes red hot I expect! Lord what fools men are!"

Tumpany said nothing, but the deep "gluck gluck" of satisfaction as he drank was far more eloquent than words.

Phoebe watched him with a pitying and almost maternal wonder in her simple mind.

"A good thing you've come early, and Mistress ain't up yet," she said. "I went into the cellar as quiet as a cat, and I held a dish-cloth over the spigot when I knocked it in again so as to deaden the sound. You can hear the knock all over the house else!"

"Thank ye, Phoebe, my dear. That there beer's in lovely condition; and I don't mind saying I wanted it bad."

"Well, take care, as you don't want it another day so early. I see your wife last night!"

She paused, maliciously enjoying the anxiety which immediately clouded the man's round, red face.

"It's all right," she said at length. "She was out when you come home from the public, and she found you snoring in the parlour. There was no words passed. I must get to work."

She hurried back to her kitchen. Tumpany began to whistle.

The growing warmth of the morning had melted the congealed blood which hung from the noses of the rabbits. One or two drops fell upon the flags of the floor and the Dog Trust licked them up

with immense relish.

Thus day began for the humbler members of the Poet's household.

At a few minutes before eight o'clock, the mistress of the house came down stairs, crossed the hall and went into the dining room.

Mary Lothian was a woman of thirty-eight. She was tall, of good figure, and carried herself well. She was erect, without producing any impression of stiffness. She walked firmly, but with grace.

Her abundant hair was pale gold in colour and worn in a simple Greek knot. The nose, slightly aquiline, was in exact proportion to the face. This was of an oval contour, though not markedly so, and was just a little thin. The eyes under finely drawn brows, were a clear and steadfast blue.

In almost every face the mouth is the most expressive feature. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, the mouth is its revelation. It is the true indication of what is within. The history of a man or woman's life lies there. For those who can read, its subtle changing curves at some time or another, betray all secrets of evil or of good. It is the first feature that sensual vices coarsen or self-control refines. The sin of pride moulds it into shapes that cannot be hidden. Envy, hatred and malice must needs write their superscription there, and the blood stirs about our hearts when we read of an angelic smile.

The Greeks knew this, and when their actors trod the marble stage of Dionysius at Athens, or the theatre of Olympian Zeus by the hill Kronian, their faces were masked. The lips of Hecuba were always frozen into horror. The mouths of the heralds of the Lysistrata were set in one curve of comedy throughout the play. Voices of gladness or sorrow came from lips of wax or clay, which never changed as the living lips beneath them needs must do. A certain sharpness and reality, as of life suddenly arrested at one moment of passion, was aimed at. Men's real mouths were too mobile and might betray things alien to the words they chanted.

The mouth of Mary Lothian was beautiful. It was rather large, well-shaped without possessing any purely æsthetic appeal, and only a very great painter could have realised it upon canvas. In a photograph it was nothing, unless a pure accident of the camera had once in a way caught its expression. The mouth of this woman was absolutely frank and kind. Its womanly dignity was overlaid with serene tenderness, a firm sweetness which never left it. In repose or in laughter—it was a mouth that could really laugh—this kindness and simplicity was always there. Always it seemed to say "here is a good woman and one without guile."

The whole face was capable without being clever. No freakish wit lurked in the calm, open eyes, there was nothing of the fantastic, little of the original in the quiet comely face. All kind and simple people loved Mary Lothian and her—

"Sweet lips, whereon perpetually did reign
The Summer calm of golden charity."

Men with feverish minds and hectic natures could see but little in her—a quiet woman moving about a tranquil house. There was nothing showy in her grave distinction. She never thought about attracting people, only of being kind to them. Not as a companion for their lighter hours nor as a sharer in their merriment, did people come to her. It was when trouble of mind, body or estate assailed them that they came and found a "most silver flow of subtle-paced counsel in distress."

Since the passing of Victoria and the high-noon of her reign, the purely English ideal of womanhood has disappeared curiously from contemporary art and has not the firm hold upon the general mind that it had thirty years ago.

The heroines of poems and fictions are complex people to-day, world-weary, tempestuous and without peace of heart or mind. The two great voices of the immediate past have lost much of their meaning for modern ears.

"So just
A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust
Her with the holy task of giving life in turn."

—Not many pens nor brushes are busy with such ladies now.

"Crown'd Isabel, thro' all her placid life,
The queen of marriage, a most perfect wife."

—Who sings such Isabels to-day? It is Calypso of the magic island of whom the modern world loves to hear, and few poets sing Penelope faithful by the hearth any more.

But when deep peace broods over a dwelling, it is from the Mary Lothians of England that it comes.

Mary was very simply dressed, but there was an indescribable air of distinction about her. The skirt of white piqué hung perfectly, the cream-coloured blouse with drawn-thread work at the neck and wrists was fresh and dainty. On her head was a panama hat with a scarf of mauve silk tied loosely round it and hanging down her back in two long ends.

In one hand she held a silver-headed walking cane, in the other a small prayer-book, for she was going to matins before breakfast.

She spoke a word to the cook and went out of the back door, calling a good-morning to Tumpany as she passed his shed, and then went through the entrance-gate into the village street.

By this hour the labourers were all at work in the fields and farmyards—the hay harvest was over and the corn cutting about to begin—but the cottage doors were open and the children were gathering in little groups, ready to proceed to school.

There was a fresh smell of wood-smoke in the air and the gardens of the cottages were brilliant with flowers.

Mary Lothian, however, was thinking very little about the village—to which she was Lady Bountiful. She hardly noticed the sweet day springing over the country side.

She was thinking of Gilbert.

He had been away for a week now and she had heard no news of him except for a couple of brief telegrams.

For several days before he went to London, she had seen the signs of restlessness and ennui approaching. She knew them well. He had been irritable and moody by fits and starts. After lunch he had slept away the afternoons, and at dinner he had been feverishly gay. Once or twice he had driven into Wordingham—the local town—during the afternoon, and had returned late at night, very angry on one of these occasions to find her sitting up for him.

"I wish to goodness you would go to bed, Mary," he had said with a sullen look in his eyes. "I do hate being fussed over as if I were a child. I hate my comings and goings spied upon in this ridiculous way. I must have freedom! Kindly try and remember that you have married a poet—an artist!—and not some beef-brained ordinary fool!"

The servants had gone to bed, but she had lit candles in old silver holders, and spread a dainty supper for him in case he should be hungry, taking especial care over the egg sandwiches and the salad which he said she made so perfectly.

She had gone to bed without a word, for she knew well what made him speak to her like that. She lay awake listening, her room was over the dining room, and heard the clink of a glass and the gurgle of a syphon. He was having more drink then. When he came upstairs he went into the dressing room where he sometimes slept, and before long she heard him breathing heavily in sleep. He always came to her room when he was himself.

Then she had gone downstairs noiselessly to find her little supper untouched, a smear of cigarette ash upon the tablecloth, and that he had forgotten to extinguish the candles.

There came a day when he was especially kind and sweet. His recent irritation and restlessness seemed to have quite gone. He smoked pipes instead of cigarettes, always a good sign in him, and in the afternoon they had gone for a long tramp together over the marshes. She was very happy. For the last year, particularly since his name had become well-known and he was seriously counted among the celebrities of the hour, he had not cared to be with her so much as in the past. He only wanted to be with her when he was depressed and despondent about the future. Then he came for comfort and clung to her like a boy with his mother. "It's for the sake of my Art," he would say often enough, though she never reproached him with neglect. "I *must* be a great deal alone now. Things come to me when I am alone. I love being with you, sweetheart, but we must both make a sacrifice for my work. It means the future. It means everything for both of us!"

He used not to be like this, she sometimes reflected. In the earlier days, when he was actually doing the work which had brought him fame, he had never wanted to be away from her. He used to read her everything, ask her opinion about all his work. Life had been more simple. She had known every detail of his. He had not drunk much in those days. In those days there had been no question of that at all. After the success it was different.

She had gone to his study in the morning, after nights when he had been working late, and had been struck with fear when she had looked at the tantalus. But, then, he had been spruce and cheerful at breakfast and had made a hearty meal. Her remonstrances had been easily swept away. He had laughed.

"Darling, don't be an old goose! You don't understand a bit. What?—Oh, yes, I suppose I did have rather a lot of whiskey last night. But I did splendid work. And it is only once in a way. I'm as fit this morning as I ever was in my life. But I'm working double tides now. You know what an immense strain it is. Just let me consolidate my reputation, become absolutely secure, and—well, then you'll see!"

But for months now things had not improved, and on this particular day, a week ago now, the sudden change in Gilbert, when the placidity of the old time seemed to have returned, was like cool water to a wound.

They had been such friends again! In the evening they had got out all her music and while he played, she had sung the dear old songs of their courtship and early married life. They had the "Keys Of Heaven," "The Rain Is on the River," "My Dear Soul" and the "Be My Dear and Dearest!" of Cotsford Dick.

On the next morning the post had brought letters calling Gilbert to London. He had to arrange with Messrs. Ince and Amberley about his new book. Mr. Amberley had asked him to dine—"You don't perhaps quite understand, dear, but when Amberley asks one, one *must* go"—there were other important things to see after.

Gilbert had not asked her to come with him. She would have liked to have gone to London very much. It was a long time since she had been to a theatre, ages since she had heard a good concert. And shopping too! It seemed such a good opportunity, while the sales were on.

She had hinted as much, but he had shaken his head with decision: "No, dear, not now. I am going strictly on business. I couldn't give you the time I should want to, and I should hate that. It wouldn't be fair to you. We'll go up in the Autumn, just you and I together and have a really good time. That will be far jollier. For heaven's sake, don't let's try to mix up business with pleasure. It's fatal to both."

Had he known that he was to be called to London? Had he arranged it beforehand, itching to be free of her gentle yoke, her wise, restraining hand? Was that the reason that he had been so affectionate the day before he went away? His conscience was uneasy perhaps . . . ?

And why had he not written—was there a sordid, horrible reason for his silence; when was he coming back . . . ?

These were the sad, disturbing thoughts stirring in Mary's mind as the near tolling of the bell smote upon her ears and she entered the Churchyard.

The church at Mortland Royal was large and noble. It would have held the total population of the village three times over. Relic of Tudor times when Norfolk was the rich and prosperous centre of the wool industry of England, it was only one of the many pious monuments of a vanished past which still keep watch and ward over the remote, forgotten villages of the North East Coast.

Stately still the fane, in its noble masses, its fairness, majesty and strength, the slender intricacy and rich meshes of its tracery in which no single cusp or finial is in vain, no stroke of the chisel useless. Stately the grey towers also, foursquare for centuries to the winds of the Wash. Dust the man who made it, but uncrumbled stone the body of his dream. He had thought in light and shadow. He had seen these immemorial stones when the sun of July mornings was hot upon them, or the early dusks of December left them to the dark. Out of the spaces of light and darkness in the vision of his mind this strong tower had been built.

Inviolate, it was standing now.

But as Mary passed through the great porch with its worn and weathered saints into the Church itself, the breath of the morning was damp and there was a chill within.

The gallant chirrup of the swallows flying round the tower, sank to a faint "cheep, cheep," the voice of the tolling bell became muffled and funereal, and mildew lay upon the air. "Non sum qualis eram," the lorn interior seemed to echo to her steps, "bonae sub regno Ecclesiæ."

There was a little American organ in the Chancel. No more would the rich plainsong of Gregory echo under these ancient roofs like a flowing tide in some cavern of the sea.

The stone Altar was covered with a decaying web of crimson upon which was embroidered a symbol of sickly, faded yellow. Perhaps never again would a Priest raise the Monstrance there, while the ceremonial candle-flames were pallid in the morning light and hushed voices hymned the Lamb of God.

These, all these, were in the olden time and long ago.

But the Presence of God, the Peace of God, were in the Church still, soul-saving, and as real as when the gracious ceremonies of the past symbolised them for those who were there to worship.

Mr. Medley, the old Priest who was curate to a Rector who was generally away, walked in from the vestry with the patient footsteps of age and began the office.

. . . *Almighty and most merciful Father; we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.*

The old and worthy man with his tremulous voice, the sweet matron with her grave beauty just matured to that St. Martin's Summer of Youth which is the youth of perfect wifehood, said the sacred words together. His cultured and appealing voice, her warm contralto echoed under the high roof in ebb and flow and antiphon of sound.

It was the twenty-sixth day of the month. . . .

> "Trouble and heaviness have laid hold upon me:
> Yet is my delight in thy commandments."
>
> "The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: O
> grant me understanding and I shall live."

The morning was lighter than ever when Mary came out of Church, and its smile was reflected on her face.

In the village street an old labourer leading a team of horses, touched his cap and grinned a welcome while his wistful eyes plainly said, "God bless you, Ma'am," as Mary went by.

A merry "ting-tang clank" came from the blacksmith's shop, ringing out brightly in the bright air, and as she drew near the gate of the Old House, whom should she see but the postman!

"No. There ain't no letter for you," said the Postman—a sly old crab-apple of a man who always knew far too much—"but what should you say," he dangled it before her as a sweetmeat before a child, "what should you say if as how I had a telegram for 'ee?"

—"That you were talking nonsense, William. There can't be a telegram. It's far too early!"

"Well, then, there *is*!" said William triumphantly, "'anded in at the St. James' Street office, London, at eight-two! Either Mr. Lothian's up early or he ain't been to bed. It come over the telephone from Wordingham while I was a sorting the letters. Mrs. Casley took'n down. So there! Mr. Lothian's a coming home by the nine-ten to-night."

Mary tore open the orange envelope:—

> "*Arrive nine-ten to-night all my love Gilbert*"

was what she read.

Then, with quick footsteps, she hurried through the gates. Her eyes sparkled, her lips had grown red, and as she smiled her beautiful, white teeth flashed in the sunlight.

She looked like a girl.

Tumpany was propped against the lintel of the back door. Phoebe was talking to him, the Dog Trust basked at his feet, and he had a short briar pipe in his mouth.

"Master is coming home this evening, Tumpany!" Mary said.

Tumpany snatched the pipe from his mouth and stood to attention. The cook vanished into the kitchen.

"Can I see you then, Mum?" Tumpany asked, anxiously.

"After breakfast. I've not had breakfast yet. Then we'll go into everything."

She vanished.

"Them peas," said Tumpany to himself, "he'll want to know about them peas—Goodorg!"—accompanied by Trust, Tumpany disappeared in the direction of the kitchen garden.

But Mary sat long over breakfast that morning. The sunlight painted oblongs of gold upon the jade-green carpet. A bee visited the copper bowl of honeysuckle upon the sideboard, a wasp became hopelessly captured by the marmalade, and from the bedrooms the voice of Blanche, the housemaid, floated down—tunefully convinced that every nice girl loves a sailor.

And of all these homely sounds Mary Lothian's ear had little heed.

Sound, light, colour, the scent of the flowers in the garden—a thing almost musical in itself—were as nothing.

One happy fact had closed each avenue of sense. Gilbert was coming home!

Gilbert was coming home!

CHAPTER II

AN EXHIBITION OF DOCTOR MORTON SIMS AND MR. MEDLEY, WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HOW LOTHIAN RETURNED TO MORTLAND ROYAL

> "Seest thou a man diligent in his business: He shall stand before Kings. He shall not stand before mean men."
>
> —*The Bible.*

About eleven-thirty in the morning, Mr. Medley, the curate, came out of the rectory where he lived, and went into the village.

Mortland Royal was a rich living, worth, with the great and lesser tythe, some eight or nine hundred a year. The rector, the Hon. Leonard O'Donnell, was the son of an Irish peer who owned considerable property in Norfolk and in whose gift the living was. Mr. O'Donnell was a man of many activities, a bachelor, much in request in London, and very little inclined to waste his energies in a small country village. He was a courtly, polished little man who found his true *milieu* among people of his own class, and neither understood, nor particularly cared to understand, a peasant community.

His work, as he said, lay elsewhere, and he did a great deal of good in his own way with considerable satisfaction to himself.

Possessed of some private means, Mortland Royal supplemented his income and provided him with a convenient *pied à terre* where he could retire in odd moments to a fashionable county in which a number of great people came to shoot in the season. The rectory itself was a large old-fashioned house with some pretensions to be called a country mansion, and for convenience sake, Mr. Medley was housed there, and became de facto, if not de jure, the rector of the village. Mr. O'Donnell gave his colleague two hundred a year, house room, and an absolutely free hand. The two men liked one another, if they had not much in common, and the arrangement was mutually convenient.

Medley was a pious priest of the old-fashioned type. His flock claimed all the interest of his life. He had certain fixed and comely habits belonging to his type and generation. He read his Horace still and took a glass of port at dinner. Something of a scholar, he occasionally reviewed some new edition of a Latin classic for the *Spectator*, though he was without literary ambitions. He had a little money of his own, and three times a year he dined at the high table in Merton College Hall, where every one was very pleased to see him.

A vanishing type to-day, but admirably suited to his environment. The right man in the right place.

The real rector was regarded with awe and some pride in the village. His name was often in the newspapers. He was an eloquent speaker upon Temperance questions at important congresses. He went to garden parties at Windsor and theatricals at Sandringham. When he was in residence and preached in his own church, it was fuller than at other times. He was a draw. His distinguished face and high, well-bred voice were a pleasant variation of monotony. And the theology which had made him so welcome in Mayfair was not without a pleasing titillation for even the rustic mind. Mr. O'Donnel was convinced, and preached melodiously, the theory that the Divine Mercy extends to all human beings. He asserted that, in the event, all people would enter Paradise—unless, indeed, there was no Paradise, which in his heart of hearts he thought exceedingly likely.

But he did good work in the world, though probably less than he imagined. It was as an advocate of Temperance that Leonard O'Donnell was particularly known, and it was as that he was welcomed by Society.

He was a sort of spiritual Karlsbad and was nicknamed the Dean of Vichy.

The fact was one that had a direct bearing on Gilbert Lothian's life.

The Rector of Mortland Royal was a "managing" man. His forte was to be a sort of earthly Providence to all sorts of people within his sphere, and his motive was one of genuine good nature and a wish to help. As a woman he would have been an inveterate matchmaker.

Did old Marchioness, who liked to keep an eye upon her household affairs, bewail the quality of London milk—then she must have it from Mr. Samuel, the tenant of the Glebe Farm at Mortland

Royal!

Did a brother clergyman ask to be recommended a school for his son, the Rector knew the very place and was quite prepared to take the boy down himself and commend him specially to the Headmaster. With equal eagerness, Mr. O'Donnell would urge a confessor or a pill, and the odd thing about it was, that he was nearly always right, and all sorts of people made use of the restless, kindly little man.

One day, Dr. Morton Sims, the bacteriologist and famous expert upon Inebriety, had walked from a meeting of the Royal Commissioners upon Alcoholism to the Junior Carlton with Mr. O'Donnell.

Both were members and they had dined there together.

"I am run down," said Morton Sims, during the meal. "I have been too much in London lately. I've got a lot of important research work to do. I'm going to take a house in the country for a few months, only I don't know where."

The mind of the man occupied with big things was impatient of detail; the mind of the man occupied with small ones responded instantly.

"I know of the very place, Sims. In my own village. How fortunate! The 'Haven.' Old Admiral Custance used to have it, but he's dead recently. There are six months of the lease still to run. Mrs. Custance has gone to live at Lugano. She wants to let the place furnished until the lease is up."

"It sounds as if it might do."

"But, my dear fellow, it's the very place you want! Exactly the thing! I can manage it for you in no time. Pashwhip and Moger—the house agents in our nearest town—have the letting. Do let me be of use!"

"It's very kind of you, O'Donnell."

"Delighted. It will be so jolly to have you in the village. I'm not there as much as I could wish, of course. My other work keeps me so much in London. But Medley, my colleague, is an excellent fellow. He'll look after you in every way."

"Who lives round about?"

"Well, as far as Society is concerned, we are a little distance from anywhere. Lord Fakenham's is the nearest house——"

"Not in that way, O'Donnell. I mean interesting people. Lord Fakenham is a bore—a twelve-bore one might say. I hate the big shooting houses in East England."

The Rector was rather at a loss. "Well," he said, reluctantly, "I don't know about what you'd probably call *interesting* people. Sir Ambrose McKee, the big Scotch distiller—Ambrosia whiskey, you know—has the shooting and comes down to the Manor House in September. Oh, and Gilbert Lothian, the poet, has a cottage in the place. I've met him twice, but I can't say that I know much about him. Medley swears by his wife, though. She does everything in the village I'm told. She was a Fielding, the younger branch."

The doctor's face became strangely interested. It was alert and watchful in a moment.

"Gilbert Lothian! He lives there does he! Now you tempt me. I've heard a good deal about Gilbert Lothian."

The Rector was genuinely surprised. "Well, most people have," he answered. "But I should hardly have thought that a modern poet was much in your line."

Morton Sims smiled, rather oddly. "Perhaps not," he said, "but I'm interested all the same. I have my own reasons. Put me into communication with the house agents, will you, O'Donnell?"

The affair had been quickly arranged. The house proved satisfactory, and Dr. Morton Sims had taken it.

On the morning when Mary Lothian had heard from Gilbert that he was returning that evening, Mr. Medley, reminded of his duty by a postcard from the Rector at Cowes, set out to pay a call and offer his services to the distinguished newcomer.

The "Haven" was a pleasant gabled house standing in grounds of about three acres, not far from the Church and Rectory. The late Admiral Custance had kept it in beautiful order. The green, pneumatic lawns suggested those of a college quadrangle, the privet hedges were clipped with care, the whole place was taut and trim.

Mr. Medley found Dr. Morton Sims smoking a morning pipe in the library, dressed in a suit of grey flannel and with a holiday air about him.

The two men liked each other at once. There was no doubt about that in the minds of either of them.

There was a certain dryness and mellow humour in Mr. Medley—a ripe flavour about him, as of an old English fruit crushed upon the palate. "Here is a rare bird," the doctor thought.

And Morton Sims interested the clerygman no less. The doctor's great achievements and the fact that he was a definite feature in English life were quite familiar. When, on fugitive occasions any one of this sort strayed into the placid domains of his interest Medley was capable of welcoming him with eagerness. He did so now, and warmed himself in the steady glow from the celebrated man with whom he was sitting.

That they were both Oxford men, more or less of the same period, was an additional link between them.

. . . "Two or three times a year I go up," Medley said, "and dine in Hall at Merton. I'm a little out of it, of course. The old, remembered faces become fewer and fewer each year. But there are friends left still, and though I can't quite get at their point of view, the younger fellows are very kind to me. Directly I turn into Oriel Street; I breathe the old atmosphere, and I confess that my heart beats a little quicker, as Merton tower comes into view."

"I know," the doctor said. "I was at Balliol you know—a little different, even in our day. But when I go up I'm always dreadfully busy, at the Museum or in the Medical School. It's the younger folk, the scientific dons and undergraduates who are reading science that I have to do with. I have not much time for the sentiments and caresses of the past. Life is so short and I have so much yet that I hope to do in it, that I simply refuse my mind the pleasures of retrospection. You'll call me a Philistine, but when I go to lecture at Cambridge—as I sometimes do—it stimulates me far more than Oxford."

"Detestable place!" said Mr. Medley, with a smile. "A nephew of mine is a tutor there, Peterhouse. He has quite a name in his way, they tell me. He writes little leprous books in which he conducts the Christian Faith to the frontier of modern thought with a consolatory cheque for its professional services in the past. And, besides, the river at Cambridge is a ditch."

The doctor's eyes leapt up at this.

"Yes, isn't it marvellous that they can row as they do!" he said with the eagerness of a boy.

"You rowed then?"

"Oh, yes. I was in the crew of—74—our year it was."

"Really! really!—I had no idea, Dr. Morton Sims! I was in the Trials of—71, when Merton was head of the river, but we were the losing boat and I never got into the Eight. How different it all was then!"

Both men were silent for a minute. The priest's words had struck an unaccustomed chord of memory in the doctor's mind.

"Those times will never come again," Morton Sims said, and puffed rather more quickly than usual at his pipe. He had spoken truly enough when he had said that he had not time in his strenuous life for memories of his youth, that he shut his eyes to the immemorial appeal of Oxford when he went there. But he responded now, instinctively, for there is a Freemasonry, greater than all the ritual of King Solomon, among those who have rowed upon the Isis, in the happy, thrice-happy days of Youth!

To weary clergymen absorbed in the *va* and *vient* of sordid parishes, to grave Justices upon the Bench, the strenuous cynics of the Bar, plodding masters of schools, the suave solicitor, the banker, the painter, or the poet, these vivid memories of the Loving Mother, must always come now and again in life.

The Bells of Youth ring once more. The faint echo of the shouts from river or from playing field, make themselves heard with ghostly voices. In the Chapels of Wayneflete, or of Laud, some soprano choir is singing yet. In the tower of the Cardinal, Big Tom tolls out of the past, bidding the College porters close their doors.

White and fretted spires shoot upwards into skies that will never be so blue again. Again the snap-dragon blooms over the grey walls of Trinity, the crimson creeper stains the porch of Cranmer, and Autumn leaves of bronze, purple and yellow carpet all the Magdalen Walks.

These things can never be quite forgotten by those who have loved them and been of them.

The duration of a reverie is purely accidental. There is no time in thought. The pictures of a lifetime may glow in the brain, while a second passes by the clock, a single episode may inform the retrospection of an hour.

These two grey-headed men, upon this delightful summer morning, were not long lost in thought.

"And now," said the clergyman, "have you seen anything of the village yet?"

"Not yet. For the three days that I have been here I have been arranging my books and instruments, and turning that big room over the barn into a laboratory."

"Oh, yes. Where the Admiral used to keep his Trafalgar models. An excellent room! Now what do you say, Dr. Morton Sims, to a little progress through the village with me? I'm quite certain that every one is agog to see you, and to sum you up. Natural village curiosity! You might as well make your appearance under my wing."

"Teucro auspice, auspice Teucro?"

"Precisely," said Medley, with a smile of pleasure at the quotation from his beloved poet, and the two men left the house together in high glee, laughing like boys.

They visited the Church, in which Morton Sims took a polite interest, and then the clergyman took his guest over the Rectory.

It was a fine house, standing in the midst of fair lawns upon which great beech trees grew here and there, giving the extensive grounds something of the aspect of a park. The rooms were large and lofty, with fine ceilings of the Adams' school, florid braveries of stucco that were quite at home in a house like this. There were portraits everywhere, chiefly members of the O'Donnell family, and the faces in their fresh Irish comeliness were gay and ingenuous, as of privileged young people who could never grow old.

"Really, this is a delightful house," the Doctor said as he stood in the library. "I wonder O'Donnell doesn't spend more time in Mortland Royal. Few parsons are housed like this."

"It's not his *metier*, Doctor. He hasn't the faculty of really understanding peasants, and I think he is quite right in what he is doing. And, of course, from a selfish point of view, I am glad. I have refused two college livings to stay on here. In all probability I shall stay here till I die. O'Donnell does a great work for Temperance all over England—though doubtless you know more about that than I do."

"Er, yes," Morton Sims replied, though without any marked enthusiasm. "O'Donnell is very eloquent, and no doubt does good. My dear old friend, Bishop Moultrie, in Norfolk here is most enthusiastic about his work. I like O'Donnell, he's sincere. But I belong to the scientific party, and while I welcome anything that really tends to stem inebriety, I believe that O'Donnell and Moultrie and all of them are on the wrong tack entirely."

"I know very little about the modern temperance movement in any direction," said Mr. Medley with a certain dryness. "Blue Ribbons and Bands of Hope are all very well, I suppose, but there is such a tendency nowadays among Non-conformists and the extreme evangelical party to exalt abstinence from alcohol into the one thing necessary to salvation, that I keep out of it all as much as I can. I like my glass of port, and I don't mean to give it up!"

Morton Sims laughed. "It doesn't do you the least good really," he said, laughing. "I could prove to you in five minutes, and with entire certainty, that your single glass of port is bad, even for you! But I quite agree with your attitude towards all the religious emotionalism that is worked up. The drunkard who turns to religion simply manifests the class of ideas, which is one of the features of the epileptic temperament. It is a confession of ineptitude, and a recourse to a means of salvation from a condition which is too hard for him to bear. That is to say, Fear is at the bottom of his new convictions!"

Certainly Medley was not particularly sympathetic to the modern Temperance movement among religious people. Perhaps Mr. O'Donnell's somewhat vociferous enthusiasm had something to do with it. But on the other hand, he was very far from accepting such a cold scientific doctrine as this. He knew that the Holy Spirit does not always work through fear. But like the wise and quiet-minded man that he was, he forbore argument and listened with intellectual pleasure to the views of his new friend.

"I know," he said, with a courtly hint of deference in his voice, that became him very well, "of your position in the ranks of those who are fighting Intemperance. But, and you must pardon the ignorance of a country priest who is quite out of all 'movements,' I don't know anything of your standpoint. What is your remedy, Dr. Morton Sims?"

The great man smiled inwardly.

It did really seem extraordinary to him that a cultured professional man of this day should actually know nothing of his hopes, aims and propaganda. And then, ever on the watch for traces of egoism and vain-glory in himself, he accepted the fact with humility.

Who was he, who was any one in life, to imagine that his views were known to all the world?

"Well," he said, "what we believe is just this: It is quite impossible to abolish or to prohibit alcohol. It is necessary in a thousand industries. Prohibition is futile. It has been tried, and has

failed, in the United States. While alcohol exists, the man predisposed to abuse it will get it. You, as a clergyman, know as well as I do, as a doctor, that it is impossible to make people moral by Act of Parliament."

This was entirely in accordance with Medley's own view. "Of course," he said, "the only thing that can make people moral is an act of God, cooperating with an act of their own."

"Possibly. I am not concerned to affirm or deny the power of an Act of the Supreme Being. Nor am I able to say anything about its operation. Science tells me nothing upon this point. About the act of the individual I have a good deal to say."

—"I am most interested" . . .

"Well then, what we want to do is to root out drunkenness by eliminating inebriates from society by a process of Artificial Selection. It is within the power of science to evolve a sober race. We must forbid inebriates to have children and make it penal for them to do so."

Medley started. "Forbid them to marry?" he asked.

"It would be futile. Drunkenness often develops after marriage. There is only one way—by preventing Drunkards from reproducing their like—by forbidding the procreation of children by them. If drunkards were taken before magistrates sitting in secret session, and, on conviction, were warned that the procreation of children would subject them to this or that penalty, then the birthrate of drunkards would certainly fall immensely."

"But innumerable drunkards would inevitably escape the meshes of the law."

"Yes. But that is an argument against all laws. And this law would be more perfect in its operation than any other, for if the drunken father evaded it in one generation, the drunken son would be taken in the next."

The Priest said nothing for a moment. The latent distrust and dislike of science which is an inherent part of the life and training of so many Priests, was blazing up in him with a fury of antagonism. What impious interference with the laws of God was this? It seemed a profanation, horrible!

Like all good Christians of his temper of mind, he was quite unable to realise that God might be choosing to work in this way, and by the human hands of men. He had not the slightest conception of the great truth that every new discovery of Science and each fresh extension of its operations is not in the least antagonistic to Christianity when surveyed by the clear, unbiassed mind.

Mr. Medley was a dog-lover. He was a member of the Kennel-Club, and sent dogs to shows. He knew that, in order to breed a long-tailed variety of dogs, it would be ridiculous to preserve carefully all the short-tailed individuals and pull vigorously at their tails. He exercised the privilege of Artificial Selection carefully enough in his own kennels, but the mere proposal that such a thing should be done in the case of human beings seemed impious to him.

Dr. Morton Sims was also incapable of realising that his scheme for the betterment of the race was perfectly in accordance with the Christian Philosophy.

But Morton Sims was not a professing Christian and was not concerned with the Christian aspect. Mr. Medley was, and although one of his favourite hymns began, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," he was really chilled to the bone for a minute at the words of the Scientist. He remained silent for a moment or so.

"But that seems to me quite horrible," he said, at length. "It is opposed to the best instincts of human nature—as horrible as Malthusianism, as horrible and as impracticable."

His expression as he looked at his guest was wistful. "I don't want to be discourteous," it seemed to say, "but this is really my thought."

"Perhaps," the other answered with a half-sigh. He was well used to encounter just such a voice, just such a shocked countenance as that of his host—"But by '*best instincts*' people often mean strong prejudices. Our scheme is undoubtedly Malthusian. I am no believer in Malthusianism as a check to what is called 'over-population.' That *does* seem to me immoral. Nature requires no help in that regard. But Inebriety is an evil the extent of which no one but an expert can possibly measure. *The ordinary man simply doesn't know!* But supposing I admit what you say. Let us agree that my scheme is horrible, that in a sense it is immoral—or a-moral—that it is possibly impracticable.

"The alternative is more horrible and more immoral still. There is absolutely no choice between Temperance Reform, by the abolition of drink, and Temperance Reform by the abolition of the drunkard. An ill thing is not rendered worse by being bravely confronted. An unavoidable evil is not made more evil by being turned to good account. It rests with us to extract what good we can from the evil. Horrible? Immoral? Perhaps; but we are confronted by two horrors and two

immoralities, and we are compelled to make a choice. Which is best; to live safe because strong, or to tremble behind fortifications; to be temperate by Nature or sober by Law?"

. . . They stood in the quiet sunlit library, with its placid books and pictures irradiated by the light of approaching noon.

The slim, bearded man in his grey suit, faced the dry, elderly clergyman. His voice rang with challenge, his whole personality was redolent of ardour, conviction, an aroma of the War he spent his life in waging far away from this quiet room of books.

For years, this had been Medley's home. Each night, with his Horace and his pipe, he spent the happy, sober hours between dinner and bedtime here. His sermons were written on the old oak table. Over the high carved marble of the mantel the engraving of Our Lord knocking at the weed-grown door of a human heart, had looked down upon all his familiar, quiet evenings. In summer the long windows were open and the moonlight washed the lawns with silver, and the shadows of the trees seemed like pieces of black velvet nailed to the grass.

In winter the piled logs glowed upon the hearth and the bitter winds from the Marshes, sang like a flight of arrows round the house.

What was this that had come into the library, what new disturbing, insistent element? The Rector brought no such atmosphere into the house when he arrived. He would sip his coffee and smoke his pipe and linger for a gracious moment with the Singer of Mantua, or dispute about the true birthplace of him who sent Odysseus sailing over wine-coloured and enchanted seas.

An insistent voice seemed to be calling to the clergyman—"Awake from your slumber—your long slumber! Hear the words of Truth!"

He said nothing. His whole face showed reluctance, bewilderment, misease.

The far keener intelligence of the other noted it at once. The mind of the Medico-Psychologist appreciated the episode at its exact value. He had troubled a still pool, and to no good purpose. Words of his—even if they carried an uneasy conviction—would never rouse this man to action. Let it be so! Why waste time? The clergyman was a delightful survival, a "rare Bird" still!

"Well, that is my theory, at any rate, since you asked for it," Morton Sims said, the urgency and excitement quite gone from his voice. "And now, some more of the village, please!"

Mr. Medley smiled cheerfully. He became suddenly conscious of the light and comfortable morning again. He felt his feet upon the carpet, he was in a place that he knew.

"We'll go through the wicket-gate in the south wall," he said, with alacrity. "It's our nearest way, and there is a good view of the Manor House to be got from there. It's a fine old place, empty for most of the year, but always full for the shooting. Sir Ambrose McKee has it."

"The whiskey man?"

"Yes. The great distiller," Medley answered nervously—most anxious to sheer off from any further controversial subjects.

They went out into the village.

The old red-brick manor house was surveyed from a distance, and Morton Sims remarked absently upon its picturesqueness. His mind was occupied with other and far alien thoughts.

Then they went down the white dusty road—the bordering hedges were all pilm-powdered for there had been no rain for many days—to the centre of the village.

Four roads met there, East, South, West and North, and it was known to the village as "The Cross." On one side of the little central green was the Post office and general shop. On the other was the Mortland Royal Arms, and on the South, to the right of the old stone bridge, which ran over the narrow river, were the roof and chimneys of Gilbert Lothian's house nestling among the trees and with a vista of the orchard which stretched down to the stream.

"That's a nice little place," the doctor said. "Whose is that?"

"It's the house of our village celebrity," Mr. Medley replied—with a rather hostile crackle in his voice, or at least the other thought so.

"Our local celebrity," Medley continued, "Mr. Gilbert Lothian, the poet."

Neither the face nor the voice of the doctor changed at all. But his mind came to attention. This was a moment he had been waiting for.

"Oh, I know," he said, with an assumed indifference which he was well aware would have its effect of provocation upon the simple mind of the Priest. "The name is quite familiar to me. Bishop Moultrie sent me a book of Lothian's poems last winter. And now that I come to think of it, O'Donnell told me that Mr. Lothian lived here. What sort of a man is he?"

Medley hesitated. "Well," he said at length, "the truth is that I don't like him much personally, and I don't understand him in any way. I speak with prejudice I'm afraid, and I do not wish that any words of mine should make you share it."

"Oh, we all have our likes and dislikes. Every one has his private Dr. Fell and it can't be helped. But tell me about Lothian. I will remember your very honest warning! Don't you like his work?"

"I confess I see very little in it, Doctor. But then, my taste is old-fashioned and not in accord with modern literary movements. My 'Christian Year' supplies all the religious verse I need."

"Keble wrote some fine verse," said the doctor tentatively.

"Exactly. Sound prosody and restrained style! There is fervour and feeling in Lothian's work. It is impossible to deny it. But it's too passionate and feverish. There is a savage, almost despairing, clutching at spiritual emotion which strikes me as thoroughly unhealthy. The Love of Jesus, the mysterious operations of the Holy Ghost—these seem to me no proper vehicles for words which are tortured into a wild and sensuous music. As I read the poems of Gilbert Lothian I am reminded of the wicked and yet beautiful verses of Swinburne, and of others who have turned their lyre to the praise of lust. The sentiment is different, but the method is the same. And I confess that it revolts me to see the verbal tricks and polished brilliance of modern Pagan writers adapted to a fugitive and delirious ecstasy of Christian Faith."

Morton Sims understood thoroughly. This was the obstinate and prejudiced voice of an older literary generation, suddenly become vindictively vocal.

"I know all that you mean," he said. "I don't agree with you in the least, but I appreciate your point of view. But let me keep myself out of the discussion for a moment. I am not what you would probably be prepared to call a professing Christian. But how about Moultrie? He sent me Lothian's poems first of all. I remember the actual evening last winter when they arrived. A contemporaneous circumstance has etched it into my memory with certainty. Moultrie is a deeply convinced Christian. He is a man of the widest culture also. Yet he savours his palate with every *nuance*, every elusive and delicate melody that the genius of Lothian gives us. How about Moultrie's attitude?—it is a very general one."

Mr. Medley laughed, half with apology, half with the grim humour which was personal to him.

"I quite admit all you say," he replied, "but, as I told you, I belong to another generation and I don't in the least mean to change or listen to the voice of the charmer! I am a prejudiced old fogey, in short! I am still so antiquated and foolish as to have a temperamental dislike for a French-man, for instance. I like a picture to tell a story, and I flatly refused to get into Moultrie's abominable automobile when he brought it to the Rectory the other day!"

Morton Sims was not in the least deceived by this half real, half mocking apologia. It was not merely a question of style that had roused this heat in the dry elderly man when he spoke of the things which he so greatly disliked in the poet's work. There was something behind this, and the doctor meant to find out what it was. He was in Mortland Royal, in the first instance, in order to follow up the problem of Gilbert Lothian. His choice of a country residence had been determined by the Poet's locality. Every instinct of the scientist and hunter was awake in him. He had dreadful reasons, reasons which he could never quite think of without a mental shudder, for finding out everything about the unknown and elusive genius who had given "Surgit Amari," to the world.

He looked his companion full in the face, and spoke in a compelling, searching voice that the other had not heard before.

"What's the real antagonism, Mr. Medley?" he said.

Then the clergyman spoke out.

"You press me," he said, "very well, I will tell you. I don't believe Lothian is a good man. It is a stern and terrible thing to say,—God grant I am mistaken!—but he appears to me to write of supreme things with insincerity. Not vulgarly, you'll understand. Not with his tongue in his cheek, but without the conviction that imposes conduct, and perhaps even with his heart in his mouth!"

"Conduct?"

". . . I fear I am saying too much."

"Hardly to me! Then Mr. Lothian—?"

"He drinks," the Priest said bluntly, "you're sure to hear of it in some indirect way since you are going to stay in the village for six months. But that's the truth of it!"

The face of Dr. Morton Sims suddenly became quite pale. His brown eyes glittered as if with an almost uncontrollable excitement.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and there was something so curious in his voice that the clergyman was alarmed at what he had said. He knew, and could know, nothing of what was passing in the other's mind. A scrupulously fair and honest man within his lights, he feared that he had made too harsh a statement—particularly to a man who thought that even an after-dinner glass of port was an error in hygiene!

"I don't mean to say that he gets drunk," Medley continued hastily, "but he really does excite himself and whip himself up to work by means of spirits."

The clergyman hesitated. The doctor spurred him on.

"Most interesting to the scientific man—please go on."

"Well, I don't know that there is much to say—I do hope I am not doing the man an injustice, because I am getting on for twice his age and envy the modern brilliance of his brain! But about a fortnight ago I went to see Crutwell—a poor fellow who is dying of phthisis—and found Lothian there. He was holding Crutwell's hand and talking to him about Paradise in a monotonous musical voice. He had been drinking. I saw it at once. His eyes were quite wild."

"But the patient was made happier?"

"Yes. He was. Happier, I freely confess it, than my long ministrations have ever been able to make him. But that is certainly not the point. It is very distressing to a parish Priest to meet with these things in his visitations. Do you know," here Mr. Medley gave a rueful chuckle, "I followed this alcoholic missioner the other day into the house of an old bed-ridden woman whom he helps to support. Lothian is extremely generous by the way. He would literally take off his coat and give it away—which really means, of course, that he has no conception of what money means.

"At any rate, I went into old Sarah's cottage about half an hour after Lothian had been there. The old lady in question lived a jolly, wicked life until senile paralysis intervened. She is now quite a connoisseur in religion. I found her, on the occasion of which I speak, lying back upon her pillows with a perfectly rapturous expression on her wicked and wrinkled old face. 'Oh, Mr. Lothian's been, sir!' she said, 'Oh, 'twas beautiful! He gave me five shillings and then he knelt down and prayed. I never heard such praying—meaning no disrespect, sir, of course. But it was beautiful. The tears were rolling down Mr. Lothian's cheeks!' 'Mr. Lothian is very kind,' I said. 'He's wonnerful,' she replied, 'for he was really as drunk as a Lord the whole time, though he didn't see as I saw it. Fancy praying so beautiful and him like that. What a brain!'"

Morton Sims burst out laughing, he could not help it. "All the same," he said at length, "it's certainly rather scandalous."

Medley made a hurried deprecating movement of his hands. "No, no!" he said, "don't think that. I am over-emphasising things. Those two instances are quite isolated. In a general way Lothian is just like any one else. To speak quite frankly, Doctor, I'm not a safe guide when Gilbert Lothian is discussed."

"Yes?"

"For this reason. I admire and reverence Mrs. Lothian as I have never reverenced any other woman. Now and then I have met saint-like people, and the more saint-like they were—I hope I am not cynical—the less of comely humanity they seemed to have. Only once have I met a saint quietly walking this world with sane and happy footsteps. And that is Mary Lothian."

There was a catch and tremble in the voice of the elderly clergyman. Morton Sims, who had liked him from the first, now felt more drawn to him than at any other time during their morning talk and walk.

"Now you see why I am a little bitter about Gilbert Lothian! I don't think that he is worthy of such a perfect wife as he has got! I'll take you to tea with her this afternoon and you will see!"

"I should like to meet her very much. Lothian is not here then?"

"He has been away for a week or so, but he is returning to-night. Our old postman, who knows everything, told me so at least."

The two men continued their walk through the village until lunch time, when they separated.

At three o'clock a maid brought a note from the Rectory to the "Haven." In the letter Medley said that he had been summoned to Wordingham by telegram and could not take the doctor to call on Mrs. Lothian.

The doctor spent the afternoon reading in the garden. He took tea among the flowers there, and after dinner, as it was extremely hot, he once more sought his deck chair under the mulberry tree in front of the house. Not a breath of air stirred. Now and then a cockchafer boomed through the heavy dark, and at his feet some glowworms had lit their elfin lamps.

There was thunder in the air too, it was murmuring ten miles away over the Wash, and now and

again the sky above the marshes was lit with flickering green and violet fires.

A definite depression settled down upon the doctor's spirits and something seemed to be like a load upon lungs and brain.

He always kept himself physically fit. In London, during his busy life, walking, which was the exercise he loved best, was not possible. So he fenced, and swam a good deal at the Bath Club, of which he was a member.

For three days now, he had taken no exercise whatever. He had been arranging his new household.

"Liver!" he thought to himself. "That is why I am melancholy and depressed to-night. And then the storm that is hanging about has its effect too. But hardly any one realises that the liver is the seat of the emotions! It should be said—more truly—that such a one died of a broken liver, not a broken heart!" . . .

He sighed. His imaginings did not amuse him to-night. His vitality was lowered. That sick ennui which lies behind the thunder was upon him. As the storm grew nearer through the vast spaces of the night, so his psychic organism responded to its approach. Some uneasy imp had got into the barracks of his brain and was beating furiously upon the cerebral drum.

The vast and level landscape, the wide night, were alike to be dramatised by the storm.

And so, also, in the sphere of his thought, upon that secret stage where, after all, everything really happens, there was drama and disturbance. The level-minded scientist in Dr. Morton Sims drooped its head and bowed to the imperious onslaught. The man of letters in him awoke. Strange and fantastic influences were abroad this night and would have their way even with this cool sane person.

He knew what was happening to him as the night grew hotter, the lightning more frequent. He, the Ego of him, was slipping away from the material plane and entering that psychic country which he knew of and dreaded for its strange allurements.

Imaginative by nature and temperament, with a something of the artist in him, it was his habit to starve and repress that side of him as much as he was able.

He knew the unfathomable gulf that separated the psychical from the physiological. It was in the sphere of physiology that his work lay, here he was great, there must be no divided allegiance.

There was a menacing stammer of thunder. A certain line of verse came into his mind, a line of Lothian's.

> "*Oh dreadful trumpets sounding,*
> *Pealing and resounding,*
> *From the hid battlements of eternity!*"

"I will take a ten mile walk to-morrow," he said to himself, and resolutely wrenched his thoughts towards material things. There was, he remembered with a slight shudder, that appalling passage in a recent letter from Mrs. Daly—

> . . . "Six weeks ago a tippler was put into an alms-house in this State. Within a few days he had devised various expedients to procure rum, but had failed. At length he hit on one that was successful. He went into the wood yard of the establishment, placed one hand upon the block, and with an axe in the other struck it off at a single blow. With the stump raised and streaming he ran into the house and cried, 'Get some rum. Get some rum. My hand is off.' In the confusion and bustle of the occasion a bowl of rum was brought, into which he plunged the bleeding member of his body, then raising the bowl to his mouth, drank freely and exultantly exclaimed, 'Now I am satisfied!'"

Horrible! Why was it possible that men might poison themselves so? Would all the efforts of himself and his friends ever make such monstrous happenings cease? Oh, that it might be so!

They were breaking up stubborn land. The churches were against them, but the Home Secretary of the day was their friend—in the future the disease might be eradicated from society.

Oh, that it might be so! for the good of the human race!

How absolutely horrible it was that transparent, coloured liquids in bottles of glass—liquids that could be bought everywhere for a few pence—should have the devilish power to transform men, not to beasts, but to monsters.

