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THE FORTUNATE YOUTH

BY

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CHAPTER I

PAUL KEGWORTHY lived with his mother, Mrs. Button, his stepfather, Mr. Button, and six little Buttons, his half brothers and sisters. His was not an ideal home; it consisted in a bedroom, a kitchen and a scullery in a grimy little house in a grimy street made up of rows of exactly similar grimy little houses, and forming one of a hundred similar streets in a northern manufacturing town. Mr. and Mrs. Button worked in a factory and took in as lodgers grimy single men who also worked in factories. They were not a model couple; they were rather, in fact, the scandal of Budge Street, which did not itself enjoy, in Bludston, a reputation for holiness. Neither was good to look upon. Mr. Button, who was Lancashire bred and born, divided the yearnings of his spirit between strong drink and dog-fights. Mrs. Button, a viperous Londoner, yearned for noise. When Mr. Button came home drunk he punched his wife about the head and kicked her about the body, while they both exhausted the vocabulary of vituperation of North and South, to the horror and edification of the neighbourhood. When Mr. Button was sober Mrs. Button chastised little Paul. She would have done so when Mr. Button was drunk, but she had not the time. The periods, therefore, of his mother's martyrdom were those of Paul's enfranchisement. If he saw his stepfather come down the street with steady gait, he fled in terror; if he saw him reeling homeward he lingered about with light and joyous heart.

The brood of young Buttons was fed spasmodically and clad at random, but their meals were regular and their raiment well assorted compared with Paul's. Naturally they came in for clouts and thumps like all the children in Budge Street; it was only Paul who underwent organized chastisement. The little Buttons often did wrong; but in the mother's eyes Paul could never do right. In an animal way she was fond of the children of Button, and in a way equally animal she bore a venomous dislike to the child of Kegworthy. Who and what Kegworthy had been neither Paul nor any inhabitant of Bludston knew. Once the boy inquired, and she broke a worn frying-pan over his head. Kegworthy, whoever he might have been, was wrapt in mystery. She had appeared in the town when Paul was a year old, giving herself out as a widow. That she was by no means destitute was obvious from the fact that she at once rented the house in Budge Street, took in lodgers, and lived at her ease. Button, who was one of the lodgers, cast upon her the eyes of desire and married her. Why she married Button she could never determine. Perhaps she had a romantic idea—and there is romance even in Budge Street-that Button would support her. He very soon shattered any such illusion by appropriating the remainder of her fortune and kicking her into the factory with hobnailed boots. It would be wrong to say that Mrs. Button did not complain; she did. She rent the air of Budge Street with horrible execration; but she went to the factory, where, save for the intervals of retirement rendered necessary by the births of the little Buttons, she was contented enough to stay.

If Paul Kegworthy had been of the same fibre as the little Buttons, he would have felt, thought and acted as they, and this history would never have been written. He would have grown up to man's estate in the factory and have been merged an indistinguishable unit in the drab mass of cloth-capped humans who, at certain hours of the day, flood the streets of Bludston, and swarm on the roofs of clanging and shrieking tramcars, and on Saturday afternoons gather in clotted greyness on the football ground. He might have been sober and industrious-the proletariat of Bludston is not entirely composed of Buttons-but he would have taken the colour of his environment, and the world outside Bludston would never have heard of him. Paul, however, differed greatly from the little Buttons. They, children of the grey cap and the red shawl, resembled hundreds of thousands of little human rabbits similarly parented. Only the trained eye could have identified them among a score or two of their congeners. For the most part, they were dingily fair, with snub noses, coarse mouths, and eyes of an indeterminate blue. Of that type, once blowsily good-looking, was Mrs. Button herself. But Paul wandered a changeling about the Bludston streets. In the rows of urchins in the crowded Board School classroom he sat as conspicuous as any little Martian who might have been bundled down to earth. He had wavy black hair, of raven black, a dark olive complexion, flushed, in spite of haphazard nourishment and nights spent on the stone floor of the reeking scullery, with the warm blood of health, great liquid black eyes, and the exquisitely delicate features of a young Praxitelean god. It was this preposterous perfection which, while redeeming him from ridiculous beauty by giving his childish face a certain rigidity, differentiated him outwardly from his fellows. Mr. Button, to whom the unusual was anathema, declared that the sight of the monstrosity made him sick, and rarely suffered him in his presence; and one day Mrs. Button, discovering him in front of the cracked mirror in which Mr. Button shaved, when his hand was steady enough, on Sunday afternoons, smote him over the face with a pound of rump steak which she happened to be carrying, instinctively desirous not only to correct her son for vanity, but also to spoil the comeliness of which he might be vain.

Until a wonderful and illuminating happening in his eleventh year, little Paul Kegworthy had taken existence with the fatalism of a child. Of his stepfather, who smelt lustily of sour beer, bad tobacco and incidentally of other things undetected by Paul's nostrils, and whom he saw rarely, he dwelt in mortal terror. When he heard of the Devil, at Sunday school, which he attended, to his stepfather's disgust, he pictured the Prince of Darkness not as a gentleman, not even as a picturesque personage with horns and tail, but as Mr. Button. As regards his mother, he had a confused idea that he was a living blight on her existence. He was not sorry, because it was not his fault, but in his childish way he coldly excused her, and, more from a queer consciousness of blighterdom than from dread of her hand and tongue, he avoided her as much as possible. In the little Buttons his experience as scapegoat taught him to take but little interest. From his earliest memories they were the first to be fed, clothed and bedded; to his own share fell the exiguous scraps. As they were much younger than himself, he found no pleasure in their companionship. For society he sought such of the youth of Budge Street as would admit him into their raucous fellowship. But, for some reason which his immature mind could not fathom, he felt a pariah even among his coevals. He could run as fast as Billy Goodge, the undisputed leader of the gang; he could dribble the rag football past him any time he desired; once he had sent him home to his mother with a bleeding nose, and, even in that hour of triumph, popular sympathy had been with Billy, not with him. It was the only problem in existence to which his fatalism did not supply the key. He knew himself to be a better man than Billy Goodge. There was no doubt about it. At school, where Billy was the woodenest blockhead, he was top of his class. He knew things about troy weight and geography and Isaac and the Mariners of England of which Billy did not dream. To Billy the football news in the Saturday afternoon edition of The Bludston Herald was a cryptogram; to him it was an open book. He would stand, acknowledged scholar, at the street corner and read out from the soiled copy retrieved by Chunky, the newsboy, the enthralling story of the football day, never stumbling over a syllable, athrill with the joy of being the umbilicus of a tense world, and, when the recital was over, he would have the mortification of seeing the throng pass away from him with the remorselessness of a cloud scudding from the moon. And he would hear Billy Goodge say exultantly:

"Didn't Aw tell yo' the Wolves hadn't a dog's chance?"

And he would see the admiring gang slap Billy on the back, and hear "Good owd Billy!" and never a word of thanks to him. Then, knowing Billy to be a liar, he would tell him so, yelping shrilly, in Buttonesque vernacular (North and South):

"This morning tha said it was five to one on Sheffield United."

"Listen to Susie!"

The parasitic urchins would yell at the witticism—the eternal petitio principii of childhood, which Billy, secure in his cohort from bloody nose, felt justified in making. And Paul Kegworthy, the rag of a newspaper crumpled tight in his little hand, would watch them disappear and wonder at the paradox of life. In any sphere of human effort, so he dimly and childishly realized, he could wipe out Billy Goodge. He had a soul-reaching contempt for Billy Goodge, a passionate envy of him. Why did Billy hold his position instead of crumbling into dust before him? Assuredly he was a better man than Billy. When, Billy duce et auspice Billy, the gang played at pirates or Red Indians, it was pitiful to watch their ignorant endeavours. Paul, deeply read in the subject, gave them chapter and verse for his suggestions. But they heeded him so little that he would turn away contemptuously, disdaining the travesty of the noble game, and dream of a gang of brighter spirits whom he could lead to glory. Paul had many such dreams wherewith he sought to cheat the realities of existence: but until the Great Happening the dream was not better than the drink: after it came the Vision Splendid.

The wonderful thing happened all because Maisie Shepherd, a slip of a girl of nineteen, staying at St. Luke's Vicarage, spilled a bottle of scent over her frock.

It was the morning of the St. Luke's annual Sunday-school treat. The waggonette was at the vicarage door. The vicar and his wife and daughter waited fussily for Maisie, an unpunctual damsel. The vicar looked at his watch. They were three minutes late, He tut-tutted impatiently. The vicar's daughter ran indoors in search of Maisie and pounced upon her as she sat on the edge of the bed in the act of perfuming a handkerchief. The shock caused the bottle to slip mouth downward from her hand and empty the contents into her lap. She cried out in dismay.

"Never mind," said the vicar's daughter. "Come along. Dad and mother are prancing about downstairs."

"But I must change my dress!"

"You've no time."

"I'm wet through. This is the strongest scent known. It's twenty-six shillings a bottle, and one little drop is enough. I shall be a walking pestilence."

The vicar's daughter laughed heartlessly. "You do smell strong. But you'll disinfect Bludston, and that will be a good thing." Whereupon she dragged the tearful and redolent damsel from the room.

In the hard-featured yard of the schoolhouse the children were assembled-the girls on one side, the boys on the other. Curates and teachers hovered about the intervening space. Almost every child wore its Sunday best. Even the shabbiest little girls had a clean white pinafore to hide deficiencies beneath, and the untidiest little boy showed a scrubbed face. The majority of the boys wore clean collars; some grinned over gaudy neckties. The only one who appeared in his week-day grime and tatterdemalion outfit was little Paul Kegworthy. He had not changed his clothes, because he had no others; and he had not washed his face, because it had not occurred to him to do so. Moreover, Mrs. Button had made no attempt to improve his forlorn aspect, for the simple reason that she had never heard of the Sunday-school treat. It was part of Paul's philosophy to dispense, as far as he could, with parental control. On Sunday afternoons the little Buttons played in the streets, where Paul, had he so chosen, might have played also: but he put himself, so to speak, to Sunday school, where, besides learning lots of queer things about God and Jesus Christ which interested him keenly, he could shine above his fellows by recitations of collects and bits of Catechism, which did not interest him at all. Then he won scores of good-conduct cards, gaudy treasures, with pictures of Daniel in the Lions' Den and the Marriage of Cana and such like, which he secreted preciously beneath a loose slab in the scullery floor. He did not show them to his mother, knowing that she would tear them up and bang him over the head; and for similar reasons he refrained from telling her of the Sunday-school treat. If she came to hear of it, as possibly she would through one of the little Buttons, who might pick up the news in the street, he would be soundly beaten. But there was a chance of her not hearing, and he desired to be no more of a blight than he could help. So Paul, vagabond and self-reliant from his babyhood, turned up at the Sunday-school treat, hatless and coatless, his dirty little toes visible through the holes in his boots, and his shapeless and tattered breeches secured to his person by a single brace. The better-dressed urchins moved away from him and made rude remarks, after the generous manner of their kind; but Paul did not care. Pariahdom was his accustomed portion. He was there for his own pleasure. They were going to ride in a train. They were going to have a wonderful afternoon in a nobleman's park, a place all grass and trees, elusive to the imagination. There was a stupefying prospect of wondrous things in profusion to

eat and drink-jam, ginger-beer, cake! So rumour had it; and to unsophisticated Paul rumour was gospel truth. With all these unexperienced joys before him, what cared he for the blankety little blanks who gibed at him? If you imagine that little Paul Kegworthy formulated his thoughts as would the angel choir-boy in the pictures, you are mistaken. The baby language of Bludston would petrify the foc'sle of a tramp, steamer. The North of England is justly proud of its virility.

The Sunday school, marshalled by curates and teachers, awaited the party from the vicarage. The thick and darkened sunshine of Bludston flooded the asphalt of the yard, which sent up a reek of heat, causing curates to fan themselves with their black straw hats, and little boys in clean collars to wriggle in sticky discomfort, while in the still air above the ignoble town hung the heavy pall of smoke. Presently there was the sound of wheels and the sight of the head of the vicar's coachman above the coping of the schoolyard wall. Then the gates opened and the vicar and his wife and Miss Merewether, her daughter, and Maisie Shepherd appeared and were immediately greeted by curates and teachers.

Maisie Shepherd, a stranger in a strange land, pretty, pink, blushing, hatefully self-conscious, detached herself, after a minute or two, from the group and looked with timid curiosity on the children. She was a London girl, her head still dancing with the delights of her first season, and she had never been to a Sunday-school treat in her life. Madge Merewether, her old schoolfellow, had told her she was to help amuse the little girls. Heaven knew how she was to do it. Already the unintelligibility of Lancashire speech had filled her with dismay. The array of hard-faced little girls daunted her; she turned to the boys, but she only saw one—the little hatless, coatless scarecrow with the perfect features And arresting grace, who stood out among his smug companions with the singularly vivid incongruity of a Greek Hermes in the central hall of Madame Tussaud's waxwork exhibition. Fascinated, she strayed down the line toward him. She halted, looked for a second or two into a pair of liquid black eyes and then blushed in agonized shyness. She stared at the beautiful boy, and the beautiful boy stared at her, and not a word could she find in her head to speak. She turned abruptly and moved away. The boy broke rank and slowly followed her.

For little Paul Kegworthy the heavens had opened and flooded his senses, till he nearly fainted, with the perfume of celestial lands. The intoxicating sweetness of it bewildered his young brain. It was nothing delicate, evanescent, like the smell of a flower. It as thick, pungent, cloying, compelling. Mouth agape and nostril wide, he followed the exquisite source of the emanation like one in a dream, half across the yard. A curate laughingly and unsuspectingly brought him back to earth by laying hands on him and bundling him back into his place. There he remained, being a docile urchin; but his eyes remained fixed on Maisie Shepherd. She was only a rosebud beauty of an English girl, her beauty heightened by the colour of distress, but to Paul the radiance of her person almost rivalled the wonder of her perfume. It was his first meeting of a goddess face to face, and he surrendered his whole being in adoration.

In a few minutes the children were marched through the squalid streets, a strident band, to the dingy railway station, a grimy proletariat third-class railway station in which the sign "First Class Waiting Room" glared an outrage and a mockery, and were marshalled into the waiting train. The wonderful experience of which Paul had dreamed for weeks—he had never ridden in a train before—began; and soon the murky environs of the town were left behind and the train sped through the open country.

His companions in the railway carriage crowded at the windows, fighting vigorously for right of place; but Paul sat alone in the middle of the seat, unmoved by the new sensation and speed, and by the glimpses of blue sky and waving trees above the others' heads. The glory of the day was blotted out until he should see and smell the goddess again. At the wayside station where they descended he saw her in the distance, and the glory came once more. She caught his eye, smiled and nodded. He felt a queer thrill run through him. He had been singled out from among all the boys. He alone knew her.

Brakes took them from the station down a country road and, after a mile or so, through stone gates of a stately park, where wonder after wonder was set out before Paul's unaccustomed eyes. On either side of this roadway stretched rolling grass with clumps and glades of great trees in their July bravery—more trees than Paul imagined could be in the world. There were sunlit upland patches and cool dells of shade carpeted with golden buttercups, where cattle fed lazily. Once a herd of fallow deer browsing by the wayside scuttled away at the noisy approach of the brakes. Only afterward did Paul learn their name and nature: to him then they were mythical beasts of fairyland. Once also the long pile-of the Tudor house came into view, flashing-white in the sunshine. The teacher in charge of the brake explained that it was the Marquis of Chudley's residence. It was more beautiful than anything Paul had ever seen; it was bigger than many churches put together; the word "Palace" came into his head—it transcended all his preconceived ideas of palaces: yet in such a palace only could dwell the radiant and sweet-smelling lady of his dream. The certainty gave him a curious satisfaction.

They arrived at the spot where the marquees were erected, and at once began the traditional routine of the school treat-games for the girls, manlier sports for the boys. Lord Chudley, patron of the living of St. Luke's, Bludston, and Lord Bountiful of the feast, had provided swing-boats and a merry-go-round which discoursed infernal music to enraptured ears. Paul stood aloof for a while from these delights, his eye on the section of the girls among whom his goddess moved. As soon as she became detached and he could approach her without attracting notice, he crept

within the magic circle of the scent and lay down prone, drinking in its intoxication, and, as she moved, he wriggled toward her on his stomach like a young snake.

After a time she came near him. "Why aren't you playing with the other boys?" she asked.

Paul sat on his heels. "Dunno, miss," he said shyly.

She glanced at his rapscallion attire, blushed, and blamed herself for the tactless question. "This is a beautiful place, isn't it?"

"It's heavenly," said Paul, with his eyes on her.

"One scarcely wants to do anything but just-just-well, be here." She smiled.

He nodded and said, "Ay!" Then he grew bolder. "I like being alone," he declared defiantly.

"Then I'll leave you," she laughed.

The blood flushed deep under his unwashed olive skin, and he leaped to his feet. "Aw didn't mean that!" he protested hotly. "It wur them other boys."

She was touched by his beauty and quick sensitiveness. "I was only teasing. I'm sure you like being with me."

Paul had never heard such exquisite tones from human lips. To his ears, accustomed to the harsh Lancashire burr, her low, accentless voice was music. So another of his senses was caught in the enchantment.

"Yo' speak so pretty," said he.

At that moment a spruce but perspiring young teacher came up. "We're going to have some boys' races, miss, and we want the ladies to look on. His lordship has offered prizes. The first is a boys' race-under eleven."

"You can join in that, anyhow," she said to Paul. "Go along and let me see you win."

Paul scudded off, his heart aflame, his hand, as he ran, tucking in the shirt whose evasion from the breeches was beyond the control of the single brace. Besides, crawling on your stomach is dislocating even to the most neatly secured attire. But his action was mechanical. His thoughts were with his goddess. In his inarticulate mind he knew himself to be her champion. He sped under her consecration. He knew he could run. He could run like a young deer. Though despised, could he not outrun any of the youth in Budge Street? He took his place in the line of competing children. Far away in the grassy distance were two men holding a stretched string. On one side of him was a tubby boy with a freckled face and an amorphous nose on which the perspiration beaded; on the other a lank, consumptive creature, in Eton collar and red tie and a sprig of sweet William in his buttonhole, a very superior person. Neither of them desired his propinquity. They tried to hustle him from the line. But Paul, born Ishmael, had his hand against them. The fat boy, smitten beneath the belt, doubled up in pain and the consumptive person rubbed agonized shins. A curate, walking down repressing bulges and levelling up concavities, ordained order. The line stood tense. Away beyond, toward the goal, appeared a white mass, which Paul knew to be the ladies in their summer dresses; and among them, though he could not distinguish her, was she in whose eyes he was to win glory. The prize did not matter. It was for her that he was running. In his childish mind he felt passionately identified with her. He was her champion.

The word was given. The urchins started. Paul, his little elbows squared behind him and his eyes fixed vacantly in space, ran with his soul in the toes that protruded through the ragged old boots. He knew not who was in front or who was behind. It was the madness of battle. He ran and ran, until somebody put his arms round him and stopped him.

"Steady on, my boy-steady on!"

Paul looked round in a dazed way. "Have A' won th' race?"

"I'm afraid not, my lad."

With a great effort he screwed his mind to another question. "Wheer did A' coom in?"

"About sixth, but you ran awfully well."

Sixth! He had come in sixth! Sky and grass and trees and white mass of ladies (among whom was the goddess) and unconsiderable men and boys became a shimmering blur. He seemed to stagger away, stagger miles away, until, finding himself quite alone, he threw himself down under a beech tree, and, after a few moments' vivid realization of what had happened, sobbed out the agony of his little soul's despair. Sixth! He had come in sixth! He had failed miserably in his championship. How she must despise him—she who had sent him forth to victory! And yet how 'had it been possible? How had it been possible that other boys could beat him? He was he. An indomitable personage. Some hideous injustice guided human affairs. Why shouldn't he have won? He could not tell. But he had not won. She had sent him forth to win. He had lost. He had

come in a sickening sixth. The disgrace devastated him.

Maisie Shepherd, interested in her child champion, sought him out and easily found him under the beech tree. "Why, what is the matter?"

As he did not answer, she knelt by his side and put her hand on his lean shoulder. "Tell me what has happened."

Again the celestial fragrance overspread his senses. He checked his sobs and wiped his eyes with the back of his grubby hand. "Aw didn't win," he moaned.

"Poor little chap," she said comfortingly. "Did you want to win so very much?"

He got up and stared at her. "Yo' told me to win."

"So you ran for me?"

"Ay!"

She rose to her feet and looked down upon him, somewhat overwhelmed by her responsibility. So in ancient days might a fair maiden have regarded her knight who underwent entirely unnecessary batterings for her sake. "Then for me you've won," she said. "I wish I could give you a prize."

But what in the nature of a prize for a gutter imp of eleven does a pocketless young woman attired for the serious business of a school treat carry upon her person? She laughed in pretty embarrassment. "If I gave you something quite useless, what would you do with it?"

"I 'u'd hide it safe, so 'ut nobody should see it," said Paul, thinking of his precious cards.

"Wouldn't you show it to anybody?"

"By Gum!—" he checked himself suddenly. Such, he had learned, was not Sunday-school language. "I wouldno' show it to a dog," said he.

Maisie Shepherd, aware of romantic foolishness, slipped a cornelian heart from a thin gold chain round her neck. "It's all I can give you for a prize, if you will have it."

If he would have it? The Koh-i-Noor' in his clutch (and a knowledge of its value) could not have given him more thrilling rapture. He was speechless with amazement; Maisie, thrilled too, realized that a word spoken would have rung false. The boy gloated over his treasure; but she did not know—how could she?—what it meant to him. To Paul the bauble was a bit of the warm wonder that was she.

"How are you going to keep it?" she asked.

He hoicked a bit of his shirt-tail from his breeches and proceeded to knot the cornelian heart secure therein. Maisie fled rapidly on the verge of hysterics, After that the school treat had but one meaning for Paul. He fed, it is true, in Pantagruelian fashion on luscious viands, transcending his imagination of those which lay behind Blinks the confectioner's window in Bludston: there he succumbed to the animal; but the sports, the swing-boats, the merry-go-round, offered no temptation. He hovered around Maisie Shepherd like a little dog-quite content to keep her in sight. And every two or three minutes he fumbled about his breeches to see that the knotted treasure was safe.

The day sank into late afternoon. The children had been fed. The weary elders had their tea. The vicarage party took a few moments' rest in the shade of a clump of firs some distance away from the marquee. Behind the screen lay Paul, his eyes on his goddess, his heels in the air, a buttercup-stalk between his teeth. He felt the comforting knot beneath his thigh. For the first time, perhaps, in his life, he knew utter happiness. He heard the talk, but did not listen. Suddenly, however, the sound of his own name caused him to prick his ears. Paul Kegworthy! They were talking about him. There could be no mistake. He slithered a foot or two nearer.

"No matter whether his people are drunkards or murderers," said the beloved voice, "he is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life. Have you ever spoken to him, Winifred?"

"No," said the vicar's daughter. "Of course I've noticed him. Every one does-he is remarkable."

"I don't believe he's a child of these people at all," Maisie declared. "He's of a different clay. He's as sensitive as-as a sensitive plant. You ought to keep your eye on him, Mr. Merewether. I believe he's a poor little prince in a fairy tale."

"A freak—a lusus naturae" said the vicar.

Paul did not know what a lusus naturae was, but it sounded mighty grand.

"He's a fairy prince, and one day he'll come into his kingdom."

"My dear, if you saw his mother!"

"But I'm sure no one but a princess could be Paul Kegworthy's mother," laughed Maisie.

"And his father?"

"A prince too!"

And Paul listened and drank in his goddess's words greedily. Truth clear as crystal fell from her lips. A wild wonder racked his little soul. She had said that his mother was not his mother, and that his father was a prince. The tidings capped the glory of an effulgent day.

When he sneaked home late Mrs. Button, who had learned how he had misspent his time, gave him a merciless thrashing. Why should he be trapesing about with Sunday schools, she asked, with impolite embroidery, while his poor little brothers and sisters were crying in the street? She would learn him to Mess about with parsons and Sunday-school teachers. She was in process of "learning" him when Mr. Button entered. He swore in a manner which would have turned our armies in Flanders pallid, and kicked Paul into the scullery. There the boy remained and went supperless to his bed of sacks, aching and tearless. Before he slept he put his cornelian heart in his hiding-hole. What cared he for stripes or kicks or curses with the Vision Splendid glowing before his eyes?

CHAPTER II

FOR splenetic reasons which none but the Buttons of this world can appreciate, Paul was forbidden, under pain of ghastly tortures, to go near the Sunday school again, and, lest he should defy authority, he was told off on Sunday afternoons to mind the baby, either in the street or the scullery, according to the weather, while the other little Buttons were not allowed to approach him. The defection of the brilliant scholar having been brought to the vicar's notice, he ventured to call one Saturday afternoon on the Buttons, but such was the contumely with which he was received that the good man hastily retreated. In lung power he was outmatched. In repartee he was singularly outclassed. He then sent the superintendent of the school, a man of brawn and zeal, to see what muscular Christianity could accomplish. But muscular Christianity, losing its head, came off with a black eye. After that the Buttons were left alone, and no friendly hand drew Paul within the gates of his Sunday Paradise. He thought of it with aching wistfulness. The only thing that the superintendent could do was to give him surreptitiously a prayer-book, bidding him perfect himself in the Catechism in view of future Confirmation. But, as emulation of his fellows and not religious zeal was the mainspring of Paul's enthusiasm, the pious behest was disregarded. Paul dived into the volume occasionally, however, for intellectual entertainment.

As for the fragrant and beautiful goddess, she had disappeared into thin air. Paul hung for a week or two about the vicarage, in the hope of seeing her, but in vain. As a matter of fact, Maisie Shepherd had left for Scotland the morning after the school treat; people don't come to Bludston for long and happy holidays. So Paul had to feed his ardent little soul on memories. That she had not been an impalpable creature of his fancy was proven by the precious cornelian heart. Her words, too, were written in fine flame across his childish mind. Paul began to live the life of dreams.

He longed for books. The fragmentary glimpses of history and geography in the Board school standard whetted without satisfying his imagination. There was not a book in the house in Budge Street, and he had never a penny to buy one. Sometimes Button would bring home a dirty newspaper, which Paul would steal and read in secret, but its contents seemed to lack continuity. He thirsted for a story. Once a generous boy, since dead-he was too good to live had given him a handful of penny dreadfuls, whence he had derived his knowledge of pirates and Red Indians. Too careless and confident, he had left them about the kitchen, and his indignant mother had used them to light the fire. The burning of his library was an enduring tragedy. He realized that it must be reconstituted; but how? His nimble wit hit on a plan. Vagrant as an unowned dog, he could roam the streets at pleasure. Why should he not sell newspapers-in a quarter of the town, be it understood, remote from both factory and Budge Street? He sold newspapers for three weeks before he was found out. Then he was chastised and forced to go on selling newspapers with no profit to himself, for his person was rigorously searched and coppers confiscated as soon as he came home. But during the three weeks' traffic on his own account he had amassed a sufficient hoard of pennies for the purchase of several books in gaudy paper covers exposed for sale in the little stationer's shop round the corner. Soon he discovered that if he could batik a copper or two on his way home his mother would be none the wiser. The stationer became his banker, and when the amount of the deposit equaled the price of a book, Paul withdrew his money's worth. So a goodly library of amazing rubbish was stored by degrees under the scullery slab, until it outgrew safe accommodation; whereupon Paul transferred the bulk of it to a hole in a bit of waste ground, a deserted brickfield on the ragged outskirts of the town. At last misfortune befell him. One dreary afternoon of rain he dropped his new bundle of papers in the

mud of the roadway. To avoid death he had to spring from the path of a thundering tramcar. A heavy cart ran over the bundle. While he was ruefully and hastily gathering the papers together, a band of street children swooped down and kicked them lustily about the filth. He was battling with one urchin when a policeman grabbed him. With an elusive twist he escaped and ran like a terrified hare. Disaster followed, and that was the end of his career as a newsvendor.

Greater leisure for reading, however, compensated the loss of the occasional penny. He read dazzling tales of dukes with palaces (like Chudley Court), and countesses with ropes of diamonds in their hair, who all bore a resemblance to the fragrant one. And dukes and countesses lived the most resplendent lives, and spoke such beautiful language, and had such a way with them! He felt a curious pride in being able to enter into all their haughty emotions. Then, one day, he began a story about a poor little outcast boy in a slum. At first he did not care for it. His soaring spirit disdained boys in slums. It had its being on higher planes. But he read on, and, reading on, grew interested, until interest was intensified into absorption For the outcast boy in the slums, you must know, was really the kidnapped child of a prince and a princess, and after the most romantic adventures was enfolded in his parents' arms, married a duke's beauteous daughter, whom in his poverty he had worshipped from afar, and drove away with his bride in a coach-and-six.

To little Paul Kegworthy the clotted nonsense was a revelation from on high. He was that outcast boy. The memorable pronouncement of the goddess received confirmation in some kind of holy writ. The Vision Splendid, hitherto confused, crystallized into focus. He realized vividly how he differed in feature and form and intellect and character from the low crowd with whom he was associated. His unpopularity was derived from envy. His manifest superiority was gall to their base natures. Yes, he had got to the heart of the mystery. Mrs. Button was not his mother. For reasons unknown he had been kidnapped. Aware of his high lineage, she hated him and beat him and despitefully used him. She never gushed, it is true, over her offspring; but the little Buttons flourished under genuine motherment. They, inconsiderable brats, were her veritable children. Whereas he, Paul-it was as plain as daylight. Somewhere far away in the great world, an august and griefstricken pair, at that very moment, were mourning the loss of their only son. There they were, in their marble palace, surrounded by flunkeys all crimson and gold (men servants were always "gorgeously apparelled flunkeys" in Paul's books), sitting at a table loaded with pineapples on golden dishes, and eating out their hearts with longing. He could hear their talk.

"If only our beloved son were with us," said the princess, wiping away a tear.

"We must be patient, my sweet Highness," replied the prince, with lofty resignation stamped on his noble brow. "Let us trust to Heaven to remove the cankerworm that is gnawing our vitals."

Paul felt very sorry for them, and he, too, wiped away a tear.

For many years he remembered that day. He was alone in his brickfield on a gusty March morning-the Easter holidays had released him from school-squatting by his hole under the lee of a mass of earth and rubbish. It was a mean expanse, blackened by soot and defiled by refuse. Here and there bramble and stunted gorse struggled for an existence; but the flora mainly consisted in bits of old boots and foul raiment protruding grotesquely from the soil, half-buried cans, rusty bits of iron, and broken bottles. On one side the backs of grimy little houses, their yards full of fluttering drab underwear, marked the edge of the hopeless town which rose above them in forbidding buildings, belching chimney shafts and the spikes of a couple of spires. On the other sides it was bounded by the brick walls of factories, the municipal gasworks and the approach to the railway station, indicated by signal-posts standing out against the sky like gallows, and a tram-line bordered by a row of skeleton cottages. Golgotha was a grim garden compared with Paul's brickfield. Sometimes the children of the town scuttled about it like dingy little rabbits. But more often it was a desolate solitude. Perhaps all but the lowest of the parents of Bludston had put the place out of bounds, as gipsies and other dwellers in vans were allowed to camp there. It also bore an evil name because a night murder or two had been committed in its murky seclusion. Paul knew the exact spot, an ugly cavity toward the gasworks end, where a woman had been "done in," and even he, lord of the brickfield, preferred to remain at a purifying distance. But it was his own domain. He felt in it a certain pride of possession. The hollow under the lee of the rubbish-heap, by the side of the hole where he kept his paper library, was the most homelike place he knew.

For many years he remembered that day. The light that never was on sea or land fell upon the brickfield. He had read the story at one stretch. He had sat there for hours reading, for hours rapt in his Vision. At last material darkness began to gather round him, and he awoke with a start to realization that he had been sitting there most of the day. With a sigh he replaced his book in the hole, which he cunningly masked with a lump of hard clay, and, feeling stiff and cold, ran, childlike, homeward. In the silence of the night he took out his cornelian heart and fondled it. The day had been curiously like, yet utterly unlike, the day on which she had taken it from her neck. In a dim fashion he knew that the two days were of infinite significance in his life and were complementary. He had been waiting, as it were, for nine months for this day's revelation, this day's confirmation.

Paul rose the next morning, a human being with a fixed idea, an unquestioned faith in his destiny. His star shone clear. He was born to great things. In those early years that followed it

was not a matter of an imaginative child's vanity, but the unalterable, serene conviction of a child's soul. The prince and princess were realities, his future greatness a magnificent certitude. You must remember this, if you would understand Paul's after-life. It was built on this radiant knowledge. In the afternoon he met Billy Goodge and the gang. They were playing at soldiers, Billy distinguished by a cocked hat made out of newspaper and a wooden sword.

"Coom on, Susie, wi be going to knock hell out of the boys in Stamford Street."

Paul folded his arms and looked at him contemptuously, as became one of his noble blood. "You could no' knock hell out of a bug."

"What's that tha says?"

Paul repeated the insult.

"Say that agen!" blustered the cocked-hatted leader.

Paul said it again and nothing happened, Billy received vociferous and sanguinary advice couched in sanguinary terms.

"Try and hit me!" said Billy.

The scene was oddly parallel with one in the story of the outcast boy of the gutter. Paul, conscious of experiment, calmly went up to him and kicked him. He kicked him hard. The sensation was delicious. Billy edged away. He knew from past experience that if it came to blows he was no match for Paul, but hitherto, having shown fight, he had received the support of the gang. Now, however, there was an extraordinary quality in Paul's defiance which took the spirit out of him. Once more he was urged by the ragged brats to deeds of blood. He did not respond. Paul kicked him again before his followers. If he could have gone on kicking him for ever and ever what delirium of joy were eternity! Billy edged farther away. The mongrel game-cock was beaten. Paul, dramatically conscious of what the unrecognized prince would do in such a circumstance, advanced, smacked his face, plucked the cocked hat from his head, the sword from his hand, and invested himself with these insignia of leadership, Billy melted silently into the subfusc air of Budge Street. The ragged regiment looked around and there was no Billy. Paul Kegworthy, the raggedest of them all, with nothing to recommend him but his ridiculous exotic beauty and the paper and wooden spolia opima of the vanquished, stood before them, a tattered Caesar. The gang hung spellbound. They were ready, small band of heroes, to follow him against the hordes of Stamford Street. They only awaited his signal. Paul tasted a joy known but to few of the sons of men-absolute power over, and supreme contempt for, his fellows. He stood for a moment or two, in the grey, miserable street discordant with the wailings of babies and the clamour of futile little girls, who, after the manner of women, had no idea of political crisis, and the shrill objurgations of slattern mothers and the raucous cries of an idealist vendor of hyacinths, and, cocked hat on head and wooden sword in hand, he looked at his fawning army. Then came the touch of genius that was often to characterize his actions in after years. It was mimetic, as he had read of such a thing in his paper-covered textbooks-but it was none the less a touch of genius. He frowned on the dirty, ignoble little boys. What had he in common with them-he, the son of a prince? Nothing. He snapped his sword across his knee, tore his cocked hat in two, and, casting the fragments before them, marched proudly toward the very last place on the face of the earth that he desired to visit-his own home. The army remained for a few seconds bewildered by the dramatic and unexpected, and, leaderless, did what many a real army has done in similar circumstances, straggled into disintegration.

Thenceforward, Paul, had he so chosen, could have ruled despotically in Budge Street. But he did not choose. The games from which he used to be excluded, or in which he used to be allowed to join on sufferance, no longer appealed to him. He preferred to let Joey Meakin lead the gang, vice Billy Goodge deposed, while he himself remained aloof. Now and then he condescended to arbitrate between disputants or to kick a little brute of a bully, but he felt that, in doing so, he was derogating from his high dignity. It was his joy to feel himself a dark, majestic power overshadowing the street, a kind of Grand Llama hidden in mystery. Often he would walk through the midst of the children, seemingly unconscious of their existence, acting strenuously to himself his part of a high-born prince.

This lasted till a dark and awful day when Mr. Button pitched him into the factory. These were times before kindly Education Acts and Factory Acts decreed that no boy under twelve years of age should work in a factory, and that every boy under fourteen should spend half his time at the factory and half at school. Paul's education was considered complete, and he had to plunge into full time at the grim and grinding place. He had joined the great army of workers. A wide gulf separated him from the gang of Budge Street. It existed for him no more than did the little girls and babies. Life changed its aspect entirely. Gone were the days of vagabondage, the lazy, the delicious even though cold and hungry hours of dreaming and reading in the brickfield; gone was the happy freedom of the chartered libertine of the gutter. He was bound, a little slave, like hundreds of other little slaves and thousands of big ones, to a relentless machine. He entered the hopeless factory gate at six in the morning and left it at half-past five in the evening; and, his rough food swallowed, slunk to his kennel in the scullery like a little tired dog. And Mr. Button drank, and beat Mrs. Button, and Mrs. Button beat Paul whenever she felt in the humour and had anything handy to do it with, and, as a matter of course, confiscated his wages on Saturday and

set him to mind the baby on Sunday afternoons. In the monotony, weariness and greyness of life the glory of the Vision began to grow dim.

In the factory he was not thrown into competition with other boys. He was the skip, the drudge, the carrier and fetcher, the cleaner and polisher for a work-bench of men devoid of sentiment and blind to his princely qualities. He tried, indeed, by nimbleness of hand and intelligence, to impress them with his superiority to his predecessors, but they were not impressed. At the most he escaped curses. His mind began to work in the logic of the real. Entrance into his kingdom implied as a primary condition release from the factory. But how could such release come, when every morning a remorseless and insensate hook-just like a certain hook in the machinery whose deadly certainty of grip fascinated and terrified him, caught him from his morning sleep every morning of his life, save Sunday, and swung him inexorably into the factory? He looked around and saw that no one was released, except through death or illness or incompetence. And the incompetent starved. Any child in Budge Street with a grain of sense knew that. There was no release. He, son of a prince, would work for ever and ever in Bludston. His heart failed him. And there was no one to whom he could tell the tragic and romantic story of his birth. One or two happy gleams of brightness, however, lightened his darkness and prevented the Vision from fading entirely into the greyness of the factory sky. Once the Owner, an unspeakable god with a bald pink head and a paunch vastly chained with gold, conducted a party of ladies over the works. One of the latter, a very grand lady, noticed him at his bench and came-and spoke kindly to him. Her voice had the same sweet timbre as his goddess's. After she had left him his quick ears caught her question to the Owner: "Where did you get your young Apollo? Not out of Lancashire, surely? He's wonderful." And just before she passed out of sight she turned and looked at him and smiled. He learned on inquiry that she was the Marchioness of Chudley. The instant recognition of him by one of his own aristocratic caste revived his faith. The day would assuredly come. Suppose it had been his own mother, instead of the Marchioness? Stranger things happened in the books. The other gleam proceeded from one of the workmen at his bench, a serious and socialistic person who occasionally lent him something to read: Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," "Mill on Liberty," Bellamy's "Looking Backward," at that time at the height of its popularity. And sometimes he would talk to Paul about collectivism and the new era that was coming when there would be no such words as rich and poor, because there would be no such classes as they denoted.

Paul would say: "Then a prince will be no better than a factory hand?"

"There won't be any princes, I tell thee," his friend would reply, and launch out into a denunciation of tyrants.

But this did not suit Paul. If there were to be no princes, where, would he come in? So, while grateful to the evangelist for talking to him and treating him as a human being, he totally rejected his gospel. It struck at the very foundations of his visionary destiny. He was afraid to argue, for his friend was vehement. Also confession of aristocratic prejudices might turn friendship into enmity. But his passionate antagonism to the communistic theory, all the more intense through suppression, strengthened his fantastic faith. Still, the transient smile of a marchioness and the political economy of a sour-avised operative are not enough to keep alive the romance of underfed, ill-clad, overdriven childhood. And after a while he was deprived even of the latter consolation, his friend being shifted to another end of the factory. In despair he turned to Ada, the eldest of the little Buttons, who now had reached years of comparative discretion, and strove to interest her in his dreams, veiling his identity under a fictitious name; but Ada, an unimaginative and practical child with a growing family to look after, either listened stupidly or consigned him, in the local vernacular, to perdition.

"But suppose 'it was me that was the unknown prince? Supposing it was me I've been talking about all the time? Supposing it was me that went away and came back in a gold coach and six horses, with a duke's daughter all over diamonds by my side, what would tha say?"

"I think tha art nowt but a fool," said the elderly child of ten, "and, if mother heard thee, she'd lamm the life out of thee."

Paul had the sickening sensation of the man who has confided the high secrets of his soul to coarsefibred woman. He turned away, darkly conscious of having magnanimously given Ada a chance to mount with him into the upper air, which opportunity she, daughter of earth, had, in her purblind manner, refused. Thenceforward Ada was to him an unnoticeable item in the cosmos.

One hopeless month succeeded another, until a cloud seemed to close round Paul's brain, rendering him automatic in his actions, merely animal in his half-satisfied appetites. Fines and curses were his portion at the factory; curses and beatings—deserved if Justice held a hurried scale at home. Paul, who had read of suicide in The Bludston Herald, turned his thoughts morbidly to death. But his dramatic imagination always carried him beyond' his own demise to the scene in the household when his waxlike corpse should be discovered dangling from a rope fixed to the hook in the kitchen ceiling. He posed cadaverous before a shocked Budge Street, before a conscience-stricken factory; and he wept on his sack bed in the scullery because the prince and the princess, his august parents, would never know that he had died. A whit less gloomy were his imaginings of the said prince and princess rushing into the house, in the nick of time, just before life was extinct, and cutting him down. How they were to find him he did not

know. This side-track exploration of possibilities was a symptom of sanity.

Yet, Heaven knows what would have happened to Paul, after a year or so at the factory, if Barney Bill, a grotesque god from the wide and breezy spaces of the world, had not limped into his life.

Barney Bill wore the cloth cap and conventional and unpicturesque, though shapeless and weather-stained, garment of the late nineteenth century. Neither horns nor goat's feet were visible; nor was the pipe of reed on which he played. Yet he played, in Paul's ear, the comforting melody of Pan, and the glory of the Vision once more flooded Paul's senses, and the factory and Budge Street and the Buttons and the scullery faded away like an evil dream.

CHAPTER III

THE Fates arranged Barney Bill's entrance late on a Saturday afternoon in August. It was not dramatic. It was merely casual. They laid the scene in the brickfield.

It had rained all day, and now there was sullen clearance. Paul, who had been bathing with some factory boys in the not very savoury canal a mile or so distant, had wandered mechanically to his brickfield library, which, by means of some scavenging process, he managed to keep meagrely replenished. Here he had settled himself with a dilapidated book on his knees for an hour's intellectual enjoyment. It was not a cheerful evening. The ground was sodden, and rank emanations rose from the refuse. From where he sat he could see an angry sunset like a black-winged dragon with belly of flame brooding over the town. The place wore an especial air of desolation. Paul felt depressed. Bathing in the pouring wet is a chilly sport, and his midday meal of cold potatoes had not been invigorating. These he had grabbed, and, having done them up hastily in newspaper, had bolted with them out of the house. He had been fined heavily for slackness during the week, and Mr. Button's inevitable wrath at docked wages he desired to undergo as late as possible. Then, the sun had blazed furiously during the last six imprisoned days, and now the long-looked for hours of freedom were disfigured by rain and blight. He resented the malice of things. He also resented the invasion of his brickfield by an alien van, a gaudy vehicle, yellow and red, to the exterior of which clinging wicker chairs, brooms, brushes and jute mats gave the impression of a lunatic's idea of decoration. An old horse, hobbled a few feet away, philosophically cropped the abominable grass. On the front of the van a man squatted with food and drink. Paul hated him as a trespasser and a gormandizer.

Presently the man, shading his eyes with his hand, scrutinized the small, melancholy figure, and then, hopping from his perch, sped toward him with a nimble and curiously tortuous gait.

He approached, a wiry, almost wizened, little man of fifty, tanned to gipsy brown. He had a shrewd thin face, with an oddly flattened nose, and little round moist dark eyes that glittered like diamonds. He wore cloth cap on the back of his head, showing in front a thick mass of closely cropped hair. His collarless shirt was open at the neck and his sleeves were rolled up above the elbow.

"You're Polly Kegworthy's kid, ain't you?" he asked.

"Ay," said Paul.

"Seen you afore, haven't I?" Then Paul remembered. Three or four times during his life, at long, long intervals, the van had passed down Budge Street, stopping at houses here and there. About two years ago, coming home, he had met it at his own door. His mother and the little man were talking together. The man had taken him under the chin and twisted his face up. "Is that the nipper?" he had asked.

His mother had nodded, and, releasing Paul with a clumsy gesture of simulated affection, had sent him with twopence for a pint of beer to the public-house at the end of the street. He recalled how the man had winked his little bright eye at his mother before putting the jug to his lips.

"I browt th' beer for yo'," said Paul.

"You did. It was the worst beer, bar none, I've ever had. I can taste it now." He made a wry face. Then he cocked his head on one side. "I suppose you're wondering who I am?" said he.

"Ay," said Paul. "Who art tha?"

"I'm Barney Bill," replied the man. "Did you never hear of me? I'm known on the road from Taunton to Newcastle and from Hereford to Lowestoft. You can tell yer mother that you seed me."

A smile curled round Paul's lips at the comic idea of giving his mother unsolicited

information. "Barney Bill?" said he.

"Yuss," said the man. Then, after a pause, "What are you doing of there?"

"Reading," said Paul.

"Let's have a look at it."

Paul regarded him suspiciously; but there was kindliness in the twinkling glance. He handed him the sorry apology for a book.

Barney Bill turned it over. 'Why, said he, "it ain't got no beginning and no end. It's all middle. 'Kenilworth.' Do yer like it?"

"Ay!" said Paul. "It's foine."

"Who do yer think wrote it?"

As both cover and a hundred pages at the beginning, including the title-page, to say nothing of a hundred pages at the end, were missing, Paul had no clue to the authorship.

"Dunno," said he.

"Sir Walter Scott."

Paul jumped to his feet. Sir Walter Scott, he knew not why or how, was one of those bright names that starred in his historical darkness, like Caesar and Napoleon and Ridley and Latimer and W. G. Grace.

"Tha' art sure? Sir Water Scott?"

The shock of meeting Sir Walter in the flesh could not have been greater. The man nodded. "Think I'd tell yer a lie? I do a bit of reading myself in the old 'bus there"-he jerked a thumb—"I've got some books now. Would yer like to see 'em?"

Would a mouse like cheese? Paul started off with his new companion.

"If it wasn't for a book or two, I'd go melancholy mad and bust myself," the latter remarked.

Paul's spirit leaped toward a spiritual brother. It was precisely his own case.

"You'll find a lot of chaps that don't hold with books. Dessay you've met 'em?"

Paul laughed, precipient of irony.

Barney Bill continued: "I've heard some on 'em say: 'What's the good of books? Give me nature,' and they goes and asks for it at the public-'ouse. Most say nothing at all, but just booze."

"Like father," said Paul.

"Eh?" cried his friend sharply.

"Sam Button, what married mother."

"Ali! so he boozes a lot, does he?"

Paul drew an impressionistic and lurid picture of Mr. Button.

"And they fight?"

"Like billy-o," said Paul.

They reached the van. Barney Bill, surprisingly agile in spite of his twisted leg, sprang into the interior. Paul, standing between the shafts, looked in with curiosity. There was a rough though not unclean bed running down one side. Beyond, at the stern, so to speak, was a kind of galley containing cooking stove, kettle and pot. There were shelves, some filled with stock-in-trade, others with miscellaneous things, the nature of which he could not distinguish in the gloom. Barney Bill presently turned and dumped an armful of books on the footboard an inch or two below Paul's nose. Paul scanned the title pages. They were: Goldsmith's "Animated Nature," "Enquire Within Upon Everything," an old bound volume of "Cassell's Family Reader," "The Remains of Henry Kirke White," and "Martin Chuzzlewit." The owner looked down upon them proudly.

"I've got some more, but I can't get at 'em."

Paul regarded him with envy. This was a man of great possessions. "How long are yo' going to stay here?" he asked hopefully.

"Till sunrise to-morrow."

Paul's face fell. He seemed to have no luck nowadays.

Barney Bill let himself down to a sitting position on the footboard and reached to the end for a huge pork pie and a clasp knife which lay beside a tin can. "I'll go on with my supper," said he; then noticing a wistful, hungry look in the child's eyes, "Have a bit?" he asked.

He cut off a mighty hunk and put it into Paul's ready hand. Paul perched himself beside him, and they both ate for a long while in silence, dangling their legs. Now and again the host passed the tin of tea to wash down the food. The flaming dragon died into a smoky red above the town. A light or two already appeared in the fringe of mean houses. Twilight fell rapidly.

"Oughtn't you to be getting home?"

Paul, his hunger appeased, grinned. His idea was to sneak into the scullery just after the public-houses closed, when his mother would be far too much occupied with Mr. Button to worry about him. Chastisement would then be postponed till the morning. Artlessly he laid the situation before his friend, who led him on to relate other amenities of his domestic life.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Barney Bill. "She must be a she-devil!"

Paul cordially agreed. He had already imagined the Prince of Darkness in the guise of Mr. Button; Mrs. Button was in every way fit to be the latter's diabolical mate. Encouraged by sympathy and shrewd questions, he sketched in broad detail his short career, glorifying himself as the prize scholar and the erstwhile Grand Llama of Budge Street, and drawing a dismal picture of the factory. Barney Bill listened comprehendingly. Then, smoking a well-blackened clay, he began to utter maledictions on the suffocating life in towns and to extol his own manner of living. Having an appreciative audience, he grew eloquent over his lonely wanderings the length and breadth of the land; over the joy of country things, the sweetness of the fields, the wayside flowers, the vaulted highways in the leafy summer, the quiet, sleepy towns, the fragrant villages, the peace and cleanness of the open air.

The night had fallen, and in the cleared sky the stars shone bright. Paul, his head against the lintel of the van door, looked up at them, enthralled by the talk of Barney Bill. The vagabond merchant had the slight drawling inflection of the Home Counties, which gave a soothing effect to a naturally soft voice. To Paul it was the pipes of Pan.

"It mightn't suit everybody," said Barney Bill philosophically. "Some folks prefer gas to laylock. I don't say that they're wrong. But I likes laylock."

"What's laylock?" asked Paul.

His friend explained. No lilac bloomed in the blighted Springs of Bludston.

"Does it smell sweet?"

"Yuss. So does the may and the syringa and the new-mown hay and the seaweed. Never smelt any of 'em?"

"No," sighed Paul, sensuously conscious of new and vague horizons. "I once smelled summat sweet," he said dreamily. "It wur a lady."

"D'ye mean a woman?"

"No. A lady. Like what yo' read of."

"I've heard as they do smell good; like violets—some on 'em," the philosopher remarked.

Drawn magnetically to this spiritual brother, Paul said almost without volition, "She said I were the son of a prince."

"Son of a WOT?" cried Barney Bill, sitting up with a jerk that shook a volume or two onto the ground.

Paul repeated the startling word.

"Lor' lumme!" exclaimed the other, "don't yer know who yer father was?"

Paul told of his disastrous attempts to pierce the mystery of his birth.

"A frying-pan? Did she now? That's a mother for yer."

Paul disowned her. He disowned her with reprehensible emphasis.

Barney Bill pulled reflectively at his pipe. Then he laid a bony hand on the boy's shoulder. "Who do you think yer mother was?" he asked gravely. "A princess?"

"Ay, why not?" said Paul.

"Why not?" echoed Barney Bill. "Why not? You're a blooming lucky kid. I wish I was a missin'

heir. I know what I'd do."

"What?" asked Paul, the ingenuous.

"I'd find my 'igh-born parents."

"How?" asked Paul.

"I'd go through the whole of England, asking all the princes I met. You don't meet 'em at every village pump, ye know," he added quickly, lest the boy, detecting the bantering note, should freeze into reserve; "but, if you keep yer eyes skinned and yer ears standing up, you can learn where they are. Lor' lumme! I wouldn't be a little nigger slave in a factory if I was the missin' heir. Not much. I wouldn't be starved and beaten by Sam and Polly Button. Not me. D'ye think yer aforesaid 'igh-born parents are going to dive down into this stinkin' suburb of hell to find yer out? Not likely. You've got to find 'em sonny. Yer can find anybody on the 'ighroad if yer tramps long enough. What d'yer think?"

"I'll find 'em," said Paul, in dizzy contemplation of possibilities.

"When are yer going to start?" asked Barney Bill.

Paul felt his wages jingle in his pocket. He was a capitalist. The thrill of independence swept him from head to foot. What time like the present? "I'll start now," said he.

It was night. Quite dark, save for the stars; the lights already disappearing in the fringe of mean houses whose outline was merged against the blackness of the town; the green and red and white disks along the railway line behind the dim mass of the gasworks; the occasional streak of conglomerate fireflies that was a tramcar; and the red, remorseless glow of here and there a furnace that never was extinct in the memory of man. And, save for the far shriek of trains, the less remote and more frequent clanging of passing tramcars along the road edged with the skeleton cottages, and, startlingly near, the vain munching and dull footfall of the old horse, all was still. Compared with home and Budge Street, it was the reposeful quiet of the tomb. Barney Bill smoked for a time in silence, while Paul sat with clenched fists and a beating heart. The simplicity of the high adventure dazed him. All he had to do was to walk away—walk and walk, free as a sparrow.

Presently Barney Bill slid from the footboard. "You stay here, sonny, till I come back."

He limped away across the dim brickfield and sat down at the edge of the hollow where the woman had been murdered. He had to think; to decide a nice point of ethics. A vagrant seller of brooms and jute mats, even though he does carry about with him "Cassell's Family Reader" and "The Remains of Henry Kirke White," is distracted by few psychological problems. Sufficient for the day is the physical thereof. And when a man like Barney Bill is unencumbered by the continuous feminine, the ordinary solution of life is simple. But now the man had to switch his mind back to times before Paul was born, when the eternal feminine had played the very devil with him, when all sorts of passions and emotions had whirled his untrained being into dizziness. No passions or emotions now affected him; but their memory created an atmosphere of puzzledom. He had to adjust values. He had to deputize for Destiny. He also had to harmonize the pathetically absurd with the grimly real. He took off his cap and scratched his cropped head. After a while he damned something indefinite and hastened in his dot-and-carry-one fashion to the van.

"Quite made up yer mind to go in search of yer 'ighborn parents?"

"Ay," said Paul.

"Like me to give yer a lift, say, as far as London?"

Paul sprang to the ground and opened his mouth to speak. But his knees grew weak and he quivered all over like one who beholds the god. The abstract nebulous romance of his pilgrimage had been crystallized, in a flash, into the concrete. "Ay," he panted.

"Ay!" and he steadied himself with his back and elbows against the shafts.

"That's all right," said Barney Bill, in a matter-of fact way, calm and godlike to Paul. "You can make up a bed on the floor of the old 'bus with some of them there mats inside and we'll turn in and have a sleep, and start at sunrise."

He clambered into the van, followed by Paul, and lit an oil lamp. In a few moments Paul's bed was made. He threw himself down. The resilient surface of the mats was luxury after the sacking on the scullery stone. Barney Bill performed his summary toilet, blew out the lamp and went to his couch.

Presently Paul started up, smitten by a pang straight through his heart. He sprang to his feet. "Mister," he cried in the darkness, not knowing how else to address his protector. "I mun go whoam."

"Wot?" exclaimed the other. "Thought better of it already? Well, go, then, yer little 'eathen

'ippocrite!"

"I'll coom back," said Paul.

"Yer afeared, yer little rat," said Barney Bill, out of the blackness.

"I'm not," retorted Paul indignantly. "I'm freeten'd of nowt."

"Then what d'yer want to go for? If you've made up yer mind to come along of me, just stay where you are. If you go home they'll nab you and whack you for staying out late, and lock you up, and you'll not be able to get out in time in the morning. And I ain't a-going to wait for yer, I tell yer straight."

"I'll be back," said Paul.

"Don't believe it. Good mind not to let yer go."

The touch of genius suddenly brushed the boy's forehead. He drew from his pockets the handful of silver and copper that was his week's wages, and, groping in the darkness, poured it over Barney Bill. "Then keep that for me till I coom back."

He fumbled hurriedly for the latch of the van door, found it, and leaped out into the waste under the stars, just as the owner of the van rose with a clatter of coins. To pick up money is a deeply rooted human instinct. Barney Bill lit his lamp, and, uttering juicy though innocuous flowers of anathema, searched for the scattered treasure. When he had retrieved three shillings and sevenpence-halfpenny he peered out. Paul was far away. Barney Bill put the money on the shelf and looked at it in a puzzled way. Was it an earnest of the boy's return, or was it a bribe to let him go? The former hypothesis seemed untenable, for if he got nabbed his penniless condition would be such an aggravation of his offence as to call down upon him a more ferocious punishment than he need have risked. And why in the name of sanity did he want to go home? To kiss his sainted mother in her sleep? To pack his blankety portmanteau? Barney Bill's fancy took a satirical turn. On the latter hypothesis, the boy was in deadly fear, and preferred the certainty of the ferocious punishment to the terrors of an unknown future. Barney Bill smoked a reflective pipe, looking at the matter from the two points of view. Not being able to decide, he put out his lamp, shut his door and went to sleep.

