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ONE OF OUR CONQUERERS

By George Meredith

1897

BOOK 4.

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CHAPTER XXV

NATALY IN ACTION

A ticket of herald newspapers told the world of Victor's returning to his London. Pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was Nataly's first afternoon visitor, and was graciously received; no sign of inquiry for the cause of the lady's alacrity to greet her being shown. Colney Durance came in, bringing the rumour of an Australian cantatrice to kindle Europe; Mr. Peridon, a seeker of tidings from the city of Bourges; Miss Priscilla Graves, reporting of Skepsey, in a holiday Sunday tone, that his alcoholic partner might at any moment release him; Mr. Septimus Barmby, with a hanged heavy look, suggestive of a wharfside crane swinging the ponderous thing he had to say. 'I have seen Miss Radnor.'

'She was well?' the mother asked, and the grand basso pitched forth an affirmative.

'Dear sweet girl she is!' Mrs. Blathenoy exclaimed to Colney.

He bowed. 'Very sweet. And can let fly on you, like a haggis, for a scratch.'

She laughed, glad of an escape from the conversational formalities imposed on her by this Mrs. Victor Radnor's mighty manner. 'But what girl worth anything! . . .

We all can do that, I hope, for a scratch!'

Mr. Barmby's Profession dissented.

Mr. Catkin appeared; ten minutes after his Peridon. He had met Victor near the Exchange, and had left him humming the non fu sogno of ERNANI.

'Ah, when Victor takes to Verdi, it's a flat City, and wants a burst of drum and brass,' Colney said; and he hummed a few bars of the march in Attila, and shrugged. He and Victor had once admired that blatancy.

Mr. Pempton appeared, according to anticipation. He sat himself beside Priscilla. Entered Mrs. John Cormyn, voluminous; Mrs. Peter Yatt, effervescent; Nataly's own people were about her and she felt at home.

Mrs. Blathenoy pushed a small thorn into it, by speaking of Captain Fenellan, and aside, as if sharing him with her. Nataly heard that Dartrey had been the guest of these Blathenoy's. Even Dartrey was but a man!

Rather lower under her voice, the vain little creature asked: 'You knew her?'

'Her?'

The cool counter-interrogation was disregarded. 'So sad! In the desert! a cup of pure water worth more than barrow-loads of gold! Poor woman!'

'Who?'

'His wife.'

'Wife!'

'They were married?'

Nataly could have cried: Snake! Her play at brevity had certainly been foiled. She nodded gravely. A load of dusky wonders and speculations pressed at her bosom. She disdained to question the mouth which had bitten her.

Mrs. Blathenoy, resolving, that despite the jealousy she excited, she would have her friend in Captain Fenellan, whom she liked—liked, she was sure, quite as innocently as any other woman of his acquaintance did, departed and she hugged her innocence defiantly, with the mournful pride which will sometimes act as a solvent.

A remark or two passed among the company upon her pretty face.

Nataly murmured to Colney: 'Is there anything of Dartrey's wife?'

'Dead,' he answered.

'When?'

'Months back. I had it from Simeon. You didn't hear?'

She shook her head. Her ears buzzed. If he had it from Simeon Fenellan, Victor must have known it.

Her duties of hostess were conducted with the official smile.

As soon as she stood alone, she dropped on a chair, like one who has taken a shot in the heart, and that hideous tumult of wild cries at her ears blankly ceased. Dartrey, Victor, Nesta, were shifting figures of the might-have-been for whom a wretched erring woman, washed clean of her guilt by death, in a far land, had gone to her end: vainly gone: and now another was here, a figure of wood, in man's shape, conjured up by one of the three, to divide the two others; likely to be fatal to her or to them: to her, she hoped, if the choice was to be: and beneath the leaden hope, her heart set to a rapid beating, a fainter, a chill at the core.

She snatched for breath. She shut her eyes, and with open lips, lay waiting; prepared to thank the kindness about to hurry her hence, out of the seas of pain, without pain.

Then came sighs. The sad old servant in her bosom was resuming his labours.

But she had been near it—very near it? A gush of pity for Victor, overwhelmed her hardness of mind.

Unreflectingly, she tried her feet to support her, and tottered to the door, touched along to the stairs, and descended them, thinking strangely upon such a sudden weakness of body, when she would no longer have thought herself the weak woman. Her aim was to reach the library. She sat on the stairs midway, pondering over the length of her journey: and now her head was clearer; for she was travelling

to get Railway-guides, and might have had them from the hands of a footman, and imagined that she had considered it prudent to hide her investigation of those books: proofs of an understanding fallen backward to the state of infant and having to begin our drear ascent again.

A slam of the kitchen stair-door restored her. She betrayed no infirmity of footing as she walked past Arlington in the hall; and she was alive to the voice of Skepsey presently on the door-steps. Arlington brought her a note.

Victor had written: 'My love, I dine with Blathenoy in the City, at the Walworth. Business. Skepsey for clothes. Eight of us. Formal. A thousand embraces. Late.'

Skepsey was ushered in. His wife had expired at noon, he said; and he postured decorously the grief he could not feel, knowing that a lady would expect it of him. His wife had fallen down stone steps; she died in hospital. He wished to say, she was no loss to the country; but he was advised within of the prudence of abstaining from comment and trusting to his posture, and he squeezed a drop of conventional sensibility out of it, and felt improved.

Nataly sent a line to Victor: 'Dearest, I go to bed early, am tired. Dine well. Come to me in the morning.'

She reproached herself for coldness to poor Skepsey, when he had gone. The prospect of her being alone until the morning had been so absorbing a relief.

She found a relief also in work at the book of the trains. A walk to the telegraph-station strengthened her. Especially after despatching a telegram to Mr. Dudley Sowerby at Cronidge, and one to Nesta at Moorsedge, did she become stoutly nerved. The former was requested to meet her at Penhurst station at noon. Nesta was to be at the station for the Wells at three o'clock.

From the time of the flying of these telegrams, up to the tap of Victor's knuckle on her bed-room door next morning, she was not more reflectively conscious than a packet travelling to its destination by pneumatic tube. Nor was she acutely impressionable to the features and the voice she loved.

'You know of Skepsey?' she said.

'Ah, poor Skepsey!' Victor frowned and heaved.

'One of us ought to stand beside him at the funeral.'

'Colney or Fenellan?'

'I will ask Mr. Durance.'

'Do, my darling.'

'Victor, you did not tell me of Dartrey's wife.'

'There again! They all get released! Yes, Dartrey! Dartrey has his luck too.'

She closed her eyes, with the desire to be asleep.

'You should have told me, dear.'

'Well, my love! Well—poor Dartrey! I fancy I hadn't a confirmation of the news. I remember a horrible fit of envy on hearing the hint: not much more than a hint: serious illness, was it?—or expected event. Hardly worth while to trouble my dear soul, till certain. Anything about wives, forces me to think of myself—my better self!'

'I had to hear of it first from Mrs. Blathenoy.'

'You've heard of duels in dark rooms:—that was the case between Blathenoy and me last night for an hour.'

She feigned somnolent fatigue over her feverish weariness of heart. He kissed her on the forehead.

Her spell-bound intention to speak of Dudley Sowerby to him, was broken by the sounding of the hall-door, thirty minutes later. She had lain in a trance.

Life surged to her with the thought, that she could decide and take her step. Many were the years back since she had taken a step; less independently than now; unregretted, if fatal. Her brain was heated for the larger view of things and the swifter summing of them. It could put the man at a remove from her and say, that she had lived with him and suffered intensely. It gathered him to her breast

rejoicing in their union: the sharper the scourge, the keener the exultation. But she had one reproach to deafen and beat down. This did not come on her from the world: she and the world were too much foot to foot on the antagonist's line, for her to listen humbly. It came of her quick summary survey of him, which was unnoticed by the woman's present fiery mind as being new or strange in any way: simply it was a fact she now read; and it directed her to reproach herself for an abasement beneath his leadership, a blind subserviency and surrender of her faculties to his greater powers, such as no soul of a breathing body should yield to man: not to the highest, not to the Titan, not to the most Godlike of men. Under cloak, they demand it. They demand their bane.

And Victor! . . . She had seen into him.

The reproach on her was, that she, in her worship, had been slave, not helper. Scarcely was she irreproachable in the character of slave. If it had been utter slave! she phrased the words, for a further reproach. She remembered having at times murmured, dissented. And it would have been a desperate proud thought to comfort a slave, that never once had she known even a secret opposition to the will of her lord.

But she had: she recalled instances. Up they rose; up rose everything her mind ranged over, subsiding immediately when the service was done. She had not conceived her beloved to be infallible, surest of guides in all earthly-matters. Her intellect had sometimes protested.

What, then, had moved her to swamp it?

Her heart answered. And that heart also was arraigned: and the heart's fleshly habitation acting on it besides: so flagellant of herself was she: covertly, however, and as the chaste among women can consent to let our animal face them. Not grossly, still perceptibly to her penetrative hard eye on herself, she saw the senses of the woman under a charm. She saw, and swam whirling with a pang of revolt from her personal being and this mortal kind.

Her rational intelligence righted her speedily. She could say in truth, by proof, she loved the man: nature's love, heart's love, soul's love. She had given him her life.

It was a happy cross-current recollection, that the very beginning and spring of this wild cast of her life, issued from something he said and did (merest of airy gestures) to signify the blessing of life—how good and fair it is. A drooping mood in her had been struck; he had a look like the winged lyric up in blue heavens: he raised the head of the young flower from its contemplation of grave-mould. That was when he had much to bear: Mrs. Burman present: and when the stranger in their household had begun to pity him and have a dread of her feelings. The lucent splendour of his eyes was memorable, a light above the rolling oceans of Time.

She had given him her life, little aid. She might have closely counselled, wound in and out with his ideas. Sensible of capacity, she confessed to the having been morally subdued, physically as well; swept onward; and she was arrested now by an accident, like a waif of the river-floods by the dip of a branch. Time that it should be! But was not Mr. Durance, inveighing against the favoured system for the education of women, right when he declared them to be unfitted to speak an opinion on any matter external to the household or in a crisis of the household? She had not agreed with him: he presented stinging sentences, which irritated more than they enlightened. Now it seemed to her, that the model women of men make pleasant slaves, not true mates: they lack the worldly training to know themselves or take a grasp of circumstances.

There is an exotic fostering of the senses for women, not the strengthening breath of vital common air. If good fortune is with them, all may go well: the stake of their fates is upon the perpetual smooth flow of good fortune. She had never joined to the cry of the women. Few among them were having it in the breast as loudly.

Hard on herself, too, she perceived how the social rebel had reduced her mind to propitiate a simulacrum, reflected from out, of an enthroned Society within it, by an advocacy of the existing laws and rules and habits. Eminently servile is the tolerated lawbreaker: none so conservative. Not until we are driven back upon an unviolated Nature, do we call to the intellect to think radically: and then we begin to think of our fellows.

Or when we have set ourselves in motion direct for the doing of the right thing: have quitted the carriage at the station, and secured the ticket, and entered the train, counting the passage of time for a simple rapid hour before we have eased heart in doing justice to ourself and to another; then likewise the mind is lighted for radiation. That doing of the right thing, after a term of paralysis, cowardice—any evil name— is one of the mighty reliefs, equal to happiness, of longer duration.