The man of whom Mrs. Daly had written—hideously alcoholised and insane! Hancock, the Hackney murderer, poisoned, insane!

The doctor had been present at the post-mortem, after the execution. It had all been so pitiably clear to the trained eye! The liver, the heart, told him their tale very plainly. Any General Practitioner would have known. Ordinary cirrhosis, the scar tissue perfectly plain; the lime-salts deposited in the wasting muscles of the heart. But Morton Sims had found far more than this in that poisoned shell which had held, also, a poisoned soul. He had marked the little swellings upon the long nerve processes that run from the normal cell of the healthy brain. Something that looked like a little string of beads under the microscope had told him all he wanted to know.

And that little string of beads, the lesions which interfered with the proper passage of nerve impulses, the scraps of tissue which the section-cutter had thinned and given to the lens, had meant torture and death to a good woman.

How dreadfully women suffered! Their husbands and lovers and brothers became brutes to them. The women who were merely struck or beaten now and then were fortunate. The women whose lives were made one long ingenious torture were legion.

Dr. Morton Sims was a bachelor. He was more. He was a man with a virgin mind. Devoted always to the line of work he had undertaken he had allowed nothing else to disturb his life. For him passion was explained by pathological and physiological occurrences. That is to say, passion in others. For himself, he had allowed nothing that was sensual to interfere with his progress, or to influence the wise order of his days.

Therefore, he reverenced women.

Hidden in his mind was that latent adoration that the Catholic feels about the Real Presence upon an altar.

A good Knight of Science, he was as pure and pellucid in thought upon these matters as any Knight who bore the descending Dove upon his shield and flung into the *mêlée* calling upon the name of the Paraclete.

In his own fashion, and with his own vision of what it was, Morton Sims, also, was one of those seeking the Holy Grail.

He adored his sister, a sweet woman made for love and motherhood but who had chosen the virgin life of renunciation that she might help the world.

Women! Yes, it was women who suffered. There were tears in his mind as he thought of Women. Before a good woman he always wished to kneel.

How heavy the night was!

He identified it with the sorrowful weight and pressure of the Fiend Alcohol upon the world. And there was a woman, here near him, a woman with a sweet and fragrant nature—so the old clergyman had said.

On her, too, the weight must be lying. For Mary Lothian there must be horror in the days. . . .

"One thing I *will* do," he said to the dark—and that he spoke aloud was sufficient indication of his state of mind—"I'll get hold of Gilbert Lothian while I am here. I'll save him at any rate, if I can. And it is quite obvious that he cannot be too far gone for salvation. I'll save him from an end no less frightful than that of his brother of whom he has probably never heard. The good woman he seems to have married shall be happy! The man's fine brain shan't be lost. This shall be my special experiment while I am down here. Coincidence, no less than good-will, makes that duty perfectly plain for me."

As he stood there, glad to have found some definite material thing with which to occupy his mind, a housemaid came through the French windows of the library. She hurried towards him, ghost-like in her white cap and apron.

"Are you there, sir?" she said, peering this way and that in the thick dark.

"Yes, here I am, Condon, what is it?"

"Please, sir, there's been an accident. A gentleman has been thrown out of a dog-cart. It's a Mr. Lothian. His man's here, and the gentleman's wife has heard you're in the village and there's no other doctor nearer than Wordingham."

"I'll come at once," Morton Sims said.

He hurried through the quiet library with its green-shaded reading lamp and went into the hall.

Tumpany was standing there, his cap held before him in two hands, naval-fashion. His round red face was streaming with perspiration, his eyes were frightened and he exhaled a strong smell of beer.

His hand went up mechanically and his left foot scraped upon the oilcloth of the hall as Morton Sims entered.

"Beg your pardon, sir," Tumpany began at once, "but I'm Mr. Gilbert Lothian's man. Master have had an accident. I was driving him home from the station when the horse stumbled just outside the village. Master was pitched out on his head. My mistress would be very grateful if you could come at once."

"Certainly, I will," Sims answered, looking at the man with a keen, experienced eye which made him shift uneasily upon his feet. "Wait here for a moment."

He hurried back into the library and put lint, cotton-wool and a pair of blunt-nosed scissors into a hand-bag. Then, calling for a candle and lighting it, he went out into the stable yard and up to the room above the big barn, emerging in a minute or two with a bottle of antiseptic lotion.

These were all the preparations he could make until he knew more. The thing might be serious or it might be little or nothing. Fortunately Lothian's house was not five minutes' walk from the "Haven." If instruments were required he could fetch them in a very short time.

As he left the house with Tumpany, he noticed that the man lurched upon the step. Quite obviously he was half intoxicated.

With a cunning born of long experience of inebriate men, the doctor affected a complete unconsciousness of what he had discovered. If he put the man upon his guard he would get nothing out of him, that was quite certain.

"He's made a direct statement so far," the doctor thought. "He's only on the border-land of intoxication. For as long as he thinks I have noticed nothing he will be coherent. Directly he realises that I have spotted his state he'll become confused and ashamed and he won't be able to tell me anything."

"This is very unfortunate," he said in a smooth and confidential voice. "I do hope it is nothing very serious. Of course I know your master very well by name."

"Yessir," Tumpany answered thickly, but with a perceptible note of pleasure in his voice. "Yessir, I should say Master is one of the best shots in Norfolk. You'd have heard of him, of course."

"But how did it happen?"

"This 'ere accident, sir?" said Tumpany rather vaguely, his mind obviously running upon his master's achievements among the wild geese of the marshes.

"Yes, the accident," the doctor answered in his smooth, kindly voice—though it would have given him great relief to have boxed the ears of his beery guide.

"I was driving master home, sir. It's not our trap. We don't keep one. We hires in the village, but the man as the trap belongs to couldn't go. So I drove, sir."

Movement had stirred up the fumes of alcohol in this barrel! Oh, the interminable repetitions, the horrid incapacity for getting to the point of men who were drunk! Lives of the utmost value had been lost by fools like this—great events in the history of the world had turned upon an extra pot of beer! But patience, patience!

"Yes, you drove, and the horse stumbled. Did the horse come right down?"

"I'm not much of a whip, sir, as you may say, though I know about ordinary driving. They say that a sailor-man is no good with a horse. But that isn't true."

Yet despite the irritation of his mind, the necessity for absolute self-control, the expert found time to make a note of this further instance of the intolerable egotism that alcohol induces in its slaves.

"But I expect you drove very well, indeed! Then the horse did *not* come right down!"

Just at the right moment, carefully calculated to have its effect, the doctor's voice became sharper and had a ring of command in it.

There was an instant response.

"No, sir. The cob only stumbled. But master was sitting loose like. He fell out like a log, sir. He made a noise like a piece of luggage falling."

"Oh! Did he fall on his head?"

"Yessir. But he had a stiff felt hat on. I got help and as we carried him into the house he was bleeding awful."

"Curious that he should fall like that. Was he, well, was he quite himself should you think?"

It was a bow drawn at a venture, and it provoked a reply that instantly told Morton Sims what he wanted to know.

"Oh, yessir! By all means, sir! Most cert'nly! Master was as sober as a judge, sir!"

"Of *course*," Sims replied in a surprised tone of voice. "I thought that he might have been tired by the journey from London."

. . . So it was true then! Lothian was drunk. The thing was obvious. But this was a good and loyal fellow, not to give his master away.

Morton Sims liked that. He made a note that poor beery Tumpany should have half a sovereign on the morrow, when he was sober. Then the two men turned in through the gates of the Old House.

The front door was wide open to the night. The light which flowed out from the tall lamp upon an oak table in the hall cut into the black velvet of the drive with a sharply defined wedge of orange-yellow.

There was something ominous in this wide-set door of a frightened house.

The doctor walked straight into the hall, a small old-fashioned place panelled in white.

To the right another door stood open. In the doorway stood a maid-servant with a frightened face. Beyond her, through the archway of the door, showed the section of a singularly beautiful room.

The maid started. "Oh, you've come, sir!" she said—"in here please, sir."

The doctor followed the girl into the lit room.

This is what he saw:—

A room with the walls covered with canvas of a delicate oat-meal colour up to the height of seven feet. Above this a moulded beading of wood which had been painted vermilion—the veritable post-box red. Above this again a frieze of pure white paper. At set intervals upon the canvas were brilliant colour-prints in thin gold frames. The room was lit with many candles in tall holders of silver.

At one side of it was a table spread for supper, gleaming with delicate napery and cut glass, peaches in a bowl of red earthenware, ruby-coloured wine in a jug of German glass with a lid of pewter shaped like a snake's head.

At the other side of the room was a huge Chesterfield couch, upholstered in broad stripes of black and olive linen.

The still figure of a man in a tweed suit lay upon the couch. There was blood upon his face and clotted rust-like stains upon his loosened collar. A washing-bowl of stained water stood upon the green carpet.

Upon a chair, by the head of the couch a tall woman with shining yellow hair was sitting. She wore a low-cut evening dress of black, pearls were about the white column of her throat, a dragon fly of emeralds set in aluminium sparkled in her hair, and upon her wrists were heavy Moorish bracelets of oxydised silver studded with the bird's egg blue of the turquoise stone.

For an instant, not of the time but of thought, the doctor was startled.

Then, as the stately and beautiful woman rose to meet him, he understood.

She had decked herself, adorned her fair body with all the braveries she had so that she might be lovely and acceptable to her husband's eyes as he came home to her. Came home to her . . . like this!

Morton Sims had shaken the slim hand, murmured some words of condolence, and hastened to the motionless figure upon the couch.

His deft fingers were feeling, pressing, touching with a wonderful instinct, the skull beneath the tumbled masses of blood-clotted hair.

Nothing there, scalp wounds merely. Arms, legs—yes, these were uninjured too. The collar-bone was intact under the flesh that cushioned it. The skin of the left wrist was lacerated and bruised—Lothian, of course, had been sitting on the left side of the driver when he fell like a log from the gig—but the bones of the hand and arm were normal. There was not a single symptom of brain concussion. The deep gurgling breathing, the alarming snore-like sound that came from between the curiously pure and clear-cut lips, meant one thing only.

Morton Sims stood up.

Mary Lothian was waiting. There was an agony of expectation in her eyes.

"Not the least reason to be alarmed," said the doctor. "Some nasty cuts in the scalp, that is all."

She gave a deep sigh, a momentary shudder, and then her face became calm.

"It is so kind of you to come, Doctor," she said.—"Then that deep spasmodic breathing—he has not really hurt his head?"

"Not in the least as far as I can say, and I am fairly certain. We must get him up to bed. Then I can cut away the hair and bandage the wounds. I must take his temperature also. It's possible—just possible that the shock may have unpleasant results, though I really don't think it will. I will give him some bromide though, as soon as he wakes up."

"Ah!" she said. That was all, but it meant everything.

He knew that to this woman, at least, plain-speaking was best.

"Yes," he continued, "I am sorry to say that he is under the influence of alcohol. He has obviously been drinking heavily of late. I am a specialist in such matters and I can hardly be mistaken. There is just a possibility that this may bring on delirium tremens—only a possibility. He has never suffered from that?"

"Oh, never. Thank God never!" A sob came into her voice. Her face glowed with the love and tenderness within, the blue eyes seemed set in a soul rather than in a face, so beautiful had they become. "He's so good," she said with a wistful smile. "You can't think what a sweet boy he is when he doesn't drink any horrible things."

"Madam, I have read his poems. I know what an intellect and force lies drugged upon that sofa there. But we will soon have the flame burning clearly once more. It has been the work of my life to study these cases."

"Yes, I know, Doctor. I have heard so much of your work."

"Believe then that I am going to save this foolish young man, to give him back to you and to the world. A free man once more!"

"Free!" she whispered. "Oh, free from his vice!"

"*Vice*, Madam! I thought that all intelligent people understood by this time. For the last ten years I and my colleagues have been trying to make them understand! It is not a *vice* from which your husband suffers. It is a *disease*!"

He saw that she was pleased that he had spoken to her thus—though he was in some doubt if she appreciated what he had actually said.

But already the shuttle of an incipient friendship was beginning to dart between them.

Two high clear souls had met and recognised each other.

"Well, suppose we get him to bed, Doctor," she said. "We can carry him up between us. There are two maids, and Tumpany is quite sober enough to help."

"Quite!" the doctor answered. "I rather like that man upon a first meeting."

Mary laughed—a low contralto laugh. "She has a sense of humour too!" the doctor thought.

"Yes," she said, "Tumpany is a good fellow at heart. And, like most people who drink, when he is himself he is a quite delightful person."

She went out into the hall, tall and beautiful, the jewels in her hair and on her hands sparkling in the candlelight.

Morton Sims took one of the candles from the table and went up to the couch.

A shadow flickered over the face of the man who was lying there.

It was but momentary, but in that instant the watcher became cold. The silver of the candle-stick stung the palm of a hand which was suddenly wet.

This tranquil, lovely room with its soft yellow light, dissolved and shifted like a scene in a dream. . . .

. . . It was a raw winter's morning. The walls were the whitewashed walls of a prison mortuary. There was a smell of chloride of lime. . . .

And lying upon a long zinc slab, with little grooves and depressions running down to the eye-hole of a drain, was a still figure whose face was a ghastly caricature of this face, hideously, revoltingly alike . . .

Mary Lothian, Tumpany, and two maid-servants came into the room, and with some difficulty the poet was carried upstairs.

He was hardly laid upon his bed when the rain came, falling in great sheets with a loud noise, cooling and purging the hot air.

CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INEBRIATE, AND THE LETTER OF JEWELLED WORDS

"Verbosa ac grandis epistola venit a Capreis."

—*Juvenal.*

It was three days after the accident.

Gilbert lay in bed. His head was crossed with bandages, his wrist was wrapped with lint and a wet compress was upon the ankle of his strained left foot.

The windows of his bedroom were wide to the sun and air of the morning. There were two pleasant droning sounds. A bee was flying round the room, and down below in the garden Tumpany was mowing the strip of lawn before the house. Gilbert was very tranquil. He was wrapped round with a delicious peace of mind and body. He seemed to be floating in some warm ether of peace.

There was a table by the side of his bed. In a slender vase upon it was a single marguerite daisy with its full green stem, its rays of white—Chinese white in a box of colours—round the central gold. Close to his hand, upon the white turned down sheet was a copy of "John Inglesant." It was a book he loved and could always return to, and he had had his copy bound in most sumptuous purple.

Mary came into the bedroom.

She was carrying a little tray upon which there was a jug of milk and a bottle of soda water. There was a serene happiness upon her face. She had him now—the man she loved! He was hers, her own without possibility of interference. She was his Providence, he depended utterly upon her.

There are not many women like this in life, but there are some. Perhaps they were more frequent in the days of the past. Women who have no single thought of Self: women whose thoughts are always prayers: women in whose veins love takes the place of blood, whose hearts are cisterns of sweet charity, whose touch means healing, whose voices are like harps that sound forgiveness and devotion alone.

She put the tray upon the bedside table and sat down upon the bed, taking his unwounded hand in hers, stroking it with the soft cushions of her fingers, holding up its well-shaped plumpness as if it were a toy.

"There is something so comic about your hands, darling!" she said. "They are so nice and fat and jolly. They make me want to laugh!"

To Gilbert his wife's happy voice seemed but part of the dream-like peace which lay upon him. He was drowsy with incense. How fresh and fragrant she was! he thought idly. He pulled her down to him and kissed her and the gilded threads of her hair brushed his forehead. Her lips were cool as violets with the dew upon their petals. She belonged to him. She was part of the pleasant furniture of the room, the hour!

"How are you feeling, darling? You're looking so much better!"

"My head hurts a little, but not much. But my nerves are ever so much better. Look how steady my hand is." He held it out with childish pride.

"And you'll see, Molly dear, that when I'm shaved, my complexion will be quite nice again! It's a horrid nuisance not to be able to shave. Do I look very bad?"

"No, you wicked image! You're a vain little wretch, Gillie, really!"

"I'm quite sure that I'm not. But, Molly, it's so nice to be feeling better. Master of one's self. Not frightened about things."

"Of course it is, you old stupid! If you were always good how much happier you'd be! Take my advice. Do what I tell you, and everything will come right. You've got a great big brain, but you're a silly boy, too! Think how much more placid you are now. Never take any more spirits again!"

"No, I won't, darling. I promise you I won't."

"That's right, dear. And this nice new doctor will help you. You like him, don't you?"

"Molly! What a dear simple fool you are! *Like* him? You don't in the least realise who he is. It's Morton Sims, Morton Sims himself! He's a fearfully important person. Twice, they say, he's refused to take a baronetcy. He's come down here to do research work. It's an enormous condescension on his part to come and plaster up my head. It's really rather like Lord Rosebery coming to shave one! And he'll send in a bill for about fifty pounds!"

"He won't, Gillie dear. I'm sure. But if he does, what's the use of worrying? I'll pay it out of my own money, and I've got nearly as much as you—nasty miser!"

They laughed together at this. Mary had three or four hundreds a year of her own, Gilbert a little more, independently of what he earned by writing. Mary was mean with her money. That is to say, she saved it up to give to poorer people and debated with herself about a new frock like a chancellor of the Exchequer about the advisability of a fresh tax. And Lothian didn't care and never thought about money. He had no real sense of personal property. He liked spending money. He was extravagant for other people. If he bought a rare book, a special Japanese colour-print, any desirable thing—he generally gave it away to some one at once. He really liked people with whom he came into contact to have delightful things quite as much as he liked to have them himself.

Nor was this an outcome of the poisoned state of his body, his brain, and—more terrible than all!—of his mind. It was genuine human kindness, an eager longing that others should enjoy things that he himself enjoyed so poignantly.

But what he gave must be the things that *he* liked, though to all *necessity* he was liberal. A sick poor person without proper nourishment, a child without a toy, some wretched tramp without tobacco for his pipe—to him these were all tragedies, equal in their appeal to his charity. And this was because of his trained power of psychology, his profound insight into the minds of others, though even that was marred by a Rousseau-like belief that every one was good and decent at heart! Still, the need of the dying village consumptive for milk and calf's-foot jelly, was no more vivid in his mind than the need of the tramp for a smoke. As far as he was able, it was his Duty, his happy duty, to satisfy the wants of both.

Mary was different.

The consumptive, yes! Stout flannel shirts for old shepherds who must tend the birth of lambs on bitter Spring midnights. Food for the tramp, too—no dusty wayfarer should go unsatisfied from the Lothians' house! But not the subsequent shilling for beer and shag and the humble luxury of the Inn kitchen that Gilbert would have bestowed.

Such was her wise penuriousness in its calm economy of the angels!

Yet, her husband had his economy also. Odd as it was, it was part of his temperament. If he had bought a rare and perfect object of art, and then met some one who he saw longed for it, but couldn't afford to have it in the ordinary way, he took a real delight in giving it. But it would have been easier for him to lop off a hand than to present one of the Toftrees' novels to any one who was thirsting for something to read. He would have thought it immoral to do so.

He had a great row with his wife when she presented a gaudy pair of pink-gilt vases to an ex-housemaid who was about to be married.

"But dear, she's *delighted*," Mary had said.

"You've committed a crime! It's disgraceful. Oblige me by never doing anything of the sort again. Why didn't you give her a ham?"

"Molly, may I have a cigarette?"

"Hadn't you better have a pipe? The doctor said that you smoked far too many cigarettes and that they were bad for you."

For three days Lothian had had nothing to drink but a glass of Burgundy at lunch and dinner. Lying in bed, perfectly tranquil, calling upon no physical resources, the sense of nerve-rest within him was grateful and profound.

But the inebriate lives almost entirely upon momentary sensation. The slightest recrudescence of health makes him forget the horrors of the past.

In the false calm of his quiet room, his tended state, the love and care surrounding him, Gilbert had already come to imagine that he was what he hoped to be in his saner moments. He had, at the moment, not the least desire for a drink. In three days he was already complacent and felt himself strong!

Yet his nerves were still unstable and every impulse was on a hair trigger, so to speak.

The fact became evident at once.

He knew well enough that when he began to smoke pipes the most pressing desire of the other narcotic, alcohol, became numbed. Cigarettes stimulated that desire, or at least accompanied it. He could not live happily without cigarettes.

He knew that Mary knew this also—experience of him had given her the sad knowledge—and he was quite certain that Dr. Morton Sims must know too.

The extraordinary transitions of the drunkard from one mental state to another are more symptomatic than any other thing about him. Gilbert's face altered and became sullen. A sharp and acid note tuned his voice.

"I see," he said, "you've been talking me over with Morton Sims. Thank you so *very* much!"

He began to brag about himself, a thing he would have been horrified to do to any one but Mary. Even with her it was a weak weapon, and sometimes in his hands a mean and cruel one too.

". . . You were kind enough to marry me, but you don't in the least seem to understand whom you have married! Is my art nothing to you? Do you realise who I am at all—in any way? Of course you don't! You're too big a fool to do so. But other women know! At any rate, I beg you will not talk over your husband with stray medical men who come along. You might spare me that at least. I should have thought you would have had more sense of personal dignity than that!"

She winced at the cruelty of his words, at the wounding bitterness which he knew so well how to throw into his voice. But she showed no sign of it. He was a poisoned man, and she knew it. Morton Sims had made it plainer than ever to her at their talks downstairs during the last three days. It wasn't Gillie who said these hard things, it was the Fiend Alcohol that lurked within him and who should be driven out. . . .

It wasn't her Gilbert, really!

In her mind she said one word. "Jesus!" It was a prayer, hope, comfort and control. The response was instant.

That secret help had been discovered long since by her. Of her own searching it had come, and then, one day she had picked up one of her husband's favourite books and had read of this very habit she had acquired.

> "Inglesant found that repeating the name of Jesus simply in the lonely nights kept his brain quiet when it was on the point of distraction, being of the same mind as Sir Charles Lucas when 'Many times calling upon the sacred name of Jesus,' he was shot dead at Colchester."

The spiritual telegraphy that goes on between Earth and Heaven, from God to His Saints is by no means understood by the World.

"You old duffer," Mary said. "Really, you are a perfect blighter—as you so often call me! Haven't you just been boasting about feeling so much better? And, fat wretch! am I not doing everything possible for you. *Of course* I've talked you over with the doctor. We're going to make you right! We're going to make you slim and beautiful once more. My dear thing! it's all arranged and settled. Don't bubble like a frog! Don't look at your poor Missis as if she were a nasty smell! It's no use, Gillie dear, we've got you now!"

No momentary ill-humour could stand against this. He was, after all, quite dependent upon the lady with the golden hair who was sitting upon his bed.

And it was with no more Oriental complacence, but with a very humble-minded reverence, that the poet drew his wife to him and kissed her once more.

". . . But I may have a cigarette, Molly?"

"Of course you may, if you want one. It was only a general sort of remark that the doctor made. A few cigarettes can't harm any one. Don't I have two every day myself—since you got me into the habit? But you've been smoking fifty a day, for *weeks* before you went to town."

"Oh, Molly! What utter rot! I *never* have!"

"But you *have*, Gilbert. You smoke the Virginian ones in the tins of fifty. You always have lots of tins, but you never think how they come into the house. I order them from the grocer in Wordingham. They're put down in the monthly book—so you see I *know*!"

"Fifty a day! Of course, it's appalling."

"Well, you're going to be a good boy now, a perfect angel. Here you are, here are three cigarettes for you. And you're going to have a sweet-bread for lunch and I'm going to cook it for you myself!"

"Dear old dear!"

"Yes, I am. And Tumpany wants to see you. Will you see him? Dr. Morton Sims won't be here for another half hour."

"Yes, I'll have Tumpany up. Best chap I know, Tumpany is. But why's the doctor coming? My head's healed up all right now."

There was a whimsical note in his voice as he asked the question.

"You know, darling! He wants to have a long talk with you."

"Apropos of the reformation stakes I suppose."

"To give you back your wonderful brain in peace, darling!" she answered, bending down, catching him to her breast in her sweet arms.

". . . Gillie! Gillie! I love you so!"

"And now suppose you send up Tumpany, dear."

"Yes, at once."

She went away, smiling and kissing her hand, hoping with an intensity of hope which burned within her like a flame, that when the doctor came and talked to Gilbert as had been arranged, the past might be wiped out and a new life begun in this quiet village of East England.

In a minute there was a knock at the bedroom door.

"Come in," Gilbert called out.

Tumpany entered.

Upon the red face of that worthy person there was a grin of sheer delight as he made his bow and scrape.

Then he held up his right arm. He was grasping a leash of mallard, and the metallic blue-green and white upon the wings of the ducks shone in the sun.

Gilbert leapt in his bed, and then put his hand to his bandaged head with a half groan.—"Good God!" he cried, "how the deuce did you get those?"

"First of August, sir. Wildfowling begins!"

"Heavens! so it is. I ought to have been out! I never thought about the date. Damn you for pitching me out of the dog-cart, William!"

"Yessir! You've told me so before," Tumpany answered, his face reflecting the smile upon his master's.

"What are they, flappers?"

"No, sir, mature birds. I was out on the marshes before daylight. The birds were coming off the meils—and North Creake flat. First day since February, sir! You know what I was feeling like!"

"Don't I, oh, don't I, by Jove! Now tell me. What were you using?"

"Well, sir, I thought I would fire at nothing but duck on the first day. Just to christen the day, sir. So I used five and a half and smokeless diamond. Your cartridges."

"What gun?"

"Well, I used my old pigeon gun, sir. It's full choke, both barrels and on the meils it's always a case of long shots."

"Why didn't you have one of my guns? The long-chambered twelve, or the big Greener ten-bore—they're there in the cupboard in the gun room, you've got the key! Did a whole sord of mallard come over, or were those three stragglers?"

"A sord, sir. The two drakes were right and left shots and this duck came down too. As I said to the mistress just now, 'last year,' I said, 'Mr. Gilbert and I were out for two mornings after the first of August and we never brought back nothing but a brace of curlew—and now here's a leash of duck, M'm.'"

"If you'd had a bigger gun, and a sord came over, you'd have got a bag, William! Why the devil didn't you take the ten-bore?"

"Well, sir, I won't say as I didn't go and have a look at 'im in the gun room—knowing how they're flighting just now and that a big gun would be useful. But with you lying in bed I couldn't do it. So I went out and shot just for the honour of the house, as it were."

"Well, I shall be up in a day or two, William, and I'll see if I can't wipe your eye!"

"I hope you will, sir, I'm sure. There's quite a lot of mallard about, early as it is."

"I'll get among them soon, Tumpany!"

"Yessir—the Mistress I think, sir, and the doctor."

Tumpany's ears were keen, like those of most wildfowlers,—he heard voices coming along the passage towards the bedroom.

The door opened and Morton Sims came in with Mary.

He shook hands with Gilbert, admired Tumpany's leash of duck, and then, left alone with the poet, sat down upon the bed.

The two men regarded each other with interest. They were both "personalities" and both of them made their mark in their several ways.

"Good heavens!" the doctor was thinking. "What a brilliant brain's hidden behind those lint bandages! This is the man who can make the throat swell with sorrow and the heart leap high with hope! With all my learning and success, I can only bring comfort to people's bowels or cure insomnia. This fellow here can heal souls—like a priest! Even for me—now and then—he has unlocked the gates of fairyland."

"Good Lord!" Gilbert said to himself. "What wouldn't I give to be a fellow like this fellow. He is great. He can put a drug into one's body and one's soul awakes! He's got a magic wand. He waves it, and sanity returns. He pours out of a bottle and blind eyes once more see God, dull ears hear music! I go and get drunk at Amberleys' house and cringe before a Toftrees, Mon Dieu! This man can never go away from a house without leaving a sense of loss behind him."

—"Well, how are you, Mr. Lothian?"

"Much better, thanks, Doctor. I'm feeling quite fit, in fact."

"Yes, but you're not, you know. I made a complete examination of you yesterday, you remember, and now I've tabulated the results."

"Tell me then."

"If you weren't who you are, I wouldn't tell you at all, being who you are, I will."

Lothian nodded. "Fire away!" he said with his sweet smile, his great charm of manner—all the greater for the enforced abstinence of the last three days—"I shan't funk anything you tell me."

"Very well, then. Your liver is beginning—only beginning—to be enlarged. You've got a more or less permanent catarrh of the stomach, and a permanent catarrh of the throat and nasal passages from membranes inflamed by alcohol and constant cigarette smoking. And there is a hint of coming heart trouble, too."

Lothian laughed, frankly enough. "I know all that," he said. "Really, Doctor, there's nothing very dreadful in that. I'm as strong as a horse, really!"

"Yes, you are, in one way. Your constitution is a fine one. I was talking to your man-servant yesterday and I know what you are able to go through when you are shooting in the winter. I would not venture upon such risks myself even."

"Then everything is for the best, in the best of all possible worlds?" Gilbert answered lightly, feeling sure that the other would take him.

"Unfortunately, in your case, it's *not*," Morton Sims replied. "You seem to forget two things about 'Candide'—that Dr. Pangloss was a failure and a fool, and that one must cultivate one's garden! Voltaire was a wise man!"

Gilbert dropped his jesting note.

"You've something to say to me," he answered, "probably a good deal more. Say it. Say anything you like, and be quite certain that I shan't be offended."

"I will. It's this, Mr. Lothian. Your stomach will go on digesting and your heart performing its functions long after your brain has gone."

Then there was silence in the sunlit bedroom.

"You think that?" Lothian said at length, in a quiet voice.

"I know it. You are on the verge of terrible nervous and mental collapse. I'm going to be brutal, but I'm going to speak the truth. Three months more of drinking as you have been of late and, for all effective purposes you go out!"

Gilbert's face flushed purple with rage.

"How dare you say such a thing to me, sir?" he cried. "How dare you tell me, tell *me*, that I have been drinking heavily. You are certainly wise to say it when there is no witness here!"

Morton Sims smiled sadly. He was quite unmoved by Lothian's rage. It left him cool. But when he spoke, there was a hypnotic ring in his voice which caught at the weak and tremulous will of the man upon the bed and held it down.

"Now really, Mr. Lothian!" he said, "what on earth is the use of talking like that to me? It means nothing. It does not express your real thought. Can you suppose that your condition is not an open book to *me*? You know that you wouldn't speak as you're doing if your nerves weren't in a terrible state. You have one of the finest minds in England; don't bring it to irremediable ruin for want of a helping hand."

Lothian lay back on his pillow breathing quickly. He felt that his hands were trembling and he pushed them under the clothes. His legs were twitching and a spasm of cramp-pain shot into the calf of one of them.

"Look here, Doctor," he said after a moment, "I spoke like a fool, which I'm not. I have been rather overdoing it lately. My work has been worrying me and I've been trying to whip myself up with alcohol."

Morton Sims nodded. "Well, we'll soon put you right," he said.

Mary Lothian had told him the true history of the case. For three years, at least, her husband had been drinking steadily, silent, persistent, lonely drinking. For a long time, a period of months to her own fear and horror-quickened knowledge, Lothian had been taking a quantity of spirits which she estimated at two-thirds of a bottle a day. Without enlightening her, and adding what an inebriate of this type could easily procure in addition, the doctor put the true quantity at about a bottle and a half—say for the last two months certainly.

He knew also, that whatever else Lothian might do, either now or when he became more confidential, he would lie about the *quantity* of spirits he was in the habit of consuming. Inebriates always do.

"Of course," he said, talking in a quiet man-of-the-world voice, "*I* know what a strain such work as yours must be, and there is certainly temptation to stimulate flagging energies with some drug. Hundreds of men do it, doctors too!—literary men, actors, legal men!"

He noted immediately the slight indication of relief in the patient, who thought he had successfully deceived him, and he saw also that sad and doubting anxiety in the eyes, which says so poignantly, "what must I do to be saved?"

Could he save this man?

Everything was against it, his history, his temperament, the length to which he had already gone. The whole stern and horrible statistics of experience were dead against it.

But he could, and would, try. There was a chance.

A great doctor must think more rapidly than a general upon the field of battle; as quickly indeed as one who faces a deadly antagonist with the naked foil. There was one way in which to treat this man. He must tell him more about the psychology—and even if necessary the pathology—of his own case than he could tell any ordinary patient.

"I'll tell you something," he said, "and I expect your personal experience will back me up. You've no 'craving' for alcohol I expect? On the sensual side there's no sense of indulging in a pleasurable self-gratification?"

Lothian's face lighted up with interest and surprise. "Not a *bit*," he said excitedly, "that's exactly where people make a mistake! I don't mind telling you that when I've taken more than I ought, people, my wife and so on, have remonstrated with me. But none of them ever seem to understand. They talk about a 'craving' and so on. Religious people, even the cleverest, don't seem to understand. I've heard Bishop Moultrie preach a temperance sermon and talk about the 'vice' of indulgence, the hideous 'craving' and all that. But it never seemed to explain anything to me, nor did it to all the men who drink too much, I ever met."

"There *is* no craving," the Doctor answered quietly—"in the sense these people use the word. And there is no vice. It is a disease. They mean well, they even effect some cures, but they are misinformed."

"Well, it's very hard to answer them at any rate. One somehow knows within oneself that they're all wrong, but one can't explain."

"I can explain to you—I couldn't explain to, well to your man Tumpany for instance, *he* couldn't understand."

"Tumpany only drinks beer," Lothian answered in a tone of voice that a traveller in Thibet would use in speaking of some one who had ventured no further from home than Boulogne.

It was another indication, an unconscious betrayal. His defences were fast breaking down.

Morton Sims felt the keen, almost æsthetic pleasure the artist knows when he is doing good work. Already this mind was responsive to the skilled touch and the expected, melancholy music sounding from that injured instrument.

"He seems a very good sort, that fellow of yours," the doctor continued indifferently, and then, with a more eager and confidential manner, "But let me explain where the ordinary temperance people are wrong. First, tell me, haven't you at times quarrelled with friends, because you've become suspicious of them, and have imagined some treacherous and concealed motive in the background?"

"I don't know that I've quarrelled much."

"Well, perhaps not. But you've felt suspicious of people a good deal. You've wondered whether people were thinking about you. In all sorts of little ways you've had these thoughts constantly. Perhaps if a correspondent who generally signs himself 'yours sincerely' has inadvertently signed 'yours truly' you have worried a good deal and invented all sorts of reasons. If some person of position you know drives past you, and his look or wave of the hand does not appear to be as cordial as usual, don't you invent all kinds of distressing reasons to account for what you imagine?"

Lothian nodded.

His face was flushed again, his eyes—rather yellow and bloodshot still—were markedly startled, a little apprehensive.

"If this man knew so much, a wizard who saw into the secret places of the mind, what more might he not know?"

But it was impossible for him to realise the vast knowledge and supreme skill of the pleasant man with the cultured voice who sat on the side of the bed.

The fear was perfectly plain to Morton Sims.

"May I have a cigarette?" he said, taking his case from his pocket.

Lothian became more at ease at once.

"Well,"—puff-puff—"these little suspicions are characteristic of the disease. The man who is suffering from it says that these feelings of resistance cannot arise in himself. Therefore, they must be caused by somebody. Who more likely then than by those who are in social contact with him?"

"I see that and it's very true. Perhaps truer than you can know!" Lothian said with a rather bitter smile. "But how does all this explain what we were talking about at first. The 'Craving' and all that?"

"I am coming to it now. I had to make the other postulate first. In this way. We have seen in this suspicion—one of many instances—that an entirely fictitious world is created in the mind of a man by alcohol. It is one in which he *must* live. It is peopled with unrealities and phantasies. As he goes on drinking, this world becomes more and more complex. Then, when a man becomes in a state which we call 'chronic alcoholism' a new Ego, a new self is created. *This new personality fails to recognise that it was ever anything else*—mark this well—*and proceeds to harmonise everything with the new state*. And now, as the new consciousness, the new Ego, is the compelling mind of the moment, the Inebriate is terrified at any weakening in it. *The preservation of this new Ego seems to be his only guard against the* imagined *pitfalls and treacheries*. Therefore he does all in his power to strengthen his defences. He continues alcohol, because it is to him the only possible agent by which he can *keep grasp of his identity*. For him it is no poison, no excess. It sustains his very being. His *stomach* doesn't crave for it, as the ignorant will tell you. It has no *sensual* appeal. Lots of inebriates hate the taste of alcohol. In advanced stages it is quite a matter of indifference to a man what form of alcohol he drinks. If he can't get whiskey, he will drink methylated spirit. He takes the drug simply because of the necessity for the maintenance of a condition the falsity of which he is unable to appreciate."

Lothian lay thinking.

The lucid statement was perfectly clear to him and absorbingly interesting in its psychology. He was a profound psychologist himself, though he did not apply his theories personally, a spectator of others, turning away from the contemplation of himself during the past years in secret terror of what he might find there.

How new this was, yet how true. It shed a flood of light upon so much that he had failed to understand!

"Thank you," he said simply. "I feel certain that what you say is true."

Morton Sims nodded with pleasure. "Perhaps nothing is quite true," he said, "but I think we are getting as near truth in these matters as we can. What we have to do, is to let the whole of the public know too. When once it is thoroughly understood what Inebriety is, then the remedy will be applied, the only remedy."

"And that is?"

"I'll tell you our theories at my next visit. You must be quiet now."

"But there are a dozen questions I want to ask you—and my own case?"

"I am sending you some medicine, and we will talk more next time. And, if you like, I will send you a paper upon the Psychology of the Alcoholic, which I read the other day before the Society for the Study of Alcoholism. It may interest you. But don't necessarily take it all for gospel! I'm only feeling my way."

"I'll compare it with such experiences as I have had—though of course I'm not what you'd call an *inebriate*." There was a lurking undercurrent of suspicion creeping into his voice once more.

"Of course not! Did I ever say so, Mr. Lothian! But what you propose will be of real value to me, if I may have your conclusions."

Lothian was flattered. He would show this great scientist how entirely capable he could be of understanding and appreciating his researches. He would collaborate with him. It would be new and exhilarating!

"I'll make notes," he replied, "and please use them as you will!"

The doctor rose. "Thanks," he answered. "It will be a help. But what we really require is an alcoholic De Quincey to detail in his graphic manner the memories of his past experiences—a man who has the power and the courage to lay open the cravings and the writhings of his former slavery, and to compare them with his emancipated self."

Lothian started. When the kindly, keen-faced man had gone, he lay long in thought.

In the afternoon Mary came to him. "Do you mind if I leave you for an hour or two, dear?" she asked. "I have some things to get and I thought I would drive into Wordingham."

"Of course not, I shall be quite all right."

"Well, be sure and ring for anything you want."

"Very well. I shall probably sleep. By the way, I thought of asking Dickson Ingworth down for a few days. There are some duck about, you know, and he can bring his gun."

"Do, darling, if you would like him."

"Very well, then. I wonder if you'd write a note for me, explaining that I'm in bed, but shall be up to-morrow. Supposing you ask him to come in a couple of days."

"Yes, I will," she replied, kissing him with her almost maternal, protective air, "and I'll post it in Wordingham."

When she had left the room he began to smoke slowly.

He felt a certain irritation at all this love and regard, a discontent. Mary was always the same. With his knowledge of her, he could predict with absolute accuracy what she would do in almost every given moment.

She would do the right thing, the kind and wise thing, but the certain, the predicted thing. She lived from a great depth of being and peace personified was hers, the peace of God indeed!—but—

"She has no changes, no surprises," he thought, "all even surface, even depth."

He admired all her care and watchfulness of him with deep æsthetic pleasure. It was beautiful and he loved beauty. But now and then, it bored him as applied to himself. After six months of the unchanging gold and blue of Italy and Greece, he remembered how he had longed for a grey, weeping sky, with ashen cirrus clouds, heaped tumuli of smoke-grey and cold pearl. And sometimes after a lifeless, rotting autumn and an iron-winter, how every fibre cried out for the sun and the South!

He remembered that a man of letters, who had got into dreadful trouble and had served a period of imprisonment, had remarked to him that the food of penal servitude was plentiful and good, but that it was its dreadful monotony that made it a contributory torture.

And who could live for ever upon honey-comb? Not he at any rate.

Mary was "always her sweet self"—just like a phrase in a girl's novel. There were men who liked that, and preferred it, of course. Even when she was angry with him, he knew exactly how the quarrel would go—a tune he had heard many times before. The passion of their early love had faded; as it must always do. She was beautiful and desirable still, but too calm, too peaceful, sometimes!

This was one of those times. One must be trained to appreciate Heaven properly, Paradise must be experienced first—otherwise, would not almost every one want a little holiday sometimes? He thought of a meeting of really good people, men and women—one stumbled in upon such a thing now and then. How appallingly dull they generally were! Did they never crave for madder music and stronger wine?

. . . He could not read. Restless and rebellious thoughts occupied his mind.

The Fiend Alcohol was at work once more, though Lothian had no suspicion of it. The new and evil Ego, created by alcohol, which the doctor had told him of, was awake within him, asserting itself, stirring uneasily, finding its identity diminishing, its vitality lowered and thus clamant for its rights.

And if this, in all its horror, is not true demoniacal possession, what else is? What more does the precise scientific language of those who study the psychology of the inebriate mean than "He was possessed of a Devil"?

The fiend, the new Ego, went on with its work as the poet lay there and the long lights of the summer afternoon filled the room with gold-dust.

The house was absolutely still. Mary had given orders that there was to be no noise at all, "in order that the Master might sleep, if he could."

It was a summer's afternoon, the scent of some flowers below in the garden came up to Gilbert with a curious familiarity. What *was* the scent? What memory, which would not come, was it trying to evoke?

A motor-car droned through the village beyond the grounds.

Memory leaped up in a moment.

Of course! The ride to Brighton, the happy afternoon with Rita Wallace.

That was it! He had thought of her a good deal on the journey down from London—until he had sat in the dining car with those shooting men from Thetford and had had too many whiskeys and sodas. During the last three days in bed, she had not "occurred" to him vividly. Yet all the time there had been something at the back of his mind of which he had been conscious, but was unable to explain to himself. The nasty knock on his head, when he had taken a toss from the dogcart, was the reason, no doubt.

Yet, there had been a distinct sense of hidden thought-treasure, something to draw upon as it were. And now he knew! and abandoned himself to the luxury of the discovery.

He must write to her, of course. He had promised to do so at once. Already she would be wondering. He would write her a wonderful letter. Such a letter as few men could write, and certainly such as she had never received. He would put all he knew into it. His sweet girl-friend should marvel at the jewelled words.

The idea excited him. His pulses began to beat quicker, his eyes grew brighter. But he would not do it now. Night was the time for such a present as he would make for her, when all the house was sleeping and Mary was in her own room. Then, in the night-silence, his brain should be awake, weaving a coloured tapestry of prose with words for threads, this new, delicious impulse of friendship the shuttle to carry them.

Like some coarser epicure, arranging and gloating over the details of a feast to come, he made his plans.

He pressed the electric button at the side of the bed and Blanche, the housemaid, answered the summons.

"Where is Tumpany, Blanche?" he asked.

"In the garden, sir."

"Well, tell him to come up, please. I want to speak to him."

In a minute or two heavy steps resounded down the corridor, accompanied by a curious scuffling noise. There was a knock, the door opened, a yelp of joy, and the Dog Trust had leapt upon the bed and was rolling over and over upon the counterpane, licking his master's hands, making loving dashes for his face, his faithful little heart bursting with emotions he was quite unable to express.

"Thought you'd like to see him, sir," said Tumpany. "He know'd you'd come back right enough, and he's been terrible restless."

Lothian captured the dog at last, and held him pressed to his side.

"I am very glad to see the old chap again. Look here, William, just you go quietly over to the Mortland Arms, don't look as if you were going on any special errand,—but you know—and get a bottle of whiskey. Draw the cork and put it back in the bottle so that I can take it out with my fingers when I want to. Then bring it quietly up here."

"Yessir," said Tumpany. "That'll be all right, sir," and departed with a somewhat ludicrous air of secrecy and importance that tickled his master's sense of humour and made him smile.

It was by no means the first time that Tumpany had carried out these little confidential missions.

In ten minutes the man was back again, with the bottle.

"Shall I leave the dog, sir?"

"Yes, you may as well. He's quite happy."

Tumpany went away.

Gilbert rose from bed, the bottle in his hand, and looked round for a hiding-place. The wardrobe! That would do. He put it in one of the big inside pockets of a shooting-coat which was hanging there and carefully closed the door.

As he did so, he caught sight of his face in the panel-mirror. It was sly and unpleasant. Something horrible seemed to be peeping out.

He shook his head and a slight blush came to his cheeks.

The eyes under the bandaged brow, the smirk upon the clear-cut mouth. . . . "Beastly!" he said aloud, as if speaking of some one else—as indeed he really was, had he but realised it.

Now he would sleep, to be fresh for the night. Bromide—always a good friend, though not so certain in its action as in the past—Ammonium Bromide should paralyse his racing brain to sleep.

He dissolved five tablets in a little water and drank the mixture.

When Mary came noiselessly into the room, three hours later, he was sleeping calmly. One arm was round the Dog Trust, who was sleeping too.

Her husband looked strangely youthful and innocent. A faint smile hung about his lips and her whole heart went out to him as he slept.

It was after midnight.

Deep peace brooded over the poet's household. Only he was awake. The dog slumbered in his kennel, the servants in their rooms, the Sweet Chatelaine of the Old House lay in tranquil sleep in her own chamber.

. . . On a small oak table by Gilbert's bedside, three tall candles were burning in holders of silver. Upon it also was an open bottle of whiskey, the carafe of water from the washstand and a bedroom tumbler.

The door was locked.

Gilbert was sitting up in bed. Upon his raised knees a pad of white paper was resting. In his hand was a stylographic pen of red vulcanite, and a third of the page was covered with small delicate writing.

His face was flushed but quite motionless. His whole body in its white pyjama suit was perfectly still. The only movement was that of the hand travelling over the page, the only sound that of the dull grinding of the stylus, as it went this way and that.

There was something sinister about this automaton in the bed with its moving hand. And in our day there is always something a little fantastic and unreal about candlelight. . . .

How absolutely still the night was! Not a breath of air stirred.

The movements, the stir and tumult of the mind of the person so rigid in the bed were not heard.

What was it, *who* was it, that was writing in the bed?

Who can say?

Was it Gilbert Lothian, the young and kindly-natured man who reverenced all things that were pure, beautiful and of good report?

Or was it that dreadful other self, the Being created out of poison, that was laying sure and stealthy fingers upon the Soul, that "glorious Devil large of heart and brain"?

Who can tell?

The subtle knowledge of the great doctor could not have said, the holy love of the young matron could not have divined.

These things are hidden yet, and still will be.

The hump of the bed-clothes sank. The pad fell flat. The figure stretched out towards the table, there was the stealthy trickle of liquid, the gurgle of a body, drinking.

Then the bed-clothes rose once more, the pad went to its place, the figure stiffened; and the red pen moved obedient to that which controlled it, setting down the jewelled words upon the page.

—The first of the long series of letters that the Girl of the Library was destined to receive! Not the most beautiful perhaps, not the most wonderful. Passion was not born yet, and if love was, there was no concrete word of it here. No one but Gilbert Lothian ever knew what was born on that fated midnight, when he wrote this first subtle letter, deadly for this girl to receive, perhaps, from such a man, at such a time in her life.

A love letter without a word of love.

These are passages from the letter:—

> . . . "So, Rita, I am going to write a great poem for you. Will you take it from your friend? I think you will, for it will be made for you in the first place and wrought with all my skill.
>
> "I am going to call it 'A Lady in a Library.' No one will know the innermost inwardness of it but just you and me. Will not that be delightful, Rita mia amica? When you answer this letter, say that it will be delightful, please!
>
> "'A Lady in a Library!' Are not the words wonderful—say it quietly to yourself—'A Lady in a Library!'"