Dawn awoke him. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. Paul was not there. He did not expect him to be there. He felt sorry. The poor little kid had funked it. He had hoped for better stuff. He rose and stretched himself, put on socks and boots, lit his cooking stove, set a kettle to boil and, opening the door, remained for a while breathing the misty morning air. Then he let himself down and proceeded to the back of the van, where stood a pail of water and a tin basin, his simple washing apparatus. Having sluiced head and neck and dried them with something resembling a towel, he hooked up the pail, stowed the basin in a rack, unslung a nosebag, which he attached to the head of the old horse, and went indoors to prepare his own elementary breakfast. That over, he put the horse into the shafts. Barney Bill was a man of his word. He was not going to wait for Paul; but he cast a glance round the limited horizon of the brickfield, hoping, against reason, to see the little slim figure emerge from some opening and run toward him.

"Darn the boy!" said Barney Bill, taking off his cap and scratching his wet head.

A low moan broke the dead silence of the Sunday dawn. He started and looked about him. He listened. There was another. The moans were those of a sleeper. He bent down and looked under the van. There lay Paul, huddled up, fast asleep on the bare ground.

"Well, I'm jiggered! I'm just jiggered. Here, you—hello!" cried Barney Bill.

Paul awakened suddenly, half sat up, grinned, grabbed at something on the ground beside him and wriggled out between the wheels.

"How long you been there?"

"About two hours," said Paul.

"Why didn't yer wake me?"

"I didn't like to disturb thee," said Paul.

"Did yer go home?"

"Ay," said Paul.

"Into the house?"

Paul nodded and smiled. Now, that it was all over, he could smile. But only afterwards, when he had greater command of language, could he describe the awful terror that shook his soul when he opened the front door, crept twice through the darkness of the sleeping kitchen and noiselessly closed the door again.

For many months he felt the terror of his dreams. Briefly he told Barney Bill of his exploit. How he had to lurk in the shadow of the street during the end of a battle between the Buttons, in which the lodgers and a policeman had intervened. How he had to wait—interminable hours—until the house was quiet. How he had stumbled over things in the drunken disorder of the kitchen floor, dreading to arouse the four elder little Buttons who slept in the room. How narrowly he had missed running into the arms of the policeman who had passed the door some seconds before he opened it. How he had crouched on the pavement until the policeman turned the corner, and how he had fled in the opposite direction.

"And if yer mother had caught ye, what would she have done to yer?"

"Half-killed me," said Paul.

Barney Bill twisted his head on one side and looked at him out of his twinkling eyes. Paul thought he resembled a grotesque bird.

"Wot did yer do it for?" he asked.

"This," said Paul, holding out a grubby palm in which lay the precious cornelian heart.

His friend blinked at it. "Wot the blazes is the good of that?"

"It's a talisman," replied Paul, who, having come across the word in a book, had at once applied it to his treasure.

"Lor' lumme!" cried Barney Bill. "And it was for that bit of stuff yer ran the risk of being flayed alive by yer loving parents?"

Paul was quick to detect a note of admiration underlying the superficial contemptuousness of the words. "I'd ha' gone through fire and water for it," he declared theatrically.

"Lor' lumme!" said Barney Bill again.

"I got summat else," said Paul, taking from his pocket his little pack of Sunday-school cards.

Barney Bill examined them gravely. "I think you'd better do away with these."

"Why?"

"They establishes yer identity," said Barney Bill.

"What's that?"

Barney Bill explained. Paul was running away from home. The police, informed of the fact, would raise a hue-and-cry. The cards, if found, would be evidence. Paul laughed. The constabulary was not popular in Budge Street.

"Mother ain't going to ha' nowt to do with the police, nor father, either."

He hinted that the cards might be useful later. His childish vanity loved the trivial encomiums inscribed thereon. They would impress beholders who had not the same reasons for preoccupation as Barney Bill.

"You're thinking of your 'igh-born parents," said Barney Bill. "All right, keep 'em. Only hide 'ern away safe. And now get in and let us clear out of this place. It smelts like a cheese with an escape of gas running through it. And you'd better stay inside and not show your face all day long. I don't want to be had up for kidnapping."

Paul jumped in. Barney Bill clambered onto the footboard and took the reins. The old horse started and the van jolted its way to the road, on which as yet no tramcars clattered. As the van turned, Paul, craning his neck out of the window, obtained the last glimpse of Bludston. He had no regrets. As far as such a thought could be formulated in his young mind, he wished that the place could be blotted out from his memory, as it was now hidden forever from his vision. He stood at the little window, facing south, gazing toward the unknown region at the end of which lay London, city of dreams. He was not quite fourteen. His destiny was before him, and to the fulfilment thereof he saw no hindrance. No more would the remorseless factory hook catch him from his sleep and swing him into the relentless machine. Never again, would he hear his mother's shrewish voice or feel her heavy, greasy hand about his ears. He was free—free to read, free to sleep, free to talk, free to drink in the beauty of the lazy hours. Vaguely he was conscious that one of the wonders that would come would be his own expansion. He would learn many things which he did not know, things that would fit him for his high estate. He looked down upon the foreshortened figure of Barney Bill, his cloth cap, his shoulders, his bare brown arms, a patch of knee. To the boy, at that moment, he was less a man than an instrument of Destiny guiding him, not knowing why, to the Promised Land.

At last on the quiet road Paul saw a bicyclist approaching them. Mindful of Barney Bill's injunction, he withdrew his head. Presently he lay down on the couch, and, soothed by the jogging of the van and the pleasant creaking of the baskets, fell into the deep sleep of tired and

happy childhood.

CHAPTER IV

IT was a day of dust and blaze. Dust lay thick on the ground, it filled the air, it silvered the lower branches of the wayside trees, it turned the old brown horse into a dappled grey, it powdered the black hair of Barney Bill and of Paul until they looked like vagabond millers. They sat side by side on the footboard while the old horse jogged on, whisking flies away with a scanty but persistent tail.

Paul, barefoot and barelegged, hatless, coatless, absorbed blaze and dust with the animal content of a young lizard. A month's summer wandering had baked him to gipsy brown. A month's sufficient food and happiness had filled gaunt hollows in his face and covered all too visible ribs with flesh. Since his flight from Bludston his life had been one sensuous trance. His hungry young soul had been gorged with beauty—the beauty of fields and trees and rolling country, of still, quivering moons and starlit nights, of exultant freedom, of never-failing human sympathy. He had a confused memory of everything. They had passed through many towns as similar to Bludston as one factory chimney to another, and had plied their trade in many a mean street, so much the counterpart of Budge Street that he had watched a certain window or door with involuntary trepidation, until he realized that it was not Budge Street, that he was a happy alien to its squalor, that he was a butterfly, a thing of woods and hedgerows fluttering for an inconsequent moment in the gloom. He came among them, none knew whence he was going, none knew whither. He was conscious of being a creature of mystery. He pitied the fettered youth of these begrimed and joyless towns—slaves, Men with Muckrakes (he had fished up an old "Pilgrim's Progress" from the lower depths of the van), who obstinately refused to raise their eyes to the glorious sun in heaven. In his childish arrogance he would ask Barney Bill, "Why don't they go away and leave it, like me?" And the wizened little man would reply, with the flicker of an eyelid unperceived by Paul, "Because they haven't no 'igh-born parents waiting for 'em. They're born to their low estate, and they knows it." Which to Paul was a solution of peculiar comfort.

Even the blackened lands between the towns had their charm for Paul, in that he had a gleeful sense of being excluded from the wrath of God, which fell continuously upon them and the inhabitants thereof. And here and there a belt of leafy country gave promise, or confirmed Barney Bill's promise, of the Paradise that would come. Besides, what mattered the perpetuations of Bludston brickfields when the Land of Beulah shimmered ahead in the blue distance, when "Martin Chuzzlewit" lay open on his knees, when the smell of the bit of steak sizzling on the cooking stove stung his young blood? And now they were in Warwickshire, county of verdant undulations and deep woods and embowered villages. Every promise that Barney Bill had made to him of beauty was in process of fulfilment. There were no more blighted towns, no more factories, no more chimneys belching forth smoke. This was the Earth, the real broad-bosomed Mother Earth. What he had left was the Hell upon Earth. What he was going to might be Paradise, but Paul's imagination rightly boggled at the conception of a Paradise more perfect. And, as Paul's prescient wit had conjectured, he was learning many things; the names of trees and wild flowers, the cries of birds, the habits of wayside beasts; what was good for a horse to eat and what was bad; which was the Waggon, and Orion's Belt and the Bunch of Keys in the heavens; how to fry bacon and sew up rents in his clothing; how to deal with his fellow-man, or, rather, with his fellow-woman, in a persuasive manner; how to snare a rabbit or a pheasant and convert it into food, and how, at the same time, to evade the terrors of the law; the differences between wheat and oats and barley; the main lines of cleavage between political parties, hitherto a puzzle to Paul, for Barney Bill was a politician (on the Conservative side) and read his newspaper and argued craftily in taverns; and the styles and titles of great landowners by whose estates they passed; and how to avoid the nets that were perpetually spread by a predatory sex before the feet of the incautious male. On the last point Barney Bill was eloquent; but Paul, with delicious memories sanctifying his young soul, turned a deaf ear to his misogyny. Barney Bill was very old and crooked and dried up; what beautiful lady would waste her blandishments on him? Even the low-born lasses with whom they at times consorted had scarce an eye for Barney Bill. The grapes were sour. Paul smiled indulgently on the little foible of his friend.

They jogged along the highroad on this blazing and dusty day. Their bower of wicker chairs crackled in the heat. It was too hot for sustained conversation. Once Barney Bill said: "If Bob"-Bob was the old horse's unimaginative name—"if Bob doesn't have a drink soon his darned old hide'll crack."

Ten minutes later: "Nothing under a quart'll wash down this dust."

"Have a drink of water," suggested Paul, who had already adopted this care for drouth, with satisfactory results.

"A grown man's thirst and a boy's thirst is two entirely different things," said Barney Bill sententiously. "To spoil this grown-up thirst of mine with water would be a crime."

A mile or so farther on the road he stretched out a lean brown arm and pointed. "See that there clump of trees? Behind that is the Little Bear Inn. They gives you cool china pots with blue round the edge. You can only have 'em if you asks for 'em, Jim Blake, the landlord, being pertickler-like. And if yer breaks em—"

"What would happen?" asked Paul, who was always very much impressed by Barney Bill's detailed knowledge of the roads and the inns of England.

Barney Bill shook his head. "It would break 'is 'eart. Them pots was being used when William the Conqueror was a boy."

"Ten-sixty-six to ten-eighty-seven," said Paul the scholar. "They mun be nine hundred years old."

"Not quite," said Barney Bill, with an air of scrupulous desire for veracity. "But nearly. Lor' lumme!" he exclaimed, after a pause, "it makes one think, doesn't it? One of them there quart mugs—suppose it has been filled, say, ten times a day, every day for nine hundred years—my Gosh! what a Pacific Ocean of beer must have been poured from it! It makes one come over all of religious-like when one puts it to one's head."

Paul did not reply, and reverential emotion kept Barney Bill silent until they reached the clump of trees and the Little Bear Inn.

It was set back from the road, in a kind of dusty courtyard masked off on one side by a gigantic elm and on the other by the fringe of an orchard with ruddy apples hanging patiently beneath the foliage. Close by the orchard stood the post bearing the signboard on which the Little Bear, an engaging beast, was pictured, and presiding in a ceremonious way over the horse-trough below. In the shade of the elm stretched a trestle table and two wooden benches. The old inn, gabled, half-timbered, its upper story overhanging the doorway, bent and crippled, though serene, with age, mellow in yellow and russet, spectacled, as befitted its years, with leaded diamond panes, crowned deep in secular thatch, smiled with the calm and homely peace of everlasting things. Its old dignity even covered the perky gilt inscription over the doorway, telling how James Blake was licensed to sell a variety of alcoholic beverages. One human figure alone was visible, as the chairs and mat-laden van slowly turned from the road toward the horse-trough —that of a young man in straw hat and grey flannels making a water-colour sketch of the inn.

Barney Bill slid off the footboard, and, looking neither to right nor left, bolted like a belated crab into the cool recesses of the bar in search of ambrosia from the blue-and-white china mug. Paul, also afoot, led Bob to the trough. Bob drank with the lusty moderation of beasts. When he had assuaged his thirst Paul backed him into the road and, slinging over his head a comforting nosebag, left him to his meal.

The young man, sitting on an upturned wooden case, at the extreme edge of the elm tree's shade, a slender easel before him, a litter of paraphernalia on the ground by his side, painted assiduously. Paul idly crept behind him and watched in amazement the smears of wet colour, after a second or two of apparent irrelevance, take their place in the essential structure of the drawing. He stood absorbed. He knew that there were such things as pictures. He knew, too, that they were made by hands. But he had never seen one in the making. After a while the artist threw back his head, looked at the inn and looked at his sketch. There was a hot bit of thatch at the corner near the orchard, and, below the eaves, bold shadow. The shadow had not come right. He put in a touch of burnt umber and again considered the effect.

"Confound it! that's all wrong," he muttered.

"It's blue," said Paul.

The artist started, twisted his head, and for the first time became conscious of the ragamuffin's presence. "Oh, you see it blue, do you?" He smiled ironically.

"Ay," said Paul, with pointing finger. "Look at it. It's not brown, anyhow. Yon's black inside and blue outside."

The young man shaded his brow and gazed intently. Brilliant sunshine plays the deuce with tones. "My hat!" cried he, "you're right. It was this confounded yellow of the side of the house." He put in a few hasty strokes. "That better?"

"Ay," said Paul.

The artist laid down his brush, and swung round on his box, clasping knees. "How the devil did you manage to see that when I didn't?"

"Dun-no!" said Paul.

The young man stretched himself and lit a cigarette.

"What are yo' doing that for, mister?" Paul asked seriously.

"That?"

"Ay," said Paul. "You mun have a reason."

"You're a queer infant," laughed the artist. "Do you really want to know?"

"I've asked yo'," said Paul.

"Well, if you're anxious to know, I'm an architect on a holiday, and I'm sketching any old thing I come across. I don't pretend to be a painter, my youthful virtuoso, and that's why I go wrong sometimes on colour. Do you know what an architect is?"

"No," said Paul, eagerly. "What is it?"

He had been baffled by the meaning of the word, which he had seen all his life, inscribed on a brass plate in the Bludston High Street: "E. Thomson, Architect & Surveyor." It had seemed to him odd, cryptically fascinating.

The young man laughed and explained; Paul listened seriously. Another mystery was solved. He had often wondered how the bricklayers knew where to lay the bricks. He grasped the idea that they were but instruments carrying out the conception of the architect's brain. "I'd like to be an architect," he said.

"Would you?" After a pause the young man continued: "Anyhow, you can earn a shilling. Just sit down there and let me make a sketch of you."

"What for?" asked Paul.

"Because you're a picturesque person. Now, I suppose you'll be asking me what's the meaning of picturesque?"

"Nay," said Paul. "I know. Yo' see it in books. 'Th' owd grey tower stood out picturesque against the crimson sky.'"

"Hullo! you're a literary gent," said the young man.

"Ay," replied Paul proudly. He was greatly attracted towards this new acquaintance, whom, by his speech and dress and ease of manner, he judged to belong to the same caste as his lost but ever-remembered goddess.

The young man picked up pencil and sketch-book and posed Paul at the end of the seat by the trestle table. "Now, then," said he, setting to work. "Head a little more that way. Capital. Don't move. If you're very quiet I'll give you a shilling." Presently he asked, "What are you? If you hadn't been a literary gent I'd have thought you might be a gipsy."

Paul flushed and started. "I'm not a gipsy."

"Steady, steady," exclaimed the artist. "I've just said you couldn't be one. Italian? You don't look English."

For the first time the idea of exotic parentage entered Paul's head. He dallied for a moment or two with the thought. "I dunno what I am," he said romantically.

"Oh? What's your father?" The young man motioned with his head toward the inn.

"Yon's not my father," said Paul. "It's only Barney Bill."

"Only Barney Bill?" echoed the other, amused. "Well, who is your father?"

"Dunno," said Paul.

"And your mother?"

"Dunno, either," said Paul, in a mysterious tone. "I dunno if my parents are living or dead. I think they're living."

"That's interesting. What are you doing with what's-his-name Bill?"

"I'm just travelling wi' him to London."

"And what are you going to do in London?"

"I'll see when I get there," said Paul.

"So you're out for adventure?"

"Ay," said the boy, a gleam of the Vision dancing before his eyes. "That's it. I'm going on an adventure."

"There, keep like that," cried the artist. "Don't stir. I do believe I'm getting you. Holy Moses, it will be great! If only I could catch the expression! There's nothing like adventure, is there? The

glorious uncertainty of it! To wake up in the morning and know that the unexpected is bound to happen during the day. Exciting, isn't it?"

"Ay," said Paul, his face aglow.

The young man worked tense and quick at the luminous eyes. He broke a long silence by asking, "What's your name?"

"Paul Kegworthy."

"Paul? That's odd." In the sphere of life to which the ragged urchin belonged Toms and Bills and Jims were as thick as blackberries, but Pauls were rare.

"What's odd?" said Paul.

"Your name. How did you get it? It's uncommon."

"I suppose it is," said Paul. "I never thowt of it. I never knew anybody of that name afore."

Here was another sign and token of romantic origin suddenly revealed. Paul felt the thrill of it. He resisted a temptation to ask his new friend whether it was an appellation generally reserved for princes.

"Look here, joking apart," said the artist, putting in the waves of the thick black hair, "are you really going to be dumped down in London to seek your fortune? Don't you know anybody there?"

"No," said Paul.

"How are you going to live?"

Paul dived a hand into his breeches pocket and jingled coins. "I've got th' brass," said he.

"How much?"

"Three shillings and sevenpence-ha'penny," said Paul, with an opulent air. "And yo'r shilling will make it four and sevenpence-ha'penny."

"Good God!" said-the young man. He went on drawing for some time in silence. Then he said: "My brother is a painter—rather a swell—a Royal Academician. He would love to paint you. So would other fellows. You could easily earn your living as a model—doing as a business, you know, what you're doing now for fun, more or less."

"How much could I earn?"

"It all depends. Say a pound to thirty shillings a week."

Paul gasped and sat paralyzed. Artist, dusty road, gaudy van, distant cornfields and uplands were blotted from his senses. The cool waves of Pactolus lapped his feet.

"Come and look me up when you get to London," continued the friendly voice. "My name is Rowlatt-W. W. Rowlatt, 4, Gray's Inn Square. Can you remember it?"

"Ay," said Paul.

"Shall I write it down?"

"Nay. 'W. W. Rowlatt, 4, Gray's Inn Square.' I'm noan likely to forget it. I never forget nowt," said Paul, life returning through a vein of boastfulness.

"Tell me all you remember," said Mr. Rowlatt, with a laugh.

"I can say all the Kings of England, with their dates, and the counties and chief towns of Great Britain and Ireland, and all the weights and measures, and 'The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold—'"

"Holy Moses!" cried Rowlatt. "Anything else?"

"Ay. Lots more," said Paul, anxious to stamp vividly the impression he saw that he was making. "I know the Plagues of Egypt."

"I bet you don't."

"Rivers of Blood, Frogs, Lice, Flies, Murrain, Boils, Hails, Locusts, Darkness and Death of Firstborn," said Paul, in a breath.

"Jehosaphat!" cried Rowlatt. "I suppose now you'd have no difficulty in reciting the Thirty-nine Articles."

Paul puckered his forehead in thought. "D'yo' mean," he asked after a pause, "the Thirty-nine

Articles o' Religion, as is in th' Prayerbuk? I ha' tried to read 'em, but couldno' understand 'em reet."

Rowlatt, who had not expected his facetious query to be so answered, stopped his drawing for a moment. "What in the name of goodness attracted you to the Thirty-nine Articles?"

"I wanted to learn about things," said Paul.

The young man looked at him and smiled. "Self-education is a jolly good thing," said he. "Learn all you can, and you'll be a famous fellow one of these days. But you must cultivate a sense of humour."

Paul was about to seek enlightenment as to this counsel when Barney Bill appeared, cool and refreshed, from the inn door, and lifted a cheery voice. "Let's be getting along, sonny."

Rowlatt held up a detaining hand. "Just a couple of minutes, if you can spare them. I've nearly finished."

"All right, sir," said Barney Bill, limping across the yard. "Taking a picture of him?"

The artist nodded. Barney Bill looked over his shoulder. "By Gosh!" he cried in admiration. "By Gosh!"

"It has come out rather well, hasn't it?" said the artist, complacently.

"It's the living image of 'im," said Barney Bill.

"He tells me he's going up to London to seek his fortune," said Rowlatt, putting in the finishing touches.

"And his 'igh-born parents," said Barney Bill, winking at Paul.

Paul flushed and wriggled uncomfortably. Instinct deprecated crude revelation of the mystery of his birth to the man of refinement. He felt that Barney Bill was betraying confidence. Gutter-bred though he was, he accused his vagrant protector of a lack of good taste. Of such a breach he himself, son of princes, could not have been guilty. Luckily, and, as Paul thought, with admirable tact, Mr. Rowlatt did not demand explanation.

"A young Japhet in search of a father. Well, I hope he'll find him. There's nothing like romance. Without it life is flat and dead. It's what atmosphere is to a picture."

"And onions to a stew," said Barney Bill.

"Quite right," said Rowlatt. "Paul, my boy, I think after all you'd better stick to Mr.—?"

"Barney Bill, sir, at your service. And, if you want a comfortable chair, or an elegant mat, or a hearth brush at a ridiculous cheap price"—he waved toward the van. Rowlatt turned his head and, laughing, looked into the twinkling black eyes. "I don't for a moment expect you to buy, sir, but I was only a-satisfying of my artistic conscience."

Rowlatt shut his sketch-book with a snap, and rose. "Let us have a drink," said he. "Artists should be better acquainted."

He whispered a message to Paul, who sped to the inn and presently returned with a couple of the famous blue and white mugs frothing deliciously at the brims. The men, their lips to the bubbles, nodded to each other. The still beat of the August noon enveloped their bodies, but a streak of heavenly coolness trickled through their souls. Paul, looking at them enviously, longed to be grown up.

Then followed a pleasant half-hour of desultory talk. Although the men did not make him, save for here and there a casual reference, the subject of their conversation, Paul, with the Vision shimmering before his eyes, was sensitive enough to perceive in a dim and elusive way that he was at the back of each man's thoughts and that, for his sake, each was trying to obtain the measure of the other. At last Barney Bill, cocking at the sun the skilled eye of the dweller in the wilderness, called the time for departure.

"Could I see th' picture?" asked Paul.

Rowlatt passed him the sketch-book. The sudden sight of oneself as one appears in another's eyes is always a shock, even to the most sophisticated sitter. To Paul it was uncanny. He had often seen his own reflection and was familiar with his own appearance, but this was the first time that he had looked at himself impersonally. The sketch was vivid, the likeness excellent; the motive, the picturesque and romantic.

A proud lift of the chin, an eager glance in the eye, a sensitive curve of the lip attracted his boyish egotism. The portrait was an ideal, something to live up to. Involuntarily he composed his features.

Barney Bill again called time. Paul surrendered the sketch-book reluctantly. Rowlatt, with a cheery word, handed him the shilling fee. Paul, than whom none better knew the magic quality of money, hesitated for a second. The boy in the sketch would have refused. Paul drew himself up. "Nay, I'll take noan. I liked doing it."

Rowlatt laughed and pocketed the coin. "All right," said he, with a playful bow. "I'm exceedingly indebted to your courtesy."

Barney Bill gave Paul an approving glance. "Good for you, boy. Never take money you've not earned. Good day to you, sir"—he touched his cap. "And"—with a motion toward the empty mugs —"thank you kindly."

Rowlatt strolled with them to the van, Barney Bill limping a pace or two ahead. "Remember what I told you, my young friend," said he in a low voice. "I don't go back upon my word. I'll help you. But if you're a wise boy and know what's good for you, you'll stick to Mr. Barney Bill and the freedom of the high-road and the light heart of the vagabond. You'll have a devilish sight more happiness in the end."

But Paul, who already looked upon his gipsy self as dead as his Bludston self, and these dead selves as stepping-stones to higher things, turned a deaf ear to his new friend's paradoxical philosophy. "I'll remember," said he. "Mr. W. W. Rowlatt, 4, Gray's Inn Square."

The young architect watched the van with its swinging, creaking excrescences lumber away down the hot and dusty road, and turned with a puzzled expression to his easel. Joy in the Little Bear Inn had for the moment departed. Presently he found himself scribbling a letter in pencil to his brother, the Royal Academician.

"So you see, my dear fellow," he wrote toward the end of the epistle, "I am in a quandary. That the little beggar is of startling beauty is undeniable. That he has got his bill agape, like a young bird, for whatever food of beauty and emotion and knowledge comes his way is obvious to any fool. But whether, in what I propose, I'm giving a helping hand to a kind of wild genius, or whether I'm starting a vain boy along the primrose path in the direction of everlasting bonfire, I'm damned if I know."

But Paul jogged along by the side of Barney Bill in no such state of dubiety. God was in His Heaven, arranging everything for his especial benefit. All was well with the world where dazzling destinies like his were bound to be fulfilled.

"I've heard of such things," said Barney Bill with a reflective twist of his head, when Paul had told him of Mr. Rowlatt's suggestion. "A cousin of mine married a man who knew a gal who used to stand in her birthday suit in front of a lot of young painter chaps-and I'm bound to say he used to declare she was as good a gal as his own wife, especially seeing as how she supported an old father what had got a stroke, and a houseful of young brothers and sisters. So I'm not saying there's any harm in it. And I wouldn't stand in your way, sonny, seeing as how you want to get to your 'igh-born parents. You might find 'em on the road, and then again you mightn't. And thirty bob a week at fourteen-no-it would be flying in the face of Providence to say 'don't do it! But what licks me is: what the blazes do they want with a little varmint like you? Why shouldn't they pay thirty bob a week to paint me?"

Paul did not reply, being instinctively averse from wounding susceptibilities. But in his heart rose a high pity for the common though kindly clay that was Barney Bill.

CHAPTER V

WHEN they reached London in November, after circuitous wanderings, Barney Bill said to Paul: "You've seed enough of me, matey, to know that I wish yer good and not harm. I've fed yer and I've housed yer-I can't say as how I've done much toward clothing yer-and three months on the road has knocked corners off the swell toggery yer came to me in; but I ain't beat yer or cussed yer more than yer deserved"—whereat Paul grinned-"and I've spent a lot of valuable time, when I might have been profitably doing nothing, a-larning yer of things and, so to speak, completing yer eddication. Is that the truth, or am I a bloomin' liar?"

Paul, thus challenged, confirmed the absolute veracity of Barney Bill's statement. The latter continued, bending forward, his lean brown hand on the boy's shoulder, and looking at him earnestly: "I took yer away from your 'appy 'ome because, though the 'ome might have been 'appy in its own sweet way, you wasn't. I wanted to set yer on the track of yer 'ighborn parents. I wanted to make a man of yer. I want to do the best for yer now, so I put it to yer straight: If yer likes to come along of me altogether, I'll pay yer wages on the next round, and when yer gets a little older I'll take yer into partnership and leave yer the business when I die. It's a man's life and a free life, and I think yer likes it, don't yer?"

"Ay," said Paul, "it's foine."

"On the other hand, as I said afore, I won't stand in yer way, and if yer thinks you'll get nearer to your 'igh-born parents by hitching up with Mr. Architect, well—you're old enough to choose. I leave it to you."

But Paul had already chosen. The Road had its magical fascination, to which he would have surrendered all his boyish soul, had not the call of his destiny been more insistent. The Road led nowhither. Princes and princesses were as rare as hips and haws in summer-time. Their glittering equipages did not stop the van, nor did they stand at the emblazoned gateways of great parks waiting patiently for long-lost sons. He knew that he must seek them in their own social world, and to this he would surely be raised by his phantasmagorial income of thirty shillings a week.

"You won't object to my keeping a friendly eye on yer for the next year or two?" asked Barney Bill, with twisted mouth and a kindly, satirical glance.

Paul flushed. He had the consciousness of being a selfish, self-centered little beast, not half enough grateful to Barney Bill for delivering him out of the House of Bondage and leading him into the Land of Milk and Honey. He was as much stung by the delicately implied rebuke as touched by the solicitude as to his future welfare. Romantic words, such as he had read in the story-books, surged vaguely in his head, but he could find none to utter. He kept silent for a few moments, his hand in his breeches pocket. Presently he drew it forth rather slowly, and held out the precious cornelian heart to his benefactor.

"I 'ud like to give it thee," said Paul.

Barney Bill took it. "Thank 'ee, sonny. I'll remember that you gave it to me. But I won't keep yer talisman. 'Ere, see—" he made a pretence to spit on it—"that's for luck. Barney Bill's luck, and good wishes."

So Paul pocketed the heart again, immensely relieved by his friend's magnanimity, and the little sentimental episode was over.

A month later, when Barney Bill started on his solitary winter pilgrimage in the South of England, he left behind him a transmogrified Paul, a Paul, thanks to his munificence, arrayed in decent garments, including collar and tie (insignia of caste) and an overcoat (symbol of luxury), for which Paul was to repay him out of his future earnings; a Paul lodged in a small but comfortable third-floor-back, a bedroom all to himself, with a real bed, mattress, pillow, sheets, and blankets all complete, and a looking-glass, and a stand with ewer and basin so beautiful that, at first, Paul did not dare wash for fear of making the water dirty; a Paul already engaged for a series of sittings by Mr. Cyrus Rowlatt, R.A., his head swimming with the wonder of the fashionable painter's studio; a Paul standing in radiant confidence upon the brink of life.

"Sonny," said Barney Bill, when he said good-bye, "d'yer see them there lovely lace-up boots you've got on?"

"Ay," said Paul, regarding them complacently.

"Well, they've got to take yer all the way up the hill, like the young man what's his name?—Excelsure—in the piece of poetry you recite; but they'll only do it if they continues to fit. Don't get too big for 'em. At any rate, wait till they're worn out and yer can buy another pair with yer own money."

Paul grinned, because he did not know what else to do, so as to show his intellectual appreciation of the parable; but in his heart, for all his gratitude, he thought Barney bill rather a prosy moralizer. It was one of the disabilities of advanced old age. Alas! what can bridge the gulf between fourteen and fifty?

"Anyhow, you've got a friend at the back of yer, sonny, and don't make no mistake about it. If you're in trouble let me know. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

That, for a season, was the end of Barney Bill, and Paul found himself thrillingly alone in London. At first its labyrinthine vastness overwhelmed him, causing him to feel an unimportant atom, which may have been good for his soul, but was not agreeable to his vanity. By degrees, however, he learned the lay of the great thoroughfares, especially those leading to the quarters where artists congregate, and, conscious of purpose and of money jingling in his pocket, he began to hold his head high in the crowded streets. In the house in Barn Street, off the Euston Road, where he lodged, he was called "Mr. Paul" by his landlady, Mrs. Seddon, and her thirteen-year-old daughter, Jane, which was comforting and stimulating. Jane, a lanky, fair, blue-eyed girl, who gave promise of good looks, attended to his modest wants with a zeal somewhat out of proportion to the payment received. Paul had the novel sensation of finding some one at his beck and call. He beckoned and called often, for the sheer pleasure of it. So great was the change in his life that, in these early days, it seemed as if he had already come into his kingdom. He strutted about, poor child, like the prince in a fairy tale, and, in spite of Barney Bill's precepts, he outgrew his boots immediately. Mrs. Seddon, an old friend of Barney Bill, whom she addressed and spoke as Mr. William, kept a small shop in which she sold newspapers and twine and penny

bottles of ink. In the little back-parlour Mrs. Seddon and Tane and Paul had their meals, while the shop boy, an inconsiderable creature with a perpetual cold in his head, attended to the unexpected customer. To Paul, this boy, with whom a few months ago he would have joyously changed places, was as the dust beneath his feet. He sent him on errands in a lordly way, treating him as, indeed, he had treated the youth of Budge Street after his triumph over Billy Goodge, and the boy obeyed meekly. Paul believed in himself; the boy didn't. Almost from the beginning he usurped an ascendancy over the little household. For all their having lived in the great maelstrom of London, he found his superficial experience of life larger than that of mother and daughter. They had never seen machinery at work, did not know the difference between an elm and a beech and had never read Sir Walter Scott. Mrs. Seddon, thin, careworn and slackly good-natured, ever lamented the loss of an astonishingly brilliant husband; Jane was markedly the more competent of the two. She had character, and, even while slaving for the romantic youth, made it clear to him that for no other man alive would she so demean herself. Paul resolved to undertake her education.

The months slipped by golden with fulfilment. News of the beautiful boy model went the round of the studios. Those were simpler times (although not so very long ago) in British art than the present, and the pretty picture was still in vogue. As Mr. Rowlatt, the young architect, had foretold, Paul had no difficulty in obtaining work. Indeed, it was fatally easy. Mr. Cyrus Rowlatt, R.A., had launched him. Being fabulously paid, he thought his new profession the most aristocratic calling in the world. In a remarkably short time he was able to repay Barney Bill. The day when he purchased the postal order was the proudest in his life. The transaction gave him a princely feeling. He alone of boys, by special virtue of his origin, was capable of such a thing. Again, his welcome in the painting world confirmed him in the belief that he was a personage, born to great things. Posed on the model throne, the object of the painter's intense scrutiny, he swelled ingenuously with the conviction of his supreme importance. The lazy luxury of the model's life appealed to his sensuous temperament. He loved the warmth, the artistic setting of the studios; the pictures, the oriental rugs, the bits of armour, the old brocade, the rich cushions. If he had not been born to it, why had he not remained, like all 'the youth of Bludston, amid the filth and clatter of the factory? He loved, too, to hear the studio talk, though at first he comprehended little of it. The men and women for whom he sat possessed the same quality as his never-forgotten goddess and Lady Chudley and the young architect—a quality which he recognized keenly, but for which his limited vocabulary could find no definition. Afterward he realized that it was refinement in manner and speech and person. This quality he felt it essential to acquire. Accordingly he played the young ape to those who aroused his admiration.

One day when Jane entered the back-parlour he sprang from his seat and advanced with outstretched hand to meet her: "My dear Lady Jane, how good of you to come! Do let me clear a chair for you."

"What are you playing at?" asked Jane.

"That's the way to receive a lady when she calls on you.

"Oh!" said Jane.

He practised on her each newly learned social accomplishment. He minced his broad Lancashire, when he spoke to her, in such a way as to be grotesquely unintelligible. By listening to conversations he learned many amazing social facts; among them that the gentry had a bath every morning of their lives. This stirred his imagination to such a pitch that he commanded Jane to bring up the matutinal washtub to his bedroom. By instinct refined he revelled in the resultant sensation of cleanliness. He paid great attention to his attire, modelling himself, as far as he could, on young Rowlatt, the architect, on whom he occasionally called to report progress. He bought such neckties and collars as Rowlatt wore and submitted them for Jane's approval. She thought them vastly genteel. He also entertained her with whatever jargon of art talk he managed to pick up. Thus, though the urchin gave himself airs and invested himself with affectations, which rendered him intolerable to all of his own social status, except the placid Mrs. Seddon and the adoring Jane, he was under the continuous influence of a high ambition. It made him ridiculous, but it preserved him from vicious and vulgar things. If you are conscious of being a prince in disguise qualifying for butterfly entrance into your kingdom, it behoves you to behave in a princely manner, not to consort with lewd fellows and not to neglect opportunities for education. You owe to yourself all the good that you can extract from the world. Acting from this point of view, and guided by the practical advice of young Rowlatt, he attended evening classes, where he gulped down knowledge hungrily. So, what with sitting and studying and backward and forward journeying, and educating Jane, and practising the accomplishments of a prince, and sleeping the long sound sleep of a tired youngster, Paul had no time to think of evil. He was far too much absorbed in himself.

Meanwhile, of Bludston not a sign. For all that he had heard of search being made for him, he might have been a runaway kitten. Sometimes he wondered what steps the Buttons had taken in order to find him. If they had communicated with the police, surely, at some stage of their journey, Barney Bill would have been held up and questioned. But had they even troubled to call in the police? Barney Bill thought not, and Paul agreed. The police were very unpopular in Budge Street—almost as unpopular as Paul. In all probability the Buttons were only too glad to be rid of him. If he found no favour in the eyes of Mrs. Button, in the eyes of Button he was detestable. Occasionally he spoke of them to Barney Bill on his rare appearances in London, but for

prudential motives the latter had struck Bludston out of his itinerary and could give no information. At last Paul ceased altogether to think of them. They belonged to a far-distant past already becoming blurred in his memory.

So Paul lived his queer sedulous life, month after month, year after year, known among the studios as a quaint oddity, drawn out indulgently by the men, somewhat petted, monkey-fashion, by the women, forgotten by both when out of their presence, but developing imperceptibly day by day along the self-centring line. A kindly adviser suggested a gymnasium to keep him in condition for professional purposes. He took the advice, and in the course of time became a splendid young animal, a being so physically perfect as to be what the good vicar of Bludston had called him in tired jest—a lusus naturae. But though proud of his body as any finely formed human may honorably be, a far higher arrogance saved him from Narcissus vanity. It was the inner and essential Paul and not the outer investiture that was born to great things.

In his eighteenth year he gradually awoke to consciousness of change. One of his classmates at the Polytechnic institute, with whom he had picked a slight acquaintance, said one evening as they were walking homeward together: "I shan't be coming here after next week. I've got a good clerkship in the city. What are you doing?"

"I'm an artist's model," said Paul.

The other, a pale and perky youth, sniffed. His name was Higgins. "Good Lord! What do you mean?"

"I'm a model in the life class of the Royal Academy School," said Paul, proudly.

"You stand up naked in front of all kinds of people for them to paint you?"

"Of course," said Paul.

"How beastly!" said Higgins.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that," said Higgins. "It's beastly!"

A minute or two afterward he jumped on a passing omnibus, and thenceforward avoided Paul at the Polytechnic Institute.

This uncompromising pronouncement on the part of Higgins was a shock; but together with other incidents, chiefly psychological, vague, intangible phenomena of his spiritual development, it showed Paul the possibility of another point of view. He took stock of himself. From the picturesque boy he had grown into the physically perfect man. As a model he was no longer sought after for subject pieces. He was in clamorous demand at Life Schools, where he drew a higher rate of pay, but where he was as impersonal to the intently working students as the cast of the Greek torso which other students were copying in the next room. The intimacy of the studio, the warmth and the colour and the meretricious luxury were gone from his life. On the other hand he was making money. He had fifty pounds in the Savings Bank, the maximum of petty thrift which an incomprehensive British Government encourages, and a fair, though unknown, sum in an iron money-box hidden behind his washstand. Up to now he had had no time to learn how to spend money. When he took to smoking cigarettes, which he had done quite recently, he regarded himself as a man.

Higgins's "How beastly!" rang in his head. Although he could not quite understand the full meaning of the brutal judgment, it brought him disquiet and discontent. For one thing, like the high-road, his profession led nowhither. The thrill of adventure had gone from it. It was static, and Paul's temperament was dynamic. He had also lost his boyish sense of importance, of being the central figure in the little stage. Disillusion began to creep over him. Would he do nothing else but this all his life? Old Erricone, the patriarchal, white-bearded Italian, the doyen of the models of London, came before his mind, a senile posturer, mumbling dreary tales of his inglorious achievements: how he was the Roman Emperor in this picture and Father Abraham in the other; how painters could not get on without him; how once he had been summoned from Rome to London; how Rossetti had shaken hands with him. Paul shivered at the thought of himself as the Erricone of a future generation.

The next day was Saturday, and he had no sitting. The morning he spent in his small bedroom in the soothing throes of literary composition. Some time ago he had thought it would be a mighty fine thing to be a poet, and had tried his hand at verse. Finding he possessed some facility, he decided that he was a poet, and at once started an epic poem in rhyme on the Life of Nelson, the material being supplied by Southey. This morning he did the Battle of the Baltic.

> He put the glass to his blind eye,
> And said "No signals do I spy,"

wrote Paul. Poetry taken at the gallop like this was a very simple affair, and Paul covered an amazing amount of ground.

In the afternoon he walked abroad with Jane, who, having lengthened her skirts and put up her hair, was now a young woman looking older than her years. She too had developed. Her lank figure had rounded into pretty curves. Her sharp little Cockney face had filled out. She had a pleasant smile and a capable brow, and, correcting a tendency to fluffiness of hair of which she disapproved, and dressing herself neatly, made herself by no means unattractive. Constant association with Paul had fired her ambitions. Like him, she might have a destiny, though not such a majestic one, Accordingly she had studied stenography and typewriting, with a view to earning her livelihood away from the little shop, which did not offer the prospect of a dazzling career. At the back of her girlish mind was the desire to keep pace with Paul in his upward flight, so that he should not be ashamed of her when he sat upon the clouds in glory. In awful secrecy she practised the social accomplishments which Paul brought home. She loved her Saturday and Sunday excursions with Paul—of late they had gone far afield: the Tower, Greenwich, Richmond—exploring London and making splendid discoveries such as Westminster Abbey and a fourpenny tea garden at Putney. She scarcely knew whether she cared for these things for themselves; but she saw them through Paul coloured by his vivid personality. Once on Chelsea Bridge he had pointed out a peculiarly ugly stretch of low-tide mud, and said: "Look at that." She, by unprecedented chance, mistaking his tone, had replied: "How lovely!" And she had thought it lovely, until his stare of rebuke and wonderment brought disillusion and spurting tears, which for the life of him he could not understand. It is very foolish, and often suicidal, of men to correct women for going into rapture over mud flats. On that occasion, however, the only resultant harm was the conviction in the girl's heart that the presence of Paul turned mud flats into beds of asphodel. Then, just as she saw outer things through his eyes, she felt herself regarded by outer eyes through him. His rare and absurd beauty made him a cynosure whithersoever he went. London, vast and seething, could produce no such perfect Apollo. When she caught the admiring glances of others of her sex, little Jane drew herself up proudly and threw back insolent glances of triumph. "You would like to be where I am, wouldn't you?" the glance would say, with the words almost formulated in her mind. "But you won't. You never will be. I've got him. He's walking out with me and not with you. I like to see you squirm, you envious little cat." Jane was not a princess, she was merely a child of the people; but I am willing to eat my boots if it can be satisfactorily proved that there is a princess living on the face of the earth who would not be delighted at seeing another woman cast covetous eyes on the man she loved, and would not call her a cat (or its homonym) for doing so.

On this mild March afternoon Paul and Jane walked in the Euston Road, he in a loose blue serge suit, floppy black tie, low collar and black soft felt hat (this was in the last century, please remember—epoch almost romantic, so fast does time fly), she in neat black braided jacket and sailor hat. They looked pathetically young.

"Where shall we go?" asked Jane.

Paul, in no mood for high adventure, suggested Regent's Park. "At least we can breathe there," said he.

Jane sniffed up the fresh spring air, unconscious of the London taint, and laughed. "Why, what's the matter with the Euston Road?"

"It's vulgar," said Paul. "In the Park the hyacinths and the daffodils will be out."

What he meant he scarcely knew. When one is very young and out of tune with life, one is apt to speak discordantly.

They mounted a westward omnibus. Paul lit a cigarette and smoked almost in silence until they alighted by the Park gates. As they entered, he turned to her suddenly. "Look here, Jane, I want to ask you something. The other night I told a man I was an artist's model, and he said 'How beastly!' and turned away as if I wasn't fit for him to associate with. What was he driving at?"

"He was a nasty cad," said Jane promptly.

"Of course he was," said Paul. "But why did he say it? Do you think there's anything beastly in being a model?"

"Certainly not." She added in modification: "That is if you like it."

"Well, supposing I don't like it?"

She did not reply for a minute or two. Then: "If you really don't like it, I should be rather glad."

"Why?" asked Paul.

She raised a piteous face.

"Yes, tell me," he insisted. "Tell me why you agree with that cad Higgins?"

"I don't agree with him."

"You must."

They fenced for a while. At last he pinned her down.

"Well, if you want to know," she declared, with a flushed cheek, "I don't think it's a man's job."

He bit his lip. He had asked for the truth and he had got it. His own dark suspicions were confirmed. Jane glanced at him fearful of offence. When they had walked some yards he spoke. "What would you call a man's job?"

Jane hesitated for an answer. Her life had been passed in a sphere where men carpentered or drove horses or sold things in shops. Deeply impressed by the knowledge of Paul's romantic birth and high destiny she could not suggest any such lowly avocations, and she did not know what men's jobs were usually executed by scions of the nobility. A clerk's work was certainly genteel; but even that would be lowering to the hero. She glanced at him again, swiftly. No, he was too beautiful to be penned up in an office from nine to six-thirty every day of his life. On the other hand her feminine intuition appreciated keenly the withering criticism of Higgins. Ever since Paul had first told her of his engagements at the Life Schools she had shrunk from the idea. It was all very well for the boy; but for the man—and being younger than he, she regarded him now as a man—there was something in it that offended her nice sense of human dignity.

"Well," he said. "Tell me, what do you call a man's job?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said in distress; "something you do with your hands or your brain."

"You think being a model is undignified."

"Yes."

"So do I," said Paul. "But I'm doing things with my brain, too, you know," he added quickly, anxious to be seen again on his pedestal. "I am getting on with my epic poem. I've done a lot since you last heard it. I'll read you the rest when we get home."

"That will be lovely," said Jane, to whom the faculty of rhyming was a never-ceasing wonder. She would sit bemused by the jingling lines and wrapt in awe at the minstrel.

They sat on a bench by the flower-beds, gay in their spring charm of belated crocus and hyacinth and daffodil, with here and there a precocious tulip. Paul, sensitive to beauty, discoursed on flowers. Max Field had a studio in St. John's Wood opening out into a garden, which last summer was a dream of delight. He described it. When he came into his kingdom he intended to have such a garden.

"You'll let me have a peep at it sometimes, won't you?" said Jane.

"Of course," said Paul.

The lack of enthusiasm in his tone chilled the girl's heart. But she did not protest. In these days, in spite of occasional outspokenness she was still a humble little girl worshipping her brilliant companion from afar.

"How often could I come?" she asked.

"That," said he, in his boyish pashadom, "would depend on how good you were."

Obedient to the thought processes of her sex, she made a bee line to the particular.

"Oh, Paul, I hope you're not angry."

"At what?"

"At what I said about your being a model."

"Not a bit," said he. "If I hadn't wanted to know your opinion, I wouldn't have asked you."

She brightened. "You really wanted to know what I thought?"

"Naturally," said Paul. "You're the most commonsense girl I've ever met."

Paul walked soberly home. Jane accompanied him—on wings.

On Monday Paul went to the Life School and stripped with a heavy heart. Jane was right. It was not a man's job. The fact, too, of his doing it lowered him in her esteem, and though he had no romantic thoughts whatever with regard to Jane, he enjoyed being Lord Paramount in her eyes. He went into the studio and took up his pose; and as he stood on the model throne, conspicuous, glaring, the one startling central object, Higgins's "How beastly!" came like a material echo and smote him in the face. He felt like Adam when he first proceeded to his primitive tailoring. A wave of shame ran through him. He looked around the great silent room, at the rows of students, each in front of an easel, using his naked body for their purposes. A phrase flashed across his mind—in three years his reading had brought vocabulary—they were using his

physical body for their spiritual purposes. For the moment he hated them all fiercely. They were a band of vampires. Habit and discipline alone saved him from breaking his pose and fleeing headlong. But there he was fixed, like marble, in an athlete's attitude, showing rippling muscles of neck and chest and arms and thighs all developed by the gymnasium into the perfection of Greek beauty, and all useless, more useless even, as far as the world's work was concerned, than the muscles of a racehorse. There he was fixed, with outstretched limbs and strained loins, a human being far more alive than the peering, measuring throng, far more important, called by a destiny infinitely higher than theirs. And none of them suspected it. For the first time he saw himself as they saw him. They admired him as a thing, an animal trained especially for them, a prize bullock. As a human being they disregarded him. Nay, in the depth of their hearts they despised him. Not one of them would have stood where he did. He would have considered it—rightly—as degrading to his manhood.

The head of the school snapped his fingers impatiently and fussed up to the model-stand. "What's the matter? Tired already? Take it easy for a minute, if you like."

"No," said Paul, instinctively stiffening himself. "I'm never tired."

It was his boast that he could stand longer in a given pose than any other model, and thereby he had earned reputation.

"Then don't go to pieces, my boy," said the head of the school, not unkindly. "You're supposed to be a Greek athlete and not Venus rising from the sea or a jelly at a children's party."

Paul flushed all over, and insane anger shook him. How dared the man speak to him like that? He kept the pose, thinking wild thoughts. Every moment the strain grew less bearable, the consciousness of his degradation more intense. He longed for something to happen, something dramatic, something that would show the vampires what manner of man he was. He was histrionic in his anguish.

A fly settled on his back—a damp, sluggish fly that had survived the winter—and it crawled horribly up his spine. He bore it for a few moments, and then his over-excited nerves gave way and he dashed his hand behind him. Somebody laughed. He raised his clenched fists and glared at the class.

"Ay, yo' can laugh—you can laugh till yo' bust!" he cried, falling back into his Lancashire accent. "But yo'll never see me, here agen. Never, never, never, so help me God!"

He rushed away. The head of the school followed him and, while he was dressing, reasoned with him.

"Nay," said Paul. "Never agen. Aw'm doan wi' th' whole business."

And as Paul walked home through the hurrying streets, he thought regretfully of twenty speeches which would have more adequately signified his indignant retirement from the profession.

CHAPTER VI

PAUL'S model-self being dead, he regarded it with complacency and set his foot on it, little doubting that it was another stepping-stone.

He spoke loftily of his independence.

"But how are you going to earn your living?" asked Jane, the practical.

"I shall follow one of the arts," Paul replied. "I think I am a poet, but I might be a painter or a musician."

"You do sing and play lovely," said Jane.

He had recently purchased from a pawnshop a second-hand mandoline, which he had mastered by the aid of a sixpenny handbook, and he would play on it accompaniments to sentimental ballads which he sang in a high baritone.

"I'll not choose yet awhile," said Paul, disregarding the tribute. "Something will happen. The 'moving finger' will point—"

"What moving finger?"

"The finger of Destiny," said Paul.

And, as the superb youth predicted, something did happen a day or two afterwards.

They were walking in Regent Street, and stopped, as was their wont, before a photographer's window where portraits of celebrities were exposed to view. Paul loved this window, had loved it from the moment of discovery, a couple of years before. It was a Temple of Fame. The fact of your portrait being exhibited, with your style and title printed below, marked you as one of the great ones of the earth. Often he had said to Jane: "When I am there you'll be proud, won't you?"

And she had looked up to him adoringly and wondered why he was not there already.

It was Paul's habit to scrutinize the faces of those who had achieved greatness, Archbishops, Field-Marshals, Cabinet Ministers, and to speculate on the quality of mind that had raised them to their high estate; and often he would shift his position, so as to obtain a glimpse of his own features in the plate-glass window, and compare them with those of the famous. Thus he would determine that he had the brow of the divine, the nose of the statesman and the firm lips of the soldier. It was a stimulating pastime. He was born to great things; but to what great things he knew not. The sphere in which his glory should be fulfilled was as yet hidden in the mists of time.

But this morning, instead of roving over the illustrious gallery, his eye caught and was fascinated by a single portrait. He stood staring at it for a long time, lost in the thrill of thought.

At last Jane touched his arm. "What are you looking at?"

He pointed. "Do you see that?"

"Yes. It's—" She named an eminent actor, then in the heyday of his fame, of whom legend hath it that his photographs were bought in thousands by love-lorn maidens who slept with them beneath their pillows.

Paul drew her away from the little knot of idlers clustered round the window. "There's nothing that man can do that I can't do," said Paul.

"You're twenty times better looking," said Jane.

"I have more intelligence," said Paul.

"Of course," said Jane.

"I'm going to be an actor," said Paul.

"Oh!" cried Jane in sudden rapture. Then her sturdy common-sense asserted itself. "But can you act?"

"I'm sure I could, if I tried. You've only got to have the genius to start with and the rest is easy."

As she did not dare question his genius, she remained silent.

"I'm going to be an actor," said he, "and when I'm not acting I shall be a poet."

In spite of her adoration Jane could not forbear a shaft of raillery. "You'll leave yourself some time to be a musician, won't you?"

He laughed. His alert and retentive mind had seized, long ago, on Rowlatt's recommendation at the Little Bear Inn, and he had developed, perhaps half consciously, a half sense of humour. A whole sense, however, is not congruous with the fervid beliefs and soaring ambitions of eighteen. Your sense of humour, that delicate percipience of proportion, that subrident check on impulse, that touch of the divine fellowship with human frailty, is a thing of mellower growth. It is a solvent and not an excitant. It does not stimulate to sublime effort; but it can cool raging passion. It can take the salt from tears, the bitterness from judgment, the keenness from despair; but in its universal manifestation it would effectually stop a naval engagement.

Paul laughed. "You mustn't think I brag too much, Jane," said he. "For anybody else I know what I say would be ridiculous. But for me it's different. I'm going to be a great man. I know it. If I'm not going to be a great actor, I shall be a great something else. God doesn't put such things into people's heads for nothing. He didn't take me from the factory in Bludston and set me here with you, walking up Regent Street, like a gentleman, just to throw me back into the gutter."

"But who said you were going back to the gutter?" asked Jane.

"Nobody. I wanted to get right with myself. But—that getting right with oneself—do you think it egotistic?"

"I don't quite know what that is."

He defined the term.

"No," she said seriously. "I don't think it is. Everybody has got a self to consider. I don't look

on it as ego-what-d'-you-call-it to strike out for myself instead of going on helping mother to mind the shop. So why should you?"

"Besides, I owe a duty to my parents, don't I?" he asked eagerly.

But here Jane took her own line. "I can't see that you do, considering that they've done nothing for you."

"They've done everything for me," he protested vehemently. "They've made me what I am."

"They didn't take much trouble about it," said Jane.

They squabbled for a while after the manner of boy and girl. At last she cried: "Don't you see I'm proud of you for yourself and not for your silly old parents? What have they got to do with me? And besides, you'll never find them."

"I don't think you know what you're talking about," he said loftily. "It is time we were getting home."

He walked on for some time stiffly, his head in the air, not condescending to speak. She had uttered blasphemy. He would find his parents, he vowed to himself, if only to spite Jane. Presently his ear caught a little sniff, and looking down, saw her dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief. His heart softened at once. "Never mind," said he. "You didn't mean it."

"It's only because I love you, Paul," she murmured wretchedly.

"That's all right," he said. "Let us go in here"—they were passing a confectioner's—"and we'll have some jam-puffs."

Paul went to his friend Rowlatt, who had already heard, through one of his assistants who had a friend in the Life School, of the dramatic end of the model's career.

"I quite sympathize with you," Rowlatt laughed. "I've wondered how you stuck it so long. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going on the stage."

"How are you going to get there?"

"I don't know," said Paul, "but if I knew an actor, he would be able to tell me. I thought perhaps you might know an actor."

"I do—one or two," replied Rowlatt; "but they're just ordinary actors—not managers; and I shouldn't think they'd be able to do anything for you."

"Except what I say," Paul persisted. "They'll tell me how one sets about being an actor."

Rowlatt scribbled a couple of introductions on visiting cards, and Paul went away satisfied. He called on the two actors. The first, in atrabiliar mood, advised him to sweep crossings, black shoes, break stones by the roadside, cart manure, sell tripe or stocks and shares, blow out his brains rather than enter a profession over whose portals was inscribed the legend, Lasciate ogni speranza—he snapped his finger and thumb to summon memory as if it were a dog.

"Voi che intrate," continued Paul, delighted at showing off the one Italian tag he had picked up from his reading. And filled with one of the purest joys of the young literary life and therefore untouched by pessimistic counsel, he left the despairing actor.

The second, a brighter and more successful man, talked with Paul for a long time about all manner of things. Having no notion of his antecedents, he assumed him to be a friend of Rowlatt and met him on terms of social equality. Paul expanded like a flower to the sun. It was the first time he had spoken with an educated man on common ground—a man to whom the great imaginative English writers were familiar friends, who ran from Chaucer to Lamb and from Dryden to Browning with amazing facility. The strong wine of allusive talk mounted to Paul's brain. Tingling with excitement, he brought out all his small artillery of scholarship and acquitted himself so well that his host sent him off with a cordial letter to a manager of his acquaintance.

The letter opened the difficult door of the theatre. His absurd beauty of face and figure, a far greater recommendation in the eyes of the manager who had begun rehearsals for an elaborate romantic production than a knowledge of The Faerie Queene, obtained for him an immediate engagement—to walk on as a gilded youth of Italy in two or three scenes at a salary of thirty shillings a week. Paul went home and spread himself like a young peacock before Jane, and said: "I am an actor."

The girl's eyes glowed. "You are wonderful."

"No, not I," replied Paul modestly. "It is my star."

"Have you got a big part?" asked Jane.

He laughed pityingly, sweeping back his black curls. "No, you silly, I haven't any lines to speak"—he had at once caught up the phrase—"I must begin at the beginning. Every actor has to do it."

"You'll get mother and me orders to come and see you, won't you?"

"You shall have a box," declared Paul the magnificent.