Nataly had it. But her mind was actually radiating, and the comfort to her heart evoked the image of

Dartrey Fenellan. She saw a possible reason for her bluntness to the coming scene with Dudley.

At once she said, No! and closed the curtain; knowing what was behind, counting it nought. She repeated almost honestly her positive negative. How we are mixed of the many elements! she thought, as an observer; and self-justifyingly thought on, and with truth, that duty urged her upon this journey; and proudly thought, that she had not a shock of the painful great organ in her breast at the prospect at the end, or any apprehension of its failure to carry her through.

Yet the need of peace or some solace needed to prepare her for her interview turned her imagination burningly on Dartrey. She would not allow herself to meditate over hopes and schemes:—Nesta free: Dartrey free. She vowed to her soul sacredly—and she was one of those in whom the Divinity lives, that they may do so—not to speak a word for the influencing of Dudley save the one fact. Consequently, for a personal indulgence, she mused; she caressed maternally the object of her musing; of necessity, she excluded Nesta; but in tenderness she gave Dartrey a fair one to love him.

The scene was waved away. That one so loving him, partly worthy of him, ready to traverse the world now beside him—who could it be other than she who knew and prized his worth? Foolish! It is one of the hatefuller scourges upon women whenever, a little shaken themselves, they muse upon some man's image, that they cannot put in motion the least bit of drama without letting feminine self play a part; generally to develop into a principal part. . . The apology makes it a melancholy part.

Dartrey's temper of the caged lion dominated by his tamer, served as keynote for any amount of saddest colouring. He controlled the brute: but he held the contempt of danger, the love of strife, the passion for adventure; he had crossed the desert of human anguish. He of all men required a devoted mate, merited her. Of all men living, he was the hardest to match with a woman—with a woman deserving him.

The train had quitted London. Now for the country, now for free breathing! She who two days back had come from Alps, delighted in the look on flat green fields. It was under the hallucination of her saying in flight adieu to them, and to England; and, that somewhere hidden, to be found in Asia, Africa, America, was the man whose ideal of life was higher than enjoyment. His caged brute of a temper offered opportunities for delicious petting; the sweetest a woman can bestow: it lifts her out of timidity into an adoration still palpitatingly fearful. Ah, but familiarity, knowledge, confirmed assurance of his character, lift her to another stage, above the pleasures. May she not prove to him how really matched with him she is, to disdain the pleasures, cheerfully accept the burdens, meet death, if need be; readily face it as the quietly grey to-morrow: at least, show herself to her hero for a woman—the incredible being to most men—who treads the terrors as well as the pleasures of humanity beneath her feet, and may therefore have some pride in her stature. Ay, but only to feel the pride of standing not so shamefully below his level beside him.

Woods were flying past the carriage-windows. Her solitary companion was of the class of the admiring gentlemen. Presently he spoke. She answered. He spoke again. Her mouth smiled, and her accompanying look of abstract benevolence arrested the tentative allurement to conversation.

New ideas were set revolving in her. Dartrey and Victor grew to a likeness; they became hazily one man, and the mingled phantom complimented her on her preserving a good share of the beauty of her youth. The face perhaps: the figure rather too well suits the years! she replied. To reassure her, this Dartrey-Victor drew her close and kissed her; and she was confused and passed into the breast of Mrs. Burman expecting an operation at the hands of the surgeons. The train had stopped. 'Penhurst?' she said.

'Penhurst is the next station,' said the gentleman. Here was a theme for him! The stately mansion, the noble grounds, and Sidney! He discoursed of them.

The handsome lady appeared interested. She was interested also by his description of a neighbouring village, likely one hundred years hence to be a place of pilgrimage for Americans and for Australians. Age, he said, improves true beauty; and his eyelids indicated a levelling to perform the soft intentness. Mechanically, a ball rose in her throat; the remark was illuminated by a saying of Colney's, with regard to his countrymen at the play of courtship. No laughter came. The gentleman talked on.

All fancies and internal communications left her. Slowness of motion brought her to the plain piece of work she had to do, on a colourless earth, that seemed foggy; but one could see one's way. Resolution is a form of light, our native light in this dubious world.

Dudley Sowerby opened her carriage-door. They greeted.

'You have seen Nesta?' she said.

'Not for two days. You have not heard? The Miss Duvidneys have gone to Brighton.'

'They are rather in advance of the Season.'

She thanked him for meeting her. He was grateful for the summons.

Informing the mother of his betrothed, that he had ridden over from Cronidge, he speculated on the place to select for her luncheon, and he spoke of his horse being led up and down outside the station. Nataly inquired for the hour of the next train to London. He called to one of the porters, obtained and imparted the time; evidently now, as shown by an unevenness of his lifted brows, expecting news of some little weight.

'Your husband is quite well?' he said, in affection for the name of husband.

'Mr. Radnor is well; I have to speak to you; I have more than time.'

'You will lunch at the inn?'

'I shall not eat. We will walk.'

They crossed the road and passed under trees.

'My mother was to have called on the Miss Duvidneys. They left hurriedly; I think it was unanticipated by Nesta. I venture . . . you pardon the liberty . . . she allows me to entertain hopes. Mr. Radnor, I am hardly too bold in thinking . . . I trust, in appealing to you . . . at least I can promise!

'Mr. Sowerby, you have done my daughter the honour to ask her hand in marriage.'

He said: 'I have,' and had much to say besides, but deferred: a blow was visible. The father had been more encouraging to him than the mother.

'You have not known of any circumstance that might cause hesitation in asking?'

'Miss Radnor?'

'My daughter:—you have to think of your family.'

'Indeed, Mrs. Radnor, I was coming to London tomorrow, with the consent of my family.'

'You address me as Mrs. Radnor. I have not the legal right to the name.'

'Not legal!' said he, with a catch at the word.

He spun round in her sight, though his demeanour was manfully rigid.

'Have I understood, madam . . . ?'

'You would not request me to repeat it. Is that your horse the man is leading?'

'My horse: it must be my horse.'

'Mount and ride back. Leave me: I shall not eat. Reflect, by yourself. You are in a position of one who is not allowed to decide by his feelings. Mr. Radnor you know where to find.'

'But surely, some food? I cannot have misapprehended?'

'I cannot eat. I think you have understood me clearly.'

'You wish me to go?'

'I beg.'

'It pains me, dear madam.'

'It relieves me, if you will. Here is your horse.'

She gave her hand. He touched it and bent. He looked at her. A surge of impossible questions rolled to his mouth and rolled back, with the thought of an incredible thing, that her manner, more than her words, held him from doubting.

'I obey you,' he said.

'You are kind.'

He mounted horse, raised hat, paced on, and again bowing, to one of the wayside trees, cantered. The man was gone; but not from Nataly's vision that face of wet chalk under one of the shades of fire.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH WE SEE A CONVENTIONAL GENTLEMAN ENDEAVOURING TO EXAMINE A SPECTRE OF HIMSELF

Dudley rode back to Cronidge with his thunderstroke. It filled him, as in those halls of political clamour, where explanatory speech is not accepted, because of a drowning tide of hot blood on both sides. He sought to win attention by submitting a resolution, to the effect, that he would the next morning enter into the presence of Mr. Victor Radnor, bearing his family's feelings, for a discussion upon them. But the brutish tumult, in addition to surcharging, encased him: he could not rightly conceive the nature of feelings: men were driving shoals; he had lost hearing and touch of individual men; had become a house of angrily opposing parties.

He was hurt, he knew; and therefore he supposed himself injured, though there were contrary outcries, and he admitted that he stood free; he had not been inextricably deceived.

The girl was caught away to the thinnest of wisps in a dust-whirl. Reverting to the father and mother, his idea of a positive injury, that was not without its congratulations, sank him down among his disordered deeper sentiments; which were a diver's wreck, where an armoured livid subtermarine, a monstrous puff-ball of man, wandered seriously light in heaviness; trembling his hundredweights to keep him from dancing like a bladder-block of elastic lumber; thinking occasionally, amid the mournful spectacle, of the atmospheric pipe of communication with the world above, whereby he was deafened yet sustained. One tug at it, and he was up on the surface, disengaged from the hideous harness, joyfully no more that burly phantom cleaving green slime, free! and the roaring stopped; the world looked flat, foreign, a place of crusty promise. His wreck, animated by the dim strange fish below, appeared fairer; it winked lurefully when abandoned.

The internal state of a gentleman who detested intangible metaphor as heartily as the vulgarest of our gobbegobbets hate it, metaphor only can describe; and for the reason, that he had in him just something more than is within the compass of the language of the meat-markets. He had—and had it not the less because he fain would not have had—sufficient stuff to furnish forth a soul's epic encounter between Nature and Circumstance: and metaphor, simile, analysis, all the fraternity of old lamps for lighting our abysmal darkness, have to be rubbed, that we may get a glimpse of the fray.

Free, and rejoicing; without the wish to be free; at the same time humbly and sadly acquiescing in the stronger claim of his family to pronounce the decision: such was the second stage of Dudley's perturbation after the blow. A letter of Nesta's writing was in his pocket: he knew her address. He could not reply to her until he had seen her father: and that interview remained necessarily prospective until he had come to his exact resolve, not omitting his critical approval of the sentences giving it shape, stamp, dignity—a noble's crest, as it were.

Nesta wrote briefly. The apostrophe was, 'Dear Mr. Sowerby.' She had engaged to send her address. Her father had just gone. The Miss Duvidneys had left the hotel yesterday for the furnished house facing the sea. According to arrangements, she had a livery-stable hack, and had that morning trotted out to the downs with a riding-master and company, one of whom was 'an agreeable lady.'

He noticed approvingly her avoidance of an allusion to the 'Delphica' of Mr. Durance's incomprehensible serial story, or whatever it was; which, as he had shown her, annoyed him, for its being neither fact nor fun; and she had insisted on the fun; and he had painfully tried to see it or anything of a meaning; and it seemed to him now, that he had been humiliated by the obedience to her lead: she had offended by her harping upon Delphica. However, here it was unmentioned. He held the letter out to seize it in the large, entire.

Her handwriting was good, as good as the writing of the most agreeable lady on earth. Dudley did not blame her for letting the lady be deceived in her—if she knew her position. She might be ignorant of it. And to strangers, to chance acquaintances, even to friends, the position, of the loathsome name, was not materially important. Marriage altered the view. He sided with his family.

He sided, edging away, against his family. But a vision of the earldom coming to him, stirred reverential objections, composed of all which his unstained family could protest in religion, to repudiate an alliance with a stained house, and the guilty of a condonation of immorality. Who would have imagined Mr. Radnor a private sinner flaunting for one of the righteous? And she, the mother, a lady—quite a lady; having really a sense of duty, sense of honour! That she must be a lady, Dudley was convinced. He beheld through a porous crape, woven of formal respectfulness, with threads of personal disgust, the scene, striking him drearily like a distant great mansion's conflagration across moorland at midnight, of a lady's breach of bonds and plunge of all for love. How had it been concealed? In Dudley's upper sphere, everything was exposed: Scandal walked naked and unashamed-figurante of the polite world. But still this lady was of the mint and coin, a true lady. Handsome now, she must have been beautiful. And a comprehensible pride (for so would Dudley have borne it) keeps the forsaken man silent up to death: . . . grandly silent; but the loss of such a woman is enough to kill a man! Not in time, though! Legitimacy evidently, by the mother's confession, cannot protect where it is wanted. Dudley was optically affected by a round spot of the world swinging its shadow over Nesta.