This was the poem which appeared two months afterwards in the *English Review* and definitely established Gilbert Lothian's claim to stand in the very forefront of the poets of his decade. It is certain to live long. More than one critic of the highest standing has printed his belief that it will be immortal, and many lovers of the poet's work think so too.

> . . . "The Lady and the Poet meet in a Library upon a golden afternoon. She is the very Spirit and Genius of the place. She has drawn beauty from many brave books. They have told her their secrets as she moves among them, and lavished all their store upon her. Some of the beauty which they hold has passed into her face, and the rosy tints of youth become more glorious.
>
> "Oh, they have been very generous!
>
> "The thin volume of Keats gave her eyes their colour, but an old and sober-backed edition of Coleridge opened its dun boards and robbed the magic stanzas of 'Kubla Khan' to give them their mystery and wonder.
>
> "Milton bestowed the music of her voice, but it came from the second volume in which Comus lies hid. Her smile was half Herrick and half Heine, and her hair was spun in a 'Wood near Athens' by the fairies—Tom III, *Opera Glmi Shakespeare, Editio e Libris Podley!*—upon a night in Midsummer."

> "Random thoughts, Cupid! random thoughts! They come to me like moths through the still night, and I put them down for you. A grey-fawn *Papillon de nuit* is fluttering round my candles now and sometimes he falls flapping and whirring on my paper like a tiny clock-work toy. But I will not kill him. I am happy in writing to my friend, distilling my friendship for you in the lonely laboratory of self, so he shall go unharmed. His ancestors may have feasted upon royal tapestries and laid their eggs in the purple robes of kings!
>
> "What are the moths like in Kensington this night, Cupid?—But of course you are asleep now. I make a picture for myself of you sleeping.
>
> "The whole village is asleep now, save only me, and I am trying to reconstruct our afternoon and evening together, five days ago or was it six? It is more than ever possible to do that at midnight and alone, though every detail is etched upon my

memory and I am only adding colour.

"How happy we were! It is so strange to me to think how instantly we became friends—as we are agreed we are always to be, you and I. And think of all we still have to find out about each other! There are golden days coming in our friendship, all sorts of revelations and surprises. There are so many enchanted places in the Kingdom of Thought to which I have the key, so many doors I shall open for you.

"Ours shall be a perfect friendship—of your bounty I crave again what you have already given!—and I will build it up as an artificer in rare woods or stained marbles, a carver of moon-stones, a builder of temples in honey-coloured Travertine, makes beautiful states in which the soul can dwell, out of beautiful perishable things.

"How often do two people meet as you and I have met? Most rarely. Men and women fall in love, sometimes too early, sometimes too late. There is a brief summer, and then a long winter of calm grey days which numb the soul into acquiescence, or stab the dull tranquillity with the lightnings of tragedy and woe.

"We have the better part! We are to be friends, Rita, you and I—that is the rivulet of repeated melody which runs through my first letter to you. Some sad dawn will rise for me, when you tell of something nearer and more poignant than anything I can offer you. It will be a dawn in which, for you the trumpets, the sackbuts and the psalteries of Heaven will sound. And your friend will bless you; and retire to the back of the scene with a most graceful bow!

"In the last act of the play, when all the players appear as Nymphs and Graces, and Seasons, your friend will be found wearing the rich yet sober liveries of Autumn, saluting Spring and her Partner with a courtly song, and a dance which expresses his sentiments according to the best choreographic traditions.

"But, as he retires among the last red leaves of the year, and walks jauntily down the forest rides as the setting sun shows the trees already bare, he will know one thing, even if Spring does not know it then—when she turns to her Partner.

"He will know that in her future life, his voice, his face, can never be quite forgotten. Sometimes, at the feast, 'surgit amari aliquid' that he is not present there with the wistful glance, the hands that were ever reverent, the old familiar keys!

"For a brief instant of recollection, he will have for you '*L'effet d'un clair-de-lune par une nuit d'été*'. And you will say to yourself, '*Ami du temps passés, vos paroles me reviennent comme un écho lointain, comme le son d'un cloche apporté par le vent; et il me semble que vous êtes là quand je lis des passages d'amour dans vos livres*'."

A click of glass against glass, the low sound of drinking, a black shadow parodied and repeated upon the ceiling in the candle-glow.

The letter is nearly finished now—the bottle is nearly empty.

"'Tiens!' I hear you say—by the way, Rita, where did you learn to speak such perfect French? They tell me in Paris and, Mon Dieu! in Tours even! that I speak well. Mais, toi! . . .

"Well 'How stupid!' I hear you say. 'Why does Gilbert strike this note of the 'cello and the big sobbing flutes at the very beginning of things?'

"Why, indeed? I hardly know myself. But it is very late now. The curtains of the dark are already shaken by the birth-pangs of the morning. Soon the jocund noises of dawn will begin.

"Let it be so for you and me. There are long and happy days coming in our friendship. The end is not yet! Soon, quite soon, I will return to London with a pocket-full of plans for pleasure, and the magician's wand polished like the poker in the best parlour of an evangelical household, and charged with the most superior magic!

"Meanwhile I shall write you my thoughts as you must send me yours.

"I kiss your hand,

"GILBERT LOTHIAN."

The figure rose from the bed, gathering the papers together, putting them into a drawer of the dressing-table.

It staggered a little.

"I'm drunk," came in a tired voice, from lips that were parched and dry.

With trembling hands the empty bottle was hidden, the glass washed out and replaced, the door noiselessly unlocked.

Then Lothian lurched to the open window.

It was as he had said, dawn was at hand. But a thick grey mist hid everything. Phantoms seemed to sway in it, speaking to each other with tiny doll-like squeaks.

There were no jocund noises as he crept back into bed and fell into a stupor, snoring loudly.

No jocund noises of Dawn.

CHAPTER IV

DICKSON INGWORTH UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

> "On n'est jamais trahi que par ses siens."
>
> —*Proverb of Provence.*

Lothian and Dickson Ingworth were driving into Wordingham.

It was just after lunch and there was a pleasant cold-snap in the air, a hint of Autumn which would soon be here.

The younger man was driving, sending the cob along at a good pace, quite obviously a skilful and accustomed whip.

His host sat by his side and looked up at him with some curiosity, a curiosity which had been growing upon him during the last few days.

Ingworth was certainly good-looking, in a boyish, rather rakish fashion. There were no indications of dissipation in his face. He was not a dissipated youth. But there was, nevertheless, in the cast of the features, something that suggested rather more than staidness. The hair was dark red and very crisp and curly, the mouth was well-shaped and rather thick in the lips. Upon it, more often than not, was the hint of a smile at some inward thought, "rather like some youthful apprentice pirate, not adventured far upon the high seas yet, but with sufficient experience to lick the chops of memory now and then" . . . thus Gilbert's half amused, half wondering thought.

And the eyes?—yes, there was something a little queer about the eyes. They were dark, not very steady in expression, and the whites—by Jove! that was it—had a curious opalescence at times. Could it possibly be that his friend had a touch of the tar-brush somewhere? It was faint, elusive, born more of a chance thought than of reality perhaps, and yet as the dog-cart bowled along the straight white road Gilbert wondered more and more.

He had known the lad, who was some two and twenty years of age, for twelve months or more. Where had he met him?—Oh, yes, at an exhibition of caricatures in the Carfax Gallery. Cromartie had introduced them. Ingworth had made friends at once. In a graceful impulsive way he had taken Lothian into a corner, and, blushing a good deal, had told him how much he had wanted to know him. He had just come down from Oxford; he told the poet how eagerly he was being read by the younger men there.

That was how it had begun.

Friendship was an immediate result. Lothian, quite impervious to flattery and spurning coteries and the "tea-shops," had found this young man's devotion a pleasant thing. He was a gentleman and he didn't bore Gilbert by literary talk. He was, in short, like an extremely intelligent fag to a boy in the sixth form of a public school. He spoke the same language of Oxford and school that Gilbert did—the bond between them was just that, and the elder and well-known man had done all he could for his protégé.

From Gilbert's point of view, the friendship had occurred by chance, it had presented no jarring elements, and he had drifted into it with good-natured acquiescence.

It was a fortnight after Mary had sent the invitation to Ingworth, who could not come at the moment, being kept in London by "important work." He had now arrived, and this was the eighth

day of his visit.

"I can't understand Tumpany letting this beast down," Ingworth said. "He's as sure footed as possible. Was Tumpany fluffed?"

"I suppose he was, a little."

"Then why didn't you drive, Gilbert?"

"I? Oh, well, I did myself rather well in the train coming down, and so I thought I'd leave it to William!"

Gilbert smiled as he said this, his absolutely frank and charming smile—it would have disarmed a coroner!

Ingworth smiled also, but here was something self-conscious and deprecating. He was apologising for his friend's rueful but open statement of fact. The big man had said, in effect, "I was drunk," the small man tried to excuse the plain statement with quite unnecessary sycophancy.

"But you couldn't have been very bad?"

"Oh, no, I wasn't, Dicker. But I was half asleep as we got into the village, and as you see this cart is rather high and with a low splashboard. My feet weren't braced against the foot-bar and I simply shot out!"

Ingworth looked quickly at Lothian, and chuckled. Then he clicked his tongue and the trap rolled on silently.

Lothian sat quietly in his place, smoking his cigar. He was conscious of a subtle change in this lad since he had come down. It interested him. He began to analyse as Ingworth drove onwards, quite oblivious of the keen, far-seeing brain beside him.

—That last little laugh of Ingworth's. There was a new note in it, a note that had sounded several times during the last few days. It almost seemed informed with a slight hint of patronage, and also of reservation. It wasn't the admiring response of the past. The young man had been absolutely loyal in the past, though no great strain had been put upon his friendship. It was not difficult to be friends with a benefactor—while the benefactions last. Certainly on one occasion—at the Amberleys' dinner-party—he had behaved with marked loyalty. Gilbert had heard all about it from Rita Wallace. But that, after all, was an isolated instance. Lothian decided to test it. . . .

"Of course I wasn't tight," he said suddenly and with some sharpness.

"My dear old chap," the lad replied hastily—too hastily—"don't I know?"

It wasn't sincere! How badly he did it! Lothian watched him out of the corner of his eye. There was certainly *something*. Dickson was changed.

Then the big mind brushed these thoughts away impatiently. It had enough to brood over! This small creature which was just now intruding in the great and gathering sweep of his daily thoughts might well be dissected some other time.

Lothian's head sank forward upon his chest. His eyes lost light and speculation, the mouth set firm. Instinctively he crossed his arms upon his breast, and the clean-shaved face with the growing heaviness of contour mingled with its youth, made an almost Napoleonic profile against the bright grey arc of sky over the marshes.

Ingworth saw it and wondered. "One can see he's a big man," he thought with a slight feeling of discomfort. "I wonder if Toftrees is right and his reputation is going down and people are beginning to find out about him?"

He surveyed the circumstances of the last fortnight—two very important weeks for him.

Until his arrival in Norfolk about a week ago he had not seen Lothian since the night of the party at the Amberleys', the poet having left town immediately afterwards. But he had met, and seen a good deal of Herbert Toftrees and his wife.

These worthy people liked an audience. Their somewhat dubious solar system was incomplete without a whole series of lesser lights. The rewards of their industry and popularity were worth little unless they were constantly able to display them.

Knowing their own disabilities, however, quite aware that they were in literature by false pretences so to speak, they preferred to be reigning luminaries in a minor constellation rather than become part of the star dust in the Milky Way. Courtier stars must be recruited, little eager parasitic stars who should twinkle pleasantly at their hospitable board.

Dickson Ingworth, much to his own surprise and delight, had been swept in. He thought himself in great good luck, and perhaps indeed he was.

Nephew of a retired civilian from the Malay Archipelago, he had been sent to Eton and Oxford by this gentleman, who had purchased a small estate in Wiltshire and settled down as a minor country squire. The lad was destined to succeed to this moderate establishment, but, at the University, he had fallen into one of those small and silly "literary" sets, which are the despair of tutors and simply serve as an excuse for general slackness. The boy had announced his intention of embracing a literary career when he had managed to scrape through his pass schools. He had a hundred a year of his own—always spent before he received it—and the Wiltshire squire, quite confident in the ultimate result, had cut off his allowance. "Try it," he had said. "No one will be more pleased than I if you make it a success. You won't, though! When you're tired, come back here and take up your place. It will be waiting for you. But meanwhile, my dear boy, not a penny do you get from me!"

So Dickson Ingworth had "embraced a literary career." The caresses had not as yet been returned with any ardour. Conceit and a desire to taste "ginger in the mouth while it was hot" had sent him to London. He had hardly ever read a notable book. He had not the slightest glimmerings of what literature meant. But he got a few short stories accepted now and then, did some odd journalism, and lived on his hundred a year, a fair amount of credit, and such friends as he was able to make.

In his heart of hearts the boy knew himself for what he was. But his good looks, his youth—most valuable asset of all!—and the fact that he would some day have some sort of settled position, enabled him to rub along pretty well for the time.

Without much real harm in him—he was too lacking in temperament to be really wicked—he was as cunning as an ape and justified his good opinions of his cleverness by the fact that his laborious little tricks constantly succeeded. He was always achieving infinitesimal successes.

He had marked out Gilbert Lothian, for instance, and had succeeded in making a friend of him easily enough.

Lothian rarely thought ill of any one and any one could take him in. To do Ingworth justice he liked Lothian very much, and really admired him. He did not understand him in the least. His poems were rather worse Greek to him than the Euripidean choruses he had learnt by heart at school. At the same time it was a great thing to be Fidus Achates to the poet of the moment, and it was extremely convenient—also—to have a delightful country house to retire to when one was hard up, and a patron who not only introduced one to editors, but would lend five pounds as a matter of course.

Perhaps there was really some Eastern taint in the young fellow's blood. At any rate he was sly by nature, had a good deal of undeveloped capability for treachery latent within him, and, encouraged by success, was becoming a marked parasite.

Lazy by nature, he soon discovered how easy it was—to take one example—to look up the magazines of three years back, steal a situation or a plot, adapt it to the day, and sell it for a guinea or two. His small literary career had hitherto been just that. If he had been put upon the rack he could not have confessed to an original thought. And it was the same in many other aspects of his life. He made himself useful. He was always sympathetic and charming to some wife in Bohemia who bewailed the inconstancy of her husband, and earned the title of a "nice, good-hearted boy." On the next evening he would gladly sup with the husband and the chorus girl who was the cause of the trouble, and flatter them both.

Master Dickson Ingworth, it will be seen, was by no means a person of fine nature. He was simply very young, without any sort of ideals save the gratification of the moment, and would, no doubt, become a decent member of society in time.

In a lower rank of life, and without the comfortable inheritance which awaited him, he would probably have become a sneak-thief or a blackmailer in a small way.

In the event, he was destined to live a happy and fairly popular life in the Wiltshire Grange, and to die a much better man than he was at two and twenty. He was not to repent of, but to forget, all the calculated meannesses of his youth, and at fifty he would have shown any one to the door with horror who suggested a single one of the tricks that he had himself been guilty of in his youth.

And, parasite always, he is displayed here because of the part he is destined to take in the drama of Gilbert Lothian's life.

"I've been seeing a good deal of Toftrees lately, Gilbert," Ingworth said with a side glance.

Lothian looked up from his reverie.

"What? Oh, yes!—the Toftrees. Nice chap, Toftrees, I thought, when I met him the other night. Awfully clever, don't you think, to get hold of such an enormous public? Mind you, Dicker, I wouldn't give one of his books to any one if I could help it. But that's because I want every one to

care for real literature. That's my own personal standpoint. Apart from that, I do think that Mr. and Mrs. Toftrees deserve all they get in the way of money and popularity and so on. There must be such people under the modern conditions, and apart from their work they both seem most interesting."

This took the wind from the young man's sails. He was sensitive enough to perceive—though not to appreciate—the largeness of such an attitude as this. He felt baffled and rather small.

Then, something that had been instilled into him by his new and influential friends not only provided an antidote to his momentary discomfiture but became personal to himself.

A sense of envy, almost of hate, towards this man who had been so consistently kind to him, bloomed like some poisonous and swift-growing fungus in his unstable mind.

"I say," he said maliciously, though there was fear in his voice, too, "Herbert Toftrees has got his knife into you, Gilbert."

Lothian looked at the young man in surprise. "Got his *knife into me*?" he said, genuinely perplexed.

"Well, yes. He's going about town saying all sorts of unpleasant things about you."

Lothian laughed. "Yes!" he said, "I remember! Miss Wallace told me so not long ago. How intensely amusing!"

Ingworth hated him at the moment. There was a disgusting sense of impotence and smallness, in that he could not sting Lothian.

"Toftrees is a very influential man in London," he said sententiously.

At that moment all the humour in Lothian awoke.

He leant back and laughed aloud.

"Oh, Dicker!" he said, "what a babe you are!"

Ingworth grew red. He was furious, but dared say nothing more. He felt as if he had been trying to bore a tunnel through the Alps with a boiled carrot and had wasted a franc in paying some one to hold his shadow while he made the attempt!

Lothian's laughter was perfectly genuine. He cared absolutely nothing what Toftrees said or thought about him. But he did care about the young man at his side.

. . . The other Self, the new Ego, suddenly became awake and dominant. Suspicion reared its head.

For days and days now he had drunk hardly anything. The anti-alcoholic medicines that Morton Sims had administered were gradually strengthening the enfeebled will and bringing back the real tenant of his soul. But now . . .

Here was one whom he had thought his friend. It was not so then! An enemy sat by his side?—he would soon discover.

And then, with a skill which made the lad a plaything in his hands, with a cunning a hundred times deeper than Ingworth's immature shiftiness, Lothian began his work.

But it was not the real Lothian. It was the adroit devil waked to life that set itself to the task as the dog-cart rattled into the little country town and drew up before the George Hotel in the Market Square.

"Thanks awfully, old chap," Lothian said cheerfully as they turned under the archway into the stable yard. "You're a topping whip, you know, Dicker. I can't drive a bit myself. But I like to see you."

For a moment Ingworth forgot his rancour at the praise. Unconscious of the dominant personality and the mental grin behind the words, he swallowed the compliment as a trout gulps a fly.

They descended from the trap and the stable-men began to unharness the cob. Lothian thrust his arm through the other's. "Come along, Jehu!" he said. "I want a drink badly, and I'm sure you do, after the drive. I don't care what you say, that cob is *not* so easy to handle." . . .

His voice was lost in the long passage that led from the stable yard to the "saloon-lounge."

CHAPTER V

A QUARREL IN THE "MOST SELECT LOUNGE IN THE COUNTY"

"I strike quickly, being moved. . . . A dog of the house of Montague moves me."

—*Romeo and Juliet.*

The George Hotel in Wordingham was a most important place in the life and economy of the little Norfolk town.

The town drank there.

In the handsome billiard room, any evening after dinner, one might find the solicitor, the lieutenant of the Coast-guards, in command of the district, a squire or two, Mr. Pashwhip and Mr. Moger the estate agents and auctioneers, Mr. Reeves the maltster and local J.P.—town, not county—and in fact all the local notabilities up to a certain point, including Mr. Helzephron, the landlord and Worshipful Master of the Wordingham Lodge of Freemasons for that year.

The Doctor, the Bank Manager and, naturally, the Rector, were the only people of consequence who did not "use the house" and make it their club. They were definitely upon the plane of gentlefolk and could not well do so. Accordingly they formed a little bridge playing coterie of their own, occasionally assisted by the Lieutenant, who preferred the Hotel, but made fugitive excursions into the somewhat politer society which was his *milieu* by birth.

Who does not know them, these comfortable, respectable hotels in the High Streets or Market Places of small country towns? Yet who has pointed the discovering finger at them or drawn attention to the smug and *convenable* curses that they are?

"There was a flaunting gin palace at the corner of the street,"—that is the sort of phrase you may read in half a hundred books. The holes and dens where working people get drunk, and issuing therefrom make night hideous at closing time, stink in the nostrils of every one. They form the texts and illustrations of many earnest lectures, much fervent sermonizing. But nothing is said of the suave and well-conducted establishments where the prosperous inebriates of stagnant county towns meet to take their poison. When the doors of the George closed in Wordingham and its little coterie of patrons issued forth, gravely, pompously, a little unsteadily perhaps, to seek their homes, the Police Inspector touched his cap—"The gentlemen from the George, going home!"

But the wives knew all about such places as the George.

It is upon the women that the burden falls, gentle or simple, nearly always the women.

Mrs. Gaunt, the naval officer's wife, knew very well why her husband had never got his ship, and why he "went into the Coast-guard." She was accustomed to hear unsteady steps upon the gravel sweep a little after eleven, to see the flushed face of the man she loved, to know that he had spent the evening tippling with his social inferiors, to lie sad and uncomplaining by his side while his snores filled the air and the bedroom was pervaded by the odour of spirits—an Admiral's daughter she, gently nurtured, gently born, well accustomed to these sordid horrors by now.

Mrs. Reeves, the Maltster's wife, was soured in temper and angular of face. She had been a pretty and trusting girl not so long ago as years measure. She "gave as good as she got," and the servants of the big bourgeois house with its rankly splendid furniture only turned in their sleep when, towards midnight and once or twice a month, loud recriminations reached them from the downstairs rooms.

The solicitor, a big genial brute with a sense of humour, only frightened to tears the elderly maiden sister who kept his house. He was never unkind, never used bad language, and was merely noisy, but at eight o'clock on the mornings following an audit dinner, a "Lodge Night," or the evening of Petty Sessions, a little shrivelled, trembling spinster would creep out of the house before breakfast and kneel in piteous supplication at the Altar rails for the big, blond and jovial brother who was "dissolving his soul" in wine—the well-remembered phrase from the poem of Longfellow which she had learned at school was always with her and gave a bitter urgency to her prayers.

All the company who met almost nightly at the George were prosperous, well-to-do citizens. The government of the little town was in their hands. They administered the laws for drunkards, fined them or sent them to prison at Norwich. Their prosperity did not suffer. Custom flowed to Mr. Pashwhip and Mr. Moger, who were always ready to take or stand a drink. The malt of Mr. Reeves was bought by the great breweries of England and deteriorated nothing in quality, while more money than the pompous and heavy man could spend rolled into his coffers. The solicitor did his routine conveyancing and so on well enough.

No one did anything out of the ordinary. There were no scandals, "alarums and excursions." It was all decent and ordered.

The doctor could have given some astonishing evidence before a Medical Commission. But he

was a wise and quiet general practitioner who did his work, held his tongue and sent his three boys to Cambridge.

The Rector might have had an illuminating word to say. He was a good but timid man, and saw how impossible it was to make any movement. They were all his own church-wardens, sidesmen, supporters! How could he throw the sleepy, stagnant, comfortable town into a turmoil and disorder in which souls might be definitely lost for ever?

He could only pray earnestly as he said the Mass each morning during the seasons of the year.

It is so all over England. Deny it who may.

In Whitechapel the Fiend Alcohol is a dishevelled fury shrieking obscenities. In the saloons and theatres of the West End he is a suave Mephistopheles in evening dress. In Wordingham and the other provincial towns and cities of England, he appears as a plump and prosperous person in broadcloth, the little difficulty about his feet being got over by well-made country shoes, and with a hat pressed down over ears that may be a trifle pointed or may not.

But the mothers, the wives, the sisters recognise him anywhere.

The number of martyrs is uncounted. Their names are unknown, their hidden miseries unsung.

Who hears the sobs or sees the tears shed by the secret army of Slaves to the Slaves of Alcohol?

It is they who must drink the cup to the last dregs of horror and of shame. The unbearable weight is upon them, that is to say, upon tenderness and beauty, on feebleness and Love. Women endure the blows, or cruel words more agonising. They are the meek victims of the Fiend's malice when he enters into those they love. It is womanhood that lies helpless upon the rack for ruthless hands to torture.

Cujus animam geminentem!

—She whose soul groaning, condoling and grieving the sword pierced through!

Saviours sometimes, sufferers always.

Into the "lounge" of the George Hotel came Gilbert Lothian and Dickson Ingworth.

They were well-dressed men of the upper classes. Their clothes proclaimed them—for there will be (unwritten) sumptuary laws for many years in England yet. Their voices and intonation stamped them as members of the upper classes. A railway porter, a duke, or the Wordingham solicitor would alike have placed them with absolute certainty.

They were laughing and talking together with bright, animated faces, and in this masked life that we all lead to-day no single person could have guessed at the forces and tragedies at work beneath.

They sat down in a long room with a good carpet upon the floor, dull green walls hung with elaborate pictures advertising whiskeys, in gold frames, and comfortable leather chairs grouped in threes round tables with tops of hammered copper.

Mr. Helzephron did everything in a most up-to-date fashion—as he could well afford. "The most select lounge in the county" was a minor heading upon the hotel note-paper.

At one end of the room was a semicircular counter, upon which were innumerable regiments of tumblers and wine-glasses and three or four huge crystal vessels of spirits, tulip-shaped, with gilded inscriptions and shining plated taps.

Behind the counter was Miss Molly Palmer, the barmaid of the hotel, and, behind her, the alcove was lined with mirrors and glass shelves on which were rows of liqueur flasks, bottles of brandy and dummy boxes of chocolates tied up with scarlet ribands.

"Now tell me, Dicker," Lothian said, lighting a cigarette, "how do you mean about Toftrees?"

The glamour of the past was on the unstable youth now, the same influence which had made him—at some possible risk to himself—defend Lothian so warmly in the drawing room at Bryanstone Square.

The splendour of Toftrees was far away, dim in Lancaster Gate.

"Oh, he's jealous of you because you really can write, Gilbert! That must be it. But he really has got his knife into you!"

Internally, Lothian winced. "Oh, but I assure you he has not," was all that he said.

Ingworth finished his whiskey and soda. "Well, you know what I mean, old chap," he replied. "He's going about saying that you aren't sincere, that you're really fluffed when you write your poems, don't you know. The other night, at a supper at the Savoy, where I was, he said you were making a trade of Christianity, that you didn't really believe in what you wrote, and couldn't possibly."

Lothian laughed. "Have another whiskey," he said. "And what did you say, Dicker?"

There was a sneer in Lothian's voice which the other was quite quick to hear and to resent. On that occasion he had not defended his friend, as it happened.

"Oh, I said you meant well," Ingworth answered with quick impertinence, and then, afraid of what he had done hurriedly drained the second glass which the barmaid had just brought him.

"Well, I do, really," Lothian replied, so calmly that the younger man was deceived, and once more angry that his shaft had glanced upon what seemed to be impenetrable armour.

Yet, below the unruffled surface, the poet's mind was sick with loathing and disgust. He was not angry with Ingworth, against Toftrees he felt no rancour. He was sick, deadly sick with himself, inasmuch as he had descended so low as to be touched by such paws as these.

"I'll get through his damned high-and-mighty attitude yet," Ingworth thought to himself.

"I say," he remarked, "did you enjoy your trip to Brighton with Rita Wallace? Toftrees saw you there, you know. He was dining at the Metropole the same night."

He had pierced—right through—though he did not know it.

"Rather dangerous, wasn't it?" he continued. "Suppose your wife got to know, Gilbert?"

Something, those letters, near his heart, began to throb like a pulse in Lothian's pocket. One of the letters had arrived that very morning.

"Look here, Ingworth," he said, and his face became menacing, "you rather forget yourself, I think, in speaking to me in this way. You're a good sort of boy—at least I've thought so—and I've taken you up rather. But I don't allow impudence from people like you. Remember!"

The ice-cold voice frightened the other, but he had to the full that ape-like semi-courage which gibbers on till the last moment of a greater animal's patience.

The whiskey had affected him also. His brain was becoming heated.

"Well, I don't know about impudence," he answered pertly and with a red face. "Anyhow, Rita dined with *me* last week!"

He brought it out with a little note of triumph.

Lothian nodded.

"Yes, and you took her to that disgusting little café Maréchale in Soho. You ought not to take a lady to such a place as that. You've been long enough in London to know. Don't be such a babe. If you ever get a nice girl to go out with you again try and think things out a little more."

Tears of mortified vanity were in the young man's eyes.

"She's been writing to you!" he said with a catch in his voice, and suddenly his whole face seemed to change and dissolve into something else.

Did the lips really grow thicker? Did the angry blood which suffused the cheeks give them a dusky tinge which was not of Europe? Would the tongue loll out soon?

"I *beg* your pardon?" Lothian said coolly.

"Yes, she has!" the young fellow hissed. "You're trying on a game with the girl. She's a lady, and a good girl, and you're a married man. She's been telling you about me, though I've a right to meet her and you've not!—Look here, if she realised and knew what I know, and Toftrees and Mr. Amberley know, what every one in London knows, by Jove, she'd never speak to you again!"

Gilbert lifted his glass and sipped slowly. His face was composed. It bore the Napoleonic mask it had worn during the last part of their drive to the town.

Suddenly Gilbert rose up in his chair.

"You dirty little hanger-on," he said in a low voice, "how dare you mention any woman's name in this way!"

Without heat, without anger, but merely as a necessary measure of precaution or punishment, he smashed his left fist into Ingworth's jaw and laid him flat upon the carpet.

The girl behind the bar, who knew who Gilbert Lothian was very well, had been watching what was going on with experienced eyes.

She had seen, or known with the quick intuition of her training, that a row was imminent between the famous Mr. Lothian—whose occasional presences in the "lounge" were thought to confer a certain lustre upon that too hospitable rendezvous—and the excited young man with the dark red and strangely curly hair.

Molly Palmer had pressed the button of her private bell, which called Mr. Helzephron himself from his account books in the office.

Mr. Helzephron was a slim, bearded man, black of hair and saffron of visage. He was from Cornwall, in the beginning, and combined the inherent melancholy and pessimism of the Celt with the Celt's shrewd business instincts when he transplants himself.

He entered at that moment and caught hold of the wretched Ingworth just as the young man had risen, saw red, and was about to leap over the table at Lothian, whom, in all probability he would very soon have demolished.

Helzephron's arms and hands were like vices of steel. His voice droned like a wasp in a jam jar.

"Now, then," he said, "what's all this? What's all this, sir? I can't have this sort of thing going on. Has this gentleman been insulting you, Mr. Lothian?"

Ingworth was powerless in the Cornishman's grip. For a moment he would have given anything in the world to leap at the throat of the man at the other side of the table, who was still calmly smoking in his chair.

But quick prudence asserted itself. Lothian was known here, a celebrity. He was a celebrity anywhere, a public brawl with him would be dreadfully scandalous and distressing, while in the end it would assuredly not be the poet who would suffer most.

And Ingworth was a coward; not a physical coward, for he would have stood up to any one with nothing but glee in his heart, but a moral one. Lothian, he knew, wouldn't have minded the scandal a bit, here or anywhere else. But to Ingworth, cooled instantly by the lean grip of the landlord, the prospect was horrible.

And to be held by another man below one in social rank, landlord of an inn, policeman, or what not, while it rouses the blood of some men to frenzy, in others brings back an instant sanity.

Ingworth remained perfectly still.

For a second or two Lothian watched him with a calm, almost judicial air. Then he flushed suddenly, with a generous shame at the position.

"It's all right, Helzephron," he said. "It's a mistake, a damned silly mistake. As a matter of fact I lost my temper. Please let Mr. Ingworth go."

Mr. Helzephron possessed those baser sides of tact which pass for sincerity with many people.

"Very sorry, I'm sure," he droned, and stood waiting with melancholy interest to see what would happen next.

"I'm very sorry, Dicker," Lothian said impulsively; "you rather riled me, you know. But I behaved badly. It won't do either of us any good to have a rough and tumble here, but of course" . . . he looked significantly at the door.

Ingworth took him, and admired him for his simplicity. The old public school feeling was uppermost now. He knew that Gilbert knew he was no coward. He knew also that he could have knocked the other into a cocked hat in about three minutes.

"I was abominably rude, Gilbert," he said frankly. "Don't let's talk rot. I'm sorry."

"It's good of you to take it in that way, Dicker. I'm awfully sorry, too."

Mr. Helzephron interposed. "All's well that ends well," he remarked sententiously. "That's the best of gentlemen, they do settle these matters as gentlemen should. Now if you'll come with me, sir, I'll take you to the lavatory and you can sponge that blood off your face. You're not marked, really."

With a grin and a wink to Lothian, both of which were returned, Ingworth marched away in the wake of the landlord.

The air was cleared.

Gilbert was deeply sorry for what he had done. He had quite forgotten the provocation that he had received. "Good old sportsman, Dicker!" he thought; "he's a fine chap. I was a bounder to hit him. It would have served me jolly well right if he'd given me a hiding."

And the younger man, as he went to remove the stain of combat, had kindly and generous thoughts of his distinguished friend.

But, *che sara sara*, these kindly thoughts were but to bloom for an hour and fade. Neither knew that one of them was so soon to be brought to the yawning gates of Hell itself, and, at the very last moment, the unconscious action of the other was to snatch him from them.

Already the threads were being woven in those webs of Time, whereof God alone knows the pattern and directs the loom. Neither of them knew.

The barmaid, a tall, fresh-faced young girl, came down the room and took the empty glasses from the table.

"I say, Mr. Lothian," she remarked, "it's no business of mine, and no offence meant, but you didn't ought to have hit him."

"I know," Gilbert answered, "but why do you say so?"

"He's got such nice curly hair!" she replied with a provocative look from her bright eyes, and whisked away to the shelter of her counter.

Lothian sighed. During the years he had lived in Norfolk he had seen many fresh-faced girls come and go. Only a few days before, he had read a statement made by Mrs. Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army that the number of immoral women in the West End of London who have been barmaids is one quarter of the whole. . . .

At that moment, this Miss Molly Palmer was the *belle des coulisses* of Wordingham. The local bloods quarrelled about her, the elder men gave her gloves on the sly, her pert repartees kept the lounge in a roar from ten to eleven.

Once, with a sneer and as one man of the world to another, Helzephron had shown Lothian a trade paper in which these girls are advertised for—

"Barmaid wanted, must be attractive."

"Young lady wanted for select wine-room in the West End, gentlemen only, must be well educated and of good appearance, age not over twenty-five."

"Required at once, attractive young lady as barmaid—young. Photograph."

. . . A great depression fell upon the poet. Everywhere he turned just now ennui and darkness seemed to confront him. His youth was going. His fame brought no pleasure nor contentment. The easy financial circumstances of his life seemed to roll over him like a weed-clogged wave. His wife's love and care—was not that losing its savour also? The delightful labour of writing, the breathless and strenuous clutching at the waiting harps of poetry, was not he fainting and failing in this high effort, too?

His life was a grey, numbed thing. He was reminded of it whichever way he turned.

There was a time when the Holy Mysteries brought him a joy which was priceless and unutterable.

Yes! when he knelt at the Mass with Mary by his side, he had felt the breath of Paradise upon his brow. Emptied of all earthly things his soul had entered into the mystical Communion of Saints.

To husband and wife, in humble supplication side by side, the still small voice had spoken. The rushing wind of the Holy Ghost had risen around them and the Passion of Jesus been more near.

And now?—the man rose from his chair with a laugh so sad and hollow, a face so contorted with pain, that it startled the silly girl behind the bar.

She made a rapid calculation. "He was sober when 'e come," she thought in the vernacular, "and 'e can stand a lot, can Mr. Lothian. It's nothing. Them poets!"

"Something amusing you?" she said with her best smile.

Lothian nodded. "Oh, just my thoughts," he replied. "Give me another whiskey and soda—a fat one, yes, a little more, yes, that'll do."

For a moment, a moment of hesitation, he held it out at arm's length.

The sunlight of the afternoon blazed into the glass and turned the liquid to molten gold.

The light came from a window in the roof, just over the bar itself. The remainder of the room was in quiet shadow.

He looked down into the room and shuddered. It was typical of his life now.

He looked up at the half open window from which the glory came.

"Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!" he said, with a sad smile.

Molly Palmer watched him. "Juggins!" she thought, "them poets!"

But Lothian's words seemed to call for some rejoinder and the girl was at a loss.

"Wish you meant it!" she said at length, wondering if that would meet the occasion—as it often met others.

Lothian laughed, and drank down the whiskey.

The light from above faded almost instantly—perhaps a cloud was passing over the sun.

But, *au contraire*, the shadow of the room beyond had invitation now. It no longer seemed sombre.

He went into the shadows and sat down in the same chair where he had been before.

He smiled as he lit another cigarette. How strange moods were! how powerful for a moment, but how quickly over! The letters in his breast pocket seemed to glow out with material warmth, a warmth that went straight to his heart through the cloth and linen of his clothing. The new Ego was fed. Rita!

Yes! at least life had given him this and was it not the treasure of treasures? There was nothing coarse nor earthly in this at least!

The music of the Venusberg throbbed in all his pulses, calling, calling from the hollow hill. He did not realise from where it came—this magic music—and that there is more than one angelic choir.

Rita and Gilbert. Gilbert and Rita!

The words and music of one song!

So we observe that now the masked musicians in the unseen orchestra are in their places.

Any little trouble with the Management is over. Opposition players have sorrowfully departed. The Audience has willed it so, and the band only awaits its leader.

Monsieur L'Ame du Vin, that celebrated conductor, has just slid into his seat. He smirks at his players, gives an intelligent glance at the first violin, and taps upon the desk.

Three beats of the baton, a raised left hand, and once more the oft repeated overture to the Dance of Death commences, with the Fiend Alcohol beating time.

Ingworth came back soon. There was a slight bruise upon his upper lip, but that was all.

The two men—it was to be the last time in lives which had so strangely crossed—were friends in a sense that they had never been before. Both of them looked back upon that afternoon during the immediate days to come with regret and sorrow. Each remembered it differently, according to the depth of individual temperament. But it was remembered, as an hour when strife and turmoil had ceased; when, trembling on the brink of unforeseen events to come, there was pause and friendship, when the good in both of them rose to the surface for a little space and was observed of both.

"Now, Dicker, you just watch. They'll all be here soon for their afternoon drink—the local bloods, I mean. It's their substitute for afternoon tea, don't you know. They sit here talking about nothing to friends who have devoted their lives to the subject. Watch it for your work. You'll learn a lot. That must have been the way in which Flaubert got his stuff for 'Madame Bovary.'"

Something of the artist's fire animated the lad. He was no artist. He hadn't read "Madame Bovary," and it wouldn't have interested him if he had. But the plan appealed to him. It fitted in with his method of life. It was getting something for nothing. Yet he realised, to give him his due, a little more than this. He was sitting at the feet of his Master.

But as it happened, on that afternoon the local bloods were otherwise employed, for at any rate they made no appearance.

Lothian felt at ease. He had one or two more pegs. He had been so comparatively abstemious since his accident and under the regime of Dr. Morton Sims, that what he took now had only a tranquillising and pleasantly narcotic influence.

The nervous irritation of an hour before which had made him strike his friend, the depression and hollow misery which succeeded it, the few minutes of lyrical exaltation as he thought of Rita Wallace, all these were merged in a sense of *bien être* and drowsiness.

He enjoyed an unaccustomed and languid repletion in his mind, as if it had been overfed and wanted to lie down for a time.

Mr. Helzephron sat down at their table after a time and prosed away in his monotonous voice. He was a man of some education, had read, and was a Dickens lover. He did not often have the opportunity of conversation with any one like Lothian and he made the most of it. Like many common men who are anxious to ingratiate themselves with their superiors, he thought that the surest way to do so was to abuse his neighbours, thus, as he imagined, proclaiming himself above them and flattering his hearer. Lothian always said of the landlord of the George that he was worth his weight in gall, and for a time he was amused.

At five o'clock the two visitors had some tea and toast and at the half hour both were ready to go.

"I'll run round to the post office," Ingworth said, "and see if there are any late letters."

"Very well," Gilbert answered, "and I'll have the horse put in."

The afternoon post for Mortland Royal left the town at three, and letters which came in by the five o'clock mail were not delivered at the village until the next morning unless—as now—they were specially called for.

Ingworth ran off.

"Well, Mr. Lothian," said the landlord. "I don't often have the pleasure of a talk with you. Just one more with me before you go?"

They were standing together at the bar counter when a page boy entered the lounge and went up to his master. "Please, sir," he said, "the new young lady's come."

"Oh, very well," Helzephron answered. "I'll be out in a minute. Where is she?"

"In the hall, sir. And shall Boots go down for her trunk?"

"Yes; tell him to go to the station at once with the hand-cart. A new barmaid," he said, turning to Gilbert, "for the four ale bar, a woman of about thirty, not much class, you understand, wouldn't do for the lounge, but will keep the working men in order. It's astonishing how glad they are to get a job when they're about thirty! They're no draw then, and they know it. The worst of it is that these older women generally help themselves from the till or the bottle! I've had fifty applications for this job."

He led the way out into the hall of the hotel, followed by Lothian, who was on his way to the stable yard.

A woman was sitting upon a plush-covered bench by the wall. She was a dark gipsy looking creature, coarsely handsome and of an opulent figure. She stood up as Helzephron came out into the hall, and there seemed to be a suggestion of great boldness and flaunting assertion about her, oddly restrained and overlaid by a timidity quite at variance with her appearance.

The landlord was in front, and for a moment Lothian was concealed. Then, as he was about to wish Helzephron good afternoon and turned for the purpose, he came into view of the new barmaid.

She saw him full face and an instant and horrible change came over her own. It faded to dead paper-white. The dark eyes became fixed like lenses. The jaw dropped like the jaw of a ventriloquist's puppet, a strangled gurgle came from the open mouth and then a hoarse scream of terror. The woman's arms jerked up in the air as if they had been pulled by strings, and her hands in shabby black gloves curved into claws and were rigid. Then she spun round, caught her boot in the leg of the chair and fell in a swoon upon the floor.

The landlord swore in his surprise and alarm.

Then, keen as a knife, he whipped round and looked at Lothian.

Lothian's face expressed nothing but the most unbounded astonishment. Help was summoned and the woman was carried into the landlord's private office, where restoratives were applied.

In three or four minutes she opened her eyes and moaned. Lothian, Helzephron and a chambermaid who was attending on her, were the only other people in the office.

"There, there," said the landlord irritably, when he saw that consciousness was returning. "What in heaven's name did you go off like that for? You don't belong to do that sort of thing often I hope. If so I may as well tell you at once that you'll be no good here."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the poor creature, trembling and obviously struggling with rising hysteria. "It took me sudden. I'm very strong, really, sir. It shan't happen again."

"I hope not," Helzephron answered in a rather more kindly tone. "Elsie, go into the lounge and ask Miss Palmer for a little brandy and water—but what took you like this?"

The woman hesitated. Her glance fell upon Lothian who was standing there, a pitying and perplexed spectator of this strange scene. She could not repress a shudder as she saw him,

though both men noticed that the staring horror was going from her eyes and that her face was relieved.

"I'm very sorry," she said again, "but the sight of that gentleman coming upon me sudden and unexpected was the cause of it."

"This gentleman!" Helzephron replied. "This is Mr. Gilbert Lothian, a famous gentleman and one of our country gentleman in Norfolk. What can you have to do with him?"

"Oh, nothing sir, nothing. But there's a very strong resemblance in this gentleman to some one"—she hesitated and shuddered—"to some one I once knew. I thought it was him come back at first. I see now that there's lots of difference. I've had an unhappy life, sir."

She began to sob quietly.

"Now, drink this," said the landlord, handing her the brandy which the chambermaid had just brought. "Stop crying and Elsie will take you up to your room. Your references are all right and I don't want to know nothing of your history. Do your duty by me like a good girl and you'll find me a good master. Your past's nothing to me."

Lothian and the landlord went out into the stable yard where the rainbow-throated pigeons were murmuring on the tiled roofs, and the ostler—like Mousqueton—was spitting meditatively. They discussed this strange occurrence.

"I never saw a woman so frightened!" said Mr. Helzephron. "You might have been old Bogy himself, Mr. Lothian. I didn't know what to think for a moment! I hope she doesn't drink."

"Well, I suppose we've all got a double somewhere or other," Lothian answered. "I suppose she saw some likeness in me to some one who has ill used her, poor thing."

"Oh, yes, sir," Helzephron replied. "That's it—she said as much. Half the plays and novels turn on such likenesses. I used to be a great play-goer when I was in London and I've seen all the best actresses. But I'm damned if I ever see such downright horror as there was in that girl's face. He must have been a bad un whoever he was. Real natural tragedy in that face—William, put in Mr. Lothian's horse."

He said good-bye and re-entered the hotel.

Lothian remained in the centre of the yard. He lit a cigarette and watched the horse being harnessed. His face was clouded with thought.

It was very strange! How frightful the poor woman had looked. It was a nightmare face, a face of Gustave Doré from the Inferno engravings!

He never saw the woman again, as it happened, and never knew who she was. If he had read of the Hackney murder in the papers of the year before he had given it no attention. He knew nothing of the coarse siren for whose sake the poisoned man of Hackney had killed the wife who loved him, and who, under an assumed name, was living out her obscure and haunted life in menial toil.

Dr. Morton Sims might have thrown some light upon the incident at the George perhaps. But then Dr. Morton Sims never heard of it and it soon passed from the poet's mind.

No doubt the Fiend Alcohol who provided the incidental music at the head of his orchestra was smiling.

For the Overture to the Dance of Death is curiously coloured music and there are red threads of melody interwoven with the sable chords.

CHAPTER VI

AN OMNES EXEUNT FROM MORTLAND ROYAL

"Wenn Menschen auseinandergehn
So sagen sie—auf Wiedersehn!
Ja Wiederseh'n."

—*Goethe.*

Dickson Ingworth returned from the post office with several letters.

He handed three of them to Lothian. One was a business letter from the firm of Ince and

Amberley, the other an invitation to a literary dinner at the Trocadero, the third, with foreign stamp and postmark, was for Mary Lothian.

As they drove out of the town, Ingworth was in high spirits. His eyes sparkled, he seemed excited.

"Good news by this post, Dicker?" Gilbert asked.

Ingworth had been waiting for the question. He tried to keep the tremulous pleasure out of his voice as he answered.

"Well, rather. I've just heard from Herbert Toftrees. When I saw him last, just before I came down here, he hinted that he might be able to influence things for me in a certain quarter." . . .

He paused.

Gilbert saw how it was. The lad was bursting with news but wanted to appear calm, wanted to be coaxed. Well, Gilbert owed him that!

"Really! Has something come off, Dicker, then? Do tell me, I should be so glad."

"Yes, Gilbert. It's the damnedst lucky thing! Toftrees is a topping chap. The other day he hinted at something he might be able to do for me in his deep-voiced, mysterious way. I didn't pay much attention because they say he's rather like that, and one mustn't put too much trust in it. But, by Jove! it's come off. The editor of the *Wire*—Ommany you know—wants somebody to go to Italy with the delegation of English Public School Masters, as special correspondent for a month. They've offered it to me. It's a big step, Gilbert, for me! They will pay awfully well for the job and it means that I shall get in permanently with the *Wire*."

"I'm awfully glad, Dicker. Splendid for you! But what is it exactly?"

"The new movement in Italy, anti-Papal and National. It's the schools, you know. The King and the Mayor of Rome are frightfully keen that all the better class schools, like our public schools, you know—shall be taken out of the hands of the Jesuits and the seminary priests. Games and a healthy sort of school life are to be organised for the boys. They're going to try and introduce our system if they can. A Harrow tutor, a Winchester man, undermasters from Haileybury, Repton and Denstone are going out to organise things."

"And you're going with them to tell England all about it! I congratulate you, Dicker. It's a big chance. You can make some fine articles out of it, if you take care. It should introduce your name."

"Thanks awfully, I hope so. It's because I got my running blue I expect. But it's jolly decent of the old Toffer all the same."