Thus began a new phase in the career of Paul Kegworthy. After the first few days of bewilderment on the bare, bleak stage, where oddments of dilapidated furniture served to indicate thrones and staircases and palace doors and mossy banks; where men and women in ordinary costume behaved towards one another in the most ridiculous way and went through unintelligible actions with phantom properties; where the actor-manager would pause in the breath of an impassioned utterance and cry out, "Oh, my God! stop that hammering!" where nothing looked the least bit in the world like the lovely ordered picture he had been accustomed to delight in from the shilling gallery—after the first few days he began to focus this strange world and to suffer its fascination. And he was proud of the silent part allotted to him, a lazy lute-player in attendance on the great lady, who lounged about on terrace steps in picturesque attitudes. He was glad that he was not an unimportant member of the crowd of courtiers who came on in a bunch and bowed and nodded and pretended to talk to one another and went off again. He realized that he would be in sight of the audience all the time. It did not strike him that the manager was using him merely as a piece of decoration.

One day, however, at rehearsal the leading lady said: "If my lute-player could play a few chords here—or the orchestra for him-it would help me tremendously. I've got all this long cross with nothing to say."

Paul seized his opportunity. "I can play the mandoline," said he.

"Oh, can you?" said the manager, and Paul was handed over to the musical director, and the next day rehearsed with a real instrument which he twanged in the manner prescribed. He did not fail to announce himself to Jane as a musician.

Gradually he found his feet among the heterogeneous band who walk on at London theatres. Some were frankly vulgar, some were pretentiously genteel, a good many were young men of gentle birth from the public schools and universities. Paul's infallible instinct drew him into timid companionship with the last. He knew little of the things they talked about, golf and cricket prospects, and the then brain-baffling Ibsen, but he listened modestly, hoping to learn. He reaped the advantage of having played "the sedulous ape" to his patrons of the studios. His tricks were somewhat exaggerated; his sweep of the hat when ladies passed him at the stage door entrance was lower than custom deems necessary; he was quicker in courteous gesture than the young men from the universities; he bowed more deferentially to an interlocutor than is customary outside Court circles; but they were all the tricks of good breeding. More than one girl asked if he were of foreign extraction. He remembered Rowlatt's question of years ago, and, as then, he felt curiously pleased. He confessed to an exotic strain: to Italian origin. Italy was romantic. When he obtained a line part and he appeared on the bill, he took the opportunity of changing a name linked with unpleasant associations which he did not regard as his own. Kegworthy was cast into the limbo of common things, and he became Paul Savelli. But this was later.

He made friends at the theatre. Some of the women, by petting and flattery, did their best to spoil him; but Paul was too ambitious, too much absorbed in his dream of greatness and his dilettante literary and musical pursuits, too much yet of a boy to be greatly affected. What he prized far more highly than feminine blandishments was the new comradeship with his own sex. Instinctively he sought them, as a sick dog seeks grass, unconsciously feeling the need of them in his mental and moral development. Besides, the attitude of the women reminded him of that of the women painters in his younger days. He had no intention of playing the pet monkey again. His masculinity revolted. The young barbarian clamoured. A hard day on the river he found much more to his taste than sporting in the shade of a Kensington flat over tea and sandwiches with no matter how sentimental an Amaryllis. Jane, who had seen the performance, though not from a box, a couple of upper-circle seats being all that Paul could obtain from the acting-manager, and had been vastly impressed by Paul's dominating position in the stage fairy-world, said to him, with a sniff that choked a sigh: "Now that you've got all those pretty girls around you, I suppose you soon won't think of me any longer?"

Paul waved the dreaded houris away as though they were midges. "I'm sick of girls," he replied in a tone of such sincerity that Jane tossed her head.

"Oh? Then I suppose you lump me with the rest and are sick of me too?"

"Don't worry a fellow," said Paul. "You're not a girl-not in that sense, I mean. You're a pal."

"Anyway, they're lots prettier than what I am," she said defiantly.

He looked at her critically, after the brutal manner of obtuse boyhood, and beheld an object quite agreeable to the sight. Her Londoner's ordinarily colourless checks were flushed, her blue eyes shone bright, her little chin was in the air and her parted lips showed a flash of white teeth. She wore a neat simple blouse and skirt and held her slim, half-developed figure taut. Paul shook

his head. "Jolly few of them—without grease-paint on."

"But you see them all painted up."

He burst into laughter. "Then they're beastly, near by! You silly kid, don't you know? We've got to make up, otherwise no one in front would be able to see our mouths and noses and eyes. From the front we look lovely; but close to we're horrors."

"Well, how should I know that?" asked Jane.

"You couldn't unless you saw us—or were told. But now you know."

"Do you look beastly too?"

"Vile," he laughed.

"I'm glad I didn't think of going on the stage,"' she said, childish yet very feminine unreason combining with atavistic puritanism. "I shouldn't like to paint my face."

"You get used to it," said Paul, the experienced.

"I think it horrid to paint your face."

He swung to the door—they were in the little parlour behind the shop—a flash of anger in his eyes. "If you think everything I do horrid, I can't talk to you."

He marched out. Jane suddenly realized that she had behaved badly. She whipped herself. She had behaved atrociously. Of course she had been jealous of the theatre girls; but had he not been proving to her all the time in what small account he held them? And now he had gone. At seventeen a beloved gone for an hour is a beloved gone for ever. She rushed to the foot of the stairs on which his ascending steps still creaked.

"Paul!"

"Yes."

"Come back! Do come back!"

Paul came back and followed her into the parlour.

"I'm sorry," she said.

He graciously forgave her, having already arrived at the mature conclusion that females were unaccountable folk whose excursions into unreason should be regarded by man with pitying indulgence. And, in spite of the seriousness with which he took himself, he was a sunny-tempered youth.

Barney Bill, putting into the Port of London, so to speak, in order to take in cargo, also visited the theatre towards the end of the run of the piece. He waited, by arrangement, for Paul outside the stage door, and Paul, coming out, linked arms and took him to a blazing bar in Piccadilly Circus and ministered to his thirst, with a princely air.

"It seems rum," said Bill, wiping his lips with the back of his hand, after a mighty pull at the pint tankard—"it seems rum that you should be standing me drinks at a swell place like this. It seems only yesterday that you was a two-penn'orth of nothing jogging along o' me in the old 'bus."

"I've moved a bit since then, haven't I?" said Paul.

"You have, sonny," said Barney Bill. "But"—he sighed and looked around the noisy glittering place, at the smart barmaids, the well-clad throng of loungers, some in evening dress, the half-dozen gorgeous ladies sitting with men at little tables by the window—"I thinks as how you gets more real happiness in a quiet village pub, and the beer is cheaper, and—gorblimey!"

He ran his finger between his stringy neck and the frayed stand-up collar that would have sawn his head off but for the toughness of his hide. To do Paul honour he had arrayed himself in his best—a wondrously cut and heavily-braided morning coat and lavender-coloured trousers of eccentric shape, and a funny little billycock hat too small for him, and a thunder-and-lightning necktie, all of which he had purchased nearly twenty years ago to grace a certain wedding at which he had been best man. Since then he had worn the Nessus shirt of a costume not more than half-a-dozen times. The twisted, bright-eyed little man, so obviously ill at ease in his amazing garb, and the beautiful youth, debonair in his well-fitting blue serge, formed a queer contrast.

"Don't you never long for the wind of God and the smell of the rain?" asked Barney Bill.

"I haven't the time," said Paul. "I'm busy all day long."

"Well, well," said Barney Bill, "the fellow wasn't far wrong who said it takes all sorts to make a world. There are some as likes electric light and some as likes the stars. Gimme the stars." And

in his countryman's way he set the beer in his tankard swirling round and round before he put it again to his lips.

Paul sipped his beer reflectively. "You may find happiness and peace of soul under the stars," said he, sagely, "and if I were a free agent I'd join you tomorrow. But you can't find fame. You can't rise to great things. I want to—well, I don't quite know what I want to do," he laughed, "but it's something big."

"Yuss, my boy," said Barney Bill. "I understand. You was always like that. You haven't come any nearer finding your 'igh-born parents?"—there was a twinkle in his eyes—"'ave yer?"

"I'm not going to bother any more about them, whoever they are," said Paul, lighting a cigarette. "When I was a kid I used to dream that they would find me and do everything for me. Now I'm a man with experience of life, I find that I've got to do everything for myself. And by George!"—he thumped the bar and smiled the radiant smile of the young Apollo—"I'm going to do it."

Barney Bill took off his Luke's iron crown of a billycock hat and scratched his cropped and grizzled head. "How old are you, sonny?"

"Nearly nineteen," said Paul.

"By Gosh!" said Barney Bill.

He put on his hat at a comfortable but rakish angle. He looked like a music-hall humourist. A couple of the gorgeous ladies giggled.

"Yuss," said he, "you're a man with an experience of life—and nobody can do nothing for you but yerself. Poor old Barney Bill has been past helping you this many a year."

"But I owe everything to you!" cried Paul, boyishly. "If it hadn't been for you, I should still be working in that factory at Bludston."

Bill winked and nodded acquiescence as he finished his tankard.

"I've often wondered—since I've grown up—what induced you to take me away. What was it?"

Bill cocked his head on one side and regarded him queerly. "Now you're arsking," said he.

Paul persisted. "You must have had some reason."

"I suppose I was interested in them parents of yours," said Barney Bill.

And that was all he would say on the subject.

The days went on. The piece had run through the summer and autumn, and Paul, a favourite with the management, was engaged for the next production. At rehearsal one day the author put in a couple of lines, of which he was given one to speak. He now was in very truth an actor. Jane could no longer taunt him in her naughty moods (invariably followed by bitter repentance) with playing a dumb part like a trained dog. He had a real part, typewritten and done up in a brown-paper cover, which was handed to him, with lack of humour, by the assistant stage manager.

In view of his own instantaneous success he tried to persuade Jane to go on the stage; but Jane had no artistic ambitions, to say nothing of her disinclination to paint her face. She preferred the prosaic reality of stenography and typewriting. No sphere could be too dazzling for Paul; he was born to great things, the consciousness of his high destiny being at once her glory and her despair; but, as regards herself, her outlook on life was cool and sober. Paul was peacock born; it was for him to strut about in iridescent plumage. She was a humble daw and knew her station. It must be said that Paul held out the stage as a career more on account of the social status that it would give to Jane than through a belief in her histrionic possibilities. He too, fond as he was of the girl with whom he had grown up, recognized the essential difference between them. She was as pretty, as sensible, as helpful a little daw as ever chattered; but the young peacock never for an instant forgot her daw-dom.

Jane's profound common-sense reaped its reward the following spring when she found herself obliged to earn her livelihood. Her mother died, and the shop was sold, and an aunt in Cricklewood offered Jane a home, on condition that she paid for her keep. This she was soon able to do when she obtained a situation with a business firm in the city. The work was hard and the salary small; but Jane had a brave heart and held her head high. In her simple philosophy life was work, and dreaming an occasional luxury. Her mother's death grieved her deeply, for she was a girl of strong affections, and the breaking up of her life with Paul seemed an irremediable catastrophe.

"It's just as well," said her aunt, "that there's an end of it, or you'd be making a fool of yourself over that young actor chap with his pretty face. I don't hold with any of them."

But Jane was too proud to reply.

On their last night together in the Barn Street house they sat alone in the little back-parlour as they had done for the last six years—all their impressionable childish days. It was the only home that Paul had known, and he felt the tragedy of its dissolution. They sat on the old horsehair sofa, behind the table, very tearful, very close together in spirit, holding each other's hands. They talked as the young talk—and the old, for the matter of that. She trembled at his wants unministered to in his new lodgings. He waved away prospective discomfort: what did it matter? He was a man and could rough it. It was she herself whose loss would be irreparable. She sighed; he would soon forget her. He vowed undying remembrance by all his gods. Some beautiful creature of the theatre would carry him off. He laughed at such an absurdity. Jane would always be his confidante, his intimate. Even though they lived under different roofs, they would meet and have their long happy jaunts together. Jane said dolefully that it could only be on Sundays, as their respective working hours would never correspond—"And you haven't given me your Sundays for a year," she added. Paul slid from the dark theme and, to comfort her, spoke glowingly of the future, when he should have achieved his greatness. He would give her a beautiful house with carriages and servants, and she would not have to work.

"But if you are not there, what's the good of anything?" she said.

"I'll come to see you, silly dear," he replied ingenuously.

Before they parted for the night she threw her arms round his neck impulsively. "Don't quite forget me, Paul. It would break my heart. I've only you left now poor mother's gone."

Paul kissed her and vowed again. He did not vow that he would be a mother to her, though to the girl's heart it seemed as if he did. The little girl was aching for a note in his voice that never came. Now, ninety-nine youths in a hundred who held, at such a sentimental moment, a comely and not uncared-for maiden in their arms, would have lost their heads (and their hearts) and vowed in the desired manner. But Paul was different, and Jane knew it, to her sorrow. He was by no means temperamentally cold; far from it. But, you see, he lived intensely in his dream, and only on its outer fringe had Jane her place. In the heart of it, hidden in amethystine mist, from which only flashed the diadem on her hair, dwelt the exquisite, the incomparable lady, the princess who should share his kingdom, while he knelt at her feet and worshipped her and kissed the rosy tips of her calm fingers. So, as it never entered his head to kiss the finger tips of poor Jane, it never entered his head to fancy himself in love with her. Therefore, when she threw herself into his arms, he hugged her in a very sincere and brotherly way, but kissed her with a pair of cast lips of Adonis. Of course he would never forget her. Jane went to bed and sobbed her heart out. Paul slept but little. The breaking up of the home meant the end of many precious and gentle things, and without them he knew that his life would be the poorer. And he vowed once more, to himself, that he would never prove disloyal to Jane.

While he remained in London he saw what he could of her, sacrificing many a Sunday's outing with the theatre folk. Jane, instinctively aware of this, and finding in his demeanour, after examining it with femininely jealous, microscopic eyes, nothing perfunctory, was duly grateful, and gave him of her girlish best. She developed very quickly after her entrance into the world of struggle. Very soon it was the woman and not the child who listened to the marvellous youth's story of the wonders that would be. She never again threw herself into his arms, and he never again called her a "little silly." She was dimly aware of change, though she knew that the world could hold no other man for her. But Paul was not.

And then Paul went on tour.

CHAPTER VII

PAUL had been four years on the stage. Save as a memory they had as little influence on the colour of his after-life as his years at Bludston or his years in the studios. He was the man born to be king. The attainment of his kingdom alone mattered. The intermediary phases were of no account. It had been a period of struggle, hardship and, as far as the stage itself was concerned, disillusion. After the first year or so, the goddess Fortune, more fickle in Theatreland, perhaps, than anywhere else, passed him by. London had no use for his services, especially when it learned that he aspired to play parts. It even refused him the privilege of walking on and understudying. He drifted into the provinces, where, when he obtained an engagement, he found more scope for his ambitions. Often he was out, and purchased with his savings the bread of idleness. He knew the desolation of the agent's dingy stairs; he knew the heartache of the agent's dingy outer office.

He was familiar, too, with bleak rehearsals, hours of listless waiting for his little scenes; with his powerlessness to get into his simple words the particular intonation required by an overdriven producer. Familiar, too, with long and hungry Sunday railway journeys when pious refreshment rooms are shut; with little mean towns like Bludston, where he and three or four of the company shared the same mean theatrical lodgings; with the dirty, insanitary theatres; with

the ceaseless petty jealousies and bickerings of the ill-paid itinerant troupe. The discomforts affected Paul but little, he had never had experience of luxuries, and the life itself was silken ease compared with what it would have been but for Barney Bill's kidnapping. It never occurred to him to complain of nubbly bed and ill-cooked steak and crowded and unventilated dressing rooms; but it always struck him as being absurd that such should continue to be the lot of one predestined to greatness. There was some flaw in the working of destiny. It puzzled him.

Once indeed, being out, but having an engagement ahead, and waiting for rehearsals to begin, he had found himself sufficiently prosperous to take a third-class ticket to Paris, where he spent a glorious month. But the prosperity never returned, and he had to live on his memories of Paris.

During these years books were, as ever, his joy and his consolation. He taught himself French and a little German. He read history, philosophy, a smattering of science, and interested himself in politics. So aristocratic a personage naturally had passionate Tory sympathies. Now and again —but not often, for the theatrical profession is generally Conservative—he came across a furious Radical in the company and tasted the joy of fierce argument. Now and again too, he came across a young woman of high modern cultivation, and once or twice narrowly escaped wrecking his heart on the Scylline rock of her intellect. It was only when he discovered that she had lost her head over his romantic looks, and not over his genius and his inherited right to leadership, that he began to question her intellectual sincerity. And there is nothing to send love scuttling away with his quiver between his legs like a note of interrogation of that sort. The only touch of the morbid in Paul was his resentment at owing anything to his mere personal appearance. He could not escape the easy chaff of his fellows on his "fatal beauty." He dreaded the horrible and hackneyed phrase which every fresh intimacy either with man or woman would inevitably evoke, and he hated it beyond reason. There was a tour during which he longed for small-pox or a broken nose or facial paralysis, so that no woman should ever look at him again and no man accuse him in vulgar jest.

He played small utility parts and understudied the leading man. On the rare occasions when he played the lead, he made no great hit. The company did not, after the generous way of theatre folks, surround him, when the performance was over, with a chorus of congratulation. The manager would say, "Quite all' right, my boy, as far as it goes, but still wooden. You must get more life into it." And Paul, who knew himself to be a better man in every way than the actor whose part he was playing, just as in his childhood days he knew himself to be a better man than Billy Goodge, could not understand the general lack of appreciation. Then he remembered the early struggles of the great actors: Edmund Kean, who on the eve of his first appearance at Drury Lane cried, "If I succeed I shall go mad!"; of Henry Irving (then at his zenith) and the five hundred parts he had played before he came to London; he recalled also the failure of Disraeli's first speech in the House of Commons and his triumphant prophecy. He had dreams of that manager on his bended knees, imploring him, with prayerful hands and streaming eyes, to play Hamlet at a salary of a thousand a week and of himself haughtily snapping his fingers at the paltry fellow.

Well, which one of us who has ever dreamed at all has not had such dreams at twenty? Let him cast at Paul the first stone.

And then, you must remember, Paul's faith in his vague but glorious destiny was the dynamic force of his young life. Its essential mystery kept him alert and buoyant. His keen, self-centred mind realized that his search on the stage for the true expression of his genius was only empirical. If he failed there, it was for him to try a hundred other spheres until he found the right one. But just as in his childish days he could not understand why he was not supreme in everything, so now he could not appreciate the charge of wooden inferiority brought against him by theatrical managers.

He had been on the stage about three years when for the first time in his emancipated life something like a calamity befell him. He lost Jane. Like most calamities it happened in a foolishly accidental manner. He received a letter from Jane during the last three weeks of a tour—they always kept up an affectionate but desultory correspondence—giving a new address. The lease of her aunt's house having fallen in, they were moving to the south side of London. When he desired to answer the letter, he found he had lost it and could not remember the suburb, much less the street and number, whither Jane had migrated. A letter posted to the old address was returned through the post. The tour over, and he being again in London, he went on an errand of inquiry to Cricklewood, found the house empty and the neighbours and tradespeople ignorant. The poorer classes of London in their migrations seldom leave a trail behind them. Their correspondence being rare, it is not within their habits of life to fill up post-office forms with a view to the forwarding of letters. He could not write to Jane because he did not in the least know where she was.

He reflected with dismay that Jane could, for the same reason, no longer write to him. Ironic chance had so arranged that the landlady with whom he usually lodged in town, and whose house he used as a permanent address, had given up letting lodgings at the beginning of the tour, and had drifted into the limbo of London. Jane's only guide to his whereabouts had been the tour card which he had sent her as usual, giving dates and theatres. And the tour was over. On the chance that Jane, not hearing from him, should address a letter to the last theatre on the list, he communicated at once with the local management. But as local managements of provincial

theatres shape their existences so as to avoid responsibilities of any kind save the maintenance of their bars and the deduction of their percentages from the box-office receipts, Paul knew that it was ludicrous to expect it to interest itself in the correspondence of an obscure member of a fourth-rate company which had once played to tenth-rate business within its mildewed walls. Being young, he wrote also to the human envelope containing the essence of stale beer, tobacco and lethargy that was the stage doorkeeper. But he might just as well have written to the station master or the municipal gasworks. As a matter of fact Jane and he were as much lost to one another as if the whole of England had been primaeval forest.

It was a calamity which he regarded with dismay. He had many friends of the easy theatrical sort, who knew him as Paul Savelli, a romantically visaged, bright-natured, charming, intellectual, and execrably bad young actor. But there was only one Jane who knew him as little Paul Kegworthy. No woman he had ever met—and in the theatrical world one is thrown willy-nilly into close contact with the whole gamut of the sex—gave him just the same close, intimate, comforting companionship. From Jane he hid nothing. Before all the others he was conscious of pose. Jane, with her cockney common-sense, her shrewdness, her outspoken criticism of follies, her unfailing sympathy in essentials, was welded into the very structure of his being. Only when he had lost her did he realize this. Amidst all the artificialities and pretences and pseudo-emotionalities of his young actor's life, she was the one thing that was real. She alone knew of Bludston, of Barney Bill, of the model days the memory of which made him shiver. She alone (save Barney Bill) knew of his high destiny—for Paul, quick to recognize the cynical scepticism of an indifferent world, had not revealed the Vision Splendid to any of his associates. To her he could write; to her, when he was in London, he could talk; to her he could outpour all the jumble of faith, vanity, romance, egotism and poetry that was his very self, without thought of miscomprehension. And of late she had mastered the silly splenetics of childhood. He had an uncomfortable yet comforting impression that latterly she had developed an odd, calm wisdom, just as she had developed a calm, generous personality. The last time he had seen her, his quick sensitiveness had noted the growth from girl to woman. She was large, full-bosomed, wide-browed, clear-eyed. She had not worried him about other girls. She had reproved him for confessed follies in just the way that man loves to be reproved. She had mildly soared with him into the empyrean of his dreams. She had enjoyed whole-heartedly, from the back row of the dress-circle, the play to which he had taken her—as a member of the profession he had, in Jane's eyes, princely privileges—and on the top of the Cricklewood omnibus she had eaten, with the laughter and gusto of her twenty years, the exotic sandwiches he had bought at the delicatessen shop in Leicester Square. She was the ideal sister.

And now she was gone, like a snow-flake on a river. For a long while it seemed absurd, incredible. He went on all sorts of preposterous adventures to find her. He walked through the city day after day at the hours when girls and men pour out of their honeycombs of offices into the streets. She had never told him where she was employed, thinking the matter of little interest; and he, in his careless way, had never inquired. Once he had suggested calling for her at her office, and she had abruptly vetoed the suggestion. Paul was too remarkable a young man to escape the notice of her associates; her feelings towards him were too fine to be scratched by jocular allusion. After a time, having failed to meet her in the human torrents of Cheapside and Cannon Street, Paul gave up the search. Jane was lost, absolutely lost—and, with her, Barney Bill. He went on tour again, heavy-hearted. He felt that, in losing these two, he had committed an act of base ingratitude.

He had been four years on the stage and had grown from youth into manhood. But one day at three-and-twenty he found himself as poor in pence, though as rich in dreams, as at thirteen.

Necessity had compelled him to take what he could get. This time it was a leading part; but a leading part in a crude melodrama in a fit-up company. They had played in halls and concert rooms, on pier pavilions, in wretched little towns. It was glorious July Weather and business was bad—so bad that the manager abruptly closed the treasury and disappeared, leaving the company stranded a hundred and fifty miles from London, with a couple of weeks' salary unpaid.

Paul was packing his clothes in the portmanteau that lay on the narrow bed in his tiny back bedroom, watched disconsolately by a sallow, careworn man who sat astride the one cane chair, his hat on the back of his head, the discoloured end of a cigarette between his lips.

"It's all very well for you to take it cheerfully," said the latter. "You're young. You're strong. You're rich. You've no one but yourself. You haven't a wife and kids depending on you."

"I know it makes a devil of a difference," replied Paul, disregarding the allusion to his wealth. As the leading man, he was the most highly paid member of the disastrous company, and he had acquired sufficient worldly wisdom to know that to him who has but a penny the possessor of a shilling appears arrogantly opulent. "But still," said he, "what can we do? We must get back to London and try again."

"If there was justice in this country that son of a thief would get fifteen years for it. I never trusted the skunk. A fortnight's salary gone and no railway fare to London. I wish to God I had never taken it on. I could have gone with Garbutt in The White Woman—he's straight enough—only this was a joint engagement. Oh, the swine!"

He rose with a clatter, threw his cigarette on the floor and stamped on it violently.

"He's a pretty bad wrong 'un," said Paul. "We hadn't been going a fortnight before he asked me to accept half salary, swearing he would make it up, with a rise, as soon as business got better. Like an idiot, I consented."

His friend sat down again hopelessly. "I don't know what's going to become of us. The missus has pawned everything she has got, poor old girl! Oh, it's damned hard! We had been out six months."

"Poor old chap!" said Paul, sitting on the bed beside his portmanteau. "How does Mrs. Wilmer take it?"

"She's knocked endways. You see," cried Wilmer desperately, "we've had to send home everything we could scrape together to keep the kids—there's five of them; and now—and now there's nothing left. I'm wrong. There's that." He fished three or four coppers from his pocket and held them out with a harsh laugh. "There's that after twenty years' work in this profession."

"Poor old chap!" said Paul again. He liked Wilmer, a sober, earnest, ineffectual man, and his haggard, kindly-natured wife. They had put on a brave face all through the tour, letting no one suspect their straits, and doing both him and other members of the company many little acts of kindness and simple hospitality. In the lower submerged world of the theatrical profession in which Paul found himself he had met with many such instances of awful poverty. He had brushed elbows with Need himself. That morning he had given, out of his scanty resources, her railway fare to a tearful and despairing girl who played the low-comedy part. But he had not yet come across any position quite so untenable as that of Wilmer. Forty odd years old, a wife, five children, all his life given honestly to his calling—and threepence half-penny to his fortune.

"But, good God!" said he, after a pause, "your kiddies? If you have nothing—what will happen to them?"

"Lord knows," groaned Wilmer, staring in front of him, his elbows on the back of the chair and his head between his fists.

"And Mrs. Wilmer and yourself have got to get back to London."

"I've got the dress suit I wear in the last act. It's fairly new. I can get enough on it."

"But that's part of your outfit—your line of business; you'll want it again," said Paul.

Wilmer had played butlers up and down the land for many years. Now and again, when the part did not need any special characterization, he obtained London engagements. He was one of the known stage butlers.

"I can hire if I'm pushed," said he. "It's hell, isn't it? Something told me not to go out with a fit-up. We'd never come down to it before. And I mistrusted Larkins—but we were out six months. Paul, my boy, chuck it. You're young; you're clever; you've had a swell education; you come of gentlefolk—my father kept a small hardware shop in Leicester—you have"—the smitten and generally inarticulate man hesitated—"well, you have extraordinary personal beauty; you have charm; you could do anything you like in the world, save act—and you can't act for toffee. Why the blazes do you stick to it?"

"I've got to earn my living just like you," said Paul, greatly flattered by the artless tribute to his aristocratic personality and not offended by the professional censure which he knew to be just. "I've tried all sorts of other things-music, painting, poetry, novel-writing—but none of them has come off."

"Your people don't make you an allowance?"

"I've no people living," said Paul, with a smile—and when Paul smiled it was as if Eros's feathers had brushed the cheek of a Praxitelean Hermes; and then with an outburst half sincere, half braggart—"I've been on my own ever since I was thirteen."

Wilmer regarded him wearily. "The missus and I have always thought you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth."

"So I was," Paul declared from his innermost conviction. "But," he laughed, "I lost it before my teeth came and I could get a grip on it."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Wilmer, "that you're not doing this for fun?"

"Fun?" cried Paul. "Fun? Do you call this comic?" He waved his hand comprehensively, indicating the decayed pink-and-purple wall-paper, the ragged oil-cloth on the floor, the dingy window with its dingier outlook, the rickety deal wash-stand with the paint peeling off, a horrible clothless tray on a horrible splotchy chest of drawers, containing the horrible scraggy remains of a meal. "Do you think I would have this if I could command silken sloth? I long like hell, old chap, for silken sloth, and if I could get it, you wouldn't see me here."

Wilmer rose and stretched out his hand. "I'm sorry, dear boy," said he. "The wife and I thought it didn't very much matter to you. We always thought you were a kind of young swell

doing it for amusement and experience—and because you never put on side, we liked you."

Paul rose from the bed and put his hand on Wilmer's shoulder. "And now you're disappointed?"

He laughed and his eyes twinkled humorously. His vagabond life had taught him some worldly wisdom. The sallow and ineffectual man looked confused. His misery was beyond the relief of smiles.

"We're all in the same boat, old chap," said Paul, "except that I'm alone and haven't got wife and kids to look after."

"Good-bye, my boy," said Wilmer. "Better luck next time. But chuck it, if you can."

Paul held his hand for a while. Then his left hand dived into his waistcoat pocket and, taking the place of his right, thrust three sovereigns into Wilmer's palm. "For the kiddies," said he.

Wilmer looked at the coins in his palm, and then at Paul, and the tears spurted. "I can't, my boy. You must be as broke as any of us—you—half salary—no, my boy, I can't. I'm old enough to be your father. It's damned good of you—but it's my one pride left—the pride of both of us—the missus and me—that we've never borrowed money—"

"But it isn't borrowed, you silly ass," cried Paul cheerfully. "It's just your share of the spoils, such as they are. I wish to God it was more." With both hands he clasped the thin, ineffectual fingers over the coins and pushed the man' with his young strength out of the door. "It's for the kiddies. Give them my love," he cried, and slammed the door and locked it from the inside.

"Poor old chap!" said he.

Then he went through his pockets and laid the contents on the narrow mantel-piece. These were a gold watch and chain, a cornelian heart fixed to the free end of the chain, a silver cigarette case, a couple of keys, one sovereign, four shillings, three pennies and two half-pennies. A trunk already fastened and filled with books and clothes, and the portmanteau on the bed, contained the rest of his possessions. In current coin his whole fortune amounted to one pound, four shillings and fourpence. Luckily he had paid his landlady. One pound four and fourpence to begin again at three-and-twenty the battle of life on which he had entered at thirteen. He laughed because he was young and strong, and knew that such reverses were foreordained chapters in the lives of those born to a glorious destiny. They were also preordained chapters in the lives of those born to failure, like poor old Wilmer. He was conscious of the wide difference between Wilmer and himself. Good Heavens! To face the world at forty-three, with wife and children and threepence-halfpenny, and the once attendant hope replaced by black-vestured doom! Poor Wilmer! He felt certain that Wilmer had not been able to pay his landlady, and he felt that he had been mean in keeping back the other sovereign.

The sudden loss, however, of three-fourths of his fortune brought him up against practical considerations. The more he had in his pocket when he arrived in London, the longer could he subsist. That was important, because theatrical engagements are not picked up in a hurry. Now; the railway fare would swallow a goodly number of shillings. Obviously it was advisable to save the railway fare; and the only way to do this was to walk to London. His young blood thrilled at the notion. It was romantic. It was also inspiring of health and joy. He had been rather run down lately, and, fearful of the catastrophe which had in fact occurred, he had lived this last week very sparingly—-chiefly on herrings and tea. A hundred and fifty miles' tramp along the summer roads, with bread and cheese and an occasional glass of beer to keep him going, would be just the thing to set him up again. He looked in the glass. Yes, his face was a bit pinched and his eyes were rather too bright. A glorious tramp to London, thirty or forty miles a day in the blazing and beautiful sunshine, was exactly what he needed.

Joyously he unpacked his trunk and took from it a Norfolk jacket suit and stockings, changed, and, leaving his luggage with his landlady, who was to obey further instructions as to its disposal, marched buoyantly away through the sun-filled streets of the little town, stick in hand, gripsack on shoulder, and the unquenchable fire of youth and hope in his heart.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS URSULA WINWOOD, hatless, but with a cotton sunshade swinging over her shoulder, and with a lean, shiny, mahogany-coloured Sussex spaniel trailing behind, walked in her calm, deliberate way down the long carriage drive of Drane's Court. She was stout and florid, and had no scruples as to the avowal of her age, which was forty-three. She had clear blue eyes which looked steadily upon a complicated world of affairs, and a square, heavy chin which showed her capacity for dealing with it. Miss Ursula Winwood knew herself to be a notable person, and the knowledge did not make her vain or crotchety or imperious. She took her notability for granted,

as she took her mature good looks and her independent fortune. For some years she had kept house for her widowed brother, Colonel Winwood, Conservative Member for the Division of the county in which they resided, and helped him efficiently in his political work. The little township of Morebury—half a mile from the great gates of Drane's Court—felt Miss Winwood's control in diverse ways. Another town, a little further off, with five or six millions of inhabitants, was also, through its newspapers, aware of Miss Winwood. Many leagues, societies, associations, claimed her as President, Vice-President, or Member of Council. She had sat on Royal Commissions. Her name under an appeal for charity guaranteed the deserts of the beneficiaries. What she did not know about housing problems, factory acts, female prisons, hospitals, asylums for the blind, decayed gentlewomen, sweated trades, dogs' homes and Friendly Societies could not be considered in the light of knowledge. She sat on platforms with Royal princesses, Archbishops welcomed her as a colleague, and Cabinet Ministers sought her counsel.

For some distance from the porch of the red-brick, creeper-covered Queen-Anne house the gravel drive between the lawns blazed in the afternoon sun. For this reason, the sunshade. But after a while came an avenue of beech and plane and oak casting delectable shade on the drive and its double edging of grass, and the far-stretching riot of flowers beneath the trees, foxgloves and canterbury bells and campanulas and delphiniums, all blues and purples and whites, with here and there the pink of dog-roses and gorgeous yellow splashes of celandine. On entering the stately coolness, Miss Winwood closed her sunshade and looked at her watch, a solid timepiece harboured in her belt. A knitted brow betrayed mathematical calculation. It would take her five minutes to reach the lodge gate. The train bringing her venerable uncle, Archdeacon Winwood, for a week's visit would not arrive at the station for another three minutes, and the two fat horses would take ten minutes to drag from the station the landau which she had sent to meet him. She had, therefore, eight minutes to spare. A rustic bench invited repose. Graciously she accepted the invitation.

Now, it must be observed that it was not Miss Winwood's habit to waste time. Her appointments were kept to the minute, and her appointment (self-made on this occasion) was the welcoming of her uncle, the Archdeacon, on the threshold of Drane's Court. But Miss Winwood was making holiday and allowed herself certain relaxations. Her brother's health having broken down, he had paired for the rest of the session and gone to Contrexeville for a cure. She had therefore shut up her London house in Portland Place, Colonel Winwood's home while Parliament sat, and had come to her brother's house, Drane's Court, her home when her presence was not needed in London. She was tired; Drane's Court, where she had been born and had lived all her girlhood's life, was restful; and the seat in the shade of the great beech was cunningly curved. The shiny, mahogany-coloured spaniel, prescient of siesta, leaped to her side and lay down with his chin on her lap and blinked his yellow eyes.

She lay back on the seat, her hand on the dog's head, looking contentedly at the opposite wilderness of bloom and the glimpses, through the screen of trees and shrubs, of the sunlit stretches of park beyond. She loved Drane's Court. Save for the three years of her brother's short married life, it had been part of herself. A Winwood, a very younger son of the Family—the Family being that of which the Earl of Harpenden is Head (these things can only be written of in capital letters)—had acquired wealth in the dark political days of Queen Anne, and had bought the land and built the house, and the property had never passed into alien hands. As for the name, he had used that of his wife, Viscountess Drane in her own right,—a notorious beauty of whom, so History recounts, he was senilely enamoured and on whose naughty account he was eventually run through the body by a young Mohawk of a paramour. They fought one spring dawn in the park—the traditional spot could be seen from where Ursula Winwood was sitting.

Ursula and her brother were proud of the romantic episode, and would relate it to guests and point out the scene of the duel. Happy and illusory days of Romance now dead and gone! It is not conceivable that, generations hence, the head of a family will exhibit with pride the stained newspaper cuttings containing the unsavoury details of the divorce case of his great-great-grandmother.

This aspect of family history seldom presented itself to Ursula Winwood. It did not do so this mellow and contented afternoon. Starlings mindful of a second brood chattered in the old walnut trees far away on the lawn; thrushes sang their deep-throated bugle-calls; finches twittered. A light breeze creeping up the avenue rustled the full foliage languorously. Ursula Winwood closed her eyes. A bumble-bee droned between visits to foxglove bells near by. She loved bumble-bees. They reminded her of a summer long ago when she sat, not on this seat—as a matter of fact it was in the old walled garden a quarter of a mile away—with a gallant young fellow's arms about her and her head on his shoulder. A bumble-bee had droned round her while they kissed. She could never hear a bumble-bee without thinking of it. But the gallant young fellow had been killed in the Soudan in eighteen eighty-five, and Ursula Winwood's heart had been buried in his sandy grave. That was the beginning and end of her sentimental history. She had recovered from the pain of it all and now she loved the bumble-bee for invoking the exquisite memory. The lithe Sussex spaniel crept farther on her lap and her hand caressed his polished coat. Drowsiness disintegrated the exquisite memories. Miss Ursula Winwood fell asleep.

The sudden plunging of strong young paws into her body and a series of sharp barks and growls awakened her with a start, and, for a second, still dazed by the drowsy invocation of the bumble-bee, she saw approaching her the gallant fellow who had been pierced through the heart by a Soudanese spear in eighteen eighty-five. He was dark and handsome, and, by a trick of

coincidence, was dressed in loose knickerbocker suit, just as he was when he had walked up that very avenue to say his last good-bye. She remained for a moment tense, passively awaiting co-ordination of her faculties. Then clear awake, and sending scudding the dear ghosts of the past, she sat up, and catching the indignant spaniel by the collar, looked with a queer, sudden interest at the newcomer. He was young, extraordinarily beautiful; but he staggered and reeled like a drunken man. The spaniel barked his respectable disapproval. In his long life of eighteen months he had seen many people, postmen and butcher boys and casual diggers in kitchen gardens, whose apparent permit to exist in Drane's Court had been an insoluble puzzle; but never had he seen so outrageous a trespasser. With unparalleled moral courage he told him exactly what he thought of him. But the trespasser did not hear. He kept on advancing. Miss Winwood rose, disgusted, and drew herself up. The young man threw out his hands towards her, tripped over the three-inch-high border of grass, and fell in a sprawling heap at her feet.

He lay very still. Ursula Winwood looked down upon him. The shiny brown spaniel took up a strategic position three yards away and growled, his chin between his paws. But the more Miss Winwood looked, and her blue eyes were trained to penetrate, the more was she convinced that both she and the dog were wrong in their diagnosis. The young man's face was deadly white, his cheeks gaunt. It was evidently a grave matter. For a moment or so she had a qualm of fear lest he might be dead. She bent down, took him in her capable grip and composed his inert body decently, and placed the knapsack he was wearing beneath his head. The faintly beating heart proved him to be alive, but her touch on his brow discovered fever. Kneeling by his side, she wiped his lips with her handkerchief, and gave herself up to the fraction of a minute's contemplation of the most beautiful youth she had ever seen. So there he lay, a new Endymion, while the most modern of Dianas hung over him, stricken with great wonderment at his perfection.

In this romantic attitude was she surprised, first by the coachman of the landau and pair as he swung round the bend of the drive, and then by the Archdeacon, who leaned over the door of the carriage. Miss Winwood sprang to her feet; the coachman pulled up, and the Archdeacon alighted.

"My dear Uncle Edward"—she wrung his hand—"I'm so glad to see you. Do help me grapple with an extraordinary situation."

The Archdeacon smiled humorously. He was a spare man of seventy, with thin, pointed, clean-shaven face, and clear blue eyes like Miss Winwood's. "If there's a situation, my dear Ursula, with which you can't grapple," said he, "it must indeed be extraordinary."

She narrated what had occurred, and together they bent over the unconscious youth. "I would suggest," said she, "that we put him into the carriage, drive him up to the house, and send for Dr. Fuller."

"I can only support your suggestion," said the Archdeacon.

So the coachman came down from his box and helped them to lift the young man into the landau; and his body swayed helplessly between Miss Winwood and the Archdeacon, whose breeches and gaiters were smeared with dust from his heavy boots. A few moments afterwards he was carried into the library and laid upon a sofa, and Miss Winwood administered restoratives. The deep stupor seemed to pass, and he began to moan.

Miss Winwood and the housekeeper stood by his side. The Archdeacon, his hands behind his back, paced the noiseless Turkey carpet. "I hope," said he, "your doctor will not be long in coming."

"It looks like a sunstroke," the housekeeper remarked, as her mistress scrutinized the clinical thermometer.

"It doesn't," said Miss Winwood bluntly. "In sunstroke the face is either congested or clammy. I know that much. He has a temperature of 103."

"Poor fellow!" said the Archdeacon.

"I wonder who he is," said Miss Winwood.

"Perhaps this may tell us," said the Archdeacon.

From the knapsack, carelessly handled by the servant who had brought it in, had escaped a book, and the servant had laid the book on the top of the knapsack. The Archdeacon took it up.

"Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici and Urn Burial. On the flyleaf, 'Paul Savelli.' An undergraduate, I should say, on a walking tour."

Miss Winwood took the book from his hands—a little cheap reprint. "I'm glad," she said.

"Why, my dear Ursula?"

"I'm very fond of Sir Thomas Browne, myself," she replied.

Presently the doctor came and made his examination. He shook a grave head. "Pneumonia. And he has got it bad. Perhaps a touch of the sun as well." The housekeeper smiled discreetly. "Looks half-starved, too. I'll send up the ambulance at once and get him to the cottage hospital."

Miss Winwood, a practical woman, was aware that the doctor gave wise counsel. But she looked at Paul and hesitated. Paul's destiny, though none knew it, hung in the balance. "I disapprove altogether of the cottage hospital," she said.

"Eh?" said the doctor.

The Archdeacon raised his eyebrows. "My dear Ursula, I thought you had made the Morebury Cottage Hospital the model of its kind."

"Its kind is not for people who carry about Sir Thomas Browne in their pocket," retorted the disingenuous lady. "If I turned him out of my house, doctor, and anything happened to him, I should have to reckon with his people. He stays here. You'll kindly arrange for nurses. The red room, Wilkins,—no, the green—the one with the small oak bed. You can't nurse people properly in four-posters. It has a south-east aspect"—she turned to the doctor—"and so gets the sun most of the day. That's quite right, isn't it?"

"Ideal. But I warn you, Miss Winwood, you may be letting yourself in for a perfectly avoidable lot of trouble."

"I like trouble," said Miss Winwood.

"You're certainly looking for it," replied the doctor glancing at Paul and stuffing his stethoscope into his pocket. "And in this case, I can promise you worry beyond dreams of anxiety."

The word of Ursula Winwood was law for miles around. Dr. Fuller, rosy, fat and fifty, obeyed, like everyone else; but during the process of law-making he had often, before now, played the part of an urbane and gently satirical leader of the opposition.

She flashed round on him, with a foolish pain through her heart that caused her to catch her breath. "Is he as bad as that?" she asked quickly.

"As bad as that," said the doctor, with grave significance. "How he managed to get here is a mystery!" Within a quarter-of-an-hour the unconscious Paul, clad in a suit of Colonel Winwood's silk pyjamas, lay in a fragrant room, hung with green and furnished in old, black oak. Never once, in all his life, had Paul Kegworthy lain in such a room. And for him a great house was in commotion. Messages went forth for nurses and medicines and the paraphernalia of a luxurious sick-chamber, and-the lady of the house being absurdly anxious—for a great London specialist, whose fee, in Dr. Fuller's quiet eyes, would be amusingly fantastic.

"It seems horrible to search the poor boy's pockets," said Miss Winwood, when, after these excursions and alarms the Archdeacon and herself had returned to the library; "but we must try to find out who he is and communicate with his people. Savelli. I've never heard of them. I wonder who they are."

"There is an historical Italian family of that name," said the Archdeacon.

"I was sure of it," said Miss Winwood.

"Of what?"

"That his people—are—well—all right."

"Why are you sure?"

Ursula was very fond of her uncle. He represented to her the fine flower of the Church of England—a gentleman, a scholar, an ideal physical type of the Anglican dignitary, a man of unquestionable piety and Christian charity, a personage who would be recognized for what he was by Hottentots or Esquimaux or attendants of wagon-lits trains or millionaires of the Middle West of America or Parisian Apaches. In him the branch of the family tree had burgeoned into the perfect cleric. Yet sometimes, the play of light beneath the surface of those blue eyes, so like her own, and the delicately intoned challenges of his courtly voice, exasperated her beyond measure. "It's obvious to any idiot, my dear," she replied testily. "Just look at him. It speaks for itself."

The Archdeacon put his thin hand on her plump shoulder, and smiled. The old man had a very sunny smile. "I'm sorry to carry on a conversation so Socratically," said he. "But what is 'it'?"

"I've never seen anything so physically beautiful, save the statues in the Vatican, in all my life. If he's not an aristocrat to the finger tips, I'll give up all my work, turn Catholic, and go into a nunnery—which will distress you exceedingly. And then"—she waved a plump hand—"and then, as I've mentioned before, he reads the Religio Medici. The commonplace, vulgar young man of to-day no more reads Sir Thomas Browne than he reads Tertullian or the Upanishads."

"He also reads," said the Archdeacon, stuffing his hand into Paul's knapsack, against whose

canvas the stiff outline of a book revealed itself—"he also reads"—he held up a little fat duodecimo—"the Chansons de Beranger."

"That proves it," cried Miss Winwood.

"Proves what?"

His blue eyes twinkled. Having a sense of humour, she laughed and flung her great arm round his frail shoulders. "It proves, my venerable and otherwise distinguished dear, that I am right and you are wrong."

"My good Ursula," said he, disengaging himself, "I have not advanced one argument either in favour of, or in opposition to, one single proposition the whole of this afternoon."

She shook her head at him pityingly.

The housekeeper entered carrying a double handful of odds and ends which she laid on the library table—a watch and chain and cornelian heart, a cigarette case bearing the initials "P.S.," some keys, a very soiled handkerchief, a sovereign, a shilling and a penny. Dr. Fuller had sent them down with his compliments; they were the entire contents of the young gentleman's pockets.

"Not a card, not a scrap of paper with a name and address on it?" cried Miss Winwood.

"Not a scrap, miss. The doctor and I searched most thoroughly."

"Perhaps the knapsack will tell us more," said the Archdeacon.

The knapsack, however, revealed nothing but a few toilet necessaries, a hunk of stale bread and a depressing morsel of cheese, and a pair of stockings and a shirt declared by the housekeeper to be wet through. As the Beranger, like the Sir Thomas Browne, was inscribed "Paul Savelli," which corresponded with the initials on the cigarette case, they were fairly certain of the young man's name. But that was all they could discover regarding him.

"We'll have to wait until he can tell us himself," said Miss Winwood later to the doctor.

"We'll have to wait a long time," said he.

CHAPTER IX

THE London physician arrived, sat up with Paul most of the night, and went away the next morning saying that he was a dead man. Dr. Fuller, however, advanced the uncontrovertible opinion that a man was not dead till he died; and Paul was not dead yet. As a matter of fact, Paul did not die. If he had done so, there would have been an end of him and this history would never have been written. He lay for many days at the gates of Death, and Miss Winwood, terribly fearful lest they should open and the mysterious, unconscious shape of beauty and youth should pass through, had all the trouble promised her by the doctor. But the gates remained shut. When Paul took a turn for the better, the London physician came down again and declared that he was living in defiance of all the laws of pathology, and with a graceful compliment left the case in the hands of Dr. Fuller. When his life was out of danger, Dr. Fuller attributed the miracle to the nurses; Ursula Winwood attributed it to Dr. Fuller; the London physician to Paul's superb constitution; and Paul himself, perhaps the most wisely, to the pleasant-faced, masterful lady who had concentrated on his illness all the resources of womanly tenderness.

But it was a long time before Paul was capable of formulating such an opinion. It was a long time before he could formulate any opinion at all. When not delirious or comatose, he had the devil of pleurisy tearing at the wall of his lung like a wild cat. Only gradually did he begin to observe and to question. That noiseless woman in coot blue and white was a nurse. He knew that. So he must be in hospital. But the room was much smaller than a hospital ward; and where were the other patients? The question worried him for a whole morning. Then there was a pink-faced man in gold spectacles, Obviously the doctor. Then there was a sort of nurse whom he liked very much, but she was not in uniform. Who could she be? He realized that he was ill, as weak as a butterfly; and the pain when he coughed was agonizing. It was all very odd. How had he come here? He remembered walking along a dusty road in the blazing sun, his head bursting, every limb a moving ache. He also vaguely remembered being awakened at night by a thunder storm as he lay snugly asleep beneath a hedge. The German Ocean had fallen down upon him. He was quite sure it was the German Ocean, because he had fixed it in his head by repeating "the North Sea or German Ocean." Mixing up delirious dream with fact, he clearly remembered the green waves rearing themselves up first, an immeasurable wall, then spreading a translucent canopy beneath the firmament and then descending in awful deluge. He had a confused memory of morning sunshine, of a cottage, of a hard-featured woman, of sitting before a fire with a blanket

round his shoulders, of a toddling child smeared to the eyebrows with dirt and treacle whom he had wanted to wash. Over and over again, lately, he had wanted to wash that child, but it had always eluded his efforts. Once he had thought of scraping it with a bit of hoof-iron, but it had turned into a Stilton cheese. It was all very puzzling. Then he had gone on tramping along the high road. What was that about bacon and eggs? The horrible smell offended his nostrils. It must have been a wayside inn; and a woman twenty feet high with a face like a cauliflower—or was it spinach?—or Brussels sprouts?—silly not to remember—one of the three, certainly—desired to murder him with a thousand eggs bubbling up against rank reefs of bacon. He had escaped from her somehow, and he had been very lucky. His star had saved him. It had also saved him from a devil on a red-hot bicycle. He had stood quite still, calm and undismayed, in the awful path of the straddling Apollyon whose head was girt around with yellow fire, and had seen him swerve madly and fall off the machine. And when the devil had picked himself up, he had tried to blast him with the Great Curse of the Underworld; but Paul had shown him his cornelian heart, his talisman, and the devil had remounted his glowing vehicle and had ridden away in a spume of flame. The Father of Lies had tried to pass himself off as a postman. The memory of the shallow pretence tickled Paul so that he laughed; and then he half fainted in pleuritic agony.

After the interlude with the devil he could recollect little. He was going up to London to make his fortune. A princess was waiting for him at the golden gate of London, with a fortune piled up in a coach-and-six. But being very sick and dizzy, he thought he would sit down and rest in a great green cathedral whose doors stood invitingly open ... and now he found himself in the hospital ward. Sometimes he felt a desire to question the blue-and-white nurse, but it seemed too much trouble to move his lips. Then in a flash came the solution of the puzzle, and he chuckled to himself over his cunning. Of course it was a dream. The nurse was a dream-nurse, who wanted to make him believe that she was real. But she was not clever enough. The best way to pay her out for her deception was to take no notice of her whatsoever. So comforted, he would go to sleep.

At last one morning he woke, a miserably weak but perfectly sane man, and he turned his head from side to side and looked wonderingly at the fresh and exquisite room. A bowl of Morning Glow roses stood by his bedside, gracious things for fevered eyes to rest upon. A few large photographs of famous pictures hung on the walls. In front of him was the Santa Barbara of Palma Vecchio, which he recognized with a smile. He had read about it, and knew that the original was in Venice. Knowledge of things like that was comforting.

The nurse, noticing the change, came up to him and spoke in a soothing voice. "Are you feeling better?"

"I think so," said Paul. "I suppose I've been very ill."

"Very ill," said the nurse.

"This can't be a hospital?"

"Oh, no. It's the house of some very kind, good friends. You don't know them," she added quickly, seeing him knit a perplexed brow. "You stumbled into their garden and fainted. And they're very anxious for you to get well and strong."

"Who are they?" asked Paul.

"Colonel and Miss Winwood. They will be so glad to see you better—at least Miss Winwood will; the Colonel's not at home."

She lifted his head gently and smoothed his pillows, and ordained silence. Presently the doctor came, and spoke kindly. "You've had a narrow shave, my friend, and you're not out of the wood yet," said he. "And you'll have to go slow and take things for granted for some time."

Then came Miss Winwood, whom he recognized as the puzzling but pleasant nurse out of uniform.

"I don't know how to thank you for taking me in, a stranger, like this," said Paul.

She smiled. "It's Providence, not me, that you must thank. You might have been taken ill by the roadside far away from anybody. Providence guided you here."

"Providence or Destiny," murmured Paul, closing his eyes. It was absurd to feel so weak.

"That's a theological question on which we won't enter," laughed Miss Winwood. "Anyhow, thank God, you're better."

A little later she came to him again. "I've been so anxious about your people—you see, we've had no means of communicating with them."

"My people?" asked Paul, surprised.

"Yes. They must be wondering what has become of you."

"I have no people," said Paul.

"No people? What do you mean?" she asked sharply, for the moment forgetful of the sick room. She herself had hundreds of relations. The branches of her family tree were common to half the country families of England. "Have you no parents—brothers or sisters—?"

"None that I know of," said Paul. "I'm quite alone in the world."

"Have you no friends to whom I could write about you?"

He shook his head, and his great eyes, all the greater and more lustrous through illness, smiled into hers. "No. None that count. At least—there are two friends, but I've lost sight of them for years. No—there's nobody who would be in the least interested to know. Please don't trouble. I shall be all right."

Miss Winwood put her cool hand on his forehead and bent over him. "You? You, alone like that? My poor boy!"

She turned away. It was almost incredible. It was monstrously pathetic. The phenomenon baffled her. Tears came into her eyes. She had imagined him the darling of mother and sisters; the gay centre of troops of friends. And he was alone on the earth. Who was he? She turned again.

"Will you tell me your name?"

"Savelli. Paul Savelli."

"I thought so. It was in the two books in your knapsack. A historical Italian name."

"Yes," said Paul. "Noble. All dead."

He lay back, exhausted. Suddenly a thought smote him. He beckoned. She approached. "My heart—is it safe?" he whispered.

"Your heart?"

"At the end of my watch-chain."

"Quite safe."

"Could I have it near me?"

"Of course."

Paul closed his eyes contentedly. With his talisman in his hand, all would be well. For the present he need take thought of nothing. His presence in the beautiful room being explained, there was an end of the perplexity of his semi-delirium. Of payment for evident devoted service there could be no question. Time enough when he grew well and able to fare forth again, to consider the immediate future. He was too weak to lift his head, and something inside him hurt like the devil when he moved. Why worry about outer and unimportant matters? The long days of pain and illness slipped gradually away. Miss Winwood sat by his bedside and talked; but not until he was much stronger did she question him as to his antecedents. The Archdeacon had gone away after a week's visit without being able to hold any converse with Paul; Colonel Winwood was still at Contrexeville, whence he wrote sceptically of the rare bird whom Ursula had discovered; and Ursula was alone in the house, save for a girl friend who had no traffic with the sick-chamber. She had, therefore, much leisure to devote to Paul. Her brother's scepticism most naturally strengthened her belief in him. He was her discovery. He grew almost to be her invention. Just consider. Here was a young Greek god—everyone who had a bowing acquaintance with ancient sculpture immediately likened Paul to a Greek god, and Ursula was not so far different from her cultured fellow mortals as to liken him to anything else—here was a young Phoebus Apollo, all the more Olympian because of his freedom from earthly ties, fallen straight from the clouds. He had fallen at her feet. His beauty had stirred her. His starlike loneliness had touched her heart. His swift intelligence, growing more manifest each day as he grew stronger, moved her admiration. He had, too, she realized, a sunny and sensuous nature, alive to beauty—even the beauty of the trivial things in his sickroom. He had an odd, poetical trick of phrase. He was a paragon of young Greek gods. She had discovered him; and women don't discover even mortal paragons every day in the week. Also, she was a woman of forty-three, which, after all, is not wrinkled and withered eld; and she was not a soured woman; she radiated health and sweetness; she had loved once in her life, very dearly. Romance touched her with his golden feather and, in the most sensible and the most unreprehensible way in the world, she fell in love with Paul.

"I wonder what made you put that Santa Barbara of Palma Vecchio just opposite the bed," he said one day. He had advanced so far toward recovery as to be able to sit up against his pillows.

"Don't you like it?" She turned in her chair by his bedside.

"I worship it. Do you know, she has a strange look of you? When I was half off my head I used to mix you up together. She has such a generous and holy bigness—the generosity of the All-woman."

Ursula flushed at the personal tribute, but let it pass without comment. "It's not a bad photograph; but the original—that is too lovely."

"It's in the Church of Santa Maria Formosa in Venice," said Paul quickly.

He had passed through a period of wild enthusiasm for Italian painting, and had haunted the National Gallery, and knew by heart Sir Charles Eastlake's edition of Kugler's unique textbook.

"Ah, you know it?" said Ursula.

"I've never been to Venice," replied Paul, with a sigh. "It's the dream of my life to go there."

She straightened herself on her chair. "How do you know the name of the church?"

Paul smiled and looked round the walls, and reflected for a moment. "Yes," said he in answer to his own questioning, "I think I can tell you where all these pictures are, though I've never seen them, except one. The two angels by Melozzo da Forli are in St. Peter's at Rome. The Sposalia of Raphael is in the Breza, Milan. The Andrea del Sarto is in the Louvre. That's the one I've seen. That little child of Heaven, playing the lute, is in the predella of an altar-piece by Vittore Carpaccio in the—in the—please don't tell me—in the Academia of Venice. Am I right?"