He pitied, and strove to be sensible of her. The effort succeeded so well, that he was presently striving to be insensible. The former state, was the mounting of a wall; the latter, was a sinking through a chasm. There would be family consultations, abhorrent; his father's agonized amazement at the problem presented to a family of scrupulous principles and pecuniary requirements; his mother's blunt mention of the abominable name—mediaevally vindicated in champions of certain princely families indeed, but morally condemned; always under condemnation of the Church: a blot: and handed down: Posterity, and it might be a titled posterity, crying out. A man in the situation of Dudley could not think solely of himself. The nobles of the land are bound in honour to their posterity. There you have one of the prominent permanent distinctions between them and the commonalty.

His mother would again propose her chosen bride for him: Edith Averst, with the dowry of a present one thousand pounds per annum, and prospect of six or so, excluding Sir John's estate, Carping, in Leicestershire; a fair estate, likely to fall to Edith; consumption seized her brothers as they ripened. A fair girl too; only Dudley did not love her; he wanted to love. He was learning the trick from this other one, who had become obscured and diminished, tainted, to the thought of her; yet not extinct. Sight of her was to be dreaded.

Unguiltily tainted, in herself she was innocent. That constituted the unhappy invitation to him to swallow one half of his feelings, which had his world's blessing on it, for the beneficial enlargement and enthronement of the baser unblest half, which he hugged and distrusted. Can innocence issue of the guilty? He asked it, hoping it might be possible: he had been educated in his family to believe, that the laws governing human institutions are divine—until History has altered them. They are altered, to present a fresh bulwark against the infidel. His conservative mind, retiring in good order, occupied the next rearward post of resistance. Secretly behind it, the man was proud of having a heart to beat for the cause of the besieging enemy, in the present instance. When this was blabbed to him, and he had owned it, he attributed his weakness to excess of nature, the liking for a fair face. —Oh, but more! spirit was in the sweet eyes. She led him—she did lead him in spiritual things; led him out of common circles of thought, into refreshing new spheres; he had reminiscences of his having relished the juices of the not quite obviously comic, through her indications: and really, in spite of her inferior flimsy girl's education, she could boast her acquirements; she was quick, startlingly; modest, too, in commerce with a slower mind that carried more; though she laughed and was a needle for humour: she taught him at times to put away his contempt of the romantic; she had actually shown him, that his expressed contempt of it disguised a dread: as it did, and he was conscious of the foolishness of it now while pursuing her image, while his intelligence and senses gave her the form and glory of young morning.

Wariness counselled him to think it might be merely the play of her youth; and also the disposition of a man in harness of business, exaggeratingly to prize an imagined finding of the complementary feminine of himself. Venerating purity as he did, the question, whether the very sweetest of pure young women, having such an origin, must not at some time or other show trace of the origin, surged up. If he could only have been sure of her moral exemption from taint, a generous ardour, in reserve behind his anxious dubieties, would have precipitated Dudley to quench disapprobation and brave the world under a buckler of those monetary advantages, which he had but stoutly to plead with the House of Cantor, for the speedy overcoming of a reluctance to receive the nameless girl and prodigious heiress. His family's instruction of him, and his inherited tastes, rendered the aspect of a Nature stripped of the clothing of the laws offensive down to devilish: we grant her certain steps, upon certain conditions accompanied by ceremonies; and when she violates them, she becomes visibly again the revolutionary wicked old beast bent on levelling our sacredest edifices. An alliance with any of her votaries, appeared to Dudley as an act of treason to his house, his class, and his tenets. And nevertheless he was haunted by a cry of criminal happiness for and at the commission of the act.

He would not decide to be 'precipitate,' and the days ran their course, until Lady Grace Halley

arrived at Cronidge, a widow. Lady Cantor spoke to her of Dudley's unfathomable gloom. Lady Grace took him aside.

She said, without preface: 'You've heard, have you!'

'You were aware of it?' said he, and his tone was irritable with a rebuke.

'Coming through town, for the first time yesterday. I had it—of all men!—from a Sir Abraham Quatley, to whom I was recommended to go, about my husband's shares in a South American Railway; and we talked, and it came out. He knows; he says, it is not generally known; and he likes, respects Mr. Victor Radnor; we are to keep the secret. Hum? He had heard of your pretensions; and our relationship, etc.: "esteemed" it— you know the City dialect—his duty to mention, etc. That was after I had spied on his forehead the something I wormed out of his mouth. What are you going to do?'

'What can I do!'

'Are you fond of the girl?'

An attachment was indicated, as belonging to the case. She was not a woman to whom the breathing of pastoral passion would be suitable; yet he saw that she despised him for a lover; and still she professed to understand his dilemma. Perplexity at the injustice of fate and persons universally, put a wrinkled mask on his features and the expression of his feelings. They were torn, and the world was torn; and what he wanted, was delay, time for him to define his feelings and behold a recomposed picture of the world. He had already taken six days. He pleaded the shock to his family.

'You won't have such a chance again,' she said. Shrugs had set in.

They agreed as to the behaviour of the girl's mother. It reflected on the father, he thought.

'Difficult thing to proclaim, before an engagement!' Her shoulders were restless.

'When a man's feelings get entangled!'

'Oh! a man's feelings! I'm your British Jury for, a woman's.'

'He has married her?'

She declared to not knowing particulars. She could fib smoothly.

The next day she was on the line to London, armed with the proposal of an appointment for the Hon. Dudley to meet 'the girl's father.'

CHAPTER XXVII

CONTAINS WHAT IS A SMALL THING OR A GREAT, AS THE SOUL OF THE CHIEF ACTOR MAY DECIDE

Skepsey ushered Lady Grace into his master's private room, and entertained her during his master's absence. He had buried his wife, he said: she feared, seeing his posture of the soaping of hands at one shoulder, that he was about to bewail it; and he did wish to talk of it, to show his modest companionship with her in loss, and how a consolation for our sorrows may be obtained: but he won her approval, by taking the acceptable course between the dues to the subject and those to his hearer, as a model cab should drive considerate equally of horse and fare.

A day of holiday at Hampstead, after the lowering of the poor woman's bones into earth, had been followed by a descent upon London; and at night he had found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of a public house, noted for sparring exhibitions and instructions on the first floor; and he was melancholy, unable quite to disperse 'the ravens' flocking to us on such days: though, if we ask why we have to go out of the world, there is a corresponding inquiry, of what good was our coming into it; and unless we are doing good work for our country, the answer is not satisfactory—except, that we are as well gone. Thinking which, he was accosted by a young woman: perfectly respectable, in every way: who inquired if he had seen a young man enter the door. She described him, and reviled the temptations of those houses; and ultimately, as she insisted upon going in to look for the young man and use her persuasions to withdraw him from 'that snare of Satan,' he had accompanied her, and he had gone upstairs and brought the young man down. But friends, or the acquaintances they call

friends, were with him, and they were 'in drink,' and abused the young woman; and she had her hand on the young man's arm, quoting Scripture. Sad to relate of men bearing the name of Englishmen— and it was hardly much better if they pleaded intoxication!—they were not content to tear the young man from her grasp, they hustled her, pushed her out, dragged her in the street.

'It became me to step to her defence: she was meek,' said Skepsey. 'She had a great opinion of the efficacy of quotations from Scripture; she did not recriminate. I was able to release her and the young man she protected, on condition of my going upstairs to give a display of my proficiency. I had assured them, that the poor fellows who stood against me were not a proper match. And of course, they jeered, but they had the evidence, on the pavement. So I went up with them. I was heavily oppressed, I wanted relief, I put on the gloves. He was a bigger man; they laughed at the little one. I told them, it depended upon a knowledge of first principles, and the power to apply them. I will not boast, my lady: my junior by ten years, the man went down; he went down a second time; and the men seemed surprised; I told them, it was nothing but first principles put into action. I mention the incident, for the extreme relief it afforded me at the close of a dark day.'

'So you cured your grief!' said Lady Grace; and Skepsey made way for his master.

Victor's festival-lights were kindled, beholding her; cressets on the window-sill, lamps inside.

'Am I so welcome?' There was a pull of emotion at her smile. 'What with your little factotum and you, we are flattered to perdition when we come here. He has been proposing, by suggestion, like a Court-physician, the putting on of his boxing-gloves, for the consolation of the widowed:— meant most kindly! and it's a thousand pities women haven't their padded gloves.'

'Oh! but our boxing-gloves can do mischief enough. You have something to say, I see.'

'How do you see?'

'Tusk, tush.'

The silly ring of her voice and the pathless tattle changed; she talked to suit her laden look. 'You hit it. I come from Dudley. He knows the facts. I wish to serve you, in every way.'

Victor's head had lifted.

'Who was it?'

'No enemy.'

'Her mother. She did rightly!'

'Certainly she did,' said Victor, and he thought that instantaneously of the thing done. 'Oh, then she spoke to him! She has kept it from me. For now nearly a week—six days—I've seen her spying for something she expected, like a face behind a door three inches ajar. She has not been half alive; she refused explanations;—she was expecting to hear from him, of him:—the decision, whatever it's to be!'

'I can't aid you there,' said Lady Grace. 'He's one of the unreadables. He names Tuesday next week.'

'By all means.'

'She?'

'Fred!—poor Fred!—ah, my poor girl, yes!—No, she knows nothing. Here is the truth of it.—she, the legitimate, lives: they say she lives. Well, then, she lives against all rules physical or medical, lives by sheer force of will—it's a miracle of the power of a human creature to . . . I have it from doctors, friends, attendants, they can't guess what she holds on, to keep her breath. All the happiness in life!—if only it could benefit her. But it 's the cause of death to us. Do you see, dear friend;—you are a friend, proved friend,' he took her hand, and held and pressed it, in great need of a sanguine response to emphasis; and having this warm feminine hand, his ideas ran off with it. 'The friend I need! You have courage. My Nataly, poor dear—she can endure, in her quiet way. A woman of courage would take her place beside me and compel the world to do her homage, help;—a bright ready smile does it! She would never be beaten. Of course, we could have lived under a bushel—stifled next to death! But I am for light, air-battle, if you like. I want a comrade, not a—not that I complain. I respect, pity, love—I do love her, honour: only, we want something else—courage —to face the enemy. Quite right, that she should speak to Dudley Sowerby. He has to know, must know; all who deal closely with us must know. But see a moment: I am waiting to see the impediment dispersed, which puts her at an inequality with the world: and then I speak to all whom it concerns—not before: for her sake. How is it now? Dudley will

ask . . . you understand. And when I am forced to confess, that the mother, the mother of the girl he seeks in marriage, is not yet in that state herself, probably at that very instant the obstacle has crumbled to dust! I say, probably: I have information—doctors, friends, attendants—they all declare it cannot last outside a week. But you are here— true, I could swear! a touch of a hand tells me. A woman's hand? Well, yes: I read by the touch of a woman's hand:—betrays more than her looks or her lips!' He sank his voice. 'I don't talk of condoling: if you are in grief, you know I share it.' He kissed her hand, and laid it on her lap; eyed it, and met her eyes; took a header into her eyes, and lost himself. A nip of his conscience moved his tongue to say: 'As for guilt, if it were known . . . a couple of ascetics—absolutely!' But this was assumed to be unintelligible; and it was merely the apology to his conscience in communion with the sprite of a petticoated fair one who was being subjected to tender little liberties, necessarily addressed in enigmas. He righted immediately, under a perception of the thoroughbred's contempt for the barriers of wattled sheep; and caught the word 'guilt,' to hide the Philistine citizen's lapse, by relating historically, in abridgement, the honest beauty of the passionate loves of the two whom the world proscribed for honestly loving. There was no guilt. He harped on the word, to erase the recollection of his first use of it.