"Oh, it is. When do you go?"

"At once. They start in four days. I shall have to go up to town by the first train to-morrow."

"I'm sorry, but of course, if you must" . . .

"Oh, I must," Ingworth said importantly. "I have to see Ommany to-morrow night."

Unconsciously, as he urged the cob onwards, his head sank forward a little, and he imitated the grave pre-occupation of Lothian upon the drive out.

Mary Lothian was sitting in a deck chair in front of the house when the two men came through the gate. A little table stood by the side of her chair, and on it was a basket of the thin silk socks her husband wore. She was darning one of the expensive gossamer things with a tiny needle and almost invisible thread.

Mary looked up quickly as the two men came up to her. There was a swift interrogation in her eyes, instantly suppressed but piteous in its significance.

But now, she smiled.

Gilbert was all right! She knew it at once. He had come back from Wordingham quite sober, and in her tender anxious heart she blessed God and Dr. Morton Sims.

She was told of Dickson's opportunity. Gilbert was as anxious to tell, and as excited as his friend. "Oh, I *am* so glad, Dicker!" she said over and over again. "My dear boy, I *am* so glad! Now you've got your chance at last. Your real chance. Never come down here again if you don't make the most of it!"

Ingworth sat down upon the lawn at her feet. Dusk was at hand. The sun was sinking to rest and the flowers of the garden were almost shouting with perfume.

Rooks winged homeward through the fading light, and the Dog Trust gambolled in the middle-

distance of the lawn as the cock-chafers went booming by.

. . . "Think I shall be able to do it, Mrs. Gilbert?"

"Of course you will, Dicker! Put your very heart into it, won't you! It's your chance at last, isn't it?"

Ingworth jumped to his feet. "I shall do it," he said gravely, as who should say that the destinies of kingdoms depended upon his endeavours.

"And now I must go in and write some letters. I shall have to be off quite early to-morrow, Mrs. Gilbert."

"I'll arrange all that. Go in and do your letters. We're not going to dine till eight to-night."

Ingworth crossed the lawn and went into the house.

Gilbert drew his chair up to his wife.

She held out her hand. He took it, raised it to his lips and kissed it. He was at home.

"I'm glad, dear," Mary said, "that Dicker has got something definite to do. It will steady him. If he is successful it will give him a new sense of responsibility. I wouldn't say anything to you, Gillie, but I have not liked him so much this time as I used to."

"Why?"

"He doesn't seem to have been treating you quite in the way he used to. He's been talking a good deal to me of some people who seem to have taken him up in London. And I can't help knowing that you've done everything for him in the past. Really, Gillie, I have had to snub him quite severely, for me, once or twice."

"Yes."

"*Yes.* He assumed a confidential, semi-superior sort of air and manner. In a clumsy, boyish sort of way he's tried to suggest that I'm not happy with you."

Lothian laughed bitterly. "I know," he said, "so many people are like that. Ingworth has good streaks like all of us. But speaking generally he's unstable. I've found it out lately, too. Never mind. He's off to-morrow. Oh, by the way, here's a letter for you, dear, I forgot."

Mary took the letter and rose from her chair. Arm in arm they entered the house together and went upstairs to dress for dinner.

Gilbert had had his bath, had changed, and was tying his tie in front of the dressing table mirror, when the door of his room opened and Mary hurried in.

Her hair was coiled in its masses of pale gold, and a star of emeralds which he had given her was fixed in it. She wore a long dressing robe of green silk fringed with dull red arabesques—he had bought it for her in Tunis.

A rope of camels' hair gathered it in round her slender waist and the lovely column of her neck, the superb white arms were bare.

"What is it, dear?" he said, for his wife's fair face was troubled.

"Oh, darling," she answered, with a sob in her voice, "I've had bad news from Nice."

"About Dorothy?"

"Yes, Miss Dalton, the lady nurse who is with her has written. It's all been no use, Gillie, no use at all! She's dying, dear. The doctor from Cannes who has been attending her has said so. And Sir William Larus who is at Mentone was called in too. They give her three weeks or a month. They've cabled to India but it's a forlorn hope. Harold won't be able to get to her in time—though there's just a chance."

She sank down upon the bed and covered her face with her hands.

She was speaking of her sister, Lady Davidson, who was stricken with consumption. Sir Harold Davidson was a major in the Indian Army, a baronet without much money, and a keen soldier. Mary's sister had developed the disease in England, where she had been ordered from Simla by the doctors there. She was supposed to be "run down" and no more then. Phthisis had been diagnosed in London—incipient only—and she had been sent to the Riviera at once. The reports from Nice had become much worse during the last few weeks, and now—this letter.

Gilbert went to his wife and sat down beside her upon the bed, drawing her to him. He was fond of Dorothy Davidson and also of her husband, but he knew that Mary adored her sister.

"Darling," he said, "don't give way. It may not be so bad after all. And so much depends upon the

patient in all illnesses—doesn't it? Morton Sims was telling us so the other night, you remember? Dolly is an awfully sporting sort of girl. She won't give in."

Mary leant her head upon his shoulder. The strong arms that held her brought consolation. The lips of the husband and wife met.

"It's dear of you to say so," Mary said at length, "but I know, dear. The doctor and the nurse have been quite explicit. Dorothy is dying, Gillie, I can't let her die alone, can I?"

"No, dear, of course not," he replied rather vaguely, not quite understanding what she meant for a moment.

"She must have some one of her own people with her. Harold will most likely not arrive in time. I must go—mustn't I?"

Then Gilbert realised.

His swift imagination pictured a lonely hotel death-bed among the palms and mimosa of the Côte d'Azur, a pretty and charming girl fading away from the blue white and gold with no loving hands to tend her, and only the paid services of strangers to speed or assuage the young soul's passage from sunshine and laughter to the unknown.

"You must go to her at once, sweetheart," he said gravely.

"Oh, I *must*! You don't mind my leaving you?"

"How can you ask it? But I will come with you. We will both go. You will want a man."

Mary hesitated for a second, and then she shook her head.

"I shall manage quite well by myself," she said. "It will be better so. I'm quite used to travelling alone as you know. And the journey to Nice is nothing. I shall be in one carriage all the way from Calais. You could come out after, if necessary."

"I would come gladly, dear."

"I know, Gillie, and it's sweet of you. But you couldn't be of use and it would be miserable for you. It is better that I should be alone with Dolly. I can always wire if I want you."

"As you think best, dear. Then I will stay quietly down here."

"Yes, do. You have that poem to work on, 'A Lady in a Library.' It is a beautiful fancy and will make you greater than ever! It's quite the best thing you've done so far. And then there's the shooting."

"Oh, I shall do very well, Molly. Don't bother about me, dear."

She held him closer. Her cool white arms were around his neck.

"But I always do bother about you, husband," she whispered, "because I love you better than anything else in the world. It is sweet of you to let me go like this. And I feel so much happier about you now, since the doctor has come to the village."

He winced with pain and shame at her loving words. A pang went right through him.

It passed as swiftly as it had come. Sweet and loving women too often provide men with excuses for their own ill conduct. Lothian knew that—under the special circumstances of which his wife knew nothing—it was his duty to go with Mary. But he didn't want to go. He would have hated going.

Already a wide vista was opening before him—a freedom, an absolute freedom! Wild music! The Wine of Life! Now, if ever, Fate, Destiny, call it what he would, was preparing the choicest banquet.

He had met Rita. Rita was waiting, he could be with Rita!

And yet, so subtle and tortuous is the play of egoism upon conscience, he felt pleased with himself for his ready concurrence in his wife's plans. He assumed the rôle she gave him with avidity, and when he answered her she thought him the best and noblest of men.

"It will be dreadful without you, darling, but you are quite right to go. Send for me if you want me. I'll catch the next boat. But I have my work to do, and I can see a good deal of Morton Sims"—he knew well, and felt with shame, the cunning of this last statement—"and if I'm dull I can always run up to town for a day or two and stay at the club."

"Of course you can, dear. You won't feel so lonely then. Now about details. I must pack to-night."

"Yes, dear, and then you can go off with Dicker in the morning, and catch the night boat. If you like, that is."

"Well, I shouldn't gain anything by that, dear. I should only have to wait about in Calais until one o'clock the next day when the train de luxe starts. But I should like to go first thing to-morrow. I couldn't wait about here the whole day. Dicker will be company of sorts. I shall get to town about two, and go to the Charing Cross Hotel. Then I shall do some shopping, go to bed early, and catch the boat train from the station in the morning. I would rather do it like that."

Both of them were experienced travellers and knew the continental routes well. It was arranged so.

Mary did not come down to dinner. A tray was sent up to her room. Lothian dined alone with Ingworth. The voices of the two men were hushed to a lower tone in deference to the grief of the lady above. But there was a subdued undercurrent of high spirits nevertheless. Ingworth was wildly excited by the prospect before him; Gilbert fell into his mood with no trouble at all.

He also had his own thoughts, his own private thoughts.

—"I say, Dicker, let's have some champagne, shall we?—just to wish your mission success."

"Yes, do let's. I'm just in the mood for buzz-water to-night."

The housemaid went to the cellar and fetched the wine.

"Here's to you, Dicker! May you become a G. W. Stevens or a Julian Ralph!"

"Thanks, old chap. I'll do my best, now that my chance has come. I say I am awfully sorry about Lady Davidson. It's such rough luck on Mrs. Gilbert. You'll be rather at a loose end without your wife, won't you?—or will you write?"

He tossed off his second glass of Pol Roger.

"Oh, I shall be quite happy," Lothian answered, and as he said it a quiet smile came placidly upon his lips. It glowed out from within, as from some comfortable inward knowledge.

Ingworth saw it, and his mind, quickened by wine and excitement, found the truth unerringly.

Anger and envy flushed the young man's veins. He hated his host once more.

"So that is his game, damned hypocrite!" Ingworth thought. "I shall be away, his wife will be out of the way and he will make the running with Rita Wallace just as he likes."

He looked at Lothian, and then had a mental vision of himself.

"He's fat and bloated," he thought. "Surely a young and lovely girl like Rita *can't* care for him?"

But even as he endeavoured to comfort his greedy conceit by these imaginings, he felt the shadow of the big mind falling upon them. He knew, as he had known so often of late, the power of that which was cased in its envelope of flesh, and which could not be denied.

Perhaps there is no hate so bitter, no fear so impotent and distressing, as that which is experienced by the surface for the depth.

It is the fury of the brilliant scabbard against the sword within, decoration versus that which cleaves.

Ingworth wished that he were not going away—leaving the field clear. . . .

"Have a cigar, Dicker. No?—well, here's the very best of luck."

"Thanks, the same to you!"

END OF BOOK TWO

BOOK THREE

FRUIT OF THE DEAD SEA

> "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth."
>
> "Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe: let her breasts satisfy thee at all times: and be thou ravished always with her love."
>
> "And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?"

"*His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.*"

CHAPTER I

THE GIRLS IN THE FOURTH STORY FLAT

"We were two daughters of one race;
She was the fairest in the face;"

—*Tennyson.*

In the sitting room of a small forty-five pound flat, upon the fourth floor of a tall red-brick building in West Kensington known as Queens Mansions, Ethel Harrison, the girl who lived with Rita Wallace, sat sewing by the window.

It was seven o'clock in the evening and though dusk was at hand there was still enough light to sew by. The flat, moreover, was on the west side of the building and caught the last rays of the sun as he sank to rest behind the quivering vapours of London.

Last week in August as it was, the heat which hung over the metropolis for so long was in no way abated. All the oxygen was gone from the air, and for those who must stay in London—the workers, who could only read in the papers of translucent sunlit seas in Cornwall where one bathed from the beaches all day long; of bright northern moors where dew fell upon the heather at dawn—life was become stifling and hard.

In the window hung a bird-cage and the canary within it—the pet of these two lonely maidens—drooped upon its perch. It was known as "The Lulu Bird" and was a recurring incident in their lives.

Ethel was six and twenty, short, undistinguished of feature and with sandy hair. She was the daughter of a very poor clergyman in Lancashire, and she was the principal typist in the busy office of a firm of solicitors in the city. She had ever so many certificates for shorthand, was a quick and accurate machine-writer, understood the routine of an office in all its details, and was invaluable to her employers. They boasted of her, indeed, trusted her in every way, worked her from nine to six on normal days, to any hours of the night at times of pressure, and paid her the highest salary in the market.

That is to say, that this girl was at the very top of her profession and received two pounds ten shillings a week. Dozens of girls envied her, she was more highly paid than most of the men clerks in the city. She knew herself to be a very fortunate girl. She gave high technical ability, a good intelligence, unceasing, unwearying and most loyal service for fifty shillings a week.

Each year she had a holiday of fourteen days, when she clubbed with some other girls and they all went to some farmhouse in the country, or even for a cheap excursion abroad, with everything calculated to the last shilling. This girl did all this, dressed like a lady, had a little home of her own with Rita, preserved her dignity and independence, and sent many a small postal order to help the poor curate's wife, her mother, with the hungry brood of younger ones. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison in Lancashire spoke of their eldest daughter with pride. She had "her flat in town." She was "doing extraordinarily well"; "Sister Ethel" was a fairy godmother to her little brothers and sisters.

She was a good girl, good and happy. The graces were denied her; she had made all sweet virtues her own. No man wooed her, no man looked twice at her. She had no religious ecstasies, and—instead of a theatre where one had to pay—asked no thrills from sensuous ceremonial. She simply went to the nearest church and said her prayers.

It is the shame of most of us that when we meet such women as these, we pass them by with a kindly laugh or a patronising word. Men and women of the world prefer more decorative folk. They like to watch holiness in a picturesque setting, Elizabeth of Hungary washing the beggar's feet upon the palace steps. . . .

A little worker-bee saint, making a milk pudding for a sick washerwoman on a gas-stove in a flat—that comes rather too close home, does it not?

The light was really fading now, and Ethel put down her sewing, rose from her basket-work chair, and lit the gas.

It was an incandescent burner, hanging from the centre of the ceiling, and the girls' living room was revealed.

It was a very simple, comely, makeshift little home.

On one side of the fireplace—now filled with a brown and gasping harts-tongue fern in an earthen pot—was Ethel's bookshelf.

Up-to-date she had a hundred and thirty-two books, of the "Everyman" and "World's Classics" series. She generally managed a book and a half each fortnight, and her horizon was bounded by the two-hundredth volume. Dickens she had very much neglected of late, the new Ruskin had kept the set at "David Copperfield" for weeks, but she was getting on steadily with her Thackeries.

Rita had no books. She was free of that Kingdom at the Podley Institute, but the little black piano was hers. The great luxury of the Chesterfield was a joint extravagance. Both ends would let down to make a couch when necessary, and though it had cost the girls three pounds ten, it "made all the difference to the room."

All the photographs upon the mantel-shelf were Ethel's. There was her father in his cassock—staring straight out of the frame like a good and patient mule. . . . Her sisters and brothers also, of all ages and sizes, and all clothed with an odd suggestion of masquerading, of attempting the right thing. Not but what they were all perfect to poor Ethel, whose life was far too busy and limited to understand the tragedy of clothes.

Rita's photographs were on the piano.

There were several of her school-friends—lucky Rita had been to a smart school!—and the enigmatic face of Muriel Amberley with its youthful Mona Lisa smile looked out from an oval frame of red leather stamped with an occasional fleur-de-lys in gold.

There was a portrait of Mr. Podley, cut from the *Graphic* and framed cheaply, and there were two new photographs.

One of them was that of a curly-headed, good-looking young man with rather thick lips and a painful consciousness that he was being photographed investing the whole picture with suspense.

Ethel had heard Rita refer to the original of this portrait once or twice as "Dicker" or "Curly."

But, then, there was another photograph. A large one this time, done in cloudy browns, nearly a foot square and with the name of a very famous artist of the camera stamped into the card.

This was a new arrival, also, of the past few weeks, and it was held in a massive frame of thick plain silver.

The frame, with the portrait in it, had arrived at the flat some fortnight ago in an elaborate wooden box.

Ethel had recognised the portrait at once. It was of Mr. Gilbert Lothian, the great poet. Rita had met him at a dinner-party, and, if she didn't exaggerate, the great man had almost shown a disposition to be friendly. It was nice of him to send Rita his photograph, but the frame was rather too much. All that massive silver!—"it must have cost thirty shillings at least," she had thought in her innocence.

When the gas was turned up, for some reason or other her eye had fallen at once upon the photograph upon the top of the piano.

She had read some of Lothian's poems, but she had found nothing whatever in them that had pleased her. Even when her father had written to her and recommended them for her to read the poems meant less than nothing, and the face—no! she didn't like the face. "I hardly think that it's quite a *good* face," she said to herself, not recognising that—the question of morality quite apart—her hostility rose from the fact that it was a face utterly outside her limited experience, a face that was eloquent of a life, of things, of thoughts that she could never even begin to understand.

In the middle of the room the small round table was spread with a fair white cloth and set for a meal. There was a green bowl of bananas, a loaf of brown bread, some sardines in a glass dish. But a place was laid for one person only.

Rita was in their mutual bedroom dressing. Rita was going to dine out.

The two girls had lived together for a year now. At the beginning of their association one thing had been agreed between them. Their outside lives were to be lived independently of their home life. No confidences were to be expected or demanded as a matter of course. If confidences were made they were to be free and spontaneous, at the wish or whim of each.

The contract had been loyally observed. Ethel never had any secrets. Rita had had several during the year of their association, but they had proved only minor little secrets after all. Sooner or later she had told them, and they had been food for virginal laughter for them both.

But now, during the last few weeks?—Ethel's glance flitted uneasily from the big photograph upon the piano to a little round table of bamboo work in one corner of the sitting room.

Upon this table lay a huge bunch of dark red roses. The stalks were fitted into a holder of finely-woven white grass—as delicate in texture as a panama hat—and the bouquet was tied with graceful bows and streamers of purple satin—broad, expensive ribbon.

A boy messenger, most unusual visitor, had brought them an hour ago. "For Miss Rita Wallace."

The quiet mind, the crystal soul of this girl, dimly discerned something alien and disturbing.

The door of the sitting-room opened and Rita came in.

She was radiant. Her one evening dress was not an expensive affair, a simple, girl's frock of olive-green *crêpe de chene* in the Empire fashion, but the girl and her clothes were one.

The high "waist," coming just under the curve of the breast, was edged with an embroidery of dull silver thread, and the gleam of this upon its olive setting threw up the fair column of the throat the rounded arms, the whiteness of the girlish bosom, with a most striking and arresting lustre.

Round her neck the girl wore a riband of dark green velvet, and as a pendant from it hung a little star of amethysts and olivines set in a filigree of platinum, no rare nor costly jewel, but a beautiful one. She was pulling her long white gloves up to the elbow as she entered the room.

Ethel loved Rita dearly. Rita was her romance, the art and colour of her life. She was always saying or doing astonishing things, she was always beautiful. To-night, though the frock was an old friend, the pendant quite familiar, Ethel thought that she had never seen her friend so lovely. The nut-brown hair was shining, the young, brown eyes lit up with excitement and joy, the tints of rose and pearl upon Rita's cheeks came and went as her heart beat.

"A Duke might be glad to marry her," the plain girl thought without a throb of envy.

She was perfectly right. If Rita had been in society or on the stage she probably would have married a peer—not a Duke though, that was Ethel's inexperience. There are so few dukes that they have not the same liberty of action as other noblemen. The Beauty Market is badly organised—curious fact in an age when to purvey cats' meat is a specialised industry. But the fact remains. The prettiest girls in England don't have their pictures in the papers and advertise no dentrifice or musical comedy on the one hand, nor St. Peter and St. George, their fashionable West End temples, on the other. Buyers of Beauty have but a limited choice, and on the whole it is a salutary thing, though doubtless hard upon loveliness that perforce throws itself away upon men without rank or fortune for want of proper opportunity!

"How do I look, Wog dear?" Rita asked.

"Splendid, darling," Ethel answered eagerly—a pretty junior typist in Ethel's office, who had been snubbed, had once sent her homely senior a golliwog doll, and since then the good-humoured Ethel was "Wog" to her friends.

"I'm so glad. I want to look my best to-night."

"Well, then, you do," Ethel replied, and with an heroic effort forbore further questioning.

She always kept loyally to the compact of silence and non-interference with what went on outside the flat.

Rita chuckled and darted one of her naughty, provocative glances.

"Wog! You're dying to know where I'm going!"

Some girls would have affected indifference immediately. Not so the simple Wog.

"Of course I am, Cupid," she said.

"I'm going to dine with Gilbert."

"Gilbert?"

"Gilbert Lothian I mean, of course. We are absolute friends, Wog dear—he and I. I haven't told you before, but I will now. You remember that night I was home so late, nearly a month ago? Yes?—well I had been motoring to Brighton with Gilbert. I met him for the first time at the Amberleys'—but that you know. Since then we have become friends—such a strange and wonderful friendship it is, Ethel! It's made things so different for me."

"But how friends? Have you seen him often, then? But you can't have?"

Rita shook her head, impatiently for a moment, and then she smiled gently. How could poor old Wog know or understand!

"No!" she cried, with a little tap of her shoe upon the carpet. "But there are such things as letters aren't there?"

"Has he been writing to you, then?"

"Writing! I have had four of the most beautiful letters that a poet ever wrote. It took him days to write each one. He chose every word, over and over again. Every sentence is music, every word a note in a chord!"

Ethel went up to her friend and kissed her. "Dear old Cupid," she said, "I'm so glad, so very glad. I don't understand his poems myself, but Father simply loves them. I am sure you will be very happy. Only I do hope he is a good man—really worthy of my dear! And so"—she continued, with a struggle to get down to commonplace brightness of manner—"And so he's coming for you to-night! Now I know why you look so beautiful and are so happy."

Two tears gathered in the kind green eyes, tears of joy at her dear girl's happiness, but with a tincture of sadness too. With a somewhat unaccustomed flash of imagination, she looked into the future and saw herself lonely in the flat, or with another girl who could never be to her what Rita was.

She looked up at Rita again, trying to smile through her tears.

What she saw astounded her.

Rita's face was flushed. A knot of wrinkles had sprung between her eyebrows. Her mouth was mutinous, her brown eyes lit with an angry and puzzled light.

"I don't understand you, Ethel," she said in a voice which was so cold and unusual that the other girl was dumb.—"What on earth do you mean?"

"Mean, dear," Ethel faltered. "I don't quite understand. I thought you meant—I thought . . ."

"What did you think?"

"I thought you meant that you were engaged to him, Cupid darling!"

"Engaged!—*Why Gilbert is married.*"

Ethel glanced quickly at the flowers, at the photograph upon the piano. Things seemed going round and round her—the heat, that was it—"But the letters!" she managed to say at length, "and, and—oh, Cupid, what *are* you doing? He can't be a good man. I'm certain of it, dear! I'm older than you are. I know more about things. You don't realise,—but how should you poor darling! He can't be a good man! Rita, *does his wife know*?"

The girl frowned impatiently. "How limited and narrow you are, Ethel," she said. "Have you such low ideals that you think friendship between a man and a woman impossible? Are you entirely fettered by convention and silly old puritanical nonsense? Wouldn't you be glad and proud to have a man with a wonderful mind for your friend—a man who is all chivalry and kindness, who pours out the treasures of his intellect for one?"

Ethel did not answer. She did not, in truth, know what to say. There *was* no reason she could adduce why Rita should not have a man friend. She knew that many singular and fine natures despised conventionality or ordinary rules and seemed to have the right to do so. And then—*honi soit*! Yet, inarticulate as she was, she felt by some instinct that there was something wrong. Mr. Gilbert Lothian was married. That meant everything. A married man, and a poet too! oughtn't to have any secret and very intimate friendships with beautiful, wilful and unprotected girls.

. . . "You have nothing to say! Of course! There *is* nothing that any wide-minded person could say. Ethel, you're a dear old stupe!"—she crossed the room and kissed her friend.

And Ethel was so glad to hear the customary affection return to Rita's voice, the soft lips upon her cheek set her gentle and loving heart in so warm a glow, that her fears and objections dissolved and she said no more.

The electric bell at the front door whirred.

Rita tore herself from Ethel's embrace. There was a mirror over the mantel-shelf. She gazed into it for a few seconds and then hurried away into the little hall.

There was the click of the latch as it was drawn back, a moment of silence, and then Ethel heard a voice with a peculiar vibration and timbre—an altogether unforgettable voice—say two words.

"At last!"

Then there was a murmur of conversation, the words of which she could not catch, interrupted once by Rita's happy laughter.

Finally she heard Rita hurry into the bedroom, no doubt for her cloak, and return with an excited word. Then the door closed and there was an instant of footsteps upon the stone stairs outside.

Ethel was left alone.

She went to her bookshelf—she did not seem to want to think just now—and after a moment's hesitation took down "Sesame and Lilies." Then she sat at the table with a sigh and looked without much interest at the bananas, the sardines and the brown bread.

Ethel was left alone.

CHAPTER II

OVER THE RUBICON

"Inside the Horsel here the air is hot;
Right little peace one hath for it, God wot;
The scented dusty daylight burns the air,
And my heart chokes me till I hear it not."

—*Swinburne.*

Gilbert and Rita said hardly anything to each other as the motor-cab drove them to the restaurant where they were to dine.

There was a sort of constraint between them. It was not awkwardness, it was not shyness. Nevertheless, they had little to say to each other—yet.

They had become extraordinarily intimate during the last weeks by means of the letters that had passed between them. In all his life Lothian had never written anything like these letters. Those already written, and those that were to be written before the end, would catch the imagination of Europe and America could they ever be published. In prose of a subtle beauty, which was at the same time virile and with the organ-note of a big, revealing mind, he had poured his thoughts upon the girl.

She was the inspiration, the *raison d'être*, of these letters. That "friendship" which his heated brain had created and imposed upon hers, he had set up before him like a picture and had woven fervent and critical rhapsodies about it. The joy that he had experienced in the making of these letters was more real and utterly satisfying than any he had ever known. He was filled and exalted by a sense of high power as he wrote the lovely words. He knew how she would read, understand and be thrilled by them. Paragraph after paragraph, sentence after sentence, were designed to play upon some part of the girl's mind and temperament—to flatter her own opinion at a definite point, and to flatter it with a flattery so subtle and delicate, so instinct with knowledge, that it came to her as a discovery of herself. He would please her—since she was steeped in books and their appeal, utterly ignorant of Life itself—with a pleasure that he alone could give. He would wrap her round with the force and power of his mind, make her his utterly in the bonds of a high intellectual friendship, dominate her, achieve her—through the mind.

He had set himself to do this thing and he had done it.

Her letters to him, in their innocent, unskilful, but real and vivid response had shown him everything. From each one he gathered new material for his reply.

He had lived of late in a new world, where, neglecting everything else, he sat Jove-like upon the Olympus of his own erection and drew a young and supremely beautiful girl nearer and nearer to him by his pen.

He had fallen into many mortal sins during his life. Until now he had not known the one by which the angels fell, the last sin of Pride which burns with a fierce, white consuming flame.

All these wonderful letters had been wrought under the influence of alcohol. He would go to his study tired in body and so wearied in brain that he felt as if his skull were literally packed with grey wool.

"I must write to Rita," he would think, and sit down with the blank sheet before him. There would not be an idea. The books upon the walls called to him to lose himself in noble company. The Dog Trust gambolling with Tumpany in the garden invited him to play. The sight of Mary with her basket on her arm setting out upon some errand of mercy in the village, spoke of the pleasant, gracious hours he might spend with her, watching how sweet and wise she was with the poor people and how she was beloved.

But no, he must write to Rita. He felt chained by the necessity. And then the fat cut-glass bottle from the tantalus would make an appearance, the syphon of soda-water in its holder of silver filigree. The first drink would have little or no effect—a faint stirring of the pulses, a sort of dull opening of tired mental eyes, perhaps. Yet even that was enough to create the desire for the

moment when the brain should leap up to full power. Another drink—the letter begun. Another, and images, sentences which rang and chimed, gossamer points of view, mosaics and vignettes glowing with color, merry sunlight laughter, compliments and *devoirs* of exquisite grace and refinement, all flowed from him with steady, uninterrupted progress.

. . . But now, as he sat beside Rita, touching her, with the fragrance of her hair athwart his face, all ideas and thoughts had to be readjusted.

The dream was over. The dream personality, created and worshipped by his Art in those long, drugged reveries, was a thing of the past.

He had never realised Rita to himself as being quite a human girl. No grossness had ever entered into his thoughts about her. He was not gross. The temper of his mind was refined and high. The steady progress of the Fiend Alcohol had not progressed thus far as yet. Sex was a live fact in this strangely-coloured "friendship" which he had created, but, as yet, in his wildest imaginings it had always been chivalrous, abstract and pure. Passion had never soiled it even in thought. It had all been mystical, not Swinburnian.

And the fact had been as a salve to his Conscience. His Conscience told him from the first—when, after the excursion to Brighton he had taken up his pen to continue the association—that he was doing wrong. He knew it with all the more poignancy because he had never done sweet Mary a treachery in allegiance before. She had always been the perfect and utterly satisfying woman to him. His "fountain was blessed; and he rejoiced with the wife of his youth."

But the inhabiting Devil had found a speedy answer. It had told him that such a man as he was might well have a pure and intellectual friendship with such a girl as Rita was. It harmed none, it was of mutual and uplifting benefit.

Who of the world could point an accusing finger, utter a word of censure upon this delightful meeting of minds and temperaments through the medium of paper and pen?

"No one at all," came the satisfactory answer.

Lothian at the prompting of Alcohol was content to entertain and welcome a low material standard of conduct, a debased ideal, which he would have scorned in any other department of life.

And as for Rita, she hadn't thought about such things at all. She had been content with the music which irradiated everything.

It was only now, with a flesh and blood man by her side in the little box of the taxi-cab, that she glanced curiously at the Musician and felt—also—that revision and re-statement were at hand.

So they said very little until they were seated at the table which had been reserved for them at a celebrated restaurant in the Strand.

Rita looked round her and gave a deep sigh of pleasure. They sat in a long high hall with a painted ceiling. At the side opposite to them and at the end were galleries with gilded latticework. At the other end, in the gilded cage which hid the performers from view, was an orchestra which discoursed sweet music—a little orchestra of artists. The walls of the white and gold hall were covered with brilliantly painted frescoes of scenes in that Italy from where the first proprietor had come. The blue seas, the little white towns clustering round the base of some volcanic mountain, the sunlight and gaiety of Italy were there, in these paintings so cunningly drawn and coloured by a great scenic artist. A soft, white and bright light pervaded everything. There was not a sound of service as the waiters moved over the thick carpets.

The innumerable tables, for two or four, set with finest crystal and silver and fair linen had little electric lamps of silver with red shades upon them. Beautiful, radiant women with white arms and shining jewels sat with perfectly dressed men at the tables covered with flowers. It was a succession of little dinner parties; it seemed as if no one could come here without election or choice. The ordinary world did not exist in this kingdom of luxury, ease and wealth.

She leant over the little table against the wall. "It's marvellous," she said. "The whole atmosphere is new. I did not think such a place as this existed."

"And the Metropole at Brighton?"

"It was like a bathing machine is to Buckingham Palace, compared to this. How exquisite the band is! Oh, I am so happy!"

"That makes me happy, Cupid. This is the night of your initiation. Our wonderful weeks have begun. I have thought out a whole series of delights and contrasts. Every night shall be a surprise. You will never know what we are going to do. London is a magic city and you have known nothing of it."

"How could the 'Girl from Podley's' know?—That's what I am, the Girl from Podley's. I feel like Cinderella must have felt when she went to the ball. Oh, I am so happy!"

He smiled at her. Something had taken ten years from his age to-night. Youth shone out upon his face, the beauty of his twenties had come back. "Lalage!" he murmured, more to himself than to her—"dulce ridentem, dulce loquentem!"

"What—Gilbert?"

"I was quoting some Latin to myself, Cupid dear."

"And it was all Greek to me!" she said in a flash. "Oh! who *ever* saw so many hors d'œuvres all at one time! I love hors d'œuvres, advise me, don't let me have too many different sorts, Gilbert, or I shan't be able to eat anything afterwards."

How extraordinarily fresh and innocent she was! She possessed in perfection that light, reckless and freakish humour which was so strong a side of his own temperament.

She had stepped from her dingy little flat, from a common cab, straight into the Dance of the Hours, taking her place with instant grace in the gay and stately minuet.

For it was stately. All this quintessence of ordered luxury and splendour had a most powerful influence upon the mind. It might have made Caliban outwardly courteous and debonnair.

Yes, she was marvellously fresh! He had never met any one like her. And it *was* innocence, it *must* be. Yet she was very conscious of the power of her beauty and her sex—over him at any rate. She obviously knew nothing of the furtive attention she was exciting in a place where so many jaded experts came to look at the flowers. It was the naïve and innocent Aspasia in every young girl bubbling up with entire frankness. She was amazed and half frightened at herself—he could see that.

Well! he was very content to be Pericles for a space, to join hands and tread a measure with her and the rosy-bosomed hours in their dance.

It was as though they had known each other for ever and a day, ere half the elaborate dinner was over.

She had called him "Gilbert" at once, as if he were her brother, her lover even. He could have found or forged no words to describe the extraordinary intimacy that had sprung up between them. It almost seemed unreal, he had to wonder if this were not a dream.

She became girlishly imperious. When they brought the golden plovers—king and skipper, as good epicures know, of all birds that fly—she leant over the table till her perfect face was close to his.

"Oh, Gilbert dear! what is it now!"

He told her how these little birds, with their "trail" upon the toast and their accompaniment of tiny mushrooms stewed in Sillery, were said to be the rarest flower in the gourmet's garden, one of the supreme pleasures that the cycle of the seasons bring to those who love and live to eat.

"How *perfectly* sweet! Like the little roast pigling was to Elia! Gilbert, I'm so happy."

She chattered away to him, as he sat and watched her, with an entire freedom. She told him all about her life in the flat with Ethel Harrison. Her brown eyes shone with happiness, he heard the silver ripple of her voice in a mist of pleasure.

Once he caught a man whom he knew watching them furtively. It was a very well-known actor, who at the moment was rehearsing his autumn play.

This celebrated person was, as Gilbert well knew, a monster. He lived his life with a dreadful callousness which made him capable of every bestial habit and crime, without fear, without pleasure, without horror, and without pity.

The poet shuddered as he caught that evil glance, and then, listening anew to Rita's joyous confidences, he became painfully aware of the brute that is in every man, in himself too, though as yet he had never allowed it to be clamant.

The happy girl went on talking. Suddenly Gilbert realised that she was telling him something, innocent enough in her mouth, but something that a woman should tell to a woman and not to a man.

The decent gentleman in him became wide awake, the sense of comeliness and propriety. He wasn't in the least shocked—indeed there was nothing whatever to be shocked about—but he wanted to save her, in time, from an after-realisation of a frankness that might give her moments of confusion.

He did it, as he did everything when he was really sober, really himself, with a supreme grace and delicacy. "Cupid dear," he said with his open and boyish smile, "you really oughtn't to tell me that, you know. I mean—well, think!"

She looked at him with puzzled eyes for a moment and then she took his meaning. A slight flush came into her cheeks.

"Oh, I see," she replied thoughtfully, and then, with a radiant smile and the provocative, challenging look—"Gilbert dear, you seem just like a girl to me. I quite forgot you were a man. So it doesn't matter, does it?"

Who was to attempt to preserve *les convenances* with such a delightful child as this?

"Here is the dessert," he said gaily, as waiters brought ices, nectarines, and pear-shaped Paris bon-bons filled with Benedictine and Chartreuse.

A single bottle of champagne had served them for the meal. Gilbert lit a cigarette and said two words to a waiter. In a minute he was brought a carafe of whiskey and a big bottle of Perrier in a silver stand. It was a dreadful thing to do, from a gastronomic or from a health point of view. Whiskey, now! He saw the look of wonder on the waiter's face, a pained wonder, as who should say, "Well, I shouldn't have thought *this* gentleman would have done such a thing."

But Lothian didn't care. It was only upon the morning after a debauch, when with moles' eyes he watched every one with suspicion and with fear, that he cared twopence what people thought about anything he did.

He was roused to a high pitch of excitement by his beautiful companion. Recklessness, an entire abandon to the Dance of the Hours was mounting up within him. But where there's a conscience, there's a Rubicon. The little brook stretched before him still, but now he meant to leap over it into the forbidden, enchanted country beyond. He ordered "jumping powder."

He drank deeply, dropped his cigarette into the copper bowl of rose water at his side and lit another.

"Cupid!" he said suddenly, in a voice that was quite changed, "Rita dear, I'm going to show you something!"

She heard the change in his voice, recognised it instantly, must have known by instinct, if not by knowledge, what it meant. But there was no confusion, nor consciousness in her face. She only leant over the narrow table and blew a spiral of cigarette smoke from her parted lips.

"What, Gilbert?" she said, and he seemed to hear a caress in her voice that fired him.

"You shall hear," he said in a low and unsteady voice. He drew a calling card from the little curved case of thin gold he carried in his waistcoat pocket, and wrote a sentence or two upon the back in French.

A waiter took the card and hurried away.

"Oh, Gilbert dear, what is the surprise?"

"Music, sweetheart. I've sent up to the band to play something. Something special, Cupid, just for you and me alone on the first of our Arabian Nights!"

She waited for a minute, following his eyes to the gilded gallery of the musicians which bulged out into the end of the room.

There was a white card with a great black "7" upon it, hanging to the rail. And then a sallow man with a moustache of ink came to the balcony and removed the card, substituting another for it on which was printed in staring sable letters—"BY DESIRE."

It was all quite new to Rita. She was awed at Gilbert's almost magical control of everything! She understood what was imminent, though.

"What's it going to be, Gilbert?" she whispered.

Her hand was stretched over the table. He took its cool virginal ivory into his for a moment. "The 'Salut d'Amour' of Elgar," he answered her in a low voice, "just for you and me."

The haunting music began.

To the end of her life Rita Wallace never heard the melody without a stab of pain and a dreadful catch of horror at her heart.

Perhaps the thing had not been played lately, perhaps the hour was ripe for it in the great restaurant. But as the violins and 'cello sobbed out the first movement, a hush fell over the place.

It was the after-dinner hour. The smoke from a hundred cigarettes curled upwards in delicate spirals like a drawing of Flaxman's. Bright eyes were languorous and spoke, voices sank to silence. The very waiters were congregated in little groups round the walls and service tables.

Salut d'Amour!

The melody wailed out into the great room with all the exquisite appeal of its rose-leaf sadness, its strange autumnal charm. It was perfectly rendered. And many brazen-beautiful faces softened for a moment, many pleasure-sodden hearts had a diastole of unaccustomed tenderness as the music pulsed to its close.

Gilbert's acquaintance, the well-known actor, who was personified animal passion clothed in flesh if ever a man was, felt the jews-harp which he called his heart vibrate within him.

He was a luxurious pariah-dog in his emotions as in everything else.

The last sob of the violins trembled into silence. There was a loud spontaneous burst of applause, and a slim foreign man, grasping his fiddle by the neck, came from behind the gilded screen and looked down into the hall below with patient eyes.

Lothian rose from his chair and bowed to the distant gallery. The musician's face lighted up and he bowed twice to Lothian. Monsieur Toché had recognised the name upon the card. And the request, written in perfect, idiomatic French, had commenced, "*Cher Maitre et Confrère*." The lasting hunger of the obscure artist for recognition by another and greater one was satisfied. Poor Toché went to his bed that night in Soho feeling as if he had been decorated with the Order of Merit. And though, during the supper hours from eleven to half past twelve he had to play "selections" from the Musical Comedy of the moment, he never lost the sense of *bien être* conferred upon him by Gilbert Lothian at dinner.

Gilbert was trembling a little as the music ended. Rita sat back in her chair with downcast eyes and lips slightly parted. Neither of them spoke.

Gilbert suddenly experienced a sense of immense sorrow, of infinite regret too deep for speech or tears. "This is the moment of realisation," he thought, "the first real moment in my life, perhaps. *I know what I have missed.* Of all women this was the one for me, as I for her. We were made for each other. Too late! too late!"

He struggled for mastery over his emotion. "How well they play," he said.

She made a slight motion with her hand. "Don't let's talk for a minute," she answered.

He was thrilled through and through. Did she also, then, feel and know . . . ? Surely that could not be. His youth was so nearly over, the keen æsthetic vision of the poet showed him so remorselessly how changed he was physically from what he had been in years gone by, for ever.

Mechanically, without thinking, obeying the order given by the new half-self, that spawn of poison which was his master and which he mistook for himself, he filled his glass once more and drank.

In forty seconds after, triumph and pride flared up within him like a sheet of thin paper lit suddenly with a match. Yes! She was his, part of him—it was true! He, the great poet, had woven his winged words around her. He had bent the power of his Mind upon her—utterly desirable, unsoiled and perfect—and she was his.

The blaze passed through him and upwards, a thing from below. Then it ended and only a curl of grey ash floated in the air.

The most poignant and almost physical sorrow returned to him. His heart seemed to ache like a tooth. Yet it wasn't dull, hopeless depression. It was, he thought, a high tragic sorrow ennobling in its strength; a sorrow such as only the supreme soul-wounded artists of the world could know —had known.

"She was for me!" his heart cried out. "Ah, if only I had met her first!" Yes! he was fain of all the tragic sorrows of the Great Ones to whom he was brother, of whose blood he was.

In a single flash of time—as the drowning man is said to experience all the events of his life at the penultimate moment of dissolution—he felt that he knew the secrets of all sorrow, the pangs of all tragedy.

The inevitable thought of his wife passed like a blur across the fire-lit heights of his false agony.

"I cannot love her," he said in his mind. "I have never loved her. I have been blind until this moment." A tear of sentiment welled into his eye at the thought of poor Mary, bereft of his love. "How sad life was!"

Nearly every man, at some time or other, has found a faint reflection of this black thought assail him and has put it from him with a prayer and the "vade retro Sathanas."

Few men would have chosen their present wives if they had met—let us assume—fifty other women before they married. And when the ordinary, normal, decent man meets a woman better, clever, more desirable than the one he has, it is perfectly natural that he should admire her. He would be insensible if he did not. But with the normal man it stops there. He is obliged to be satisfied with his own wife. The chaos that riotous and unbalanced minds desire has not come

yet. And if a man says that he *cannot* love a wife who is virtuous and good, then Satan is in him.

"I cannot love her," Lothian thought of his wife, and in the surveyal of this fine brain and noble mind poisoned by alcohol it is proper to remember that two hours before he could not have thought this thing. It would have been utterly impossible.

Was it then the few recent administrations of poison that had changed him so terribly, brought him to this?

The Fiend Alcohol has a myriad dominations. A lad from the University gets drunk in honour on boat-race night—for the first time in his life—and tries to fight with a policeman. But he is only temporarily insane, becomes ashamed and wiser in the morning, and never does such a thing again.

Lothian had been poisoning himself, slowly, gradually, certainly for years. The disease which was latent in his blood, and for which he was in no way personally responsible, had been steadily undermining the forces of his nature.

He had injured his health and was coming near to gravely endangering his reputation. His work, rendered more brilliant and appealing at first by the unfair and unnatural stimulus of Alcohol, was trembling upon the brink of a débâcle. He had inflicted hundreds of hours of misery and despair upon the woman he had married.

This, all this, was grave and disastrous enough.

But the awful thing that he was feeding and breeding within him—the "false Ego," to use the cold, scientific, and appallingly accurate definition of the doctors—had not achieved supreme power. Even during the last year of the three or four years of the poisoning process it had not become all-powerful. It had kept him from Church; it had kept him from the Eucharist; it had drawn one thick grey blanket after another between the eye of his soul and the vision of God. But kindly human instinct had remained unimpaired, and he had done many things *sub specie Crucis* —under the influence of, and for the sake of that Cross which was so surely and steadily receding from his days and passing away to a dim and far horizon.

But there arrives a time when the pitcher that is filled drop by drop becomes full. The liquid trembles for a moment upon the brim and trickles over.

And there comes a sure moment in the life of the alcoholic when the fiend within waxes strong enough finally to strangle the old self, fills all the house and reigns supreme.

It is always something of relatively small importance that hastens the end—ensures the final plunge.

It was the last few whiskeys that sent honour and conscience flying away with scared faces from this man's soul. But they acted upon the poison of years, now risen to the very brim of the cup.

One more drop . . .

People were getting up from the tables and leaving the restaurant. The band was resting, there was no more music at the moment, and the remaining diners were leaning over the tables and talking to each other in low, confidential tones.

Rita looked up suddenly. "What are we going to do now?" she said with her quick bright smile.

"When we went to Brighton together," Gilbert answered, "you told me that you had never been to a Music Hall. A box at the Empire is waiting for us. Let us go and see how you like it. If you don't, we can come away and go for a drive round London in a taxi. The air will be cooler now, and in the suburbs we may see the moon. But come and try. The night is yours, and I am yours, also. You are the Queen of the Dance of the Hours and I your Court Chamberlain."

"Oh, how perfectly sweet! Take me to the Empire."

As they stood upon the steps of the restaurant and the commissionaire whistled up a cab, Gilbert spoke to Rita in a low, husky voice.

"We ought to get there in time for the ballet," he said, "because it is the most perfect thing to be seen in Europe, outside Milan or St. Petersburg. But we've ten minutes yet, at least. Shall I tell him to drive round?"

"Yes, Gilbert."

The taxi-meter glided away through the garish lights of the Strand, and then, unexpectedly, swerved into Craven Street towards the Embankment.

Almost immediately the interior of the cab grew dark.

Gilbert put his arm round Rita's waist and caught her hand with his. He drew her closer to him.

"Oh, my love!" he said with a sob in his voice. "My dear little Love; at last, at last!"

She did not resist. He caught her closer and closer and kissed her upon the cheeks, the eyes, the low-falling masses of nut-brown, fragrant hair.

"Turn your face to me, darling."

His lips met hers for one long moment.

. . . He hardly heard her faint-voiced, "Gilbert, you mustn't." He sank back upon the cushions with a strange blankness and emptiness in his mind.

He had kissed her, her lovely lips had been pressed to his.

And, behold, it was nothing after all. It was just a little girl kissing him.

"Kiss met Kiss me again!" he said savagely. "You must, you must! Rita, my darling, *my darling*!"

She pressed her cool lips to his once more—how cool they were!—almost dutifully, with no revolt from his embrace, but as she might have kissed some girl friend at parting after a day together.

All evil, dominant passions of his nature, hidden and sleeping within him for so long, were awake at last.

He had held Rita in his arms. Yet, whatever she might say or do in her reckless school-girl fashion, she was really absolutely innocent and virgin, untouched by passion, incredibly ignorant of the red flame which burned within him now and which he would fain communicate to her.

"Are you unhappy, dearest?" he asked suddenly.

"Unhappy, Gilbert? With you? How could I be?"

And so daring innocence and wicked desire drove on through the streets of London—innocence a little tarnished, ignorance no longer, but pulsing with youth and the sense of adventure; absolutely unaware that it was playing with a man's soul.

The girl had read widely, but ever with the hunger for beauty, colour, music, the sterile, delicate emotions of others. One of the huge facts of life, the central, underlying fact of all the Romance, all the Poetry on which she was fed, had come to her at last and she did not recognise it.

Gilbert had held her in his arms and had kissed her. It was pleasant to be kissed and adored. It wasn't right—that she knew very well. Ethel would be horrified, if she knew. All sorts of proper, steady, ordinary people would be horrified, if *they* knew. But they didn't and never would! And Gilbert wanted to kiss her so badly. She had known it all the time. Why shouldn't he, poor boy, if it made him happy? He was so kind and so charming. He was a magician with the key of fairyland.