"Absolutely right," said Miss Winwood.

He laughed, delighted. At three and twenty, one—thank goodness!—is very young. One hungers for recognition of the wonder-inspiring self that lies hidden beneath the commonplace mask of clay. "And that," said he—"the Madonna being crowned—the Botticelli—is in the Uffizi at Florence. Walter Pater talks about it—you know—in his 'Renaissance'—the pen dropping from her hand—'the high, cold words that have no meaning for her—the intolerable honour'! Oh, it's enormous, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid I've not read my Pater as I ought," said Miss Winwood.

"But, you must!" cried Paul, with the gloriously audacious faith of youth which has just discovered a true apostle. "Pater puts you on to the inner meaning of everything—in art, I mean. He doesn't wander about in the air like Ruskin, though, of course, if you get your mental winnowing machine in proper working order you can get the good grain out of Ruskin. 'The Stones of Venice' and 'The Seven Lamps' have taught me a lot. But you always have to be saying to yourself, 'Is this gorgeous nonsense or isn't it?' whereas in Pater there's no nonsense at all. You're simply carried along on a full stream of Beauty straight into the open Sea of Truth."

And Ursula Winwood, to whom Archbishops had been deferential and Cabinet Ministers had come for, guidance, meekly promised to send at once for Pater's 'Renaissance' and so fill in a most lamentable gap in her education.

"My uncle, the Archdeacon," she said, after a while, "reminded me that the great Savelli was a Venetian general—of Roman family; and, strangely enough, his name, too, was Paul. Perhaps that's how you got the name."

"That must be how," said Paul dreamily. He had not heard of the great general. He had seen the name of Savelli somewhere—also that of Torelli—and had hesitated between the two. Thinking it no great harm, he wove into words the clamour of his cherished romance. "My parents died when I was quite young—a baby—and then I was brought to England. So you see"—he smiled in his winning way—"I'm absolutely English."

"But you've kept your Italian love of beauty."

"I hope so," said Paul.

"Then I suppose you were brought up by guardians," said Ursula.

"A guardian," said Paul, anxious to cut down to a minimum the mythical personages that might be connected with his career. "But I seldom saw him. He lived in Paris chiefly. He's dead now."

"What a poor little uncared-for waif you must have been."

Paul laughed. "Oh, don't pity me. I've had to think for myself a good deal, it is true. But it has done me good. Don't you find it's the things one learns for oneself—whether they are about life or old china—that are the most valuable?"

"Of course," said Miss Winwood. But she sighed, womanlike, at the thought of the little Paul—(how beautiful he must have been as a child!)—being brought up by servants and hirelings in a lonely house, his very guardian taking no concern in his welfare.

Thus it came about that, from the exiguous material supplied by Paul, Miss Winwood, not doubting his gentle birth and breeding, constructed for him a wholly fictitious set of antecedents. Paul invented as little as possible and gratefully accepted her suggestions. They worked together unconsciously. Paul had to give some account of himself. He had blotted Bludston and his

modeldom out of his existence. The passionate belief in his high and romantic birth was part of his being, and Miss Winwood's recognition was a splendid confirmation of his faith. It was rather the suppressio veri of which he was guilty than the propositio falsi. So between them his childhood was invested with a vague semblance of reality in which the fact of his isolation stood out most prominent.

They had many talks together, not only on books and art, but on the social subjects in which Ursula was so deeply interested. She found him well informed, with a curiously detailed knowledge of the everyday lives of the poor. It did not occur to her that this knowledge came from his personal experience. She attributed it to the many-sided genius of her paragon.

"When you get well you must help us. There's an infinite amount to be done."

"I shall be delighted," said Paul politely.

"You'll find I'm a terrible person to deal with when once I've laid my hands on anybody," she said with a smile. "I drag in all kinds of people, and they can't escape. I sent young Harry Gostling—Lord Ruthmere's son, you know—to look into a working girls' club in the Isle of Dogs that was going wrong. He hated it at first, but now he's as keen as possible. And you'll be keen too."

It was flattering to be classified with leisured and opulent young Guardsmen; but what, Paul reflected with a qualm, would the kind lady say if she learned the real state of his present fortunes? He thought of the guinea that lay between him and starvation, and was amused by the irony of her proposition. Miss Winwood evidently took it for granted that he was in easy circumstances, living on the patrimony administered during his boyhood by a careless guardian. He shrank from undeceiving her. His dream was beginning to come true. He was accepted by one of the high caste as belonging to the world where princes and princesses dwelt serene. If only he could put the theatre behind him, as he had put the rest, and make a stepping-stone of his dead actor self! But that was impossible, or at least the question would have to be fought out between himself and fortune after he had left Drane's Court. In the meanwhile he glowed with the ambition to leave it in his newly acquired splendour, drums beating, banners flying, the young prince returning to his romantic and mysterious solitude.

The time was approaching when he should get up. He sent for his luggage. The battered trunk and portmanteau plastered with the labels of queer provincial towns did not betray great wealth. Nor did the contents, taken out by the man-servant and arranged in drawers by the nurse. His toilet paraphernalia was of the simplest and scantiest. His stock of frayed linen and darned underclothes made rather a poor little heap on the chair. He watched the unpacking somewhat wistfully from his bed; and, like many another poor man, inwardly resented his poverty being laid bare to the eyes of the servants of the rich.

The only thing that the man seemed to handle respectfully—as a recognized totem of a superior caste—was a brown canvas case of golf clubs, which he stood up in a conspicuous corner of the room. Paul had taken to the Ancient and Royal game when first he went on tour, and it had been a health-giving resource during the listless days when there was no rehearsal or no matinee—hundreds of provincial actors, to say nothing of retired colonels and such-like derelicts, owe their salvation of body and soul to the absurd but hygienic pastime—and with a naturally true eye and a harmonious body trained to all demands on its suppleness in the gymnasium, proficiency had come with little trouble. He was a born golfer; for the physically perfect human is a born anything physical you please. But he had not played for a long time. Half-crowns had been very scarce on this last disastrous tour, and comrades who included golf in their horizon of human possibilities had been rarer. When would he play again? Heaven knew! So he looked wistfully, too, at his set of golf clubs. He remembered how he had bought them—one by one.

"Do you want this on the dressing table?" The nurse held up a little oblong case.

It was his make-up box, luckily tied round with string.

"Good heavens, no!" he exclaimed. He wished he could have told her to burn it. He felt happier when all his belongings were stowed away out of sight and the old trunk and portmanteau hauled out of the room.

Colonel Winwood came home and asked his sister pertinent questions. He was a bald, sad-looking man with a long grizzling moustache that drooped despondently. But he had a square, obstinate chin, and his eyes, though they seldom smiled, were keen and direct, like Miss Winwood's. Romance had passed him by long since. He did not believe in paragons.

"I gather, my dear Ursula," said he in a dry voice, "that our guest is an orphan, of good Italian family, brought up in England by a guardian now dead who lived in France. Also that he is of prepossessing exterior, of agreeable manners, of considerable cultivation, and apparently of no acquaintance. But what I can't make out is: what he does for a living, how he came to be half-starved on his walking tour—the doctor said so, you remember—where he was going from and where he is going to when he leaves our house. In fact, he seems to be a very vague and mysterious person, of whom, for a woman of your character and peculiar training, you know singularly little."

Miss Winwood replied that she could not pry into the lad's private affairs. Her brother retorted that a youth, in his physically helpless condition, who was really ingenuous, would have poured out his life's history into the ears of so sympathetic a woman, and have bored her to tears with the inner secrets of his soul.

"He has high aspirations. He has told me of them. But he hasn't bored me a bit," said Ursula.

"What does he aspire to?"

"What does any brilliant young fellow of two or three and twenty aspire to? Anything, everything. He has only to find his path."

"Yes, but what is his path?"

"I wish you weren't so much like Uncle Edward, James," said Ursula.

"He's a damned clever old man," said Colonel Winwood, "and I wish he had stayed here long enough to be able to put our young friend through a searching cross-examination."

Ursula lifted her finger-bowl an inch from the doiley and carefully put it down again. It was the evening of Colonel Winwood's arrival, and they were lingering over coffee in the great, picture-hung and softly lighted dining room. Having fixed the bowl in the exact centre of the doiley, she flashed round on her brother. "My dear James, do you think I'm an idiot?"

He took his cigar from his lips and looked at her with not unhumorous dryness. "When the world was very young, my dear," said he, "I've no doubt I called you so. But not since."

She stretched out her hand and tapped his. She was very fond of him. "You can't help being a man, my poor boy, and thinking manly thoughts of me, a woman. But I'm not an idiot. Our young friend, as you call him, is as poor as a church mouse. I know it. No, don't say, 'How?' like Uncle Edward. He hasn't told me, but Nurse has—a heart-breaking history of socks and things. There's the doctor's diagnosis, too. I haven't forgotten. But the boy is too proud to cry poverty among strangers. He keeps his end up like a man. To hear him talk, one would think he not only hadn't a care in the world, but that he commanded the earth. How can one help admiring the boy's pluck and—that's where my reticence comes in—respecting the boy's reserve?"

"H'm!" said Colonel Winwood.

"But, good gracious, Jim, dear, supposing you—or any of us—men, I mean—had been in this boy's extraordinary position—would you have acted differently? You would have died rather than give your poverty away to absolute strangers to whom you were indebted, in the way this boy is indebted to us. Good God, Jim"—she sent her dessert knife skimming across the table—"don't you see? Any reference to poverty would be an invitation—a veiled request for further help. To a gentleman like Paul Savelli, the thing's unthinkable."

Colonel Winwood selected a fresh cigar, clipped off the end, and lit it from a silver spirit lamp by his side. He blew out the first exquisite puff—the smoker's paradise would be the one first full and fragrant, virginal puff of an infinite succession of perfect cigars—looked anxiously at the glowing point to see that it was exactly lighted, and leaned back in his chair.

"What you say, dear," said he, "is plausible. Plausible almost to the point of conviction. But there's a hole somewhere in your argument, I'm sure, and I'm too tired after my journey to find it."

Thus, as the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, so did they fight for Paul; and in both cases they used a woman as their instrument.

Colonel Winwood, in spite of a masculine air of superiority, joined with the Archbishops and Cabinet Ministers above referred to in their appreciation of his sister's judgment. After all, what business of his were the private affairs of his involuntary guest? He paid him a visit the next day, and found him lying on a couch by the sunny window, clad in dressing gown and slippers. Paul rose politely, though he winced with pain.

"Don't get up, please. I'm Colonel Winwood."

They shook hands. Paul began to wheel an armchair from the bedside, but Colonel Winwood insisted on his lying down again and drew up the chair himself. "I'm afraid," said Paul, "I've been a sad trespasser on your hospitality. Miss Winwood must have told you it has scarcely been my fault; but I don't know how to express my thanks."

As Paul made it, the little speech could not have been better. Colonel Winwood, who (like the seniors of every age) deplored the lack of manners of the rising generation, was pleased by the ever so little elaborate courtesy.

"I'm only too glad we've pulled you round. You've had a bad time, I hear."

Paul smiled. "Pretty bad. If it hadn't been for Miss Winwood and all she has done for me, I should have pegged out."

"My sister's a notable woman," said the Colonel. "When she sets out to do a thing she does it thoroughly."

"I owe her my life," said Paul simply.

There was a pause. The two men, both bright-eyed, looked at each other for the fraction of a second. One, the aristocrat secure of his wealth, of his position, of himself, with no illusion left him save pride of birth, no dream save that of an England mighty and prosperous under continuous centuries of Tory rule, no memories but of stainless honour—he had fought gallantly for his Queen, he had lived like a noble gentleman, he had done his country disinterested service—no ambition but to keep himself on the level of the ideal which he had long since attained; the other the creation of nothing but of dreams, the child of the gutter, the adventurer, the vagabond, with no address, not even a back room over a sweetstuff shop in wide England, the possessor of a few suits of old clothes and one pound, one shilling and a penny, with nothing in front of him but the vast blankness of 'life, nothing behind him save memories of sordid struggle, with nothing to guide him, nothing to set him on his way with thrilling pulse and quivering fibres save the Vision Splendid, the glorious Hope, the unconquerable Faith. In the older man's eyes Paul read the calm, stern certainty of things both born to and achieved; and Colonel Winwood saw in the young man's eyes, as in a glass darkly, the reflection of the Vision.

"And yours is a very young life," said he. "Gad! it must be wonderful to be twenty. 'Rich in the glory of my rising sun.' You know your Thackeray?"

"'Riche de ma jeunesse,'" laughed Paul. "Thackeray went one better than Beranger, that time."

"I forgot," said Colonel Winwood. "My sister told me. You go about with Beranger as a sort of pocket Bible."

Paul laughed again. "When one is on the tramp one's choice of books is limited by their cubical content. One couldn't take Gibbon, for instance, or a complete Balzac."

Colonel Winwood tugged at his drooping moustache and again scrutinized the frank and exceedingly attractive youth. His astonishing perfection of feature was obvious to anybody. Yet any inconsiderable human—a peasant of the Campagna, a Venetian gondolier, a swaggering brigand of Macedonia—could be astonishingly beautiful. And, being astonishingly beautiful, that was the beginning and end of him. But behind this merely physical attractiveness of his guest glowed a lambent intelligence, quick as lightning. There was humorous challenge in those laughing and lucent dark eyes.

"Do you know your Balzac?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Paul.

"I wonder if you do," said Colonel Winwood. "I'm rather a Balzacian myself."

"I can't say I've read all Balzac. That's a colossal order," said Paul, rather excited-for, in his limited acquaintance with cultivated folk, Colonel Winwood was the only human being who could claim acquaintance with one of the literary gods of his idolatry—"but I know him pretty well. I can't stand his 'Theatre'—that's footle—but the big things—'Le Pere Goriot,' 'La Cousine Bette,' 'Cesar Birotteau'—what a great book 'Cesar Birotteau' is!—"

"You're right," said Colonel Winwood, forgetful of any possible barriers between himself and the young enthusiast. "It's one of the four or five great books, and very few people recognize it."

"'Le Lys dans la Vallee,'" said Paul.

"There's another—"

And they talked for half an hour of the Baron Nucingen, and Rastignac, and Hulot, and Bixiou, and Lousteau, and Gobsec, and Gaudissart, and Vautrin, and many another vivid personage in the human comedy.

"That man could have gone on writing for a hundred years," cried Paul, "and he could have exhausted all the possibilities of human life."

Colonel Winwood smiled courteously. "We have a bond in Balzac," said he. "But I must go. My sister said I mustn't tire you." He rose. "We're having a lot of people down here this week for the shooting. There'll be good sport. Pity you're not well enough to join us."

Paul smiled. He had one of his flashes of tact, "I'm afraid," said he modestly, "that I've never fired off a gun in my life."

"What?" cried the Colonel.

"It's true."

Colonel Winwood looked at him once more. "It's not many young men," said he, "who would

dare to make such a confession."

"But what is the good of lying?" asked Paul, with the eyes of a cherub.

"None that I know of," replied the Colonel. He returned to his chair and rested his hand on the back. "You play golf, anyhow," said he, pointing to the brown canvas bag in the corner.

"Oh, yes," said Paul.

"Any good?"

"Fair to middling."

"What's your handicap?" asked the Colonel, an enthusiastic though inglorious practitioner of the game.

"One," said Paul.

"The deuce it is!" cried the Colonel. "Mine is fifteen. You must give me a lesson or two when you pull round. We've a capital course here."

"That's very kind of you," said Paul, "but I'm afraid I shall be well enough for ordinary purposes long before I'm able to handle a golf club."

"What do you mean?"

"This silly pleurisy. It will hang about for ages!"

"Well?"

"I'll have to go my ways from here long before I can play."

"Any great hurry?"

"I can't go on accepting your wonderful hospitality indefinitely," said Paul.

"That's nonsense. Stay as long as ever you like."

"If I did that," said Paul, "I would stay on forever."

The Colonel smiled and shook hands with him. In the ordinary way of social life this was quite an unnecessary thing to do. But he acted according to the impulses common to a thousand of his type—and a fine type—in England. Setting aside the mere romantic exterior of a Macedonian brigand, here was a young man of the period with astonishingly courteous manners, of—and this was of secondary consideration—of frank and winning charm, with a free-and-easy intimacy with Balzac, of fearless truthfulness regarding his deficiencies, and with a golf handicap of one. The Colonel's hand and heart went out in instinctive coordination. The Colonel Winwoods of this country are not gods; they are very humanly fallible; but of such is the Kingdom of England.

"At any rate," said he, "you mustn't dream of leaving us yet."

He went downstairs and met his sister in the hall.

"Well?" she asked, with just a gleam of quizzicality in her eyes, for she knew whence he had come.

"One of these days I'll take him out and teach him to shoot," said the Colonel.

CHAPTER X

THE shooting party came, and Paul, able to leave his room and sit in the sunshine and crawl about the lawn and come down to dinner, though early retirement was prescribed, went among the strange men and women of the aristocratic caste like one in a dream of bliss. Much of their talk, sport and personalities, was unintelligible; every man seemed to have killed everything everywhere and every woman seemed to know everybody and everybody's intimate secrets. So when conversation was general, Paul, who had killed nothing and knew nobody, listened in silent perplexity. But even the perplexity was a happiness. It was all so new, so fascinating. For was not this world of aristocrats—there were lords and ladies and great personages whose names he had read in the newspapers—his rightful inheritance, the sphere to which he had been born? And they did not always talk of things which he did not understand. They received him among them with kind welcome and courtesy. No one asked him whence he came and whither he was going. They took him for granted, as a guest of the Winwoods. Of course if Paul had seen himself on the

way to rival the famous actor whose photograph in the window of the London Stereoscopic Company had inspired him with histrionic ambitions, he would have been at no pains to hide his profession. But between the darling of the London stage and a seedy member of a fit-up company lies a great gulf. He shrank from being associated with Mr. Vincent Crummles. One thing, however, of invaluable use he had brought with him from Theatreland—the dress suit which formed part of his stage wardrobe. There were other things, too, which he did not appreciate—ease of manner, victory over the lingering Lancastrian burr, and a knowledge of what to do with his feet and hands.

One day he had a great shock. The house party were assembling in the drawing-room, when in sailed the great lady, the ever-memorable great lady, the Marchioness of Chudley, who had spoken to him and smiled on him in the Bludston factory. Fear laid a cold grip on his heart. He thought of pleading weakness and running away to the safe obscurity of his room. But it was too late. The procession was formed immediately, and he found himself in his place with his partner on his arm. Dinner was torture. What he said to his neighbours he knew not. He dared not look up the table where Lady Chudley sat in full view. Every moment he expected—ridiculous apprehension of an accusing conscience—Colonel Winwood to come and tap him on the shoulder and bid him begone. But nothing happened. Afterwards, in the drawing-room, Fate drove him into a corner near Lady Chudley, whose eyes he met clear upon him. He turned away hurriedly and plunged into conversation with a young soldier standing by. Presently he heard Miss Winwood's voice.

"Mr. Savelli, I want to introduce you to Lady Chudley."

The fear gripped him harder and colder. How could he explain that he was occupying his rightful place in that drawing-room? But he held himself up and resolved to face the peril like a man. Lady Chudley smiled on him graciously—how well he remembered her smile!—and made him sit by her side. She was a dark, stately woman of forty, giving the impression that she could look confoundedly cold and majestic when she chose. She wore diamonds in her hair and a broad diamond clasp to the black velvet round her throat.

"Miss Winwood has been telling me what an awful time you've had, Mr. Savelli," she said pleasantly. "Now, whenever I hear of people having had pneumonia I always want to talk to them and sympathize with them."

"That's very kind of you, Lady Chudley," said Paul.

"Only a fellow-feeling. I nearly died of it once myself. I hope you're getting strong."

"I'm feeling my strength returning every day. It's a queer new joy."

"Isn't it?"

They discussed the exhilaration of convalescence. It was a 'wonderful springtide. They reverted to the preceding misery.

"You're far luckier than I was," she remarked. "You've had a comfy English house to be ill in. I was in a stone-cold palazzo in Florence—in winter. Ugh! Shall I ever forget it? I don't want to speak evil of Italy to an Italian—"

"I'm only Italian by descent," exclaimed Paul, with a laugh, his first frank laugh during the whole of that gloomy evening. And he laughed louder than was necessary, for, as it suddenly dawned upon him that he did not in the least recall to her mind the grimy little Bludston boy, the cold hand of fear was dissolved in a warm gush of exultation. "You can abuse Italy or any country but England as much as you like."

"Why mustn't I abuse England?"

"Because it's the noblest country in the world," he cried; and, seeing approval in her eyes, he yielded to an odd temptation. "If one could only do something great for her!"

"What would you like to do?" she asked.

"Anything. Sing for her. Work for her. Die for her. It makes one so impatient to sit down and do nothing. If one could only stir her up to a sense of her nationality!" he went on, less lyrically, though with the same fine enthusiasm. "She seems to be losing it, letting the smaller nations assert theirs to such an extent that she is running the risk of becoming a mere geographical expression. She has merged herself in the Imperial Ideal. That's magnificent; but the Empire ought to realize her as the great Motherheart. If England could only wake up as England again, what a wonderful thing it would be!"

"It would," said Lady Chudley. "And you would like to be the awakener?"

"Ay!" said Paul—"what a dream!"

"There was never a dream worth calling a dream that did not come true."

"Do you believe that, too?" he asked delightedly. "I've held to it all my life."

Colonel Winwood, who had been moving hostwise from group to group in the great drawing-room, where already a couple of bridge tables had been arranged, approached slowly. Lady Chudley gave him a laughing glance of dismissal. Paul's spacious Elizabethan patriotism, rare—at least in expression—among the young men of the day, interested and amused her.

"Have you dreamed all your life of being the Awakener of England?"

"I have dreamed of being so many things," he said, anxious not to commit himself. For, truth to say, this new ambition was but a couple of minutes old.

It had sprung into life, however, like Pallas Athene, all armed and equipped.

"And they have all come true?"

His great eyes laughed and his curly head bent ever so slightly. "Those worth calling dreams," said he.

A little later in the evening, when on retiring to an early bed he was wishing Miss Winwood good night, she said, "You're a lucky young man."

"I know—but—" He looked smiling inquiry.

"Lady Chudley's the most valuable woman in England for a young man to get on the right side of."

Paul went to bed dazed. The great lady who had recognized the divine fire in the factory boy had again recognized it in the grown man. She had all but said that, if he chose, he could be the Awakener of England. The Awakener of England! The watchword of his new-born ambition rang in his brain until he fell asleep.

The time soon came when the prospective Awakener of England awoke to the fact that he must fare forth into the sleeping land with but a guinea in his pocket. The future did not dismay him, for he knew now that his dreams came true. But he was terribly anxious, more anxious than ever, to leave Drane's Court with all the prestige of the prospective Awakener. Now, this final scene of the production could not be worked for a guinea. There were golden tips to servants, there was the first-class railway fare. Once in London—he could pawn things to keep him going, and a Bloomsbury landlady with whom he had lodged, since the loss of Jane, would give him a fortnight or three weeks' credit. But he had to get to London-to get there gloriously; so that when the turn of Fortune's wheel enabled him to seek again these wonderful friends in the aristocratic sphere to which he belonged, he could come among them untarnished, the conquering prince. But that miserable guinea! He racked his brains. There was his gold watch and chain, a symbol, to his young mind, of high estate. When he had bought it there crossed his mind the silly thought of its signification of the infinite leagues that lay between him and Billy Goodge. He could pawn it for ten pounds—it would be like pawning his heart's blood—but where? Not in Morebury, even supposing there was a pawnbroker's in the place. He had many friends in his profession, scattered up and down the land. But he had created round himself the atmosphere of the young magnifico. It was he who had lent, others who had borrowed. Rothschild or Rockefeller inviting any of them to lend him money would have produced less jaw-dropping amazement. Even if he sent his pride flying and appealed to the most friendly and generous, he shrank from the sacrifice he would call upon the poor devil to make. There was only his beautiful and symbolic watch and chain. The nearest great town where he could be sure of finding a pawnbroker was distant an hour's train journey.

So on the day before that for which, in spite of hospitable protestations on the part of Colonel and Miss Winwood, he had fixed his departure, he set forth on the plea of private business, and returned with a heavier pocket and a heavier heart. He had been so proud, poor boy, of the gold insignia across his stomach. He had had a habit of fingering it lovingly. Now it was gone. He felt naked—in a curious way dishonoured. There only remained his cornelian talisman. He got back in time for tea and kept his jacket closely buttoned. But in the evening he had perforce to appear stark and ungirt—in those days Fashion had not yet decreed, as it does now, the absence of watchchain on evening dress—and Paul shambled into the drawing-room like a guest without a wedding garment. There were still a few people staying in the house—the shooting party proper, and Lady Chudley, had long since gone—but enough remained to be a social microcosm for Paul. Every eye was upon him. In spite of himself, his accusing hand went fingering the inanity of his waistcoat front. He also fingered, with a horrible fascination, the dirty piece of card that took the place of his watch in his pocket.

One must be twenty to realize the tragedy of it. Dans un grenier qu'on est bien a vingt ans! To be twenty, in a garret, with the freedom and the joy of it! Yes; the dear poet was right. In those "brave days" the poignancy of life comes not in the garret, but in the palace.

To-morrow, with his jacket buttoned, he could make his exit from Drane's Court in the desired splendour—scattering largesse to menials and showing to hosts the reflected glow of the golden prospects before him; but for this evening the glory had departed. Besides, it was his last evening there, and London's welcome tomorrow would be none too exuberant.

The little party was breaking up, the ladies retiring for the night, and the men about to

accompany Colonel Winwood to the library for a final drink and cigarette. Paul shook hands with Miss Winwood.

"Good night—and good-bye," she said, "if you take the early train. But must you really go to-morrow?"

"I must," said Paul.

"I hope we'll very soon be seeing you again. Give me your address." She moved to a bridge table and caught up the marking block, which she brought to him. "Now I've forgotten the pencil."

"I've got one," said Paul, and impulsively thrusting his fingers into his waistcoat pocket, flicked them out with the pencil. But he also flicked out the mean-looking card of which he had been hatefully conscious all the evening. The Imp of Mischance arranged that as Miss Winwood stood close by his side, it should fall, unperceived by him, on the folds of her grey velvet train. He wrote the Bloomsbury address and handed her the leaf torn from the pad. She folded it up, moved away, turning back to smile. As she turned she happened to look downward; then she stooped and picked the card from her dress. A conjecture of horror smote Paul. He made a step forward and stretched out his hand; but not before she had instinctively glanced first at the writing and then at his barren waistcoat. She repressed a slight gasp, regarding him with steady, searching eyes.

His dark face flushed crimson as he took the accursed thing, desiring no greater boon from Heaven than instant death. He felt sick with humiliation. The brightly lit room grew black. It was in a stupor of despair that he heard her say, "Wait a bit here, till I've got rid of these people."

He stumbled away and stood on the bearskin rug before the fireplace, while she joined the lingering group by the door. The two or three minutes were an eternity of agony to Paul. He had lost his great game.

Miss Winwood shut the door and came swiftly to him and laid her hand on his arm. Paul hung his head and looked into the fire. "My poor boy!" she said very tenderly. "What are you going to do with yourself?"

If it had not been for the diabolical irony of the mishap he would have answered with his gay flourish. But now he could not so answer. Boyish, hateful tears stood in his eyes and, in spite of anguished effort of will, threatened to fall. He continued to look into the fire, so that she should not see them. "I shall go on as I always have done," he said as stoutly as he could.

"Your prospects are not very bright, I fear."

"I shall keep my head above water," said Paul. "Oh, please don't!" he cried, shivering. "You have been so good to me. I can't bear you to have seen that thing. I can't stand it."

"My dear boy," she said, coming a little nearer, "I don't think the worse of you for that. On the contrary, I admire your pluck and your brave attitude towards life. Indeed I do. I respect you for it. Do you remember the old Italian story of Ser Federigo and his falcon? How he hid his poverty like a knightly gentleman? You see what I mean, don't you? You mustn't be angry with me!"

Her words were Gilead balm of instantaneous healing.

"Angry?"

His voice quavered. In a revulsion of emotion he turned blindly, seized her hand and kissed it. It was all he could do.

"If I have found it out—not just now," she quickly interjected, seeing him wince, "but long ago—it was not your fault. You've made a gallant gentleman's show to the end—until I come, in a perfectly brutal way, and try to upset it. Tell me—I'm old enough to be your mother, and you must know by this time that I'm your friend—have you any resources at all—beyond—?" She made ever so slight a motion of her hand toward the hidden pawn ticket.

"No," said Paul, with his sure tact and swiftly working imagination. "I had just come to an end of them. It's a silly story of losses and what-not—I needn't bother you with it. I thought I would walk to London, with the traditional half-crown in my pocket"—he flashed a wistful smile—"and seek my fortune. But I fell ill at your gates."

"And now that you're restored to health, you propose in the same debonair fashion to—well—to resume the search?"

"Of course," said Paul, all the fighting and aristocratic instincts returning. "Why not?"

There were no tears in his eyes now, and they looked with luminous fearlessness at Miss Winwood. He drew a chair to the edge of the bearskin. "Won't you sit down, Miss Winwood?"

She accepted the seat. He sat down too. Before replying she played with her fan rather roughly—more or less as a man might have played with it. "What do you think of doing?"

"Journalism," said Paul. He had indeed thought of it.

"Have you any opening?"

"None," he laughed. "But that's the oyster I'm going to open."

Miss Winwood took a cigarette from a silver box near by. Paul sprang to light it. She inhaled in silence half a dozen puffs. "I'm going to ask you an outrageous question," she said, at last. "In the first place, I'm a severely business woman, and in the next I've got an uncle and a brother with cross-examining instincts, and, though I loathe them—the instincts, I mean—I can't get away from them. We're down on the bedrock of things, you and I. Will you tell me, straight, why you went away to-day to—to"—she hesitated—"to pawn your watch and chain, instead of waiting till you got to London?"

Paul threw out his arms in a wide gesture. "Why—your servants—"

She cast the just lighted cigarette into the fire, rose and clapped her hands on his shoulders, her face aflame. "Forgive me—I knew it—there are doubting Thomases everywhere—and I'm a woman who deals with facts, so that I can use them to the confusion of enemies. Now I have them. Ser Federigo's watch and chain. Nicht wahr?"

Remember, you who judge this sensible woman of forty-three, that she had fallen in love with Paul in the most unreprehensible way in the world; and if a woman of that age cannot fall in love with a boy sweetly motherwise, what is the good of her? She longed to prove that her polyhedral crystal of a paragon radiated pure light from every one of his innumerable facets. It was a matter of intense joy to turn him round and find each facet pure. There was also much pity in her heart, such as a woman might feel for a wounded bird which she had picked up and nursed in her bosom and healed. Ursula was loath to let her bird fly forth into the bleak winter.

"My brother and I have been talking about you—he is your friend, too," she said, resuming her seat. "How would it suit you to stay with us altogether?"

Paul started bolt upright in his chair. "What do you mean?" he asked breathlessly, for the heavens had opened with dazzling unexpectedness.

"In some such position as confidential secretary—at a decent salary, of course. We've not been able to find a suitable man since Mr. Kinghorne left us in the spring. He got into Parliament, you know, for Reddington at the by-election—and we've been muddling along with honorary secretaries and typists. I shouldn't suggest it to you," she went on, so as to give him time to think, for he sat staring at her, openmouthed, bewildered, his breath coming quickly—"I shouldn't suggest it to you if there were no chances for you in it. You would be in the thick of public affairs, and an ambitious man might find a path in them that would lead him anywhere. I've had the idea in my head," she smiled, "for-some time. But I've only spoken to my brother about it this afternoon—he has been so busy, you see—and I intended to have another talk with him, so as to crystallize things—duties, money, and so forth—before making you any proposal. I was going to write to you with everything cut and dried. But"—she hesitated delicately—"I'm glad I didn't. It's so much more simple and friendly to talk. Now, what do you say?"

Paul rose and gripped his hands together and looked again into the fire. "What can I say? I could only go on my knees to you—and that—"

"That would be beautifully romantic and entirely absurd," she laughed. "Anyhow, it's settled. Tomorrow we can discuss details." She rose and put out her hand. "Good night, Paul."

He bowed low. "My dearest lady," said he in a low voice, and went and held the door open for her to pass out.

Then he flung up his arms wildly and laughed aloud and strode about the room in exultation. All he had hoped for and worked for was an exit of fantastic and barren glory. After which, the Deluge—anything. He had never dreamed of this sudden blaze of Fortune. Now, indeed, did the Great Things to which he was born lie to his hand. Queerly but surely Destiny was guiding him upward. In every way Chance had worked for him. His poverty had been a cloak of honour; the thrice-blessed pawn ticket a patent of nobility. His kingdom lay before him, its purple mountains looming through the mists of dawn. And he would enter into it as the Awakener of England. He stood thrilled. The ambition was no longer the wild dream of yesterday. From the heart of the great affairs in which he would have his being he could pluck his awakening instrument. The world seemed suddenly to become real. And in the midst of it was this wonderful, beautiful, dearest lady with her keen insight, her delicate sympathy, her warm humanity. With some extravagance he consecrated himself to her service.

After a while he sat down soberly and took from his pocket the cornelian heart which his first goddess had given him twelve years ago. What had become of her? He did not even know her name. But what happiness, he thought, to meet her in the plenitude of his greatness and show her the heart, and say, "I owe it all to you!" To her alone of mortals would he reveal himself.

And then he thought of Barney Bill, who had helped him on his way; of Rowlatt, good fellow, who was dead; and of Jane, whom he had lost. He wished he could write to Jane and tell her the

wonderful news. She would understand.... Well, well! It was time for bed. He rose and switched off the lights and went to his room. But as he walked through the great, noiseless house, he felt, in spite of Fortune's bounty, a loneliness of soul; also irritation at having lost Jane. What a letter he could have written to her! He could not say the things with which his heart was bursting to anyone on earth but Jane. Why had he lost Jane? The prospective Awakener of England wanted Jane.

CHAPTER XI

ONE morning Paul, with a clump of papers in his hand, entered his pleasant private room at Drane's Court, stepped briskly to the long Cromwellian table placed in the window bay, and sat down to his correspondence.

It was gusty outside, as could be perceived by the shower of yellow beech leaves that slanted across the view; but indoors a great fire flaming up the chimney, a Turkey carpet fading into beauty, rich eighteenth century mezzotints on the walls, reposeful leather-covered chairs and a comfortable bookcase gave an atmosphere of warmth and coziness. Paul lit a cigarette and attacked a pile of unopened letters. At last he came to an envelope, thick and faintly scented, bearing a crown on the flap. He opened it and read:

> DEAR MR. SAVELLI:
>
> Will you dine on Saturday and help me entertain an eminent Egyptologist? I know nothing of Egypt save Shepheard's Hotel, and that I'm afraid wouldn't interest him. Do come to my rescue. Yours, SOPHIE ZOBRASKA.

Paul leaned back in his chair, twiddling the letter between his fingers, and looked smilingly out on the grey autumn rack of clouds. There was a pleasant and flattering intimacy in the invitation: pleasant because it came from a pretty woman; flattering because the woman was a princess, widow of a younger son of a Royal Balkan house. She lived at Chetwood Park, on the other side of Morebury, and was one of the great ones of those latitudes. A real princess.

Paul's glance, travelling back from the sky, fell upon the brass date indicator on the table. It marked the 2nd of October. On that day five years ago he had entered on his duties at Drane's Court. He laughed softly. Five years ago he was a homeless wanderer. Now princesses were begging him to rescue them from Egyptologists. With glorious sureness all his dreams were coming true.

Thus we see our Fortunate Youth at eight-and-twenty in the heyday of success. If he had strutted about under Jane's admiring eyes, like a peacock among daws, he now walked serene, a peacock among peacocks. He wore the raiment, frequented the clubs, ate the dinners of the undeservingly rich and the deservingly great. His charm and his self-confidence, which a genius of tact saved from self-assertion, carried him pleasantly through the social world; his sympathetic intelligence dealt largely and strongly with the public affairs under his control. He loved organizing, persuading, casting skilful nets. His appeal for subscriptions was irresistible. He had the magical gift of wringing a hundred pounds from a plutocrat with the air of conferring a graceful favour. In aid of the Mission to Convert the Jews he could have fleeced a synagogue. The societies and institutions in which the Colonel and Ursula Winwood were interested flourished amazingly beneath his touch. The Girls' Club in the Isle of Dogs, long since abandoned in despair by the young Guardsman, grew into a popular and sweetly mannered nunnery. The Central London Home for the Indigent Blind, which had been languishing for support, in spite of Miss Winwood's efforts, found itself now in a position to build a much-needed wing. There was also, most wonderful and, important thing of all, the Young England League, which was covering him with steadily increasing glory. Of this much hereafter. But it must be remembered. Ursula complained that he left her nothing to do save attend dreary committee meetings; and even for these Paul saved her all the trouble in hunting up information. She was a mere figurehead.

"Dearest lady," Paul would say, "if you send me about my business, you'll write me a character, won't you, saying that you're dismissing me for incorrigible efficiency?"

"You know perfectly well," she would sigh, "that I would be a lost, lone woman without you."

Whereat Paul would laugh his gay laugh. At this period of his life he had not a care in the world.

The game of politics also fascinated him. A year or so after he joined the Winwoods there was a General Election. The Liberals, desiring to drive the old Tory from his lair, sent down a strong

candidate to Morebury. There was a fierce battle, into which Paul threw himself, heart and soul. He discovered he could speak. When he first found himself holding a couple of hundred villagers in the grip of his impassioned utterance he felt that the awakening of England had begun. It was a delicious moment. As a canvasser he performed prodigies of cajolery. Extensive paper mills, a hotbed of raging Socialism, according to Colonel Winwood, defaced (in the Colonel's eyes) the outskirts of the little town.

"They're wrong 'uns to a man," said the Colonel, despondently.

Paul came back from among them with a notebook full of promises.

"How did you manage it?" asked the Colonel.

"I think I got on to the poetical side of politics," said Paul.

"What the deuce is that?"

Paul smiled. "An appeal to the imagination," said he.

When Colonel Winwood got in by an increased majority, in spite of the wave of Liberalism that spread over the land, he gave Paul a gold cigarette case; and thenceforward admitted him into his political confidence. So Paul became familiar with the Lobby of the House of Commons and with the subjects before the Committees on which Colonel Winwood sat, and with the delicate arts of wire-pulling and intrigue, which appeared to him a monstrously fine diversion. There was also the matter of Colonel Winwood's speeches, which the methodical warrior wrote out laboriously beforehand and learned by heart. They were sound, weighty pronouncements, to which the House listened with respect; but they lacked the flashes which lit enthusiasm. One day he threw the bundle of typescript across to Paul.

"See what you think of that."

Paul saw and made daring pencilled amendments, and took it to the Colonel.

"It's all very funny," said the latter, tugging his drooping moustache, "but I can't say things like that in the House."

"Why not?" asked Paul.

"If they heard me make an epigram, they would have a fit."

"Our side wouldn't. The Government might. The Government ought to have fits all the time until it expires in convulsions."

"But this is a mere dull agricultural question. The Board of Agriculture have brought it in, and it's such pernicious nonsense that I, as a county gentleman, have to speak against it."

"But couldn't you stick in my little joke about the pigs?" asked Paul pleadingly.

"What's that?" Colonel Winwood found the place in the script. "I say that the danger of swine fever arising from this clause in the Bill will affect every farmer in England."

"And I say," cried Paul eagerly, pointing to his note, "if this clause becomes law, swine fever will rage through the land like a demoniacal possession. The myriad pigs of Great Britain, possessed of the devils of Socialism, will be turned into Gadarene swine hurtling down to destruction. You can show how they hurtle, like this—" He flickered his hands. "Do try it."

"H'm!" said Colonel Winwood.

Sorely against his will, he tried it. To his astonishment it was a success. The House of Commons, like Mr. Peter Magnus's friend, is easily amused. The exaggeration gave a cannon-ball's weight to his sound argument. The Government dropped the clause—it was only a trivial part of a wide-reaching measure—the President of the Board of Agriculture saying gracefully that in the miracle he hoped to bring about he had unfortunately forgotten the effect it might have on the pigs. There was "renewed laughter," but Colonel Winwood remained the hero of the half-hour and received the ecstatic congratulations of unhumorous friends. He might have defeated the Government altogether. In the daily round of political life nothing is so remarkable as the lack of sense of proportion.

"It was the Gadarene swine that did it," they said.

"And that," said Colonel Winwood honestly, "was my young devil of a secretary."

Thenceforward the young wit and the fresh fancy of Paul played like a fountain over Colonel Winwood's speeches.

"Look here, young man," said he one day, "I don't like it. Sometimes I take your confounded suggestions, because they happen to fit in; but I'm actually getting the reputation of a light political comedian, and it won't do."

Whereupon Paul, with his swift intuition, saw that in the case of a proud, earnest gentleman like Colonel Winwood the tempting emendations of typescript would not do. In what Miss Winwood called his subtle Italian way, he induced his patron to discuss the speeches before the process of composition. These discussions, involving the swift rapier play of intelligences, Colonel Winwood enjoyed. They stimulated him magically. He sat down and wrote his speeches, delightfully unconscious of what in them was Paul and what was himself; and when he delivered them he was proud of the impression he had made upon the House.

And so, as the years passed, Paul gained influence not only in the little circle of Drane's Court and Portland Place, but also in the outer world. He was a young man of some note. His name appeared occasionally in the newspapers, both in connection with the Winwood charities and with the political machine of the Unionist party. He was welcomed at London dinner tables and in country houses. He was a young man who would go far. For the rest, he had learned to ride and shoot, and not to make mistakes about the genealogical relationships of important families. He had travelled about Europe, sometimes with the Winwoods, sometimes by himself. He was a young man of cultivation and accomplishment.

On this fifth anniversary he sat gazing unseeingly at the autumn rack, the Princess's letter in his hand, and letting his thoughts wander down the years. He marvelled how valiantly the stars in their courses had fought for him. Even against recognition his life was charmed. Once, indeed, he met at the house in Portland Place a painter to whom he had posed. The painter looked at him keenly.

"Surely we have met before?"

"We have," said Paul with daring frankness. "I remember it gratefully. But if you would forget it I should be still more grateful."

The painter shook hands with him and smiled. "You may be sure I haven't the least idea what you're talking about."

As for Theatreland, the lower walks in the profession to which Paul had belonged do not cross the paths of high political society. It lay behind him far and forgotten. His position was secure. Here and there an anxious mother may have been worried as to his precise antecedents; but Paul was too astute to give mothers over-much cause for anxiety. He lived under the fascination of the Great Game. When he came into his kingdom he could choose; not before. His destiny was drawing him nearer and nearer to it, he thought, with slow and irresistible force. In a few years there would be Parliament, office, power, the awaking from stupor of an England hypnotized by malign influences. He saw himself at the table in the now familiar House of green benches, thundering out an Empire's salvation. If he thought more of the awakener than the awakening, it was because he was the same little Paul Kegworthy to whom the cornelian heart had brought the Vision Splendid in the scullery of the Bludston slum. The cornelian heart still lay in his waistcoat pocket at the end of his watch chain. He also held a real princess's letter in his hand.

A tap at the door aroused him from his day-dream.

There entered a self-effacing young woman with pencil and notebook. "Are you ready for me, sir?"

"Not quite. Sit down for a minute, Miss Smithers. Or, come up to the table if you don't mind, and help me open these envelopes."

Paul, you see, was a great man, who commanded the services of a shorthand typist.

To the mass of correspondence then opened and read he added that which he had brought in from Colonel and Miss Winwood. From this he sorted the few letters which it would be necessary to answer in his own handwriting, and laid them aside; then taking the great bulk, he planted himself on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire, and, cigarette in mouth, dictated to the self-effacing young woman. She took down his words with anxious humility, for she looked upon him as a god sphered on Olympian heights—and what socially insecure young woman of lower-middle-class England could do otherwise in the presence of a torturingly beautiful youth, immaculately raimented, who commanded in the great house with a smile more royal and debonair than that of the master thereof, Member of Parliament though he was, and Justice of the Peace and Lord of the Manor? And Paul, fresh from his retrospect, looked at the girl's thin shoulders and sharp, intent profile, and wondered a little, somewhat ironically. He knew that she regarded him as a kind of god, for reasons of caste. Yet she was the daughter of a Morebury piano tuner, of unblemished parentage for generations. She had never known hunger and cold and the real sting of poverty. Miss Winwood herself knew more of drunken squalor. He saw himself a ragged and unwashed urchin, his appalling breeches supported by one brace, addressing her in familiar terms; and he saw her transfigured air of lofty disgust; whereupon he laughed aloud in the middle of a most unhumorous sentence, much to Miss Smithers' astonishment.

When he had finished his dictation he dismissed her and sat down to his writing. After a while Miss Winwood came in. The five years had treated her lightly. A whitening of the hair about her brows, which really enhanced the comeliness of her florid complexion, a few more lines at corners of eyes and lips, were the only evidences of the touch of Time's fingers. As she entered

Paul swung round from his writing chair and started to his feet. "Oh, Paul, I said the 20th for the Disabled Soldiers and Sailors, didn't I? I made a mistake. I'm engaged that afternoon."

"I don't think so, dearest lady," said Paul.

"I am."

"Then you've told me nothing about it," said Paul the infallible.

"I know," she said meekly. "It's all my fault. I never told you. I've asked the Bishop of Frome to lunch, and I can't turn him out at a quarter-past two, can I? What date is there free?"

Together they bent over the engagement book, and after a little discussion the new date was fixed.

"I'm rather keen on dates to-day," said Paul, pointing to the brass calendar.

"Why?"

"It's exactly five years since I entered your dear service," said Paul.

"We've worked you like a galley slave, and so I love your saying 'dear service,'" she replied gently.

Paul, half sitting on the edge of the Cromwellian table in the bay of the window, laughed. "I could say infinitely more, dearest lady, if I were to let myself go."

She sat on the arm of a great leathern chair. Their respective attitudes signified a happy intimacy. "So long as you're contented, my dear boy—-" she said.

"Contented? Good heavens!" He waved a protesting hand.

"You're ambitious."

"Of course," said he. "What would be the good of me if I wasn't?"

"One of these days you'll be wanting to leave the nest and—what shall we say?—soar upwards."

Paul, too acute to deny the truth of this prophecy said: "I probably shall. But I'll be the rarissima avis, to whom the abandoned nest will always be the prime object of his life's consideration."

"Pretty,"' said Miss Winwood.

"It's true."

"I'm sure of it," she said pleasantly. "Besides, if you didn't leave the nest and make a name for yourself, you wouldn't be able to carry on our work. My brother and I, you see, are of the older generation—you of the younger."

"You're the youngest woman I know," Paul declared.

"I shan't be in a few years, and my brother is a good deal older than I."

"Well, I can't get into Parliament right away," said Paul. "For one thing, I couldn't afford it."

"We must find you a nice girl with plenty of money," she said, half in jest.

"Oh, please don't. I should detest the sight of her. By the way, shall you want me on Saturday evening?"

"No—unless it would be to take Miss Durning in to dinner."

Now Miss Durning being an elderly, ugly heiress, it pleased Miss Winwood to be quizzical. He looked at her in mock reproof. "Dearest lady that you are, I don't feel safe in your hands just now. I shall dine with the Princess on Saturday."

An enigmatic smile flitted across Ursula Winwood's clear eyes. "What does she want you for?"

"To entertain an Egyptologist," assured Paul. He waved his hand toward the letter on the table. "There it is in black and white."

"I suppose for the next few days you'll be cramming hard."

"It would be the polite thing to do, wouldn't it?" said Paul blandly.

Miss Winwood shook her head and went away, and Paul happily resumed his work. In very truth she was to him the dearest of ladies.

The Princess Zobraska was standing alone by the fireplace at the end of the long drawing-room when Paul was announced on Saturday evening. She was a distinguished-looking woman in the late twenties brown-haired, fresh-complexioned, strongly and at the same time delicately featured. Her dark blue eyes, veiled by lashes, smiled on him lazily as he approached; and lazily, too, her left arm stretched out, the palm of the hand downward, and she did not move. He kissed her knuckles, in orthodox fashion.

"It is very good of you to come, Mr. Savelli," she said in a sweetly foreign accent, "and leave your interesting company at Drane's Court."

"Any company without you, Princess, is chaos," said Paul.

"Grand flatteur, va,—' said she.

"C'est que vous etes irresistible, Princesse, surlout dans ce costume-la."

She touched his arm with an ostrich feather fan. "When it comes to massacring languages, Mr. Savelli, let me be the assassin."

"I laid the tribute of my heart at your feet in the most irreproachable grammar," said Paul.

"But with the accent of John Bull. That's the only thing of John Bull you have about you. For the sake of my ears I must give you some lessons."

"You'll find me such a pupil as never teacher had in the world before. When shall we begin?"

"Aux Kalendes Grecques."

"Ah que vous etes femme!"

She put her hands to her ears. "Listen. Que-vous-etes-femme" she said.

"Que-vous-etes-femme," Paul repeated parrotwise. "Is that better?"

"A little."

"I see the Greek Kalends have begun," said he.

"Mechant, you have caught me in a trap," said she.

And they both laughed.

From which entirely foolish conversation it may be gathered that between our Fortunate Youth and the Princess some genial sun had melted the icy barriers of formality. He had known her for eighteen months, ever since she had bought Chetwood Park and settled down as the great personage of the countryside. He had met her many times, both in London and in Morebury; he had dined in state at her house; he had shot her partridges; he had danced with her; he had sat out dances with her, notably on one recent June night, in a London garden, where they lost themselves for an hour in the discussion of the relative parts that love played in a woman's life and in a man's. The Princess was French, ancien regime, of the blood of the Coligny, and she had married, in the French practical way, the Prince Zobraska, in whose career the only satisfactory incident history has to relate is the mere fact of his early demise. The details are less exhilarating. The poor little Princess, happily widowed at one-and-twenty, had shivered the idea of love out of her system for some years. Then, as is the way of woman, she regained her curiosities. Great lady, of enormous fortune, she could have satisfied them, had she so chosen, with the large cynicism of a Catherine of Russia. She could also, had she so chosen, have married one of a hundred sighing and decorous gentlemen; but with none of them had she fallen ever so little in love, and without love she determined to try no more experiments; her determination, however, did not involve surrender of interest in the subject. Hence the notable discussion on the June night. Hence, perhaps, after a few other meetings of a formal character, the prettily intimate invitation she had sent to Paul.

They were still laughing at the turn of the foolish conversation when the other guests began to enter the drawing-room. First came Edward Doon, the Egyptologist, a good-looking man of forty, having the air of a spruce don, with a pretty young wife, Lady Angela Doon; then Count Lavretsky, of the Russian Embassy, and Countess Lavretsky; Lord Bantry, a young Irish peer with literary ambitions; and a Mademoiselle de Cressy, a convent intimate of the Princess and her paid companion, completed the small party.

Dinner was served at a round table, and Paul found himself between Lady Angela Doon, whom he took in, and the Countess Lavretsky. Talk was general and amusing. As Doon did not make, and apparently did not expect anyone to make any reference to King Qa or Amenhotep or Rameses—names vaguely floating in Paul's brain—but talked in a sprightly way about the French stage and the beauty of Norwegian fiords, Paul perceived that the Princess's alleged reason for her invitation was but a shallow pretext. Doon did not need any entertainment at all. Lady Angela, however, spoke of her dismay at the prospect of another winter in the desert; and drew a graphic little sketch of the personal discomforts to which Egyptologists were subjected.

"I always thought Egyptologists and suchlike learned folk were stuffy and snuffy with goggles and ragged old beards," laughed Paul. "Your husband is a revelation."

"Yes, he's quite human, isn't he?" she said with an affectionate glance across the table. "He's dead keen on his work, but he realizes—as many of his stuffy and snuffy confreres don't—that there's a jolly, vibrating, fascinating, modern world in which one lives."

"I'm glad to hear you say that about the modern world," said Paul.

"What is Lady Angela saying about the modern world?" asked the Princess, separated from Paul's partner only by Count Lavretsky.

"Singing paeans in praise of it," said Paul.

"What is there in it so much to rejoice at?" asked the diplomatist, in a harsh voice. He was a man prematurely old, and looked at the world from beneath heavy, lizard-like eyelids.

"Not only is it the best world we've got, but it's the best world we've ever had," cried Paul. "I don't know any historical world which would equal the modern, and as for the prehistoric—well, Professor Doon can tell us—"

"As a sphere of amenable existence," said Doon with a smile, "give me Chetwood Park and Piccadilly."

"That is mere hedonism," said Count Lavretsky. "You happen, like us all here, to command the creature comforts of modern wealthy conditions, which I grant are exceedingly superior to those commanded by the great Emperors of ancient times. But we are in a small minority. And even if we were not—is that all?"

"We have a finer appreciation of our individualities," said the Princess. "We lead a wider intellectual life. We are in instant touch, practically, with the thought of the habitable globe."

"And with the emotive force of mankind," said Paul.

"What is that?" asked Lady Angela.

Why Paul, after the first glance of courtesy at the speaker, should exchange a quick glance with the Princess would be difficult to say. It was instinctive; as instinctive as the reciprocal flash of mutual understanding.

"I think I know, but tell us," she said.

Paul, challenged, defined it as the swift wave of sympathy that surged over the earth. A famine in India, a devastating earthquake in Mexico, a bid for freedom on the part of an oppressed population, a deed of heroism at sea—each was felt within practically a few moments, emotionally, in an English, French or German village. Our hearts were throbbing continuously at the end of telegraph wires.

"And you call that pleasure?" asked Count Lavretsky.

"It isn't hedonism, at any rate," said Paul.

"I call it life," said the Princess. "Don't you?"—she turned to Doon.

"I think what Mr. Savelli calls the emotive force of mankind helps to balance our own personal emotions," said he.

"Or isn't it rather a wear and tear on the nervous system?" laughed his wife.

"It seems so to me," said Count Lavretsky. "Perhaps, being a Russian, I am more primitive and envy a nobleman of the time of Pharaoh who never heard of devastations in Mexico, did not feel his heart called upon to pulsate at anything beyond his own concerns. But he in his wisdom at his little world was vanity and was depressed. We moderns, with our infinitely bigger world and our infinitely greater knowledge, have no more wisdom than the Egyptian, and we see that the world is all the more vanity and are all the more overwhelmed with despair."

"But—" said Paul.

"But—" cried the Princess.

Both laughed, and paused. Paul bowed with a slight gesture.

"I am not overwhelmed with despair," the Princess continued.

"Neither am I," said Paul.

"I am keeping my end up wonderfully," said Lady Angela.

"I am in a nest of optimists," Count Lavretsky groaned. "But was it not you, Lady Angela, who

talked of wear and tear.

"That was only to contradict my husband."

"What is all this about?" asked the Countess Lavretsky, who had been discussing opera with Lord Bantry and Mademoiselle de Cressy.

Doon scientifically crystallized the argument. It held the octette, while men-servants in powder and gold-laced livery offered poires Zobraska, a subtle creation of the chef. Lord Bantry envied the contemplative calm which unexciting circumstances allowed the literary ancient. Mademoiselle de Cressy advanced the feminist view in favour of the modern world. The talk became the light and dancing interplay of opinion and paradox common to thousands of twentieth-century dinner-tables.

"All the same," said Count Lavretsky, "they wear you out, these emotive forces. Nobody is young nowadays. Youth is a lost art."

"On the contrary," cried Mademoiselle de Cressy in French. "Everybody is young to-day. This pulsation of the heart keeps you young. It is the day of the young woman of forty-five."

Count Lavretsky, who was fifty-nine, twirled a grey moustache. "I am one of the few people in the world who do not regret their youth. I do not regret mine, with its immaturity, its follies and subsequent headaches. I would sooner be the scornful philosopher of sixty than the credulous lover of twenty."

"He always talks like that," said the Countess to Paul; "but when he met me first he was thirty-five—and"—she laughed—"and now voila—for him there is no difference between twenty and sixty. Expliquez-moi ca."

"It's very simple," declared Paul. "In this century the thirties, forties, and fifties don't exist. You're either twenty or sixty."

"I hope I shall always be twenty," said the Princess lightly.

"Do you find your youth so precious, then?" asked Count Lavretsky.

"More than I ever did!" She laughed and again met Paul's eyes.

This time she flushed faintly as she held them for a fraction of a second. He had time to catch a veiled soft gleam intimate and disquieting. For some time he did not look again in her direction; when he did, he met in her eyes only the lazy smile with which she regarded all and sundry.

Later in the evening she said to him: "I'm glad you opposed Lavretsky. He makes me shiver. He was born old and wrinkled. He has never had a thrill in his life."

"And if you don't have thrills when you're young, you can't expect to have them when you're old," said Paul.

"He would ask what was the good of thrills."

"You don't expect me to answer, Princess."

"We know because we're young."

They stood laughing in the joy of their full youth, a splendid couple, some distance away from the others, ostensibly inspecting a luminous little Cima on the wall. The Princess loved it as the bright jewel of her collection, and Paul, with his sense of beauty and knowledge of art, loved it too. Yet, instead of talking of the picture, they talked of Lavretsky, who was looking at them sardonically from beneath his heavy eyelids.