'Fiddle,' said Lady Grace. 'The thing happened. You have now to carry it through. You require a woman's aid in a social matter. Rely on me, for what I can do. You will see Dudley on Tuesday? I will write. Be plain with him; not forgetting the gilding, I need not remark. Your Nesta has no aversion?'

'Admires, respects, likes; is quite—is willing.'

'Good enough beginning.' She rose, for the atmosphere was heated, rather heavy. 'And if one proves to be of aid, you'll own that a woman has her place in the battle.'

The fair black-clad widow's quick and singular interwreathing of the evanescent pretty pouts and frowns dimpled like the brush of the wind on a sunny pool in a shady place; and her forehead was close below his chin, her lips not far. Her apparel was attractively mourning.

Widows in mourning, when they do not lean over extremely to the Stygian shore, with the complexions of the drugs which expedited the defunct to the ferry, provoke the manly arm within reach of them to pluck their pathetic blooming persons clean away from it. What of the widow who visibly likes the living? Compassion; sympathy, impulse; and gratitude, impulse again, living warmth; and a spring of the blood to wrestle with the King of Terrors for the other poor harper's half-night capped Eurydice; and a thirst, sudden as it is overpowering; and the solicitude, a reflective solicitude, to put the seal on a thing and call it a fact, to the astonishment of history; and a kick of our naughty youth in its coffin; all the insurgencies of Nature, with her colonel of the regiment absent, and her veering trick to drive two vessels at the cross of a track into collision, combine for doing that, which is very much more, and which affects us at times so much less than did the pressure of a soft wedded hand by our own elsewhere pledged one. On the contrary, we triumph, we have the rich flavour of the fruit for our pains; we commission the historian to write in hieroglyphs a round big fact.

The lady passed through the trial submitting, stiffening her shoulders, and at the close, shutting her eyes. She stood cool in her blush, and eyed him, like one gravely awakened. Having been embraced and kissed, she had to consider her taste for the man, and acknowledge a neatness of impetuosity in the deed; and he was neither apologizing culprit nor glorying-bandit when it was done, but something of the lyric God tempering his fervours to a pleased serenity, not offering a renewal of them. He glowed transparently. He said: 'You are the woman to take a front place in the battle!' With this woman beside him, it was a conquered world.

Comparisons, in the jotting souvenirs of a woman of her class and set, favoured him; for she disliked enterprising libertines and despised stumbling youths; and the genial simple glow of his look assured her, that the vanished fiery moment would not be built on by a dating master. She owned herself. Or did she? Some understanding of how the other woman had been won to the leap with him, was drawing in about her. She would have liked to beg for the story; and she could as little do that as bring her tongue to reproach. If we come to the den! she said to her thought of reproach. Our semi-civilization makes it a den, where a scent in his nostrils will spring the half-tamed animal away to wildness. And she had come unanticipatingly, without design, except perhaps to get a superior being to direct and restrain a gambler's hand perhaps for the fee of a temporary pressure.

'I may be able to help a little—I hope!' she fetched a breath to say, while her eyelids mildly sermonized; and immediately she talked of her inheritance of property in stocks and shares.

Victor commented passingly on the soundness of them, and talked of projects he entertained:—Parliament! 'But I have only to mention it at home, and my poor girl will set in for shrinking.'

He doated on the diverse aspect of the gallant woman of the world.

'You succeed in everything you do,' said she, and she cordially believed it; and that belief set the neighbour memory palpitating. Success folded her waist, was warm upon her lips: she worshipped the figure of Success.

'I can't consent to fail, it's true, when my mind is on a thing,' Victor rejoined.

He looked his mind on Lady Grace. The shiver of a maid went over her. These transparent visages, where the thought which is half design is perceived as a lightning, strike lightning into the physically feebler. Her hand begged, with the open palm, her head shook thrice; and though she did not step back, he bowed to the negation, and then she gave him a grateful shadow of a smile, relieved, with a startled view of how greatly relieved, by that sympathetic deference in the wake of the capturing intrepidity.

'I am to name Tuesday for Dudley?' she suggested.

'At any hour he pleases to appoint.'

'A visit signifies . . .'

'Whatever it signifies!'

'I'm thinking of the bit of annoyance.'

'To me? Anything appointed, finds me ready the next minute.'

Her smile was flatteringly bright. 'By the way, keep your City people close about you: entertain as much as possible; dine them,' she said.

'At home?'

'Better. Sir Rodwell Blachington, Sir Abraham Quatley: and their wives. There's no drawing back now. And I will meet them.'

She received a compliment. She was on the foot to go.

But she had forgotten the Tiddler mine.

The Tiddler mine was leisurely mounting. Victor stated the figures; he saluted her hand, and Lady Grace passed out, with her heart on the top of them, and a buzz about it of the unexpected having occurred. She had her experiences to match new patterns in events; though not very many. Compared with gambling, the game of love was an idle entertainment. Compared with other players, this man was gifted.

Victor went in to Mr. Inchling's room, and kept Inchling from speaking, that he might admire him for he knew not what, or knew not well what. The good fellow was devoted to his wife. Victor in old days had called the wife Mrs. Grundy. She gossiped, she was censorious; she knew—could not but know—the facts; yet never by a shade was she disrespectful. He had a curious recollection of how his knowledge of Inchling and his wife being always in concert, entirely—whatever they might think in private—devoted to him in action, had influenced, if it had not originally sprung, his resolve to cast off the pestilential cloak of obscurity shortening his days, and emerge before a world he could illumine to give him back splendid reflections. Inchling and his wife, it was: because the two were one: and if one, and subservient to him, knowing all the story, why, it foreshadowed a conquered world.

They were the one pulse of the married Grundy beating in his hand. So it had been.

He rattled his views upon Indian business, to hold Inchling silent, and let his mind dwell almost lovingly on the good faithful spouse, who had no phosphorescent writing of a recent throbbing event on the four walls of his room.

Nataly was not so generously encountered in idea.

He felt and regretted this. He greeted her with a doubled affectionateness. Her pitiable deficiency of courage, excusing a man for this and that small matter in the thick of the conflict, made demands on him for gentle treatment.

'You have not seen any one?' she asked.

'City people. And you, my love?'

'Mr. Barmby called. He has gone down to Tunbridge Wells for a week, to some friend there.' She

added, in pain of thought: 'I have seen Dartrey. He has brought Lord Clanconan to town, for a consultation, and expects he will have to take him to Brighton.'

'Brighton? What a life for a man like Dartrey, at Brighton!'

Her breast heaved. 'If I cannot see my Nesta there, he will bring her up to me for a day:

'But, my dear, I will bring her up to you, if it is your wish to see her.'

'It is becoming imperative that I should.'

'No hurry, no hurry: wait till the end of next week. And I must see Dartrey, on business, at once!'

She gave the address in a neighbouring square. He had minutes to spare before dinner, and flew. She was not inquisitive.

Colney Durance had told Dartrey that Victor was killing her. She had little animation; her smiles were ready, but faint. After her interview with Dudley, there had been a swoon at home; and her maid, sworn to secrecy, willingly spared a tender-hearted husband—so good a master.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. MARSETT

Little acts of kindness were not beyond the range of Colney Durance, and he ran down to Brighton, to give the exiled Nesta some taste of her friendly London circle. The Duvidney ladies knew that the dreaded gentleman had a regard for the girl. Their own, which was becoming warmer than they liked to think, was impressed by his manner of conversing with her. 'Child though she was,' he paid her the compliment of a sober as well as a satirical review of the day's political matter and recent publications; and the ladies were introduced, in a wonderment, to the damsel Delphica. They listened placidly to a discourse upon her performances, Japanese to their understandings.

At New York, behold, another adventurous representative and advocate of the European tongues has joined the party: Signor Jeridomani: a philologer, of course; a politician in addition; Macchiavelli redivivus, it seems to fair Delphica. The speech he delivers at the Syndicate Delmonico Dinner, is justly applauded by the New York Press as a masterpiece of astuteness. He appears to be the only one of the party who has an eye for the dark. She fancies she may know a more widely awake in the abstract. But now, thanks to jubilant Journals and Homeric laughter over the Continent, the secret is out, in so far as the concurrents are all unmasked and exposed for the edification of the American public. Dr. Bouthoin's eyebrows are up, Mr. Semhians disfigures his name by greatly gaping. Shall they return to their Great Britain indignant? Patriotism, with the sauce of a luxurious expedition at no cost to the private purse, restrains them. Moreover, there is no sign of any one of the others intending to quit the expedition; and Mr. Semhians has done a marvel or two in the cricket-field: Old England looks up where she can. What is painfully extraordinary to our couple, they find in the frigid attitude of the Americans toward their 'common tongue'; together with the rumour of a design to despatch an American rival emissary to Japan.

Nesta listened, inquired, commented, laughed; the ladies could not have a doubt that she was interested and understood. She would have sketches of scenes between Delphica and M. Falarique, with whom the young Germania was cleverly ingenuous indeed—a seminary Celimene; and between Delphica and M. Mytharete, with whom she was archaeological, ravishingly amoebaeon of Homer. Dr. Gannius holds a trump card in his artless daughter, conjecturally, for the establishment of the language of the gutturals in the far East. He has now a suspicion, that the inventive M. Falarique, melted down to sobriety by misfortune, may some day startle their camp by the cast of more than a crow into it, and he is bent on establishing alliances; frightens the supple Signor Jeridomani to lingual fixity; eulogizes Football, with Dr. Bouthoin; and retracts, or modifies, his dictum upon the English, that, 'masculine brawn they have in their bodies, but muscle they have not in their feminine minds'; to exalt them, for a signally clean, if a dense, people: 'Amousia, not Alousia, is their enemy:—How, when we have the noblest crop of poets? 'You have never heartily embraced those aliens among you until you learnt from us, that you might brag of them.'—Have they not endowed us with the richest of languages? 'The words of which are used by you, as old slippers, for puns.' Mr. Semhians has been superciliously and

ineffectively punning in foreign presences: he and his chief are inwardly shocked by a new perception; What if, now that we have the populace for paymaster, subservience to the literary tastes of the populace should reduce the nation to its lowest mental level, and render us not only unable to compete with the foreigner, but unintelligible to him, although so proudly paid at home! Is it not thus that nations are seen of the Highest to be devouring themselves?

'For,' says Dr. Gannius, as if divining them, 'this excessive and applauded productiveness, both of your juvenile and your senile, in your modern literature, is it ever a crop? Is it even the restorative perishable stuff of the markets? Is it not rather your street-pavement's patter of raindrops, incessantly in motion, and as fruitful?' Mr. Semhians appeals to Delphica. 'Genius you have,' says she, stiffening his neck-band, 'genius in superabundance':—he throttles to the complexion of the peony:—'perhaps criticism is wanting.' Dr. Gannius adds: 'Perhaps it is the drill-sergeant everywhere wanting for an unrivalled splendid rabble!'