He made love beautifully! This was the Dance of the Hours!

The cab stopped in front of the Empire. Led by a little page-boy who sprung up from somewhere, they passed through the slowly-moving tide of men and women in the promenade to their box.

For a little space Rita said nothing.

She settled herself in her chair and leaned upon the cushioned ledge of the box, gazing at the huge crowded theatre and at the shifting maze of colour upon the stage. She had removed the long glove from her right hand and her chin was supported by one white rounded arm. A very fair young Sybil she seemed, lost in the vague, empty spaces of maiden thought.

Gilbert began to tell her about the dancers and to explain the ballet. She had never seen anything like it before, and he pointed out its beauty, what a marvellous poem it really was; music, movement, and colour built up by almost incredible labour into one stupendous whole. A dozen minor geniuses, each one a poet in his or her way, had been at work upon this triumphant shifting beauty, evanescent and lovely as a dream painted upon the sable curtains of sleep.

She listened and seemed to understand but made little comment.

Once she flashed a curious speculative look at him.

And, on his part, though he saw her lovelier than ever, he was chilled nevertheless. Grey veils seemed to be falling between him and the glow of his desire, falling one by one.

"Surgit amari aliquid?"—was it that?—but he could not let the moment escape him. It must and should be captured.

He made an excuse about cigarettes, and chocolates for her, and left the box, hurrying to the little bar in the promenade, drinking there almost furiously, tasting nothing, waiting, a strange

silent figure with a white face, until he felt the old glow re-commencing.

It came. The drugged mind answered to the call, and he went back to the box with light footsteps, full of riotous, evil thoughts.

Rita had withdrawn her chair into the box a little.

She looked up with a smile of welcome as he entered and sat down by her side. She began to eat the chocolates he had brought, and he watched her with greedy eyes.

Suddenly—maid of moods as she was—she pushed the satin-covered box away.

He felt a little white arm pushed through his.

"Gilbert, let's pretend we're married, just for this evening," she said, looking at him with dancing eyes.

"What do you mean, Rita?" he said in a hoarse whisper.

The girl half-smiled, flushed a little, and then patted the black sleeve of his coat.

"It's so nice to be together," she whispered. "I am so happy with you. London is so wonderful with you to show it to me. I only wish it could go on always."

He caught her wrist with his hot hand. "It can, always, if you wish," he said.

She started at the fierce note in his voice. "Hush," she said. "You mustn't talk like that." Her face became severe and reproving. She turned it towards the stage.

The remainder of the evening alternated between wild fits of gaiety and rather moody silences. There was absolutely nothing of the crisp, delightful friendship of the drive to Brighton. A new relation was established between them, and yet it was not, as yet, capable of any definition at all.

She was baffling, utterly perplexing. At one moment he thought her his, really in love with him, prepared for all that might mean, at another she was a shy and rather dissatisfied school girl. The nervous strain within him, as the fires of his passion burned and crackled, was intense. He fed the flame with alcohol whenever he had an opportunity.

All the old reverence and chivalry of that ideal friendship of which he had sung so sweetly vanished utterly.

A faint, but growing brutality of thought came to him as he considered her. Her innocence did not seem so insistent as before. He could not place her yet. All he knew was that she was certainly not the Rita of his dreams.

Yet with all this, his longing, his subjection to her every whim and mood, grew and grew each moment. He was absolutely pervaded by her. Honour, prudence, his keen insight were all thrust away in the gathering storm of desire.

They had supper at a glittering palace in the Haymarket. In her simple girlish frock, without much adornment of any sort, she was the prettiest girl in the room. She enjoyed everything with wild avidity, and not the least of the exhilarations of the night was the knowledge—ripe and unmistakable now—of her complete power over him.

Gilbert ate nothing at the Carlton, but drank again. Distinguished still, an arresting personality in any room, his face had become deeply flushed and rather satyr-like as he watched Rita with longing, wonder, and an uneasy suspicion that only added fuel to the flame.

It was after midnight when he drove her home and they parted upon the steps of Queens Mansions.

He staggered a little in the fresh air as he stood there, though Rita in her excitement did not notice it. He had drunk enough during that day and night to have literally *killed* two ordinary men.

"To-morrow!" he said, trying to put something that he knew was not there into his dull voice. "To-morrow night."

"To-morrow!" she replied. "At the same time," and evading his clumsy attempt at an embrace, she swirled into the hall of the flat with a last kiss of her hand.

And even Prince, at the club, had never seen "Mr. Gilbert" so brutishly intoxicated as he was that night.

CHAPTER III

THIRST

"*A little, passionately, not at all?*"
She casts the snowy petals on the air. . . .

—*Villanelle of Marguerites.*

Lothian had taken chambers for a short time in St. James' and near his club. Prince, the valet, had found the rooms for him and the house, indeed, was kept by the man's brother.

Gilbert would not stay at the club. Rita could not come to him there. He wanted a place where he could be really alone with her.

During the first few days, though they met each night and Gilbert ransacked London to give her varied pleasure, Rita would not come and dine in his chambers. "I couldn't possibly, Gilbert dear," she would say, and the refusal threw him into a suppressed fever of anger and irritation.

He dare show little or nothing of it, however. Always he had a haunting fear that he might lose her. If she was silent or seemed cold he trembled inwardly and redoubled his efforts to please, to gratify her slightest whim, to bring her back to gaiety and a caressing, half lover-like manner.

She knew it thoroughly and would play upon him like a piano, striking what chords she wished.

He spent money like water, and in hardly any time at all, the girl whose salary was thirty-five shillings a week found a delirious joy in expensive wines and foods, in rare flowers, in what was to her an astounding *vie de luxe*. If they went to a theatre—"Gilbert, we simply must have the stage box. I'm not in the mood to sit *anywhere* else to-night,"—and the stage box it was.

There is a shop in Bond Street where foolish people buy cigarettes which cost three pence or four pence each and a box of a hundred is bought for two guineas or so. Rita wouldn't smoke any others. Rita knew no more about wine than she did about astronomy, but she would pucker her pretty brows over the *carte des vins* in this or that luxurious restaurant, and invariably her choice would fall upon the most expensive. Once, it was at the Ritz, she noticed the word Tokay—a costly Johannesburger wine—and asked Gilbert what it was. He explained, and then, to interest her, went on to tell of the Imperial Tokay, the priceless wine which is almost unobtainable.

"But surely one could get it *here*?" she had said eagerly.

"It's not on the card, dear."

"*Do* ask, Gilbert!"

He asked. A very special functionary was called, who hesitated, hummed and hawed. "There *was* some of the wine in the cellars, a half bin, just as there *was* some of the famous White Hermitage—but, but"—he whispered in Gilbert's ear, "The King of Spain, um um um—The Grand Duke Alexis—you'll understand, sir, 'm 'm."

They were favoured with a bottle at last. Rita was triumphant. Gilbert didn't touch it. Rita drank two glasses and it cost five pounds.

Lothian did not care twopence. He had been poor after he left Oxford. His father, the solicitor, who never seemed to understand him or to care much about him, had made him an infinitesimal allowance during the young man's journalistic days. Then, when the old man died he had left his son a comfortable income. Mary had money also. The house at Mortland Royal was their own, they lived in considerable comfort but neither had really expensive tastes and they did not spend their mutual income by a long way. Gilbert's poems had sold largely also. He was that rare bird, a poet who actually made money—probably because he could have done very well without it.

It did not, therefore, incommode him in the least to satisfy every whim of Rita's. If it amused her to have wine at five pounds a bottle, what on earth did it matter? Frugal in his tastes and likings himself—save only in a quantity of cheap poison he procured—he was lavish for others. Although, thinking it would amuse him, his wife had begged him to buy a motor-car he had always been too lazy or indifferent to do so.

So he had plenty of money. If Rita Wallace had been one of the devouring harpies of Paris, who—if pearls really would melt in champagne—would drink nothing else, Gilbert could have paid the piper for a few weeks at any rate.

But Rita was curious. He would have given her anything. Over and over again he had pressed her to have things—bracelets, a ring, a necklace. She had refused with absolute decision.

She had let him give her a box of gloves, flowers she could not have enough of, the more costly the amusement of the night the better she seemed to like it. But that was all.

In his madness, his poisoned madness, he would have sold his house to give her diamonds had she asked for them—she would not even let him make her a present of a trumpery silver case for cigarettes.

She was baffling, elusive, he could not understand her. For several days she had refused to dine alone with him in his rooms.

One night, when he was driving her home after the dinner at the Ritz and a box at the Comedy theatre, he had pressed her urgently. She had once more refused.

And then, something unveiled and brutal had risen within him. The wave of alcohol submerged all decency and propriety of speech. He was furiously, coarsely angry.

"Damn you!" he said. "What are you afraid of?—of compromising yourself? If there were half a dozen people in London who knew or cared what you did, you've done that long ago. And for heaven's sake don't play Tartuffe with me. Haven't I been kissing you as much as ever I wanted to for the last three days? Haven't you kissed me? You'll dine with me to-morrow night in St. James' Street or I'll get out of town at once and chuck it all. I've been an ass to come at all. I'm beginning to see that now. I've been leaving the substance for the shadow."

She answered nothing to this brutal tirade for a minute or two.

The facile anger died away from him. He cursed himself for his insane folly in jeopardising everything and felt compunction for his violence.

He was just about to explain and apologise when he heard a chuckle from the girl at his side.

He turned swiftly to her. Her face was alight with pleasure, mingled with an almost tender mischief. She laughed aloud.

"Of course I'll come, Gilbert dear," she said softly—"since you *command* me!"

He realised at once that, like all women, she found joy in abdication when it was forced upon her. The dominant male mind had won in this little contest. He had bullied her roughly. It was a new sensation and she liked it.

But when she dined in the rooms and he tried to accomplish artificially what he had achieved spontaneously, she was on her guard and it was quite ineffectual.

They sat at a little round table. The dinner was simple, but perfectly served. During the meal, for once,—once again—he had talked like his old self, brilliantly touching upon literary things and illuminating much that had been dark to her before with that splendour of intellect which came back to him to-night for a space; and brought a trace of spirituality to his coarsening face.

And after dinner he had made her play to him on the little Bord piano against the wall. She was not a good pianist but she was efficient, and certain things that she knew well, and *felt*, she played well.

With some technical accomplishment she certainly rendered the "Bees' Wedding" of Mendelssohn with astonishing vivacity that night. The elfin humour of the thing harmonised so much with certain aspects of her own temperament!

The swarming bees of Fairyland were in the room!

And then, with merry malice, and at Gilbert's suggestion, she improvised a Podley Polonaise.

Then she gave a little melody of Dvôrak that she knew—"A mad scarlet thing by Dvôrak," he quoted to her, and finally, at Gilbert's urgent request, she attempted the Troisième Ballade of Chopin.

It reminded him of the first night on which he had met her, at the Amberleys' house. She did not play it well but his imagination filled the lacunae; his heated mind rose to a wild ecstasy of longing.

He put his arm round her and embraced her with tears in his eyes.

"Sweetheart," he said, "you are wonderful! See! We are alone here together, perfectly alone, perfectly happy. Let us always be for each other. Dear, I will sacrifice everything for you. You complete me. You were made for me. Come away with me, come with me for ever and ever. My wife will divorce me and we can be married; always to be together."

He had declared himself, and his wicked wish at last. He made an open proffer of his shameful love.

There was not a single thought in his mind of Mary, her deep devotion, her love and trust. He brushed aside the supreme gift that God had allowed him as a man brushes away an insect from his face.

All that the girl had said in answer was that he must not talk in such a way. Of course it could never be. They must be content as they were, hard as it was. "I am very sorry, Gilbert dear, you can never know how sorry I am. But you know I care for you. That must be all."

He had sent her home by herself that night, paying the cabman and giving him the address in Kensington.

Then for an hour before going to bed he had walked up and down his sitting room in a welter of hope, fear, regret, desire, wonder and deep perplexity.

He had now lost all sense of honour, all measure of proportion. His desire filled him and racked his very bones. Sometimes he almost hated Rita; always he longed for her to be his, his very own.

Freed from all possible restraint, lord of himself—"that heritage of woe!"—he was now drinking more deeply, more madly than ever before in his life.

He was abnormal in an abnormal world which his insanity created. The savage torture he inflicted on himself shall be only indicated here. There are deeper hells yet, blacknesses more profound in which we shall see this unhappy soul!

Suffice it to say that for three red weeks he drove the chariot of his ruin more recklessly and furiously than ever towards hell.

And the result, as far as his blistering hunger was concerned, was always the same.

The girl led him on and repulsed him alternately. He never advanced a step towards his desire. Yet the longing grew in intensity and never left him for a moment.

He tried hard to fathom Rita's character, to get at the springs of her thoughts. He failed utterly, and for two reasons.

Firstly, he was in no state to see anything steadily. The powers of insight and analysis were alike deserting him. His *mind* had been affected before. Now his *brain* was becoming affected.

One morning, with shaking hand, bloodshot eyes and a bottle of whiskey before him on the table, he sat down to write out what he thought of Rita. The accustomed pen and paper, the material implements of his power, might bring him back what he seemed to be losing.

This is what he wrote, in large unsteady characters, entirely changed from the neat beautiful caligraphy of the past.

> "Passionate and yet calculating at the same time; eager to rule and capable of ruling, though occasionally responsive to the right control; generous in confidence and trust, though with suspicion never very far away.
>
> "Merrily false and frankly furtive in many of the actions of life. A dear egoist! yet capable of self-abandoning enthusiasm, a brilliant embryo really wanting the guiding hand and master brain but reluctant to accept them until the last moment."

There was more of it, all compact of his hopes and fears, an entirely false conception of her, an emanation of poison which, nevertheless, affords some indication of his mental state.

The sheet concluded:—

> "A white and graceful yacht seriously setting out into dangerous waters with no more certainty than hangs upon the result of a toss up or the tinkle of a tambourine. Deeply desiring a pilot, but unwilling that he should come aboard too soon and spoil the fun of beating up into the wind to see what happens. Weak, but not with the charm of dependence and that trusting weakness which stiffens a man's arm."

A futile, miserable dissection with only a half-grain of truth in it.

Gilbert knew it for what it was directly it had been written. He crumpled it up with a curse and flung it into the fireplace.

Yet the truth about the girl was simple enough. She was only an exceptionally clever and attractive example of a perfectly well-defined and numerous type.

Lothian was ignorant of the type, had never suspected its existence in his limited experience of young women, that was all.

Rita Wallace was just this. Heredity had given her a quick, good brain and an infinite capacity for enjoyment. It was an accident also that she was a very lovely girl. All beautiful people are spoiled. Rita was spoiled at school. Girls and mistresses alike adored her. With hardly any interregnum she had been plumped into Podley's Pure Literature Library and begun to earn her own living.

She lived with a good, commonplace girl who worshipped her.

Except that she could attract them and that on the whole they were silly moths she knew nothing of men. Her heart, unawakened as yet save by school-girl affections, was a kind and tender little organ. But, with all her beauty and charm she was essentially shallow, from want of experience rather than from lack of temperament.

Gilbert Lothian had come to her as the most wonderful personality she had ever known. His letters were things that any girl in the world might be proud of receiving. He was giving her, now, a time which, upon each separate evening, was to her like a page out of the "Arabian Nights." Every day he gave her a tablet upon which "Sesame" was written.

Had he been free to ask her honourably, she would have married Gilbert within twenty-four hours, had it been possible. He was delightful to be with. She liked him to kiss her and say adoring things to her. Even his aberrations—of which of course she had become aware—only excited her interest. The bad boy drank far too many whiskies and sodas. Of course! She would cure him of that. If any one had told her that her nightly and delightful companion was an inebriate approaching the last stages of lingering sanity, Rita would have laughed in her informant's face.

She knew what a drunkard was! It was a horrid wretch who couldn't walk straight and who said, "My dearsh"—like the amusing pictures in "Punch."

Poor dear Gilbert's wife would be in a fury if she knew. But fortunately she didn't know, and she wasn't in England. Meanwhile, for a short time, life was entrancing, and why worry about the day after to-morrow?

It was ridiculous of Gilbert to want her to run away with him. That would be really wicked. He might kiss her as much as he liked, and when Mrs. Lothian came back they could still go on much as before. Certainly they would continue being friends and he would write her beautiful letters again.

"I'm a wicked little devil," she said to herself once or twice with a naughty inward chuckle, "but dear old Gilbert is so perfectly sweet, and I can do just what I like with him!"

Nearly three weeks had gone by. Gilbert and Rita had been together every evening, on the Saturday afternoons when she was free of Podley's Library, and for the whole of Sunday.

Gilbert had almost exhausted his invention in thinking out surprises for her night after night.

There had been many dull moments and hours when pleasure trembled in the balance. But no night had been quite a failure. The position was this.

Lothian, almost convinced that Rita was unassailable, assailed her still. She was sweet to him, gave her caresses but not herself. They had arrived at a curious sort of understanding. He bewailed with bitter and burning regret that he could not marry her. Lightly, only half sincerely, but to please him, she joined in his sorrow.

She had been seen about with him, constantly, in all sorts of places, and that London that knew him was beginning to talk. Of this Rita was perfectly unconscious.

He had written to his wife at Nice, letters so falsely sympathetic that he felt she must suspect something. He followed up every letter with a long, costly telegram. A telegram is not autograph and the very lesions of the prose conceal the lesions of the sender's dull intention. His physical state was beginning to be so alarming that he was putting himself constantly under the influence of bromide and such-like drugs. He went regularly to the Turkish Bath in Jermyn Street, had his face greased and hammered in the Haymarket each morning, and fought with a constantly growing terror against an advancing horror which he trembled to think might not be far off now.

Delirium Tremens.

But when Rita met him at night, drugs, massage and alcohol had had their influence and kept him still upon the brink.

In his well-cut evening clothes, with his face a little fatter, a little redder perhaps, he was still her clever, debonnair Gilbert.

A necessity to her now.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHAMBER OF HORRORS

"Let us have a quiet hour,
Let us hob-and-nob with Death."

—*Tennyson.*

Three weeks passed. There was no change in the relations of Rita Wallace and Gilbert Lothian.

She was gay, tender, silent by turns, and her thirst for pleasure seemed unquenchable. She yielded nothing. Things were as they were. He was married: there was no more to be said, they must "dree their wierd"—endure their lot.

Often the man smiled bitterly to hear her girlish wisdom, uttered with almost complacent finality. It was not very difficult for *her* to endure. She had no conception of the dreadful state into which he had come, the torture he suffered.

When he was alone—during the long evil day when he could not see her—the perspiration his heated blood sent out upon his face and body seemed like the very night dews of the grave. He was the sensualist of whom Ruskin speaks, the sensualist with the shroud about his feet. All day long he fought for sufficient mastery over himself to go through the evening, fought against the feverish disease of parched throat and wandering eyes; senseless, dissolute, merciless.

And one dreadful flame burned steadily in the surrounding gloom—

"*Love, which is lust, is the lamp in the tomb.*
Love, which is lust, is the call from the gloom."

"Je me nourris de flammes" was the proud motto of an ancient ducal house in Burgundy. With grimmer meaning Lothian might have taken it for his own during these days.

He had heard from his wife that she was coming home almost at once. Lady Davidson had rallied. There was every prospect of her living for a month or two more. Sir Harold Davidson was on his way home from India. He would go to her at once and it was now as certain as such things can be that he would be in time.

Mary wrote with deep sadness. To bid her beloved sister farewell on this earth was heart-rending. "And yet, darling,"—so the letter had run—"how marvellous it is to know, not to just hope, but to *know* that I shall meet Dorothy again and that we shall see Jesus. When I think of that, tears of happiness mingle with the tears of sorrow. Sweet little Dorothy will be waiting for us when we too go, my dearest, dearest husband. God keep you, beloved. Day and night I pray for my dear one."

This letter had stabbed the man's soul through and through. It had been forwarded from Mortland Royal and was brought to him as he lay in bed at breakfast time. His heavy tears had bedewed the pillow upon which he lay. "Like bitter wine upon a sponge was the savour of remorse."

Shuddering and sobbing he had crawled out of bed and seized the whiskey bottle which stood upon the dressing table—his sole comforter, hold-fast and standby now; very blood of his veins.

And then, warmth, comfort—remorse and shame fading rapidly away—oblivion and a heavy sleep or stupor till long after midday.

He must go home at once. He must be at home to receive Mary. And, in the quiet country among familiar sights and sounds, he would have time to think. He could write to Rita again. He could say things upon paper with a force and power that escaped him *à vive voix*. He could pull himself together, too, recruit his physical faculties. He realised, with an ever growing dread, in what a shocking state he was.

Yes, he would go home. There would be peace there, some sort of kindly peace for a day or two. What would happen when Mary returned, how he would feel about her, what he would do, he did not ask. Sufficient for the day!

He longed for a few days' peace. No more late midnights—sleep. No nights of bitter hollow pleasure and longing. He would be among his quiet books again in his pleasant little library. He would talk wildfowling with Tumpany and they would go through the guns together. The Dog Trust who loved him should sleep on his bed.

It was Saturday. He was going down to Norfolk by the five o'clock train from St. Pancras. He would be able to dine on board—and have what drinks he wanted en route. The dining-car stewards on that line knew him well. He would arrive at Wordingham by a little after nine. By ten he might be in bed in his peaceful old house.

The Podley Library closed at 12:30 on Saturday. He was to call for Rita, when they were to lunch together, and at five she would come to the station to see him off. It was a dull, heavy day. London was chilly, there was a gloom over the metropolis; leaden opaque light fell from a sky that was ashen. It was as though cold thunder lurked somewhere up above, as Lothian drove to Kensington.

He had paid for his rooms and arranged for his luggage to be taken to the station where a man was to meet him with it a little before five.

Then he had crossed St. James' Street and spent a waiting hour at his club. For some reason or other, this morning he had more control over his nerves. There was a lull in his rapid physical progress downwards. Perhaps it was that he had at any rate made some decision in his mind. He was going to do something definite. He was going home. That was something to grasp at—a real fact—and it steadied him a little.

He had smoked a cigar in the big smoking room of the club. It was rather early yet and there was hardly any one there. Two whiskies and sodas had been sufficient for the hour.

The big room, however, was so dark that all the electric lamps were turned on and he read the newspapers in an artificial daylight that harmonised curiously with the dull, numbed peace of the nerves which had come to him for a short time.

He opened *Punch* and there was a joke about him—a merry little paragraph at the bottom of the column. It was the fourth or fifth time his name had appeared in the paper. He remembered how delighted he and Mary had been when it first happened. It meant so definitely that one had "got there."

He read it now without the slightest interest.

He glanced at the *Times*. Many important things were happening at home and abroad, but he gazed at all the news with a lack-lustre eye. Usually a keen and sympathetic observer of what went on in the world, for three weeks now he hadn't opened a paper.

As he closed the broad, crackling sheet on its mahogany holding rod, his glance fell upon the Births, Deaths and Marriages column.

A name among the deaths captured his wandering attention. A Mr. James Bethune Dickson Ingworth, C.B., was dead at Hampton Hall in Wiltshire. It was Dicker's uncle, of course! The boy would come into his estate now.

"It's a good thing for him," Lothian thought. "I don't suppose he's back from Italy yet. The old man must have died quite suddenly. I hope he'll settle down and won't be quite so uppish in the future."

He was thinking drowsily, and quite kindly of Dickson, when he suddenly remembered something Mary had said on the night before she went to Nice.

He had tried to make mischief between them—so he had! And then there was that scene in the George at Wordingham, which Lothian had forgotten until now.

"What a cock-sparrow Beelzebub the lad really is," he said in his mind. "And yet I liked him well enough. Even now he's not important enough to dislike. Rita likes him. She often talks of him. He took her out to dinner—yes, so he did—to some appalling little place in Wardour Street. She was speaking of it yesterday. He's written to her from Milan and Rome, too. She wanted to show me the letters and she was cross because I wasn't interested. She tried to pique me and I wouldn't be! What was it she said, oh, 'he's such nice curly hair.'"

He gazed into the empty fireplace before which he was sitting in a huge chair of green leather. The remembered words had struck some chords of memory. He frowned and puzzled over it in his drowsy numbed state, and then it came to him suddenly. Of course! The barmaid at Wordingham, Molly what's-her-name whom all the local bloods were after, had said just the same thing about Ingworth.

Little fools! They were all alike, fluffy little duffers. . . .

He looked up at the clock. It was twenty minutes to one. He had to meet Rita at the library as the hour struck.

He started. The door leading into the outside world shut with a clang. His chains fell into their place once more upon the limbs of his body and soul.

He called a waiter, gulped down another peg, and got into a cab for the Podley Institute.

The pleasant numbness had gone from him now. Once more he was upon the rack. What he saw with his mental vision was as the wild phantasmagoria of a dream . . . a dark room in which a magic lantern is being worked, and fantastic, unexpected pictures flit across the screen. Pictures as disconnected as a pack of cards.

Rita was waiting upon the steps of the Institute.

She wore a simple coat and skirt of dark brown tweed with a green line in it. Her face was pale. Her eyes were without sparkle—she also was exhausted by pleasure, come to the end of the Arabian Nights.

She got into the taxi-cab which was trembling with the power of the unemployed engines below it.

Tzim, tzim, tzim!

"Where shall we go, Gilbert?" she said, in a languid, uninterested voice.

He answered her in tones more cold and bloodless than her own. "I don't know, Rita, and I don't care. Ce que vous voulez, Mademoiselle des livres sans reproche!"

She turned her white face on him for a moment, almost savage with impotent petulance. Then she thrust her head out of the window and coiled round to the waiting driver.

"Go to Madame Tussaud's," she cried.

Tzim, tzim, bang-bang-bang, and then a long melancholy drone as the rows of houses slid backwards.

Gilbert turned on her. "Why did you say that?" he asked bitterly.

"What difference *does* it make?" she replied. "You didn't seem to care where we went for this last hour or two. I said the first thing that came into my mind. I suppose we can get lunch at Madame Tussaud's. I've never been there before. At any rate, I expect they can manage a sponge cake for us. I don't want anything more."

—"Yes, it's better for us both. It's a relief to me to think that the end has come. No, Rita dear, I don't want your hand. Let us make an end now—a diminuendo. It must be. Let it be. You've said it often yourself."

She bit her lips for a second. Then her eyes flashed. She put her arms round his neck and drew him to her. "You shan't!" she said. "You shan't glide away from me like this."

Every nerve in his body began to tremble. His skin pricked and grew hot.

"What will you give?" he asked in a muffled voice.

"I? What I choose to give!" she replied. "Gillie, I'll do what I like with you."

She shrank back in the corner of the cab with a little cry. Lothian's face was red and blazing with anger.

"No names like that, Rita!" he said roughly. "You shan't call me that."

It was a despairing cry of drowning conscience, honour bleeding to death, dissolving dignity and manhood.

However much he might long for her: however strongly he was enchained, it was a blot, an indignity, an outrage, that this girl should call him by the familiar home name. That was Mary's name for him. Mrs. Gilbert Lothian alone had the right to say that.

Just then the taxi-metre stopped outside the big red erection in the Marylebone Road, an unusual and fantastic silhouette against the heavy sky.

They went in together, and there was a chill over them both. They felt, on this grey day, as people who have lived for pleasure, sensation, and have fed too long on honeycomb, must ever feel; the bitterness of the fruit with the fair red and yellow rind. Ashes were in their mouths, an acrid flavour within their souls.

It is always and for ever thus, if men could only realise it. Since the Cross rose in the sky, the hectic joys of sin have been mingled with bitterness, torture, cold.

The frightful "Colloque Sentimental" of Verlaine expresses these two people, at this moment, well enough. Written by a temperamental saint turned satyr and nearly always influenced by drink; translated by a young English poet whose wings were always beating in vain against the prison wall he himself had built; you have these sad companions. . . .

Into the lonely park all frozen fast,
Awhile ago there were two forms who passed.

Lo, are their lips fallen and their eyes dead,
Hardly shall a man hear the words they said.

Into the lonely park all frozen fast
There came two shadows who recall the past.

"Dost thou remember our old ecstasy?"
"Wherefore should I possess that memory?"

"Doth thy heart beat at my sole name alway?
Still dost thou see my soul in visions?" "Nay!"—

And on such a day as this, with such a weight as this upon their tired hearts, they entered the halls of Waxwork and stood forlorn among that dumb cloistered company.

They passed through "Room No. 1. Commencing Right-hand side" and their steps echoed upon the floor. On this day and at this hour hardly any visitors were there; only a few groups moved from figure to figure and talked in hissing whispers as if they were in some church.

All around them they saw lifeless and yet half convincing dolls in rich tarnished habiliments. They walked, as it were, in a mausoleum of dead kings, and the livid light which fell upon them from the glass roof above made the sordid unreality more real.

"There's Charles the First," Rita said drearily.

Gilbert glanced at the catalogue. "He was fervently pious, a faithful husband, a fond parent, a kind master, and an enthusiastic lover and patron of the fine arts."

"How familiar that sort of stuff sounds," she answered. "It's written for the schools which come here to see history in the flesh—or wax rather. Every English school girl of the upper middle classes has been brought here once in her life. Oh, here's Milton! What does it say about him?"

—"Sold his immortal poem 'Paradise Lost' for the sum of five pounds," Lothian answered grimly.

"*Much* better to be a modern poet, Gilbert dear! But I'm disappointed. These figures don't thrill one at all. I always thought one was thrilled and astonished here."

"So you will be, Cupid, soon. Don't you see that all these people are only names to us. Here they are names dressed up in clothes and with pink faces and glass eyes. They're too remote. Neither of us is going to connect that thing"—he flung a contemptuous movement of his thumb at Milton —"with 'Lycidas.' We shall be interested soon, I'm sure. But won't you have something to eat?"

"No. I don't want food. After all, this is strange and fantastic. We've lots more to see yet, and these kings and queens are only for the schools. Let's explore and explore. And let's talk about it all as we go, Gilbert! Talk to me as you do in your letters. Talk to me as you did at the beginning, illuminating everything with your mind. That's what I want to hear once again!"

She thrust her arm in his, and desire fled away from him. The Dead Sea Fruit, the "Colloque Sentimental" existed no more, but, humour, the power of keen, incisive phrase awoke in him.

Yes, this was better!—their two minds with play and interplay. It would have been a thousand times better if it had never been anything else save this.

They wandered into the Grand Saloon, made their bow to Sir Thomas Lipton—"Wog and I find his tea really the best and cheapest," Rita said—decided that the Archbishop of Canterbury had a suave, but uninteresting face, admired the late Mr. Dan Leno, who was posed next to Sir Walter Scott, and gazed without much interest at the royal figures in the same room.

King George the Fifth and his spouse; the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn—Prince Arthur William Patrick Albert, K.G., K.T., K.P., G.C.M.C.; Princess Royal of England—Her Royal Highness Princess Louise Victoria Alexandra Dagmar; and, next to these august people, little Mr. Dan Leno!

"Poor little man," Rita said, looking at the sad face of the comedian. "Why should they put him here with the King and the Queen? Do they just plant their figures anywhere in this show?"

Gilbert shook his head. In this abnormal place—one of the strangest and most psychologically interesting places in the world—his freakish humour was to the fore.

"What a little stupid you are, Rita!" he said. "The man who arranges these groups is one of the greatest philosophers and students of humanity who ever lived. In this particular case the ghost of Heine must have animated him. The court jester! The clown of the monarch—I believe he did once perform at Sandringham—set cheek by jowl with the great people he amused. It completes the picture, does it not?"

"No, Gilbert, since you pretend to see a design in the arrangement, I don't think it *does* complete the picture. Why should a mere little comic man be set to intrude—?"

He caught her up with whimsical grace. "Oh, but you don't see it at all!" he cried, and his vibrating voice, to which the timbre and life had returned, rang through "Room No. 2."

—"This place is designed for the great mass of the population. They all visit it. It is a National Institution. People like you and me only come to it out of curiosity or by chance. It's out of our beat. Therefore, observe the genius of the plan! The Populace has room in its great stupid heart for only a few heroes. The King is always one, and the popular comedian of the music halls is always another. These, with Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Toftrees, satisfy all the hunger for symbols to be adored. Thus Dan Leno in this splendid company. Room No. 2 is really a subtle and ironic comment upon the psychology of the crowd!"

Rita laughed happily. "But where are the Toftrees?" she said.

"In the Chamber of Horrors, probably, for murdering the public taste. We are sure to find them here, seated before two Remingtons and with the actual books with which the crime was committed on show."

"Oh, I've heard about the 'Chamber of Horrors.' Can we go, Gilbert? Do let's go. I want to be thrilled. It's such a funereal day."

"Yes it is, grey as an old nun. I'm sorry I was unkind in the cab, dear. Forgive me."

"I'll forgive you anything. I'm so unhappy, Gilbert. It's dreadful to think of you being gone. All my days and my nights will be grey now. However shall I do without you?"

There was genuine desolation in her voice. He believed that she really regretted *his* departure and not the loss of the pleasures he had been giving her. His blood grew hot once more—for a single moment—and he was about to embrace her, for they were alone in the room.

And then listlessness fell upon him before he had time to put his wish into action. His poisoned mind was vibrating too quickly. An impulse was born, only to be strangled in the brain before the nerves could telegraph it to the muscles. His whole machinery was loose and out of control, the engines running erratically and not in tune. They could not do their work upon the fuel with which he fed them.

He shuddered. His heart was a coffer of ashes and within it, most evil paramours, dwelt the quenchless flame and the worm that dieth not.

. . . They went through other ghostly halls, thronged by a silent company which never moved nor spake. They came to the entrance of that astounding mausoleum of wickedness, The Chamber of Horrors.

There they saw, as in a faint light under the sea, the legion of the lost, the horrible men and women who had gone to swell the red quadrilles of hell.

In long rows, sitting or standing, with blood-stained knives and hangmen's ropes in front of them, in their shameful resurrection they inhabited this place of gloom and death.

Here, was a man in shirt-sleeves, busy at work in a homely kitchen lit by a single candle. Alone at midnight and with sweat upon his face he was breaking up the floor; making a deep hole in which to put something covered with a spotted shroud which lay in a bedroom above.

There, was the "most extraordinary relic in the world," the knife of the guillotine that decapitated Marie Antoinette, Robespierre, and twenty thousand human beings besides.

The strange precision of portraiture, the somewhat ghastly art which had moulded these evil faces was startlingly evident in its effect upon the soul.

When a *great* novelist or poet creates an evil personality it shocks and terrifies us, but it is never wholly evil. We know of the monster's antecedents and environment. However stern we may be in our attitude towards the crime, sweet charity and deep understanding of the motives of human action often give us glimmerings which enable us to pity a lamentable human being who is a brother of ours whatever he may have done.

But here? No. All was sordid and horrible.

Gilbert and Rita saw rows upon rows of faces which differed in every way one from the other and were yet dreadfully alike.

For these great sinister dolls, so unreal and so real, had all a likeness. The smirk of cruelty and cunning seemed to lie upon the waxen masks. Colder than life, far colder than death, they gave forth emanations which struck the very heart with woe and desolation.

To many visitors the Chamber of Horrors is all its name signifies. But it is a place of pleasure nevertheless. The skin creeps but the sensation is pleasant. It provides a thrill like a switchback railway. But it is not a place that artists and imaginative people can enter and easily forget. It epitomises the wages of sin. It ought to be a great educational force. Young criminals should be taken there between stern guardians, to learn by concrete evidence which would appeal to them as no books or sermons could ever do, the Nemesis that waits upon unrepentant ways.

The man and the girl who had just entered were both in a state of nervous tension. They were physically exhausted, one by fierce indulgence in poison, the other by three weeks of light and feverish pleasure.

And more than this.

Each, in several degree, knew that they were doing wrong, that they had progressed far down the primrose path led by the false flute-players.

"I couldn't have conceived it was so, so unnerving, Gilbert," Rita said, shrinking close to him.

"It is pretty beastly," Lothian answered. "It's simply a dictionary of crime though, that's all—rather too well illustrated."

"I don't want to know of these horrors. One sees them in the papers, but it means little or nothing. How dreadful life is though, under the surface!"

Gilbert felt a sudden pang of pity for her, so young and fair, so frightened now.—Ah! *he* knew well how dreadful life was—under the surface!

For a moment, in that tomb-like place a vision came to him, sunlit and splendid, calm and beautiful.

He saw his life as it might be—as doubtless God meant it to be, a favoured, fortunate and happy life, for God does not, in His inscrutable wisdom chastise all men. Well-to-do, brilliant of mind, with trained capacity to exact every drop of noble joy from life; blessed with a sweet and beautiful woman to watch over him and complement him; did ever a man have a fairer prospect, a luckier chance?

His Hell was so real. Heaven was so near. He had but to say, "I will not," and the sun would rise again upon his life. To the end he would walk dignified, famous, happy, loving and deeply-loved—if only he could say those words.

A turn of the hand would banish the Fiend Alcohol for ever and ever!

But even as the exaltation of the thought animated him, the dominant false Ego, crushed momentarily by heavenly inspiration, growled and fought for life.

Immediately the longing for alcohol burned within him. They had been nearly an hour among the figures. Lothian longed for drink, to satisfy no mere physical craving, but to keep the Fiend within quiescent.

He had come to that alternating state—the author of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" has etched it upon the plate for all time—when he must drug the devil in order to have a little license in which to speak the words and think the thoughts of a clean man leading a Christian life.

So the vision of what might be faded and went. The present asserted itself, and asserted itself merely as a brutish desire for poison.

All these mental changes and re-adjustments took place in a mere second of time.

Rita had hardly made an end of speaking before he was ready with an answer.

"Poor little Rita," he said. "It was your choice you know. It *is* horrible. But I expect that the weather, and the inexorable fact that we have to part this afternoon for a time, has something to do with it. Oh, and then we haven't lunched. There's a great influence in lunch. I want a drink badly, too. Let's go."

Rita was always whimsical. She loved to assert herself. She wanted to go at least as ardently as her companion, but she did not immediately agree.

"Soon," she said. "Look here, Gilbert, we'll meet at the door. I'm going to flit down this aisle of murderers on the other side. You go down this side. And if you meet the Libricides—Toftrees et femme I mean, call out!"

She vanished with noiseless tread among the stiff ranks of figures.

Gilbert walked slowly down his own path, looking into each face in turn.

. . . This fat matronly woman, a sort of respectable Mrs. Gamp who probably went regularly to Church, was a celebrated baby farmer. She "made angels" by pressing a gimlet into the soft skulls of her charges—there was the actual gimlet—and save for a certain slyness, she had the face of a quite motherly old thing. Yet she, too, had dropped through the hole in the floor—like all her companions here. . . .

He turned away from all the faces with an impatient shudder.

He ought never to have come here. He was a donkey ever to have let Rita come here. Where was

she?—he was to meet her at the end of this horrid avenue. . . .

But the place was large. Rita had disappeared among the waxen ghosts. The door must be this way. . . .

He pressed onwards, walking silently—as one does in a place of the dead—but disregarding with averted eyes, the leers, the smiles, the complacent appeal, of the murderers who had paid their debt to the justice of the courts.

He was beginning to be most unpleasantly affected.

Walking onwards, he suddenly heard Rita's voice. It was higher in key than usual—whom was she speaking to? His steps quickened.

. . . "Gilbert, how silly to try and frighten me! It's not cricket in this horrid place, get down at once—oh!"

The girl shrieked. Her voice rang through the vault-like place.

Gilbert ran, turned a corner, and saw Rita.

She was swaying from side to side. Her face was quite white, even the lips were bloodless. She was staring with terrified eyes to where upon the low dais and behind the confining rail a figure was standing—a wax-work figure.

Gilbert caught the girl by the hands. They were as cold as ice.

"Dear!" he said in wild agitation. "What is it? I'm here, don't be frightened. What is it, Rita?"

She gave a great sob of relief and clung to his hands. A trace of colour began to flow into her cheeks.

"Thank goodness," she said, gasping. "Oh, Gilbert, I'm a fool. I've been so frightened."

"But, dear, what by?"

"By that——"

She pointed at the big, still puppet immediately opposite her.

Gilbert turned quickly. For a moment he did not understand the cause of her alarm.

"I talked to *it*," she said with an hysterical laugh. "I thought *it* was you! I thought you'd got inside the railing and were standing there to frighten me."

Gilbert looked closely at the effigy. He was about to say something and then the words died away upon his lips.

It was as though he saw himself in a distorting glass—one of those nasty and reprehensible toys that fools give to children sometimes.

There was an undeniable look of him in the staring face of coloured wax. The clear-cut lips were there. The shape of the head was particularly reminiscent, the growing corpulence of body was indicated, the hair of the stiff wig waved as Lothian's living hair waved.

"Good God!" he said. "It *is* like me! Poor little girl—but you know I wouldn't frighten you for anything. But it *is* like! What an extraordinary thing. We looked for the infamous Toftrees! the egregious Herbert who has split so many infinitives in his time, and we find—Me!"

Rita was recovering. She laughed, but she held tightly to Gilbert's arm at the same time.

"Let's see who the person is—or was—" Gilbert went on, drawing the catalogue from his pocket.

"Key of the principal gate of the Bastille—no, that's not it. Number 365, oh, here we are! Hancock, the Hackney Murderer. A chemist in comfortable circumstances, he——"

Rita snatched the book from his hand. "I don't want to hear any more," she said. "Let's go away, quick!"

In half an hour they were lunching at a little Italian restaurant which they found in the vicinity. The day was still dark and lowering, but a risotto Milanese and something which looked like prawns in *polenta*, but wasn't, restored them to themselves.

There was a wine list in this quite snug little place, but the proprietor advanced and explained that he had no license and that money must be paid in advance before the camerière could fetch what was required from an adjacent public house.

It was a bottle of whiskey that Gilbert ordered, politely placed upon the table by a pathetic little Genoese whose face was sallow as spaghetti and who was quite unconscious that for the moment the Fiend Alcohol had borrowed his poor personality.

. . . "You must have a whiskey and soda, Rita. I dare not let you attempt any of the wines from the public house at the corner."

"I've never tried it in my life. But I will now, out of curiosity. I'll taste what you are so far too fond of."

Rita did so. "Horrible stuff," she said. "It's just like medicine."

Gilbert had induced the pleasant numbness again. "You've said exactly what it is," he replied in a dreamy voice.—"'Medicine for a mind diseased.'"

They hardly conversed at all after that.

The little restaurant with its red plush seats against the wall, its mirrors and hanging electric lights, was cosy. They lingered long over their coffee and cigarettes. No one else was there and the proprietor sidled up to them and began to talk. He spoke in English at first, and then Gilbert answered him in French.

Gilbert spoke French as it is spoken in Tours, quite perfectly. The Italian spoke it with the soft, ungrammatical fluency of his race.

The interlude pleased the tired, jaded minds of the sad companions, and it was with some fictitious reconstruction of past gaiety and animation that they drove to St. Pancras.

The train was in.

Gilbert's dressing-case was already placed in a first-class compartment, his portmanteau snug in the van.

When he walked up the long platform with Rita, a porter, the Guard of the train and the steward of the dining-car, were grouped round the open door.

He was well known. All the servants of the line looked out for him and gave him almost ministerial honours. They knew he was a "somebody," but were all rather vague as to the nature of his distinction.

He was "Mr. Gilbert Lothian" at least, and his bountiful largesse was generally spoken of.

The train was not due to start for six minutes. The acute guard, raising his cap, locked the door of the carriage.

Gilbert and Rita were alone in it for a farewell.

He took her in his arms and looked long and earnestly into the young lovely face.

He saw the tears gathering in her eyes.

"Have you been happy, sweetheart, with me?"

"Perfectly happy." There was a sob in the reply.

"You really do care for me?"

"Yes."

His breath came more quickly, he held her closer to him—only a little rose-faced girl now.

"Do you care for me more than for any other man you have ever met?"

She did not answer.

"Tell me, tell me! Do you?"

"Yes."

"Rita, my darling, say, if things had been different, if I were free to ask you to be my wife now, would you marry me?"

"Yes."

"Would you be my dear, dear love, as I yours, for ever and ever and ever?"

She clung to him in floods of tears. He had his answer. Each tear was an answer.

The guard of the train, looking the other way, opened the door with his key and coughed.

"Less than a minute more, sir," said the guard.

. . . "Once more, say it once more! You *would* be my wife if I were free?"

"I'd be your wife, Gilbert, and I'd love you—oh, what shall I do without you? How dull and

dreadful everything is going to be now!"

"But I shall be back soon. And I shall write to you every day!"

"You will, won't you, dear? Write, write—" The train was almost moving.

It began to move. Gilbert leaned out of the window and waved his hand for a long time, to a forlorn little girl in a brown coat and skirt who stood upon the platform crying bitterly.

The waiter of the dining-car, knowing his man well, brought Lothian a large whiskey and soda before the long train was free of the sordid Northwest suburbs.

Lothian drank it, arranged about dinner, and sank back against the cushions. He lit a cigarette and drew the hot smoke deep into his lungs.

The train was out of the town area now. There was no more jolting and rattling over points. Its progress into the gathering night was a continuous roar.

Onwards through the gathering night. . . .

"*I'd be your wife, Gilbert, and I'd love you—if you were free.*"

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT JOURNEY FROM NICE WHEN MRS. DALY SPEAKS WORDS OF FIRE

> "Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
> It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
> Close to my breast: its splendour, soon or late
> Shall pierce the gloom. I shall emerge one day."
>
> —*Browning.*

A carriage was waiting outside a white and gilded hotel on the Promenade des Anglais at Nice.

The sun was just dipping behind the Esterelle mountains and the Mediterranean was the colour of wine. Already the Palais du Jetée was being illuminated and outlined itself in palest gold against the painted sky above the Cimiez heights, where the olive-coloured headland hides Villefranche and the sea-girt pleasure city of Monte Carlo.

The tall palms in the gardens which front the gleaming palaces of the Promenade were bronze gold in the fading light, and their fans clicked and rustled in a cool breeze which was eddying down upon the Queen of the Mediterranean from the Maritime Alps.

Mary Lothian came out of the hotel. Her face was pale and very sad. She had been crying. With her was a tall, stately woman of middle-age; grey-haired, with a massive calmness and peace of feature recalling the Athena of the Louvre or one of those noble figures of the Erectheum crowning the hill of the Acropolis at Athens.

She was Mrs. Julia Daly, who had been upon the Riviera for two months. Dr. Morton Sims had written to her. She had called upon Mary and the two had become fast friends.

Such time as Mary could spare from the sickbed of her sister, she spent in the company of this great-souled woman from America, and now Mrs. Daly, whose stay at Nice was over, was returning to London with her friend.

The open carriage drove off, by the gardens and jewellers' shops in front of the Casino and Opera House and down the Avenue de la Gare. The glittering cafés were full of people taking an apéritif before dinner. There was a sense of relaxation and repose over the pleasure city of the South, poured down upon it in a golden haze from the last level rays of the sun.

Outside one of the cafés, as the carriage turned to the station, some Italians were singing "*O Soli Mio*" to the accompaniment of guitars and a harp, with mellow, passionate voices.

The long green train rolled into the glass-roofed station, the brass-work of the carriage doors covered thick with oily dust from the Italian tunnels through which it had passed. The conductor of the sleeping-car portion found the two women their reserved compartment. Their luggage was already registered through to Charing Cross and they had only dressing bags with them.

As the train started again Mrs. Daly pulled the sliding door into its place, the curtains over it and the windows which looked out into the corridor. Then she switched on the electric light in the roof and also the lamp which stood on a little table at the other end.

"There, my dear," she said, "now we shall be quite comfortable."