CHAPTER XII

A FEW days afterwards you might have seen Paul dashing through the quiet main street of Morebury in a high dog-cart, on his way to call on the Princess. A less Fortunate Youth might have had to walk, risking boots impolitely muddy, or to hire a funereal cab from the local job-master; but Paul had only to give an order, and the cart and showy chestnut were brought round to the front door of Drane's Court. He loved to drive the showy chestnut, whose manifold depravities were the terror of Miss Winwood's life. Why didn't he take the cob? It was so much safer. Whereupon he would reply gaily that in the first place he found no amusement in driving woolly lambs, and in the second that if he did not take some of the devil out of the chestnut it would become the flaming terror of the countryside. So Paul, spruce in hard felt hat and box-cloth overcoat, clattered joyously through the Morebury streets, returning the salutations of the

little notabilities of the town with the air of the owner not only of horse and cart, but of half the hearts in the place. He was proud of his popularity, and it scarcely entered his head that he was not the proprietor of his equipage. Besides, he was going to call on the Princess. He hoped that she would be alone: not that he had anything particular to say to her, or had any defined idea of love-making; but he was eight-and-twenty, an age at which desire has not yet failed and there is not the sign of a burdensome grasshopper anywhere about.

But the Princess was not alone. He found Mademoiselle de Cressy in charge of the tea-table and the conversation. Like many Frenchwomen, she had a high-pitched voice; she also had definite opinions on matter-of-fact subjects. Now when you have come to talk gossamer with an attractive and sympathetic woman, it is irritating to have to discuss Tariff Reform and the position of the working classes in Germany with somebody else, especially when the attractive and pretty woman does not give you in any way to understand that she would prefer gossamer to such arid topics. The Princess was as gracious as you please. She made him feel that he was welcome in her cosy boudoir; but there was no further exchange of mutually understanding glances. If a great lady entertaining a penniless young man can be demure, then demure was the Princess Sophie Zobraska. Paul, who prided himself on his knowledge of feminine subtlety, was at fault; but who was he to appreciate the repressive influence of a practical-minded convent friend, quickly formative and loudly assertive of opinions, on an impressionable lady awakening to curiosities? He was just a dunderhead, like any one of us—just as much as the most eminent feminine psychologist alive—which is saying a good deal. So he drove away disappointed, the sobriety of the chestnut's return trot through Morebury contrasting oddly with the dashing clatter of the former journey.

It was some time before he met the Princess again, for an autumn session of Parliament required migration to Portland Place. The Princess, indeed, came to London, shortly afterwards, to her great house in Berkeley Square; but it was not till late November that he was fortunate enough to see her. Then it was only a kiss of the hand and a hurried remark or two, at a large dinner-party at the Winwoods'. You see, there are such forces as rank and precedence at London dinner-parties, to which even princesses and fortunate youths have to yield.

On this occasion, as he bent over her hand, he murmured: "May I say how beautiful you are to-night, Princess?"

She wore a costume of silver and deep blue, and the blue intensified the blue depths of her eyes. "I am delighted to please monsieur," she said in French.

And that was their meeting. On parting she said again in French: "When are you coming to see me, fickle one?"

"Whenever you ask me. I have called in vain."

"You have a card for my reception next Tuesday?"

"I have replied that I do myself the honour of accepting the Princess's gracious invitation."

"I don't like London, do you?" she asked, allowing a touch of wistfulness to inflect her voice.

"It has its charms. A row on the Serpentine, for instance, or a bicycle ride in Battersea Park."

"How lovely it would be," she said, between laugh and sigh, "if only it could be kept out of the newspapers! I see it from here under the Fashionable Intelligence. 'The beautiful Princess Zobraska was observed in a boat on the ornamental water in Regent's Park with the well-known—tiens—what are you?—politician, say—with the well-known young politician, Mr. Paul Savelli.' Quel scandale, hein?"

"I must content myself with kissing your finger tips at your reception," said Paul.

She smiled. "We will find a means," she said.

At her reception, an assemblage glittering with the diamonds and orders of the great ones of the earth, she found only time to say: "Come to-morrow at five. I shall be alone."

Darkness descended on Paul as he replied: "Impossible, Princess. Colonel Winwood wants me at the House."

The next morning, greatly daring, he rang her up; for a telephone stood on the Fortunate Youth's table in his private sitting-room in Portland Place.

"It is I, Princess, Paul Savelli."

"What have you to say for yourself, Paul Savelli?"

"I am at your feet."

"Why can't you come to-day?"

He explained.

"But tell Colonel Winwood that I want you"—the voice was imperious.

"Would that be wise, Princess?"

"Wise?"

"Yes. Don't you see?"

He waited for an answer. There was blank electric current whirring faintly on his ear. He thought she had rung off—rung off not only this conversation, but all converse in the future. At last, after the waiting of despair, came the voice, curiously meek. "Can you come Friday?"

"With joy and delight." The words gushed out tempestuously.

"Good. At five o'clock. And leave your John Bull wisdom on the doorstep."

She rang off abruptly, and Paul stood ruminating puzzlewise on the audacious behest.

On Friday he presented himself at her house in Berkeley Square. He found her gracious, but ironical in attitude, very much on the defensive. She received him in the Empire drawing room—very stiff and stately in its appointments. It had the charm (and the intrinsic value) of a museum; it was as cosy as a room (under present arrangements) at Versailles. The great wood fire alone redeemed it from artistic bleakness. Tea was brought in by portentous, powdered footmen in scarlet and gold. She was very much the princess; the princess in her state apartments, a different personage from the pretty woman in a boudoir. Paul, sensitive as far as it is given man to be, saw that if he had obeyed her and left his John Bull wisdom on the doorstep, he would have regretted it. Obviously she was punishing him; perhaps herself; perhaps both of them. She kept a wary, appraising eye on him, as they talked their commonplaces. Paul's attitude had the correctness of a young diplomatist paying a first formal call. It was only when he rose to go that her glance softened. She laughed a queer little laugh.

"I hear that you are going to address a meeting in the North of London next week."

"That is so," said Paul; "but how can my unimportant engagements have come to the ears of Your Highness?"

"I read my newspapers like everybody else. Did you not know that there were announcements?"

Paul laughed. "I put them in myself. You see," he explained, "we want our Young England League to be as widely known as possible. The more lambs we can get into the fold, the better."

"Perhaps if you asked me very prettily," she said, "I might come and hear you speak."

"Princess!" His olive cheek flushed with pleasure and his eyes sparkled. "It would be an undreamed-of honour. It is such things that angels do."

"Eh bien, je viendrai. You ought to speak well. Couldn't you persuade them to give the place a better name? Hickney Heath! It hurts the roof of one's mouth. Tiens—would it help the Young England League if you announced my name in the newspapers?"

"Dear Princess, you overwhelm me. But—"

"Now, don't ask me if it is wise." She smiled in mockery. "You print the names of other people who are supporting you. Mr. John Felton, M.P., who will take the chair, Colonel Winwood, M.P., and Miss Winwood, the Dean of Halifax and Lady Harbury, et cetera, et cetera. Why not poor Princess Sophie Zobraska?"

"You have a good memory, Princess."

She regarded him lazily. "Sometimes. When does the meeting begin?"

"At eight. Oh, I forget." His face fell. "How can you manage it? You'll have to dine at an unearthly hour."

"What does it matter even if one doesn't dine—in a good cause?"

"You are everything that is perfect," said Paul fervently.

She dismissed a blissful youth. The Princess Zobraska cared as much for the Young England League as for an Anti-Nose-Ring Society in Central Africa. Would it help the Young England League, indeed! He laughed aloud on the lamp-lit pavement of decorous Berkeley Square. For what other man in the world would she dine at six and spend the evening in a stuffy hall in North London? He felt fired to great achievement. He would make her proud of him, his Princess, his own beautiful, stately, royal Princess. The dream had come true. He loved a Princess; and she—? If she cared naught for him, why was she cheerfully contemplating a six-o'clock dinner? And why did she do a thousand other things which crowded on his memory? Was he loved? The thought thrilled him. Here was no beautiful seductress of suspect title such as he had heard of during his

sojourn in the Gotha Almanack world, but the lineal descendant of a princely house, the widow of a genuinely royal, though deboshed personage. Perhaps you may say that the hero of a fairy-tale never thinks of the mere rank of his beloved princess. If you do, you are committing all sorts of fallacies in your premises. For one thing, who said that Paul was a hero? For another, who said this was a fairy-tale? For yet another, I am not so sure that the swineherd is not impressed by the rank of his beloved. You must remember the insistent, lifelong dream of the ragged urchin. You must also reflect that the heart of any high-born youth in the land might well have been fluttered by signs of peculiar favour from Princess Sophie Zobraska. Why, then, should Paul be blamed for walking on air instead of greasy pavement on the way from Berkeley Square to Portland Place? Moreover, as sanity returned to him, his quick sense recognized in his Princess's offer to support him, a lovely indiscretion. Foreign ladies of high position must be chary of their public appearances. Between the row-boat on the Serpentine and the platform in the drill hall, Hickney Heath, the difference was but one of degree. And for him alone was this indiscretion about to be committed. His exultation was tempered by tender solicitude.

At dinner that evening—he was dining alone with the Winwoods—he said: "I've persuaded the Princess to come to our meeting on Friday. Isn't it good of her?"

"Very good," replied Colonel Winwood. "But what interest can she take in the lower walks of English politics?"

"It isn't English politics," said Paul. "It's world politics. The Princess is an aristocrat and is tremendously keen on the Conservative principle. She thinks our scheme for keeping the youth of the nation free from the taint of Socialism is magnificent."

"H'm!" said the Colonel.

"And I thought Miss Winwood would be pleased if I inveigled Her Highness on to the platform," said Paul.

"Why, of course it's a good thing," assented the Colonel. "But how the deuce did you get her?"

"Yes, how?" asked Miss Winwood, with a smile in her straight blue eyes.

"How does one get anything one wants in this world," said Paul, "except by going at it, hammer and tongs?"

A little later, when Paul opened the dining-room for her to pass out, she touched his shoulder affectionately and laughed. "Hammer and tongs to Sophie Zobraska! Oh, Paul, aren't you a bit of a humbug?"

Perhaps he was. But he was ingenuous in his desire to shield his Princess's action from vain conjecture. It were better that he should be supposed, in vulgar phrase, to have roped her in, as he had roped in a hundred other celebrities in his time. For there the matter ended. On the other hand, if he proclaimed the lady's spontaneous offer, it might be subjected to heaven knew how many interpretations. Paul owed much of his success in the world to such instinctive delicacies. He worked far into the night, composing his speech on England's greatness to the beautiful eyes of his French Princess.

The Young England League was his pet political interest. It had been inaugurated some years before he joined the Winwoods. Its objects were the training of the youth, the future electorate of England, in the doctrines of Imperialism, Constitutionalism and sound civicism, as understood by the intellectual Conservatives. Its mechanical aims were to establish lodges throughout the country. Every town and rural district should have its lodge, in connection wherewith should be not only addresses on political and social subjects, but also football and cricket clubs, entertainments for both sexes such as dances, whist-drives, excursions of archaeological and educational interest, and lantern (and, later, cinematographic) lectures on the wide aspects of Imperial Britain. Its appeal was to the young, the recruit in the battle of life, who in a year or two would qualify for a vote and, except for blind passion and prejudice, not know what the deuce to do with it. The octogenarian Earl of Watford was President; Colonel Winwood was one of a long list of Vice-Presidents; Miss Winwood was on the Council; a General Hankin, a fussy, incompetent person past his prime, was Honorary Secretary.

Paul worked with his employers for a year on the League thinking little of its effectiveness. One day, when they spoke despairingly of progress, he said, not in so many words, but in effect: "Don't you see what's wrong? This thing is run for young people, and you've got old fossils like Lord Watford and General Hankin running it. Let me be Assistant Secretary to Hankin' and I'll make things hum."

And thinking the words of the youth were wise, they used their influence with the Council, and Paul became Assistant Secretary, and after a year or two things began to hum so disconcertingly that General Hankin resigned in order to take the Presidency of the Wellingtonian Defence Association, and almost automatically Paul slipped into his place. With the instinct of the man of affairs he persuaded the Council to change his title. An Honorary Secretary is but a dilettante, an amateur carrying no weight, whereas an Organizing Secretary is a devil of a fellow professedly dynamic. So Paul became Organizing Secretary of the Young England League, and made things hum all the louder. He put fresh life into local Committees and local

Secretaries by a paternal interest in their doings, making them feel the pulsations of the throbbing heart of headquarters. If a local lodge was in need of speakers, he exercised his arts of persuasion and sent them down in trainloads. He visited personally as many lodges as his other work permitted. In fact, he was raising the League from a jejune experiment into a flourishing organization. To his secret delight, old Lord Watford resigned the chairmanship owing to the infirmities of old age, and Lord Harbury, a young and energetic peer whom Paul had recently driven into the ranks of the Vice-Presidents, was elected in his stead. Paul felt the future of the League was assured.

With a real Member of Parliament to preside, a real dean to propose the vote of thanks, another Member of Parliament and two ex-mayors of the borough to add silent dignity to the proceedings, well-known ladies, including, now, a real Princess to grace the assembly, this meeting of the Hickney Heath Lodge was the most important occasion on which Paul had appeared in public.

"I hope you won't be nervous," said Miss Winwood, on the morning of the meeting.

"I nervous?" He laughed. "What is there to be nervous about?"

"I've had over twenty years' experience of public speaking, and I'm always nervous when I get UP."

"It's only because you persistently refuse to realize what a wonderful woman you are," he said affectionately.

"And you," she teased, "are you always realizing what a wonderful man you are?"

He cried with his sunny boldness: "Why not? It's faith in oneself and one's destiny that gets things done."

The drill hall was full. Party feeling ran high in those days at Hickney Heath, for a Liberal had ousted a Unionist from a safe seat at the last General Election, and the stalwarts of the defeated party, thirsting for revenge, supported the new movement. If a child was not born a Conservative, he should be made one. That was the watchword of the League. They were also prepared to welcome the new star that had arisen to guide the younger generation out of the darkness. When, therefore, the Chairman, Mr. John Felton, M.P., who had held minor office in the last administration, had concluded his opening remarks, having sketched briefly the history of the League and introduced Mr. Paul Savelli, in the usual eulogistic terms, as their irresistible Organizing Secretary, and Paul in his radiant young manhood sprang up before them, the audience greeted him with enthusiastic applause. They had expected, as an audience does expect in an unknown speaker, any one of the usual types of ordinary looking politicians—perhaps bald, perhaps grey headed, perhaps pink and fat—it did not matter; but they did not expect the magnetic personality of this young man of astonishing beauty, with his perfect features, wavy black hair, athletic build and laughing eyes, who seemed the embodiment of youth and joy and purpose and victory.

Before he spoke a word, he knew that he had them under his control, and he felt the great thrill of it. Physically he had the consciousness of a blaze of light, of a bare barn of an ungalleried place, of thickly-set row upon row of faces, and a vast confused flutter of beating hands. The applause subsided. He turned with his "Mr. Chairman, Your Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen," to the circle behind him, caught Miss Winwood, his dearest lady's smile, caught and held for a hundredth part of a second the deep blue eyes of the Princess—she wore a great hat with a grey feather and a chinchilla coat thrown open, and looked the incarnation of all the beauty and all the desires of all his dreams—and with a flash of gladness faced the audience and plunged into his speech.

It began with a denunciation of the Little Englander. At that period one heard, perhaps, more of the Little Englander than one does nowadays—which to some people's way of thinking is a pity. The Little Englander (according to Paul) was a purblind creature, with political vision ice-bound by the economic condition of the labouring classes in Great Britain. The Little Englander had no sense of patriotism. The Little Englander had no sense of Empire. He had no sense of India, Australia, Canada. He had no sense of foreign nations' jealousy of England's secular supremacy. He had a distinct idea, however, of three nationalities; those of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The inhabitants of those three small nations took peculiar pains to hammer that idea into his head. But of England he had no conception save as a mere geographical expression, a little bit of red on a map of Europe, a vague place where certain sections of the population clamoured for-much pay and little work. His dream was a parochial Utopia where the Irish peasant, the Welsh farmer and the Scottish crofter should live in luxury, and when these were satisfied, the English operative should live in moderate comfort. The Little Englander, in his insensate altruism, dreamed of these three nations entirely independent of England, except in the trivial matter of financial support. He wanted Australia, Canada, South Africa, to sever their links from him and take up with America, Germany, Switzerland—anybody so long as they did not interfere with his gigantic scheme for providing tramps in Cromarty with motor cars and dissolute Welsh shepherds with champagne. As for India, why not give it up to a benign native government which would depend upon the notorious brotherly love between Hindoo and Mussulman? If Russia, foolish, unawakened Russia, took possession of it, what would it matter to the miner of Merthyr

Tydvil? As for England, provided such a country existed, she would be perfectly happy. The rich would provide for the poor—and what did anyone want further? Paul took up the Little Englander in his arms and tossed him in the air, threw him on the ground and jumped upon him. He cast his mutilated fragments with rare picturesqueness upon a Guy Fawkes bonfire. The audience applauded vociferously. He waited with a gay smile for silence, scanning them closely for the first time; and suddenly the smile faded from his face. In the very centre of the third row sat two people who did not applaud. They were Barney Bill and Jane.

He looked at them fascinated. There could be no mistake. Barney Bill's cropped, shoe-brush hair was white as the driven snow; but the wry, bright-eyed face was unchanged. And Jane, quietly and decently dressed, her calm eyes fixed on him, was—Jane. These two curiously detached themselves against the human background. It was only the sudden stillness of the exhausted applause that brought him to consciousness of his environment; that, and a heaven-sent fellow at the back of the audience who shouted: "Go on, sonny!"

Whereupon he plucked himself together with a swift toss of the head, and laughed his gay laugh. "Of course I'm going on, if you will let me. This is only the beginning of what I've got to tell you of the Englishman who fouls the nest of England—who fouls the nest of all that matters in the future history of mankind."

There was more applause. It was the orator's appeal to the mass. It set Paul back into the stream of his argument. He forgot Barney Bill and Jane, and went on with his speech, pointedly addressing the young, telling them what England was, what England is, what Englishmen, if they are true to England, shall be. It was for the young, those who came fresh to life with the glories of England fresh in their memories, from Crecy to the Armada, from the Armada to Waterloo, to keep the banner of England flying over their topmost roofs.

It was a fighting, enthusiastic, hyperbolic speech, glowing, as did the young face of the speaker, with the divine fire of youth. It ended triumphantly. He sat down to an ovation. Smiles and handshakes and words of praise surrounded him on the platform. Miss Winwood pressed his hand and said, "Well done." The Princess regarded him with flushed cheeks and starry eyes. It was only when silence fell on the opening words of the Dean of Halifax that he searched the rows in front for Barney Bill and Jane. They were still there. Impulsively he scribbled a few lines on a scrap of paper torn from his rough notes: "I must see you. Wait outside the side entrance for me after the meeting is over. Love to you both. Paul." A glance round showed him an attendant of the hall lurking at the back of the platform. He slipped quietly from his seat by the Chairman's side and gave the man the paper with directions as to its destination. Then he returned. Just before the Dean ended, he saw the note delivered. Jane read it, whispered its contents to Bill and seemed to nod acquiescence. It was fitting that these two dear ghosts of the past should appear for the first time in his hour of triumph. He longed to have speech with them, The Dean of Halifax was brief, the concluding ceremonies briefer. The audience gave Paul a parting cheer and dispersed, while Paul, the hero of the evening, received the congratulations of his friends.

"Those are things that needed saying, but we're too cautious to say them," remarked the Chairman.

"We've got to be," said Colonel Winwood.

"The glory of irresponsibility," smiled the Dean.

"You don't often get this kind of audience," Paul answered with a laugh. "A political infants' school. One has to treat things in broad splashes."

"You almost persuade me to be an Englishwoman," said the Princess.

Paul bowed. "But what more beautiful thing can there be than a Frenchwoman with England in her heart? Je ne demande pas mieux."

And the Princess did not put her hands to her ears.

The group passed slowly from the platform through a sort of committee room at the back, and reached the side entrance, Here they lingered, exchanging farewells. The light streamed dimly through the door on the strip of pavement between two hedges of spectators, and on the panelling and brass-work of an automobile by the curb. A chauffeur, with rug on arm, stepped forward and touched his cap, as the Princess appeared, and opened the door of the car. Paul, bare-headed, accompanied her across the pavement. Half way she stopped for a second to adjust a slipping fur. He aided her quickly and received a bright smile of thanks. She entered the car—held out her hand for, his kiss.

"Come and see me soon. I'll write or telephone."

The car rolled away. The Winwoods' carriage drove up.

It was a fighting, enthusiastic, hyperbolic speech, glowing with the divine fire of youth.

"Can we give you a lift home, Paul?" asked Miss Winwood.

"No thanks, dearest lady. There are one or two little things I must do before I go."

"Good night."

"Good night, Paul," said Colonel Winwood, shaking hands. "A thundering good speech."

CHAPTER XIII

PAUL looked from side to side at the palely lit faces of the spectators, trying to distinguish Barney Bill and Jane. But he did not see them. He was disappointed and depressed, seized with a curious yearning for his own people. Vehicle after vehicle drew up and carried away the remainder of the platform group, and Paul was left in the doorway with the President and Honorary Secretary of the local lodge. The little crowd began to melt away. Suddenly his heart leaped and, after a hasty good night to the two officials, he sprang forward and, to their astonishment, gripped the hand of a bent and wizened old man.

"Barney Bill! This is good. Where is Jane?"

"Close by," said Bill.

The President and Honorary Secretary waved farewells and marched away. Out of the gloom came Jane, somewhat shyly. He took both her hands and looked upon her, and laughed. "My dear Jane! What ages since we lost each other!"

"Seven years, Mr. Savelli."

"'Mr. Savelli!' Rubbish! Paul."

"Begging your pardon," said Barney Bill, "but I've got a pal 'ere what I've knowed long before you was born, and he'd like to tell yer how he enjoyed your speech."

A tall man, lean and bearded, and apparently very well dressed, came forward.

"This is my old pal, Silas Finn," said Bill.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Finn," said Paul, shaking hands.

"I too," said the man gravely.

"Silas Finn's a Councillor of the Borough," said Bill proudly.

"You should have been on the platform," said Paul.

"I attended in my private capacity," replied Mr. Finn.

He effaced himself. Paul found himself laughing into Barney Bill's twinkling eyes. "Dear old Bill," he cried, clapping his old friend on the shoulder. "How are things going? How's the caravan? I've looked out for it on so many country roads."

"I'm thinking of retiring," said Bill. "I can only do a few summer months now—and things isn't what they was."

"And Jane?" He turned to her.

"I'm Mr. Finn's secretary."

"Oh," said Paul. Mr. Finn, then, was an important person.

The drill hall attendant shut the door, and save for the street lamps they were in gloom. There was an embarrassed little silence. Paul broke it by saying: "We must exchange addresses, and fix up a meeting for a nice long talk."

"If you would like to have a talk with your old friends now, my house is at your disposal," said Mr. Finn, in a soft, melancholy voice. "It is not far from here."

"That's very kind of you—but I couldn't trespass on your hospitality."

"Gor bless you," exclaimed Barney Bill. "Nothing of the kind. Didn't I tell yer I've knowed him since we was lads together? And Jane lives there."

Paul laughed. "In that case—"

"You'll be most welcome," said Mr. Finn. "This way."

He went ahead with Barney Bill, whose queer side limp awoke poignant memories of the Bludston brickfield. Paul followed with Jane.

"And what have you been doing?" he asked.

"Typewriting. Then Bill came across Mr. Finn, whom he hadn't seen for years, and got me the position of secretary. Otherwise I've been doing nothing particular."

"If you knew what a hunt I had years ago to find you," he said, and began to explain the set of foolish circumstances when they turned the corner of the drill hall and found a four-wheeled cab waiting.

"I had already engaged it for my friends and myself," Mr. Finn explained. "Will you get in?"

Jane and Paul and Mr. Finn entered the cab. Barney Bill, who liked air and for whom the raw November night was filled apparently with balmy zephyrs, clambered in his crablike way next the driver. They started.

"What induced you to come to-night?" Paul asked.

"We saw the announcement in the newspapers," replied Jane. "Barney Bill said the Mr. Paul Savelli could be no one else but you. I said it couldn't."

"Why?" he asked sharply.

"There are heaps of people of the same name."

"But you didn't think I was equal to it?"

She laughed a short laugh. "That's just how you used to talk. You haven't changed much."

"I hope I haven't," replied Paul earnestly. "And I don't think you've changed either."

"Very little has happened to change me," said Jane.

The cab lumbered on through dull, dimly lit, residential roads. Only by the swinging gleam of an occasional street lamp could Paul distinguish the faces of his companions. "I hope you're on our side, Mr. Finn," he said politely to his host, who sat on the small back seat.

"I don't disagree with much that you said to-night. But you are on the side of wealth and aristocracy. I am on the side of the downtrodden and oppressed."

"But so am I," cried Paul. "The work of every day of my life tends to help them."

"You're a Conservative and I'm a Radical."

"What do labels matter? We're both attacking the same problem, only from different angles."

"Very likely, Mr. Savelli; but you'll pardon me if, according to my political creed, I regard your angle as an obtuse one."

Paul wondered greatly who he could be, this grave, intelligent friend of Barney Bill's, who spoke with such dignity and courtesy. In his speech was a trace of rough accent; but his words were chosen with precision.

"You think we glance off, whereas your attack is more direct," laughed Paul.

"That is so. I hope you don't mind my saying it. You were the challenger."

"I was. But anyhow we're not going to be enemies."

"God forbid," said Mr. Finn.

Presently the cab stopped before a fairly large detached house standing back from the road. A name which Paul could not decipher was painted on the top bar of the gate. They trooped through and up some steps to the front door, which Mr. Finn opened with his latchkey. The first impression that Paul had on entering a wide vestibule was a blaze of gilt frames containing masses of bright, fresh paint. A parlour-maid appeared, and helped with hats and coats.

"We are having a very simple supper, Mr. Savelli. Will you join us?" said Mr. Finn.

"With the greatest pleasure," said Paul.

The host threw open the dining-room door on the right. Jane and Paul entered; were alone for a few moments, during which Paul heard Barney Bill say in a hoarse whisper: "Let me have my hunk of bread and beef in the kitchen, Silas. You know as how I hates a fork and I likes to eat in my shirt sleeves."

Paul seized Jane by the arms and regarded her luminously. He murmured: "Did you hear? The

dear old chap!"

She raised clear, calm eyes. "Aren't you shocked?"

He shook her. "What do you take me for?"

Jane was rebellious. "For what girls in my position generally call a 'toff.' You—-"

"You're horrid," said Paul.

"The word's horrid, not me. You're away up above us."

"'Us' seems to be very prosperous, anyhow," said Paul, looking round him. Jane watched him jealously and saw his face change. The dining room, spaciously proportioned, was, like the vestibule, a mass of gilt frames and staring paint. Not an inch of wall above the oak dado was visible. Crude landscapes, wooden portraits, sea studies with waves of corrugated iron, subject pictures of childishly sentimental appeal, blinded the eyes. It looked as if a kindergarten had been the selecting committee for an exhibition of the Royal Academy. It looked also as if the kindergarten had replaced the hanging committee also. It was a conglomerate massacre. It was pictorial anarchy. It was individualism baresark, amok, crazily frantic. And an execrably vile, nerve-destroying individualism at that.

Paul released Jane, who kept cool, defiant eyes on him.

"What do you think of it?"

He smiled. "A bit disconcerting."

"The whole house is like this."

"It's so new," said Paul.

He looked about him again. The long table was plainly laid for three at the far end. The fare consisted of a joint of cold beef, a cold tart suggestive of apple, a bit of Cheshire cheese, and celery in a glass vase. Of table decoration of any kind there was no sign. A great walnut monstrosity meagrely equipped performed the functions of a sideboard. The chairs, ten straight-backed, and two easy by the fireplace, of which one was armless, were upholstered in saddlebag, yellow and green. In the bay of the red-curtained window was a huge terra-cotta bust of an ivy-crowned and inane Austrian female. There was a great fireplace in which a huge fire blazed cheerily, and on the broad, deep hearth stood little coloured plaster figures of stags, of gnomes, of rabbits, one ear dropping, the other ear cocked, of galloping hounds unknown to the fancy, scenting and pursuing an invisible foe.

She watched him as he scanned the room.

"Who is Mr. Finn?" he asked in a low voice.

"Many years ago he was 'Finn's Fried Fish.' Now he's 'Fish Palaces, Limited.' They're all over London. You can't help seeing them even from a motor car."

"I've seen them," said Paul.

The argument outside the door having ended in a victory for the host, he entered the room, pushing Barney Bill gently in front of him. For the first time Paul saw him in the full light. He beheld a man sharply featured, with hair and beard, once raven-black, irregularly streaked with white—there seemed to be no intermediary shades of grey—and deep melancholy eyes. There hung about him the atmosphere of infinite, sorrowful patience that might mark a Polish patriot. As the runner of a successful fried fish concern he was an incongruity. As well, thought Paul, picture the late Cardinal Newman sharpening knife on steel outside a butcher's shop, and crying, "buy, buy," in lusty invitation. Then Paul noticed that he was oddly apparelled. He wore the black frock-coat suit of a Methodist preacher at the same time as the rainbow tie, diamond tie-pin, heavy gold watch-chain, diamond ring and natty spats of a professional bookmaker. The latter oddities, however, did not detract from the quiet, mournful dignity of his face and manner. Paul felt himself in the presence of an original personality.

The maid came in and laid a fourth place. Mr. Finn waved Paul to a seat on his right, Barney Bill to one next Paul; Jane sat on his left.

"I will ask a blessing," said Mr. Finn.

He asked one for two minutes in the old-fashioned Evangelical way, bringing his guest into his address to the Almighty with an almost pathetic courtesy. "I am afraid, Mr. Savelli," said he, when he sat down and began to carve the beef, "I have neither wine nor spirits to offer you. I am a strict teetotaller; and so is Miss Seddon. But as I knew my old friend Simmons would be unhappy without his accustomed glass of beer—"

"That's me," said Barney Bill, nudging Paul with his elbow. "Simmons. You never knowed that afore, did yer? Beg pardon, guv'nor, for interrupting."

"Well, there's a jug of beer—and that is all at this hour, except water, that I can put before you."

Paul declared that beer was delicious and peculiarly acceptable after public speaking, and demonstrated his appreciation by draining the glass which the maid poured out.

"You wanted that badly, sonny," said Barney Bill. "The next thing to drinking oneself is to see another chap what enjoys swallering it."

"Bill!" said Jane reprovingly.

Barney Bill cocked his white poll across the table with the perkiness of a quaint bird—Paul saw that the years had brought a striation of tiny red filaments to his weather-beaten face—and fixed her with his little glittering eyes. "Bill what? You think I'm 'urting his feelings?" He jerked a thumb towards his host. "I ain't. He thinks good drink's bad because bad has come of it to him—not that he ever took a drop too much, mind yer—but bad has come of it to him, and I think good drink's good because nothing but good has come of it to me. And we've agreed to differ. Ain't we, Silas?"

"If every man were as moderate as you, and I am sure as Mr. Savelli, I should have nothing to say against it. Why should I? But the working man, unhappily, is not moderate."

"I see," said Paul. "You preach, or advocate—I think you preach—total abstinence, and so feel it your duty to abstain yourself."

"That is so," said Mr. Finn, helping himself to mustard. "I don't wish to bore you with my concerns; but I'm a fairly large employer of labour. Now I have found that by employing only pledged abstainers I get extraordinary results. I exact a very high rate of insurance, towards a fund—I need not go into details—to which I myself contribute a percentage—a far higher rate than would be possible if they spent their earnings on drink. I invest the whole lot in my business—their stoppages from wages and my contributions. I guarantee them 3 per cent.; I give them, actually, the dividends that accrue to the holders of ordinary stock in my company. They also have the general advantages of insurance—sickness, burial, maternity, and so forth—that they would get from an ordinary benefit society."

"But that's enormous," cried Paul, with keen interest. "On the face of it, it seems impossible. It seems entirely uneconomic. Co-operative trading is one thing; private insurance another. But how can you combine the two?"

"The whole secret lies in the marvellously increased efficiency of the employee." He developed his point.

Paul listened attentively. "But," said he, when his host concluded, "isn't it rather risky? Supposing, for the sake of argument, your business failed."

Mr. Finn held up the lean, brown hand on which the diamond sparkled. "My business cannot fail."

Paul started. The assertion had a strange solemnity. "Without impertinence," said he, "why can't it fail?"

"Because God is guiding it," said Silas Finn.

The fanatic spoke. Paul regarded him with renewed interest. The black hair streaked with white, banging over the temples on the side away from the parting, the queerly streaked beard, the clear-cut ascetic features, the deep, mournful eyes in whose depths glowed a soul on fire, gave him the appearance of a mad but sanctified apostle. Barney Bill, who profoundly distrusted all professional drinkers of water, such as Mr. Finn's employees, ate his cold beef silently, in the happy surmise that no one was paying the least attention to his misperformances with knife, fork and fingers. Jane looked steadily from Paul to Silas and from Silas to Paul.

Paul said: "How do you know God is guiding it?"

At the back of his mind was an impulse of mirth—there was a touch of humorous blasphemy in the conception of the Almighty as managing director of "Fish Palaces, Limited"—but the nominal earthly managing director saw not the slightest humour in the proposition.

"Who is guiding you in your brilliant career?" he asked.

Paul threw out his hands, in the once practised and now natural foreign gesture. "I'm not an atheist. Of course I believe in God, and I thank Him for all His mercies—"

"Yes, yes," said his host. "That I shouldn't question. But a successful man's thanks to God are most often merely conventional. Don't think I wish to be offensive. I only want to get at the root of things. You are a young man, eight-and-twenty—"

"How do you know that?" laughed Paul.

"Oh, your friends have told me. You are young. You have a brilliant position. You have a brilliant future. Were you born to it?"

There was Jane on the opposite side of the table, entirely uninterested in her food, looking at him in her calm, clear way. She was so wholesome, so sane, in her young yet mature English lower-class beauty. She had broad brows. Her mass of dark brown hair was rather too flawlessly arranged. He felt a second's irritation at not catching any playfully straying strand. She was still the Jane of his boyhood, but a Jane developed, a Jane from whom no secrets were hid, a searching, questioning and quietly disturbing Jane.

"A man is born to his destiny, whatever destiny may be," said Paul.

"That is Mohammedan fatalism," said Mr. Finn, "unless one means by destiny the guiding hand of the Almighty. Do you believe that you're under the peculiar care of God?"

"Do you, Mr. Finn?"

"I have said so. I ask you. Do you?"

"In a general way, yes," said Paul. "In your particular sense, no. You question me frankly and I answer frankly. You would not like me to answer otherwise."

"Certainly not," said his host.

"Then," Paul continued, with a smile, "I must say that from my childhood I have been fired with a curious certainty that I would succeed in life. Chance has helped me. How far a divine hand has been specially responsible, it isn't for me to conjecture. But I know that if I hadn't believed in myself I shouldn't have had my small measure of success."

"You believe in yourself?"

"Yes. And I believe in making others believe in me."

"That is strange—very strange." Mr. Finn fixed him with his deep, sorrowful eyes. "You believe that you're predestined to a great position. You believe that you have in you all that is needful to attain it. That has carried you through. Strange!" He put his hand to his temple, elbow on table, and still regarded Paul. "But there's God behind it all. Mr. Savelli," he said earnestly, after a slight pause, "you are twenty-eight; I am fifty-eight; so I'm more than old enough to be your father. You'll forgive my taking up the attitude of the older man. I have lived a life such as your friends on the platform to-night—honorable, clean, sweet people—I've nothing to say against them—have no conception. I am English, of course—London born. My father was an Englishman; but my mother was a Sicilian. She used to go about with a barrel-organ—my father ran away with her. I have that violent South in my blood, and I've lived nearly all my days in London. I've had to pay dearly for my blood. The only compensation it has given me is a passion for art"—he waved his lean, bediamonded hand towards the horrific walls. "That is external—in a way—mere money has enabled me to gratify my tastes; but, as I was saying, I have lived a life of strange struggle, material, physical, and"—he brought down his free hand with a bang on the table—"it is only by the grace of God and the never-ceasing presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ by my side, that—that I am able to offer you my modest hospitality this evening."

Paul felt greatly drawn to the man. He was beyond doubt sincere. He wore the air of one who had lived fiercely, who had suffered, who had conquered; but the air of one whose victory was barren, who was looking into the void for the things unconquerable yet essential to salvation. Paul made a little gesture of attention. He could find no words to reply. A man's deep profession of faith is unanswerable.

"Ah," said Barney Bill, "you ought to have come along o' me, Silas, years ago in the old 'bus. You mightn't have got all these bright pictures, but you wouldn't have had these 'ere gloomy ideas. I don't say as how I don't hold with Gawd," he explained, with uplifted forefinger and cocked head; "but if ever I thinks of Him, I like to feel that He's in the wind or in the crickle-crackle of the earth, just near and friendly like, but not a-worrying of a chap, listening for every cuss-word as he uses to his old horse, and measuring every half-pint he pours down his dusty throat. No. That ain't my idea of Gawd. But then I ain't got religion."

"Still the same old pagan," laughed Paul.

"No, not the same, sonny," said Barney Bill, holding up his knife, which supported a morsel of cheese. "Old. Rheumaticky. Got to live in a 'ouse when it rains—me who never keered whether I was baked to a cinder or wet through! I ain't a pagan no more. I'm a crock."

Jane smiled affectionately at the old man, and her face was lit with rare sweetness when she smiled. "He really is just the same," she said.

"He hasn't changed much in forty years," said Mr. Finn.

"I was a good Conservative then, as I am now," said Bill. "That's one thing, anyhow. So was you, Silas. But you had Radical leanings."

Barney Bill's remark set the talk on political lines. Paul learned that his host had sat for a year or more as a Progressive on the Hickney Heath Borough Council and aspired to a seat in Parliament.

"The Kingdom of Heaven," said he, not unctuously or hypocritically, but in his grave tone of conviction, "is not adequately represented in the House."

Paul pointed out that in the House of Lords one had the whole bench of Bishops.

"I'm not a member of the Established Church, Mr. Savelli," replied Mr. Finn. "I'm a Dissenter—a Free Zionist."

"I've heard him conduc' the service," said Barney Bill. "He built the Meeting House close by, yer know. I goes sometimes to try and get converted. But I'm too old and stiff in the j'ints. No longer a pagan, but a crock, sonny. But I likes to listen to him. Gorbli—bless me, it's a real bean feast—that's what it is. He talks straight from the shoulder, he does, just as you talked to-night. Lets 'em 'ave it bing-bang in the eye. Don't he, Jane?"

"Bill means," she explained, with the shadow of a smile, for Paul's benefit, "that Mr. Finn is an eloquent preacher."

"D'yer suppose he didn't understand what I meant?" he exclaimed, setting down the beer glass which he was about to raise to his lips. "Him, what I discovered reading Sir Walter Scott with the cover off when he was a nipper with no clothes on? You understood, sonny."

"Of course I did." He laughed gaily and turned to his host, who had suffered Barney Bill's queer eulogy with melancholy indulgence. "One of these days I should like to come and hear you preach."

"Any Sunday, at ten and six. You would be more than welcome."

The meal was over. Barney Bill pulled a blackened clay pipe from his waistcoat pocket and a paper of tobacco.

"I'm a non-smoker," said Mr. Finn to Paul, "and I'm sorry I've nothing to offer you—I see little company, so I don't keep cigars in the house—but if you would care to smoke—-" he waved a courteous and inviting hand.

Paul whipped out his cigarette case. It was of gold—a present last Christmas from the Winwood fitting part of the equipment of a Fortunate Youth. He opened it, offered a cigarette to Barney Bill.

"Garn!" said the old man. "I smokes terbakker," and he filled his pipe with shag.

Mr. Finn rose from the table. "Will you excuse me, Mr. Savelli, if I leave you? I get up early to attend to my business. I must be at Billingsgate at half-past five to buy my fish. Besides, I have been preventing your talk with our friends. So pray don't go. Good-night, Mr. Savelli."

As he shook hands Paul met the sorrowful liquid eyes fixed on him with strange earnestness. "I must thank you for your charming hospitality. I hope you'll allow me to come and see you again."

"My house is yours."

It was a phrase—a phrase of Castilian politeness—oddly out of place in the mouth of a Free Zionist purveyor of fried fish. But it seemed to have more than a Castilian, more than a Free Zionist significance. He was still pondering over it when Mr. Finn, having bidden Jane and Barney Bill good-night, disappeared.

"Ah!" said Barney Bill, lifting up the beer jug in order to refill his glass, and checked whimsically by the fact of its emptiness. "Ah," said he, setting down the jug and limping round the table, "let us hear as how you've been getting on, sonny."

They drew their chairs about the great hearth, in which the idiotic little Viennese plaster animals sported in movement eternally arrested, and talked of the years that had passed. Paul explained once more his loss of Jane and his fruitless efforts to find her.

"We didn't know," said Jane. "We thought that either you were dead or had forgotten us—or had grown too big a man for us."

"Axing your pardon," said Barney Bill, taking his blackened clay from his lips and holding it between his gnarled fingers, "you said so. I didn't. I always held that, if he wasn't dead, the time would come when, as it was to-night, the three of us would be sitting round together. I maintained," he added solemnly after a puff or two, "that his heart was in the right place. I'm a broken-down old crock, no longer a pagan; but I'm right. Ain't I, sonny?" He thrust an arm into the ribs of Paul, who was sitting between them.

Paul looked at Jane. "I think this proves it."

She returned his look steadily. "I own I was wrong. But a woman only proves herself to be right by always insisting that she is wrong."

"My dear Jane," cried Paul. "Since when have you become so psychological?"

"Gorblime," said Barney Bill, "what in thunder's that?"

"I know," said Jane. "You"—to Paul—"were good enough to begin my education. I've tried since to go on with it."

"It's nothing to do with edication," said Barney Bill. "It's fac's. Let's have fac's. Jane and I have been tramping the same old high-road, but you've been climbing mountains—yer and yer gold cigarette cases. Let's hear about it."

So Paul told his story, and as he told it, it seemed to him, in its improbability, more like a fairy-tale than the sober happenings of real life.

"You've said nothing about the princess," Jane remarked, when he had ended.

"The princess?"

"Yes. Where does she come in?"

"The Princess Zobraska is a friend of my employers."

"But you and she are great friends," Jane persisted quietly. "That's obvious to anybody. I was standing quite close when you helped her into the motor car."

"I didn't see you."

"I took care you didn't. She looks charming."

"Most princesses are charming—when they've no particular reason to be otherwise," said Paul. "It is their metier—their profession."

There was a little silence. Jane, cheek on hand, looked thoughtfully into the fire. Barney Bill knocked' the ashes out of his pipe and thrust it in his pocket. "It's getting late, sonny."

Paul looked at his watch. It was past one o'clock. He jumped up. "I hope to goodness you haven't to begin work at half-past five," he said to Jane.

"No. At eight." She rose as he stretched out his hand. "You don't know what it is to see you again, Paul. I can't tell you. Some things are upsetting. But I'm glad. Oh, yes, I'm glad, Paul dear. Don't think I'm not."

Her voice broke a little. They were the first gentle words she had given him all the evening. Paul smiled and kissed her hand as he had kissed that of the princess, and, still holding it, said: "Don't I know you of old? And if you suppose I haven't thought of you and felt the need of you, you're very much mistaken. Now I've found you, I'm not going to let you go again."

She turned her head aside and looked down; there was the slightest movement of her plump shoulders. "What's the good? I can't do anything for you now, and you can't do anything for me. You're on the way to becoming a great man. To me, you're a great man already. Don't you see?"

"My dear, I was an embryonic Shelley, Raphael, Garrick, and Napoleon when you first met me," he said jestingly.

"But then you didn't belong to their—to their sphere. Now you do. Your friends are lords and ladies and—and princesses—"

"My friends," cried Paul, "are people with great true hearts—like the Winwoods—and the princess, if you like—and you, and Barney Bill."

"That's a sentiment as does you credit," said the old man. "Great true hearts! Now if you ain't satisfied, my dear, you're a damn criss-cross female. And yer ain't, are yer?' She laughed and Paul laughed. The little spell of intensity was broken. There were pleasant leave-takings.

"I'll set you on your road a bit," said Barney Bill. "I live in the neighbourhood. Good-bye, Jane."

She went with them to the front door, and stood in the gusty air watching them until they melted into the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

BETWEEN the young man of immaculate vesture, of impeccable manners, of undeniable culture, of instinctive sympathy with the great world where great things are done, of unerring tact, of mythological beauty and charm, of boundless ambition, of resistless energy, of incalculable promise, in outer semblance and in avowed creed the fine flower of aristocratic England, professing the divine right of the House of Lords and the utilitarian sanctity of the Church of England—between Paul, that is to say, and the Radical, progressive councillor of Hickney Heath, the Free Zionist dissenter (not even Congregationalist or Baptist or Wesleyan, or any powerfully organized Non-conformist whose conscience archbishops consult with astute patronage), the purveyor of fried fish, the man of crude, uncultivated taste, there should have been a gulf fixed as wide as the Pacific Ocean. As a matter of fact, whatever gulf lay between them was narrow enough to be bridged comfortably over by mutual esteem. Paul took to visiting Mr. Finn. Accustomed to the somewhat tired or conventional creeds of his political world, he found refreshment in the man's intense faith. He also found pathetic attraction in the man's efforts towards self-expression. Mr. Finn, who lived a life of great loneliness—scarcely a soul, said Jane, crossed his threshold from month's end to month's end—seemed delighted to have a sympathetic visitor to whom he could display his painted treasures. When he was among them the haunting pain vanished from his eyes, as sometimes one has seen it vanish from those of an unhappy woman among her flowers. He loved to take Paul through his collection and point out the beauties and claim his admiration. He had converted a conservatory running along one side of the house into a picture gallery, and this was filled with his masterpieces of pictorial villainy. Here Paul was at first astonished at recognizing replicas of pictures which hung in other rooms. Mr. Finn explained.

"These," said he, "are the originals."

Paul pondered over the dark saying for a moment or two until he came upon a half-finished canvas on an easel. It was the copy of a landscape on the wall. He turned questioningly to his host. The latter smiled.

"I'm a bit of an artist myself," he said. "But as I've never had time for lessons in painting, I teach myself by copying good pictures. It's a Saunders"—a name unknown to Paul—"and a very good example. It's called Noontide. The cow is particularly good, isn't it? But it's exceedingly difficult. That fore-shortening—I can't get it quite right yet. But I go on and on till I succeed. The only way."

Paul acquiesced and asked him where he had picked up his Saunders. Indeed, where had he picked up all the others? Not an exhibition in London would have admitted one of them. This "Saunders" represented a wooden cow out of drawing lying in the shade of a conventional tree. It was peculiarly bad.

"I bought it direct from the artist," replied Mr. Finn. "He's an unrecognized genius, and now he's getting old, poor fellow. Years ago he offended the Royal Academy, and they never forgot it. He says they've kept him under all his life. I have a great many of his pictures." He looked admiringly at the cow for a while, and added: "I gave him four pounds ten for this one."

Paul could not forbear saying, though his tone betrayed no irony: "A good price."

"I think so," replied Mr. Finn. "That's what he asked. I could never haggle with an artist. His work is of the spirit, isn't it?"

And Paul marvelled at the childlike simplicity of the man, the son of the Sicilian woman who went about with a barrel-organ, who, starting in the race on a level with Barney Bill, had made a fortune in the exploitation of fried fish. To disturb his faith in the genius of Saunders were a crime—as base a crime as proving to a child the non-existence of fairies. For Paul saw that Silas Finn found in this land of artistic illusion a refuge from many things; not only from the sordid cares of a large business, but perhaps also from the fierce intensity of his religion, from his driving and compelling deity. Here God entered gently.

There was another reason, which Paul scarcely confessed to himself, for the pleasure he found in the older man's company. The veil which he had thrown so adroitly over his past history, which needed continuous adroitness to maintain, was useless in this house. Both Barney Bill and Jane had spoken of him freely. Silas Finn knew of Bludston, of his modeldom, of his inglorious career on the stage. He could talk openly once more, without the never-absent subconscious sense of reserve. He was still, in his own, eyes, the prince out of the fairy-tale; but Silas Finn and the two others alone of his friends shared the knowledge of the days when he herded swine. Now a prince out of a fairy-tale who has herded swine is a romantic figure. Paul did not doubt that he was one. Even Jane, in spite of her direct common sense, admitted it. Barney Bill proclaimed it openly, slapping him on the back and taking much credit to himself for helping the prince on the way to his kingdom. And Mr. Finn, even in the heat of political discussion or theological asseveration, treated him with a curious and pathetic deference.

Meanwhile Paul pursued his own career of glory. The occasional visits to Hickney Heath were, after all, but rare, though distinct, episodes in his busy life. He had his parliamentary work for Colonel Winwood, his work for Miss Winwood, his work for the Young England League. He

had his social engagements. He had the Princess Zobraska. He also began to write, in picturesque advocacy of his views, for serious weekly and monthly publications. Then Christmas came and he found himself at Drane's Court, somewhat gasping for breath. A large houseparty, however, including Lord Francis Ayres, the chief Opposition Whip, threatened to keep him busy.

The Princess drove over from Chetwood Park for dinner on Christmas Day. He had to worship from afar; for a long spell of the evening to worship with horrible jealousy. Lord Francis Ayres, a bachelor and a man of winning charm, as men must be whose function it is to keep Members of Parliament good and pleased with themselves and sheeplike, held the Princess captive, in a remote corner, with his honeyed tongue. She looked at him seductively out of her great, slumberous blue eyes, even as she had looked, on occasion, at him, Paul. He hated Lord Francis, set himself up against him, as of old he had set himself up against Billy Goodge. He was a better man than Frank Ayres. Frank Ayres was only a popinjay. Beneath the tails of his coat he snapped his fingers at Frank Ayres, while he listened, with his own agreeable smile, to Mademoiselle de Cressy's devilled gossip.

He was very frigid and courtly when he bade the Princess good night at the door of her limousine.

"Ah, que vous etes bete!" she laughed.

He went to bed very angry. She had told him to his face that he was a silly fool. And so he was. He thought of all the brilliantly dignified things he might have said, if the relentless engine had not whirred her away down the drive. But the next morning Lord Francis met him in the wintry garden and smiled and held out a winning hand. Paul hid his hatred beneath the mask of courtesy. They talked for a few moments of indifferent matters. Then Frank Ayres suddenly said: "Have you ever thought of standing for Parliament?"

Paul, who had been sauntering between flowerless beds with his companion, stood stock still. The Chief Whip of a political party is a devil of a fellow. To the aspiring young politician he is much more a devil of a fellow than the Prime Minister or any Secretary of State. If a Chief Whip breathes the suggestion that a man might possibly stand for election as a Member of Parliament, it means that at any suitable vacancy, or at a general election, he will, with utter certainty, have his chance as a candidate with the whole force of his party behind him. It is part of the business of Chief Whips to find candidates.

"Of course," said Paul, rather stupidly. "Eventually. One of these days."

"But soon?"

"Soon?"

Paul's head reeled. What did he mean by soon? "Well," Lord Francis laughed, "not to-morrow. But pretty soon. Look here, Savelli. I'm going to speak frankly. The party's in for a long period out of office. That's obvious. Look at the majority against us. We want the young blood—not the old hacks—so that when we come in again we shall have a band of trained men in the heyday of their powers. Of course I know—it's my business to know—what generally you have done for the Young England League, but I missed your speech at Flickney Heath in the autumn. You had an immense success, hadn't you?"

"They seemed pleased with what I had to say," replied Paul modestly. "When did you hear about it?"

"Last night."

"The Winwoods are the dearest people in the world," said Paul, walking warily, "but they are prejudiced in my favour."

"It wasn't the Winwoods."

The beautiful truth flashed upon Paul.

"Then it was the Princess Zobraska."

The other laughed. "Never mind. I know all about it. It isn't often one has to listen to speeches at second-hand. The question is: Would you care to stand when the time comes?"

"I should just think I would," cried Paul boyishly.

All his jealous resentment had given place to exultation. It was the Princess who had told Frank Ayres. If she had been laying him under the spell of her seduction it was on his, Paul's, account. She had had the splendid audacity to recite his speech to the Chief Whip. Frank Ayres was suddenly transformed from a popinjay into an admirable fellow. The Princess herself sat enthroned more adorable than ever.

"The only difficulty," said Paul, "is that I have to earn my living."

"That might be arranged," said Lord Francis.

So Paul, as soon as he found an opportunity, danced over to Chetwood Park and told his Princess all about it, and called her a tutelary goddess and an angel and all manner of pretty names. And the Princess, who was alone, poured for him her priceless Russian tea into egg-shell China tea-cups and fed him on English crumpets, and, in her French and feminine way, gave him the outer fringe of her heart to play with—a very dangerous game. She had received him, not as once before in the state drawing room, but in the intimacy of her own boudoir, a place all soft lights and cushions and tapestries and gleaming bits of sculpture. After tea and crumpets had been consumed, the dangerous game proceeded far enough for Paul to confess his unjust dislike of Frank Ayres.

"Gros jaloux," said the Princess.

"That was why you said que vous etes bete," said he.

"Partly."

"What were the other reasons?"

"Any woman has a thousand reasons for calling any man stupid."

"Tell me some of them at any rate."

"Well, isn't it stupid of a man to try to quarrel with his best friend when he won't be seeing her again for three or four months?"

"You're not going away soon?"

"Next week."

"Oh!" said Paul.

"Yes. I go to Paris, then to my villa at Mont Boron. I have the nostalgia of my own country, you see. Then to Venice at Easter."

Paul looked at her wistfully, for life seemed suddenly very blank and dismal. "What shall I do all that time without my best friend?"

"You will probably find another and forget her."

She was lying back among cushions, pink and terra-cotta, and a round black cushion framed her delicate head.

Paul said in a low voice, bending forward: "Do you think you are a woman whom men forget?"

Their eyes met. The game had grown very perilous. "Men may remember the princess," she replied, "but forget the woman."

"If it weren't for the woman inside the princess; what reason should I have for remembering?" he asked.

She fenced. "But, as it is, you don't see me very often."

"I know. But you are here—to be seen—not when I want you, for that would be every hour of the day—but, at least, in times of emergency. You are here, all the same, in the atmosphere of my life."

"And if I go abroad I shall no longer be in that atmosphere? Did I not say you would forget?"

She laughed. Then quickly started forward, and, elbow on knee and chin on palm, regarded him brightly. "We are talking like a couple of people out of Mademoiselle de Scudery," she said before he had time to reply. "And we are in the twentieth century, mon pauvre ami. We must be sensible. I know that you will miss me. And I will miss you too. Mais que voulez-vous? We have to obey the laws of the world we live in."

"Need we?" asked Paul daringly. "Why need we?"

"We must. I must go away to my own country. You must stay in yours and work and fulfill your ambitions." She paused. "I want you to be a great man," she said, with a strange tenderness in her voice.

"With you by my side," said he, "I feel I could conquer the earth."

"As your good friend I shall always be by your side. Vous voyez, mon cher Paul," she went on quickly in French. "I am not quite as people see me. I am a woman who is lonely and not too happy, who has had disillusions which have embittered her life. You know my history. It is public property. But I am young. And my heart is healed—and it craves faith and tenderness and—and friendship. I have many to flatter me. I am not too ugly. Many men pay their court to me, but they do not touch my heart. None of them even interest me. I don't know why. And then I have my rank, which imposes on me its obligations. Sometimes I wish I were a little woman of nothing at

all, so that I could do as I like. Mais enfin, I do what I can. You have come, Paul Savelli, with your youth and your faith and your genius, and you pay your court to me like the others. Yes, it is true—and as long as it was amusing, I let it go on. But now that you interest me, it is different. I want your success. I want it with all my heart. It is a little something in my life—I confess it—quelque chose de tres joli—and I will not spoil it. So let us be good friends, frank and loyal—without any Scudery." She looked at him with eyes that had lost their languor—a sweet woman's eyes, a little moist, very true. "And now," she said, "will you be so kind as to put a log on the fire."

Paul rose and threw a log on the glowing embers, and stood by her side. He was deeply moved. Never before had she so spoken. Never before had she afforded a glimpse of the real woman. Her phrases, so natural, so sincere, in her own tongue, and so caressive, stirred the best in him. The glamour passed from the royal lady; only the sweet and beautiful woman remained.

"I will be what you will, my Princess," he said.

At that moment he could not say more. For the first time in his life he was mute in a woman's presence; and the reason was that for the first time in his life love for a woman had gripped his heart.

She rose and smiled at him. "Bons amis, francs et loyaux?"

"Francs et loyaux."

She gave him her hand in friendship; but she gave him her eyes in love. It is the foolish way of women.

"May a frank and loyal friend write to you sometimes?" he asked.

"Why, yes. And a frank and loyal friend will answer."

"And when shall I see you again?"

"Did I not tell you," she said, moving to the bell, for this was leave-taking—"that I shall be in Venice at Easter?"