Colney left the whole body of concurrents on the raised flooring of a famous New York Hall, clearly entrapped, and incited to debate before an enormous audience, as to the merits of their respective languages. 'I hear,' says Dr. Bouthoin to Mr. Semhians (whose gape is daily extending), 'that the tickets cost ten dollars!'

There was not enough of Delphica for Nests.

Colney asked: 'Have you seen any of our band?'

'No,' she said, with good cheer, and became thoughtful, conscious of a funny reason for the wish to hear of the fictitious creature disliked by Dudley. A funny and a naughty reason, was it? Not so very naughty: but it was funny; for it was a spirit of opposition to Dudley, without an inferior feeling at all, such as girls should have.

Colney brought his viola for a duet; they had a pleasant musical evening, as in old days at Creckholt; and Nesta, going upstairs with the ladies to bed, made them share her father's amused view of the lamb of the flock this bitter gentleman became when he had the melodious instrument tucked under his chin. He was a guest for the night. Dressing in the early hour, Nests saw him from her window on the parade, and soon joined him, to hear him at his bitterest, in the flush of the brine. 'These lengths of blank-faced terraces fronting sea!' were the satirist's present black beast. 'So these moneyed English shoulder to the front place; and that is the appearance they offer to their commercial God!' He gazed along the miles of 'English countenance,' drearily laughing. Changeful ocean seemed to laugh at the spectacle. Some Orphic joke inspired his exclamation: 'Capital!'

'Come where the shops are,' said Nesta.

'And how many thousand parsons have you here?'

'Ten, I think,' she answered in his vein, and warmed him; leading him contemplatively to scrutinize her admirers: the Rev. Septimus; Mr. Sowerby.

'News of our friend of the whimpering flute?'

'Here? no. I have to understand you!'

Colney cast a weariful look backward on the 'regiments of Anglo-Chinese' represented to him by the moneyed terraces, and said: 'The face of a stopped watch!—the only meaning it has is past date.'

He had no liking for Dudley Sowerby. But it might have been an allusion to the general view of the houses. But again, 'the meaning of it past date,' stuck in her memory. A certain face close on handsome, had a fatal susceptibility to caricature.

She spoke of her 'exile': wanted Skepsey to come down to her; moaned over the loss of her Louise. The puzzle of the reason for the long separation from her parents, was evident in her mind, and unmentioned.

They turned on to the pier.

Nesta reminded him of certain verses he had written to celebrate her visit to the place when she was a child:

"And then along the pier we sped,
And there we saw a Whale
He seemed to have a Normous Head,
And not a bit of Tail!"

'Manifestly a foreigner to our shores, where the exactly inverse condition rules,' Colney said.

"And then we scampered on the beach,
To chase the foaming wave;
And when we ran beyond its reach
We all became more brave."

Colney remarked: 'I was a poet—for once.'

A neat-legged Parisianly-booted lady, having the sea, winds very enterprising with her dark wavy, locks and jacket and skirts, gave a cry of pleasure and—a silvery 'You dear!' at sight of Nesta; then at sight of one of us, moderated her tone to a propriety equalling the most conventional. 'We ride to-day?'

'I shall be one,' said Nesta.

'It would not be the commonest pleasure to me, if you were absent.'

'Till eleven, then!'

'After my morning letter to Ned.'

She sprinkled silvery sound on that name or on the adieu, blushed, blinked, frowned, sweetened her lip-lines, bit at the underone, and passed in a discomposure.

'The lady?' Colney asked.

'She is—I meet her in the troop conducted by the riding-master: Mrs. Marsett.'

'And who is Ned?'

'It is her husband, to whom she writes every morning. He is a captain in the army, or was. He is in Norway, fishing.'

'Then the probability is, that the English officer continues his military studies.'

'Do you not think her handsome, Mr. Durance?'

'Ned may boast of his possession, when he has trimmed it and toned it a little.!

'She is different, if you are alone with her.'

'It is not unusual,' said Colney.

At eleven o'clock he was in London, and Nesta rode beside Mrs. Marsett amid the troop.

A South-easterly wind blew the waters to shifty goldleaf prints of brilliance under the sun.

'I took a liberty this morning, I called you "Dear" this morning,' the lady said. 'It's what I feel, only I have no right to blurt out everything I feel, and I was ashamed. I am sure I must have appeared ridiculous. I got quite nervous.'

'You would not be ridiculous to me.'

'I remember I spoke of Ned!

'You have spoken of him before.'

'Oh! I know: to you alone. I should like to pluck out my heart and pitch it on the waves, to see whether it would sink or swim. That's a funny idea, isn't it! I tell you everything that comes up. What shall I do when I lose you! You always make me feel you've a lot of poetry ready-made in you.'

'We will write. And you will have your husband then.'

'When I had finished my letter to Ned, I dropped my head on it and behaved like a fool for several minutes. I can't bear the thought of losing you!'

'But you don't lose me,' said Nesta; 'there is no ground for your supposing that you will. And your wish not to lose me, binds me to you more closely.'

'If you knew!' Mrs. Marsett caught at her slippery tongue, and she carolled: 'If we all knew everything, we should be wiser, and what a naked lot of people we should be!'

They were crossing the passage of a cavalcade of gentlemen, at the end of the East Cliff. One among them, large and dominant, with a playful voice of brass, cried out:

'And how do you do, Mrs. Judith Marsett—ha? Beautiful morning?'

Mrs. Marsett's figure tightened; she rode stonily erect, looked level ahead. Her woman's red mouth was shut fast on a fighting underlip.

'He did not salute you,' Nesta remarked, to justify her for not having responded.

The lady breathed a low thunder: 'Coward!'

'He cannot have intended to insult you,' said Nesta.

'That man knows I will not notice him. He is a beast. He will learn that I carry a horsewhip.'

'Are you not taking a little incident too much to heart?'

The sigh of the heavily laden came from Mrs. Marsett.

'Am I pale? I dare say. I shall go on my knees tonight hating myself that I was born "one of the frail sex." We are, or we should ride at the coward and strike him to the ground. Pray, pray do not look distressed! Now you know my Christian name. That dog of a man barks it out on the roads. It doesn't matter.'

'He has offended you before?'

'You are near me. They can't hurt me, can't touch me, when I think that I 'm talking with you. How I envy those who call you by your Christian name!'

'Nesta,' said smiling Nesta. The smile was forced, that she might show kindness, for the lady was jarring on her.

Mrs. Marsett opened her lips: 'Oh, my God, I shall be crying!—let's gallop. No, wait, I'll tell you. I wish I could! I will tell you of that man. That man is Major Worrell. One of the majors who manage to get to their grade. A retired warrior. He married a handsome woman, above him in rank, with money; a good woman. She was a good woman, or she would have had her vengeance, and there was never a word against her. She must have loved that—Ned calls him, full-blooded ox. He spent her money and he deceived her.—You innocent! Oh, you dear! I'd give the world to have your eyes. I've heard tell of "crystal clear," but eyes like yours have to tell me how deep and clear. Such a world for them to be in! I did pray, and used your name last night on my knees, that you —I said Nesta—might never have to go through other women's miseries. Ah me! I have to tell you he deceived her. You don't quite understand.'

'I do understand,' said Nesta.

'God help you!—I am excited to-day. That man is poison to me. His wife forgave him three times. On three occasions, that unhappy woman forgave him. He is great at his oaths, and a big breaker of them. She walked out one November afternoon and met him riding along with a notorious creature. You know there are bad women. They passed her, laughing. And look there, Nesta, see that groyne; that very one.' Mrs. Marsett pointed her whip hard out. 'The poor lady went down from the height here; she walked into that rough water look!—steadying herself along it, and she plunged; she never came out alive. A week after her burial, Major Worrell—I 've told you enough.'

'We 'll gallop now,' said Nesta.

Mrs. Marsett's talk, her presence hardly less, affected the girl with those intimations of tumult shown upon smooth waters when the great elements are conspiring. She felt that there was a cause why she had to pity, did pity her. It might be, that Captain Marsett wedded one who was of inferior station,' and his wife had to bear blows from cruel people. The supposition seemed probable. The girl accepted it; for beyond it, as the gathering of the gale masked by hills, lay a brewing silence. What? She did not reflect. Her quick physical sensibility curled to some breath of heated atmosphere brought about her by this new acquaintance: not pleasant, if she had thought of pleasure: intensely suggestive of our life at the consuming tragic core, round which the furnace pants. But she was unreflecting, feeling only a beyond and hidden.

Besides, she was an exile. Spelling at dark things in the dark, getting to have the sight which peruses darkness, she touched the door of a mystery that denied her its key, but showed the lock; and her life was beginning to know of hours that fretted her to recklessness. Her friend Louise was absent: she had so few friends—owing to that unsolved reason: she wanted one, of any kind, if only gentle: and this lady

seemed to need her: and she flattered; Nesta was in the mood for swallowing and digesting and making sweet blood of flattery.

At one time, she liked Mrs. Marsett best absent: in musing on her, wishing her well, having said the adieu. For it was wearisome to hear praises of 'innocence'; and women can do so little to cure that 'wickedness of men,' among the lady's conversational themes; and 'love' too: it may be a 'plague,' and it may be 'heaven': it is better left unspoken of. But there were times when Mrs. Marsett's looks and tones touched compassion to press her hand: an act that had a pledging signification in the girl's bosom: and when, by the simple avoidance of ejaculatory fervours, Mrs. Marsett's quieted good looks had a shadow of a tender charm, more pathetic than her outcries were.

These had not always the sanction of polite usage: and her English was guilty of sudden lapses to the Thameswater English of commerce and drainage instead of the upper wells. But there are many uneducated ladies in the land. Many, too, whose tastes in romantic literature betray now and then by peeps a similarity to Nesta's maid Mary's. Mrs. Marsett liked love, blood, and adventure. She had, moreover, a favourite noble poet, and she begged Nesta's pardon for naming him, and she would not name him, and told her she must not read him until she was a married woman, because he did mischief to girls. Thereupon she fell into one of her silences, emerging with a cry of hate of herself for having ever read him. She did not blame the bard. And, ah, poor bard! he fought his battle: he shall not be named for the brand on the name. He has lit a sulphur match for the lover of nature through many a generation; and to be forgiven by sad frail souls who could accuse him of piping devil's agent to them at the perilous instant—poor girls too!—is chastisement enough. This it is to be the author of unholy sweets: a Posterity sitting in judgement will grant, that they were part of his honest battle with the hypocrite English Philistine, without being dupe of the plea or at all the thirsty swallower of his sugary brandy. Mrs. Marsett expressed aloud her gladness of escape in never having met a man like him; followed by her regret that 'Ned' was so utterly unlike; except 'perhaps'—and she hummed; she was off on the fraternity in wickedness.

Nesta's ears were fatigued. 'My mother writes of you,' she said, to vary the subject.

Mrs. Marsett looked. She sighed downright: 'I have had my dream of a friend!—It was that gentleman with you on the pier! Your mother objects?'

'She has inquired, nothing more.'