She sat down by Mary, took her hand in hers and kissed her.

"I know what you are experiencing now," she said in her low rich voice, "and it is very bitter. But the separation is only for a short, short time. God wants her, and we shall all be in heaven together soon, Mrs. Lothian. And you're leaving her with her husband. It is a great mercy that he has come at last. They are best alone together. And see how brave and cheery he is!—There's a real man, a Christian soldier and gentleman if ever one lived. His wife's death won't kill him. It will make him live more strenuously for others. He will pass the short time between now and meeting her again in a high fever of righteous works and duty. There is no death."

Mary held the firm white hand.

"You comfort me," she said. "I thank God that you came to me in my affliction. Otherwise I should have been quite alone till Harold came."

"I'm real glad that dear good Morton Sims asked me to call. Edith Sims and I are like" . . . She broke off abruptly. "Like sisters," she was about to say, but would not.

Mary smiled. Her friend's delicacy was easy to understand. "I know," she answered, "like sisters! You needn't have hesitated. I am better now. All you tell me is just what I am *sure* of and it is everything. But one's heart grows faint at the moment of parting and the reassuring voice of a friend helps very much. I hope it doesn't mean that one's faith is weak, to long for a sympathetic and confirming voice?"

"No, it does not. God has made us like that. I know the value of a friend's word well. Nothing heartens one so. I have been in deep waters in my time, Mary. You must let me call you Mary, my dear."

"Oh, do, do! Yes, it is wonderful how words help, human living words."

"Nothing is more extraordinary in life than the power of the spoken word. How careful and watchful every one ought to be over words. Spoken, they always seem to me to have more lasting influence than words in a book. They pass through mind after mind. Just think, for instance, how when we meet a man or woman with a sincere intellectual belief which is quite opposed to our own, we are chilled into a momentary doubt of our own opinions—however strongly we may hold them. And when it is the other way about, what strength and comfort we get!"

"Thank you," Mary said simply, "you are very helpful. Dr. Morton Sims"—she hesitated for a moment—"Dr. Morton Sims told me something of your life. And of course I know all about your work, as the whole world knows. I know, dear Mrs. Daly, how much you have suffered. And it is because of that that you help me so, who am suffering too."

There was silence for a space. The train had stopped at Cannes and started again. Now it was winding and climbing the mountain valleys towards Toulon. But neither of the two women knew anything of it. They were alone in the quiet travelling room that money made possible for them. Heart was meeting heart in the small luxurious place in which they sat, remote from the outside world as if upon some desert island.

"Dear Morton Sims," the American lady said at length. "The utter sane goodness of that man! My dear, he is an angel of light, as near a perfect character as any one alive in the world to-day. And yet he doesn't believe in Jesus and thinks the Church and the Sacraments—I've been a member of the Episcopalian Church from girlhood—only make-believe and error."

"He is the finest natured man I have ever met," Mary answered. "I've only known him for a short time, but he has been so good and friendly. What a sad thing it is that he is an infidel. I don't use the word in the popular reprehensible sense, but as just what it means—without faith."

"It's a sad thing to us," Mrs. Daly said briskly, "but I have no fears for him. God hasn't given him the gift of Faith. Now that's all we can say about it. In the next world he will have to go through a probation and learn his catechism, so to speak, before he steps right into his proper place. But he won't be a catechumen long. His pure heart and noble life will tell where hearts and wills are weighed. There is a place by the Throne waiting for him."

"Oh, I am sure. He is wonderfully good. Indeed one seems to feel his goodness more than one does that of our clergyman at home, though Mr. Medley is a good man too!"

"Brains, my dear! Brains! Morton Sims, you see, is of the aristocracy. Your clergyman probably is not."

"Aristocracy?"

"The only aristocracy, the aristocracy of brain-power. Don't forget I'm an American woman, Mary! Goodness has the same value in Heaven however it is manifested upon earth. The question of bimetallism doesn't trouble God and His Angels. But a brilliant-minded Saint has certainly more influence down here than a fool-saint."

Mary nodded.

Such a doctrine as this was quite in accord with what she wished to think. She rejoiced to hear it spoken with such sharp lucidity. She also worshipped at a shrine, that of no saint, certainly, but where a flaming intellect illuminated the happenings of life. In his way, quite a different way, of course, she knew that Gilbert had a finer mind than even Morton Sims. And yet, Gilbert wasn't good, as he ought to be. . . . How these speculations and judgments coiled and recoiled upon themselves; puzzled weary minds and, when all was done, were very little good after all!

At any rate, she loved Gilbert more than anything or anybody in the world. So that was that!

But tears came into her eyes as she thought of her husband with deep and yearning love. If he would only give up alcohol! *Why* wouldn't he? To her, such an act seemed so simple and easy. Only a refusal, that was all! The young man who came to Jesus in the old days was asked to give up so much. Even for Jesus and immortality he found himself unable to do it. But Gilbert had only to give up one thing in order to be good and happy, to make her happy.

It was true that Dr. Morton Sims had told her many scientific facts, had explained and explained. He had definitely said that Gilbert was in the clutches of a disease; that Gilbert couldn't really help himself, that he must be cured as a man is cured of gout. And then, when she had asked the doctor how this was to be done, he had so little comfort to give. He had explained that all the advertised "cures"—even the ones backed up by people of name, bishops, magistrates, and so on, were really worthless. They administered other drugs in order to sober up the patient from alcohol. That was easy and possible—though only with the thorough co-operation of the patient. After a few weeks, when health appeared to be restored, and the will power was certainly strengthened, the "cure" did nothing more. The *pre-disposition* was not eradicated. That was an affair to be accomplished only by two or three years of abstinence and not always then.

—"I'll talk to Mrs. Daly about it," the sad wife said to herself. "She is a noble, Christian woman. She understands more than even the doctor. She *must* do so. She loves our Lord. Moreover she has given her life to the cause of temperance." . . .

But she must be careful and diplomatic. The natural reticence and delicacy of a well-bred woman shrank from the unveiling, not only of her own sorrow, but of a beloved's shame. The coarse, ill-balanced and bourgeois temperament bawls its sorrow and calls for sympathy from the sweepings of any Pentonville omnibus. It writes things upon a street wall and enjoys voluptuous public hysterics. The refined and gracious mind hesitates long before the least avowal.

"You said," she began, after a period of sympathetic silence, "that you had been in deep waters."

Julia Daly nodded. "I guess it's pretty well known," she said with a sigh. "That's the worst of a campaign like mine. It's partly because every one knows all about what you've gone through that they give you a hearing. In the States the papers are full of my unhappy story whenever I lecture in a new place. But I'm used to it now and it doesn't hurt me. Most of the stories are untrue, though. Mr. Daly was a pretty considerable ruffian when he was in drink. But he wasn't the monster he's been made out to be, and he couldn't help himself, poor, poisoned man. But which story have you read, Mary?"

"None at all. Only Dr. Morton Sims, when he wrote, told me that you had suffered, that your husband, that——"

"That Patrick was an alcoholic. Yes, that's the main fact. He did a dreadful thing when he became insane through drink. There's no need to speak of it. But I loved him dearly all the same. He might have been such a noble man!"

"Ah, that's just what I feel about my dear boy. He's not as bad as—as some people. But he does drink quite dreadfully. I hate telling you. It seems a sort of treachery to him. But you may be able to help me."

"I knew," Mrs. Daly said with a sigh. "The doctor has told me in confidence. I'd do anything to help you, dear girl. Your husband's poems have been such a help and comfort to me in hours of sadness and depression. Oh, what a dreadful scourge it is! this frightful thing that seizes on noble and ignoble minds alike! It is the black horror of the age, the curse of nations, the ruin of thousands upon thousands. If only the world would realise it!"

"No one seems to realise the horror except those who have suffered dreadfully from it."

"More people do than you think, Mary, but, still, they are an insignificant part of the whole. People are such fools! I was reading 'Pickwick' the other day, a great English classic and a work of genius, too, in its way, I suppose. The principal characters get drunk on every other page. Things are better now, as far as books are concerned, though the comic newspapers keep up their ghastly fun about drunken folk. But the cause of Temperance isn't a popular one, here or in my own country."

"A teetotaller is so often called a fanatic in England," Mary said.

"I know it well. But I say this, with entire conviction, absolute bed-rock certainty, my dear, the people who have joined together to go without alcohol themselves and to do all they can to fight it, are in the right whatever people may say of them. And it doesn't matter what people say either. As in all movements, there is a lot of error and mistaken energy. The Bands of Hope, the Blue Ribbon Army, the Rechabites are not always wise. Some of them make total abstinence into a religion and think that alcohol is the only Fiend to fight against. Most of them—as our own new scientific party think—are fighting on wrong lines. That's to say they are not doing a tenth as much good as they might do, because the scientific remedy has not become real to them. That will come though, if we can bring it about. But I tire you?"

"Please go on."

"Well, you know our theory. It is a certain remedy. You can't stop alcohol. But by making it a penal offence for drunkards to have children, drunkenness must be almost eliminated in time."

"Yes," Mary said. "Of course, I have read all about it. But I know so little of science. But what is the *individual* cure? Is there none, then? Oh, surely if it is a disease it can be cured? Dr. Morton Sims tried to be encouraging, but I could see that he didn't think there really *was* much chance for a man who is a slave to drink. It is splendid, of course, to think that some day it may all be eliminated by science. But meanwhile, when women's hearts are bleeding for men they love . . ."

Her voice broke and faltered. Her heart was too full for further speech.

The good woman at her side kissed her tenderly. "Do not grieve," she said. "Listen. I told you just now that so many of the great Temperance organisations err in their rejection of scientific advice and scientific means to a great end. They place their trust in God, forgetting that science only exists by God's will and that every discovery made by men is only God choosing to reveal Himself to those who search for Him. But the Scientists are wrong, too, in their rejection—in so many cases—of God. They do not see that Religion and Science are not only non-antagonistic, but really complement each other. It is beginning to be seen, though. In time it will be generally recognised. I read the admission of a famous scientist the other day, to this effect. He said, 'It is generally recognised that any form of treatment in which the "occult," the "supernatural," or anything secret or mysterious is allowed to play a dominant part in so neurotic an affection as inebriety, often succeeds.' And he closed a most helpful and able essay on the arrest of alcohol with something like these words:

> "'The reference to agencies for the uplifting of the drink-victim would be sadly incomplete without a very definite acknowledgment of the incalculable assistance which the wise worker and unprejudiced physician may obtain by bringing to bear upon the whole life of the patient that Power, the majesty and mystery, the consolation and inspiration of which it is the mission of religion to reveal.'"

"Then even the doctors are coming round?" Mary said. "And it means exactly, you would say—?"

"I would tell you what has been proved without possibility of dispute a thousand times. I would tell you that when all therapeutic agencies have failed, the Holy Spirit has succeeded. The Power which is above every other power can do this. No loving heart need despair. However black the night *that* influence can enlighten it. Ask those who work among the desolate and oppressed; the outcast and forlorn, the drink-victims and criminals. Ask, here in England, old General Booth or Prebendary Carlile. Ask the clergy of the Church in the London Docks, ask the Nonconformist ministers, ask the Priests of the Italian Mission who work in the slums.

"They will tell you of daily miracles of conversion and transformations as marvellous and mystical as ever Jesus wrought when He was visible on earth. Mary! It goes on to-day, it *does* go on. There is the only cure, the only salvation. Jesus."

There was a passionate fervour in her voice, a divine light upon her face. She also prophesied, and the Spirit of God was upon her as upon the holy women of old.

And Mary caught that holy fire also. Her lips were parted, her eyes shone. She re-echoed the sacred Name.

"I would give my life to save Gilbert," she said.

"I have no dear one to save, now," the other answered. "But I would give a thousand lives if I had them to save America from Alcohol. I love my land! There is much about my country that the ordinary English man or woman has no glimmering of. Your papers are full of the extravagances and divorces of wealthy vulgarians—champagne corks floating on cess-pools. You read of trusts and political corruption. These are the things that are given prominence by the English newspapers. But of the deep true heart of America little is known here. We are not really a race of money-grubbers and cheap humourists. We are great, we shall be greater. The lamps of freedom burn clearly in the hearts of millions of people of whom Europe never hears. God is with us still! The Holy Spirit broods yet over the forests and the prairies, the mountains and the rivers of my land. Read the 'Choir Invisible' by James Lane Allen and learn of us who are America."

"I will, dear Mrs. Daly. How you have comforted me to-night! God sent you to me. I feel quite happy now about my darling sister. I feel much happier about my husband. Whatever this life has in store, there is always the hereafter. It seems very close to-night, the veil wears thin."

"We will rest, Mary, while these good thoughts and hopes remain within us. But before we go to bed, listen to this."

Julia Daly felt in her dressing bag and withdrew a small volume bound in vermilion morocco.

"It's your best English novel," she said, "far and away the greatest—Charles Reade's 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' I mean. I'm reading it for the fifth time. For five years now I have done so each year."

"For ever?" she began in her beautiful voice, that voice which had brought hope to so many weary hearts in the great Republic of the West.

> "'For ever? Christians live "for ever," and love "for ever" but they never part "for ever." They part, as part the earth and sun, only to meet more brightly in a little while. You and I part here for life. And what is our life? One line in the great story of the Church, whose son and daughter we are; one handful in the sand of time, one drop in the ocean of "For ever." Adieu—for the little moment called "a life!" We part in trouble, we shall meet in peace; we part in a world of sin and sorrow, we shall meet where all is purity and love divine; where no ill passions are, but Christ is, and His Saints around Him clad in white. There, in the turning of an hour-glass, in the breaking of a bubble, in the passing of a cloud, she, and thou, and I shall meet again; and sit at the feet of angels and archangels, apostles and saints, and beam like them with joy unspeakable, in the light of the shadow of God upon His throne, for ever—and ever—and ever.'"

The two women undressed and said their prayers, making humble supplication at the Throne of Grace for themselves, those they loved and for all those from whom God was hidden.

And as the train bore them through Nimes and Arles, Avignon and the old Roman cities of southern France, they slept as simple children sleep.

CHAPTER VI

GILBERT LOTHIAN'S DIARY

> "It comes very glibly off the tongue to say, 'Put yourself in his position,'—'What would you have done under the circumstances?' but if self-analysis is difficult, how much more so is it to appreciate the 'Ego' of another, to penetrate within the veil of the maimed and debased inner temple of the debauched inebriate?"—"*The Psychology of the Alcoholic*," by T. Claye Shawe, M.D., F.R.C.P., Lecturer on psychological medicine. St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London.

> "Like one, that on a lonesome road,
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread."

—*Coleridge.*

When Mary Lothian returned home to Mortland Royal she was very unwell. The strain of watching over Lady Davidson, and the wrench of a parting which in this world was to be a final one, proved more than she was able to endure.

She had been out of doors, imprudently, during that dangerous hour on the Riviera between sunset and nine o'clock. Symptoms of that curious light fever, with its sharp nervous pains, which is easily contracted at such times along the Côte d'Azur, began to show themselves.

Dr. Morton Sims was away in Paris for a few weeks upon a scientific engagement he was unable to refuse, and Mary was attended by Dr. Heywood, the general practitioner from Wordingham.

There was nothing very serious the matter, but the Riviera fever brings collapse and great depression of spirits with it. Mary remained in bed, lying there in a dreamy, depressed state of both physical and mental faculties. She read but little, preferred to be alone as much as possible,

and found it hard to take a lively interest in anything at all.

Gilbert was attentive enough. He saw that every possible thing was done for her comfort. But his manner was nervous and staccato, though he made great efforts at calm. He was assiduous, eager to help and suggest, but there was no repose about him. In her great longing for rest and solitude—a necessary physical craving resulting upon her illness—Mary hardly wanted to see very much even of Gilbert. She was too weak and dispirited to remonstrate with him, but it was quite obvious to her experienced eyes that he was drinking heavily again.

His quite unasked-for references to the fact that he was taking nothing but a bottle of beer in the middle of the morning, a little claret at meals and a single whiskey and soda before going to bed, betrayed him at once. His tremulous anxiety, his furtive manner, the really horrible arrogation of gaiety and ease made upon a most anxious hope that he was deceiving her, told their own tale.

So did the heavy puffed face, yellowish red and with spots appearing upon it. His eyes seemed smaller as the surrounding tissues were dilated, they were yellowish, streaked with little veins of blood at the corners, and dull in expression.

His head jerked, his hands trembled and when he touched her they were hot and damp.

Her depression of mind, her sense of hopelessness, were greatly increased. Darkness seemed to be closing round her, and prayer—for it happens thus at times with even the most saintly souls—gave little relief.

"I shall be better soon," she kept repeating to herself. "The doctor says so. Then, when I am well, I shall be able to take poor Gillie really in hand. It won't be long now. Then I will save him with God's help."

In her present feebleness she knew that it was useless to attempt to do anything in this direction. So she pretended to believe her husband, said nothing at all, and prayed earnestly to recover her health that she might set about the task of succour.

She did not know, had not the very slightest idea, of Lothian's real state. Nobody knew, nobody could know.

On his part, freed of all restraint, his mind a cave of horror, a chamber of torture, he drank with lonely and systematic persistence.

It was about this time that he began to make these notes in the form of a diary which long afterwards passed into the hands of Dr. Morton Sims. The record of heated horror, the extraordinary glimpse into an inferno incredible to the sane man, has proved of immense value to those who are engaged in studying the psychology of the inebriate.

From much that they contain, it is obvious that the author had no intention of letting them be seen by any other eyes than his own, at the time of writing them. Dr. Morton Sims had certainly suggested the idea in the first place, but there can be no doubt whatever that Lothian soon abandoned his original plan and wrote for the mere relief of doing so, and doubtless with a sinister fascination at the spectacle of his own mind thus revealed by subtle analysis and the record of a skilled pen. Alcoholised and impaired as his mind was, it was nevertheless quite capable of doing this accurately and forcibly, and there are many corroborative instances of such an occurrence. More than one medical man during the progress of a protracted death agony has left minute statements of his sensations for the good of Society.

Such papers as these, for use in a book which has an appeal to all sorts of people, cannot, of course, be printed entire. There are things which it would serve no good purpose for the layman to know, valuable as they are to the patient students of morbid states. And what can be given is horrible enough.

The selected passages follow herewith, and with only such comment as is necessary to elucidate the text.

> . . . Last night a letter came from a stranger, one of the many that I get, thanking me for some of the poems in "Surgit Amari" which he said had greatly solaced and helped him throughout a period of mental distress. When I opened the letter it was after dinner, and I had dined well—my appetite keeps good at any rate, and while that is so there is no fear of it—according to the doctors and the medical books. I opened the letter and read it without much interest. I am not so touched and pleased by these letters as I used to be. Then, after I had said good-night to my wife, I went into the library. After two or three whiskies and a lot of cigarettes the usual delusion of greatness and power came over me. I know, of course, that I have great power and am in a way celebrated, but at ordinary times I have no overmastering consciousness and bland, suave pride in this. When I am recovering from the effects of too much alcohol I doubt everything. My own work seems to me trivial and worthless, void of life and imitations of greater work.
>
> Well, I had the usual quickening, but vague and incoherent sense of greatness, and

I picked up the letter again. I walked up and down the room smoking furiously, and then I had some more whiskey. The constant walking up and down the room, by the way, is a well-marked symptom of my state. The nerves refuse me calm. I can't sit down for long, even with the most alluring book. Some thought comes into my mind like a stone thrown suddenly into a pool, and before I am aware of it I am marching up and down the room like a forest beast in a cage. When I had read the letter twice more I sat down and wrote a most effusive reply to my correspondent. I almost wept as I read it. I went into high things, I revealed myself and my innermost thoughts with the grave kindness and wish to be of help that a great and good man; intimate with a lesser and struggling man; might use.

In the morning I read the letter which I had thought so wonderful. As usual, I tore it up. It was written in a handwriting which might have betrayed drunkenness to a child. Long words lacked a syllable, words ending in "ing" were concluded by a single stroke, the letter "l" was the same size as the letter "e" and could not be distinguished from it. But what was worse, was the sickly sentiment, expressed in the most feeble sloppy prose.

It was sort of educated Chadband or Stiggins and there was an appalling lack of reticence.

It is a marked symptom of my state, that when I am drunk I always want to write effusive letters to strangers or mere acquaintances. Sometimes, if I have been reading a book that I liked, I sit down and turn out pages of gush to the unknown author, hailing him as a brother and a master. Thank goodness I always tear the wretched things up next day. It is a good thing I live in the country. In London these wretched letters, which I am impelled to write, would be in some adjacent pillar box before I realised what I had done.

Oh, to be a sane man, a member of the usual sane army of the world who never do these things!

The above passage must have been re-read some time after it was written and been the *raison d'être* of what follows. The various passages are only occasionally dated, but their chronological order can be determined with some certainty by these few dates, changes of handwriting, and above all by the progress and interplay of thought.

It had not occurred to me before, with any strength that is, how very far my inner life diverges now from ordinary paths! It is, I see in a moment such as the present when I am able to contemplate it, utterly abnormal. I am glad to realise this for a time. It is so intensely interesting from the psychologist's point of view. I can so very, very rarely realise it. Immediately that I slip back into the abnormal life, long custom and habit reassert themselves and I become quite unaware that it is abnormal. I live mechanically according to the *bizarre* and fantastic rules imposed upon me by drink. Now, for a time, I have a breathing space. I have left the dim green places under the sea and my head is above water. I see the blue sky and feel the winds of the upper world upon my face. I used to belong up there, now I am an inhabitant of the under world, where the krakens and the polyps batten in their sleep and no light comes.

I will therefore use my little visit to "glimpse the moon" like the Prince of Denmark's sepulchral father. I will catalogue the ritual of the under world which has me fast.

I will, that is, write as much as I can. Before very long my eyes will be tired and little black specks will dance in front of them. The dull pain in my side—cirrhosis of course—which is quiet and feeding now—will begin again. Something in my head, at the back of the skull on the left hand side—so it seems—will begin to throb and ache. Little shooting pains will come in my knees and round about my ankles and drops of perspiration which taste bitter as brine will roll down my face. And, worse than all, the fear of It will commence. Slight "alcoholic tremors" will hint of what might be. After a few minutes I shall feel that it is going to be.

I will define all that I mean by "It" another time.

Well, then I shall send "It" and all the smaller "Its" to the right about. I shall have two or three strong pegs. Then physical pains, all mental horrors, will disappear at once. But I shall be back again under the sea nevertheless. I shan't realise, as I am realising now, the abnormality of my life. But I should say that I have an hour at least before I need have any more whiskey, before that becomes imperative. So here goes for a revelation more real and minute than de Quincey, though, lamentable fact! in most inferior prose!

Here this passage ends. It is obvious from what follows that the period of expected freedom came to an end long before the author expected. Excited by what he proposed to do, he had spent too much of his brief energy in explaining it. Mechanically he had taken more drink to preserve

himself upon the surface—the poisoned mind entirely forgetting what it had just set down—and with mathematic certainty the alcohol had plunged the poet once more beneath the ruining waters.

The next entry, undated, is written in a more precise and firmer handwriting. It recalls the small and beautiful caligraphy of the old days. There is no preamble to the bald and hideous confession of mental torture.

> I wish that my imagination was not so horribly acute and vivid when it is directed towards horrors—as indeed it always seems to be now. I wish, too, that I had never talked curiously to loquacious medical friends and read so many medical books.
>
> I am always making amateur, and probably perfectly ridiculous, tests for Locomotor Ataxy and General Paralysis—always shrinking in nameless fear from what so often seems the inevitable onslaught of "It."
>
> Meanwhile, with these fears never leaving me for a moment, to what an infinity of mad superstitions I am slave! How I strive, by a bitter, and (really) hideously comic, ritual to stave off the inevitable.
>
> Oh, I used to love God and trust in Him. I used to pray to Jesus. Now, like any aborigine I only seek to ward off evil, to propitiate the Devil and the Powers of the Air, to drag the Holy Trinity into a forced compliance with my conjuring tricks. *I can hardly distinguish the devil from God.* Both seem my antagonists. Hardly able to distinguish Light from dark, I employ myself with dirty little conjuring tricks. I well know that all these are the phantasms of a disordered brain! I am not really fool enough to believe that God can be propitiated or Satan kept at bay by movements: touchings and charms.
>
> But I obey my demon.
>
> These things are a foolish network round my every action and thought. I can't get out of the net.
>
> Touching, I do not so much mind. In me it is a symptom of alcoholism, but greater people have known it as a mere nervous affection quite apart from drink. Dr. Johnson used to stop and return to touch lamp-posts. In "Lavengro," Borrow has words to say about this impulse—I think it is in Lavengro or it may be in the Spanish book. Borrow used to "touch wood." I began it a long time ago, in jest at something young Ingworth said. I did it as one throws spilt salt over one's shoulder or avoids seeing the new moon through glass. Together with the other things I *have* to do now, it has become an obsession. I carry little stumps of pencil in all my pockets. Whenever a thought of coming evil, a radiation from the awful cloud of Apprehension comes to me, then I can thrust a finger into the nearest pocket and touch wood. Only a fortnight ago I was frightened out of my senses by the thought that I had never been really touching wood at all. The pencil stumps were all varnished. I had been touching varnish! It took me an hour to scrape all the varnish off with a pocket knife. I must have about twenty stumps in constant use. At night I always put one in the pocket of my pyjama coat—one wakes up with some fear—but, half asleep and lying as I do upon my left side, the pocket is often under me and I can't get to the wood quickly. So I keep my arm stretched out all night and my hand can touch the wooden top of a chair by the bed in a second. I made Tumpany sand-paper all the varnish off the top of the chair too. He thought I was mad. I suppose I am, as a matter of fact. But though I am perfectly aware of the damnable foolishness of it, these things are more real to me than the money-market to a business man.

> If it were only this compulsion to touch wood I should not mind. But there are other tyrannies coincident which are more urgent and compelling. My whole mind—at times—seems taken up by the necessity for ritual actions. I have no time for quiet thought. Everything is broken in upon. There is the Sign of the Cross. I have linked even *that* in the chain of my terrors. I touch wood and then I make this sign. I do it so often that I have invented all sorts of methods of doing it secretly in public, and quickly when I am alone. I do it in a sort of imaginary way. For instance, I bend my head and in so doing draw an imaginary line with my right eye upon the nearest wall, or upon the page of the book that I am reading. Then I move my head from side to side and make another fictitious line to complete the cross. A propos of making the sign, the imaginary lines nearly always go crooked in my brain. This especially so when I am doing it on a book. I follow two lines of type on both pages and use the seam of the binding between them to make the down strokes. But it hardly ever comes right the first time. I begin to notice people looking at me curiously as I try to get it right and my head moves about. If they only knew!

Then another and more satisfactory way—for the imaginary method always makes my head ache for a second or two—I accomplish with the thumb of my right hand moving vertically down the first joint of the index finger, and then laterally. I can do this as often as I like and no one can possibly see me. I have a little copper Cross too, with "In hoc vinces" graved upon it. But I don't like using this much. It is too concrete. It reminds me of the use I am making of the symbol of salvation. "In hoc vinces"! Not I. There are times when I think that I am surely doomed.

But I think that the worst of all the foul, senseless, and yet imperative petty lordships I endure, is the dominion of the two numbers. The Dominion of The Two Numbers!—capital letters shall indicate this! For some reason or other I have for years imagined mystical virtue in the number 7 and some maleficent influence in the number 13. These, of course, are old superstitions, but they, and all the others, ride me to a weariness of spirit which is near death.

Although I got my first in "Lit. Hum." at Oxford, have read almost everything, and can certainly say that I am a man of wide culture and knowledge, Figures always gave me aversion and distaste. I got an open scholarship at my college and was as near as nothing ploughed in the almost formal preliminary exam of Responsions by Arithmetic. I can't add up my bank-book correctly even now, and I have no sense whatever of financial amounts and affairs.

But I am a slave to the good but stern fairy 7 and the hell-hag 13.

I attempt lightness and the picturesque. There is really nothing of the sort about my unreasoning and mad servitude. It's bitter, naked, grinning truth.

In my bath I sponge myself seven times—first. Then I begin again, but I stop at six in the second series and cross myself upon the breast with the bath sponge. Seven and six make thirteen. If I did not cancel out that thirteen by the sign of the Cross I should walk in fear of some dreadful thing all day.

Every time I drink I sip seven times first and then again seven times. When six times comes in the second seven, I make the Cross with my head. My right hand is holding the glass so that the thumb and finger joint method won't work. It would be disastrous to make the sign with the left hand.

That is another thing. . . . I use my left hand as little as I can. It frightens me. I *always* raise a glass to my lips with the right hand. If I use the left hand owing to momentary thoughtlessness, I have to go through a lengthy purification of wood-touching, crossing, and counting numbers.

All my habits re-act one upon the other and the rules are added to daily until they have become appallingly intricate. A failure in one piece of ritual entails all sorts of protracted mental and physical gestures in order to put it right.

I wonder if other men who drink know this heavy, unceasing slavery which makes the commonest actions of life a burden?

I suppose so. It must be so. All drugs have specific actions. Men don't tell, of course. Neither do I! Sometimes, though, when I have gone to some place like the Café Royal, or perhaps one of the clubs which are used by fast men, I have had a disgusting glee when I met men whom I knew drank heavily to think that they had their secrets—must have them—as well as I.

On reading through these notes that I have been making now and then, I am, of course, horrified at what they really seem to mean. Put down in black and white they convey—or at least they would convey to anyone who saw them—nothing but an assurance of the fact that I am mad. Yet I am not really mad. I have two lives. . . . I see that I have referred constantly to "It." I have promised myself to define exactly what I mean by "IT."

I am writing this immediately after lunch. I didn't get up till eleven o'clock. I am under the influence of twenty-five grains of ammonium bromide. I had a few oysters for lunch and nothing else. I am just about as normal as any man in my state can hope to be.

Nevertheless when I come to try and define "It" for myself I am conscious of a deep horror and distrust. My head is above water, I am sane, but so powerful is the influence of the continual FEAR under which I live my days and nights, that even now I am afraid.

"It" is a protean thing. More often than not it is a horrible dread of that Delirium Tremens which I have never had, but ought to have had long ago. I have read up the symptoms until I know each one of them. When I am in a very nervous and excited condition—when, for example, I could not face anybody at all and must be alone in my room with my bottle of whiskey—I stare at the wall to see if rats or serpents are running up it. I peer into the corners of the library to detect sheeted corpses standing there. I do not see anything of the sort. Even the imaginings of my

fear cannot create them. I am, possibly, personally immune from Delirium Tremens, some people are. All the same, the fear of it racks me and tears me a hundred times a day. If it really seized me it surely would be almost enjoyable! Nothing, at any rate, can be more utterly dreadful than the continual apprehension.

Then I have another and always constant fear—these fears, I want to insist, are fantastically intermingled with all the crossings, wood-touchings and frantic calculations I have to do each minute of my life. The other fear is that of Prison.

Now I know perfectly well that I have done nothing in my life that could ever bring me near prison. All the same I cannot now hear a strange voice without a start of dread. A knock at the front door of my house unnerves me horribly. I open the door of whatever room I am in and listen with strained, furtive attention, slinking back and closing the door with a sob of relief when I realise that it is nothing more than the postman or the butcher's boy. I can hardly bear to read a novel now, because I so constantly meet with the word "arrest."

"He was arrested in the middle of his conversation,"—"She placed an arresting hand upon his arm." . . . These phrases which constantly occur in every book I read fill me with horror. A wild phantasmagoria of pictures passes through my mind. I see myself being led out of my house with gyves upon my wrists like the beastly poem Hood made upon "Eugene Aram." Then there is the drive into Wordingham in a cab. All the officials at the station who know me so well cluster round. I am put into a third class carriage and the blinds are pulled down. At St. Pancras, where I am also known, it is worse. The next day there is the Magistrate's Court and all the papers full of my affair. I know it is all fantastic nonsense—moonshine, wild dream. But it is so appallingly real to me that I sometimes long to have got the trial over and to be sitting with shaven head, wearing coarse prison clothes, in a lonely cell.

Then, I think to myself, I should really have peace. The worst would have happened and there would be an end of it all. There would be an end of deadly Fear.

I remember "——" telling me at Bruges, where so many *mauvais sujets* go to kill themselves with alcohol, that wherever he went, night and day, he was always afraid of a tiger that would suddenly appear. He had never experienced Delirium Tremens either. He knew how mad and fantastic this apprehension was but he was quite unable to get rid of it.

At other times I have the Folie de Grandeur.

My reading has told me that this is the sure sign of approaching General Paralysis. General paralysis means that one's brain goes, that one loses control of one's limbs and all acts of volition go. One is simply alive, that is all. One is alive and yet one is fed and pushed about, and put into this place or that as the entomologist would use a snail. So, in all my wild imaginings the grisly fear is never far away.

The imaginings are, in themselves, not without interest to a student of the dreadful thing I have become.

I always start from one point. That is that I have become suddenly enormously rich. I have invented all sorts of ways in which this might happen, but lately, in order to save trouble, and to have a base to start from I have arranged that Rockefeller, the American oil person, has been so intrigued by something that I have written that he presents me with two million pounds.

I start in the possession of two million pounds. I buy myself a baronetcy at once and I also purchase some historic estate. I live the life of the most sporting and beneficent country gentleman that ever was! I see myself correcting the bucolic errors of my colleagues on the Bench at Quarter Sessions. I am a Providence to all the labourers and small farmers. My name is acclaimed throughout the county of which I am almost immediately made Lord Lieutenant.

After about five minutes of this prospect I get heartily sick of it.

I buy a yacht then. It is as big as an Atlantic liner. I fit it up and make it the most perfect travelling palace the world has ever seen. I go off in it to sail round the globe—to see all the most beautiful things in the world, to suck the last drop of honey that the beauty of unknown seas, fairy continents, fortunate islands can yield. During this progress I am accompanied by charming and beautiful women. Some are intellectual, some are artistic—all are beautiful and charming. I, I myself, am the central star around which all this assiduous charm and loveliness revolve.

Another, and very favourite set of pictures, is the one in which I receive the two millions from Mr. Rockefeller—or whoever he is—and immediately make a public renunciation of it. With wise fore-thought I found great pensions for underpaid

clergy. I inaugurate societies by means of which authors who could do really artistic work, but are forced to pot-boil in order to live, may take a cheque and work out their great thoughts without any worldly embarrassments. I myself reserve one hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds a year and go and work among the poor in an East-end slum. At the same time I am most anxious that this great renunciation should be widely spoken of. I must be interviewed in all the papers. The disdainful nobility of my sacrifice for Christ's sake must be well advertised.

Indeed all my Folies de Grandeur are nothing else but exaggerated megalomania. I must be in the centre of the picture always. Spartan or Sybarite I must be glorified.

Another symptom which is very marked is that of spasmodic and superstitious prayer. When my heated brain falls away from its kaleidoscopic pictures of grandeur owing to sheer weariness; when my wire-tight nerves are strained to breaking point by the despotism of "touchings," the tyranny of "Thirteen" and "Seven," the nervous misery of the Sign of the Cross, I try to sum up all the ritual and to escape the whole welter of false obligation by spasmodic prayer. I suppose that I say "God-the-Father-help-me" about two or three hundred times a day. I shut my eyes and throw the failing consciousness of myself into the back of my head, and then I say it—in a sort of hot feverish horror, "God-the-Father-help-me." I vary this, too. When my thoughts or my actions have been more despicable than usual, I jerk up an appeal to God the Father. When fluid *sentiment* is round me it is generally Jesus on whom I call.

. . . I cannot write any more of this, it is too horrible even to write. But God knows how true it is!

This morning I went out for a walk. I was feeling wretchedly ill. I had to go to the Post Office and there I met little O'Donnell, the Rector, and dear old Medley his curate. It was torture to talk to them, to preserve an ordinary appearance. I felt that old Medley's eyes were on me the whole time. I like him very much. I know every corner of his good simple mind as if I had lived in it. He is a good man, and I can't help liking him. He dislikes and distrusts me intensely, however. He doesn't know enough—like Morton Sims for instance—to understand that I want to be good, that I am of his company really. The Rector himself was rather too charming. He fussed away about my poems, asked after Dorothy Davidson at Nice, purred out something that the Duke of Perth had said to him about the verses I had in the "Spectator" a month ago. Yet O'Donnell must know that I drink badly. Neither he nor Medley know, of course, how absolutely submerged I really am. No one ever realises that about a "man who drinks" until they read of his death in the paper. Only doctors, wives, experienced eyes know.

I funked Medley's keen old eyes in the Post Office and I couldn't help disgust at O'Donnell's humbug, as I thought it, though it may have been meant kindly. Curious! to fear one good man because he detects and reprobates one's wickedness, to feel contempt for another because he is civil.

I hurried away from them and went into the Mortland Royal Arms. Two strong whiskies gave myself back to me. I felt a stupid desire to meet the two clergymen again, with my nerves under proper control—to show them that I was myself.

Going back home, however, another nerve wave came over me. I knew how automatic and jerky my movements were really. I knew that each movement of my legs was dictated by a *conscious* exercise of command from the brain. I imagined that everyone I met—a few labourers—must know it and observe it also. I realise, now that I am safe in my study again, that this was nonsense. They couldn't have seen—or *could* they?

—I am sure of nothing now!

. . . It is half an hour ago since I wrote the last words. I began to feel quite drunk and giddy for a moment. I concentrated my intelligence upon the "Telegraph" until the lines became clear and I was appreciating what I read. Now I am fairly "possible" I think. Reading a passage in the leading article aloud seems to tell me that my voice is under control. My face twitched a little when I looked in the mirror over the mantel-shelf, but if I have a biscuit, and go to my room and sponge my face, I think that I shall be able to preserve sufficient grip on myself to see Mary for ten minutes now. Directly my eyes go wrong—I can feel when they are beginning to betray me—I will make an excuse and slip away. Then I'll lunch, and sleep till tea-time. After two cups of strong tea and the sleep, I shall be outwardly right for an hour at least. I might have tea taken up to her room and sit by the bed—if she

> doesn't want candles brought in. I can be quite all right in the dusk.

The next entry of these notes dates, from obvious evidence, three or four days afterwards. They are all written on the loose sheets of thick and highly glazed white paper, which Lothian, always sumptuous in the tools of his work, invariably used. It will be seen that the last paragraphs have, for a moment, strayed into a reminiscence of the hour. That is to say they have recorded not only continuous sensations, but those which were proper to an actual experience. The Notes do so no more. The closing paragraphs that are exhibited here once more fall back into the key of almost terrified interest with which this keen, incisive mind surveys its own ruin.

There are no more records of actual happenings.

Yet, nevertheless, while Gilbert Lothian was making this accurate diagnosis of his state, it is as well to remember that *there is no prognosis*.

He *refuses to look into the future*. He really refuses to give any indication of what is going on in the present. He puts down upon the page the symptoms of his disease. He catalogues the tortures he endures. But in regard to where his state is leading him in his life, what it is all going to result in, he says nothing whatever.

Psychologically this is absolutely corroborative and true.

He studies himself as a diseased subject and obviously takes a horrible pleasure in writing down all that he endures. But there are things and thoughts so terrible that even the most callous and most poisoned mind dare not chronicle them.

While the very last of what was Gilbert Lothian is finding an abnormal pleasure, and perhaps a terrible relief, in the surveyal of his extinguishing personality, the other self, the False Ego—the Fiend Alcohol—was busy with a far more dreadful business.

We may regard the excerpts already given, and the concluding ones to come, as really the last of Lothian—until his resurrection.

Sometimes a lamp upon the point of expiration flares up for a final second.

Then, with a splutter, it goes out. And in the circle of confining glass a dull red glow fades, disappears, and only an ugly, lifeless black circle of exhausted wick is left.

> I didn't mean in making these notes—confound Morton Sims that he should have suggested such a thing to me!—Well, I didn't mean to bring in any daily happenings. My only idea was, for a sort of pitiful satisfaction to myself, to make a record of what I am going through. It has been a relief to me—that is quite certain. While I have been writing these notes I have had some of the placidity and quiet that I used to know when I was engaged upon purely literary pursuits. I can't write now—that is to say, I can't create. My poetic faculty seems quite to have left me. I write certain letters, to a certain person, but they are no longer the artistic and literary productions that they were in the first stages of my acquaintance with this person.
>
> All the music that God gave me is gone out of me now.
>
> Well, even this relief is passing, I have more in my mind and heart than will allow me to continue this fugitive journal.

Here, obviously, Lothian makes a slight reference to the ghastly obsession which, at this time, must have had him well within its grip.

> Well, I will round it up with a few final words.

> One thing that strikes me with horror and astonishment is that I have become quite unable to understand how what I am doing, the fact of what I have become, hurts, wounds and makes other people unhappy. I try to put myself—sympathetically—in the place of those who are around me and who must necessarily suffer by my behaviour. *I can't do it.* When I try to do it my mind seems full of grey wool. The other people seem a hundred miles away. Their sentiments, emotions, wishes—their love for me . . .

It is significant that here Lothian uses the plural pronoun as if he was afraid of the singular.

> —dwindle to vanishing point. I used to be able to be sympathetic to the sorrows and troubles of almost everyone I met. I remember once after helping a man in this

village to die comfortably, after sitting with him for hours and hours and hours during the progress of a most loathsome disease after closing his eyes, paying for his poor burial and doing all I could to console his widow and his daughters, that the widow and the daughters spoke bitterly about me and my wife—who had been so good to them—because one of our servants had returned the cream they sent to the kitchen because it was of inferior quality. These poor women actually made themselves unpleasant. For a day at least I was quite angry. It seemed so absolutely ungrateful when my wife and I had done everything for them for so long. But, I remember quite well, how I thought out the whole petty little incident one night when I was out with Tumpany after the wild geese. We were waiting in a cold midnight when scurrying clouds passed beneath the moon. It was bitter cold and my gun barrels burnt like fire. I thought it out with great care, and on the icy marshes a sort of understanding of narrow brains and unimaginative natures came to me. The next day I told my servants to still continue taking cream from the widow, and I have been friendly and kind to her ever since.

But now, I can't possibly get into the mind of anyone else with sympathy.

I think only of myself, of my own desires, of my own state. . . .

Although I doubt it in my heart of hearts, I must put it upon record that I still have a curious and ineradicable belief that I can, by a mere effort of volition, get rid of all the horrors that surround me and become good and normal once more. When I descend into the deepest depths of all I am yet conscious of a little jerky, comfortable, confidential nudge from something inside me. "You'll be all right," it says. "When you want to stop you will be able to all right!" This false confidence, though I know it to be utterly false, never deserts me in moments of exhilarated drunkenness.

And finally, I add, that when my brain is becoming exhausted the last moment before stupor creeps over it, I constantly make the most supreme and picturesque pronunciations of my wickedness.

I could not pray the words aloud—or at least if I did they would be somewhat tumbled and incoherent—but I mentally pray them. I wring my hands, I abase my soul and mind, I say the Pater Noster and the Credo, I stretch out my hot hands, and I give it all up for ever and ever and ever.

I tumble into bed with a sigh of unutterable relief.

The Fiend that stands beside my bed on all ordinary nights assumes the fantastic aspect of an angel. I fall into my drunken sleep, murmuring that "there is joy in Heaven when one sinner repenteth."

I wake up in the morning full of evil thoughts, blear-eyed, and trembling. I am a mockery of humanity, longing, crying for poison.

There is only a dull and almost contemptuous memory of the religious ecstasies of the night before. My dreams, my confession, have not the slightest influence upon me. I don't fall again into ruining habits—I continue them, without restraint, without sorrow.

I will write no more. I am adding another Fear to all the other Fears. I have been making a true picture of what I am, and it is so awful that even my blinded eyes cannot bear to look upon it.

Thus these notes, in varying handwriting, indicating the ebb and flow of poison within the brain, cease and say no more.

At the bottom of the last page—which was but half filled by the concluding words of the Confession—there is something most terribly significant, most horrible to look at in the light of after events.

There is a greenish splash upon the glossy paper, obviously whiskey was spilt there.

Beginning in the area of the splashed circle, the ink running, a word of four letters is written.

Two letters are cloudy, the others sharp and clear.

The word is "Rita."

A little lower down, and now right at the bottom of the page, the word is repeated again in large

tremulous handwriting, three times. "Rita, Rita, Rita!"

The last "Rita" sprawls and tumbles towards the bottom right-hand corner of the page. Two exclamation marks follow it, and it is heavily underscored three times.

CHAPTER VII

INGWORTH REDUX: TOFTREES COMPLACENS

> "Les absents ont toujours tort."
>
> —*Proverb.*

Mr. Herbert Toftrees was at work in the splendidly furnished library of his luxuriously appointed flat at Lancaster Gate—or at least that is how he would have put it in one of his stories, while, before *her* Remington in the breakfast room Mrs. Herbert Toftrees would have rapped out a detailed description of the furniture.

The morning was dark and foggy. The London pavements had that disgustingly cold-greasy feeling beneath the feet that pedestrians in town know well at this time of year.

Within the library, with its double windows that shut out all noise, a bright fire of logs burned in the wide tiled hearth. One electric pendant lit the room and another burned in a silver lamp upon the huge writing table covered with crimson leather at which the author sat.

The library was a luxurious place. The walls were covered with books—mostly in series. The Complete Scott, the Complete Dickens, the Complete Thackeray reposed in gilded fatness upon the shelves. Between the door and one of the windows one saw every known encyclopedia, upon another wall-space were the shelves containing those classical French novels with which "culture" is supposed to have a nodding acquaintance—in translations.

Toftrees threw away his cigarette and sank into his padded chair. The outside world was raw and cold. Here, the fire of logs was red, the lamps threw a soft radiance throughout the room, and the keyboard of the writing-machine had a dapper invitation.

"Confound it, I *must* work," Toftrees said aloud, and at once proceeded to do so.

To his left, upon the table, in something like an exaggerated menu holder was a large piece of white cardboard. At the moment Toftrees and his wife were engaged in tossing off "Claire" which went into its fifth hundred thousand, at six-pence, within the year.

The sheet of cardboard bore the names of the principal characters in the story, and what they looked like, in case the prolific author should forget. There was also marked upon the card, in red ink, exactly how far Toftrees had got with the plot—which was copied out in large round hand, for instant reference, by his secretary upon another card.

Clipped on to the typewriter was a note which ran as follows:

> Chapter VII. Book V. Love scene between Claire and Lord Quinton. To run, say, 2,000 words. Find Biblical chapter caption. Mrs. T. at work on Chapter 145 in epilogue—discovery by Addie that Lord Q is really John Boone.

With experienced eyes, Toftrees surveyed the morning's work-menu as arranged by Miss Jones from painstaking scrutiny and dovetailing of the husband and wife's work on the preceding day.

"Biblical chapter caption"—that should be done at once.

Toftrees stretched out his hand and took down a "Cruden's Concordance." It was nearly two years ago now that he had discovered the Bible as an almost unworked mine for chapter headings.

"Love! hm, hm, hm,—why not 'Love one another'—? Yes, that would do. It was simple, direct, and expressed the sentiment of chapter VII. If there were any reason against it Miss Jones would spot it at once. She would find another quotation and so make it right."

Now then, to work!

> "Claire, I am leaving here the day after to-morrow."
>
> "Yes?"

"Have you no idea, cannot you guess what it is that I have come to say to you?" He moved nearer to her and for a moment rested his hand on her arm.

"I have no idea," she told him with great gravity of manner.

"I have come to ask you to be my wife. Ah, wait before you bid me be silent. I love you—you surely cannot have failed to see that?—I love you, Claire!"

"Do not," she interrupted, putting up a warning hand. "I cannot hear you."