Paul went out into the frosty air, and the bright wintry stars shone down on him. Often on such nights he had looked up, wondering which was his star, the star that guided his destiny. But to-night no such fancy crossed his mind. He did not think of the stars. He did not think of his destiny. His mind and soul were drenched in thought of one woman. It had come at last, the great passion, the infinite desire. It had come in a moment, wakened into quivering being by the caressive notes of the dear French voice—"mais je suis jeune, et mon coeur est gueri, et il lui manque affreusement de la foi, de la tendresse, de—de"—adorable catch of emotion—"de l'amitie." Friendship, indeed! For amitie all but her lips said amour. He walked beneath the wintry stars, a man in a perfect dream.

Till then she had been but his Princess, the exquisite lady whom it had amused to wander with him into the pays du tendre. She had been as far above him as the now disregarded stars. She had come down with a carnival domino over her sidereal raiment, and had met him on carnival equality. He beau masque! He, knowing her, had fallen beneath her starry spell. He was Paul Kegworthy, Paul Savelli, what you like; Paul the adventurer, Paul the man born to great things. She was a beautiful woman, bearing the title of Princess, the title that had haunted his life since first the Vision Splendid dawned upon him as he lay on his stomach eavesdropping and heard the words of the divinely-smelling goddess who had given him his talisman, the cornelian heart. To "rank himself with princes" had been the intense meaning of his life since ragged and fiercely imaginative childhood. Odd circumstances had ranked him with Sophie Zobraska. The mere romance of it had carried him off his feet. She was a princess. She was charming. She frankly liked his society. She seemed interested in his adventurous career. She was romantic. He too. She was his Egeria. He had worshipped her romantically, in a mediaeval, Italian way, and she had accepted the homage. It had all been deliciously artificial. It had all been Mademoiselle de Scudery. But to-day the real woman, casting off her carnival domino, casting off too the sidereal raiment, had spoken, for the first time, in simple womanhood, and her betraying eyes had told things that they had told to no other man living or dead. And all that was artificial, all that was fantastic, all that was glamour, was stripped away from Paul in the instant of her self-revelation. He loved her as man loves woman. He laughed aloud as his young feet struck the frozen road. She knew and was not angry. She, in her wonder, gave him leave to love her. It was obvious that she loved him to love her. Dear God! He could go on loving her like this for the rest of his life. What more did he want? To the clean man of nine-and-twenty, sufficient for the day is the beauty thereof.

An inspired youth took his place at the Winwoods' dinner table that evening. The elderly, ugly heiress, Miss Durning, concerning whom Miss Winwood had, with gentle malice, twitted him some months before, sat by his side. He sang her songs of Araby and tales of far Cashmere—places which in the commonplace way of travel he had never visited. What really happened in the drawing room between the departure of the ladies and the entrance of the men no one knows. But before the ladies went to bed Miss Winwood took Paul aside.

"Paul dear," she said, "you're never going to marry an old woman for money, are you?"

"Good God, no! Dearest lady, what do you mean?"

His cry was so sincere that she laughed.

"Nothing," she said.

"But you must mean something." He threw out his hands.

"Are you aware that you've been flirting disgracefully with Lizzle Durning?"

"I?" said Paul, clapping a hand to his shirt-front.

"You."

He smiled his sunny smile into the clear, direct eyes of his dearest lady—all the more dear because of the premature white of her hair. "I would flirt to-night with Xantippe, or Kerenhappuch, or Queen Victoria," said he.

"Why?"

He laughed, and although none of the standing and lingering company had overheard them, he gently led her to the curtained embrasure of the drawing-room window.

"This is perhaps the biggest day of my life. I've not had an opportunity of telling you. This morning Frank Ayres offered me a seat in Parliament."

"I'm glad," said Ursula Winwood; but her eyes hardened. "And so—Lizzie Durning—"

He took both her elbows in his hands—only a Fortunate Youth, with his laughing charm, would have dared to grip Ursula Winwood's elbows and cut her short. "Dearest lady," said he, "to-day there are but two women in the world for me. You are one. The other—well—it isn't Miss Durning."

She searched him through and through, "This afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Paul!" She withdrew from his grasp. In her voice was a touch of reproach.

"Dearest lady," said he, "I would die rather than marry a rich woman, ugly or beautiful, if I could not bring her something big in return—something worth living for."

"You've told me either too much or too little. Am I not entitled to know how things stand?"

"You're entitled to know the innermost secrets of my heart," he cried; and he told thereof as far as his love for the Princess was concerned.

"But, my poor boy," said Ursula tenderly, "how is it all going to end?"

"It's never going to end," cried Paul.

Ursula Winwood smiled on him and sighed a little; for she remembered the gallant young fellow who had been killed in the Soudan in eighteen eighty-five.

CHAPTER XV

IT would never end. Why should it? Could a Great Wonder be merely a transient thrill? Absurd. Dawn followed night, day after day, and the wonder had not faded. It would never fade. Letter followed letter, each more precious than the last.

She began with "Mon cher Paul." Then "Mon cher," then sometimes "Paul." She set the tone of the frank and loyal friendship in a style very graceful, very elusive, a word of tenderness melting away in a laugh; she took the friendship, pulled it to pieces and reconstructed it in ideal form; then she tied blue ribbon round its neck, and showed him how beautiful it was. She sat on the veranda of her villa and looked out on the moonlit Mediterranean and wanted to cry—"J'avais envie de Pleurer"—because she was all alone, having entertained at dinner a heap of dull and ugly people. She had spent a day on the yacht of a Russian Grand-Duke. "Il m'a fait une cour effrenee"—Paul thirsted immediately for the blood of this Grand-Duke, who had dared to make violent love to her. But when, a few lines farther on, he found that she had guessed his jealousy and laughed at it, he laughed too. "Don't be afraid. I have had enough of these people." She wanted une ame sincere et candide; and Paul laid the flattering unction to his own sincere and candid soul. Then she spoke prettily of his career. He was to be the flambeau eveilleur, the

awakening torch in the darkness before the daybreak. But he musn't overwork. His health was precious. There was a blot and erasure in the sentence. He took the letter to the light, lover-wise, and looked at it through a magnifying glass—and his pulses thrilled when it told him that she had originally written, "Votre sante m'est precieuse," and had scrabbled out the "m." "Your health is precious to me." That is what her heart had said. Did lover ever have a dearer mistress? He kissed the blot, and the thick French ink coming off on his lips was nectar.

And he began his letters with "My dear Princess;" then it was "Dearest Princess;" then "My Princess." Then she rallied him on the matter. It came to "Mais enfin j'ai un petit nom comme tout le monde." In common with the rest of humanity she had a Christian name—and she was accustomed to be called by it by her frank and loyal friends. "And they are so few." Paul heard the delicate little sigh and saw the delicate rise and fall of the white bosom. And again he fed on purple ink. So he began his next letter with "Dear Sophie." But he could not pour the same emotion into "Dear Sophie" as he could into "My Princess"—and "My Sophie" was a step beyond the bounds of frank and loyal friendship. So it came to his apostrophizing her as "Dear" and scattering "Sophies" deliciously through the text. And so the frank and loyal friendship went on its appointed course, as every frank and loyal friendship between two young and ardent souls who love each other has proceeded since the beginning of a sophisticated world.

The first three months of that year were a period of enchantment. He lived supremely. The daily round of work was trivial play. He rose at seven, went to bed at two, crowded the nineteen hours of wakefulness with glorious endeavour. He went all over the country with his flambeau eveilleur, awakening the Youth of England, finding at last the great artistic gift the gods had given him, the gift of oratory. One day he reminded Jane of a talk long ago when he had fled from the studios: "You asked me how I was going to earn my living. I said I was going to follow one of the Arts."

"I remember," said Jane, regarding him full-eyed. "You said you thought you were a poet—but you might be a musician or painter. Finally you decided you were an actor."

He laughed his gay laugh. "I was an infernally bad actor," he acknowledged.

Then he explained his failure on the stage. He was impatient of other people's inventions, wanting to play not Hamlet or Tom or Dick or Romeo or Harry, but himself. Now he could play himself. It was acting in a way. Anyhow it was an Art; so his boyish prophecy had come true. He had been struggling from childhood for a means of self-expression. He had tried most of them save this. Here he had found it. He loved to play upon a crowd as if they were so many notes of a vast organ.

On this occasion Jane said: "And my means of self-expression is to play on the keys of a typewriter."

"Your time hasn't come," he replied. "When you have found your means you will express yourself all the more greatly."

Which was ingenious on the part of Paul, but ironically consoling to Jane.

One week-end during the session he spent at the Marchioness of Chudley's place in Lancashire. He drove in a luxurious automobile through the stately park, which once he had traversed in the brakeful of urchins, the raggedest of them all, and his heart swelled with pardonable exultation. He had passed through Bludston and he had caught a glimpse of what had once been his brickfield, now the site of more rows of mean little houses, and he had seen the grim factory chimneys still smoking, smoking.... The little Buttons, having grown up into big Buttons, were toiling away their lives in those factories. And Button himself, the unspeakable Button? Was he yet alive? And Mrs. Button, who had been Polly Kegworthy and called herself his mother? It was astonishing how seldom he thought of her.... He had run away a scarecrow boy in a gipsy van. He came back a formative force in the land, the lover of a princess, the honoured guest of the great palace of the countryside. He slipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket and felt the cornelian heart.

Yes, in the great palace he found himself an honoured guest. His name was known independently of his work for the Winwoods. He was doing good service to his party. The word had gone abroad—perhaps Frank Ayres had kindly spoken it—that he was the coming man. Lady Chudley said: "I wonder if you remember what we talked about when I first met you."

Paul laughed, for she did not refer to the first meeting of all. "I'm afraid I was very young and fatuous," said he. "It was years ago. I hadn't grown up."

"Never mind. We talked about waking the country from its sleep."

"And you gave me a phrase, Lady Chudley—'the Awakener of England.' It stuck. It crystallized all sorts of vague ambitions. I've never forgotten it for five consecutive minutes. But how can you remember a casual act of graciousness to an unimportant boy?"

"No boy who dreams of England's greatness is unimportant," she said. "You've proved me to be right. Your dreams are coming true—see, I don't forget!"

"I owe you far more than you could possibly imagine," said Paul.

"No, no. Don't. Don't exaggerate. A laughing phrase—that's nothing."

"It is something. Even a great deal. But it's not all," said he.

"What else is there?"

"You were one of the two or three," he said earnestly, thinking of the Bludston factory, "who opened new horizons for me."

"I'm a proud woman," said Lady Chudley.

The next day, Sunday, old Lord Chudley dragged him into his own private den. He had a very red, battered, clean-shaven face and very red hair and side whiskers; and he was a very honest gentleman, believing implicitly in God and the King and the House of Lords, and Foxes, and the Dutch School of Painting, and his responsibility as a great landowner toward the two or three thousand human beings with whom he had business relations.

"Look here, Savelli. I've looked into your League. It's a damned good thing. About the only thing that has been invented which can stem the tide of Socialism. Catch 'em young. That's the way. But you want the sinews of war. You get subscriptions, but not enough; I've seen your last balance sheet. You want a little army of—what the devil shall we call 'em?"

"Big Englanders," Paul suggested at a venture.

"Good. We want an army of 'em to devote their whole time to the work. Open a special fund. You and Ursula Winwood will know how to work it. What Ursula Winwood doesn't know in this sort of business isn't worth knowing—and here's something to head the list with."

And he handed Paul a cheque, which after a dazed second or two he realized to be one for five thousand pounds.

That was the beginning of the financial prosperity and the real political importance of the Young England League. Paul organized a great public dinner with the Leader of the Opposition in the chair and an amazing band of notables around the tables. Speeches were made, the Marquis of Chudley's patriotism extolled, and subscription lists filled up and handed to a triumphant organizing secretary.

A powerful daily newspaper took up the cause and made strong appeal. The Lodges made simultaneous efforts in their respective districts. Money flowed into the League's coffers.

When Parliament rose for the Easter recess Paul, the most tired, yet the most blissful, youth among the Fortunate, flew straight to Venice, where a happy-eyed princess welcomed him. She was living in a Palazzo on the Grand Canal, lent to her—that is the graceful Italian way of putting it—by some Venetian friends; and there, with Mademoiselle de Cressy to keep off the importunate, she received such acquaintance as floated from the ends of the earth through the enchanted city.

"I have started by seeing as few people as I can," she said. "That's all on account of you, monsieur."

He pressed her hand. "I hope we don't see a single soul we know as long as I'm here," he declared.

His hope was gratified, not completely, but enough to remove grounds for lover's fretfulness. He passed idyllic days in halcyon weather. Often she would send her gondola to fetch him from the Grand Hotel, where he was staying. Now and then, most graciously audacious of princesses, she would come herself. On such occasions he would sit awaiting her with beating heart, juvenis fortunatus nimium, on the narrow veranda of the hotel, regardless of the domed white pile of Santa Maria della Salute opposite, or the ceaseless life on the water, or the sunshine, or anything else in Venice, his gaze fixed on the bend of the canal; and then at last would appear the tall curved prow, and then the white-clad, red-sashed Giacomo bending to his oar, and then the white tenda with the dear form beneath, vaguely visible, and then Felipe, clad like Giacomo and bending, too, rhythmically with the foremost figure. Slowly, all too slowly, the gondola would near the steps, and beneath the tenda would smile the dearest face in the world, and the cheeks would be delicately flushed and the eyes tender and somewhat shy. And Paul would stand, smiling too, a conquering young figure with green Marienbad hat tilted with ever so tiny a shade of jauntiness, the object of frankly admiring and curious glances from a lone woman or two on the veranda, until the gondola was brought up to the wave-washed steps, and the hotel porter had fixed the bridge of plank. Then, with Giacomo supporting his elbow, he would board the black craft and would creep under the tenda and sink on the low seat by her side with a sense of daring and delicious intimacy, and the gondola would glide away into fairyland.

"Let us be real tourists and do Venice thoroughly," she had said. "I have never seen it properly."

"But you've been here many times before."

"Yes. But—"

She hesitated.

"Eh bien?"

"Je ne peux pas le dire. Il faut deviner."

"Will you forgive me if I guess right? Our great Shakespeare says: 'Love lends a precious seeing to the eye.'"

"That—that's very pretty," said the Princess in French. "I love much your Shakespeare."

Whereupon Paul recognized her admission of the correctness of his conjecture; and so, with the precious vision they had borrowed, they went about tourist-wise to familiar churches and palaces, and everything they saw was lit with exceeding loveliness. And they saw the great pictures of the world, and Paul, with his expert knowledge, pointed out beauties she had not dreamed of hitherto, and told her tales of the painters and discoursed picturesquely on Venetian history, and she marvelled at his insight and learning and thought him the most wonderful man that had ever dropped, ready-made, from heaven. And he, in the flush of his new love, was thrilled by her touch and the low tones of her voice when she plucked him by the sleeve and murmured: "Ah, Paul, regardez-moi ca. It is so beautiful one wants to weep with joy."

They spoke now half in French, half in English, and she no longer protested against his murderous accent, which, however, he strove to improve. Love must have lent its precious hearing too, for she vowed she loved to hear him speak her language.

In the great Council Chamber of the Ducal Palace they looked at the seventy-six portraits of the illustrious succession of Doges—with the one tragic vacant space, the missing portrait of Marino Faliero, the Rienzi of Venice, the man before his time.

"It seizes one's heart, doesn't it?" said the Princess, with her impulsive touch on his sleeve. "All these men were kings—sovereigns of a mighty nation. And how like they are to one another—in this essential quality one would say they were brothers of a great family."

"Why, yes," he cried, scanning the rows of severe and subtle faces. "It's true. Illuminatingly true."

He slid up his wrist quickly so that his hand met hers; he held it. "How swift your perception is! And what is that quality—that quality common to them all—that quality of leadership? Let us try to find it."

Unconsciously he gripped her hand, and she returned his pressure; and they stood, as chance willed it, alone, free from circumambulant tourists, in the vast chamber, vivid with Paul Veronese's colour on wall and ceilings, with Tintoretto and Bassano' with the arrogant splendour of the battles and the pomp and circumstance of victorious armies of the proud and conquering republic, and their eyes were drawn from all this painted and riotous wonder by the long arresting frieze of portraits of serene, masterful and subtle faces.

"The common factor—that's what we want, isn't it?"

"Yes," she breathed.

And as they stood, hand in hand, the unspoken thought vibrating between them, the memory came to him of a day long ago when he had stood with another woman—a girl then—before the photographs in the window of the London Stereoscopic Company in Regent Street, and he had scanned faces of successful men. He laughed—he could not help it—and drew his Princess closer to him. Between the analogous then and the wonderful now, how immense a difference! As he laughed she looked swiftly up into his face.

"I know why you laugh."

"No, my Princess. Impossible."

"Mais oui. Tell me. All these great princes"—she swept her little gloved hand toward the frieze. "What is their common factor?"

Paul, forgetful of his mirth, looked round. "'Indomitable will," said he seriously. "Unconquerable ambition, illimitable faith. They all seem to be saying their creed. 'I believe in myself almighty, and in Venice under my control, and in God who made us both, and in the inferiority of the remnant of the habitable globe.' Or else: 'In the beginning God created Venice. Then He created the rest of the world. Then He created Me. Then He retired and left me to deal with the situation.' Or else: 'I am an earthly Trinity. I am myself. I am Venice. I am God.'"

"It is magnificent!" she cried. "How you understand them! How you understand the true aristocratic spirit! They are all, what you call, leaders of men. I did not expect an analysis so swift

and so true. But, Paul"—her voice sank adorably—"all these men lack something—something that you have. And that is why I thought you laughed."

He smiled down on her. "Do you think I was measuring myself with these men?"

"Naturally. Why should you not?" she asked proudly.

"And what have I got that they lack?"

"Happiness," said the Princess.

Paul was silent for a while, as they moved slowly away to the balcony which overlooks the lagoon and San Giorgio Maggiore glowing warm in the sunshine, and then he said: "Yet most of those men loved passionately in their time, and were loved by beautiful women."

"Their love was a thing of the passions, not of the spirit. You cannot see a woman, that is to say happiness, behind any of their faces."

He whispered: "Can you see a woman behind mine."

"If you look like that," she replied, with a contented little laugh, "the whole world can see it." And so their talk drifted far away from Doges, just as their souls were drifting far from the Golden Calf of the Frank and Loyal Friendship which Sophie the Princess had set up.

How could they help it—and in Venice of all places in the world? If she had determined on maintaining the friendship calm and austere, why in Minerva's name had she bidden him hither? Sophie Zobraska passed for a woman of sense. None knew better than she the perils of moonlit canals and the sensuous splash of water against a gondola, and the sad and dreamy beauty which sets the lonely heart aching for love. Why had she done it? Some such questions must Mademoiselle de Cressy have asked, for the Princess told him that Stephanie had lectured her severely for going about so much in public alone with a beau jeune homme.

"But we don't always want Stephanie with us," she argued, "and she is not sympathetic in Venice. She likes restaurants and people. Besides, she is always with her friends at Danielli's, so if it weren't for you I should be doing nothing all by myself in the lonely palazzo. Forcement we go about together."

Which was all sophistical and nonsensical; and she knew it, for there was a mischievous little gleam in her eye as she spoke. But none the less, shutting her ears to the unsympathetic Stephanie, did she continue to show herself alone in public with the beautiful youth. She had thrown her crown over the windmills for a few happy days; for a few happy days she was feeding her starved nature, drinking in her fill of beauty and colour and the joy of life. And the pair, thus forcibly thrown together, drifted through the narrow canals beneath the old crumbling palaces, side by side, and hand in hand while Giacomo and Felipe, disregarded automata, bent to their oars.

One afternoon, one mellow and memorable afternoon, they were returning from Murano. Not a breath of wind ruffled the lagoon. The islands in their spring verdure slumbered peacefully. Far away the shipping in the bacino lay still like enchanted craft. Only a steamer or two, and here and there the black line of a gondola with its standing, solitary rower, broke the immobility of things. And Venice, russet and rose and grey, brooded in the sunset, a city of dreams. They murmured words of wonder and regret. Instinctively they drew near and their shoulders touched. Their clasp of fingers tightened and their breath came quickly, and for a long time they were silent. Then at last he whispered her name, in the old foolish and inevitable way. And she turned her face to him, and met his eyes and said "Paul," and her lips as she said it seemed to speak a kiss. And all the earth was wrapped in glory too overwhelming for speech.

It was only when they entered the Grand Canal and drew up by the striped posts of the palazzo that she said: "I have those Roman people and the Heatherfields coming to dinner. I wish I hadn't." She sighed. "Would you care to come?"

He smiled into her eyes. "No, my Princess, not to-night. I should do silly things. To-night I will go and talk to the moon. To-morrow, when can I come?"

"Early. As early as you like."

And Paul went away and talked to the moon, and the next morning, his heart tumultuous, presented himself at the palazzo. He was shown into the stiff Italian drawing-room, with its great Venetian glass chandelier, its heavy picture-hung walls, its Empire furniture covered in yellow silk. Presently the door opened and she entered, girlish in blouse and skirt, fresh as the morning. "Bon jour, Paul. I've not had time to put on my hat, but—"

She did not end, for he strode toward her and with a little laugh of triumph took her in his arms and kissed her. And so what had to be came to pass.

CHAPTER XVI

"I LOVE you too much, my Sophie, to be called the Princess Zobraska's husband."

"And I love you too much, dear, to wish to be called anything else than Paul Savelli's wife."

That was their position, perfectly defined, perfectly understood. They had arrived at it after many arguments and kisses and lovers' protestations.

"Such as I am I am," cried Paul. "A waif and stray, an unknown figure coming out of the darkness. I have nothing to give you but my love."

"Are there titles or riches on earth of equal value?"

"But I must give you more. The name Paul Savelli itself must be a title of honour."

"It is becoming that," said the Princess. "And we can wait a little, Paul, can't we? We are so happy like this. Ah!" she sighed. "I have never been so happy in my life."

"Nor I," said Paul.

"And am I really the first?"

"The first. Believe it or not as you like. But it's a fact. I've told you my life's dream. I never sank below it; and that is why perhaps it has come true."

For once the assertion was not the eternal lie. Paul came fresh-hearted to his Princess.

"I wish I were a young girl, Paul."

"You are a star turned woman. The Star of my Destiny in which I always believed. The great things will soon come."

They descended to more commonplace themes. Until the great things came, what should be their mutual attitude before Society?

"Until I can claim you, let it be our dear and beautiful secret," said Paul. "I would not have it vulgarized by the chattering world for anything in life."

Then Paul proved himself to be a proud and delicate lover, and when London with its season and its duties and its pleasures absorbed them, he had his reward. For it was sweet to see her in great assemblies, shining like a queen and like a queen surrounded by homage, and to know that he alone of mortals was enthroned in her heart. It was sweet to meet her laughing glance, dear fellow-conspirator. It was sweet every morning and night to have the intimate little talk through the telephone. And it was sweetest of all to snatch a precious hour with her alone. Of such vain and foolish things is made all that is most beautiful in life.

He took his dearest lady—though Miss Winwood, now disclaimed the title—into his confidence. So did the Princess. It was very comforting to range Miss Winwood on their side; and to feel themselves in close touch with her wisdom and sympathy. And her sympathy manifested itself in practical ways—those of the woman confidante of every love affair since the world began. Why should the Princess Zobraska not interest herself in some of the philanthropic schemes of which the house in Portland Place was the headquarters? There was one, a Forlorn Widows' Fund, the presidency of which she would be willing to resign in favour of the Princess. The work was trivial: it consisted chiefly in consultation with Mr. Savelli and in signing letters. The Princess threw her arms round her neck, laughing and blushing and calling her delicieuse. You see it was obvious that Mr. Savelli could not be consulted in his official capacity or official letters signed elsewhere than in official precincts.

"I'll do what I can for the pair of you," said Miss Winwood to Paul. "But it's the most delightfully mad and impossible thing I've ever put my hand to."

Accepting the fact of their romance, however, she could not but approve Paul's attitude. It was the proud attitude of the boy who nearly six years ago was going, without a word, penniless and debonair out of her house. All the woman in her glowed over him.

"I'm not going to be called an adventurer," he had declared. "I shall not submit Sophie to the indignity of trailing a despised husband after her. I'm not going to use her rank and wealth as a stepping-stone to my ambitions. Let me first attain an unassailable position. I shall have owed it to you, to myself, to anybody you like—but not to my marriage. I shall be somebody. The rest won't matter. The marriage will then be a romantic affair, and romantic affairs are not unpopular dans le monde ou l'on s'ennuie."

This declaration was all very well; the former part all very noble, the latter exhibiting a knowledge of the world rather shrewd for one so young. But when would he be able to attain his unassailable position? Some years hence. Would Sophie Zobraska, who was only a few months

younger than he, be content to sacrifice these splendid and irretrievable years of her youth? Ursula Winwood looked into the immediate future, and did not see it rosy. The first step toward an unassailable position was flight from the nest. This presupposed an income. If the party had been in power it would not have been difficult to find him a post. She worried herself exceedingly, for in her sweet and unreprehensible way she was more than ever in love with Paul. Meeting Frank Ayres one night at a large reception, she sought his advice.

"Do you mind a wrench?" he asked. "No? Well, then—you and Colonel Winwood send him about his business and get another secretary. Let Savelli give all his time to his Young England League. Making him mug up material for Winwood's speeches and write letters to constituents about football clubs is using a razor to cut butter. His League's the thing. It can surely afford to pay him a decent salary. If it can't I'll see to a guarantee."

"The last thing we see, my dear Frank," she said after she had thanked him, "is that which is right under our noses."

The next day she went to Paul full of the scheme. Had he ever thought of it? He took her hands and smiled in his gay, irresistible way. "Of course, dearest lady," he said frankly. "But I would have cut out my tongue sooner than suggest it."

"I know that, my dear boy."

"And yet," said he, "I can't bear the idea of tearing myself away from you. It seems like black ingratitude."

"It isn't. You forget that James and I have our little ambitions too—the ambition of a master for a favourite pupil. If you were a failure we should both be bitterly disappointed. Don't you see? And as for leaving us—why need you? We should miss you horribly. You've never been quite our paid servant. And now you're something like our son." Tears started in the sweet lady's clear eyes. "Even if you did go to your own chambers, I shouldn't let our new secretary have this room"—they were in what the household called "the office"—really Paul's luxuriously furnished private sitting room, which contained his own little treasures of books and pictures and bits of china and glass accumulated during the six years of easeful life—"He will have the print room, which nobody uses from one year's end to another, and which is far more convenient for the street door. And the same at Drane's Court. So when you no longer work for us, my dear boy, our home will be yours, as long as you're content to stay, just because we love you."

Her hand was on his shoulder and his head was bent. "God grant," said he, "that I may be worthy of your love."

He looked up and met her eyes. Her hand was still on his shoulder. Then very simply he bent down and kissed her on the cheek.

He told his Princess all about it. She listened with dewy eyes. "Ah, Paul," she said. "That 'precious seeing' of love—I never had it till you came. I was blind. I never knew that there were such beautiful souls as Ursula Winwood in the world."

"Dear, how I love you for saying that!" cried Paul.

"But it's true."

"That is why," said he.

So the happiest young man in London worked and danced through the season, knowing that the day of emancipation was at hand. His transference from the Winwoods to the League was fixed for October 1. He made great plans for an extension of the League's, activities, dreamed of a palace for headquarters with the banner of St. George flying proudly over it, an object-lesson for the nation. One day in July while he was waiting for Colonel Winwood in the lobby of the House of Commons, Frank Ayres stopped in the middle of a busy rush and shook hands.

"Been down to Hickney Heath again? I would if I were you. Rouse 'em up."

As the words of a Chief Whip are apt to be significant, Paul closeted himself with the President of the Hickney Heath Lodge, who called the Secretary of the local Conservative Association to the interview. The result was that Paul was invited to speak at an anti-Budget meeting convened by the Association. He spoke, and repeated his success. The Conservative newspapers the next morning gave a resume of his speech. His Sophie, coming to sign letters in her presidential capacity, brought him the cuttings, a proceeding which he thought adorable. The season ended triumphantly.

For a while he lost his Princess. She went to Cowes, then to stay with French relations in a chateau in the Dordogne. Paul went off yachting with the Chudleys and returned for the shooting to Drane's Court. In the middle of September the Winwoods' new secretary arrived and received instruction in his duties. Then came the Princess to Morebury Park. "Dearest," she said, in his arms, "I never want to leave you again. France is no longer France for me since I have England in my heart."

"You remember that? My wonderful Princess!"

He found her more woman, more expansive, more bewitchingly caressing. Absence had but brought her nearer. When she laid her head on his shoulder and murmured in the deep and subtle tones of her own language: "My Paul, it seems such a waste of time to be apart," it took all his pride and will to withstand the maddening temptation. He vowed that the time would soon come when he could claim her, and went away in feverish search for worlds to conquer.

Then came October and London once more.

Paul was dressing for dinner one evening when a reply-paid telegram was brought to him.

"If selected by local committee will you stand for Hickney Heath? Ayres."

He sat on his bed, white and trembling, and stared at the simple question. The man-servant stood imperturbable, silver tray in hand. Seeing the reply-paid form, he waited for a few moments.

"Is there an answer, sir?"

Paul nodded, asked for a pencil, and with a shaky hand wrote the reply. "Yes," was all he said.

Then with reaction came the thrill of mighty exultation, and, throwing on his clothes, he rushed to the telephone in his sitting room. Who first to hear the wondrous news but his Princess? That there was a vacancy in Hickney Heath he knew, as all Great Britain knew; for Ponting, the Radical Member, had died suddenly the day before. But it had never entered his head that he could be chosen as a candidate.

"Mais j'y ai bien pense, moi," came the voice through the telephone. "Why did Lord Francis tell you to go to Hickney Heath last July?"

How a woman leaps at things! With all his ambition, his astuteness, his political intuition, he had not seen the opportunity. But it had come. Verily the stars in their courses were fighting for him. Other names, he was aware, were before the Committee of the Local Association, perhaps a great name suggested by the Central Unionist Organization; there was also that of the former Tory member, who, smarting under defeat at the General Election, had taken but a lukewarm interest in the constituency and was now wandering in the Far East. But Paul, confident in his destiny, did not doubt that he would be selected. And then, within the next fortnight—for bye-elections during a Parliamentary session are matters of sweeping swiftness—would come the great battle, the great decisive battle of his life, and he would win. He must win. His kingdom was at stake—the dream kingdom of his life into which he would enter with his loved and won Princess on his arm. He poured splendid foolishness through the telephone into an enraptured ear.

The lack of a sense of proportion is a charge often brought against women; but how often do men (as they should) thank God for it? Here was Sophie Zobraska, reared from childhood in the atmosphere of great affairs, mixing daily with folk who guided the destiny of nations, having two years before refused in marriage one of those who held the peace of Europe in his hands, moved to tense excitement of heart and brain and soul by the news that an obscure young man might possibly be chosen to contest a London Borough for election to the British Parliament, and thrillingly convinced that now was imminent the great momentous crisis in the history of mankind.

With a lack of the same sense of proportion, equal in kind, though perhaps not so passionate in degree, did Miss Winwood receive the world-shaking tidings. She wept, and, thinking Paul a phoenix, called Frank Ayres an angel. Colonel Winwood tugged his long, drooping moustache and said very little; but he committed the astounding indiscretion of allowing his glass to be filled with champagne; whereupon he lifted it, and said, "Here's luck, my dear boy," and somewhat recklessly gulped down the gout-compelling liquid. And after dinner, when Miss Winwood had left them together, he lighted a long Corona instead of his usual stumpy Bock, and discussed with Paul electioneering ways and means.

For the next day or two Paul lived in a whirl of telephones, telegrams, letters, scurryings across London, interviews, brain-racking questionings and reiterated declarations of political creed. But his selection was a foregone conclusion. His youth, his absurd beauty, his fire and eloquence, his unswerving definiteness of aim, his magic that had inspired so many with a belief in him and had made him the Fortunate Youth, captivated the imagination of the essentially unimaginative. Before a committee of wits and poets, Paul perhaps would not have had a dog's chance. But he appealed to the hard-headed merchants and professional men who chose him very much as the hero of melodrama appeals to a pit and gallery audience. He symbolized to them hope and force and predestined triumph. One or two at first sniffed suspiciously at his lofty ideals; but as there was no mistaking his political soundness, they let the ideals pass, as a natural and evanescent aroma.

So, in his thirtieth year, Paul was nominated as Unionist candidate for the Borough of Hickney Heath, and he saw himself on the actual threshold of the great things to which he was

born. He wrote a little note to Jane telling her the news. He also wrote to Barney Bill: "You dear old Tory—did you ever dream that ragamuffin little Paul was going to represent you in Parliament? Get out the dear old 'bus and paint it blue, with 'Paul Savelli forever' in gold letters, and, instead of chairs and mats, hang it with literature, telling what a wonderful fellow P. S. is. And go through the streets of Hickney Heath with it, and say if you like: 'I knew him when' he was a nipper—that high.' And if you like to be mysterious and romantic you can say: 'I, Barney Bill, gave him his first chance,' as you did, my dear old friend, and Paul's not the man to forget it. Oh, Barney, it's too wonderful"—his heart went out to the old man. "If I get in I will tell you something that will knock you flat. It will be the realization of all the silly rubbish I talked in the old brickfield at Bludston. But, dear old friend, it was you and the open road that first set me on the patriotic lay, and there's not a voter in Hickney Heath who can vote as you can—for his own private and particular trained candidate."

Jane, for reasons unconjectured, did not reply. But from Barney Bill, who, it must be remembered, had leanings toward literature, he received a postcard with the following inscription: "Paul, Hif I can help you konker the Beastes of Effesus I will. Bill."

And then began the furious existence of an electioneering campaign. His side had a clear start of the Radicals, who found some hitch in the choice of their candidate. The Young England League leaped into practical enthusiasm over their champion. Seldom has young candidate had so glad a welcome. And behind him stood his Sophie, an inspiring goddess.

It so happened that for a date a few days hence had been fixed the Annual General Meeting of the Forlorn Widows' Fund, when Report and Balance Sheet were presented to the society. The control of this organization Paul had not allowed to pass into the alien hands of Townsend, the Winwoods' new secretary. Had not his Princess, for the most delicious reasons in the world, been made President? He scorned Ursula Winwood's suggestion that for this year he would allow Townsend to manage affairs. "What!" cried he, "leave my Princess in the lurch on her first appearance? Never!" By telephone he arranged an hour for the next day, when they could all consult together over this important matter.

"But, my dear boy," said Miss Winwood, "your time is not your own. Suppose you're detained at Hickney Heath?"

"The Conqueror," he cried, with a gay laugh, "belongs to the Detainers—not the Detained."

She looked at him out of her clear eyes, and shook an indulgent head.

"I know," said he, meeting her glance shrewdly. "He has got to use his detaining faculty with discretion. I've made a study of the little ways of conquerors. Ali! Dearest lady!" he burst out suddenly, in his impetuous way, "I'm talking nonsense; but I'm so uncannily happy!"

"It does me good to look at you," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

PAUL leaned back in his leather writing chair, smoking a cigarette and focussing the electioneering situation. Beside a sheet of foolscap on which he had been jotting down notes lay in neat piles the typewritten Report of the Forlorn Widows' Fund, the account book and the banker's pass book. He had sat up till three o'clock in the morning preparing for his Princess. Nothing now remained but the formal "examined and found correct" report of the auditors. For the moment the Forlorn Widows stood leagues away from Paul's thoughts. He had passed a strenuous day at Hickney Heath, lunching in the committee room on sandwiches and whisky and soda obtained from the nearest tavern, talking, inventing, dictating, writing, playing upon dull minds the flashes of his organizing genius. His committee was held up for the while by a dark rift in the Radical camp. They had not yet chosen their man. Nothing was known, save that a certain John Questerhayes, K. C., an eminent Chancery barrister, who had of late made himself conspicuous in the constituency, had been turned down on the ground that he was not sufficiently progressive. Now for comfort to the Radical the term "Progressive" licks the blessed word Mesopotamia into a cocked hat. Under the Progressive's sad-coloured cloak he need not wear the red tie of the socialist. Apparently Mr. Questerhayes objected to the sad-coloured cloak, the mantle of Elijah, M. P., the late member for Hickney Heath. "Wanted: an Elisha," seemed to be the cry of the Radical Committee.

Paul leaned back, his elbows on the arms of his chair, his finger tips together, a cigarette between his lips, lost in thought. The early November twilight deepened in the room. He was to address a meeting that night. In order to get ready for his speech he had not allowed himself to be detained, and had come home early. His speech had been prepared; but the Radical delay was a new factor of which he might take triumphant advantage. Hence the pencil notes on the sheet of foolscap, before him.

A man-servant came in, turned on the electric light, pulled the curtains together and saw to the fire.

"Tea's in the drawing-room, sir."

"Bring me some here in a breakfast cup—nothing to eat," said Paul.

Even his dearest lady could not help him in his meditated attack on the enemy whom the Lord was delivering into his hands.

The man-servant went away. Presently Paul heard him reenter the room; the door was at his back. He threw out an impatient hand behind him. "Put it down anywhere, Wilton, I'll have it when I want it."

"I beg pardon, sir," said the man, coming forward, "but it's not the tea. There's a gentleman and a lady and another person would like to see you. I said that you were busy, sir, but—"

He put the silver salver, with its card, in front of Paul. Printed on the card was, "Mr. Silas Finn." In pencil was written: "Miss Seddon, Mr. William Simmons."

Paul looked at the card in some bewilderment. What in the name of politics or friendship were they doing in Portland Place? Not to receive them, however, was unthinkable.

"Show them in," said he.

Silas Finn, Jane and Barney Bill! It was odd. He laughed and took out his watch. Yes, he could easily give them half an hour or so. But why had they come? He had found time to call once at the house in Hickney Heath since his return to town, and then he had seen Jane and Silas Finn together and they had talked, as far as he could remember, of the Disestablishment of the Anglican Church and the elevating influence of landscape painting on the human soul. Why had they come? It could not be to offer their services during the election, for Silas Finn in politics was a fanatical enemy. The visit stirred a lively curiosity.

They entered: Mr. Finn in his usual black with many-coloured tie and diamond ring, looking more mournfully grave than ever; Jane wearing an expression half of anxiety and half of defiance; Barney Bill, very uncomfortable in his well-preserved best suit, very restless and nervous. They gave the impression of a deputation coming to announce the death of a near relative. Paul received them cordially. But why in the world, thought he, were they all so solemn? He pushed forward chairs.

"I got your postcard, Bill. Thanks so much for it."

Bill grunted and embraced his hard felt hat.

"I ought to have written to you," said Jane—"but—-"

"She felt restrained by her duty towards me," said Mr. Finn. "I hope you did not think it was discourteous on her part."

"My dear sir," Paul laughed, seating himself in his writing chair, which he twisted away from the table, "Jane and I are too old friends for that. In her heart I know she wishes me luck. And I hope you do too, Mr. Finn," he added pleasantly—"although I know you're on the other side."

"I'm afraid my principles will not allow me to wish you luck in this election, Mr. Savelli."

"Well, well," said Paul. "It doesn't matter. If you vote against me I'll not bear malice."

"I am not going to vote against you, Mr. Savelli," said Mr. Finn, looking at him with melancholy eyes. "I am going to stand against you."

Paul sprang forward in his chair. Here was fantastic news indeed! "Stand against me? You? You're the Radical candidate?"

"Yes."

Paul laughed boyishly. "Why, it's capital! I'm awfully glad."

"I was asked this morning," said Mr. Finn gravely. "I prayed God for guidance. He answered, and I felt it my duty to come to you at once, with our two friends."

Barney Bill cocked his head on one side. "I did my best to persuade him not to, sonny."

"But why shouldn't he?" cried Paul courteously—though why he should puzzled him exceedingly. "It's very good of you, Mr. Finn. I'm sure your side," he went on, "could not have chosen a better man. You're well known in the constituency—I am jolly lucky to have a man like you as an opponent."

"Mr. Savelli," said Mr. Finn, "it was precisely so that we should not be opponents that I have taken this unusual step."

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

"Mr. Finn wants you to retire in favour of some other Conservative candidate," said Jane calmly.

"Retire? I retire?"

Paul looked at her, then at Barney Bill, who nodded his white head, then at Mr. Finn, whose deep eyes met his with a curious tragical mournfulness. The proposal took his breath away. It was crazily preposterous. But for their long faces he would have burst into laughter. "Why on earth do you want me to retire?" he asked good-humouredly.

"I will tell you," said Mr. Finn. "Because you will have God against you."

Paul saw a gleam of light in the dark mystery of the visit. "You may believe it, Mr. Finn, but I don't. I believe that my war cry, 'God for England, Savelli and Saint George,' is quite as acceptable to, the Almighty as yours."

Mr. Finn stretched out two hands in earnest deprecation. "Forgive me if I say it; but you don't know what you're talking about. God has not revealed Himself to you. He has to me. When my fellow-citizens asked me to stand as the Liberal candidate, I thought it was because they knew me to be an upright man, who had worked hard on their council, an active apostle in the cause of religion, temperance and the suppression of vice. I thought I had merely deserved well in their opinion. When I fell on my knees and prayed the glory of the Lord spread about me and I knew that they had been divinely inspired. It was revealed to me that this was a Divine Call to represent the Truth in the Parliament of the nation."

"I remember your saying, when I first had the pleasure of meeting you," Paul remarked, with unwonted dryness, "that the Kingdom of Heaven was not adequately represented in the House of Commons."

"I have not changed my opinion, Mr Savelli. The hand of God has guided my business. The hand of God is placing me in the House of Commons to work His will. You cannot oppose God's purpose, Paul Savelli—and that is why I beg you not to stand against me."

"You see, he likes yer," interjected Barney Bill, with anxiety in his glittering eyes. "That's why he's a-doing of it. He says to hisself, says he, 'ere's a young chap what I likes with his first great chance in front of him, with the eyes of the country sot on him—now if I comes in and smashes him, as I can't help myself from doing, it'll be all u-p with that young chap's glorious career. But if I warns him in time, then he can retire—find an honourable retreat—that's what he wants yer to have—an honourable retreat. Isn't that it, Silas?"

"Those are the feelings by which I am actuated," said Mr. Finn.

Paul stretched himself out in his chair, his ankles crossed, and surveyed his guests. "What do you think of it, Jane?" said he, not without a touch of irony.

She had been looking into the fire, her face in profile. Addressed, she turned. "Mr. Finn has your interests very deep at heart," she answered tonelessly.

Paul jumped to his feet and laughed his fresh laugh. It was all so comic, so incredible, so mad. Yet none of them appeared to see any humour in the situation. There sat Jane and Barney Bill cowering under the influence of their crazy fishmongering apostle; and there, regarding him with a world of appeal in his sorrowful eyes, sat the apostle himself, bolt upright in his chair, an odd figure with his streaked black and white hair, ascetic face and Methodistico-Tattersall raiment. And they all seemed to expect him to obey this quaint person's fanatical whimsy.

"It's very kind indeed of you, Mr. Finn, to consult my interests in this manner," said he. "And I'm most indebted to you for your consideration. But, as I said before, I've as much reason for believing God to be on my side as you have. And I honestly believe I'm going to win this election. So I certainly won't withdraw."

"I implore you to do so. I will go on my knees and beseech you," said Mr. Finn, with hands clasped in front of him.

Paul looked round. "I'm afraid, Bill," said he, "that this is getting rather painful."

"It is painful. It's more than painful. It's horrible! It's ghastly!" cried Mr. Finn, in sudden shrill crescendo, leaping to his feet. In an instant the man's demeanour had changed. The mournful apostle had become a wild, vibrating creature with flashing eyes and fingers.

"Easy, now, Silas. Whoa! Steady!" said Barney Bill.

Silas Finn advanced on Paul and clapped his hands on his shoulders and shouted hoarsely: "For the love of God—don't thwart me in this. You can't thwart me. You daren't thwart me. You daren't thwart God."

Paul disengaged himself impatiently. The humour had passed from the situation. The man was a lunatic, a religious maniac. Again he addressed Barney Bill. "As I can't convince Mr. Finn of the absurdity of his request, I must ask you to do so for me."

"Young man," cried Silas, quivering with passion, "do not speak to God's appointed in your vanity and your arrogance. You—you—of all human beings—"

Both Jane and Barney Bill closed round him. Jane clutched his arm. "Come away. Do come away."

"Steady now, Silas," implored Barney Bill. "You see it's no use. I told you so. Come along."

"Leave me alone," shouted Finn, casting them off. "What have I to do with you? It is that young man there who defies God and me."

"Mr. Finn," said Paul, very erect, "if I have hurt your feelings I am sorry. But I fight this election. That's final. The choice no longer rests with me. I'm the instrument of my party. I desire to be courteous in every way, but you must see that it would be useless to prolong this discussion." And he moved to the door.

"Come away now, for Heaven's sake. Can't you realize it's no good?" said Jane, white to the lips.

Silas Finn again cast her off and railed and raved at her. "I will not go away," he cried in wild passion. "I will not allow my own son to raise an impious hand against the Almighty."

"Lor' lumme!" gasped Barney Bill, dropping his hat. "He's done it."

There was a silence. Silas Finn stood shaking in the middle of the room, the sweat streaming down his forehead.

Paul turned at the door and walked slowly up to him. "Your son? What do you mean?"

Jane, with wringing hands and tense, uplifted face, said in a queer cracked voice: "He promised us not to speak. He has broken his promise."

"You broke your sacred word," said Barney Bill.

The man's face grew haggard. His passion left him as suddenly as it had seized him. He collapsed, a piteous wreck, looked wide of the three, and threw out his hands helplessly. "I broke my promise. May God forgive me!"

"That's neither here nor there," said Paul, standing over him. "You must answer my question. What do you mean?"

Barney Bill limped a step or two toward him and cleared his throat. "He's quite correct, sonny. Silas Kegworthy's your father right enough."

"Kegworthy?"

"Yes. Changed his name for business—and other reasons."

"He?" said Paul, half dazed for the moment and pointing at Silas Finn. "His name is Kegworthy and he is my father?"

"Yes, sonny. 'Tain't my fault, or Jane's. He took his Bible oath he wouldn't tell yer. We was afraid, so we come with him."

"Then?" queried Paul, jerking a thumb toward Lancashire.

"Polly Kegworthy? Yes. She was yer mother."

Paul set his teeth and drew a deep breath—not of air, but of a million sword points, Jane watched him out of frightened eyes. She alone, with her all but life-long knowledge of him, and with her woman's intuition, realized the death-blow that he had received. And when she saw him take it unflinching and stand proud and stern, her heart leaped toward him, though she knew that the woman in the great chased silver photograph frame on the mantelpiece, the great and radiant lady, the high and mighty and beautiful and unapproachable Princess, was the woman he loved. Paul touched his father on the wrist, and motioned to a chair.

"Please sit down. You too, please,"—he waved a hand, and himself resumed his seat in his writing chair. He turned it so that he could rest his elbow on his table and his forehead in his palm. "You claim to be my father," said he. "Barney Bill, in whom I have implicit confidence, confirms it. He says that Mrs. Button is my mother—"

"She has been dead these six years," said Barney Bill.

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Paul.

"I didn't think it would interest yer, sonny," replied Barney Bill, in great distress. "Yer see, we conspirated together for yer never to know nothing at all about all this. Anyway, she's dead and won't worry yer any more."

"She was a bad mother to me. She is a memory of terror. I don't pretend to be grieved," said Paul; "any more than I pretend to be overcome by filial emotion at the present moment. But, if you are my father, I should be glad to know—in fact, I think I'm entitled to know—why you've taken thirty years to reveal yourself, and why"—a sudden fury swept him—"why you've come now to play hell with my life."

"It is the will of God," said Silas Finn, in deep dejection.

Paul snapped three or four fingers. "Bah!" he cried. "Talk sense. Talk facts. Leave God out of the question for a while. It's blasphemy to connect Him with a sordid business like this. Tell me about myself—my parentage—let me know where I am."

"You're with three people as loves yer, sonny," said Barney Bill. "What passes in this room will never be known to another soul on earth."

"That I swear," said Silas Finn.

"You can publish it broadcast in every newspaper in England," said Paul. "I'm making no bargains. Good God! I'm asking for nothing but the truth. What use I make of it is my affair. You can do—the three of you—what you like. Let the world know. It doesn't matter. It's I that matter—my life and my conscience and my soul that matter."

"Don't be too hard upon me," Silas besought him very humbly.

"Tell me about myself," said Paul.

Silas Finn wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and covered his eyes with his hand. "That can only mean telling you about myself," he said. "It's raking up a past which I had hoped, with God's help, to bury. But I have sinned to-night, and it is my punishment to tell you. And you have a right to know. My father was a porter in Covent Garden Market. My mother—I've already mentioned—"

"Yes—the Sicilian and the barrel organ—I remember," said Paul, with a shiver.

"I had a hard boyhood. But I rose a little above my class. I educated myself more or less. At last I became assistant in a fishmonger's shop. Our friend Simmons here and I were boys together. We fell in love with the same girl. I married her. Not long afterward she gave way to drink. I found that in all kinds of ways I had mistaken her character. I can't describe your own mother to you. She had a violent temper. So had I. My life was a hell upon earth. One day she goaded me beyond my endurance and I struck at her with a knife. I meant at the bloodred instant to kill her. But I didn't. I nearly killed her. I went to prison for three years. When I came out she had vanished, taking you with her. In prison I found the Grace of God and I vowed it should be my guide through life. As soon as I was free from police supervision I changed my name—I believe it's a good old Devonshire name; my father came from there—the prison taint hung about it. Then, when I found I could extend a miserable little business I had got together, I changed it again to suit my trade. That's about all."

There was a spell of dead silence. The shrunken man, stricken with a sense of his sin of oath-breaking, had Spoken without change of attitude, his hand over his eyes. Paul, too, sat motionless, and neither Jane nor Barney Bill spoke. Presently Silas Finn continued:

"For many years I tried to find my wife and son—but it was not God's will. I have lived with the stain of murder on my soul"—his voice sank—"and it has never been washed away. Perhaps it will be in God's good time.... And I had condemned my son to a horrible existence—for I knew my wife was not capable of bringing you up in the way of clean living. I was right. Simmons has since told me—and I was crushed beneath the burden of my sins."

After a pause he raised a drawn face and went on to tell of his meeting, the year before, with Barney Bill, of whom he had lost track when the prison doors had closed behind him. It had been in one of his Fish Palaces where Bill was eating. They recognized each other. Barney Bill told his tale: how he had run across Polly Kegworthy after a dozen years' wandering; how, for love of his old friend, he had taken Paul, child of astonishing promise, away from Bludston—

"Do you remember, sonny, when I left you alone that night and went to the other side of the brickfield? It was to think it out," said Bill. "To think out my duty as a man."

Paul nodded. He was listening, with death in his heart. The whole fantastic substructure of his life had been suddenly kicked away, and his life was an inchoate ruin. Gone was the glamour of romance in which since the day of the cornelian heart he had had his essential being. Up to an hour ago he had never doubted his mysterious birth. No real mother could have pursued an innocent child with Polly Kegworthy's implacable hatred. His passionate repudiation of her had been a cardinal article of his faith. On the other hand, the prince and princess theory he had long ago consigned to the limbo of childish things; but the romance of his birth, the romance of his

high destiny, remained a vital part of his spiritual equipment. His looks, his talents, his temperament, his instincts, his dreams had been irrefutable confirmations. His mere honesty, his mere integrity, had been based on this fervent and unshakable creed. And now it had gone. No more romance. No more glamour. No more Vision Splendid now faded into the light of common and sordid day. Outwardly listening, his gay, mobile face turned to iron, he lived in a molten intensity of thought, his acute brain swiftly coordinating the ironical scraps of history. He was the son of Polly Kegworthy. So far he was unclean; but hitherto her blood had not manifested itself in him. He was the son of this violent and pathetic fanatic, this ex-convict; he had his eyes, his refined face; perhaps he inherited from him the artistic temperament—he recalled grimly the daubs on the man's walls, and his purblind gropings toward artistic self-expression; and all this—the Southern handsomeness, and Southern love of colour, had come from his Sicilian grandmother, the nameless drab, with bright yellow handkerchief over swarthy brows, turning the handle of a barrel organ in the London streets. Instinct had been right in its promptings to assume an Italian name; but the irony of it was of the quality that makes for humour in hell. And his very Christian name—Paul—the exotic name which Polly Kegworthy would not have given to a brat of hers—was but a natural one for a Silas to give his son, a Silas born of generations of evangelical peasants. His eyes rested on the photograph of his Princess. She, first of all, was gone with the Vision. An adventurer he had possibly been; but an adventurer of romance, carried high by his splendid faith, and regarding his marriage with the Princess but as a crowning of his romantic destiny. But now he beheld himself only as a base-born impostor. His Princess was gone from his life. Death was in his heart.

He saw his familiar, luxurious room as in a dream, and Jane, anxious-eyed, looking into the fire, and Barney Bill a little way off, clutching his hard felt hat against his body; but his eyes were fixed on the strange, many-passioned, unbalanced man who claimed to be—nay, who was—his father.

"When I first met you that night my heart went out to you," he was saying. "It overflowed in thankfulness to God that He had delivered you out of the power of the Dog, and in His inscrutable mercy had condoned that part of my sin as a father and had set you in high places."

With the fringe of his brain Paul recognized, for the first time, how he brought into ordinary talk the habits of speech acquired in addressing a Free Zionist congregation.

"It was only the self-restraint," Silas continued, "taught me by bitter years of agony and a message from God that it was part of my punishment not to acknowledge you as my son—"

"And what I told you, and what Jane told you about him," said Barney Bill. "Remember that, Silas."

"I remember it—it was these influences that kept me silent. But we were drawn together, Paul." He bent forward in his chair. "You liked me. In spite of all our differences of caste and creed—you liked me."

"Yes, I was drawn to you," said Paul, and a strange, unknown note in his voice caused Jane to glance at him swiftly. "You seemed to be a man of many sorrows and deep enthusiasms—and I admit I was in close sympathy with you." He paused, not moving from his rigid attitude, and then went on: "What you have told me of your sufferings—and I know, with awful knowledge, the woman who was my mother—has made me sympathize with you all the more. But to express that sympathy in any way you must give me time. I said you had played hell with my life. It's true. One of these days I may be able to explain. Not now. There's no time. We're caught up in the wheels of an inexorable political machine. I address my party in the constituency to-night." It was a cold intelligence that spoke, and once more Jane flashed a half-frightened glance at him. "What I shall say to them, in view of all this, I don't quite know. I must have half an hour to think."

"I know I oughtn't to interfere, Paul," said Jane, "but you mustn't blame Mr. Finn too much. Although he differs from you in politics and so on, he loves you and is proud of you—as we all are—and looks forward to your great career—I know it only too well. And now he has this deep conviction that he has a call from on High to ruin your career at the very beginning. Do understand, Paul, that he feels himself in a very terrible position."

"I do," said Mr. Finn. "God knows that if it weren't for His command, I should myself withdraw."

"I appreciate your position, perfectly," replied Paul, "but that doesn't relieve me of my responsibilities."

Silas Finn rose and locked the fingers of both hands together and stood before Paul, with appealing eyes. "My son, after what I have said, you are not going to stand against me?"

Paul rose too. A sudden craze of passion swept him. "My country has been my country for thirty years. You have been my father for five minutes. I stand by my country."

Silas Finn turned away and waved a haphazard hand. "And I must stand by my God."

"Very well. That brings us to our original argument. 'Political foes. Private friends.'"

Silas turned again and looked into the young man's eyes. "But father and son, Paul."

"All the more honourable. There'll be no mud-throwing. The cleanest election of the century."

The elder man again covered his face with both hands, and his black and white streaked hair fell over his fingers and the great diamond in his ring flashed oddly, and he rocked his head for a while to and fro.

"I had a call," he wailed. "I had a call. I had a call from God. It was clear. It was absolute. But you don't understand these things. His will must prevail. It was terrible to think of crushing your career—my only son's career. I brought these two friends to help me persuade you not to oppose me. I did my best, Paul. I promised them not to resort to the last argument. But flesh is weak. For the first time since—you know—the knife—your mother—I lost self-control. I shall have to answer for it to my God—" He stretched out his arms and looked haggardly at Paul. "But it is God's will. It is God's will that I should voice His message to the Empire. Paul, Paul, my beloved son—you cannot flout Almighty God."

"Your God doesn't happen to be my God," said Paul, once more suspicious—and now hideously so—of religious mania. "And possibly the real God is somebody else's God altogether. Anyway, England's the only God I've got left, and I'm going to fight for her."

The door opened and Wilton, the man-servant, appeared. He looked round. "I beg your pardon, sir."

Paul crossed the room. "What is it?"

"Her Highness, sir," he said in his well-trained, low voice, "and the Colonel and Miss Winwood. I told them you were engaged. But they've been waiting for over half-an-hour, sir."

Paul drew himself up. "Why did you not tell me before? Her Highness is not to be kept waiting. Present my respectful compliments to Her Highness, and ask her and Colonel and Miss Winwood to have the kindness to come upstairs."

"We had better go," cried Jane in sudden fear.

"No," said he. "I want you all to stay."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN the tense silence of the few moments of waiting Paul passed from the boy to whom the earth had been a fairyland to the man grappling with great realities. In those few moments he lived through his past life and faced an adumbration of the future.

The door was thrown open and the Princess appeared, smiling, happy, a black ostrich feather in her hat and a sable stole hanging loose from her shoulders; a great and radiant lady. Behind her came the Colonel and Ursula Winwood. Paul bent over the Princess's, outstretched hand.