'I am not twenty-three: not as old as I should be, for a guide to you. I know I would never do you harm. That I know. I would walk into that water first, and take Mrs. Worrell's plunge:—the last bath; a thorough cleanser for a woman! Only, she was a good woman and didn't want it, as we—as lots of us do:—to wash off all recollection of having met a man! Your mother would not like me to call you Nesta! I have never begged you to call me Judith. Damnable name!' Mrs. Marsett revelled in the heat of the curse on it, as a relief to torture of the breast, until a sense of the girl's alarmed hearing sent the word reverberating along her nerves and shocked her with such an exposure of our Shaggy wild one on a lady's lips. She murmured: 'Forgive me,' and had the passion to repeat the epithet in shrieks, and scratch up male speech for a hatefuller; but the twitch of Nesta's brows made her say: 'Do pardon me. I did something in Scripture. Judith could again. Since that brute Worrell crossed me riding with you, I loathe my name; I want to do things. I have offended you.'

'We have been taught differently. I do not use those words. Nothing else.'

'They frighten you.'

'They make me shut; that is all.'

'Supposing you were some day to discover . . . ta-tata, all the things there are in the world.' Mrs. Marsett let fly an artificial chirrup. 'You must have some ideas of me.'

'I think you have had unhappy experiences.'

'Nesta . . . just now and then! the first time we rode out together, coming back from the downs, I remember, I spoke, without thinking—I was enraged—of a case in the newspapers; and you had seen it, and you were not afraid to talk of it. I remember I thought, Well, for a girl, she's bold! I thought you knew more than a girl ought to know: until—you did—you set my heart going. You spoke of the poor women like an angel of compassion. You said, we were all mixed up with their fate—I forget the words. But no one ever heard in Church anything that touched me so. I worshipped you. You said, you thought of them often, and longed to find out what you could do to help. And I thought, if they could hear you, and only come near you, as I was—ah, my heaven! Unhappy experiences? Yes. But when men get women on the slope to their perdition, they have no mercy, none. They deceive, and they lie; they are false in acts and words; they do as much as murder. They're never hanged for it. They make the Laws!

And then they become fathers of families, and point the finger at the "wretched creatures." They have a dozen names against women, for one at themselves.'

'It maddens me at times to think . . . !' said Nesta, burning with the sting of vile names.

Oh, there are bad women as well as bad men: but men have the power and the lead, and they take advantage of it; and then they turn round and execrate us for not having what they have robbed us of!'

'I blame women—if I may dare, at my age,' said Nesta, and her bosom heaved. 'Women should feel for their sex; they should not allow the names; they should go among their unhappier sisters. At the worst, they are sisters! I am sure, that fallen cannot mean—Christ shows it does not. He changes the tone of Scripture. The women who are made outcasts, must be hopeless and go to utter ruin. We should, if we pretend to be better, step between them and that. There cannot be any goodness unless it is a practiced goodness. Otherwise it is nothing more than paint on canvas. You speak to me of my innocence. What is it worth, if it is only a picture and does no work to help to rescue? I fear I think most of the dreadful names that redden and sicken us.—The Old Testament!— I have a French friend, a Mademoiselle Louise de Seines—you should hear her: she is intensely French, and a Roman Catholic, everything which we are not: but so human, so wise, and so full of the pride of her sex! I love her. It is love. She will never marry until she meets a man who has the respect for women, for all women. We both think we cannot separate ourselves from our sisters. She seems to me to wither men, when she speaks of their injustice, their snares to mislead and their cruelty when they have succeeded. She is right, it is the—brute: there is no other word.'

'And French and good!' Mrs. Marsett ejaculated. 'My Ned reads French novels, and he says, their women But your mademoiselle is a real one. If she says all that, I could kneel to her, French or not. Does she talk much about men and women?'

'Not often: we lose our tempers. She wants women to have professions; at present they have not much choice to avoid being penniless. Poverty, and the sight of luxury! It seems as if we produced the situation, to create an envious thirst, and cause the misery. Things are improving for them; but we groan at the slowness of it.'

Mrs. Marsett now declared a belief, that women were nearly quite as bad as men. 'I don't think I could take up with a profession. Unless to be a singer. Ah! Do you sing?'

Nesta smiled: 'Yes, I sing.'

'How I should like to hear you! My Ned's a thorough Englishman— gentleman, you know: he cares only for sport; Shooting, Fishing, Hunting; and Football, Cricket, Rowing, and matches. He's immensely proud of England in those things. And such muscle he has! though he begins to fancy his heart's rather weak. It's digestion, I tell him. But he takes me to the Opera sometimes—Italian Opera; he can't stand German. Down at his place in Leicestershire, he tells me, when there 's company, he has— I'm sure you sing beautifully. When I hear beautiful singing, even from a woman they tell tales of, upon my word, it's true, I feel my sins all melting out of me and I'm new-made: I can't bear Ned to speak. Would you one day, one afternoon, before the end of next week?—it would do me such real good, you can't guess how much; if I could persuade you! I know I'm asking something out of rules. For just half an hour: I judge by your voice in talking. Oh! it would do me good-good-good to hear you sing. There is a tuned piano—a cottage; I don't think it sounds badly. You would not see any great harm in calling on me? once!'

'No,' said Nesta. And it was her nature that projected the word. Her awakened wits were travelling to her from a distance, and she had an intimation of their tidings; and she could not have said what they were; or why, for a moment, she hesitated to promise she would come. Her vision of the reality of things was without written titles, to put the stamp of the world on it. She felt this lady to be one encompassed and in the hug of the elementary forces, which are the terrors to inexperienced pure young women. But she looked at her, and dared trust those lips, those eyes. She saw, through whatever might be the vessel, the spirit of the woman; as the upper nobility of our brood are enabled to do in a crisis mixed of moral aversion and sisterly sympathy, when nature cries to them, and the scales of convention, the mud-spots of accident, even naughtiness, even wickedness, all misfortune's issue, if we but see the one look upward, fall away. Reason is not excluded from these blind throbs of a blood that strikes to right the doings of the Fates. Nesta did not err in her divination of the good and the bad incarnate beside her, though both good and bad were behind a curtain; the latter sparing her delicate senses, appealing to chivalry, to the simply feminine claim on her. Reason, acting in her heart as a tongue of the flames of the forge where we all are wrought, told her surely that the good predominated. She had the heart which is at our primal fires when nature speaks.

She gave the promise to call on Mrs. Marsett and sing to her.

'An afternoon? Oh! what afternoon?' she was asked, and she said: 'This afternoon, if you like.'

So it was agreed: Mrs. Marsett acted violently the thrill of delight she felt in the prospect.

The ladies Dorothea and Virginia, consulted, and pronounced the name of Marsett to be a reputable County name. 'There was a Leicestershire baronet of the name of Marsett.' They arranged to send their button-blazing boy at Nesta's heels. Mrs. Marsett resided in a side-street not very distant from the featureless but washed and orderly terrace of the glassy stare at sea.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHOWS ONE OF THE SHADOWS OF THE WORLD CROSSING A VIRGIN'S MIND

Nesta and her maid were brought back safely through the dusk by their constellation of a boy, to whom the provident ladies had entrusted her. They could not but note how short her syllables were. Her face was only partly seen. They had returned refreshed from their drive on the populous and orderly parade—so fair a pattern of their England!—after discoursing of 'the dear child,' approving her manners, instancing proofs of her intelligence, nay, her possession of 'character.' They did so, notwithstanding that these admissions were worse than their growing love for the girl, to confound established ideas. And now, in thoughtfulness on her behalf, Dorothea said, 'We have considered, Nesta, that you may be lonely; and if it is your wish, we will leave our card on your new acquaintance.' Nesta took her hand and kissed it; she declined, saying, 'No,' without voice.

They had two surprises at the dinner-hour. One was the card of Dartrey Fenellan, naming an early time next day for his visit; and the other was the appearance of the Rev. Stuart Rem, a welcome guest. He had come to meet his Bishop.

He had come also with serious information for the ladies, regarding the Rev. Abram Posterley. No sooner was this out of his mouth than both ladies exclaimed:

'Again!' So serious was it, that there had been a consultation at the Wells; Mr. Posterley's friend, the Rev. Septimus Barmby, and his own friend, the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, had journeyed from London to sit upon the case: and, 'One hoped,' Mr. Stuart Rem said, 'poor Posterley would be restored to the senses he periodically abandoned.' He laid a hand on Tasso's curls, and withdrew it at a menace of teeth. Tasso would submit to rough caresses from Mr. Posterley; he would not allow Mr. Stuart Rem to touch him. Why was that? Perhaps for the reason of Mr. Posterley's being so emotional as perpetually to fall a victim to some bright glance and require the rescue of his friends; the slave of woman had a magnet for animals!

Dorothea and Virginia were drawn to compassionate sentiments, in spite of the provokeing recurrence of Mr. Posterley's malady. He had not an income to support a wife. Always was this unfortunate gentleman entangling himself in a passion for maid or widow of the Wells and it was desperate, a fever. Mr. Stuart Rem charitably remarked on his taking it so severely because of his very scrupulous good conduct. They pardoned a little wound to their delicacy, and asked: 'On this occasion?' Mr. Stuart Rem named a linendraper's establishment near the pantiles, where a fair young woman served. 'And her reputation?' That was an article less presentable through plate-glass, it seemed: Mr. Stuart Rem drew a prolonged breath into his nose.

'It is most melancholy!' they said in unison. 'Nothing positive,' said he. 'But the suspicion of a shadow, Mr. Stuart Rem! You will not permit it?' He stated, that his friend Buttermore might have influence. Dorothea said: 'When I think of Mr. Posterley's addiction to ceremonial observances, and to matrimony, I cannot but think of a sentence that fell from Mr. Durance one day, with reference to that division of our Church: he called it:—you frown! and I would only quote Mr. Durance to you in support of your purer form, as we hold it to be—with the candles, the vestments, Confession, alas! he called it, "Rome and a wife."'

Mr. Stuart Rem nodded an enforced assent: he testily dismissed mention of Mr. Durance, and resumed on Mr. Posterley.

The good ladies now, with some of their curiosity appeased, considerably signified to him, that a young maiden was present.

The young maiden had in heart stuff to render such small gossip a hum of summer midges. She did not imagine the dialogue concerned her in any way. She noticed Mr. Stuart Rem's attentive scrutiny of her from time to time. She had no sensitiveness, hardly a mind for things about her. To-morrow she was to see Captain Dartrey. She dwelt on that prospect, for an escape from the meshes of a painful hour—the most woeful of the hours she had yet known—passed with Judith Marsett: which dragged her soul through a weltering of the deeps, tossed her over and over, still did it with her ideas. It shocked her nevertheless to perceive how much of the world's flayed life and harsh anatomy she had apprehended, and so coldly, previous to Mrs. Marsett's lift of the veil in her story of herself: a skipping revelation, terrible enough to the girl; whose comparison of the previously suspected things with the things now revealed imposed the thought of her having been both a precocious and a callous young woman: a kind of 'Delphica without the erudition,' her mind phrased it airily over her chagrin.—And the silence of Dudley proved him to have discovered his error in choosing such a person—he was wise, and she thanked him. She had an envy of the ignorant-innocents adored by the young man she cordially thanked for quitting her. She admired the white coat of armour they wore, whether bestowed on them by their constitution or by prudence. For while combating mankind now on Judith Marsett's behalf, personally she ran like a hare from the mere breath of an association with the very minor sort of similar charges; ardently she desired the esteem of mankind; she was at moments abject. But had she actually been aware of the facts now known?