"But you must. Forgive me, you shall. I love you as I never loved any woman in my life, and I am asking you to be my wife."

"You do me much honour, Lord Quinton," she returned—and was it his fancy that made it seem to him that her lips curled a little?—"but the offer you make me I must refuse."

"Refuse!" There was almost amusing wonder and a good deal of anger in his tone and look.

"You force me to repeat the word—refuse."

"And why?"

"I do not want to marry you."

"You do not love me?"—incredulously.

"I do not love you,"—colouring slightly.

"But I would teach you, Claire"—catching her arm firmly in his hold now and drawing her to him,—"I would teach you. I can give you all and more of wealth and luxury than——"

"Hush! And please let go my arm. If you could give me the world it would make no difference."

"Claire, reconsider it! During the whole of my life I have never really wanted to marry any other woman. I will own that I have flirted and played at love."

"No passport to my favour, I assure you, Lord Quinton."

"Pshaw! I tell you women were all alike to me, all to be amusing and amused with, all so many butterflies till I met you. I won't mind admitting"—making his most fatal step—"that even when I first saw you—and it was not easy to do considering Warwick Howard kept you well in the background—I only thought of your sweet eyes and lovely face. But after—after—Oh, Claire, I learned to love you!"

"Enough!" cried the girl—

And enough also said the Remington, for the page was at an end. Toftrees withdrew it with a satisfied smile and glanced down it.

"Yes!" he thought to himself, "the short paragraph, the quick conversation, that's what they really want. A paragraph of ten consecutive lines would frighten them out of their lives. Their minds wouldn't carry from the beginning to the end. We know!"

At that moment there was a knock at the door and the butler entered. Smithers was a good servant and he enjoyed an excellent place, but it was the effort of his life to conceal from his master and mistress that he read Shakespeare in secret, and, in that household, his sense of guilt induced an almost furtive manner which Toftrees could never quite understand.

"Mr. Dickson Ingworth has called, sir," said Smithers.

"Ask him to come in," Toftrees said in his deep voice, and with a glint of interest in his eye.

Young Dickson Ingworth had been back from his journalistic mission to Italy for two or three weeks. His articles in the "Daily Wire" had attracted a good deal of attention. They were exceedingly well done, and Herbert Toftrees was proud of his protégé. He did not know—no one knew—that the Denstone master on the committee was a young man with a vivid and picturesque style who had early realised Ingworth's incompetence as mouthpiece of the expedition and representative of the Press. The young gentleman in question, anxious only for the success of the mission, had written nearly all Ingworth's stuff for him, and that complacent parasite was now reaping the reward.

But there was another, and greater, reason for Toftrees' welcome. Old Mr. Ingworth had died while his nephew was in Rome. The young man was now a squire in Wiltshire, owner of a pleasant country house, a personage.

"Ask Mr. Dickson Ingworth in here," Toftrees said again.

Ingworth came into the library.

He wore a morning coat and carried a silk hat—the tweeds and bowler of bohemia discarded now. An unobtrusive watch chain of gold had taken the place of the old silver-buckled lip-strap, and a largish black pearl nestled in the folds of his dark tie.

He seemed, in some subtle way, to have expanded and become less boyish. A certain gravity and dignity sat well upon his fresh good looks and the slight hint of alien blood in his features was less noticeable than ever.

Toftrees shook his young friend warmly by the hand. The worthy author was genuinely pleased to see the youth. He had done him a good service recently, pleased to exercise patronage of course, but out of pure kindness. Ingworth would not require any more help now, and Toftrees was glad to welcome him in a new relation.

Toftrees murmured a word or two of sorrow at Ingworth's recent bereavement and the bereaved one replied with suitable gravity. His uncle's sudden death had been a great grief to him. He would have given much to have been in England at the time.

"And the end?" asked Toftrees in a low voice of sympathy.

"Quite peaceful, I am glad to say, quite peaceful."

"That must be a great consolation!"

This polite humbug disposed of, both men fell immediately into bright, cheerful talk.

The new young squire was bubbling over with exhilaration, plans for the future, the sense of power, the unaccustomed and delightful feeling of solidity and *security*.

He told his host, over their cigars, that the estate would bring him in about fifteen or sixteen hundred a year; that the house was a fine old Caroline building—who his neighbours were, and so on.

"Then I suppose you'll give up literature?" Toftrees asked.

Dickson Ingworth was about to assent in the most positive fashion to this question, when he remembered in whose presence he was, and his native cunning—"diplomacy" is the better word for a man with a Caroline mansion and sixteen hundred a year—came to his aid.

"Oh, no," he said, "not entirely. I couldn't, you know. But I shall be in a position now only to do my best work!"

Toftrees assented with pleasure. The trait interested him.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "To the artist, life without expression is impossible." Toftrees spoke quite sincerely. Although his own production was not of a high order he was quite capable of genuine appreciation of greater and more serious writers. It does not follow—as shallow thinkers tell us—that because a man does not follow his ideal that he is without one at all.

They smoked cigars and talked. As a matter of form the host offered Ingworth a drink, which was refused; they were neither of them men who took alcohol between meals from choice.

They chatted upon general matters for a time.

"And what of our friend the Poet?" Toftrees asked at length, with a slight sneer in his voice.

Ingworth flushed up suddenly and a look of hate came into his curious eyes. The acute man of the world noticed it in a second. Before Ingworth had left for his mission in Italy, he had been obviously changing his views about Gilbert Lothian. He had talked him over with Toftrees in a depreciating way. Even while he had been staying at Mortland Royal he had made confidences about Lothian's habits and the life of his house in letters to the popular author—while he was eating the Poet's salt.

But Toftrees saw now that there was something deeper at work. Was it, he wondered, the old story of benefits forgot, the natural instinct of the baser type of humanity to bite the hand that feeds?

Toftrees knew how lavish with help and kindness Lothian had been to Dickson Ingworth. For himself, he detested Lothian. The bitter epigrams Lothian had made upon him in a moment of drunken unconsciousness were by no means forgotten. The fact that Lothian had probably never meant them was nothing. They had some truth in them. They were uttered by a superior mind, they stung still.

"Oh, he's no friend of mine," Ingworth said in a bitter voice.

"Really? I know, of course, that you have disapproved of much that Mr. Lothian seems to be doing just now, but I thought you were still friends. It is a pity. Whatever he may do, there are elements

of greatness in the man."

"He is a blackguard, Toftrees, a thorough blackguard."

"I *am* sorry to hear that. Well, you needn't have any more to do with him, need you? He isn't necessary to your literary career any more. And even if you had not come into your inheritance, your Italian work has put you in quite a different position."

Ingworth nodded. He puffed quickly at his cigar. He was bursting with something, as the elder and shrewder man saw, and if he was not questioned he would come out with it in no time.

There was silence for a space, and, as Toftrees expected, it was broken by Ingworth.

"Look here, Toftrees," he said, "you are discreet and I can trust you."

The other made a grave inclination of his head—it was coming now!

"Very well. I don't want to say anything about a man whom I have liked, and who *has* been kind to me. But there are times when one really must speak, whatever the past may have been—aren't there?"

Toftrees saw the last hesitation and removed it.

"Oh, he'll get over that drinking habit," he said, though he knew well that Ingworth was not bursting with that alone. "It's bad, of course, that such a man should drink. I was horribly upset—and so was my wife—at that dinner at the Amberleys'. But he'll get over it. And after all you know—poets!"

"It isn't that, Toftrees. It's a good deal worse than that. In fact I really do want your advice."

"My dear fellow you shall have it. We are friends, I hope, though not of long standing. Fire away."

"Well, then, it's just this. Lothian's wife is one of the most perfect women I have ever met. She adores him. She does everything for him, she's clever and good looking, sympathetic and kind."

Toftrees made a slight, very slight, movement of repugnance. He was a man who was temperamentally well-bred, born into a certain class of life. He might make a huge income by writing for housemaids at sixpence, but old training and habit became alive. One did not listen to intimate talk about other men's wives.

But the impulse was only momentary, a result of heredity. His interest was too keen for it to last.

"Yes?"

"Lothian doesn't care a bit for his wife—he can't. I know all about it, and I've seen it. He's doing a most blackguardly thing. He's running after a girl. Not any sort of girl, but a *lady*."—

Toftrees grinned mentally, he saw how it was at once with the lad.

"No?" he said.

"Indeed, yes. She's a sweet and innocent girl whom he's getting round somehow or other by his infernal poetry and that. He's compromising her horribly and she can't see it. I've, I've seen something of her lately and I've tried to tell her as well as I could. But she doesn't take me seriously enough. She's not really in love with Lothian—I don't see how any young and pretty girl could really be in love with a man who looks like he's beginning to look. But they write—they've been about together in the most dreadfully compromising way. One never knows how far it may go. For the sake of the nicest girl I have ever known it ought to be put a stop to."

Toftrees smiled grimly. He knew who the girl was now, and he saw how the land lay. Young Ingworth was in love and frightened to death of his erstwhile friend's influence over the girl. That was natural enough.

"Suppose any harm were to come to her," Ingworth continued with something very like a break in his voice. "She's quite alone and unprotected. She is the daughter of a man who was in the Navy, and now she has to earn her own living as an assistant librarian in Kensington. A man like Lothian who can talk, and write beautiful letters—damned scoundrel and blackguard!"

Toftrees was not much interested in his young friend's stormy love-affairs. But he *was* interested in the putting of a spoke into Gilbert Lothian's wheel. And he had a genuine dislike and disgust of intrigue. A faithful husband to a faithful wife whose interests were identical with his, the fact of a married man of his acquaintance running after some little typewriting girl whose people were not alive to look after her, seemed abominable. Nice girls should not be used so. He thought of dodges and furtive meetings, sly telephone calls, and anxious country expeditions with a shudder. And if he thanked God that he was above these things, it was perhaps not a pharisaical gratitude that animated him.

"Look here," he said suddenly. "You needn't go on, Ingworth. I know who it is. It's Miss Wallace,

of the Podley Library. She was at the Amberleys' that night when Lothian made such a beast of himself. She writes a little, too. Very pretty and charming girl!"

Ingworth assented eagerly. "Yes!" he cried, "that's just it! She's clever. She's intrigued by Lothian. She doesn't *love* him, she told me so yesterday——"

He stopped, suddenly, realising what he had said.

Toftrees covered his confusion in a moment. Toftrees wanted to see this to the end.

"No, no," he said with assumed impatience. "Of course, she knows that Lothian is married, and, being a decent girl, she would never let her feelings—whatever they may be—run away with her. She's dazzled. That's what it is, and very natural, too! But it ought to be stopped. As a matter of fact, Ingworth, I saw them together at the Metropole at Brighton one night. They had motored down together. And I've heard that they've been seen about a lot in London at night. Most people know Lothian by sight, and such a lovely girl as Miss Wallace everyone looks at. From what I saw, and from what I've heard, they are very much in love with each other."

"It's a lie," Ingworth answered. "She's not in love with him. I know it! She's been led away to compromise herself, poor dear girl, that's all."

Now, Toftrees arose in his glory, so to speak.

"I'll put a stop to it," he said. The emperor of the sixpenny market was once more upon his virtuous throne.

His deep voice was rich with promise and power.

"I know Mr. Podley," he said. "I have met him a good many times lately. We are on the committee of the 'Pure Penny Literature Movement.' He is a thoroughly good and fatherly man. He's quite without culture, but his instincts are all fine. I will take him aside to-night and tell him of the danger—you are right, Ingworth, it is a real and subtle danger for that charming girl—that his young friend is in. Podley is her patron. She has no friends, no people, I understand. She is dependent for her livelihood upon her place at the Kensington Library. He will tell her, and I am sure in the kindest way, that she must not have anything more to do with our Christian poet, or she will lose her situation."

Ingworth thought for a moment. "Thanks awfully," he said, almost throwing off all disguise now. Then he hesitated—"But that might simply throw her into Lothian's arms," he said.

Toftrees shook his head. "I shall put it to Mr. Podley," he said, "and he, being receptive of other people's ideas and having few of his own, will repeat me, to point out the horrors of a divorce case, the utter ruin if Mrs. Lothian were to take action."

Ingworth rose from his seat.

"To-night?" he said. "You're to see this Podley to-night?"

"Yes."

"Then when do you think he will talk to Rit—to Miss Wallace?"

"I think I can ensure that he will do so before lunch to-morrow morning."

"You will be doing a kind and charitable thing, Toftrees," Ingworth answered, making a calculation which brought him to the doors of the Podley Institute at about four o'clock on the afternoon of the morrow.

Then he took his leave, congratulating himself that he had moved Toftrees to his purpose. It was an achievement! Rita would be frightened now, frightened from Gilbert for ever. The thing was already half done.

"Mine!" said Mr. Dickson Ingworth to himself as he got into a taxi-cab outside Lancaster Gate.

"I think I shall cook master Lothian's goose very well to-night," Herbert Toftrees thought to himself.

Mixed motives on both sides.

Half bad, perhaps, half good. Who shall weigh out the measures but God?

Ingworth was madly in love with Rita Wallace, who had become very fond of him. He was young, handsome, was about to offer her advantageous and honourable marriage.

Ingworth's passion was quite good and pure. Here he rose above himself. "All's fair"—treacheries grow small when they assist one's own desire and can be justified upon the score of morality as well.

Toftrees was outside the fierce burning of flames beyond his comprehension.

He was a cog-wheel in the machinery of this so swiftly-weaving loom.

But he also paid himself both ways—as he felt instinctively.

He and his wife owed this upstart and privately disreputable poet a rap upon the knuckles. He would administer it to-night.

And it was a *duty*, no less than a fortunate opportunity, to save a good and charming girl from a scamp.

When Toftrees told his wife all about it at lunch that morning she quite agreed, and, moreover, gave him valuable feminine advice as to the conduct of the private conversation with Podley.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMNESIC DREAM-PHASE

> "In the drunkenness of the chronic alcoholic the higher brain centres are affected more readily and more profoundly than the rest of the nervous system, with the result that the drinker, despite the derangement of his consciousness, is capable of apparently deliberate and purposeful acts. It is in this dream-state, which may last a considerable time, that the morbid impulses of the alcoholic are most often carried into effect."
>
> *The Criminology of Alcoholism* by William C. Sullivan, M.D., Medical Officer H.M. Prison Service.

> "The confirmed toper, who is as much the victim of drug-habit as the opium eater, may have amnesic dream phases, during which he may commit automatically offensive acts while he is mentally irresponsible."
>
> *Medico-Legal Relations of Alcoholism* by Stanley B. Atkinson, M.A., M.B., B.Sc. Barrister at Law.

At nine o'clock one evening Lothian went into his wife's room. It was a bitterly cold night and a knife-like wind was coming through the village from the far saltings. There was a high-riding moon but its light was fitful and constantly obscured by hurrying clouds.

Mary was lying in bed, patiently and still. She was not yet better. Dr. Heywood was a little puzzled at her continued listlessness and depression.

A bright fire glowed upon the hearth and sent red reflections upon the bedroom ceiling. A shaded candle stood upon the bedside table, and there were also a glass of milk, some grapes in a silver dish, and the "Imitatio Christi" there.

Lothian was very calm and quiet in demeanour. His wife had noticed that whenever he came to see her during the last two or three days, there had been an unusual and almost drowsy tranquillity in his manner. His hands shook no more. His movements were no longer jerky. They were deliberate, like those of an ordinary and rather ponderous man.

And now, too, Gilbert's voice had become smooth and level. The quick and pleasant vibration of it at its best, the uneasy rise and fall of it at its worst, had alike given place to a suave, creamy monotone which didn't seem natural.

The face, also, enlarged and puffed by recent excesses, had further changed. The redness had gone from the skin. Even the eyes were bloodshot no longer. They looked fish-like, though. They had a steady introspective glare about them. The lips were red and moist, in this new and rather horrible face. The clear contour and moulding were preserved, but a quiet dreamy smile lurked about and never left them.

. . ."Gilbert, have you come to say goodnight?"

"Yes, dear,"—it *was* an odd purring sort of voice—"How do you feel?"

"Not very well, dear. I am going to try very hard to sleep to-night. You're rather early in coming, are you not?"

"Yes, dear, I am. But the moon and the tides are right to-night and the wild duck are flighting. I am going out after widgeon to-night. I ought to do well."

"Oh, I see. I hope you'll have good luck, dear."

"I hope so. Oh, and I forgot, Mary, I thought of going off for three days to-morrow, down towards the Essex coast. I should take Tumpany. I've had a letter from the Wild Fowlers' Association man there to say that the geese are already beginning to come over. Would you mind?"

Mary saw that he had already made up his mind to go—for some reason or other.

"Yes, go by all means, dear," she said, "the change and the sport will do you good."

"You will be all right?"—how soapy and mechanical that voice was. . . .

"Oh, of course I shall. Don't think a *bit* about me. Perhaps—" she hesitated for a moment and then continued with the most winning sweetness—"perhaps, Gillie darling, it will buck you up so that you won't want to . . ."

The strange voice that was coming from him dried the longing, loving words in her throat.

"Well, then, dear, I shall say good-bye, now. You see I shall be out most of this night, and if Tumpany and I are to catch the early train from Wordingham and have all the guns ready, we must leave here before you will be awake. I mean, you sleep into the morning a little now, don't you?"

He seemed anxious as he asked.

"Generally, Gillie. Then if it is to be good-bye for two days, good-bye my dear, dear husband. Come——"

She held out her arms, lying there, and he had to bend into her embrace.

"I shall pray for you all the time you are away," she whispered. "I shall think of my boy every minute. God bless you and preserve you, my dear husband."

She was doubtless about to say more, to murmur other words of sacred wifely love, when her arms slid slowly away from him and lay motionless upon the counterpane.

Immediately they did so, the man's figure straightened itself and stood upright by the side of the bed.

"Well, I'll go now," he said. "Good-night, dear."

He turned his full, palish face upon her, the yellow point of flame, coming through the top of the candle shade, showed it in every detail.

Fixed, introspective eyes, dreamy painted smile, a suave, uninterested farewell.

The door closed gently behind him. It was closed as a bland doctor closes a door.

Mary lay still as death.

The room was perfectly silent, save for the fall of a red coal in the fire or the tiny hiss and spurt of escaping gas in thin pencils of old gold and amethyst.

Then there came a loud sound into the room.

It was a steady rhythmic sound, muffled but alarming. It seemed to fill the room.

In a second or two more Mary knew that it was only her heart beating.

"But I am frightened," she said to herself. "I am really frightened. This is FEAR!"

And Fear it was, such as this clear soul had not known. This daughter of good descent, with serene, temperate mind and body, had ever been high poised above gross and elemental fear.

To her, as to the royal nature of her friend Julia Daly, God had early given a soul-guard of angels.

Now, for the first time in her life, Mary knew Fear. And she knew an unnameable disgust also. Her heart drummed. The back of her throat grew hot—hotter than her fever made it. And, worse, a thousand times more chilling and dreadful, she felt as if she had just been holding something cold and evil in her arms.

. . . The voice was unreal and almost incredible. The waxen mask with its set eyes and the small, fine mouth caught into a fixed smile—oh! this was not her husband!

She had been speaking with some *Thing*. Some *Thing*, dressed in Gilbert's flesh had come smirking into her quiet room. She had held it in her arms and prayed for it.

Drum, drum!—She put her left hand, the hand with the wedding ring upon it, over the madly throbbing heart.

And then, in her mind, she asked for relief, comfort, help.

The response was instant.

Her life had always been so fragrant and pure, her aims so single-hearted, her delight in goodness and her love of Jesus so transparently immanent, that she was far nearer the Veil than most of us can ever get.

She asked, and the amorphous elemental things of darkness dissolved and fled before heavenly radiance. The Couriers of the Wind of the Holy-Ghost came to her with the ozone of Paradise beating from their wings.

Doubtless it was now that some Priest-Angel gave Mary Lothian that last Viaticum which was to be denied to her from the hands of any earthly Priest.

It was a week ago that Mr. Medley had brought the Blessed Sacrament to Mary. It was seven days since she had thus met her Lord.

But He was with her now. Already of the Saints, although she knew it not, a Cloud of Witnesses surrounded her.

Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven were loving her, waiting for her.

Lothian went along the corridor to the library, which was on the first floor of the house. His footsteps made no noise upon the thick carpet. He walked softly, resolutely, as a man that had much to do.

The library was not a large room but it was a very charming one. A bright fire burned upon the hearth. Two comfortable saddle-back chairs of olive-coloured leather stood on either side of it, and there was a real old "gate-table" of dark oak set by one of the chairs with a silver spirit-stand upon it.

Along all one side, books rose to the ceiling, his beloved friends of the past, in court-dress of gold and damson colour, in bravery of delicate greens; in leather which had been stained bright orange, some of them; while others showed like crimson aldermen and red Lord Mayors.

Let into the wall at the end of the room—opposite to the big Tudor window—was the glass-fronted cupboard in which the guns were kept. The black-blue barrels gleamed in rows, the polished stocks caught the light from the candles upon the mantel-shelf. The huge double eight-bore like a shoulder-cannon ranked next to the pair of ten-bores by Greener. Then came the two powerful twelve-gauge guns by Tolley, chambered for three inch shells and to which many geese had fallen upon the marshes. . . .

Lothian opened the glass door and took down one of the heavy ten-bores from the rack.

He placed it upon a table, opened a cupboard, took out a leather cartridge bag and put about twenty "perfect" cases of brass, loaded with "smokeless diamond" and "number four" shot, into the bag.

Then he rang the bell.

"Tell Tumpany to come up," he said to Blanche who answered the summons.

Presently there was a somewhat heavy lurching noise as the ex-sailor came up the stairs and entered the library with his usual scrape and half-salute.

Tumpany was not drunk, but he was not quite sober. He was excited by the prospect of the three days' sport in Essex and he had been celebrating the coming treat in the Mortland Royal Arms. He had enjoyed beer in the kitchen of the old house—by Lothian's orders.

"Now be here by seven sharp to-morrow, Tumpany," Lothian said, still in his quiet level voice. "We must catch the nine o'clock from Wordingham without fail. I'm going out for an hour or two on the marshes. The widgeon are working over the West Meils with this moon and I may get a shot or two."

"Cert'nly, sir. Am I to come, sir?"

"No, I think you had better go home and get to bed. You've a long day before you to-morrow. I shan't be out late."

"Very good, sir. You'll take Trust? Shall I go and let him out?"

Lothian seemed to hesitate, while he cast a shrewd glance under his eyelids at the man.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked. "I ought to be able to pick up any birds I get myself in this light, and on the West Meils. I shan't stay out long either. You see, Trust has to go with us to-morrow and he's always miserable in the guard's van. He'll have to work within a few hours of

our arrival and I thought it best to give him as much rest as possible beforehand. He isn't really necessary to me to-night. But what do you think?"

Tumpany was flattered—as it was intended that he should be flattered—at his advice being asked in this way. He agreed entirely with his master.

"Very well then. You'd better go down again to the kitchen. I'll be with you in ten minutes. Then you can walk with me to the marsh head and carry the bag."

Tumpany scrambled away to kitchen regions for more beer.

Lothian walked slowly up and down the library. His head was falling forward upon his chest. He was thinking, planning.

Every detail must be gone into. It was always owing to neglect of detail that things fell through, that *things* were found out. Nemesis waited on the failure of fools!

A week ago the word "Nemesis" would have terrified him and sent him into the labyrinth of self-torture—crossings, touchings, and the like.

Now it meant nothing.

Yes: that was all right. Tumpany would accompany him to the end of the village—the farthest end of the village from the "Haven"—there could be no possible idea. . . .

Lothian nodded his head and then opened a drawer in the wall below the gun cupboard. He searched in it for a moment and withdrew a small square object wrapped in tissue paper.

It was a spare oil-bottle for a gun-case.

The usual oil-receptacle in a gun-case is exactly like a small, square ink-bottle, though with this difference; when the metal top is unscrewed, it brings with it an inch long metal rod, about the thickness of a knitting needle but flattened at the end.

This is used to take up beads of oil and apply them to the locks, lever, and ejector mechanisms of a gun.

Lothian slipped the thing into a side pocket of his coat.

In a few minutes, dressed in warm wildfowling clothes of grey wool and carrying his gun, he was tramping out of the long village street with Tumpany.

The wind sang like flying arrows, the dark road was hard beneath their feet.

They came to Tumpany's cottage and little shop, which were on the outskirts of the village.

Then Lothian stopped.

"Look here," he said, "you can give me the bag now. There really isn't any need for you to come to the marsh head with me, Tumpany.—Much better get to bed and be fresh for to-morrow."

The man was nothing loth. The lit window of his house invited him.

"Thank you, sir," he said, sobered now by the keen night wind, "then I'll say good-night."

—"Night Tumpany."

"G'night, sir."

Lothian tramped away into the dark.

The sailor stood for a moment with his hand upon the latch of his house door, listening to the receding footsteps.

"What's wrong with him?" he asked himself. "He speaks different like. Yesterday morning old Trust seemed positive afraid of him! Never saw such a thing before! And to-night he seems like a stranger somehow. I felt queer, in a manner of speaking, as I walked alongside of him. But what a bloody fool I am!" Tumpany concluded, using the richest adjective he knew, as his master's footsteps died away and were lost.

In less than ten minutes Lothian stood upon the edge of the vast marshes.

It was a ghostly place and hour. The wind wailed over the desolate miles like a soul sick for the love it had failed to win in life. The wide creeks with their cliff-like sides of black mud were brimming with sullen tidal water, touched here and there by faint moonbeams—lemon colour on lead.

Night birds passed high over head with a whistle of wings, heard, but not seen in the gloom. From distant Wordingham to far Blackney beyond which were the cliffs of Sherringham and Cromer, for twelve miles or more, perhaps not a dozen human beings were out upon the marshes.

A few bold wildfowlers in their frail punts with the long tapering guns in the bows, might be "setting to birds"; enduring the bitter cold, risking grave danger, and pursuing the wildest and most wary of living things with supreme endurance throughout the night.

Once the wind brought two deep booms to Lothian. His trained ear knew and located the sound at once. One of the Wordingham fowlers was out upon the flats three miles away, and had fired his double eight-bore, the largest shoulder gun that even a strong man can use.

But the saltings were given over to the night and the things of the night.

The plovers called, "'Tis dark and late." "'Tis late and dark."

The wind sobbed coldly; wan clouds sped to hood the moon with darkness. Brown hares crouched among the coarse marrum grasses, the dun owls were afloat upon the air, sounding their oboe notes, and always the high unseen flight of whistling ducks went on all over the desolate majesty of the marshes.

And beyond it all, through it all, could be heard the hollow organs of the sea.

Lothian was walking rapidly. His breathing was heavy and muffled. He skirted the marsh and did not go upon it, passing along the grass slope of foreshore which even a full marsh tide never conquered; going back upon his own trail, parallel to the village.

There were sharp pricking pains in his knees and ankles. Hot sweat clotted his clothes to his body and rained down his face. But he was unaware of this. His alarming physical condition was as nothing.

He went on through the dark, hurriedly, like a man in ambush.

Now and then he stumbled at inequalities of the ground or caught his foot in furze roots. Obscene words escaped him when this happened. They burst from between the hot cracked lips, mechanical and thin. The weak complaints of some poor filthy-minded ghost!

He knew nothing of what he said.

But with knife-winds upon his face, thin needles in his joints; sodden flesh quivering with nervous tremors and wet with warm brine, he went onwards with purpose.

He was in the Amnesic Dream-phase.

Every foul and bestial impulse which is hidden in the nature of man was riotous and awake.

The troglodytes showed themselves at last.

All the unnameable, unthinkable things that lie deep below the soul, far below the conscience, in the lowest and sealed cellars of personality, had burst from their hidden prisons.

The Temple of the Holy Ghost was full of the squeaking, gibbering Powers of utmost, nethermost Hell.

—These are similes which endeavour to hint at the frightful Truth.

Science sums it up in a simple statement. Lothian was now in "The Amnesic dream-phase."

He came to where a grass road bounded by high hedges led down to the foreshore.

Crouching under the sentinel hedge of the road's end, he lit a match and looked at his watch.

It was fifteen minutes past ten o'clock.

Old Phœbe Hannett and her daughter, the servants of Morton Sims at the "Haven," would now be fast in slumber. Christopher, the doctor's personal servant, was in Paris with his master.

The Person who walked in a Dream turned up the unused grass-grown road.

He was now at the East end of the village.

The path brought him out upon the highroad a hundred yards above the rectory, Church, and the schools. From there it was a gentle descent to the very centre of the village, where the "Haven" was.

There were no lights nor lamp-posts in the village. By now every one would be gone to bed. . . .

There came a sudden sharp chuckle into the night. Something was congratulating itself with glee that it had put water-boots with india-rubber soles upon its feet; noiseless soles that would make no sound upon the gravelled ways about the familiar house that had belonged to Admiral Custance.

. . . Lothian lifted the latch of the gate which led to the short gravel-drive of the "Haven" with delicate fingers. An expert handles a blown bird's-egg so.

It rose. It fell. Not a crack came from the slowly-pushed gate which fell back into its place with no noise, leaving the night-comer inside.

The gables of the house rose black and stark against the sky. The attic-windows where old dame Hannett and her daughter slept were black. They were fast in sleep now.

The night-intruder set his gun carefully against the stone pillar of the gate. Then he tripped over the pneumatic lawns before the house with almost a dance in his step.

He frisked over the lawns, avoiding the chocolate patches that meant flower-beds, with complacent skill.

Just then no clouds obscured the moon, which rode high before the advancing figure.

A fantastic shadow followed Lothian, coquetting with the flower beds, popping this way and that, but ever at his heels.

It threw itself about in swimming areas of grey vagueness and then concentrated itself into a black patch with moving outlines.

There was an ecstasy about this dancing shadow.

And now, the big building which had been a barn and which Admiral Custance had re-built and put to various uses, cut wedge-like into the lit sky.

The Shadow crept close to the Dream Figure and crouched at its heels.

It seemed to be spurring that figure on, to be whispering in its ear. . . .

We know all about the Dream Figure. Through the long pages of this chronicle we have learned how, and of what, It has been born.

And were it not that experts of the Middle Age—when Demonology was a properly recognised science—have stated that a devil has never a shadow, we should doubtless have been sure that it was our old friend, the Fiend Alcohol, that contracted and expanded with such fantastic measures over the moon-lit grass.

Lothian knew his way well about this domain.

Admiral Custance had been his good friend. Often in the old sailor's house, or in Lothian's, the two had tippled together and drank toasts to the supremacy which Queen Britannia has over the salt seas.

The lower floor of the barn had been used as a box-room for trunks and a general store-house, though the central floor-space was made into a court for Badminton; when nephews and nieces, small spars of Main and Mizzen and the co-lateral Yardarms, came to play upon a retired quarter-deck.

The upper floor had ever been sacred to the Admiral and his hobbies.

From below, the upper region was reached by a private stairway of wood outside the building. Of this entrance the sailor had always kept the key. A little wooden balcony ran round the angle of the building to where, at one end, a large window had been built in the wall.

Lothian went up the outside stairs noiselessly as a cat, and round the little gallery to the long window. Here he was in deep shadow.

The two leaves of the window did not quite meet. The wood had shrunk, the whole affair was rickety and old.

As he had anticipated, the night-comer had no difficulty in pushing the blade of his shooting knife through the crevice and raising the simple catch.

He stepped into the room, long empty and ghostly.

First, he closed the window again, and then let down the blue blind over it. A skylight in the sloped roof provided all the other light. Through this, now, faint and fleeting moonlights fell.

By the gallery door there was a mat. Lothian stepped gingerly to it and wiped the india-rubber boots he wore.

Then he took half a wax candle from a side-pocket and lit it. It was quite impossible that the light could be seen from outside, even if spectators there were, in the remote slumbering village.

In the corners of the long room, black-velvet shadows lurked as the yellow candle flame moved.

A huge spider with a body as big as sixpence ran up one canvas-covered wall. Despite the cold,

the air was lifeless and there was a very faint aroma of chemical things in it.

On all sides were long deal tables covered with a multiplicity of unusual objects.

Under a big bell of glass, popped over it to keep the dust away, was a large microscope of intricate mechanism. Close by was a section-cutter that could almost make a paring of a soul for scrutiny. Leather cases stood here and there full of minute hypodermic syringes, and there was a box of thin glass tubes containing agents for staining the low protoplasmic forms of life which must be observed by those who wish to arm the world against the Fiend Alcohol.

At the far end of the room, on each side of the fireplace were two glass-fronted cupboards, lined with red baize. In one of them Admiral Custance had kept his guns.

These cupboards had been constructed by the village carpenter—who had also made the gun cupboard in Lothian's library. They were excellent cupboards and with ordinary locks and keys—the Mortland Royal carpenter, indeed, buying these accessories of his business of one pattern, and by the gross, from Messrs. Pashwhip and Moger's iron-mongery establishment in Wordingham.

Lothian took the key of his own gun cupboard from his waistcoat pocket. It fitted the hole of the cupboard here—on the right side of the fireplace, exactly as he had expected.

The glass doors swung open with a loud crack, and the contents on the shelves were clearly exposed to view.

Lothian set his candle down upon the edge of an adjacent table and thought for a moment.

During their intimate conversations—before Lothian's three weeks in London with Rita Wallace, while his wife was at Nice, Dr. Morton Sims had explained many things to him. The great man had been pleased to find in a patient, in an artist also, the capability of appreciating scientific truth and being interested in the methods by which it was sought.

Lothian knew therefore, that Morton Sims was patiently following and extending the experiments of Professor Fraenkel at his laboratory in Halle, varying the investigation of Deléarde and carrying it much farther.

Morton Sims was introducing alcohol into rabbits and guinea pigs, sub-cutaneously or into the stomach direct, exhibiting the alcohol in well-diluted forms and over long periods. He was then inoculating these alcoholised subjects, and subjects which had not been alcoholised, with the bacilli of consumption—tubercle bacilli—and diphtheria toxin—the poison produced by the diphtheria bacillus.

He was endeavouring to obtain indisputable evidence of increased susceptibility to infection in the animal body under alcoholic influences.

Of all this, Lothian was thoroughly aware. He stood now—if indeed it *was* Gilbert Lothian the poet who stood there—in front of an open cupboard; the cupboard he had opened by secrecy and fraud.

Upon those shelves, as he well knew, organic poisons of immeasurable potency were resting.

In those half-dozen squat phials of glass, surrounded with felt and with curious stoppers, an immense Death was lurking.

All the quick-firing guns of the navies of the world were not so powerful as one of these little glass receptacles.

The breath came thick and fast from the intruder. It went up in clouds from his heated body; vapourised into steam which looked yellow in the candlelight.

After a minute he drew near to the cupboard.

A trembling, exploring finger pushed among the phials. It isolated one.

Upon a label pasted on the glass, were two words in Greek characters, "διφθ. ποξιν."

Here, in this vessel of gelatinous liquid, lurked the destroying army of diphtheria bacilli, millions strong.

The man held up the candle and its light fell full upon the neat cursive Greek, so plain for him to read.

He stared at it with focussed eyes. His head was pushed forward a little and oscillated slowly from side to side. The sweat ran down it and fell with little splashes upon the floor.

Then his hand began to tremble and the light flickered and danced in the recesses of the cupboard.

He turned away, shaking, and set the candle end upon the table. It swayed, toppled over, flared for a moment and went out.

But he could not wait to light it again. His attendant devil was straying, he must be called back . . . to help.

Lothian plunged his hand into his breast pocket and withdrew a flat flask of silver. It was full of undiluted whiskey.

He took a long steady pull, and the fire went through him instantly.

With firm fingers now, he screwed on the top of the flask and re-lit the candle stump. Then he took the marked phial from the cupboard shelf and set it on the table.

From a side pocket he took the little oil-bottle belonging to a travelling gun-case and unscrewed the top of that.

And now, with cunning knowledge, he takes the thick, grey woollen scarf from his neck and drenches a certain portion of its folds with raw whiskey from his flask. He binds the muffler round the throat and nose in such fashion that the saturated portion confines all the outlets of his breathing.

One must risk nothing one's self when one plays and conjures with the spawn and corruptions of death!

. . . It is done, done with infinite nicety and care—no trembling fingers now.

The vial is unstopped, the tube within has poured a drop or two of its contents into the oil-bottle, the projecting needle of which is damp with death.

The cupboard is closed and locked again. Ah! there is candle grease upon the table! It is scraped up, to the minutest portion, with the blade of the shooting knife.

Then he is out upon the balcony again. One last task remains. It is to close the long windows so that the catch will fall into its rusty holder and no trace be left of its ever having been opened.

This is not easy. It requires preparation, dexterity and thought. Cunning fingers must use the thin end of the knife to bend the little brass bracket which is to receive the falling catch. It must be bent outwards, and in the bending a warning creak suggests that the screws are parting from the rotten wood.

But it is done at last, surely dexterously. No gentlemanly burglar of the magazines could have done it better.

. . . There is no moon now. It is necessary to feel one's way in silence over the lawn and reach the outer gate.

This is done successfully, the Fiend is a good quick valet-fiend to-night and aids at every point.

The gate is closed with a gentle "click," there is only the "pad, pad" of the night-comer's footsteps passing along the dark village street towards the Old House with poison in his pocket and murder in his heart.

Outside his own gate, Lothian's feet assume a brisk and confidential measure. He rattles the latch of the drive gate and tries to whistle in a blithe undertone.

Bedroom windows may be open, it will be as well that his low, contented whistle—as of one returning from healthy night-sport—may be heard.

His lips are too cracked and salt to whistle, however. He tries to hum the burden of a song, but only a faint "croak, croak," sounds in the cold, quiet night—for the wind has fallen now.

Not far away, behind the palings of his little yard, The Dog Trust whines mournfully.

Once he whines, and then with a full-throat and opened muzzle Dog Trust bays the moon behind its cloud-pall.

When he hears the footfall of one he knows and loves, Dog Trust greets it with low, anxious whines.

He is no watch-dog. His simple duties are unvaried from the marsh and field. Growl of hostility to night-comers he knows not. His faithful mind has been attuned to no reveillé note.

But he howls mournfully now.

The step he hears is like no step he knows. Perhaps, who can say? the dim, untutored mind discerns dimly something wicked, inimical and hostile approaching the house.

So The Dog Trust howls, stands for a moment upon his cold concrete sniffing the night air, and

then with a sort of shudder plunges into the warm straw of his kennel.

Deep sleep broods over the Poet's house.

The morning was one of those cold bright autumn days without a breath of wind, which have an extraordinary exhilaration for every one.

The soul, which to the majority of folk is like an invisible cloud anchored to the body by a thin thread, is pulled down by such mornings. It reenters flesh and blood, reanimates the body, and sounds like a bugle in the mind.

Tumpany, his head had been under the pump for a few minutes, arrived fresh and happy at the Old House.

He was going away with The Master upon a Wild-fowling expedition. In Essex the geese were moving this way and that. There was an edge upon anticipation and the morning.

In the kitchen Phœbe and Blanche partook of the snappy message of the hour.

The guns were all in their cases. A pile of pigskin luggage was ready for the four-wheel dogcart.

"Perhaps when the men are out of the way for a day or two, Mistress will have a chance to get right. . . . Master said good-bye to Mistress last night, didn't he?" the cook said to Blanche.

"Yes, but he may want to go in again and disturb her."

"I don't believe he will. She's asleep now. Those things Dr. Heywood give her keep her quiet. But still you'd better go quietly into her room with her morning milk, Blanche. If she's asleep, just leave it there, so she'll find it when she wakes up."

"Very well, cook, I will," the housemaid said—"Oh, there's that Tumpany!"

Tumpany came into the kitchen. He wore his best suit. He was quite dictatorial and sober. He spoke in brisk tones.

"What are you going to do, my girl?" he said to Blanche in an authoritative voice.

"Hush, you silly. Keep quiet, can't you?" Phœbe said angrily. "Blanche is taking up Mistress' milk in case she wakes."

"Where's master, then?"

"Master is in the library. He'll be down in a minute."

"Can I go up to him, cook? . . . There's something about the guns——"

"No. You can *not*, Tumpany. But Blanche will take any message.—Blanche, knock at the library door and say Tumpany wants to see Master. But do it quietly. Remember Missis is sleeping at the other end of the passage."

As Blanche went up the stairs with her tray, the library door was open, and she saw her master strapping a suit case. She stopped at the open door.

—"Please, sir, Tumpany wants to speak to you."

Lothian looked up. It was almost as if he had expected the housemaid.

"All right," he said. "He can come up in a moment. What have you got there—oh? The milk for your Mistress. Well, put it down on the table, and tell Tumpany to come up. Bring him up yourself, Blanche, and make him be quiet. We mustn't risk waking Mistress."

The housemaid put the tray down upon the writing table and left the room, closing the door after her.

It had hardly swung into place when Lothian had whipped open a drawer in the table.

Standing upon a pile of note-paper with its vermilion heading of "The Old House, Mortland Royal" was a square oil bottle with its silver plated top.

In a few twists of firm and resolute fingers, the top was loosened. The man took the bottle from the drawer and set it upon the tray, close to the glass of milk.

Then, with infinite care, he slowly withdrew the top.

The flattened needle which depended from it was damp with the dews of death. A tiny bead of crystalline liquid, no bigger than a pin's head, hung from the slanting point.

Lothian plunged the needle into the glass of milk, moving it this way and that.

He heard footsteps on the stairs, and with the same stealthy dexterity he replaced the cap of the

bottle and closed the drawer.

He was lighting a cigarette when Blanche knocked and entered, followed by Tumpany.

"What is it, Tumpany?" he said, as the maid once more took up her tray and left the room with it.

"I was thinking, sir, that we haven't got a cleaning rod packed for the ten-bores. I quite forgot it. The twelve-bore rods won't reach through thirty-two-and-a-half barrels. And all the cases are strapped and locked now, sir. You've got the keys."

"By Jove, no, we never thought of it. But those two special rods I had made at Tolley's—where are they?"

"Here, sir," the man answered going to the gun-cupboard.

"Oh, very well. Unscrew one and stick it in your pocket. We can put it in the case when we're in the train. It's a corridor train, and when we've started you can come along to my carriage and I'll give you the key of the ten-bore case."

"Very good, sir. The trap's come. I'll just take this suit case down and then I'll get Trust. He can sit behind with me."

"Yes. I'll be down in a minute."

Tumpany plunged downstairs with the suit case. Lothian screwed up the bottle in the drawer and, holding it in his hand, went to his bedroom.

He met Blanche in the corridor.

"Mistress is fast asleep, sir," the pleasant-faced girl said, "so I just put her milk on the table and came out quietly."

"Thank you, Blanche. I shall be down in a minute."

In his bedroom, Lothian poured water into the bowl upon the washstand and shook a few dark red crystals of permanganate of potash into the water, which immediately became a purplish pink.

He plunged his hands into this water, with the little bottle, now tightly stoppered again, in one of them.

For two minutes he remained thus. Then he withdrew his hands and the bottle, drying them on a towel.

. . . There was no possible danger of infection now. As for the bottle, he would throw it out of the window of the train when he was a hundred miles from Mortland Royal.

He came out into the corridor once more. His face was florid and too red. Close inspection would have disclosed the curiously bruised look of the habitual inebriate. But, in his smart travelling suit of Harris tweed, with well-brushed hair, white collar and the "bird's eye" tie that many country gentlemen affect, he was passable enough.

A dreamy smile played over his lips. His eyes—not quite so bloodshot this morning—were drowsed with quiet thought.

As he was about to descend the stairs he turned and glanced towards a closed door at the end of the passage.

It was the door of Mary's room and this was his farewell to the wife whose only thought was of him, with whom, in "The blessed bond of board and bed" he had spent the happy years of his first manhood and success.

A glance at the closed door; an almost complacent smile; after all those years of holy intimacy this was his farewell.

As he descended the stairs, the Murderer was humming a little tune.

The two maid servants were in the hall to see him go. They were fond of him. He was a kind and generous master.

"You're looking much better this morning, sir," said Phœbe. She was pretty and privileged. . . .

"I'm feeling very well, Phœbe. This little trip will do me a lot of good, and I shall bring home lots of birds for you to cook. Now mind both you girls look after your Mistress well. I shall expect to see her greatly improved when I return. Give her my love when she wakes up. Don't forward any letters because I am not certain where I shall be. It will be in the Blackwater neighbourhood, Brightlingsea, or I may make my headquarters at Colchester for the three days. But I can't be quite sure. I shall be back in three days."

"Good morning, sir. I hope you'll have good sport."

"Thank you, Phœbe—that's right, Tumpany, put Trust on the seat first and then get up yourself—what's the matter with the dog?—never saw him so shy. No, James, you drive—all right?—Let her go then."

The impatient mare in the shafts of the cart pawed the gravel and was off. The trap rolled out of the drive as Lothian lit a cigar.

It really was a most perfect early morning, and there was a bloom upon the stubble and Mortland Royal wood like the bloom upon a plum.

The air was keen, the sun bright. The pheasants chuckled in the wood, the mare's feet pounded the hard road merrily.

"What a thoroughly delightful morning!" Lothian said to the groom at his side and his eyes were still dreamy with subtle content.

CHAPTER IX

A STARTLING EXPERIENCE FOR "WOG"

"The die rang sideways as it fell,
  Rang cracked and thin,
Like a man's laughter heard in hell. . . ."

—*Swinburne.*

It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening; a dry, acrid, coughing cold lay over London.

In the little Kensington flat of Rita Wallace and Ethel Harrison, the fire was low and almost out. The "Lulu bird" drooped on its perch and Wog was crying quietly by the fire.

How desolate the flat seemed to the faithful Wog as she looked round with brimming eyes.

The state and arrangement of a familiar room often seem organically related to the human mind. Certainly we ourselves give personality to rooms which we have long inhabited; and that personality re-acts upon us at times when event disturbs it.

It was so now with the good and tender-hearted clergyman's daughter.

The floor of the sitting-room was littered with little pieces of paper and odds and ends of string. Upon the piano—it was Wog's piano now, a present from Rita—was a massive photograph frame of silver. There was no photograph in it, but some charred remains of a photograph which had been burned still lay in the grate.

Wog had burnt the photograph herself, that morning, early.

"You do it, darling," Rita had said to her. "I can't do it myself. And take this box. It's locked and sealed. It has the letters in it. I cannot burn them, but I don't want to read them again. I must not, now. But keep it carefully, always. If ever I *should* ask for it, deliver it to me wherever I am."

"You must *never* ask for it, my darling girl," Wog had said quickly. "Let me burn the box and its contents."

"No, no! You must not, dearest Wog, my dear old friend! It would be wrong. Rossetti had to open the coffin of his wife to get back the poems which he had buried with her. Keep it as I say."

Wog knew nothing about Rossetti, and the inherent value of works of art in manuscript didn't appeal to her. But she had been able to refuse her friend nothing on this morning of mornings.

Wog was wearing her best frock, a new one, a present also. She had never had so smart a frock before. She held her little handkerchief very carefully that none of the drops that streamed from her eyes should fall upon the dress and stain it.

"My bridesmaid dress," she said aloud with a choke of melancholy laughter. "We mustn't spoil it, must we, Lulu bird?"

But the canary remained motionless upon its perch like a tiny stuffed thing.

In one corner of the room was a large corded packing-case. It contained a big and costly epergne of silver, in execrable taste and savouring strongly of the mid-Victorian, a period when a choir of great voices sang upon Parnassus but the greatest were content to live in surroundings that

would drive a minor poet of our era to insanity. This was to be forwarded to Wiltshire in a fortnight or so.

It was Mr. Podley's present.

Wog's eyes fell upon it now. "What a kind good man Mr. Podley is," she thought. "How anxious he has been to forward everything. And to give dear Rita away also!"