"A thousand pardons for keeping you waiting. I did not know you had come. I was engaged with my friends. May I have the honour of presenting them? Princess, this is Mr. Silas Finn, the managing director of Fish Palaces Limited. These are two very dear friends, Miss Seddon—Mr. Simmons. Miss Winwood—Colonel Winwood, may I?"

He waved an introductory hand. The Princess: bowed; then, struck by their unsmiling faces and by Paul's strange manner, turned to him quickly.

"'Qu'est ce qu'il y a?"

"Je vais vous le dire."

He pushed a chair. She sat down. Ursula Winwood sat in Paul's writing chair. The others remained standing.

"Mr. Finn called to inform me that he has been adopted as the Liberal candidate for Hickney Heath."' "My felicitations," said the Princess.

Silas bowed to her gravely and addressed Colonel Winwood.

"We have been, sir—Mr. Savelli and I—for some time on terms of personal friendship in the constituency."

"I see, I see," replied the Colonel, though he was somewhat puzzled. "Very polite and friendly, I'm sure."

"Mr. Finn also urges me to withdraw my candidature," said Paul.

The Princess gave a little incredulous laugh. Ursula Winwood rose and, with a quick protective step, drew nearer Paul. Colonel Winwood frowned.

"Withdraw? In Heaven's name why?"

Silas Finn tugged at his black-and-white-streaked beard and looked at his son.

"Need we go into it again? There are religious reasons, which perhaps, Madam"—Silas addressed the Princess—"you might misunderstand. Mr. Savelli possibly thinks I am a fanatic. I can't help it. I have warned him. That is enough. Good-bye, Mr. Savelli."

He held out his hand; but Paul did not take it. "You forget, Mr. Finn, that I asked you to stay." He clutched the sides of his jacket till his knuckles grew white, and he set his teeth. "Mr. Finn has another reason for wishing me not to oppose him—"

"That reason you need never give," cried Silas in a loud voice, and starting forward. "You know that I make no claims whatsoever."

"I know that," said Paul, coldly; "but I am going to give it all the same." He paused, held up his hand and looked at the Princess. "Mr. Silas Finn happens to be my father."

"Good God!" gasped the Colonel, after a flash of silence.

The Princess caught a quick breath and sat erect in her chair.

"Votre Pere, Paul?"

"Yes, Princess. Until half an hour ago I did not know it. Never in my life did I know that I had a father living. My friends there can bear witness that what I say is true."

"But, Paul dear," said Miss Winwood, laying her kind fingers on his arm and searching his face, "you told us that your parents were dead and that they were Italians."

"I lied," replied Paul calmly. "But I honestly believed the woman who was my mother not to be my mother, and I had never heard of my father. I had to account for myself to you. Your delicacy, Miss Winwood, enabled me to invent as little as possible."

"But your name—Savelli?"

"I took it when I went on the stage—I had a few years' obscure and unsuccessful struggle. You will remember I came to you starving and penniless."

The Princess grew white and her delicate nostrils quivered.

"Et monsieur votre pere—" she checked herself. "And your father, what do you say he is?"

Paul motioned to Silas to speak.

"I, Madam," said the latter, "am a self-made man, and by the establishment of fried-fish shops all over London and the great provincial towns, have, by the grace of God, amassed a considerable fortune."

"Fried fish?" said the Princess in a queer voice.

Silas looked at her out of his melancholy and unhumorous eyes.

"Yes, Madam."

"I have also learned," said Paul, "that my grandmother was a Sicilian who played a street-organ. Hence my Italian blood."

Jane, standing by the door with Barney Bill, most agonized of old men, wholly nervous, twisting with gnarled fingers the broken rim of his hard felt hat, turned aside so that no one but Bill should see a sudden gush of tears. For she had realized how drab and unimportant she was in the presence of the great and radiant lady; also how the great and radiant lady was the God-sent mate for Paul, never so great a man as now when he was cutting out his heart for truth's sake.

"I should like to tell you what my life has been," continued Paul, "in the presence of those who know it already. That's why I asked them to stay. Until an hour ago I lived in dreams. In my own fashion I was an honest man. But now I've got this knowledge of my origin, the dreams are swept away and I stand naked to myself. If I left you, Miss Winwood, and Colonel Winwood, who have been so good to me—and Her Highness, who has deigned to honour me with her friendship—in a moment's doubt as to my antecedents I should be an impostor."

"No, no, my boy," said Colonel Winwood, who was standing with hands deep in trouser pockets and his head bent, staring at the carpet. "No words like that in this house. Besides, why should we want to go into all this?"

He had the Englishman's detestation of unpleasant explanations. Ursula Winwood supported him.

"Yes, why?" she asked.

"But it would be very interesting," said the Princess slowly, cutting her words.

Paul met her eyes, which she had hardened, and saw beneath them pain and anger and wounded pride and repulsion. For a second he allowed an agonized appeal to flash through his. He knew that he was deliberately killing the love in her heart. He felt the monstrous cruelty of it. A momentary doubt shook him. Was he justified? A short while ago she had entered the room her face alight with love; now her face was as stern and cold as his own. Had he the right to use the knife like this? Then certainty came. It had to be. The swifter the better. She of all human beings must no longer be deceived. Before her, at supreme cost, he must stand clean.

"It's not very interesting," said he. "And it's soon told. I was a ragged boy in a slum in a Lancashire town. I slept on sacking in a scullery, and very seldom had enough to eat. The woman whom I didn't think was my mother ill-treated me. I gather now that she hated me because she hated my father. She deserted him when I was a year old and disappeared; she never spoke of him. I don't know exactly how old I am. I chose a birthday at random. As a child I worked in a factory. You know what child-labour in factories was some years ago. I might have been there still, if my dear old friend there hadn't helped me when I was thirteen to run away. He used to go through the country in a van selling mats and chairs. He brought me to London, and found me a lodging with Miss Seddon's mother. So, Miss Seddon and I were children together. I became an artist's model. When I grew too old for that to be a dignified occupation, I went on the stage. Then one day, starving and delirious, I stumbled through the gates of Drane's Court and fell at Miss Winwood's feet. That's all."

"Since we've begun, we may as well finish and get it over," said Colonel Winwood, still with bent head, but looking at Paul from beneath his eyebrows. "When and how did you come across this gentleman who you say is your father?"

Paul told the story in a few words.

"And now that you have heard everything," said he, "would you think me justified in withdrawing my candidature?"

"Certainly not," said the Colonel. "You've got your duty to the Party."

"And you, Miss Winwood?"

"Can you ask? You have your duty to the country."

"And you, Princess?"

She met his challenging eyes and rose in a stately fashion.

"I am not equal to these complications of English politics, Mr. Savelli," she said. She held herself very erect, but her lips trembled and tears were very near her eyes. She turned to Miss Winwood and held out her hand. "I am afraid we must postpone our discussion of the Forlorn Widows. It is getting late. Au revoir, Colonel Winwood—"

"I will see you to your carriage."

On the threshold she turned, included Paul in a vague bow to the company, and passed through the door which Colonel Winwood held open. Paul watched her until she disappeared—disappeared haughtily out of his life, taking his living heart with her, leaving him with a stone very heavy, very cold, dead. And he was smitten as with a great darkness. He remained quite still for a few moments after the door had closed, then with a sudden jerk he drew himself up.

"Mr. Finn," said he, "as I've told you, I address my first meeting to-night. I am going to make public the fact that I'm your son."

Silas put his hand to his head and looked at him wildly.

"No, no," he muttered hoarsely—"no."

"I see no reason," said Miss Winwood gently.

"I see every reason," said Paul. "I must live in the light now. The truth or nothing."

"Then obey your conscience, Paul," she answered.

But Silas came forward with his outstretched hands.

"You can't do it. You can't do it, I tell you. It's impossible."

"Why?"

He replied in an odd voice, and with a glance at Miss Winwood. "I must tell you afterwards."

"I will leave you," she said.

"Mr. Finn"—she shook hands with him—"I hope you're proud of your son." And then she shook hands with Jane and Barney Bill. "I'm glad to meet such old friends of Paul." And to Paul, as he held the door open, she said, her clear kind eyes full on him, "Remember, we want men in England."

"Thank God, we've got women," said he, with lips from which he could not keep a sudden quiver.

He closed the door and came up to his father standing on the hearthrug.

"And now, why shouldn't I speak? Why shouldn't I be an honest man instead of an impostor?"

"Out of pity for me, my son."

"Pity? Why, what harm would it do you? There's nothing dishonourable in father and son fighting an election." He laughed without much mirth. "It's what some people would call sporting. As for me, personally, I don't see why you should be ashamed of owning me. My record is clean enough."

"But mine isn't, Paul," said Silas mournfully.

For the first time Paul bowed his head. "I'm sorry," said he. "I forgot." Then he raised it again. "But that's all over and buried in the past."

"It may be unburied."

"How?"

"Don't you see?" cried Jane. "Even I can. If you spring your relationship upon the public, it will create an enormous sensation—it will set the place on fire with curiosity. They'll dig up everything they can about you—everything they can about him. Oh, Paul, don't you see.

"It's up agin a man, sonny," said Barney Bill, limping towards them, "it's up agin a candidate, you understand, him not being a Fenian or a Irish patriot, that he's been in gaol. Penal servitude ain't a nice state of life to be reminded of, sonny. Whereas if you leaves things as they is, nobody's going to ask no questions."

"That's my point," said Silas Finn.

Paul looked from one to the other, darkly. In a kind of dull fierce passion he had made up his mind to clear himself before the world, to rend to tatters his garments of romance, to snap his fingers at the stars and destiny and such-like deluding toys, to stand a young Ajax defying the thunderbolts. Here came the first check.

"If they found out as how he'd done time, they'd find out for why," said Bill, cocking his head earnestly.

As Paul, engaged in sombre thought, made no reply, Silas turned away, his hands uplifted in supplication, and prayed aloud. He had sinned in giving way to his anger. He prostrated himself before the divine vengeance. If this was his apportioned punishment, might God give him meekness and strength to bear it. The tremulous, crying voice, the rapt, fanatical face, and the beseeching attitude struck a bizarre note in the comfortable and worldly room. Supported on either side by Jane, helpless and anxious, and Barney Bill, crooked, wrinkled, with his close-cropped white hair and little liquid diamond eyes, still nervously tearing his hat-brim, he looked almost grotesque. To Paul he seemed less a man than a creation of another planet, with unknown and incalculable instincts and impulses, who had come to earth and with foolish hand had wiped out the meaning of existence. Yet he felt no resentment, but rather a weary pity for the stranger blundering through an unsympathetic world. As soon as there came a pause in the prayer, he said not ungently:

"The Almighty is not going to use me as an instrument to punish you, if I can help it. I quite appreciate your point. I'll say nothing."

Barney Bill jerked his thumb towards the chair where the Princess had been sitting:

"She won't give it away?"

Paul smiled sadly. "No, old man. She'll keep it to herself."

That marked the end of the interview. Paul accompanied the three downstairs.

"I meant to act for the best, Paul," said Silas piteously, on parting. "Tell me that I haven't made you my enemy."

"God forbid," said Paul.

He went slowly up to his room again and threw himself in his writing chair. His eye fell upon the notes on the sheet of foolscap. The Radical candidate having been chosen, they were no longer relevant to his speech. He crumpled up the paper and threw it into the waste-paper basket. His speech! He held his head in both hands. A couple of hours hence he would be addressing a vast audience, the centre of the hopes of thousands of his fellow countrymen. The thought beat upon his brain. He had had the common nightmare of standing with conductor's baton in front of a mighty orchestra and being paralyzed by sense of impotence. No less a nightmare was his present position. A couple of hours ago he was athrill with confidence and joy of battle. But then he was a different man. The morning stars, the stars of his destiny, sang together in the ever-deepening glamour of the Vision Splendid. He was entering into the lists of Camelot to fight for his Princess. He was the Mysterious Knight, parented in fairy-far Avilion, the Fortunate Youth, the Awakener of England. Now he was but a base-born young man who had attained a high position by false pretences; an ordinary adventurer with a glib tongue; a self-educated, self-seeking, commonplace fellow. At least, so he saw himself in his Princess's eyes. And he had meant that she should thus behold him. No longer was he entering lists to fight for her. For what hopeless purpose was he entering them? To awaken England? The awakener must have his heart full of dreams and visions and glamour and joy and throbbing life; and in his heart there was death.

He drew out the little cornelian talisman at the end of his watch-chain and looked at it bitterly. It was but a mocking symbol of illusion. He unhooked it and laid it on the table. He would carry it about with him no longer. He would throw it away.

Ursula Winwood quietly entered the room.

"You must come down and have something to eat before the meeting."

Paul rose. "I don't want anything, thank you, Miss Winwood."

"But James and I do. So come and join us."

"Are you coming to the meeting?" he asked in surprise.

"Of course." She lifted her eyebrows. "Why not?"

"After what you have heard?"

"All the more reason for us to go." She smiled as she had smiled on that memorable evening six years ago when she had stood with the horrible pawn-ticket in her hand. "James has to support the Party. I have to support you. James will do the same as I in a day or two. Just give him time. His mind doesn't work very quickly, not as quickly as a woman's. Come," she said. "When we have a breathing space you can tell me all about it. But in the meantime I'm pretty sure I understand."

"How can you?" he asked wearily. "You have other traditions."

"I don't know about traditions; but I don't give my love and take it away again. I set rather too much value on it. I understand because I love you."

"Others with the same traditions can't understand."

"I'm not proposing to marry you," she said bluntly. "That makes a difference."

"It does," said he, meeting her eyes unflinchingly.

"If you weren't a brave man, I shouldn't say such a thing to you. Anyhow I understand you're the last man in the world who should take me for a fool."

"My God!" said Paul in a choky voice. "What can I do to thank you?"

"Win the election."

"You are still my dearest lady—my very very dearest lady," said he.

Her shrewd eyes fell upon the cornelian heart. She picked it up and held it out to him on her plump palm.

"Why have you taken this off your watch-chain?"

"It's a little false god," said he.

"It's the first thing yon asked for when you recovered from your illness. You said you had kept it since you were a tiny boy. See? I remember. You set great value on it then?"

"I believed in it," said Paul.

"And now you don't? But a woman gave it to you."

"Yes," said Paul, wondering, in his masculine way, how the deuce she knew that. "I was a brat of eleven."

"Then keep it. Put it on your chain again. I'm sure it's a true little god. Take it back to please me."

As there was nothing, from lapping up Eisel to killing a crocodile, that Paul would not have done, in the fulness of his wondering gratitude, for his dearest lady, he meekly attached the heart to his chain and put it in his pocket.

"I must tell you," said he, "that the lady—she seemed a goddess to me then—chose me as her champion in a race, a race of urchins at a Sunday school treat, and I didn't win. But she gave me the cornelian heart as a prize."

"But as my champion you will win," said Miss Winwood. "My dear boy," she said, and her eyes grew very tender as she laid her hand on the young man's arm, "believe what an old woman is telling you is true. Don't throw away any little shred of beauty you've ever had in your life. The beautiful things are really the true ones, though they may seem to be illusions. Without the trinket or what it stood for, would you be here now?"

"I don't know," replied Paul. "I might have taken a more honest road to get here."

"We took you to ourselves as a bright human being, Paul—not for what you might or might not have been. By the way, what have you decided as regards making public the fact of your relationship?"

"My father, for his own reasons, has urged me not to do so."

Miss Winwood drew a long breath.

"I'm glad to hear it," she said.

So Paul, comforted by one woman's amazing loyalty, went out that evening and addressed his great meeting. But the roar of applause that welcomed him echoed through void spaces of his being. He felt neither thrill nor fear. The speech prepared by the Fortunate Youth was delivered by a stranger to it, glowing and dancing eloquence. The words came trippingly enough, but the informing Spirit was gone.

Those in the audience familiar with the magic of his smile were disappointed. The soundness of his policy satisfied the hard-headed, but he made no appeal to the imaginative. If his speech did not fall flat, it was not the clarion voice that his supporters had anticipated. They whispered together with depressed headshakings. Their man was not in form. He was nervous. What he said was right enough, but his utterance lacked fire. It carried conviction to those already convinced; but it could make no proselytes. Had they been mistaken in their choice? Too young a man, hadn't he bitten off a hunk greater than he could chew? So the inner ring of local politicians. An election audience, however, brings its own enthusiasms, and it must be a very dull dog indeed who damps their ardour. They cheered prodigiously when Paul sat down, and a crowd of zealots waiting outside the building cheered him again as he drove off. But Paul knew that he had been a failure. He had delivered another man's speech. To-morrow and the day after and the day after that, and ever afterwards, if he held to the political game, he would have to speak in his own new person. What kind of a person would the new Paul be?

He drove back almost in silence with the Colonel and Miss Winwood, vainly seeking to solve the problem. The foundations of his life had been swept away. His foot rested on nothing solid save his own manhood. That no shock should break down. He would fight. He would win the election. He set his lips in grim determination. If life held no higher meaning, it at least offered this immediate object for existence. Besides he owed the most strenuous effort of his soul to the devoted and loyal woman whose face he saw dimly opposite. Afterwards come what might. The Truth at any rate. Magna est veritas et praevalebit.

These were "prave 'orts" and valorous protestations.

But when their light supper was over and Colonel Winwood had retired, Ursula Winwood lingered in the dining room, her heart aching for the boy who looked so stern and haggard. She came behind him and touched his hair.

"Poor boy," she murmured.

Then Paul—he was very young, barely thirty—broke down, as perhaps she meant that he should, and, elbows sprawling amid the disarray of the meal, poured out all the desolation of his soul, and for the first time cried out in anguish for the woman he had lost. So, as love lay a-bleeding mortally pierced, Ursula Winwood wept unaccustomed tears and with tender fingers strove to staunch the wound.

CHAPTER XIX

DAYS of strain followed: days of a thousand engagements, a thousand interviews, a thousand journeyings, a thousand speeches; days in which he was reduced to an unresisting automaton, mechanically uttering the same formulas; days in which the irresistible force of the campaign swept him along without volition. And day followed day and not a sign came from the Princess Zobraska either of condonation or resentment. It was as though she had gathered her skirts around her and gone disdainfully out of his life for ever. If speaking were to be done, it was for her to speak. Paul could not plead. It was he who, in a way, had cast her off. In effect he had issued the challenge: "I am a child of the gutter, an adventurer masquerading under an historical name, and you are a royal princess. Will you marry me now?" She had given her answer, by walking out of the room, her proud head in the air. It was final, as far as he was concerned. He could do nothing—not even beg his dearest lady to plead for him. Besides, rumour had it that the Princess had cancelled her town engagements and gone to Morebury. So he walked in cold and darkness, uninspired, and though he worked with feverish energy, the heart and purpose of his life were gone.

As in his first speech, so in his campaign, he failed. He had been chosen for his youth, his joyousness, his magnetism, his radiant promise of great things to come. He went about the constituency an anxious, haggard man, working himself to death without being able to awaken a spark of emotion in the heart of anybody. He lost ground daily. On the other hand, Silas Finn, with his enthusiasms, and his aspect of an inspired prophet, made alarming progress. He swept the multitude. Paul Savelli, the young man of the social moment, had an army of helpers, members of Parliament making speeches, friends on the Unionist press writing flamboyant leaders, fair ladies in automobiles hunting for voters through the slums of Hickney Heath. Silas Finn had scarcely a personal friend. But hope reigned among his official supporters, whereas depression began to descend over Paul's brilliant host.

"They want stirring up a bit," said the Conservative agent despondently. "I hear old Finn's meetings go with a bang. They nearly raised the roof off last night. We want some roof-raising on this side."

"I do my best," said Paul coldly, but the reproach cut deep. He was a failure. No nervous or intellectual effort could save him now, though he spent himself to the last heartbeat. He was the sport of a mocking Will o' the Wisp which he had taken for Destiny.

Once on coming out of his headquarters he met Silas, who was walking up the street with two or three of his committee-men. In accordance with the ordinary amenities of English political life, the two candidates shook hands, and withdrew a pace or two aside to chat for a while. This was the first time they had come together since the afternoon of revelation, and there was a moment of constraint during which Silas tugged at his streaked beard and looked with mournful wistfulness at his son.

"I wish I were not your opponent, Paul," said he in a low voice, so as not to be overheard.

"That doesn't matter a bit," Paul replied courteously. "I see you're putting up an excellent fight."

"It's the Lord's battle. If it weren't, do you think I would not let you win?"

The same old cry. Through sheer repetition, Paul began almost to believe in it. He felt very weary. In his father's eyes he recognized, with a pang, the glow of a faith which he had lost. Their likeness struck him, and he saw himself, his old self, beneath the unquestioning though sorrowful eyes.

"That's the advantage of a belief in the Almighty's personal interest," he answered, with a touch of irony: "whatever happens, one is not easily disillusioned."

"That is true, my son," said Silas.

"Jane is well?" Paul asked, after an instant's pause, breaking off the profitless discussion.

"Very well."

"And Barney Bill?"

"He upbraids me bitterly for what I have said."

Paul smiled at the curiously stilted phrase.

"Tell him from me not to do it. My love to them both."

They shook hands again, and Paul drove off in the motor car that had been placed at his disposal during the election, and Silas continued his sober walk with his committee-men up the muddy street. Whereupon Paul conceived a sudden hatred for the car. It was but the final artistic

touch to this comedy of mockery of which he had been the victim.... Perhaps God was on his father's side, after all—on the side of them who humbly walked and not of them who rode in proud chariots. But his political creed, his sociological convictions rose in protest. How could the Almighty be in league with all that was subversive of social order, all that was destructive to Imperial cohesion, all that which inevitably tended to England's downfall?

He turned suddenly to his companion, the Conservative agent.

"Do you think God has got common sense?"

The agent, not being versed in speculations regarding the attributes of the Deity, stared; then, disinclined to commit himself, took refuge in platitude.

"God moves in a mysterious way, Mr. Savelli."

"That's rot," said Paul. "If there's an Almighty, He must move in a common-sense way; otherwise the whole of this planet would have busted up long ago. Do you think it's common sense to support the present Government?"

"Certainly not," said the agent, fervently.

"Then if God supported it, it wouldn't be common sense on His part. It would be merely mysterious?"

"I see what you're driving at," said the agent. "Our opponent undoubtedly has been making free with the name of the Almighty in his speeches. As a matter of fact he's rather crazy on the subject. I don't think it would be a bad move to make a special reference to it. It's all damned hypocrisy. There's a chap in the old French play—what's his name?"

"Tartuffe."

"That's it. Well, there you are. That speech of his yesterday—now why don't you take it and wring religiosity and hypocrisy and Tartuffism out of it? You know how to do that sort of thing. You can score tremendously. I never thought of it before. By George! you can get him in the neck if you like."

"But I don't like," said Paul. "I happen to know that Mr. Finn is sincere in his convictions."

"But, my dear sir, what does his supposed sincerity matter in political contest?"

"It's the difference between dirt and cleanliness," said Paul. "Besides, as I told you at the outset, Mr. Finn and I are close personal friends, and I have the highest regard for his character. He has seen that his side has scrupulously refrained from personalities with regard to me, and I insist on the same observance with regard to him."

"With all due deference to you, Mr. Savelli, you were called only the day before yesterday 'the spoiled darling of Duchesses' boudoirs.'"

"It wasn't with Mr. Finn's cognizance. I've found that out."

"Well," said the agent, leaning back-in the luxurious limousine, "I don't see why somebody, without your cognizance, shouldn't call Mr. Finn the spoiled minion of the Almighty's ante-chamber. That's a devilish good catch-phrase," he added, starting forward in the joy of his newborn epigram: "Devilish good. 'The spoiled minion of the Almighty's ante-chamber.' It'll become historical."

"If it does," said Paul, "it will be associated with the immediate retirement of the Conservative candidate."

"Do you really mean that?"

It was Paul's turn to start forward. "My dear Wilson," said he, "if you or anybody else thinks I'm a man to talk through his hat, I'll retire at once. I don't care a damn about myself. Not a little tuppenny damn. What the devil does it matter to me whether I get into Parliament or not? Nothing. Not a tuppenny damn. You can't understand. It's the party and the country. For myself, personally, the whole thing can go to blazes. I'm in earnest, dead earnest," he continued, with a vehemence incomprehensible to Wilson. "If anybody doesn't think so, I'll clear out at once"—he snapped his fingers. "But while I'm candidate everything I say I mean. I mean it intensely—with all my soul. And I say that if there's a single insulting reference to Mr. Finn during this election, you'll be up against the wreck of your own political career."

The agent watched the workings of his candidate's dark clear-cut face. He was very proud of his candidate, and found it difficult to realize that there were presumably sane people who would not vote for him on sight. A lingering memory of grammar school days flashed on him when he told his wife later of the conversation, and he likened Paul to a wrathful Apollo. Anxious to appease the god, he said humbly:

"It was the merest of suggestions, Mr. Savelli. Heaven knows we don't want to descend to

personalities, and your retirement would be an unqualifiable disaster. But—you'll pardon my mentioning it—you began this discussion by asking me whether the Almighty had common sense."

"Well, has He or not?"

"Of course," said Wilson.

"Then we're going to win this election," said Paul.

If he could have met enthusiasm with enthusiasm, all would have been well. The awakener of England could have captivated hearts by glowing pictures of a great and glorious future. It would have been a counter-blaze to that lit by his opponent, which flamed in all the effulgence of a reckless reformer's promise, revealing a Utopia in which there would be no drunkenness, no crime, no poverty, and in which the rich, apparently, would have to work very hard in order to support the poor in comfortable idleness. But beyond proving fallacies, Paul could do nothing—and even then, has there ever been a mob since the world began susceptible to logical argument? So, all through the wintry days of the campaign, Silas Finn carried his fiery cross through the constituency, winning frenzied adherents, while Paul found it hard to rally the faithful round the drooping standard of St. George.

The days went on. Paul addressed his last meeting on the eve of the poll. By a supreme effort he regained some of his former fire and eloquence. He drove home exhausted, and going straight to bed slept like a dog till morning.

The servant who woke him brought a newspaper to the bedside.

"Something to interest you, sir."

Paul looked at the headline indicated by the man.

"Hickney Heath Election. Liberal Candidate's Confession. Extraordinary Scene."

He glanced hurriedly down the column and read with amazement and stabbing pain the matter that was of interest. The worst had happened—the thing which during all his later life Silas Finn had feared. The spectre of the prison had risen up against him.

Towards the end of Silas Finn's speech, at his last great meeting, a man, sitting in the body of the hall near the platform, got up and interrupted him. "What about your own past life? What about your three years' penal servitude?" All eyes were turned from the man—a common looking, evil man—to the candidate, who staggered as if he had been shot, caught at the table behind him for support and stared in greyfaced terror. There was an angry tumult, and the interrupter would have fared badly, but for Silas Finn holding up his hand and imploring silence.

"I challenge the candidate to deny," said the man, as soon as he could be heard, "that his real name is Silas Kegworthy, and that he underwent three years' penal servitude for murderously assaulting his wife."

Then the candidate braced himself and said: "The bare facts are true. But I have lived stainlessly in the fear of God and in the service of humanity for thirty years. I have sought absolution for a moment of mad anger under awful provocation in unremitting prayer and in trying to save the souls and raise the fortunes of my fellow-men. Is that all you have against me?"

"That's all," said the man.

"It is for you, electors of Hickney Heath, to judge me."

He sat down amid tumultuous cheers, and the man who had interrupted him, after some rough handling, managed to make his escape. The chairman then put a vote of confidence in the candidate, which was carried by acclamation, and the meeting broke up.

Such were the essential facts in the somewhat highly coloured newspaper story which Paul read in stupefied horror. He dressed quickly and went to his sitting-room, where he rang up his father's house on the telephone. Jane's voice met his ear.

"It's Paul speaking," he replied. "I've just this moment read of last night. I'm shaken to my soul. How is my father?"

"He's greatly upset," came the voice. "He didn't sleep all night, and he's not at all well this morning. Oh, it was a cruel, cowardly blow."

"Dastardly. Do you know who it was?"

"No. Don't you?"

"I? Does either of you think that I—?"

"No, no," came the voice, now curiously tearful. "I didn't mean that. I forgot you've not had

time to find out."

"Who does he think it was?"

"Some old fellow prisoner who had a grudge against him."

"Were you at the meeting?"

"Yes. Oh, Paul, it was splendid to see him face the audience. He spoke so simply and with such sorrowful dignity. He had their sympathy at once. But it has broken him. I'm afraid he'll never be the same man again. After all these years it's dreadful."

"It's all that's damnable. It's tragic. Give him my love and tell him that words can't express my sorrow and indignation."

He rang off. Almost immediately Wilson was announced. He came into the room radiant.

"You were right about the divine common-sensicality," said he. "The Lord has delivered our adversary into our hands with a vengeance."

He was a chubby little man of forty, with coarse black hair and scrubby moustache, not of the type that readily appreciates the delicacies of a situation. Paul conceived a sudden loathing for him.

"I would give anything for it not to have happened," he said.

Wilson opened his eyes. "Why? It's our salvation. An ex-convict—it's enough to damn any candidate. But we want to make sure. Now I've got an idea."

Paul turned on him angrily. "I'll have no capital made out of it whatsoever. It's a foul thing to bring such an accusation up against a man who has lived a spotless life for thirty years. Everything in me goes out in sympathy with him, and I'll let it be known all through the constituency."

"If you take it that way," said Wilson, "there's no more to be done."

"There's nothing to be done, except to find out who put up the man to make the announcement."

"He did it on his own," Wilson replied warmly. "None of our people would resort to a dirty trick like that."

"And yet you want me to take advantage of it now it's done."

"That's quite a different matter."

"I can't see much difference," said Paul.

So Wilson, seeing that his candidate was more unmanageable than ever, presently departed, and Paul sat down to breakfast. But he could not eat. He was both stricken with shame and moved to the depths by immense pity. Far removed from him as Silas Finn was in mode of life and ideals, he found much in common with his father. Each had made his way from the slum, each had been guided by an inner light—was Silas Finn's fantastic belief less of an ignis fatuus than his own?—each had sought to get away from a past, each was a child of Ishmael, each, in his own way, had lived romantically. Whatever resentment against his father lingered in his heart now melted away. He was very near him. The shame of the prison struck him as it had struck the old man. He saw him bowed down under the blow, and he clenched his hands in a torture of anger and indignation. And to crown all, came the intolerable conviction, in the formation of which Wilson's triumphant words had not been necessary, that if he won the election it would be due to this public dishonouring of his own father. He walked about the room in despair, and at last halted before the mantelpiece on which still stood the photograph of the Princess in its silver frame. Suddenly he remembered that he had not told her of this incident in his family history. She too would be reading her newspaper this morning. He saw her proud lips curl. The son of a gaol-bird! He tore the photograph from its frame and threw it into the fire and watched it burn. As the paper writhed under the heat, the lips seemed to twist into sad reproach. He turned away impatiently. That romantic madness was over and done with. He had far sterner things to do than shriek his heart out over a woman in an alien star. He had his life to reconstruct in the darkness threatening and mocking; but at last he had truth for a foundation; on that he would build in defiance of the world.

In the midst of these fine thoughts it occurred to him that he had hidden the prison episode in his father's career from the Winwoods as well as from the Princess. His cheeks flushed; it was one more strain on the loyalty of these dear devoted friends. He went downstairs, and found the Colonel and Miss Winwood in the dining-room. Their faces were grave. He came to them with outstretched arms—a familiar gesture, one doubtless inherited from his Sicilian ancestry.

"You see what has happened. I knew all the time. I didn't tell you. You must forgive me."

"I don't blame you, my boy," said Colonel Winwood. "It was your father's secret. You had no right to tell us."

"We're very grieved, dear, for both your sakes," Ursula added. "James has taken the liberty of sending round a message of sympathy."

As ever, these two had gone a point beyond his anticipation of their loyalty. He thanked them simply.

"It's hateful," said he, "to think I may win the election on account of this. It's loathsome." He shuddered.

"I quite agree with you," said the Colonel. "But in politics one has often to put up with hateful things in order to serve one's country. That's the sacrifice a high-minded man is called upon to make."

"Besides," said Miss Winwood, "let us hope it won't affect votes. All the papers say that the vote of confidence was passed amid scenes of enthusiasm."

Paul smiled. They understood. A little while later they drove off with him to his committee room in the motor car gay with his colours. There was still much to be done that day.

CHAPTER XX

HICKNEY HEATH blazed with excitement. It is not every day that a thrill runs through a dull London borough, not even every election day. For a London borough, unlike a country town, has very little corporate life of its own. You cannot get up as much enthusiasm for Kilburn, say, as a social or historical entity, as you can for Winchester or Canterbury. You may perform civic duties, if you are public-spirited enough, with business-like zeal, and if you are borough councillor you may be proud of the nice new public baths which you have been instrumental in presenting to the community. But the ordinary man in the street no more cares for Kilburn than he does for Highgate. He would move from one to the other without a pang. For neither's glory would he shed a drop of his blood. Only at election times does it occur to him that he is one of a special brotherhood, isolated from the rest of London; and even then he regards the constituency as a convention defining geographical limits for the momentary range of his political passions. So that the day when an electric thrill ran through the whole of Hickney Heath was a rare one in its uninspiring annals.

The dramatic had happened, touching the most sluggish imaginations. The Liberal candidate for Parliament, a respected Borough Councillor, a notorious Evangelical preacher, had publicly confessed himself an ex-convict. Every newspaper in London—and for the matter of that, every newspaper in Great Britain—rang with the story, and every man, woman and child in Hickney Heath read feverishly every newspaper, morning and evening, they could lay their hands on. Also, every man, woman and child in Hickney Heath asked his neighbour for further details. All who could leave desk and shop or factory poured into the streets to learn the latest, tidings. Around the various polling stations the crowd was thickest. Those electors who had been present at Silas Finn's meeting, the night before, told the story at first-hand to eager groups. Rumours of every sort spread through the mob. The man who had put the famous question was an agent of the Tories. It was a smart party move. Silas Finn had all the time been leading a double life. Depravities without number were laid to his charge. Even now the police were inquiring into his connection with certain burglaries that had taken place in the neighbourhood. And where was he that day? Who had seen him? He was at home drunk. He had committed suicide. Even if he hadn't, and was elected, he would not be allowed to take his seat in Parliament.

On the other hand, those in whose Radical bosoms burned fierce hatred for the Tories, spoke loud in condemnation of their cowardly tactics. There was considerable free-fighting in the ordinarily dismal and decorous streets of Hickney Heath. Noisy acclamations hailed the automobiles, carriages and waggonettes bringing voters of both parties to the polls. Paul, driving in his gaily-decked car about the constituency, shared all these demonstrations and heard these rumours. The latter he denied and caused to be denied, as far as lay in his power. In the broad High Street, thronged with folk, and dissonant with tram cars and motor 'buses, he came upon a quarrelsome crowd looking up at a window above a poulterer's shop, from which hung something white, like a strip of wall paper.

Approaching, he perceived that it bore a crude drawing of a convict and "Good old Dartmoor" for legend. White with anger, he stopped the car, leaped out on to the curb, and pushing his way through the crowd, entered the shop. He seized one of the white-coated assistants by the arm. "Show me the way to that first-floor room," he cried fiercely.

The assistant, half-dragged, half-leading, and wholly astonished, took him through the shop

and pointed to the staircase. Paul sprang up and dashed through the door into the room, which appeared to be some business office. Three or four young men, who turned grinning from the window, he thrust aside, and plucking the offending strip from the drawing-pins which secured it to the sill, he tore it across and across.

"You cads! You brutes!" he shouted, trampling on the fragments. "Can't you fight like Englishmen?"

The young men, realizing the identity of the wrathful apparition, stared open-mouthed, turned red, and said nothing. Paul strode out, looking very fierce, and drove off in his car amid the cheers of the crowd, to which he paid no notice.

"It makes me sick!" he cried passionately to Wilson, who was with him. "I hope to God he wins in spite, of it!"

"What about the party?" asked Wilson.

Paul damned the party. He was in the overwrought mood in which a man damns everything. Quagmire and bramble and the derision of Olympus-that was the end of his vanity of an existence. Suppose he was elected—what then? He would be a failure-the high gods in their mirth would see to that—a puppet in Frank Ayres' hands until the next general election, when he would have ignominiously to retire. Awakener of England indeed! He could not even awaken Hickney Heath. As he dashed through the streets in his triumphal car, he hated Hickney Heath, hated the wild "hoorays" of waggon-loads of his supporters on their way to the polls, hated the smug smiles of his committee-men at polling stations. He forgot that he did not hate England. A little black disk an inch or two in diameter if cunningly focussed can obscure the sun in heaven from human eye. There was England still behind the little black disk, though Paul for the moment saw it not.

Wilson pulled his scrubby moustache and made no retort to Paul's anathema. To him Paul was one of the fine flower of the Upper Classes to which lower middle-class England still, with considerable justification, believes to be imbued with incomprehensible and unalterable principles of conduct. The grand old name of gentleman still has its magic in this country—and is, by the way, not without its influence in one or two mighty republics wherein the equality of man is very loudly proclaimed. Wilson, therefore, gladly suffered Paul's lunatic Quixotry. For himself he approved hugely of the cartoon. If he could have had his way, Hickney Heath would have flamed with poster reproductions of it. But he had a dim appreciation of, and a sneaking admiration for, the aristocrat's point of view, and, being a practical man, evaded a discussion on the ethics of the situation.

The situation was rendered more extraordinary because the Liberal candidate made no appearance in the constituency. Paul inquired anxiously. No one had seen him. After lunch he drove alone to his father's house. The parlour-maid showed him into the hideously furnished and daub-hung dining-room. The Viennese horrors of plaster stags, gnomes and rabbits stared fatuously on the hearth. No fire was in the grate. Very soon Jane entered, tidy, almost matronly in buxom primness, her hair as faultless as if it had come out of a convoluted mould, her grave eyes full of light. She gave him her capable hand.

"It's like you to come, Paul."

"It's only decent. My father hasn't shown up. What's the matter with him?"

"It's a bit of a nervous breakdown," she said, looking at him steadily. "Nothing serious. But the doctor—I sent for him—says he had better rest—and his committee people thought it wiser for him not to show himself."

"Can I see him?"

"Certainly not." A look of alarm came into her face. "You're both too excited. What would you say to him?"

"I'd tell him what I feel about the whole matter."

"Yes. You would fling your arms about, and he would talk about God, and a precious lot of good it would do to anybody. No, thank you. I'm in charge of Mr. Finn's health."

It was the old Jane, so familiar. "I wish," said he, with a smile—"I wish I had had your common sense to guide me all these years."

"If you had, you would now be a clerk in the City earning thirty shillings a week."

"And perhaps a happier man."

"Bosh, my dear Paul!" she said, shaking her head slowly. "Rot! Rubbish! I know you too well. You adding up figures at thirty shillings a week, with a common sense wife for I suppose you mean that—mending your socks and rocking the cradle in a second-floor back in Hickney Heath! No, my dear"—she paused for a second or two and her lips twitched oddly—"common sense would have been the death of you."

He laughed in spite of himself. It was so true.

Common sense might have screwed him to a thirty shillings-a-week desk: the fantastic had brought him to that very house, a candidate for Parliament, in a thousand-guinea motor car. On the other hand—and his laughter faded from his eyes—the fantastic in his life was dead. Henceforward common sense would hold him in her cold and unstimulating clasp. He said something of the sort to Jane. Once more she ejaculated "Rot, rubbish and bosh!" and they quarrelled as they had done in their childhood.

"You talk as if I didn't know you inside out, my dear Paul," she said in her clear, unsmiling way. "Listen. All men are donkeys, aren't they?"

"For the sake of argument, I agree."

"Well—there are two kinds of donkeys. One kind is meek and mild and will go wherever it is driven. The other, in order to get along, must always have a bunch of carrots dangling before its eyes. That's you."

"But confound it all!" he cried, "I've lost my carrots—can't you see? I'll never have any carrots again. That's the whole damned tragedy."

For the first time she smiled—the smile of the woman wiser in certain subtle things than the man. "My dear," she said, "carrots are cheap." She paused for an instant and added, "Thank God!"

Paul squeezed her arms affectionately and they moved apart. He sighed. "They're the most precious things in the world," said he.

"The most precious things in the world are those which you can get for nothing," said Jane.

"You're a dear," said he, "and a comfort."

Presently he left her and returned to his weary round of the constituency, feeling of stouter heart, with a greater faith in the decent ordering of mundane things. A world containing such women as Jane and Ursula Winwood possessed elements of sanity. Outside one of the polling stations he found Barney Bill holding forth excitedly to a knot of working-men. He ceased as the car drove up, and cast back a broad proud smile at the candidate's warm greeting.

"I got up the old 'bus so nice and proper, with all your colours and posters, and it would have been a spectacular Diorama for these 'ere poor people; but you know for why I didn't bring it out to-day, don't you, sonny?"

"I know, dear old friend," said Paul.

"I 'adn't the 'cart to."

"What were you speechifying about when I turned up?"

Barney Bill jerked a backward thumb. "I was telling this pack of cowardly Radicals that though I've been a Tory born and bred for sixty odd years, and though I've voted for you, Silas Finn, for all he was in prison while most of them were sucking wickedness and Radicalism out of Nature's founts, is just as good a man as what you are. They was saying, yer see, they was Radicals, but on account of Silas being blown upon, they was going to vote for you. So I tells 'em, I says, 'Mr. Savelli would scorn your dirty votes. If yer feel low and Radical, vote Radical. Mr. Savelli wants to play fair. I know both of 'em,' I says, 'both of 'em intimately.' And they begins to laugh, as if I was talking through my hat. Anyway, they see now I know you, sonny."

Paul laughed and clapped the loyal old man on the shoulder. Then he turned to the silent but interested group. "Gentlemen," said he, "I don't want to inquire on which side you are; but you can take it from me that whatever my old friend Mr. Simmons says about Mr. Finn and myself is the absolute truth. If you're on Mr. Finn's side in politics, in God's name vote for him. He's a noble, high-souled man and I'm proud of his private friendship."

He drew Barney Bill apart. "You're the only Tory in the place who can try to persuade people not to vote for me. I wish you would keep on doing it."

"I've been a-doing of it ever since the polls opened this morning," said Barney Bill. Then he cocked his head on one side and his little eyes twinkled: "It's an upside-down way of fighting an election to persuade people not to vote for you, isn't it?"

"Everything is topsy-turvy with me, these days," Paul replied: "so we've just got to stand on our heads and make the best of it."

And he drove off in the gathering dusk.

Night found him in the great chamber of the Town Hall, with his agent and members of his committee. Present too were the Liberal Agent and the members of the Liberal Committee. At one end of the room sat the Mayor of the Borough in robe and chain of office, presiding over the

proceedings. The Returning Officer and his staff sat behind long tables, on which were deposited the sealed ballot boxes brought in from the various polling stations; and these were emptied and the votes were counted, the voting papers for each candidate being done up in bundles of fifty. Knots of committee-men of both parties stood chatting in low voices. In an ordinary election both candidates would have chatted together, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred about golf, and would have made an engagement to meet again in milder conflict that day week. But here Paul was the only candidate to appear, and he sat in a cane-bottomed chair apart from the lounging politicians, feeling curiously an interloper in this vast, solemn and scantily-filled hall. He was very tired, too tired in body, mind and soul to join in the small-talk of Wilson and his bodyguard. Besides, they all wore the air of anticipated victory, and for that he held them in detestation. He had detested them the whole day long. The faces that yesterday had been long and anxious to-day had been wreathed in smirks. Wherever he had gone he had found promise of victory in his father's disgrace. Passionately the young man, fronting vital issues, longed for his own defeat.

But for the ironical interposition of the high gods, it might have been so different. Any other candidate against him, he himself buoyed up with his own old glorious faith, his Princess, dazzling meteor illuminating the murky streets—dear God! what would not have been the joy of battle during the past week, what would not have been the intense thrill, the living of a thousand lives in these few hours of suspense now so dull with dreariness and pain! He sat apart, his legs crossed, a hand over his eyes. Wilson and his men, puzzled by his apparent apathy, left him alone. It is not much use addressing a mute and wooden idol, no matter how physically prepossessing.

The counting went on slowly, relentlessly, and the bundles of fifty on each side grew in bulk, and Paul's side bulked larger than Silas Finn's.

At last Wilson could stand it no longer. He left the group with which he was talking, and came to Paul. "We're far ahead already," he cried excitedly. "I told you last night would do the trick."

"Last night," said Paul, rising and stuffing his hands in his jacket pockets, "my opponent's supporters passed a vote of confidence in him in a scene of tumultuous enthusiasm."

"Quite so," replied Wilson. "A crowd is generous and easily swayed. A theatrical audience of scalliwags and thieves will howl applause at the triumph of virtue and the downfall of the villain; and each separate member will go out into the street and begin to practise villainy and say 'to hell with virtue.' If last night's meeting could have polled on the spot, they would have been as one man. To-day they're scattered and each individual revises his excited opinion. Your hard-bitten Radical would sooner have a self-made man than an aristocrat to represent him in Parliament; but, damn it all, he'd sooner have an aristocrat than an ex-convict."

"But who the devil told you I'm an aristocrat?" cried Paul.

Wilson laughed. "Who wants to be told such an obvious thing? Anyhow, you've only got to look and you'll see how the votes are piling up."

Paul looked and saw that Wilson spoke truly. Then he reflected that Wilson and the others who had worked so strenuously for him had no part in his own personal depression. They deserved a manifestation of interest, also expressions of gratitude. So Paul pulled himself together and went amongst them and was responsive to their prophecies of victory.

Then just as the last votes were being counted, an official attendant came in with a letter for Paul. It had been brought by messenger. The writing on the envelope was Jane's. He tore it open and read.

Mr. Finn is dying. He has had a stroke. The doctor says he can't live through the night. Come as soon as you can. JANE.

Outside the Town Hall the wide street was packed with people. Men surged up to the hollow square of police guarding the approach to the flight of steps and the great entrance door. Men swarmed about the electric standards above the heads of their fellows. Men rose in a long tier with their backs to the shop-fronts on the opposite side of the road. In spite of the raw night the windows were open and the arc lights revealed a ghostly array of faces looking down on the mass below, whose faces in their turn were lit up by the more yellow glare streaming from the doors and uncurtained windows of the Town Hall. In the lobby behind the glass doors could be seen a few figures going and coming, committee-men, journalists, officials. A fine rain began to fall, but the crowd did not heed it. The mackintosh capes of the policemen glistened. It was an orderly crowd, held together by tense excitement: all eyes fixed on the silent illuminated building whence the news would come. Across one window on the second floor was a large white patch, blank and sphinx-like. At right angles to one end of the block ran the High Street and the tall, blazing trams passed up and down and all eyes in the trams strained for a transient glimpse of the patch, hoping that it would flare out into message.

Presently a man was seen to dash from the interior of the hall into the lobby, casting words at the waiting figures, who clamoured eagerly and disappeared within, just as the man broke through the folding doors and appeared at the top of the steps beneath the portico. The great crowd surged and groaned, and the word was quickly passed from rank to rank.

"Savelli. Thirteen hundred and seventy majority." And then there burst out wild cheers and the crowd broke into a myriad little waves like a choppy sea. Men danced and shouted and clapped each other on the back, and the tall facade of the street opposite the hall was a-flutter. Suddenly the white patch leaped into an illumination proclaiming the figures.

Savelli—6,135.

Finn—4,765.

Again the wild cheering rose, and then the great double windows in the centre of the first floor of the Town Hall were flung open and Paul, surrounded by the mayor and officials, appeared.

Paul gripped the iron hand-rail and looked down upon the tumultuous scene, his ears deafened by the roar, his eyes dazed by the conflicting lights and the million swift reflections from moving faces and arms and hats and handkerchiefs. The man is not born who can receive unmoved a frenzied public ovation. A lump rose in his throat. After all, this delirium of joy was sincere. He stood for the moment the idol of the populace. For him this vast concourse of human beings had waited in rain and mud and now became a deafening, seething welter of human passion. He gripped the rail tighter and closed his eyes. He heard as in a dream the voice of the mayor behind him: "Say a few words. They won't hear you—but that doesn't matter."

Then Paul drew himself up, facing the whirling scene. He sought in his pockets and suddenly shot up his hand, holding a letter, and awaited a lull in the uproar. He was master of himself now. He had indeed words to say, deliberately prepared, and he knew that if he could get a hearing he would say them as deliberately. At last came comparative calm.

"Gentlemen," said he, with a motion of the letter, "my opponent is dying."

He paused. The words, so unexpected, so strangely different from the usual exordium, seemed to pass from line to line through the crowd.

"I am speaking in the presence of death," said Paul, and paused again.

And a hush spread like a long wave across the street, and the thronged windows, last of all, grew still and silent.

"I will ask you to hear me out, for I have something very grave to say." And his voice rang loud and clear. "Last night my opponent was forced to admit that nearly thirty years ago he suffered a term of penal servitude. The shock, after years of reparation, of spotless life, spent in the service of God and his fellow-creatures, has killed him. I desire publicly to proclaim that I, as his opponent, had no share in the dastardly blow that has struck him down. And I desire to proclaim the reason. He is my own father; I, Paul Savelli, am my opponent, Silas Finn's son."

A great gasp and murmur rose from the wonder-stricken throng, but only momentarily, for the spell of drama was on them. Paul continued.

"I will make public later on the reasons for our respective changes of name. For the present it is enough to state the fact of our relationship and of our mutual affection and respect. That I thank you for electing me goes without saying; and I will do everything in my power to advance the great cause you have enabled me to represent. I regret I cannot address you in another place to-night, as I had intended. I must ask you of your kindness to let me go quietly where my duty and my heart call me to my father's death-bed."

He bowed and waved a dignified gesture of farewell, and turning into the hall met the assemblage of long, astounded faces. From outside came the dull rumbling of the dispersing crowd. The mayor, the first to break the silence, murmured a platitude.

Paul thanked him gravely. Then he went to Wilson. "Forgive me," said he, "for all that has been amiss with me to-day. It has been a strain of a very peculiar kind."

"I can well imagine it," said Wilson.

"You see I'm not an aristocrat, after all," said Paul.

Wilson looked the young man in the face and saw the steel beneath the dark eyes, and the Proud setting of the lips. With a sudden impulse he wrung his hand. "I don't care a damn!" said he. "You are."

Paul said, unsmiling: "I can face the music. That's all." He drew a note from his pocket. "Will you do me a final service? Go round to the Conservative Club at once, and tell the meeting what has happened, and give this to Colonel Winwood."

"With pleasure," said Wilson.

Then Paul shook hands with all his fellow-workers and thanked them in his courtly way, and, pleading for solitude, went through the door of the great chamber and, guided by an attendant, reached the exit in a side street where his car awaited him. A large concourse of people stood

drawn up in line on each side of the street, marshalled by policemen. A familiar crooked figure limped from the shadow of the door, holding a hard felt hat, his white poll gleaming in the shaft of light. "God bless you, sonny," he said in a hoarse whisper.

Paul took the old man by the arm and drew him across the pavement to the car. "Get in," said he.

Barney Bill hung back. "No, sonny; no."

"It's not the first time we've driven together. Get in. I want you."

So Barney Bill allowed himself to be thrust into the luxurious car, and Paul followed. And perhaps for the first time in the history of great elections the successful candidate drove away from the place where the poll was declared in dead silence, attended only by the humblest of his constituents. But every man in the throng bared his head.

CHAPTER XXI

"HE had the stroke in the night," said Barney Bill suddenly.

Paul turned sharply on him. "Why wasn't I told?"

"Could you have cured him?"

"Of course not."

"Could you have done him any good?"

"I ought to have been told."

"You had enough of worries before you for one day, sonny."

"That was my business," said Paul.

"Jane and I, being as it were responsible parties, took the liberty, so to speak, of thinking it our business too."

Paul drummed impatiently on his knees.

"Yer ain't angry, are you, sonny?" the old man asked plaintively.

"No—not angry—with you and Jane—certainly not. I know you acted for the best, out of love for me. But you shouldn't have deceived me. I thought it was a mere nervous breakdown—the strain and shock. You never said a word about it, and Jane, when I talked to her this morning, never gave me to dream there was anything serious amiss. So I say you two have deceived me."

"But I'm a telling of yer, sonny—"

"Yes, yes, I know. I don't reproach you. But don't you see? I'm sick of lies. Dead sick. I've been up to my neck in a bog of falsehood ever since I was a child and I'm making a hell of a struggle to get on to solid ground. The Truth for me now. By God! nothing but the Truth!"

Barney Bill, sitting forward, hunched up, on the seat of the car, just as he used to sit on the footboard of his van, twisted his head round. "I'm not an eddicated person," said he, "although if I hadn't done a bit of reading in my time I'd have gone dotty all by my lones in the old 'bus, but I've come to one or two conclusions in my, so to speak, variegated career, and one is that if you go on in that 'ere mad way for Truth in Parliament, you'll be a bull in a china shop, and they'll get sticks and dawgs to hustle you out. Sir Robert Peel, old Gladstone, Dizzy, the whole lot of the old Yuns was up against it. They had to compromise. It's compromise"—the old man dwelt lovingly, as usual, on the literary word—"it's compromise you must have in Parliament."

"I'll see Parliament damned first!" cried Paul, his nerves on edge.

"You'll have to wait a long time, sonny," said Barney Bill, wagging a sage head. "Parliament takes a lot of damning."

"Anyhow," said Paul, not eager to continue the argument, but unconsciously caught in the drift of Barney Bill's philosophy, "my private life isn't politics, and there's not going to be another lie in my private life as long as I live."

The old man broke a short silence with a dry chuckle. "How it takes one back!" he said reflectively. "Lor lumme! I can hear yer speaking now—just in the same tone—the night what yer

run away with me. Yer hadn't a seat to yer breeches then, and now you've a seat in Parliament." He chuckled again at his joke. "But"—he gripped the young man's knee in his bony clasp—"you're just the same Paul, sonny, God bless yer—and you'll come out straight all right. Here we are."

The car drew up before Silas Finn's house. They entered. Jane, summoned, came down at once and met them in the dreadful dining-room, where a simple meal was spread.

"I haven't heard—" she said.

"I'm in."

"I'm glad."

"My father—?" he asked curtly.

She looked at him wide-eyed for a second or two as he stood, his fur-lined coat with astrachan collar thrown open, his hand holding a soft felt hat on his hip, his absurdly beautiful head thrown back, to casual glance the Fortunate Youth of a month or two ago. But to Jane's jealous eye he was not even the man she had seen that afternoon. He looked many years older. She confessed afterwards to surprise at not finding his hair grey at the temples, thus manifesting her ordered sense of the harmonious. She confessed, too, that she was frightened—Jane who, for any other reason than the mere saving of her own skin, would have stolidly faced Hyrcanean tigers—at the stern eyes beneath the contracted brows. He was a different Paul altogether. And here we have the divergence between the masculine and the feminine point of view. Jane saw a new avatar; Barney Bill the ragged urchin of the Bludston brick-fields. She shifted her glance to the old man. He, standing crookedly, cocked his head and nodded.

"He knows all about it."

"Yes, yes," said Paul. "How is my father?"

Jane threw out her hands in the Englishwoman's insignificant gesture. "He's unconscious—has been for hours—the nurse is up with him—the end may come any moment. I hid it from you till the last for your own sake. Would you care to go upstairs?"

She moved to the door. Paul threw off his overcoat and, followed by Barney Bill, accompanied her. On the landing they were met by the nurse.

"It is all over," she said.

"I will go in for a moment," said Paul. "I should like to be alone."

In a room hung like the rest of the house with gaudy pictures he stood for a short while looking at the marble face of the strange-souled, passionate being that had been his father. The lids had closed for ever over the burning, sorrowful eyes; the mobile lips were for ever mute. In his close sympathy with the man Paul knew what had struck him down. It was not the blow of the nameless enemy, but the stunning realization that he was not, after all, the irresistible nominee of the Almighty. His great faith had not suffered; for the rigid face was serene, as though he had accepted this final chastisement and purification before entrance into the Eternal Kingdom; but his high pride, the mainspring of his fanatical life, had been broken and the workings of the physical organism had been arrested. In those few moments of intense feeling, in the presence of death, it was given to Paul to tread across the threshold of the mystery of his birth. Here lay stiff and cold no base clay such as that of which Polly Kegworthy had been formed. It had been the tenement of a spirit beautiful and swift. No matter to what things he himself had been born—he had put that foolishness behind him—at all events his dream had come partly true. His father had been one of the great ones, one of the conquerors, one of the high princes of men. Multitudes of kings had not been so parented. Outwardly a successful business man and a fanatical Dissenter—there were thousands like Silas Finn. But Paul knew his inner greatness, the terrific struggle of his soul, the warrings between fierce blood and iron will, the fervent purpose, the lofty aspirations and the unwavering conduct of his life of charity and sorrow. He stretched out his hand and with his finger tips lightly touched the dead man's forehead. "I'm proud to be your son," he murmured.

Then the nurse came in and Paul went downstairs. Barney Bill waylaid him in the hall, and led him into the dining-room. "Have a little food and drink, sonny. You look as if yer need it—especially drink. 'Ere." He seized a decanter of whisky—since Paul's first visit, Silas had always kept it in the house for his son's comforting—and would have filled the tumbler had not Paul restrained him. He squirted in the soda. "Drink it down and you'll feel better."