Those wits of the virgin young, quickened to shrewdness by their budding senses—and however vividly—require enlightenment of the audible and visible before their sterner feelings can be heated to break them away from a blushful dread and force the mind to know. As much as the wilfully or naturally blunted, the intelligently honest have to learn by touch: only, their understandings cannot meanwhile be so wholly obtuse as our society's matron, acting to please the tastes of the civilized man — a creature that is not clean-washed of the Turk in him—barbarously exacts. The signor aforesaid is puzzled to read the woman, who is after all in his language; but when it comes to reading the maiden, she appears as a phosphorescent hieroglyph to some speculative Egyptologist; and he insists upon distinct lines and characters; no variations, if he is to have sense of surety. Many a young girl is misread by the amount she seems to know of our construction, history, and dealings, when it is not more than her sincere ripeness of nature, that has gathered the facts of life profuse about her, and prompts her through one or other of the instincts, often vanity, to show them to be not entirely strange to her; or haply her filly nature is having a fling at the social harness of hypocrisy. If you (it is usually through the length of ears of your Novelist that the privilege is yours) have overheard queer communications passing between girls, and you must act the traitor eavesdropper or Achilles masquerader to overhear so clearly, these, be assured, are not specially the signs of their corruptness. Even the exceptionally cynical are chiefly to be accused of bad manners. Your Moralist is a myopic preacher, when he stamps infamy, on them, or on our later generation, for the kick they have at grandmother decorum, because you do not or cannot conceal from them the grinning skeleton behind it.

Nesta once had dreams of her being loved: and she was to love in return for a love that excused her for loving double, treble; as not her lover could love, she thought with grateful pride in the treasure she was to pour out at his feet; as only one or two (and they were women) in the world had ever loved. Her notion of the passion was parasitic: man the tree, woman the bine: but the bine was flame to enwind and to soar, serpent to defend, immortal flowers to crown. The choice her parents had made for her in Dudley, behind the mystery she had scent of, nipped her dream, and prepared her to meet, as it were, the fireside of a November day instead of springing up and into the dawn's blue of full summer with swallows on wing. Her station in exile at the Wells of the weariful rich, under the weight of the sullen secret, unenlivened by Dudley's courtship, subdued her to the world's decrees; phrased thus: 'I am not to be a heroine.' The one golden edge to the view was, that she would greatly please her father.

Her dream of a love was put away like a botanist's pressed weed. But after hearing Judith Marsett's wild sobs, it had no place in her cherishing. For, above all, the unhappy woman protested love to have been the cause of her misery. She moaned of 'her Ned'; of his goodness, his deceitfulness, her trustfulness; his pride and the vileness of his friends; her longsuffering and her break down of patience. It was done for the proof of her unworthiness of Nesta's friendship: that she might be renounced, and embraced. She told the pathetic half of her story, to suit the gentle ear, whose critical keenness was lost in compassion. How deep the compassion, mixed with the girl's native respect for the evil-fortuned, may be judged by her inaccessibility to a vulgar tang that she was aware of in the deluge of the torrent, where Innocence and Ned and Love and a proud Family and that beast Worrell rolled together in leaping and shifting involutions.

A darkness of thunder was on the girl. Although she was not one to shrink beneath it like the small bird of the woods, she had to say within herself many times, 'I shall see Captain Dartrey to-morrow,' for a recovery and a nerving. And with her thought of him, her tooth was at her underlip, she struggled

abashed, in hesitation over men's views of her sex, and how to bring a frank mind to meet him; to be sure of his not at heart despising; until his character swam defined and bright across her scope. 'He is good to women.' Fragments of conversation, principally her father's, had pictured Captain Dartrey to her most manfully tolerant toward a frivolous wife.

He came early in the morning, instantly after breakfast.

Not two minutes had passed before she was at home with him. His words, his looks, revived her spirit of romance, gave her the very landscapes, and new ones. Yes, he was her hero. But his manner made him also an adored big brother, stamped splendid by the perils of life. He sat square, as if alert to rise, with an elbow on a knee, and the readiest turn of head to speakers, the promptest of answers, eyes that were a brighter accent to the mouth, so vividly did look accompany tone. He rallied her, chatted and laughed; pleased the ladies by laughing at Colney Durance, and inspired her with happiness when he spoke of England:—that 'One has to be in exile awhile, to see the place she takes.'

'Oh, Captain Dartrey, I do like to hear you say so,' she cried; his voice was reassuring also in other directions: it rang of true man.

He volunteered, however, a sad admission, that England had certainly lost something of the great nation's proper conception of Force: the meaning of it, virtue of it, and need for it. 'She bleats for a lesson, and will get her lesson.'

But if we have Captain Dartrey, we shall come through! So said the sparkle of Nesta's eyes.

'She is very like her father,' he said to the ladies.

'We think so,' they remarked.

'There's the mother too,' said he; and Nesta saw that the ladies shadowed.

They retired. Then she begged him to 'tell her of her own dear mother.' The news gave comfort, except for the suspicion, that the dear mother was being worn by her entertaining so largely. 'Papa is to blame,' said Nesta.

'A momentary strain. Your father has an idea of Parliament; one of the London Boroughs.'

'And I, Captain Dartrey, when do I go back to them?'

'Your mother comes down to consult with you. And now, do we ride together?'

'You are free?'

'My uncle, Lord Clan, lets me out.'

'To-day?'

'Why, yes!'

'This morning?'

'In an hour's time.'

'I will be ready.'

Nesta sent a line of excuse to Mrs. Marsett, throwing in a fervent adjective for balm.

That fair person rode out with the troop under conduct of the hallowing squire of the stables, and passed by Nesta on horseback beside Dartrey Fenellan at the steps of a huge hotel; issuing from which, pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was about to mount. Mrs. Marsett looked ahead and coloured, but she could not restrain one look at Nesta, that embraced her cavalier. Nesta waved hand to her, and nodded. Mrs. Marsett withdrew her eyes; her doing so, silent though it was, resembled the drag back to sea of the shingle-wave below her, such a screaming of tattle she heard in the questions discernible through the attitude of the cavalier and of the lady, who paused to stare, before the leap up in the saddle. 'Who is she?—what is she?—how did you know her?—where does she come from?— wears her hat on her brows!—huge gauntlets out of style!—shady! shady! shady!' And as always during her nervous tumults, the name of Worrell made diapason of that execrable uproar. Her hat on her brows had an air of dash, defying a world it could win, as Ned well knew. But she scanned her gauntlets disapprovingly. This town, we are glad to think, has a bright repute for glove-shops. And Mrs. Marsett could applaud herself

for sparing Ned's money; she had mended her gloves, if they were in the fashion.—But how does the money come? Hark at that lady and that gentleman questioning Miss Radnor of everything, everything in the world about her! Not a word do they get from Miss Radnor. And it makes them the more inquisitive. Idle rich people, comfortably fenced round, are so inquisitive! And Mrs. Marsett, loving Nesta for the notice of her, maddened by the sting of tongues it was causing, heard the wash of the beach, without consciousness of analogies, but with a body ready to jump out of skin, out of life, in desperation at the sound.

She was all impulse; a shifty piece of unmercenary stratagem occasionally directing it. Arrived at her lodgings, she wrote to Nesta: 'I entreat you not to notice me, if you pass me on the road again. Let me drop, never mind how low I go. I was born to be wretched. A line from you, just a line now and then, only to show me I am not forgotten. I have had a beautiful dream. I am not bad in reality; I love goodness, I know. I cling to the thought of you, as my rescue, I declare. Please, let me hear: if it's not more than "good day" and your initials on a post-card.'

The letter brought Nesta in person to her.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BURDEN UPON NESTA

Could there be confidences on the subject of Mrs. Marsett with Captain Dartrey?—Nesta timidly questioned her heart: she knocked at an iron door shut upon a thing alive. The very asking froze her, almost to stopping her throbs of pity for the woman. With Captain Dartrey, if with any one; but with no one. Not with her mother even. Toward her mother, she felt guilty of knowing. Her mother had a horror of that curtain. Nesta had seen it, and had taken her impressions; she, too, shrank from it; the more when impelled to draw near it. Louise de Seilles would have been another self; Louise was away; when to return, the dear friend could not state. Speaking in her ear, would have been possible; the theme precluded writing.

It was ponderous combustible new knowledge of life for a girl to hold unaided. In the presence of the simple silvery ladies Dorothea and Virginia, she had qualms, as if she were breaking out in spots before them. The ladies fancied, that Mr. Stuart Rem had hinted to them oddly of the girl; and that he might have meant, she appeared a little too cognizant of poor Mr. Abram Posterley's malady—as girls in these terrible days, only too frequently, too brazenly, are. They discoursed to her of the degeneracy of the manners, nay, the morals of young Englishwomen, once patterns! They sketched the young English gentlewoman of their time; indeed a beauty; with round red cheeks, and rounded open eyes, and a demure shut mouth, a puppet's divine ignorance; inoffensive in the highest degree, rightly worshipped. They were earnest, and Nesta struck at herself. She wished to be as they had been, reserving her painful independence.

They were good: they were the ideal women of our country; which demands if it be but the semblance of the sureness of stationary excellence; such as we have in Sevres and Dresden, polished bright and smooth as ever by the morning's flick of a duster; perhaps in danger of accidents— accidents must be kept away; but enviable, admirable, we think, when we are not thinking of seed sown or help given to the generations to follow. Nesta both envied and admired; she revered them; yet her sharp intelligence, larger in the extended boundary of thought coming of strange crimson-lighted new knowledge, discerned in a dimness what blest conditions had fixed them on their beautiful barren eminence. Without challengeing it, she had a rebellious rush of sympathy for our evil- fortunate of the world; the creatures in the battle, the wounded, trodden, mud-stained: and it alarmed her lest she should be at heart one out of the fold.

She had the sympathy, nevertheless, and renewing and increasing with the pulsations of a compassion that she took for her reflective survey. The next time she saw Dartrey Fenellan, she was assured of him, as being the man who might be spoken to; and by a woman: though not by a girl; not spoken to by her. The throb of the impulse precipitating speech subsided to a dumb yearning. He noticed her look: he was unaware of the human sun in the girl's eyes taking an image of him for permanent habitation in her breast. That face of his, so clearly lined, quick, firm, with the blue smile on it like the gleam of a sword coming out of sheath, did not mean hardness, she could have vowed. O that some woman, other than the unhappy woman herself, would speak the words denied to a girl! He was the man who would hearken and help. Essential immediate help was to be given besides the noble

benevolence of mind. Novel ideas of manliness and the world's need for it were printed on her understanding. For what could women do in aid of a good cause! She fawned: she deemed herself very despicably her hero's inferior. The thought of him enclosed her. In a prison, the gaoler is a demi-God-hued bright or black, as it may be; and, by the present arrangement between the sexes, she, whom the world allowed not to have an intimation from eye or ear, or from nature's blood-ripeness in commune with them, of certain matters, which it suffers to be notorious, necessarily directed her appeal almost in worship to the man, who was the one man endowed to relieve, and who locked her mouth for shame.

Thus was she, too, being put into her woman's harness of the bit and the blinkers, and taught to know herself for the weak thing, the gentle parasite, which the fiction of our civilization expects her, caressingly and contemptuously, to become in the active, while it is exacted of her Comedy of Clowns!—that in the passive she be a rockfortress impregnable, not to speak of magically encircled. She must also have her feelings; she must not be an unnatural creature. And she must have a sufficient intelligence; for her stupidity does not flatter the possessing man. It is not an organic growth that he desires in his mate, but a happy composition. You see the world which comes of the pair.