Then this good girl remembered what a happy change in her own life and prospects was imminent.

She was to be the head librarian of the Podley Pure Literature Institute, vice Mr. Hands, retired. She was to have two hundred a year and choose her own assistant.

Mr. and Mrs. Podley—at whose house Ethel had spent some hours—were not exactly what one would call "cultured" people. They were homely; but they were sincere and good.

"Now you, my dear," Mrs. Podley had said to her, "are just the lady we want. You are a clergyman's daughter. You have had a business training. The Library will be safe in your hands. And we like you! We feel friends to you, Miss Harrison. 'Give it to Miss Harrison,' I said to my husband, directly I had had a talk with you."

"But I know so little about literature," Wog had answered. "Of course I read, and I have my own little collection of books. But to take charge of a public library—oh, Mrs. Podley, *do* you think I shall be able to do it to Mr. Podley's satisfaction?"

Mrs. Podley had patted the girl upon her arm. "You're a good girl, my dear," she said, "and that is enough for us. We mayn't be literary, my husband and me, but we know a good woman when we meet her. Now you just take charge of that library and do exactly as you like. Come and have dinner with us every week, dearie. When all's said we're a lonely old couple and a good girl like you, what is clever too, and born a lady, is just what I want. Podley shall do something for your dear Father. I'll see to that. And your brothers too, just coming from school as they are. Leave it to me, my dear!"

About Rita the good dame had been less enthusiastic.

"The evening after Podley had to talk to her" (thus Mrs. Podley) "I asked you both up here. I fell in love with you at once, my dear. Her, I didn't like. Pretty as a picture; yes! But different somehow! Yet sensible enough—really—as P. has told me. When he gave her a talking to, as being an elderly and successful man who employed her he had well a right to do, she saw at once the scandal and wrong of going about with a married man—be he poet or whatnot. It was only her girlish foolishness, of course. Poor silly lamb, she didn't know. But what a blessing that all the time she was being courted by that young country squire. I tell you, Miss H., that I felt like a mother to them in the Church this morning."

These kindly memories of this great day passed in reverie through the tear-charged heart of Wog.

But she was alone now, very much alone. She had adored Rita. Rita had flown away into another sphere. The Lulu Bird was a poor consoler! Still, Wog's sister Beatrice was sixteen now. She would have her to live with her and pay her fees for learning secretarial duties at Kensington College and Mr. Munford would find Bee a post. . . .

Wog pulled herself together. She had lost her darling, brilliant, flashing Rita. *That was that!* She must reconstruct her life and press forward without regrets. Life had opened out for her, after all.

But now, at this immediate moment, there was a necessity for calling all her forces together.

She did not know, she had refused to know, how Rita had dealt with Mr. Lothian during the past three weeks. The poet had not written for a fortnight; that she believed she knew, and she had hoped it meant that his passion for her friend was over. Rita, in her new-found love, her *legitimate* love, had never mentioned the poet to Wog. Ethel knew nothing of love, as far as it could have affected her. Yet the girl had discerned—or thought she had—an almost frightened relinquishment and regret on the part of Rita. Rita had expanded with joyous maiden surrender to the advances and love-making of Dickson Ingworth. That was her youth, her body. But there had been moments of revolt, moments when the "wizards peeped and muttered," when the intellect of the girl seemed held and captured, as the man who wooed her, and was this day her husband, had never captured it—perhaps never would or could.

Rita Wallace had once said to Gilbert Lothian that she and Ethel did not take a daily paper because of the expense.

Neither of these girls, therefore, was in the habit of glancing down the births, marriages and deaths column. Mr. and Mrs. Toftrees had run over to Nice for a month, Ingworth was far too anxious and busy with his appeal to Rita—none of the people chiefly concerned had read that the Hon. Mary Lothian, third daughter of the Viscount Boultone and wife of Gilbert Lothian, Esquire,

of the Old House, Mortland Royal, was dead.

For a fortnight—this was all Ethel Harrison knew—Rita had received no communication from the Poet.

Ethel imagined that Rita had finally sent him about his business, had told him of her quick engagement and imminent marriage. She knew that something had happened with Mr. Podley—nearly three weeks ago. Details she had none.

Yet, on the mantel-shelf, was a letter in Rita's handwriting. It was addressed to Gilbert Lothian. Wog was to forward this to him.

The letter was unnerving. It was a letter of farewell, of course, but Ethel did not like to handle any message from her dear young bride to a man who was of the past and ought never, *never*! to have been in it.

And there was more than this.

When Ethel had returned from Charing Cross Station, after the early wedding in St. Martin's Church and the departure of the happy couple for Mentone, she had found a telegram pushed through the letter-box of the flat, addressed "Miss Wallace."

She had opened it and read these words:

> "*Arriving to you at 7:30 to-night, carissima, to explain all my recent silence if you do not know already. We are coming into our own.*
>
> Gilbert."

Wog didn't know what this might mean. She regarded it as one more attempt, on the part of the married man who ought never to have had any connection with Rita. She realised that Lothian must be absolutely ignorant of Rita's marriage. And, knowing nothing of Mary Lothian's death, she regarded the telegram with disgust and fear.

"How dreadful," she thought, in her virgin mind, untroubled always by the lusts of the flesh and the desire of the eyes, "that this great man should run after Cupid. He's got his own wife. How angry Father would be if he knew. And yet, Mr. Lothian couldn't help loving Cupid, I suppose. Every one loves her."

"I must be as kind as I can to him when he comes," she said to herself. "He ought to be here almost at once. Of course, Cupid knows nothing about the telegram saying that he's coming. I can give her letter into his own hands."

. . . The bell whirred—ring, ring, ring—was there not something exultant in the shrill purring of the bell?

Wog looked round the littered room, saw the letter on the mantel, the spread telegram upon the table, breathed heavily and went out into the little hall-passage of the flat.

"Click," and she opened the door.

Standing there, wearing a fur coat and a felt hat, was some one she had never met, but whom she knew in an instant.

It was Gilbert Lothian. Yet it was not the Gilbert Lothian she had imagined from his photograph. Still less the poet of Rita's confidences and the verses of "Surgit Amari."

He looked like a well-dressed doll, just come there, like a quite *convenable* but rather unreal figure from Madame Tussaud's!

He looked at her for a quick moment and then held out his hand.

"I know," he said; "you're Wog! I've heard such a lot about you. Where's Rita? May I come in?—she got my wire?"

. . . He was in the little hall before she had time to answer him.

Mechanically she led the way into the sitting-room.

In the full electric light she saw him clearly for the first time. Ethel Harrison shuddered.

She saw a large, white face, with pinkish blotches on it here and there—more particularly at the corners of the mouth and about the nostrils. The face had an impression of immense *power*—of *concentration*. Beneath the wavy hair and the straight eyebrows, the eyes gleamed and shot out fire—shifting this way and that.

With an extraordinary quickness and comprehension these eyes glanced round the flat and took in its disorder.

. . . "She got my wire?" the man said—finding the spread-out pink paper upon the table in an instant.

"No, Mr. Lothian," Ethel Harrison said gravely. "Rita never got your wire. It came too late."

The glaring light faded out of the man's eyes. His voice, which had been suave and oily, changed utterly. Ethel had wondered at his voice immediately she heard it. It was like that of some shopman selling silks—a fat voice. It had been difficult for her to believe that *this* was Gilbert Lothian. Rita's great friend, the famous man, her father's favourite modern poet.

But she heard a *voice* now, a real, vibrant voice.

"Too late?" he questioned. "Too late for *what*?"

Ethel nodded sadly. "I see, Mr. Lothian," she said, "that you are already beginning to understand that you have to hear things that will distress you."

Lothian bowed. As he did so, *something* flashed out upon the great bloated mask his face had become. It was for a second only, but it was sweet and chivalrous.

"And will you tell me then, Miss Harrison?" he said in a voice that was beginning to tremble violently. His whole body was beginning to shake, she saw.

With one hand he was opening the button of his fur coat. He looked up at her with a perfectly white, perfectly composed, but dreadfully questioning face.

Certainly his body *was* shaking all over—it was as though little ripples were running up and down the flesh of it—but his face was a white mask of attention.

"Oh, Mr. Lothian!" the girl cried, "I am so sorry. I am so very sorry for you. You couldn't help loving her perhaps, I am only a girl, I don't pretend to know. But you must be brave. Rita is married!"

Puffed and crinkled lids fell over the staring eyes for a moment—as if automatic pressure had suddenly pushed them down.

"*Married?* Rita?"

"Oh, she ought to have told you! It was cruel of her! She ought to have told you. But you have not written to her for two or three weeks—as far as I know. . . ."

"*Married?* Rita?"

"Yes, this morning, and Mr. Podley gave her away. But I have a letter for you, Mr. Lothian. Rita asked me to post it. She gave it me in bed this morning, before I dressed her for her marriage. Of course she didn't know that you were going to be in town. I will give it to you now."

She gave him the letter.

His hands took it with a mechanical gesture, though he made a little bow of thanks.

Underneath the heavy fur coat, the man's body was absolutely rippling up and down—it was horrible.

The eyelids fell again. The voice became sleepy, childish almost.

. . . "But *I* have come to marry Rita!"

Wog became indignant. "Mr. Lothian," she said, "you ought not to speak like that before me. How could you have married Rita. You *are* married. Please don't even hint at such things."

"How stupid you are, Wog," he said, as if he had known her for years; in much the same sort of voice that Rita would have said it. "My wife's dead, dead and buried. . . . I thought you would both have known. . . ."

His trembling hands were opening the letter which Rita Wallace had left for him.

He drew the page out of the envelope and then he looked up at Ethel Harrison again. There was a dreadful yearning in his voice now.

"Yes, yes, but *whom* has my little Rita married?"

Real fear fell upon Ethel now. She became aware that this man had not realised what had happened in any way. But the whole thing was too painful. It must be got over at once.

"Mr. Ingworth Dickson, of course," she answered, with some sharpness in her tones.

For a minute Lothian looked at her as if she were the horizon. Then he nodded. "Oh, Dicker," he said in a perfectly uninterested voice—"Yes, Dicker—just her man, of course. . . ."

He was reading the letter now.

This was Rita's farewell letter.

> "*Gilbert dear*:
>
> "I shall always read your books and poems, and I shall always think of you. We have been tremendous friends, and though we shall never meet again, we shall always think of each other, shan't we? I am going to marry Dicker to-morrow morning, and by the time you see this—Wog will send it—I shall be married. Of course we mustn't meet or write to each other any more. You are married and I'm going to be to-morrow. But do think of your little friend sometimes, Gilbert. She will often think of you and read *all* you write."

Lothian folded up the letter and replaced it in its envelope with great precision. Then he thrust it in the inner breast pocket of his coat.

Wog watched him, in deadly fear.

She knew now that elemental forces had been at work, that her lovely Rita had evoked soul-shaking, sundering strengths. . . .

But Gilbert Lothian came towards her with both hands outstretched.

"Oh, I thank you, I thank you a thousand times," he said, "for all your goodness to Rita—How happy you must have been together—you two girls——"

He had taken both her hands in his. Now he dropped them suddenly. Something, something quite beautiful, which had been upon his face, snapped away.

The kindness and welcome in his eyes changed to a horror-struck stare.

He began to murmur and burble at the back of his throat.

His arms shot stiffly this way and that, like the arms of railway signals.

He ran to one wall and slapped a flat palm upon it.

"Tumpany!" he said with a giggle. "My wild-fowling man! Mary used to like him, so I suppose he's all right. But, damn him, looking out of the wall like that with his ugly red face!—"

He began to sing. His lips were dark-red and cracked, his eyes fixed and staring.

> "Tiddle-iddle, iddle-tiddle, so the green frog said in the garden!"

Saliva dropped from the corners of his mouth.

His body was jerking like a puppet of a marionette display, actuated by unseen strings.

He began to dance.

Blazing eyes, dropping sweat and saliva, twitching, awful body. . . .

She left him dancing clumsily like a performing bear. She fled hurriedly down to the office of the commissionaire.

When the man, his assistant and Miss Harrison returned to the flat, Lothian was writhing on the floor in the last stages of delirium tremens.

As they carried him, tied and bound, to the nearest hospital, they had to listen to a cryptic, and to them, meaningless mutter that never ceased.

> ". . . Dingworth Ickson, Rary, Mita. Sorten Mims. Ha, ha! ha! Tubes of poison—damn them all, blast them all—Jesus of the Cross! my wife's face as she lay there dead, forgiving me!
>
> "—Rita you pup of a girl, going off with a boy like Dicker. Rita! Rita! You're mine—don't make such a howling noise, my girl, you'll create a scandal—Rita! Rita!—damn you, *can't* you keep quiet?
>
> "All right, Mary darling. But why have you got on a sheet instead of a nightdress? Mary! Why have they tied your face up under the chin with that handkerchief? And what's that you're holding out to me on your pale hand? Is that the *membrane*? Is that really the diphtheria *membrane* which choked you?—Come closer, let me see, old chalk-faced girl. . . ."

At the hospital the house-surgeon on duty who admitted him said that death *must* supervene

within twelve or fourteen hours.

He had not seen a worse case.

But when he realised who the fighting, tied, gibbering and obscene object really was, bells rang in the private rooms of celebrated doctors.

The pulsing form was isolated.

Young doctors came to look with curiosity upon the cursing mass of flesh that quivered beneath the broad bands of webbing which held it down.

Older doctors stood by the bed with eyes full of anxiety and pain as they regarded what was once Gilbert Lothian; bared the twitching arms and pressed the hypodermic needles into the loose bunches of skin that skilled, pitiful fingers were pinching and gathering.

When they had calmed the twitching figure somewhat, the famous physicians who had been hastily called, stood in a little group some distance from the bed, consulting together.

Two younger men who sat on each side of the cot looked over the body and grinned.

"The Christian Poet, oh, my eye!" said one.

"Surgit amari aliquid," the other replied with a disgusted sneer.

END OF BOOK THREE

EPILOGUE

A Year Later

"A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, Thou wilt not despise."

WHAT OCCURRED AT THE EDWARD HALL IN KINGSWAY

"Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
   And peace of pardon win!
How else may man make straight his plan
   And cleanse his soul from sin?
How else but through a broken heart
   May Lord Christ enter in?"

—*The Ballad of Reading Gaol.*

A great deal of interest in high quarters, both in London and New York was being taken in the meeting of Leading Workers in the cause of Temperance that was to be held in Kingsway this afternoon.

The new Edward Hall, that severe building of white stone which was beginning to be the theatre of so many activities and which was so frequently quoted as a monument of good taste and inspiration on the part of Frank Flemming, the new architect, had been engaged for the occasion.

The meeting was to be at three.

It was unique in this way—The heads of every party were to be represented and were about to make common cause together. The scientific and the non-scientific workers for the suppression and cure of Inebriety had been coming very much together during the last years.

Never hostile to each other, they had suffered from a mutual lack of understanding in the past.

Now there was to be an *entente cordiale* that promised great things.

One important fact had contributed to this *rapprochement*. The earnest Christian workers and ardent sociologists were now all coming to realise that Inebriety is a disease and not, specifically, a vice. The doctors had known this, had been preaching this for years. But the time had arrived when religious workers in the same cause were beginning to find that they could with safety join hands with those who (as they had come to see) *knew* and could define the springs of action which made people intemperate.

The will of the intemperate individual was weakened by a *disease*. The doctors had shown and proved this beyond possibility of doubt.

It was a *disease*. Its various causes were discovered and put upon record. Its pathology was as clearly stated as a proposition in Euclid. Its psychology was, at last, beginning to be understood.

And it was on the basis of psychology that the two parties were meeting.

Science could take a drunkard—though really only with the drunkard's personal connivance and earnest wish to reform—and in a surprisingly short time, varying with individual cases, restore him to the world sane, and in health.

But as far as individual cases went, science professed itself able to do little more than this. It could give a man back his health of mind and body, it could—thus—enable him to recall his soul from the red hells where it had strayed. But it could not enable the man to *retain* the gifts.

Religion stepped in here. Christianity and those who professed it said that faith in Christ, and that only, could preserve the will; that, to put it shortly, a personal love of Jesus, a heart that opened itself to the mysterious operations of the Holy Spirit would be immune from the disease for ever more.

Christian workers proved their contention by statistics as clear and unmistakable as any other.

There was still one great question to be agreed upon. Religion and Science, working together, *could*, and *did*, cure the *individual* drunkard. Sometimes Science had done this without the aid of Religion, more often Religion had done it without the aid of Science—that is to say that while Science had really been at work all the time Religion had not been aware of it and had not professedly called Science in to help.

To eradicate the disease from individuals was being done every day by the allied forces.

To eradicate the disease from nations, to stamp it out as cholera, yellow fever, and the bubonic plague was being stamped out—that was the question at issue.

That was, after all, the supreme question.

Now, every one was beginning—only beginning—to understand that recent scientific discovery had made this wonderful thing possible.

Yellow fever had been destroyed upon the Isthmus of Panama. Small-pox which ravaged countries in the past, was no more than a very occasional and restricted epidemic now. Soon—in all human probability—tuberculosis and cancer would be conquered.

The remedy for the disease of Inebriety was at hand.

Sanitary Inspectors and Medical Officers had enormous power in regard to other diseases. People who disregarded their orders and so spread disease were fined and imprisoned.

It was penal to do so.

In order that this beneficent state of things should come about, the scientists had fought valiantly against many fetishes. They had fought for years, and with the spread of knowledge they had conquered.

Now the biggest Fetish of all was tottering on its foolish throne. The last idol in the temples of Dagon, the houses of Rimmon and the sacred groves was attacked.

The great "Procreation Fetish" remained.

Were drunkards to be allowed to have children without State restriction, or were they not?

That was the question which some of the acutest and most altruistic minds of the English speaking races were about to meet and discuss this afternoon.

Dr. Morton Sims drove down to the Edward Hall a little after two o'clock.

The important conference was to begin at three, but the doctor had various matters to arrange first and he was in a slightly nervous and depressed state.

It was a grey day and a sharp East wind was blowing. People in the streets wore furs and heavy coats; London seemed excessively cheerless.

It was but rarely that Morton Sims felt as he did as this moment. But the day, or probably (as he thought) a recent spell of over-work, took the pith out of him.

"It is difficult to avoid doing too much—for a man in my position," he thought. "Life is so short

and there is such an infinity of work. Oh, that I could see England in a fair way to become sober before I die! Still I must go on hard. 'Il faut cultiver notre jardin.'"

He went at once to a large and comfortable room adjoining the platform of the big hall and communicating with it by a few steps and two doors, one of red baize. It was used as the artists' room when concerts were given, as a committee room now.

A bright fire burned upon the hearth, round which were several padded armchairs, and over the mantel-shelf was an excellent portrait in oils of King Edward the Seventh.

The Doctor took up a printed agenda of the meeting from a table. Bishop Moultrie was to be in the chair and the list of names beneath his was in the highest degree influential and representative. There were two or three peers—not figure heads but men who had done and were doing great work in the world. Mr. Justice Harley—Sir Edward Harley on the programme—would be there. Lady Harold Buckingham, than whose name none was more honoured throughout the Empire for her work in the cause of Temperance, several leading medical men, and—Mrs. Julia Daly, who had once more crossed the Atlantic and had arrived the night before at the Savoy. Edith Morton Sims, who was lecturing in the North of England, could not be present to-day, but she was returning to town at the end of the week, when Mrs. Daly was to leave the hotel and once more take up her residence with Morton Sims and his sister.

In a few minutes there was a knock at the door. The doctor answered, it was opened by a commissionaire, and Julia Daly came in.

Morton Sims took her two hands and held them, his face alight with pleasure and greeting.

"This is good," he said fervently. "I have waited for this hour. I cannot say how glad I am to see you, Julia. You have heard from Edith?"

"The dear girl! Yes. There was a letter waiting for me at the Savoy when I arrived last night. I am to come to you both on Saturday."

"Yes. It will be so jolly, just like old times. Now let me congratulate you a thousand times on your great work in America. Every one over here has been reading of your interview with the President. It was a great stroke. And he really is interested?"

"Immensely. It is genuine. He was most kind and there is no doubt but that he will be heart and soul with us in the future. The campaign is spreading everywhere. And, most significant of all, *we are capturing the prohibitionists*."

"Ah! that will mean everything."

"Everything, because they are the most earnest workers of all. But they have seen that Prohibition has proved itself an impossibility. They have failed despite their whole-hearted and worthy endeavours. Naturally they have become disheartened. But they are beginning to see the truth of our proposal. The scientific method is gaining ground as they realise it more and more. In a year or two those states which legislated Prohibition, will legislate in another way and penalise the begetting of children by known drunkards. That seems to me certain. After that the whole land may, I pray God, follow suit."

She had taken off her heavy sable coat and was sitting in a chair by the fireside. Informed with deep feeling and that continuous spring of hope and confidence which gave her so much of her power, the deep contralto rang like a bell in the room.

Morton Sims leant against the mantel-shelf and looked down on his friend. The face was beautiful and inspired. It represented the very flower of intellect and patriotism, breadth, purity, strength. "Ah!" he thought, "the figure of Britannia upon our coins and in our symbolic pictures, or the Latin Dame of Liberty with the Phrygian cap, is not so much England or France as this woman is America, the soul of the West in all its power and beauty. . . ."

His reverie was broken in upon by her voice, not ringing with enthusiasm now, but sad and purely womanly.

"Tell me," she was saying, "have you heard or found out anything of Gilbert Lothian, the poet?"

Morton Sims shook his head.

"It remains an impenetrable mystery," he said. "No one knows anything."

Tears came into Mrs. Daly's eyes. "I loved that woman," she said. "I loved Mary Lothian. A clearer, more transparent soul never joined the saints in Paradise. Among the many, many things for which I have to thank you, there is nothing I have valued more than the letter from you which sent me to her at Nice. Mary Lothian was the sweetest woman I have ever met, or ever shall meet. Sometimes God puts such women into the world for examples. Her death grieved me more than I can say."

"It was very sudden."

"Terribly. We travelled home together. She was leaving her dying sister in the deepest sadness. But she was going home full of holy determination to save her husband. I never met any woman who loved a man more than Mary Lothian loved Gilbert Lothian. What a wonderful man he must have been, might have been, if the Disease had not ruined him. I think his wife would have saved him had she lived. He is alive, I suppose?"

"It is impossible to say. I should say not. All that is known is as follows. A fortnight or so after his wife's funeral, Lothian, then in a very dangerous state, travelled to London. He was paying a call at some house in the West End when Delirium Tremens overtook him at last. He was taken to the Kensington Hospital. Most cases of delirium tremens recover but it was thought that this was beyond hope. However, as soon as it was known who he was, some of the best men in town were called. I understand it was touch and go. The case presented unusual symptoms. There was something behind it which baffled treatment for a time."

"But he *was* cured?"

"Yes, they pulled him through somehow. Then he disappeared. The house in Norfolk and its contents were sold through a solicitor. A man that Lothian had, a decent enough servant and very much attached to his master, has been pensioned for life—an annuity, I think. He may know something. The general opinion in the village is that he does know something—I have kept on my house in Mortland Royal, you must know. But this Tumpany is as tight as wax. And that's all."

"He has published nothing?"

"Not a line of any sort whatever. I was dining with Amberley, the celebrated publisher, the other day. He published the two or three books of poems that made Lothian famous. But he has heard nothing. He even told me that there is a considerable sum due to Lothian which remains unclaimed. Of course Lothian is well off in other ways. But stay, though, I did hear a rumour!"

"And what was that?"

"Well, I dined at Amberley's house—they have a famous dining-room you must know, where every one has been, and it's an experience. There was a party after dinner, and I was introduced to a man called Toftrees—he's a popular novelist and a great person in his own way I believe."

Julia Daly nodded. She was intensely interested.

"I know the name," she said. "Go on."

"Well, this fellow Toftrees, who seems a decent sort of man, told me that he believed that Gilbert Lothian was killing himself with absinthe and brandy in Paris. Some one had seen him in Maxim's or some such place, a dreadful sight. This was three or four months ago, so, if it's true, the poor fellow must be dead by now."

"Requiescat," Julia Daly said reverently. "But I should have liked to have known that his dear wife's prayers in Heaven had saved him here."

Morton Sims did not answer and there was a silence between them for a minute or two.

The doctor was remembering a dreadful scene in the North London Prison.

. . . "If Gilbert Lothian still lived he must look like that awful figure in the condemned cell had looked—like his insane half-brother, the cunning murderer—" Morton Sims shuddered and his eyes became fixed in thought.

He had told no living soul of what he had learned that night. He never would tell any one. But it all came back to him with extreme vividness as he gazed into the fire.

Some memory-cell in his brain, long dormant and inactive, was now secreting thought with great rapidity, and, with these dark memories—it was as though some curtain had suddenly been withdrawn from a window unveiling the sombre picture of a storm—something new and more horrible still started into his mind. It passed through and vanished in a flash. His will-power beat it down and strangled it almost ere it was born.

But it left his face pale and his throat rather dry.

It was now twenty minutes to three, as the square marble clock upon the mantel showed, and immediately, before Julia Daly and Morton Sims spoke again, two people came into the room.

Both were clergymen.

First came Bishop Moultrie. He was a large corpulent man with a big red face. Heavy eyebrows of black shaded eyes of a much lighter tint, a kind of blue green. The eyes generally twinkled with good-humour and happiness, the wide, genial mouth was vivid with life and pleasant tolerance, as a rule.

A fine strong, forthright man with a kindly personality.

Morton Sims stepped up to him. "My dear William," he said, shaking him warmly by the hand. "So here you are. Let me introduce you to Mrs. Daly. Julia, let me introduce the Bishop to you. You both know of each other very well. You have both wanted to meet for a long time."

The Bishop bowed to Mrs. Daly and both she and the doctor saw at once that something was disturbing him. The face only held the promise and possibility of geniality. It was anxious, and stern with some inward thought; very distressed and anxious.

And when a large, fleshy, kindly face wears this expression, it is most marked.

"Please excuse me," the Bishop said to Julia Daly. "I have indeed looked forward to the moment of meeting you. But something has occurred, Mrs. Daly, which occupies my thoughts, something very unusual. . . ."

Both Morton Sims—who knew his old friend so well—and Julia Daly—who knew so much of the Bishop by repute—looked at him with surprise upon their faces and waited to hear more.

The Bishop turned round to where the second Priest was standing by the door.

"This is Father Joseph Edward," he said, "Abbot of the Monastery upon the Lizard Promontory in Cornwall. He has come with me this afternoon upon a special mission."

The newcomer was a slight, dark-visaged man who wore a black cape over his cassock, and a soft clerical hat. He seemed absolutely undistinguished, but the announcement of his name thrilled the man and woman by the fire.

The Priest bowed slightly. There was little or no expression to be discerned upon his face.

But the others in the room knew who he was at once.

Father Joseph Edward was a hidden force in the Church or England. He was a peer's son who had flashed out at Oxford, fifteen years before, as one of the cleverest, wildest, most brilliant and devil-may-care undergraduates who had ever been at "The House." Both by reason of wealth and position, but also by considered action, he had escaped authoritative condemnation and had been allowed to take his first in Lit. Hum.

But, as every one knew at his time Adrian Rathlone had been one of the wildest, wealthiest and wickedest young men of his generation.

And then, as all the world heard, Adrian Rathlone had taken Holy Orders. He had worked in the East End of London for a time, and had then founded his Cornish Monastery by permission of the Chapter and Bishop of Truro.

From the far west of England, where She stretches out her granite foot to spurn the onslaught of the Atlantic, it had become known that broken and contrite hearts might leave London and life, to seek, and find Peace upon the purple moors of the West.

"But now, John," the Bishop said to Morton Sims, "I want to tell you something. I want to explain a very important alteration in the agenda. . . ."

There was no doubt about it whatever, the Bishop's usually calm and suave voice was definitely disturbed.

He and Morton Sims bent over the table together looking at the printed paper.

The Bishop had a fat gold pencil case in his hand and was pointing to names upon the programme.

Mrs. Daly, from her seat by the fire, watched her friend, Morton Sims, with *his* friend, William Denisthorpe Moultrie, Father in God, with immense interest. She was interested extremely in the Bishop's obvious perturbation, but even more so to see these two celebrated men standing together and calling each other by their Christian names like boys. She knew that they had been at Harrow and Oxford together, she knew that despite their disagreements upon many points they had always been fast friends.

"What boys nice men are after all," she thought with a slight sympathetic contraction of her throat. "'William'! 'John'!—Our men in America are not very often like that—but what, what is the Bishop saying?"

Her face became almost rigid with attention as she caught a certain name. Even as she did so the Bishop spoke in an undertone to Morton Sims, and then glanced slightly in her direction with a hint of a question in his eyes.

"Mrs. Daly, William," Morton Sims said, "is on the Committee. She is one of my greatest friends and, perhaps, the greatest friend Edith has in the world. She was also a great friend of Mrs. Lothian and knew her well. You need not have the slightest hesitation in saying anything you wish before her."

Julia Daly rose from her seat, her heart was beating strangely.

"What is this?" she said in her gentle, but almost regal way. "Why, my lord, the doctor and I were only talking of Gilbert Lothian and his saintly wife a moment or two ago. Have you news of the poet?"

The Bishop, still with his troubled, anxious face, turned to her with a faint smile. "I did not know, Mrs. Daly," he said, "that you took any interest in Lothian, but yes, I have news."

"Then you can solve the mystery?" Julia Daly said.

The Bishop sighed. "If you mean," he said, "why Mr. Lothian has disappeared from the world for a year, I can at least tell you what he has been doing. John here tells me that you have known all about him, so that I am violating no confidences. After his wife's death, poor Lothian became very seriously ill in consequence of his excesses. He was cured eventually, but one night—it was late at night in Norfolk—some one, quite unlike the Gilbert Lothian I had known, came to my house. It was like a ghost coming. He told me many strange and terrible things, and hinted that he could have told me more, though I forbade him. With every appearance of contrition, with his face streaming with tears—ah, if ever during my career as a Priest I have seen a broken and a contrite heart I saw it then—he wished, he told me, to work out his soul's release, to go away from the world utterly and to fight the Fiend Alcohol. He would go into no home, would submit to no legal restraint. He wished to fight the devil that possessed him with no other aids than spiritual ones. I sent him to Father Joseph Edward."

"And he has cured himself?" the American lady said in a tone which so rang and vibrated through the Committee room, with eyes in which such gladness was dawning, that the three men there looked at her as if they had seen a vision.

The monkish-looking clergyman replied.

"Quite cured," he said gravely. "He is saved in body and saved in soul. You say his wife, Madam, was a Saint: I think, Madam, that our friend is not very far from it now."

He stopped suddenly, almost jerkily, and his dark, somewhat saturnine face became watchful and with a certain fear in it.

What all this might mean John Morton Sims was at a loss to understand. That it meant something, something very out of the ordinary, he was very well aware. William Moultrie was not himself—that was very evident. And he had brought this odd, mediæval parson with him for some special reason. Morton Sims was not very sympathetic toward the Middle Age. Spoken to-day the word "Abbot" or "Father"—used ecclesiastically—always affected him with slight disgust.

Nevertheless, he nodded to the Bishop and turned to Mrs. Daly.

"Gilbert Lothian is coming here during this afternoon," he said. "The Bishop has specially asked me to arrange that he shall speak during the Conference. It seems he has come specially from Mullion in Cornwall to be present this afternoon. Father Joseph Edward has brought him. It seems that he has something important to say."

For some reason or other, what it was the doctor could not have said, Julia Daly seemed strangely excited at the news.

"Such testimony as his," she said, "coming from such a man as that, will be a wonderful experience. In fact I do not know that there will ever have been anything like it."

Morton Sims had not quite realised this aspect of the question. He had wondered, when Moultrie had insisted upon putting Lothian's name down as the third speaker during the afternoon. Moultrie was perfectly within his rights, of course, as Chairman, but it seemed rather a drastic thing to do. It was a disturbance of settled order, and the scientific mind unconsciously resented it. Now, however, the scientific mind realised the truth of what Julia Daly had said. Of course, if Gilbert Lothian was really going to make a confession, and obviously that was what he was coming here for under the charge of this dark-visaged "Abbot"—then indeed it would be extremely valuable. Thousands of people who had been "converted" and cured from drunkenness had "given their experiences" upon temperance platforms, but they had invariably been people of the lower classes. While their evidence as to the reality of their conversion—their change—was valuable and real, they were incapable one and all of giving any details of value to the student and psychologist.

"Yes!" Morton Sims said suddenly, "if Mr. Lothian is going to speak, then we shall gain very much from what he says."

But he noticed that the Bishop's face did not become less troubled and anxious than before. He saw also that the silent clergyman sitting by the opposite wall showed no sympathetic interest in his point of view.

He himself began to experience again that sense of uneasiness and depression which he had

experienced all day, and especially during his drive to the Edward Hall, but which had been temporarily dispelled by the arrival of Mrs. Daly.

In a minute or two, however, great people began to arrive in large numbers. The Bishop, Morton Sims and Mrs. Daly were shaking hands and talking continuously. As for Morton Sims, he had no time to think any more about the somewhat untoward incidents in the Committee room.

The Meeting began.

The Edward Hall is a very large building with galleries and boxes. The galleries now, by a clever device, were all hung round with dark curtains. This made the hall appear much smaller and prevented the sparseness of the audience having a depressing effect upon those who addressed it.

Only some three hundred and fifty people attended this Conference. The general public were not asked. Admission was by invitation. The three hundred and fifty people who had come were, however, the very pick and élite of those interested in the Temperance cause and instrumental in forwarding it from their various standpoints.

Bishop Moultrie made a few introductory remarks. Then he introduced Sir Edward Harley, the Judge. The Judge was a small keen-faced man. Without his frame of horse hair and robe of scarlet he at first appeared insignificant and without personality. But that impression was dispelled directly he began to speak.

The quiet, keen, incisive voice, so precise and scholarly of phrase, so absolutely germane to the thought, and so illuminating of it, held some of the keenest minds in England as with a spell for twenty minutes.

Mr. Justice Harley advocated penal restriction upon the multiplication of drunkards in the most whole-hearted way. He did not go into the arguments for and against the proposed measure, but he gave illustrations from his own experience as to its absolute necessity and value.

He mentioned one case in which he had been personally concerned which intensely interested his audience.

It was that of a murderer. The man had murdered his wife under circumstances of callous cunning. In all other respects the murderer had lived a hard-working and blameless life. He had become infatuated with another woman, but the crime, which had taken nearly a month in execution, had been committed entirely under the influence of alcohol.

"Under the influence of that terrible amnesic dream-phase which our medical friends tell us of," the Judge said. "As was my duty as an officer of the law I sent that man to his death. Under existing conditions of society I think that what I was compelled to do was the best thing that could have been done. But I may say to you, my lord, my lords, ladies and gentlemen that it was not without a bitter personal shrinking that I sent that poor man to pay the penalty of his crime. The mournful bell which Dr. Archdall Reed has tolled is his 'Study in Heredity' was sounding in my ears as I did so. That is one of the reasons why I am here this afternoon to support the only movement which seems to have within it the germ of public freedom from the devastating disease of alcoholism."

The Judge concluded and sat down in his seat.

Bishop Moultrie rose and introduced the next speaker with a few prefatory remarks. Morton Sims who was sitting next Sir Edward whispered in his ear.

"May I ask, Sir Edward," he said, "if you were referring just now to Hancock, the Hackney murderer?"

The little Judge nodded.

"Yes," he whispered, "but how did you know, Sims?"

"Oh, I knew all about him before his condemnation," the doctor replied. "In fact I took a special interest in him. I was with him the night before his execution and I assisted at the autopsy the next day."

The Judge gave a keen glance at his friend and nodded.

The Bishop in the Chair now read a few brief statements as to the progress of the work that was being done. Lady Harold Buckingham was down to speak next. She sat on the Bishop's left hand, and it was obvious to the audience that she understood his next remark.

"You all have the printed programme in your hands," said the Bishop, "and from it you will see that Lady Harold is set down to address you next. But I have—" his voice changed a little and became uncertain and had a curious note of apprehension in it—"I have to ask you to give your attention to another speaker, whose wish to address the Meeting has only recently been conveyed to me, but whose right to do so is, in my judgment, indubitable. He has, I understand

from Father Joseph who has brought him here, something to say to us of great importance."

There was a low murmur and rustle among the audience, as well as among the semicircle of people on the dais.

The name of Father Joseph Edward attracted instant attention. Every one knew all about him; the slight uneasiness on the Bishop's face had not been unremarked. They all felt that something unusual and stimulating was imminent.

"It is Mr. Gilbert Lothian," the Bishop went on, "who wishes to address you. His name will be familiar to every one here. I do not know, and have not the least idea, as to what Mr. Lothian is about to say. All I know is that he is most anxious to speak this afternoon, and, even at this late hour pressure has been put upon me to alter the programme in this regard, which it is impossible for me to resist."

Now every one in the hall knew that some sensation was impending.

People nodded and whispered; people whispered and nodded. There was almost an apprehension in the air.

Why had this poet risen from the tomb as it were—this poet whose utter disappearance from social and literary life had been a three weeks' wonder—this poet whom everybody thought was dead, who, in his own personality, had become but a faint name to those who still read and were comforted by his poems.

Very many of that distinguished company had met Gilbert Lothian.

Nobody had known him well. His appearances in London society had been fugitive and he had shown no desire to enter into the great world. But still the best people had nearly all met him once or twice, and in the minds of most of them, especially the women, there was a not ungrateful memory of a man who talked well, had quite obviously no axe to grind, no personal effort to further, who was only himself and pleased to be where he was.

They were all talking to each other in low voices, wondering what the scandal was, wondering why Gilbert Lothian had disappeared, waked up to the fact of him, when Lothian himself came upon the platform.

Mr. Justice Harley vacated his seat and took the next chair, while Lothian sat down on the right of the Chairman.

Some people noticed—but those were only a very few—that the dark figure of a clergyman in a monastic cape and cassock came upon the platform at the same time and sat down in the far background.

Afterwards, everybody said that they had noticed the entrance of Father Joseph Edward and wondered at it. As a matter of fact hardly anybody did.

The Bishop rose and placed his hands upon the little table before him.

He coughed. His voice was not quite as adequate as usual.

This is what he said. "Mr. Gilbert Lothian, whose name all of you must know and whose works I am sure most of you, like myself, have in the most grateful remembrance, desires to address you."

That was all the Bishop said—he made a motion with his hand and Gilbert Lothian rose from his chair and took two steps to the front of the platform.

Those present saw a young man of medium height, neither fat nor slim, and with a very beautiful face. It was pale but the contour was perfect. Certainly it was very pale, but the eyes were bright and the æsthetic look and personality of the poet fitted in very well with what people had known of him in the past.

Only Morton Sims, who was sitting within arm's reach of Lothian—and perhaps half a dozen other people who knew rather more than the rest—were startled at what seemed to be a transformation.

As Lothian began to speak Father Joseph Edward glided from his seat, and leant over the back of Dr. Morton Sims' chair. This was a rather extraordinary proceeding and at any other time it would have been immediately remarked upon.

As it was, the first words which Gilbert Lothian spoke held the audience so immediately that they forgot, or did not see the watchful waiting "Abbot of Mullion."

In the first place Gilbert Lothian was perfectly self-possessed. He was so self-possessed that his initial sentence created a sensation.

His way and manner were absolutely different from the ordinary speaker—however self-

possessed he may be. The poet's self-possession had a quality of rigidity and automatism which thrilled every one. Yet, it was not an automaton which spoke in the clear, vibrating voice that Gilbert Lothian used.

The voice was terrible in its appeal—even in the first sentence of the memorable speech. It was the sense of a personality standing in bonds, impelled and controlled by something outside it and above it—it was this that hushed all movement and murmur, that focussed all eyes as the poet began.

The opening words of the poet were absolutely strange and unconventional, but spoken quite simply and in very short sentences.

In the first instance it had been decided that reporters were not to be admitted to this Conference. Eventually that decision had been altered and a gentleman representing the principal Press Agency, together with a couple of assistants, sat at a small table just below the platform.

It is from the shorthand transcript of the Press Agent and his colleagues that the few words Gilbert Lothian spoke have been arranged and set down here.

Those who were present have read the words over and over again.

They have remembered the gusts of emotion, of fear, of gladness—all wafted from the wings of tragedy, and perhaps illuminated by the light of Heaven, that passed through the Edward Hall on this afternoon.

. . . He was speaking.

"I have only a very few words to say. I want what I say to remain in your minds. I am speaking to you, as I am speaking, for that reason. I beg and pray that this will be of help. You see—" he made an infinitely pathetic gesture of his hands and a wan smile came upon his face—"You see you will be able to use my confession for the sake of others. That is the reason——"

Here Lothian stopped. His face became whiter than ever. His hand went up to his throat as if there was some obstruction there.

Bishop Moultrie handed him a glass of water. He took it, with a hand that trembled exceedingly. He drank a little but spilt more than he drank.

The black clothed figure of the Priest half rose and took the glass from the poet. All the people there sat very still. Some of them saw the Priest hold up something before the speaker's face—a little bronze something. A Crucifix.

The Bishop covered his face with his hands and never looked up again.

Gilbert went on. "You have come here," he said, "to make a combined effort to kill alcoholism. I have come to show you in one single instance what alcoholism means."

Some one right at the back of the hall gave a loud hysterical sob.

The speaker trembled, recovered himself by a great effort and went on.

"I had everything;" he said with difficulty, "God gave me everything, almost. I had money to live in comfort; I achieved a certain sort of fame; my life, my private life, was surrounded by the most angelic and loving care."

His figure swayed, his voice fainted into a whisper.

Dr. Morton Sims had now covered his face with his hands.

Mrs. Julia Daly was staring at the speaker. Her eyes were just interrogation. There was no horror upon her face. Her lips were parted.

The man continued.

"Drink," he said, "began in me, caught me up, twisted me, destroyed me. The terrible False Ego, which many of you must know of, entered into my mind, dominated, and destroyed it.

"I was possessed of a devil. All decent thoughts, all the natural happinesses of my station, all the gifts and pleasant outlooks upon life which God had given went, not gradually, but swiftly away. Something that was not myself came into me and made me move, and walk, and talk as a minion of hell.

"I do not know what measure of responsibility remained to me when I did what I did. But this I know, that I have been and am the blackest, most hideous criminal that lives to-day."

The man's voice was trembling dreadfully now, quite unconsciously his left hand was gripping the shoulder of the Abbot of Mullion. His eyes blazed, his voice was so forlorn, so hopeless and

poignant that there was not a sound among the several hundreds there.

"My lord,—" he turned to the Bishop with the very slightest inclination of his head—"ladies and gentlemen, I killed my wife.

"My wife—" The Bishop had risen from his chair and Father Joseph Edward was supporting the swaying figure with the pale, earnest face.—"My wife loved me, and kept me and held me and watched over me as few men's wives have ever done. I stole poison with which to kill her. I stole poison from, from you, doctor!"

He turned to Dr. Morton Sims and the doctor sat in his seat as if frozen to it by fear.

"Yes! I stole it from you! You were away in Paris. You had been making experiments. In the cupboard in the laboratory which you had taken from old Admiral Custance, I knew that there were phials of organic poisons. My wife died of diphtheria. She died of it because I had robbed your bottles—I did so and took the poison home and arranged that Mary. . . ."

There was a loud murmur in the body of the hall. A loud murmur stabbed with two or three faint shrieks from women.

The Bishop again leant over the table with his hands over his face.

Morton Sims was upon his feet. His hands were on Lothian's arm, his voice was pleading.

"No! no!" he stammered. "You mustn't say these things. You, you——"

Gilbert Lothian looked into the face of his old friend for a second.

Then he brushed his arm away and came right to the edge of the platform.

As he spoke once more he did not seem like any quite human person.

His face was dead white, his hands fell at his sides—only his eyes were awake and his voice was vibrant.

"I am a murderer. I killed and murdered with cunning, long-continued thought, the most sweet and saintly woman that I have ever known. She was my wife. Why I did this I need not say. You can all make in your minds and formulate the picture of a poisoned man lusting after a strange woman.

"But I did this. I did this thing—you shall hear it and it shall reverberate in your minds. I am a murderer. I say it quite calmly, waiting for the inevitable result, and I tell you that Alcohol, and that Alcohol alone has made me what I am.

"This, too, I must say. Disease, or demoniacal possession, as it may be, I have emerged from both. I have held God's lamp to my breast.

"There is only one cure for Alcoholism. There is only one influence that can come and catch up and surround and help and comfort the sodden man.

"That is the influence of the Holy Spirit."

As he concluded there was a loud uproar in the Edward Hall.

Upon the platform the well-known people there were gazing at him, surrounding him, saying, muttering this and that.

The people in the body of the hall had risen in horrified groups and were stretching out their hands towards the platform.

The Meeting which had promised so much in the Cause of Temperance was now totally dissolved —as far as its agenda went.

The people dispersed very gradually, talking among themselves in low and horror-struck voices.

It was now a few minutes before five o'clock.

In the Committee room—where the bright fire was still burning—Gilbert Lothian remained.

The Judge, the several peers, had hurried through without a glance at the man sitting by the fireside.

Lady Harold Buckingham, as she went through, had stopped, bowed, and held out her hand.

She had been astonished that Gilbert Lothian had risen, taken her hand and spoken to her in quite the ordinary fashion of society.

She too had gone.

The Bishop had shaken Gilbert Lothian by the hand and nodded at him as who should say, "Now

we understand each other—Good-bye."

Only Morton Sims, Julia Daly and the Priest had waited.

They had not to wait long.

There came a loud and authoritative knock at the door, within an hour of the breaking up of the Conference.

Gilbert Lothian rose, as a pleasant-looking man in dark clothes with a heavy moustache entered the room.

"Mr. Gilbert Lothian, I think," the pleasant-looking man said, staring immediately at the poet.

Gilbert made a slight inclination of his head.

The pleasant-looking man pulled a paper out of his pocket and read something.

Gilbert bowed again.

"It is only a short distance, Mr. Lothian," said the pleasant-looking man cheerfully, "and I am sure you will go with me perfectly quietly."

As he said it he gave a half jerk of his head towards the corridor where, quite obviously, satellites were waiting.

Gilbert Lothian put out his hands. One wrist was crossed over the other. "I am not at all sure," he said, "that I shall come with you quietly, so please put the manacles upon my wrists."

The pleasant gentleman did so. Father Joseph Edward followed the pleasant gentleman and Gilbert Lothian.

As the little cortège turned out of the Committee room, Julia Daly turned to Dr. Morton Sims.

Her face was radiant. "Oh," she said, "at last I know!"

"You know?" he said, horror still struggling within him, much as he would have wished to control it, "you know nothing, Julia! You do not know that the dreadful power of heredity has repeated itself within a circumscribed pattern. You do not know that this man, Lothian, has done—in his own degree and in his own way—just what a bastard brother of his did two years ago. The man who was begotten by Gilbert Lothian's father killed his wife. Gilbert Lothian has done so too."

The woman put her hands upon the other's shoulders and looked squarely into his face.

"Oh, John," she said—it was the first time she had ever called him by his Christian name—"Oh, John, be blind no more. This afternoon our Cause has been given an Impetus such as it has never had before.

"Just think how splendidly Gilbert Lothian is going to his shameful death."

"Oh, it won't be death. We shall make interest and it will be penal servitude for life."

Julia Daly made a slight motion of her hands.

"As you will," she said, "and as you wish. I think he would prefer death. But if he is to endure a longer punishment, that also will bring him nearer, and nearer, and nearer to his Mary."

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