Paul swallowed a great gulp. "Yes," he agreed. "There are times when it does help a man."

"Liquor is like a dawg," said Bill. "Keep it in subjection, so to speak, and it's yer faithful friend."

"Where's Jane?" Paul asked.

"She's busy. Half the borough seem to be calling, or telephoning"—and even at that moment

Paul could hear the maid tripping across the hall and opening the front door—"I've told her what occurred. She seemed half skeered. She's had a dreadful day, pore gal."

"She has indeed," said Paul.

He threw himself into a chair, dead beat, at the end of emotional strain, and remained talking with the old man of he scarce knew what. But these two—Jane and the old man—were linked to him by imperishable ties, and he could not leave them yet awhile in the house of death. Barney Bill stirred the fire, which blazed up, making the perky animals on the hearth cast faint and fantastic shadows.

"It's funny how he loved those darned little beasts, isn't it now? I remember of him telling me as how they transported him into magic something—or the other—medi—he had a word for it—I dunno—"

"Mediaeval?"

"That's it, sonny. Mediaeval forests. It means back of old times, don't it? King Arthur and his Round Table—I done a bit of reading, yer know." The old man took out pouch and pipe. "That's what drew us together, sonny, our taste for literature. Remember?"

"Can I ever forget?" said Paul.

"Well, he was like that too. He had lots of po'try in him—not the stuff that rhymes, yer know, like 'The Psalm of Life' and so forth, but real po'try. I wish I could tell yer what I mean—" His face was puckered into a thousand wrinkles with the intellectual effort, and his little diamond eyes gleamed. "He could take a trumpery common thing like that there mug-faced, lop-eared hare and make it stand for the medi-what-you-call-it-forest. I've said to him, 'Come out with me on the old 'bus if you want green and loneliness and nature.' And he has said—I recollect one talk in particular—he said, 'I'd love to hear' something about a pipe—I'm getting old, sonny—"

"The Pipes of Pan?" Paul suggested.

"The very words. Lor lumme! how did you guess it?" He paused, his fingers holding the lighted match, which went out before he could apply it to his tobacco. "Yus. 'The Pipes of Pan.' I don't know what it means. Anyway, he said he'd love to hear them in the real forest, but duty kept him to bricks and mortar and so he had to hear them in imagination. He said that all them footling little beasts were a-listening to 'em, and they told him all about it. I remember he told me more about the woods than I know myself—and I reckon I could teach his business to any gamekeeper or poacher in England. I don't say as how he knew the difference between a stoat and a weasel—he didn't. A cock-pheasant and a hen-partridge would have been the same to him. But the spirit of it—the meaning of it—he fair raised my hair off—he knew it a darned sight better nor I. And that's what I set out for to say, sonny. He had po'try in him. And all this"—he swept an all-inclusive hand—"all this meant to him something that you and I can't tumble to, sonny. It meant something different to what it looked like—ah!" and impatient at his impotence to express philosophic thought, he cast another lighted match angrily into the fire.

Paul, high product of modern culture, sat in wonder at the common old fellow's clarity of vision. Tears rolled down his cheek. "I know, dear old Bill, what you're trying to say. Only one man has ever been able to say it. A mad poet called Blake.

> 'To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And a heaven in a wild flower;
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And eternity in an hour'."

Barney Bill started forward in his chair and clapped his hand on the young man's knee. "By gum! you've got it. That's what I was a-driving at. That's Silas. I call to mind when he was a boy—pretty dirty and ragged he was too—as he used to lean over the parapet of Blackfriars Bridge and watch the current sort of swirling round the piers, and he used to say as how he could hear what the river was saying. I used to think him loony. But it was po'try, sonny, all the time."

The old man, thus started on reminiscence, continued, somewhat garrulous, and Paul, sunk in the armchair by the fire, listened indulgently, waiting for Jane. She, meanwhile, was occupied upstairs and in the library answering telephone messages and sending word out to callers by the maid. For, on the heels of Paul, as Barney Bill had said, many had come on errand of inquiry and condolence and all the news agencies and newspapers of London seemed to be on the telephone. Some of the latter tried for speech with the newly elected candidate whom they understood to be in the house, but Jane denied them firmly. She had had some training as a politician's private secretary. At last the clanging bell ceased ringing, and the maid ceased running to and from the street door, and the doctor had come and given his certificate and gone, and Jane joined the pair in the dining-room. She brought in from the hall a tray of visiting cards and set it on the table. "I suppose it was kind of them all to come," she said.

She sat down listlessly in a straight-backed chair, and then, at a momentary end of her fine strength suddenly broke into tears and sobs and buried her head on her arms. Paul rose, bent over her and clasped her shoulders comfortingly. Presently she turned and blindly sought his

embrace. He raised her to her feet, and they stood as they had done years ago, when, boy and girl, they had come to the parting of their ways. She cried silently for a while, and then she said miserably: "I've only you left, dear."

In this hour of spent effort and lassitude it was a queer physical comfort, very pure and sweet, to feel the close contact of her young, strong body. She, too, out of the wreck, was all that he had left. His clasp tightened, and he murmured soothing words.

"Oh, my dear, I am so tired," she said, giving herself up, for her part also, to the foolish solace of his arms. "I wish I could stay here always, Paul."

He whispered: "Why not?"

Indeed, why not? Instinct spoke. His people were her people and her people his. And she had proved herself a brave, true woman. Before him no longer gleamed the will-o'-the-wisp leading him a fantastic dance through life. Before him lay only darkness. Jane and he, hand in hand, could walk through it fearless and undismayed. And her own great love, shown unashamed in the abandonment of this moment of intense emotion' made his pulses throb. He whispered again: "Why not?"

For answer she nestled closer. "If only you could love me a little, little bit?"

"But I do," said Paul hoarsely.

She shook her head and sobbed afresh, and they stood in close embrace at the end of the room by the door, regardless of the presence of the old man who sat, his back to them, smoking his pipe and looking, with his birdlike crook of the neck, meditatively into the fire. "No, no," said Jane, at last. "It's silly of me. Forgive me. We mustn't talk of such things. Neither of us is fit to—and to-night it's not becoming. I have lost my father and you are only my brother, Paul dear."

Barney Bill broke in suddenly; and at the sound of his voice they moved apart. "Think over it, sonny. Don't go and do anything rash."

"Don't you think it would be wise for Jane to marry me?"

"Ay—for Jane."

"Not for me?"

"It's only wise for a man to marry a woman what he loves," said Barney Bill.

"Well?"

"You said, when we was a-driving here, as you are going to live for the Truth and nothing but the Truth. I only mention it," added the old man drily.

Jane recovered herself, with a gulp in the throat, and before Paul could answer said: "We too had a talk to-day, Paul. Remember," her voice quavered a little—"about carrots."

"You were right in essence," said Paul, looking at her gravely. "But I should have my incentive. I know my own mind. My affection for you is of the deepest. That is Truth—I needn't tell you. We could lead a happy and noble life together."

"We belong to two different social classes, Paul," she said gently, again sitting in the straight-backed chair by the table.

"We don't," he replied. "I repudiated my claims to the other class this evening. I was admitted into what is called high society, partly because people took it for granted that I was a man of good birth. Now that I've publicly proclaimed that I'm not—and the newspapers will pretty soon find out all about me now—I'll drop out of that same high society. I shan't seek readmittance."

"People will seek you."

"You don't know the world," said he.

"It must be mean and horrid."

"Oh, no. It's very just and honourable. I shan't blame it a bit for not wanting me. Why should I? I don't belong to it."

"But you do, dear Paul," she cried earnestly. "Even if you could get rid of your training and mode of thought, you can't get rid of your essential self. You've always been an aristocrat, and I've always been a small shop-keeper's daughter and shall continue to be one."

"And I say," Paul retorted, "that we've both sprung from the people, and are of the people. You've raised yourself above the small shop-keeping class just as much as I have. Don't let us have any sham humility about it. Whatever happens you'll always associate with folk of good-breeding and education. You couldn't go back to Barn Street. It would be idiotic for me to

contemplate such a thing for my part. But between Barn Street and Mayfair there's a refined and intellectual land where you and I can meet on equal ground and make our social position. What do you say?"

She did not look at him, but fingered idly the cards on the tray. "To-morrow you will think differently. To-night you're all on the strain."

"And, axing yer pardon, sonny, for chipping in," said the old man, holding up his pipe in his gnarled fingers, "you haven't told her as how you loves her—not as how a young woman axed in marriage ought to be told."

"I've spoken the Truth, dear old friend," said Paul. "I've got down to bed-rock to-night. I have a deep and loyal affection for Jane. I shan't waver in it all my life long. I'll soon find my carrot, as she calls it—it will be England's greatness. She is the woman that will help me on my path. I've finished with illusions for ever and ever. Jane is the bravest and grandest of realities. To-night's work has taught me that. For me, Jane stands for the Truth. Jane—"

He turned to her, but she had risen from her chair, staring at a card which she held in her hand. Her clear eyes met his for an instant as she threw the card on the table before him. "No, dear. For you, that's the Truth."

He took it up and looked at it stupidly. It bore a crown and the inscription: "The Princess Sophie Zobraska," and a pencilled line, in her handwriting: "With anxious inquiries." He reeled, as if someone had dealt him a heavy blow on the head. He recovered to see Jane regarding him with her serene gravity. "Did you know about this?" he asked dully.

"No. I've just seen the card. I found it at the bottom of the pile."

"How did it come?"

Jane rang the bell. "I don't know. If Annie's still up, we can find out. As it was at the bottom, it must have been one of the first."

"How could the news have travelled so fast?" said Paul.

The maid came in. Questioned, she said that just after Paul had gone upstairs, and while Jane was at the telephone, a chauffeur had presented the card. He belonged to a great lighted limousine in which sat a lady in hat and dark veil. According to her orders, she had said that Mr. Finn was dead, and the chauffeur had gone away and she had shut the door.

The maid was dismissed. Paul stood on the hearthrug with bent brows, his hands in his jacket pockets. "I can't understand it," he said.

"She must ha' come straight from the Town Hall," said Barney Bill.

"But she wasn't there," cried Paul.

"Sonny," said the old fellow, "if you're always dead sure of where a woman is and where a woman isn't, you're a wiser man than Solomon with all his wives and other domestic afflictions."

Paul threw the card into the fire. "It doesn't matter where she was," said he. "It was a very polite—even a gracious act to send in her card on her way home. But it makes no difference to what I was talking about. What have I got to do with princesses? They're out of my sphere. So are Naiads and Dryads and Houris and Valkyrie and other fabulous ladies. The Princess Zobraska has nothing to do with the question."

He made a step towards Jane and, his hand on her shoulder, looked at her in his new, masterful way. "I come in the most solemn hour and in the crisis of my life to ask you to marry me. My father, whom I've only learned to love and revere to-night, is lying dead upstairs. To-night I have cut away all bridges behind me. I go into the unknown. We'll have to fight, but we'll fight together. You have courage, and I at least have that. There's a seat in Parliament which I'll have to fight for afterwards like a dog for a bone, and an official position which brings in enough bread and-butter—"

"And there's a fortune remarked Barney Bill.

"What do you mean?" Paul swung round sharply.

"Yer father's fortune, sonny. Who do yer suppose he was a-going to leave it to? 'Omes for lost 'orses or Free Zionists? I don't know as 'ow I oughter talk of it, him not buried yet—but I seed his will when he made it a month or two ago, and barring certain legacies to Free Zionists and such-like lunatic folk, not to speak of Jane ere being left comfortably off, you're the residuary legatee, sonny—with something like a hundred thousand pounds. There's no talk of earning bread-and-butter, sonny."

"It never entered my head," said Paul, rather dazed. "I suppose a father would leave his money to his son. I didn't realize it." He passed his hand over his eyes. "So many things have happened to-night. Anyhow," he said, smiling queerly, in his effort to still a whirling brain, "if

there are no anxieties as to ways and means, so much the better for Jane and me. I am all the more justified in asking you to marry me. Will you?"

"Before I answer you, Paul dear," she replied steadily, "you must answer me. I've known about the will, just like Bill, all the time—"

"She has that," confirmed the old man.

"So this isn't news to me, dear, and can't alter anything from me to you."

"Why should it?" asked Paul. "But it makes my claim a little stronger."

"Oh, no," she replied, shaking her head. "It only—only confuses issues. Money has nothing to do with what I'm going to ask you. You said to-night you were going to live for the Truth—the real naked Truth. Now, Paul dear, I want the real, naked Truth. Do you love that woman?"

At her question she seemed to have grown from the common sense, clear-eyed Jane into a great and commanding presence. She had drawn herself to her full height. Her chin was in the air, her generous bust thrown forward, her figure imperious, her eyes intense. And Paul too drew himself up and looked at her in his new manhood. And they stood thus for a while, beloved enemies.

"If you want the Truth—yes, I do love her," said he.

"Then how dare you ask me to be your wife?"

"Because the one is nonsensical and illusory and the other is real and practical."

She flashed out angrily: "Do you suppose I can live my woman's life on the real and practical? What kind of woman do you take me for? An Amelia, a Patient Griselda, a tabby cat?"

Paul said: "You know very well; I take you for one of the greatest-hearted of women. I've already said it to-night."

"Do you think I'm a greater-hearted woman than she? Wait, I've not finished," she cried in a loud voice. "Your Princess—you cut her heart into bits the other day, when you proclaimed yourself a low-born impostor. She thought you a high-born gentleman, and you told her of the gutter up north and the fried-fish shop and the Sicilian organ-grinding woman. She, royalty—you of the scum! She left you. This morning she learned worse. She learned that you were the son of a convict. What does she do? She comes somehow—I don't know how—to Hickney Heath and hears you publicly give yourself away—and she drives straight here with a message for you. It's for you, the message. Who else?" She stood before Paul, a flashing Jane unknown. "Would a woman who didn't love you come to this house to-night? She wouldn't, Paul. You know it! Dear old Bill here, who hasn't moved in royal circles, knows it. No, my dear man," she said regally, "I've given you all my love—everything that is in me—since I was a child of thirteen. You will always have it. It's my great joy that you'll always have it. But, by God, Paul, I'm not going to exchange it for anything less. Can you give me the same?"

"You know I can't," said Paul. "But I can give you that which would make our marriage a happy one. I believe the experience of the world has shown it to be the securest basis."

She was on the point of breaking out, but turned away, with clenched hands, and, controlling herself, faced him again. "You're an honourable and loyal man, Paul, and you're saying this to save your face. I know that you would marry me. I know that you would be faithful to me in thought and word and act. I know that you would be good and kind and never give me a moment's cause for complaint. But your heart would be with the other woman. Whether she's out of your sphere or not—what does it matter to me? You love her and she loves you. I know it. I should always know it. You'd be living in hell and so should I. I should prefer to remain in purgatory, which, after all, is quite bearable—I'm used to it—and I love you enough to wish to see you in paradise."

She turned away with a wide gesture and an upward inflexion of her voice. Barney Bill refilled his pipe and fixed Paul with his twinkling diamond eyes. "It's a pity, sonny—a dodgasted pity!"

"We're up against the Truth, old man, the unashamed and naked truth," said Paul, with a sigh.

Jane caught Paul's fur-lined coat and hat from the chair on which he had thrown it and came to him. "It's time for you to go and rest, dear. We're all of us exhausted."

She helped him on with the heavy coat, and for farewell put both her hands on his shoulders. "You must forget a lot of things I've said to-night."

"I can't help remembering them."

"No, dear. Forget them." She drew his face down and kissed him on the lips. Then she led him out to the front door and accompanied him down the steps to the kerb where the car with its

weary chauffeur was waiting. The night had cleared and the stars shone bright in the sky. She pointed to one, haphazard. "Your star, Paul. Believe in it still."

He drove off. She entered the house, and, flinging herself on the floor by Barney Bill, buried her head on the old man's knees and sobbed her brave heart out.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next morning amazement fluttered over a million breakfast tables and throbbed in a million railway carriages. For all the fierceness of political passions, parliamentary elections are but sombre occurrences to the general public. Rarely are they attended by the picturesque, the dramatic, the tragic. But already the dramatic had touched the election of Hickney Heath, stimulating interest in the result. Thousands, usually apathetic as to political matters, opened their newspapers to see how the ex-convict candidate had fared. They read, with a gasp, that he was dead; that his successful opponent had proclaimed himself to be his son. They had the dramatic value of cumulative effect. If Paul had ever sought notoriety he had it now. His name rang through the length and breadth of the land. The early editions of the London afternoon papers swelled the chorus of amazed comment and conjecture. Some had even routed out a fact or two, Heaven knows whence, concerning father and son. According to party they meted out praise or blame. Some, unversed in the law, declared the election invalid. The point was discussed in a hundred clubs.

There was consternation in the social world. The Duchesses' boudoirs with which Paul had been taunted hummed with indignation. They had entertained an adventurer unawares. They had entrusted the sacred ark of their political hopes to a charlatan. Their daughters had danced with the offspring of gaol and gutter. He must be cast out from the midst of them. So did those that were foolish furiously rage together and imagine many a vain thing. The Winwoods came in for pity. They had been villainously imposed upon. And the Young England League to which they had all subscribed so handsomely—where were its funds? Was it safe to leave them at the disposal of so unprincipled a fellow? Then germs of stories crept in from the studios and the stage and grew perversely in the overheated atmosphere. Paul's reputation began to assume a pretty colour. On the other hand, there were those who, while deploring the deception, were impressed by the tragedy and by Paul's attitude. He had his defenders. Among the latter first sprang forward Lord Francis Ayres, the Chief Whip, officially bound to protect his own pet candidate.

He called early at the house in Portland Place, a distressed and anxious man. The door was besieged by reporters from newspapers, vainly trying to gain, entrance. His arrival created a sensation. At any rate there was a headline "Opposition Whip calls on Savelli." One or two attempted to interview him on the doorstep. He excused himself courteously. As-yet he knew as much or as little as they. The door opened. The butler snatched him in hurriedly. He asked to see the Winwoods. He found them in the library.

"Here's an awful mess," said he, throwing up his hands. "I thought I'd have a word or two with you before I tackle Savelli. Have you seen him this morning?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, what do you think about it?"

"I think," said Ursula, "that the best thing I can do is to take him away with me for a rest as soon as possible. He's at the end of his tether."

"You seem to take it pretty calmly."

"How do you expect us to take it, my dear Frank?" she asked. "We always expected Paul to do the right thing when the time came, and we consider that he has done it."

The Chief Whip smoothed a perplexed brow. "I don't quite follow. Were you, vulgarly speaking, in the know all the time?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you."

So he sat down and Miss Winwood quietly told him all she knew about Paul and what had happened during the past few weeks, while the Colonel sat by his desk and tugged his long moustache and here and there supplemented her narrative.

"That's all very interesting," Ayres remarked when she had finished, "and you two have acted like bricks. I also see that he must have had a devil of a time of it. But I've got to look at things from an official point of view."

"There's no question of invalidity, is there?" asked Colonel Winwood.

"No. He was known as Paul Savelli, nominated as Paul Savelli, and elected as Paul Savelli by the electors of Hickney Heath. So he'll sit as Paul Savelli. That's all right. But how is the House going to receive him when he is introduced? How will it take him afterwards? What use will he be to the party? We only ran him because he seemed to be the most brilliant of the young outsiders. We hoped great things of him. Hasn't he smashed up himself socially? Hasn't he smashed up his career at the very beginning? All that is what I want to know."

"So do I," groaned Colonel Winwood. "I didn't have a wink of sleep last night."

"I didn't either," said Ursula, "but I don't think it will matter a row of pins to Paul in his career."

"It will always be up against him," said Ayres.

"Because he has acted like a man?"

"It's the touch of Ruy Blas that I'm afraid of."

"You must remember that he wasn't aware of his relation to the dead man until the eve of the election."

"But he was aware that he wasn't a descendant of a historical Italian family, which everyone thought him to be. I don't speak for myself," said Ayres. "I'm fond of the chap. One can't help it. He has the charm of the great gentleman, confound him, and it's all natural. The cloven hoof has never appeared, because I personally believe there's no cloven hoof. The beggar was born well bred, and, as to performance—well—he has been a young meteor across the political sky. Until this election. Then he was a disappointment. I frankly confess it. I didn't know what he was playing at. Now I do. Poor chap. I personally am sympathetic. But what about the cold-blooded other people, who don't know what you've told me? To them he's the son of an ex-convict—a vendor of fried fish—I put it brutally from their point of view—who has been masquerading as a young St. George on horseback. Will he ever be forgiven? Officially, have I any use for him? You see, I'm responsible to the party."

"Any party," said Ursula, "would be a congregation of imbeciles who didn't do their best to develop the genius of Paul Savelli."

"I'm fond of Paul," said Colonel Winwood, in his tired way, "but I don't know that I would go as far as that."

"It's only because you're a limited male, my dear James. I suppose Caesar was the only man who really crossed the Rubicon. And the fuss he made about it! Women jump across with the utmost certainty. My dear Frank, we're behind Paul, whatever happens. He has been fighting for his own hand ever since he was a child, it is true. But he has fought gallantly."

"My dear Miss Winwood," said Frank Ayres, "if there's a man to be envied, it's the one who has you for his champion!"

"Anyone, my dear Frank, is to be envied," she retorted, "who is championed by common-sense."

"All these fireworks illuminate nothing," said Colonel Winwood. "I think we had better ask Paul to come down and see Frank. Would you like to see him alone?"

"I had rather you stayed," said Frank Ayres.

A message was sent to Paul, and presently he appeared, very pale and haggard.

Frank Ayres met him with outstretched hand, spoke a courteous word of sympathy, apologized for coming in the hour of tragic bereavement.

Paul thanked him with equal courtesy. "I was about to write to you, Lord Francis," he continued, "a sort of statement in explanation of what happened last night—"

"Our friends have told me all, I think, that you may have to say."

"I shall still write it," said Paul, "so that you can have it in black and white. At present, I've given the press nothing."

"Quite right," said Frank Ayres. "For God's sake, let us work together as far as the press is concerned. That's one of the reasons why I've forced myself upon you. It's horrible, my dear fellow, to intrude at such a time. I hate it, as you can well imagine. But it's my duty."

"Of course it is," said Paul. There was a span of awkward silence. "Well," said he, with a wan smile, "we're facing, not a political, but a very unimportant party situation. Don't suppose I haven't a sense of proportion. I have. What for me is the end of the world is the unruffled continuance of the cosmic scheme for the rest of mankind. But there are relative things to consider. You have to consider the party. I'm sort of fly-blown. Am I any use? Let us talk straight. Am I or am I not?"

"My dear chap," said Frank Ayres, with perplexed knitting of the brows, "I don't quite know what to say. You yourself have invited me to talk straight. Well! Forgive me if I do. There may be a suggestion in political quarters that you have won this election under false pretences."

"Do you want me to resign my seat?"

The two men looked deep into each other's eyes.

"A Unionist in is a Liberal out," said Frank Ayres, "and counts two on division. That's one way of looking at it. We want all we can get from the enemy. On the other hand, you'd come in for a lot of criticism and hostility. You'd have to start not only from the beginning, but with a handicap. Are you strong enough to face it?"

"I'm not going to run away from anything," said Paul. "But I'll tell you what I'm prepared to do. I'll resign and fight the constituency again, under my real name of Kegworthy, provided, of course, the local people are willing to adopt me—on the understanding, however, that the party support me, or, at least, don't put forward another candidate. I'm not going to turn berserk."

"That's a sporting offer, at any rate. But, pardon me—we're talking business—where is the money for another election to come from?"

"My poor father's death makes me a wealthy man," replied Paul.

Miss Winwood started forward in her chair. "My dear, you never told us."

"There were so many other things to talk about this morning," he said gently; "but of course I would have told you later. I only mention it now"—he turned to the Chief Whip—"in answer to your direct and very pertinent question."

Now between a political free-lance adopting a parliamentary career in order to fight for his own hand, as all Paul's supporters were frankly aware that he was doing, and a wealthy, independent and brilliant young politician lies a wide gulf. The last man on earth, in his private capacity, to find his estimate of his friends influenced by their personal possessions was the fine aristocrat Lord Francis Ayres. But he was a man of the world, the very responsible head of the executive of a great political party. As that executive head he was compelled to regard Paul from a different angle. The millions of South Africa or the Middle West might vainly knock at his own front door till the crack of doom, while Paul the penniless sauntered in an honoured guest. But in his official room in the House of Commons more stern and worldly considerations had to prevail.

"Of course I can't give you an answer now," said he. "I'll have to discuss the whole matter with the powers that be. But a seat's a seat, and though I appreciate your Quixotic offer, I don't see why we should risk it. It's up to you to make good. It's more in your own interest that I'm speaking now. Can you go through with it?"

Paul, with his unconquerable instinct for the dramatic, hauled out the little cornelian heart at the end of his watch-chain. "My dear fellow," said he. "Do you see that? It was given to me for failing to win a race at a Sunday-school treat, when I was a very little boy. I didn't possess coat or stockings, and my toes came out through the ends of my boots, and in order to keep the thing safe I knotted it up in the tail of my shirt, which waggled out of the seat of my breeches. It was given to me by a beautiful lady, who, I remember, smelled like all the perfumes of Araby. She awakened my aesthetic sense by the divine and intoxicating odour that emanated from her. Since then I have never met woman so—so like a scented garden of all the innocences. To me she was a goddess. I overheard her prophesy things about me. My life began from that moment. I kept the cornelian heart all my life, as a talisman. It has brought me through all kinds of things. Once I was going to throw it away and Miss Winwood would not let me. I kept it, somewhat against my will, for I thought it was a lying talisman. It had told me, in the sweet-scented lady's words, that I was the son of a prince. Give me half an hour to-morrow or the day after," he said, seeing a puzzled look in Frank Ayres's face, "and I'll tell you a true psychological fairy tale—the apologia pro vita mea. I say, anyhow, that lately, until last night, I thought this little cornelian heart was a lying talisman. Then I knew it didn't lie. I was the son of a prince, a prince of men, although he had been in gaol and spent his days afterwards in running emotional Christianity and fried-fish shops. His name was Silas. Mine is Paul. Something significant about it, isn't there? Anyhow"—he balanced the heart in the palm of his hand—"this hasn't lied. It has carried me through all my life. When I thought it failed, I found it at the purest truth of its prophecy. It's not going to fail me now. If it's right for me to take my seat I'll take it—whether I make good politically, or not, is on the knees of the gods. But you may take it from me that there's nothing in this wide world that I won't face or go through with, if I've set my mind to it."

So the child who had kicked Billy Goodge and taken the spolia opima of paper cocked hat and wooden sword spoke through the man. As then, in a queer way, he found himself commanding a situation; and as then, commanding it rightfully, through sheer personal force. Again, at a sign, he would have broken the sword across his knee. But the sign did not come.

"Speaking quite unofficially," said Frank Ayres, "I think, if you feel like that, you would be a fool to give up your seat."

"Very well," said Paul, "I thank you. And now, perhaps, it would be wise to draw up that

statement for the press, if you can spare the time."

So Paul made a draft and Frank Ayres revised it, and it was sent upstairs to be typed. When the typescript came down, Paul signed and dispatched it and gave the Chief Whip a duplicate.

"Well," said the latter, shaking hands, "the best of good luck!"

Whereupon he went home feeling that though there would be the deuce to pay, Paul Savelli would find himself perfectly solvent; and meeting the somewhat dubious Leader of the Opposition later in the day he said: "Anyhow, this 'far too gentlemanly party' has got someone picturesque, at last, to touch the popular imagination."

"A new young Disraeli?"

"Why not?"

The Leader made a faint gesture of philosophic doubt. "The mould is broken," said he.

"We'll see," said Frank Ayres, confidently.

Meanwhile, Paul returned to his room and wrote a letter, three words of which he had put on paper—"My dear Princess"—when the summons to meet the Chief Whip had come. The unblotted ink had dried hard. He took another sheet.

"My dear Princess," he began.

He held his head in his hand. What could he say? Ordinary courtesy demanded an acknowledgment of the Princess's message of inquiry. But to write to her whom he had held close in his arms, whose lips had clung maddeningly to his, in terms of polite convention seemed impossible. What had she meant by her message? If she had gone scornfully out of his life, she had gone, and there was an end on't. Her coming back could bear only one interpretation—that of Jane's passionate statement. In spite of all, she loved him. But now, stripped and naked and at war with the world, for all his desire, he would have none of her love. Not he.... At last he wrote:

> PRINCESS,—A thousand grateful thanks for last night's gracious act—the act of the very great lady that I have the privilege of knowing you to be.
>
> PAUL SAVELLI.

He rang for a servant and ordered the note to be sent by hand, and then went out to Hickney Heath to see to the burying of his dead. On his return he found a familiar envelope with the crown on the flap awaiting him. It contained but few words:

> PAUL, come and see me. I will stay at home all day.
>
> SOPHIE.

His pulses throbbed. Her readiness to await his pleasure proved a humility of spirit rare in Princess Sophie Zobraska. Her hands were held out towards him. But he hardened his heart. The fairy-tale was over. Nothing but realities lay before him. The interview was perilous; but he was not one to shirk danger. He went out, took a cab and drove to Berkeley Square.

She rose shyly as he entered and advanced to meet him. He kissed her hand, but when he sought to release it he found his held in her warm clasp. "Mon Dieu! How ill you are looking!" she said, and her lips quivered.

"I'm only tired."

"You look so old. Ah!" She moved away from him with a sigh. "Sit down. I suppose you can guess why I've asked you to come," she continued after a pause. "But it is a little hard to say. I want you to forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Paul.

"Don't be ungenerous; you know there is. I left you to bear everything alone."

"You were more than justified. You found me an impostor. You were wounded in everything you held sacred. I wounded you deliberately. You could do nothing else but go away. Heaven forbid that I should have thought of blaming you. I didn't. I understood."

"But it was I who did not understand," she said, looking at the rings on her fingers. "Yes. You are right. I was wounded—like an animal, I hid myself in the country, and I hoped you would write, which was foolish, for I knew you wouldn't. Then I felt that if I had loved you as I ought, I should never have gone away."

"I thought it best to kill your love outright," said Paul.

She lay back on her cushions, very fair, very alluring, very sad. From where he sat he saw her face in its delicate profile, and he had a mighty temptation to throw himself on his knees by her

side.

"I thought, too, you had killed it," she said.

"Still think so," said Paul, in a low voice.

She raised herself, bent forward, and he met the blue depths of her gaze. "And you? Your love?"

"I never did anything to kill it."

"But I did."

"No, you couldn't. I shall love you to the hour of my death." He saw the light leap into her eyes. "I only say it," he added somewhat coldly, "because I will lie to you no longer. But it's a matter that concerns me alone."

"How you alone? Am not I to be considered?"

He rose and stood on the hearthrug, facing her. "I consider you all the time," said he.

"Listen, mon cher ami," she said, looking up at him. "Let us understand one another. Is there anything about you, your birth or your life that I still don't know—I mean, anything essential?"

"Nothing that matters," said Paul.

"Then let us speak once and for all, soul to soul. You and I are of those who can do it. Eh bien. I am a woman of old family, princely rank and fortune—you—"

"By my father's death," said Paul, for the second time that day, "I am a rich man. We can leave out the question of fortune—except that the money I inherit was made out of a fried-fish shop business. That business was conducted by my father on lines of peculiar idealism. It will be my duty to carry on his work—at least"—he inwardly and conscientiously repudiated the idea of buying fish at Billingsgate at five o'clock in the morning—"as far as the maintenance of his principles is concerned."

"Soit," said the Princess, "we leave out the question of fortune. You are then a man of humble birth, and the rank you have gained for yourself."

"I am a man of no name and of tarnished reputation. Good God!" he blazed out suddenly, losing control. "What is the good of torturing ourselves like this? If I wouldn't marry you—before—until I had done something in the front of the world to make you proud of me, what do you think I'll do now, lying in the gutter for every one to kick me? Would it be to the happiness of either of us for me to sneak through society behind your rank? It would be the death of me and you would come to hate me as a mean hound."

"You? A mean hound?" Her voice broke and the tears welled up in her eyes. "You have done nothing for me to be proud of? You? You who did what you did last night? Yes, I was there. I saw and heard. Listen!" She rose to her feet and stood opposite to him, her eyes all stars, her figure trembling and her hands moving in her Frenchwoman's passionate gestures. "When I saw in the newspapers about your father, my heart was wrung for you. I knew what it meant. I knew how you must suffer. I came up straight to town. I wanted to be near you. I did not know how. I did not want you to see me. I called in my steward. 'How can I see the election?' We talked a little. He went and hired a room opposite the Town Hall. I waited there in the darkness. I thought it would last forever. And then came the result and the crowd cheered and I thought I should choke. I sobbed, I sobbed, I sobbed—and then you came. And I heard, and then I held out my arms to you alone in the dark room—like this—and cried: 'Paul, Paul!"' Woman conquered. Madness surged through him and he flung his arms about her and they kissed long and passionately.

"Whether you do me the honour of marrying me or not," she said a while later' flushed and triumphant, "our lives are joined together."

And Paul, still shaken by the intoxication of her lips and hair and clinging pressure of her body, looked at her intensely with the eyes of a man's longing. But he said: "Nothing can alter what I said a few minutes ago—not all the passion and love in the world. You and I are not of the stuff, thank God, to cut ourselves adrift and bury ourselves in some romantic island and give up our lives to a dream. We're young. We're strong. We both know that life is a different sort of thing altogether from that. We're not of the sort that shirks its responsibilities. We've got to live in the world, you and I, and do the world's work."

"Parfaitement, mon bien aime." She smiled at him serenely. "I would not bury myself with you in an Ionian island for more than two months in a year for anything on earth. On my part, it would be the unforgivable sin. No woman has the right, however much she loves him, to ruin a man, any more than a man has the right to ruin a woman. But if you won't marry me, I'm perfectly willing to spend two months a year in an Ionian island with you," and she looked at him, very proud and fearless.

Paul took her by the shoulders and shook her, more roughly than he realized. "Sophie, don't tempt me to a madness that we should both regret."

She laughed, wincing yet thrilled, under the rude handling, and freed herself. "But what more can a woman offer the man who loves her—that is to say if he does love her?"

"I not love you?" He threw up his hands—"Dear God!"

She waved him away and retreated a step or two, still laughing, as he advanced. "Then why won't you marry me? You're afraid."

"Yes," he cried. "It's the only thing on this earth that I'm afraid of."

"Why?"

"The sneers. First you'd hate them. Then you'd hate and despise me."

She grew serious. "Calme-toi, my dearest. Just consider things practically. Who is going to sneer at a great man?"

"I the first," replied Paul bitterly, his self-judgment warped by the new knowledge of the vanities and unsubstantialities on which his life had been founded. "I a great man, indeed!"

"A very great man. A brilliant man I knew long ago. A brave man I have known, in spite of my pride, these last two or three awful weeks. But last night I knew you were a great man—a very great man. Ah, mon Paul. La canaille, whether it lives in Whitechapel or Park Lane, what does it matter to us?"

"The riff-raff, unfortunately," said Paul, "forms the general judgment of society."

The Princess drew herself up in all her aristocratic dignity. "My Paul well-beloved," said she, "you have still one or two things to learn. People of greatness and rank march with their peers, and they can spit upon the canaille. There is canaille in your House of Lords, upon which, the day after to-morrow, you can spit, and it will take off its coronet and thank you—and now," she said, resuming her seat on the sofa, among the cushions, "let us stop arguing. If there is any more arguing to be done, let us put it off to another occasion. Let us dismiss the questions of marriage and Ionian islands altogether, and let us talk pleasantly like dear friends who are reconciled."

And with the wit of the woman who loves and the subtlety of the woman of the world she took Paul in her delicate hands and held him before her smiling eyes and made him tell her of all the things she wanted to know. And so Paul told her of all his life, of Bludston, of Barney Bill, of the model days, of the theatre, of Jane, of his father; and he showed her the cornelian heart and expounded its significance; and he talked of his dearest lady, Miss Winwood, and his work on the Young England League, and his failure to grip in this disastrous election, and he went back to the brickfield and his flight from the Life School, and his obsessing dream of romantic parentage and the pawning of his watch at Drane's Court; and in the full tide of it all a perturbed butler appeared at the door.

"Can I speak a word to Your Highness?"

She rose. The butler spoke the word. She burst out laughing. "My dear," she cried, "it's past nine o'clock. The household is in a state of agitation about dinner. We'll have it at once, Wilkins."

The butler bowed and retired.

The Princess laughed again. "Of course you'll stay. I left Stephanie at Morebury."

And Paul stayed to dinner, and though, observing the flimsy compact, they dismissed the questions of Ionian islands and marriage, they talked till midnight of matters exceedingly pleasant.

CHAPTER XXIII

SO the lovers were reconciled, although the question of marriage was farther off than ever, and the Princess and Miss Winwood wept on each other's shoulders after the way of good women, and Paul declared that he needed no rest, and was eager to grapple with the world. He had much to do. First, he buried his dead, the Princess sending a great wreath and her carriage, after having had a queer interview with Jane, of which neither woman would afterwards speak a word; but it was evident that they had parted on terms of mutual respect and admiration. Then Paul went through the task of settling his father's affairs. Jane having expressed a desire to take over the management of a certain department of the business, he gladly entrusted it to her capable hands. He gave her the house at Hickney Heath, and Barney Bill took up his residence

there as a kind of old watch-dog. Meanwhile, introduced by Frank Ayres and Colonel Winwood, he faced the ordeal of a chill reception by the House of Commons and took his seat. After that the nine-days' wonder of the scandal came to an end; the newspapers ceased talking of it and the general public forgot all about him. He only had to reckon with his fellow-members and with social forces. His own house too he had to put in order. He resigned his salary and position as Organizing Secretary of the Young England League, but as Honorary Secretary he retained control. To assure his position he applied for Royal Letters Patent and legalized his name of Savelli, Finally, he plunged into the affairs of Fish Palaces Limited, and learned the many mysteries connected with that outwardly unromantic undertaking.

These are facts in Paul's career which his chronicler is bound to mention. But on Paul's development they exercised but little influence. He walked now, with open eyes, in a world of real things. The path was difficult, but he was strong. Darkness lay ahead, but he neither feared it nor dreamed dreams of brightness beyond. The Vision Splendid had crystallized into an unconquerable purpose of which he felt the thrill. Without Sophie Zobraska's love he would have walked on doggedly, obstinately, with set teeth. He had proved himself fearless, scornful of the world's verdict. But he would have walked in wintry gloom with a young heart frozen dead. Now his path was lit by warm sunshine and the burgeon of spring was in his heart. He could laugh again in his old joyous way; yet the laughter was no longer that of the boy, but of the man who knew the place that laughter should hold in a man's life.

On the day when he, as chairman, had first presided over a meeting of the Board of Directors of Fish Palaces Limited, he went to the Princess and said: "If I bring with me 'an ancient and fish-like smell, a kind of, not of the newest, Poor-John,' send me about my business."

She bade him not talk foolishly.

"I'm talking sense," said he. "I'm going through with it. I'm in trade. I know to the fraction of a penny how much fat ought to be used to a pound of hake, and I'm concentrating all my intellect on that fraction of a penny of fat."

"Tu as raison," she said.

"N'est-ce-pas? It's funny, isn't it? I've often told you I once thought myself the man born to be king. My dreams have come true. I am a king. The fried-fish king."

Sophie looked at him from beneath her long lashes. "And I am a princess. We meet at last on equal terms."

Paul sprang forward impulsively and seized her hands. "Oh, you dear, wonderful woman! Doesn't it matter to you that I'm running fried-fish shops?"

"I know why you're doing it," she said. "I wouldn't have you do otherwise. You are you, Paul. I should love to see you at it. Do you wait at table and hand little dishes to coster-mongers, ancien regime, en emigre?"

She laughed deliciously. Suddenly she paused, regarded him wide-eyed, with a smile on her lips.

"Tiens! I have an idea. But a wonderful ideal Why should I not be the fried-fish queen? Issue new shares. I buy them all up. We establish fish palaces all over the world? But why not? I am in trade already. Only yesterday my homme d'affaires sent me for signature a dirty piece of blue paper all covered with execrable writing and imitation red seals all the way down, and when I signed it I saw I was interested in Messrs. Jarrods Limited, and was engaged in selling hams and petticoats and notepaper and furniture and butter and—remark this—and fish. But raw fish. Now what the difference is between selling raw fish and fried fish, I do not know. Moi, je suis deja marchande de poissons, voila!"

She laughed and Paul laughed too. They postponed, however, to an indefinite date, consideration of the business proposal.

As Paul had foreseen, Society manifested no eagerness to receive him. Invitations no longer fell upon him in embarrassing showers. Nor did he make any attempt to pass through the once familiar doors. For one thing, he was proud: for another he was too busy. When the Christmas recess came he took a holiday, went off by himself to Algiers. He returned bronzed and strong, to the joy of his Sophie.

"My dear," said Miss Winwood one day to the curiously patient lady, "what is to come of it all? You can't go on like this for ever and ever."

"We don't intend to," smiled the Princess. "Paul is born to great things. He cannot help it. It is his destiny, I believe in Paul."

"So do I," replied Ursula. "But it's obvious that it will take him a good many years to achieve them. You surely aren't going to wait until he's a Cabinet Minister."

The Princess lay back among her cushions and laughed. "Mais non. It will all come in

woman's good time. Laissez-moi faire. He will soon begin to believe in himself again."

At last Paul's opportunity arrived. The Whips had given him his chance to speak. His luck attended him, in so far that when his turn came he found a full House. It was on a matter of no vital importance; but he had prepared his speech carefully. He stood up for the first time in that strangely nerve-shaking assembly in which he had been received so coldly and in which he was still friendless, and saw the beginning of the familiar exodus into the lobbies. A sudden wave of anger swept through him and he tore the notes of his speech across and across, and again he metaphorically kicked Billy Goodge. He plunged into his speech, forgetful of what he had written, with a passion queerly hyperbolic in view of the subject. At the arresting tones of his voice many of the withdrawing members stopped at the bar and listened, then as he proceeded they gradually slipped back into their places. Curiosity gave place to interest. Paul had found his gift again, and his anger soon lost itself completely in the joy of the artist. The House is always generous to performance. There was something novel in the spectacle of this young man, who had come there under a cloud, standing like a fearless young Hermes before them, in the ring of his beautiful voice, in the instinctive picturesqueness of phrase, in the winning charm of his personality. It was but a little point in a Government Bill that he had to deal with, and he dealt with it shortly. But he dealt with it in an unexpected, dramatic way, and he sat down amid comforting applause and circumambient smiles and nods. The old government hand who rose to reply complimented him gracefully and proceeded of course to tear his argument to tatters. Then an ill-conditioned Socialist Member got up, and, blundering and unconscious agent of Destiny in a fast-emptying House, began a personal attack on Paul. Whereupon there were cries of "Shame!" and "Sit down!" and the Speaker, in caustic tones, counselled relevancy, and the sympathy of the House went out to the Fortunate Youth; so that when he went soon afterwards into the outer lobby—it was the dinner hour—he found himself surrounded by encouraging friends. He did not wait long among them, for up in the Ladies' Gallery was his Princess. He tore up the stairs and met her outside. Her face was pale with anger.

"The brute!" she whispered. "The cowardly brute!"

He snapped his fingers. "Canaille, canaille! He counts for nothing. But I've got them!" he cried exultingly, holding out clenched fists. "By God, darling, I've got them! They'll listen to me now!"

She looked at him and the sudden tears came. "Thank God," she said, "I can hear you talk like that at last."

He escorted her down the stone stairs and through the lobby to her car, and they were objects of many admiring eyes. When they reached it she said, with a humorous curl of the lip, "Veux-tu m'epouser maintenant?"

"Wait, only wait," said he. "These are only fireworks. Very soon we'll get to the real thing."

"We shall, I promise you," she replied enigmatically; and she drove off.

One morning, a fortnight later, she rang him up. "You're coming to dine with me on Friday, as usual, aren't you?"

"Of course," said he. "Why do you ask?"

"Just to make sure. And yes—also—to tell you not to come till half-past eight."

She rang off. Paul thought no more of the matter. Ever since he had taken his seat in the House he had dined with her alone every Friday evening. It was their undisturbed hour of intimacy and gladness in the busy week. Otherwise they rarely met, for Paul was a pariah in her social world.

On the Friday in question his taxi drew up before an unusual-looking house in Berkeley Square. An awning projected from the front door and a strip of carpet ran across the pavement. At the sound of the taxi, the door opened and revealed the familiar figures of the Princess's footmen in their state livery. He entered, somewhat dazed.

"Her Highness has a party?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A very large dinner party."

Paul passed his hand over his forehead. What did it mean? "This is Friday, isn't it?"

"Of course, sir."

Paul grew angry. It was a woman's trap to force him on society. For a moment he struggled with the temptation to walk away after telling the servant that it was a mistake and that he had not been invited. At once, however, came realization of social outrage. He surrendered hat and coat and let himself be announced. The noise of thirty voices struck his ear as he entered the great drawing-room. He was confusedly aware of a glitter of jewels, and bare arms and shoulders and the black and white of men. But radiant in the middle of the room stood his Princess, with a tiara of diamonds on her head, and beside her stood a youngish man whose face seemed oddly

familiar.

Paul advanced, kissed her hand.

She laughed gaily. "You are late, Paul."

"You said half-past, Princess. I am here to the minute."

"Je te dirai apres," she said, and the daring of the intimate speech took his breath away.

"Your Royal Highness," she turned to the young man beside her—and then Paul suddenly recognized a prince of the blood royal of England—"may I present Mr. Savelli."

"I'm very pleased to meet you," said the Prince graciously. "Your Young England League has interested me greatly. We must have a talk about it one of these days, if you can spare the time. And I must congratulate you on your speech the other night."

"You are far too kind, sir," said Paul.

They chatted for a minute or two. Then the Princess said: "You'll take in the Countess of Danesborough. I don't think you've met her; but you'll find she's an old friend."

"Old friend?" echoed Paul.

She smiled and turned to a pretty and buxom woman of forty standing near. "My dear Lady Danesborough. Here is Mr. Savelli, whom you are so anxious to meet."

Paul bowed politely. His head being full of his Princess, he was vaguely puzzled as to the reasons for which Lady Danesborough desired his acquaintance.

"You don't remember me," she said.

He looked at her squarely for the first time; then started back. "Good God!" he cried involuntarily. "Good God! I've been wanting to find you all my life. I never knew your name. But here's the proof."

And he whipped out the cornelian heart from his waistcoat pocket. She took it in her hand, examined it, handed it back to him with a smile, a very sweet and womanly smile, with just the suspicion of mist veiling her eyes.

"I know. The Princess has told me."

"But how did she find you out—I mean as my first patroness?"

"She wrote to the vicar, Mr. Merewether—he is still at Bludston—asking who his visitor was that year and what had become of her. So she found out it was I. I've known her off and on ever since my marriage."

"You were wonderfully good to me," said Paul. "I must have been a funny little wretch."

"You've travelled far since then."

"It was you that gave me my inspiration," said he.

The announcement of dinner broke the thread of the talk. Paul looked around him and saw that the room was filled with very great people indeed. There were chiefs of his party and other exalted personages. There was Lord Francis Ayres. Also the Winwoods. The procession was formed.

"I've often wondered about you," said Lady Danesborough, as they were walking down the wide staircase. "Several things happened to mark that day. For one, I had spilled a bottle of awful scent all over my dress and I was in a state of odoriferous misery."

Paul laughed boyishly. "The mystery of my life is solved at last." He explained, to her frank delight. "You've not changed a bit," said he. "And oh! I can't tell you how good it is to meet you after all these years."

"I'm very, very glad you feel so," she said significantly. "More than glad. I was wondering ... but our dear Princess was right."

"It seems to me that the Princess has been playing conspirator," said Paul.

They entered the great dining-room, very majestic with its long, glittering table, its service of plate, its stately pictures, its double row of powdered and liveried footmen, and Paul learned, to his amazement, that in violation of protocols and tables of precedence, his seat was on the right hand of the Princess. Conspiracy again. Hitherto at her parties he had occupied his proper place. Never before had she publicly given him especial mark of her favour.

"Do you think she's right in doing this?" he murmured to Lady Danesborough.

It seemed so natural that he should ask her—as though she were fully aware of all his secrets.

"I think so," she smiled—as though she too were in the conspiracy.

They halted at their places, and there, at the centre of the long table, on the right of the young Prince stood the Princess, with flushed face and shining eyes, looking very beautiful and radiantly defiant.

"Mechante," Paul whispered, as they sat down. "This is a trap."

"Je le sais. Tu est bien prise, petite souris."

It pleased her to be gay. She confessed unblushingly. Her little mouse was well caught. The little mouse grew rather stern, and when the great company had settled down, and the hum of talk arisen, he deliberately scanned the table. He met some friendly glances—a Cabinet Minister nodded pleasantly. He also met some that were hostile. His Sophie had tried a dangerous experiment. In Lady Danesborough, the Maisie Shepherd of his urchindom, whose name he had never known, she had assured him a sympathetic and influential partner. Also, although he had tactfully not taken up that lady's remark, he felt proud of his Princess's glorious certainty that he would have no false and contemptible shame in the encounter. She had known that it would be a joy to him; and it was. The truest of the man was stirred. They talked and laughed about the far-off day. Incidents flaming in his mind had faded from hers. He recalled forgotten things. Now and then she said: "Yes, I know that. The Princess has told me." Evidently his Sophie was a conspirator of deepest dye.

"And now you're the great Paul Savelli," she said.

"Great?" He laughed. "In what way?"

"Before this election you were a personage. I've never run across you because we've been abroad so much, you know—my husband has a depraved taste for governing places—but a year or two ago we were asked to the Chudleys, and you were held out as an inducement."

"Good Lord!" said Paul, astonished.

"And now, of course, you're the most-discussed young man in London. Is he damned or isn't he? You know what I refer to."

"Well, am I?' he asked pleasantly.

"I'm glad to see you take it like that. It's not the way of the little people. Personally, I've stuck up for you, not knowing in the least who you were. I thought you did the big, spacious thing. It gave me a thrill when I read about it. Your speech in the House has helped you a lot. Altogether—and now considering our early acquaintance—I think I'm justified in calling you 'the great Paul Savelli.'"

Then came the shifting of talk. The Prince turned to his left-hand neighbour; Lady Danesborough to her right. Paul and the Princess had their conventional opportunity for conversation. She spoke in French, daringly using the intimate "tu"; but of all sorts of things—books, theatres, picture shows. Then tactfully she drew the Prince and his neighbour and Lady Danesborough into their circle, and, pulling the strings, she at last brought Paul and the Prince into a discussion over the pictures of the Doges in the Ducal Palace in Venice. The young Prince was gracious. Paul, encouraged to talk and stimulated by precious memories, grew interesting. The Princess managed to secure a set of listeners at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as if carrying on the theme, she said in a deliberately loud voice, compelling attention: "Your Royal Highness, I am in a dilemma."

"What is it?"

She paused, looked round and widened her circle. "For the past year I have been wanting Mr. Savelli to ask me to marry him, and he obstinately refuses to do so. Will you tell me, sir, what a poor woman is to do?"

She addressed herself exclusively to the young Prince; but her voice, with its adorable French intonation, rang high and clear. Paul, suddenly white and rigid, clenched the hand of the Princess which happened to lie within immediate reach. A wave of curiosity, arresting talk, spread swiftly down. There was an uncanny, dead silence, broken only by a raucous voice proceeding from a very fat Lord of Appeal some distance away:

"After my bath I always lie flat on my back and bring my knees up to my chin."

There was a convulsive, shrill gasp of laughter, which would have instantly developed into an hysterical roar, had not the young Prince, with quick, tactful disregard of British convention, sprung to his feet, and with one hand holding champagne glass, and the other uplifted, commanded silence. So did the stars in their courses still fight for Paul. "My lords, ladies and gentlemen," said the Prince, "I have the pleasure to announce the engagement of Her Highness the Princess Sophie Zobraska and Mr. Paul Savelli. I ask you to drink to their health and wish

them every happiness."

He bowed to the couple, lifted his glass, and standing, swept a quick glance round the company, and at the royal command the table rose, dukes and duchesses and Cabinet Ministers, the fine flowers of England, and drank to Paul and his Princess.

"Attrape!" she whispered, as they got up together, hand in hand. And as they stood, in their superb promise of fulfilment, they conquered. The Princess said: "Mais dis quelque chose, toi."

And Paul met the flash in her eyes, and he smiled. "Your Royal Highness, my lords, ladies and gentlemen," said he, while all the company were racking their brains to recall a precedent for such proceedings at a more than formal London dinner party; "the Princess and myself thank you from our hearts. For me this might almost seem the end of the fairy-tale of my life, in which—when I was eleven years old—her ladyship the Countess of Danesborough" (he bowed to the Maisie of years ago), "whom I have not seen from that day to this, played the part of Fairy Godmother. She gave me a talisman then to help me in my way through the world. I have it still." He held up the cornelian heart. "It guided my steps to my dearest lady, Miss Winwood, in whose beloved service I lived so long. It has brought me to the feet of my Fairy Princess. But now the fairy-tale is over. I begin where the fairy-tales end"—he laughed into his Sophie's eyes—"I begin in the certain promise of living happy ever afterwards."

In this supreme hour of his destiny there spoke the old, essential Paul, the believer in the Vision Splendid. The instinctive appeal to the romantic ringing so true and so sincere awoke responsive chords in hearts which, after all, as is the simple way of hearts of men and women, were very human.

He sat down a made man, amid pleasant laughter and bowings and lifting of glasses, the length of the long table.

Lady Danesborough said gently: "It was charming of you to bring me in. But I shall be besieged with questions. What on earth shall I tell them?"

"The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," he replied. "What do the Princess and I care?"

Later in the evening he managed to find himself alone for a moment with the Princess. "My wonderful Sophie, what can I say to you?"

She smiled victoriously. "Cry quits. Confess that you have not the monopoly of the grand manner. You have worked in your man's way—I in my woman's way."

"You took a great risk," said he.

Her eyes softened adorably. "Non, mon Paul, cheri. C'etait tout arrange. It was a certainty."

And then, Paul's dearest lady came up and pressed both their hands. "I am so glad. Oh, so glad." The tears started. "But it is something like a fairy-tale, isn't it?"

Well, as far as his chronicler can say at present, that is the end of the Fortunate Youth. But it is really only a beginning. Although his party is still in opposition, he is still young; his sun is rising and he is rich in the glory thereof. A worldful of great life lies before him and his Princess. What limit can we set to their achievement? Of course he was the Fortunate Youth. Of that there is no gainsaying. He had his beauty, his charm, his temperament, his quick southern intelligence—all his Sicilian heritage—and a freakish chance had favoured him from the day that, vagabond urchin, he attended his first and only Sunday-school treat. But personal gifts and favouring chance are not everything in this world.

On the day before his wedding he had a long talk with Barney Bill.

"Sonny," said the old man, scratching his white poll, "when yer used to talk about princes and princesses, I used to larf—larf fit to bust myself. I never let yer seen me do it, sonny, for all the time you was so dead serious. And now it has come true. And d'yer know why it's come true, sonny?" He cocked his head on one side, his little diamond eyes glittering, and laid a hand on Paul's knee. "D'yer know why? Because yer believed in it. I ain't had much religion, not having, so to speak, much time for it, also being an old crock of a pagan—but I do remember as what Christ said about faith—just a mustard seed of it moving mountains. That's it, sonny. I've observed lots of things going round in the old 'bus. Most folks believe in nothing. What's the good of 'em? Move mountains? They're paralytic in front of a dunghill. I know what I'm talking about, bless yer. Now you come along believing in yer 'igh-born parents. I larfed, knowing as who yer parents were. But you believed, and I had to let you believe. And you believed in your princes and princesses, and your being born to great things. And I couldn't sort of help believing in it too."

Paul laughed. "Things happen to have come out all right, but God knows why."

"He does," said Barney Bill very seriously. "That's just what He does know. He knows you had faith."

"And you, dear old man?" asked Paul, "what have you believed in?"

"My honesty, sonny," replied Barney Bill, fixing him with his bright eyes. "'Tain't much. 'Tain't very ambitious-like. But I've had my temptations. I never drove a crooked bargain in my life."

Paul rose and walked a step or two.

"You're a better man than I am, Bill."

Barney Bill rose too, rheumatically, and laid both hands on the young man's shoulders. "Have you ever been false to what you really believed to be true?"

"Not essentially," said Paul.

"Then it's all right, sonny," said the old man very earnestly, his bent, ill-clad figure, his old face wizened by years of exposure to suns and frosts, contrasting oddly with the young favourite of fortune. "It's all right. Your father believed in one thing. I believe in another. You believe in something else. But it doesn't matter a tuppenny damn what one believes in, so long as it's worth believing in. It's faith, sonny, that does it. Faith and purpose."

"You're right," said Paul. "Faith and purpose."

"I believed in yer from the very first, when you were sitting down reading Sir Walter with the bead and tail off. And I believed in yer when yer used to tell about being 'born to great things!"

Paul laughed. "That was all childish rubbish," said he.

"Rubbish?" cried the old man, his head more crooked, his eyes more bright, his gaunt old figure more twisted than ever. "Haven't yer got the great things yer believed yer were born to? Ain't yer rich? Ain't yer famous? Ain't yer a Member of Parliament? Ain't yer going to marry a Royal Princess? Good God Almighty! what more d'yer want?"

"Nothing in the wide, wide world!" laughed Paul.

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