This burning Nesta, Victor's daughter, tempered by Nataly's milder blood, was a girl in whom the hard shocks of the knowledge of life, perforce of the hardness upon pure metal, left a strengthening for generous imagination. She did not sit to brood on her injured senses or set them through speculation touching heat; they were taken up and consumed by the fire of her mind. Nor had she leisure for the abhorrences, in a heart all flowing to give aid, and uplift and restore. Self was as urgent in her as in most of the young; but the gift of humour, which had previously diverted it, was now the quick feeling for her sisterhood, through the one piteous example she knew; and broadening it, through her insurgent abasement on their behalf, which was her scourged pride of sex. She but faintly thought of blaming the men whom her soul besought for justice, for common kindness, to women. There was the danger, that her aroused young ignorance would charge the whole of the misery about and abroad upon the stronger of those two: and another danger, that the vision of the facts below the surface would discolour and disorder her views of existence. But she loved, she sprang to, the lighted world; and she had figures of male friends, to which to cling; and they helped in animating glorious historical figures on the world's library-shelves or under yet palpitating earth. Promise of a steady balance of her nature, too, was shown in the absence of any irritable urgency to be doing, when her bosom bled to help. Beyond the resolve, that she would not abandon the woman who had made confession to her, she formed no conscious resolutions. Far ahead down her journey of the years to come, she did see muffled things she might hope and would strive to do. They were chrysalis shapes. Above all, she flew her blind quickened heart on the wings of an imaginative force; and those of the young who can do that, are in their blood incorruptible by dark knowledge, irradiated under darkness in the mind. Let but the throb be kept for others. That is the one secret, for redemption; if not for preservation.

Victor descended on his marine London to embrace his girl, full of regrets at Fredi's absence from the great whirl 'overhead,' as places of multitudinous assembly, where he shone, always appeared to him. But it was not to last long; she would soon be on the surface again! At the first clasp of her, he chirped some bars of her song. He challenged her to duet before the good ladies, and she kindled, she was caught up by his gaiety, wondering at herself; faintly aware of her not being spontaneous. And she made her father laugh, just in the old way; and looked at herself in his laughter, with the thought, that she could not have become so changed; by which the girl was helped to jump to her humour. Victor turned his full front to Dorothea and Virginia, one sunny beam of delight and although it was Mr. Stuart Rem who was naughty Nesta's victim, and although it seemed a trespass on her part to speak in such a manner of a clerical gentleman, they were seized; they were the opposite partners of a laughing quadrille, lasting till they were tired out.

Victor had asked his girl, if she sang on a Sunday. The ladies remembered, that she had put the question for permission to Mr. Stuart Rem, who was opposed to secular singing.

'And what did he say?' said Victor.

Nesta shook her head: 'It was not what he said, papa; it was his look. His duty compelled him, though he loves music. He had the look of a Patriarch putting his handmaiden away into the desert.'

Dorothea and Virginia, in spite of protests within, laughed to streams. They recollected the look; she had given the portrait of Mr. Stuart Rem in the act of repudiating secular song.

'Victor conjured up a day when this darling Fredi, a child, stood before a famous picture in the Brera, at Milan; when he and her mother noticed the child's very studious graveness; and they had talked of it; he remarking, that she disapproved of the Patriarch; and Nataly, that she was taken with Hagar's face.

He seemed surprised at her not having heard from Dudley.

'How is that?' said he.

'Most probably because he has not written, papa.'

He paused after the cool reply. She had no mournful gaze at all; but in the depths of the clear eyes he knew so well, there was a coil of something animate, whatever it might be. And twice she drew a heavy breath.

He mentioned it in London. Nataly telegraphed at night for her girl to meet her next day at Dartrey's hotel.

Their meeting was incomprehensibly joyless to the hearts of each, though it was desired, and had long been desired, and mother was mother, daughter daughter, without diminution of love between them. They held hands, they kissed and clasped, they showered their tender phrases with full warm truth, and looked into eyes and surely saw one another. But the heart of each was in a battle of its own, taking wounds or crying for supports. Whether to speak to her girl at once, despite the now vehement contrary counsel of Victor, was Nataly's deliberation, under the thought of the young creature's perplexity in not seeing her at the house of the Duvidney ladies: while Nesta conjured in a flash the past impressions of her mother's shrinking distaste from any such hectic themes as this which burdened and absorbed her; and she was almost joining to it, through sympathy with any thought or feeling of one in whom she had such pride; she had the shudder of revulsion. Further, Nataly put on, rather cravenly an air, of distress, or she half designingly permitted her trouble to be seen, by way of affecting her girl's recollection when the confession was to come, that Nesta might then understand her to have been restrained from speaking, not evasive of her duty. The look was interpreted by Nesta as belonging to the social annoyances dating, in her calendar, from Creckholt, apprehensively dreaded at Lakelands. She hinted asking, and her mother nodded; not untruthfully; but she put on a briskness after the nod; and a doubt was driven into Nesta's bosom.

Her dear Skepsey was coming down to her for a holiday, she was glad to hear. Of Dudley, there was no word. Nataly shunned his name, with a superstitious dread lest any mention of him should renew pretensions that she hoped, and now supposed, were quite withdrawn. So she had told poor Mr. Barmby only yesterday, at his humble request to know. He had seen Dudley on the pantiles, walking with a young lady, he said. And 'he feared,' he said; using, a pardonable commonplace of deceit. Her compassion accounted for the 'fear' which was the wish, and caused her not to think it particularly strange, that he should imagine Dudley to have quitted the field. Now that a disengaged Dartrey Fenellan was at hand, poor Mr. Barmby could have no chance.

Dartrey came to her room by appointment. She wanted to see him alone, and he informed her, that Mrs. Blathenoy was in the hotel, and would certainly receive and amuse Nesta for any length of time.

'I will take her up,' said Nataly, and rose, and she sat immediately, and fluttered a hand at her breast. She laughed: 'Perhaps I'm tired!'

Dartrey took Nesta.

He returned, saying: 'There's a lift in the hotel. Do the stairs affect you at all?'

She fenced his sharp look. 'Laziness, I fancy; age is coming on. How is it Mrs. Blathenoy is here?'

'Well! how?' 'Foolish curiosity?' 'I think I have made her of service. I did not bring the lady here.' 'Of service to whom?' 'Why, to Victor!' 'Has Victor commissioned you?' 'You can bear to hear it. Her husband knows the story. He has a grudge . . . commercial reasons. I fancy it is, that Victor stood against his paper at the table of the Bank. Blathenoy vowed blow for blow. But I think the little woman holds him in. She says she does.' 'Victor prompted you?' 'It occurred as it occurred.' 'She does it for love of us?—Oh! I can't trifle. Dartrey!' 'Tell me.' 'First, you haven't let me know what you think of my Nesta.' 'She's a dear good girl.' 'Not so interesting to you as a flighty little woman!' 'She has a speck of some sort on her mind.' Nataly spied at Dudley's behaviour, and said: 'That will wear away. Is Mr. Blathenoy much here?' 'As often as he can come, I believe.' 'That is . . . ?' 'I have seen him twice.' 'His wife remains?' 'Fixed here for the season.' 'My friend!' 'No harm, no harm!' 'But-to her!' 'You have my word of honour.' 'Yes: and she is doing you a service, at your request; you occasionally reward her with thanks; and she sees you are a man of honour. Do you not know women?'

Dartrey blew his pooh-pooh on feminine suspicions. 'There's very little left of the Don Amoroso in me. Women don't worship stone figures.'

'They do: like the sea-birds. And what do you say to me, Dartrey?—I can confess it: I am one of them: I love you. When last you left England, I kissed your hand. It was because of your manly heart in that stone figure. I kept from crying: you used to scorn us English for the "whimpering fits" you said we

enjoy and must have in books, if we can't get them up for ourselves. I could have prayed to have you as brother or son. I love my Victor the better for his love of you. Oh!—poor soul— how he is perverted since that building of Lakelands! He cannot take soundings of the things he does. Formerly he confided in me, in all things: now not one;—I am the chief person to deceive. If only he had waited! We are in a network of intrigues and schemes, every artifice in London—tempting one to hate simple worthy people, who naturally have their views, and see me an impostor, and tolerate me, fascinated by him: — or bribed—it has to be said. There are ways of bribing. I trust he may not have in the end to pay too heavily for succeeding. He seems a man pushed by Destiny; not irresponsible, but less responsible than most. He is desperately tempted by his never failing. Whatever he does! . . . it is true! And it sets me thinking of those who have never had an ailment, up to a certain age, when the killing blow comes. Latterly I have seen into him: I never did before. Had I been stronger, I might have saved, or averted But, you will say, the stronger woman would not have occupied my place. I must have been blind too. I did not see, that his nature shrinks from the thing it calls up. He dreads the exposure he courts—or has to combat with all his powers. It has been a revelation to me of his life as well. Nothing stops him. Now it is Parliament—a vacant London Borough. He counts on a death: Ah! terrible! I have it like a snake's bite night and day.'

Nataly concluded: 'There: it has done me some good to speak. I feel so base.' She breathed heavily.

Dartrey took her hand and bent his lips to it. 'Happy the woman who has not more to speak! How long will Nesta stay here?'

'You will watch over her, Dartrey? She stays—her father wishes—up to— ah! We can hardly be in such extreme peril. He has her doctor, her lawyer, and her butler—a favourite servant—to check, and influence, her: She—you know who it is!—does not, I am now convinced, mean persecution. She was never a mean-minded woman. Oh! I could wish she were. They say she is going. Then I am to be made an "honest woman of." Victor wants Nesta, now that she is away, to stay until You understand. He feels she is safe from any possible kind of harm with those good ladies. And I feel she is the safer for having you near. Otherwise, how I should pray to have you with us! Daily I have to pass through, well, something like the ordeal of the red-hot ploughshares— and without the innocence, dear friend! But it's best that my girl should not have to be doing the same; though she would have the innocence. But she writhes under any shadow of a blot. And for her to learn the things that are in the world, through her mother's history!— and led to know it by the falling away of friends, or say, acquaintances! However ignorant at present, she learns from a mere nothing. I dread! In a moment, she is a blaze of light. There have been occurrences. Only Victor could have overcome them! I had to think it better for my girl, that she was absent. We are in such a whirl up there! So I work round again to "how long?" and the picture of myself counting the breaths of a dying woman. The other day I was told I was envied!'

'Battle, battle, battle; for all of us, in every position!' said Dartrey sharply, to clip a softness: 'except when one's attending on an invalid uncle. Then it's peace; rather like extinction. And I can't be crying for the end either. I bite my moustache and tap foot on the floor, out of his hearing; make believe I'm patient. Now I 'll fetch Nesta.'

Mrs. Blathenoy came down with an arm on Nesta's shoulder. She held a telegram, and said to Nataly

'What can this mean? It's from my husband; he puts "Jacob": my husband's Christian name:—so like my husband, where there's no concealment! There—he says:

"Down to-night else pack ready start to-morrow." Can it signify, affairs are bad with my husband in the city?'

It had that signification to Nataly's understanding. At the same time, the pretty little woman's absurd lisping repetition of 'my husband' did not seem without design to inflict the wound it caused.

In reality, it was not malicious; it came of the bewitchment of a silly tongue by her knowledge of the secret to be controlled: and after contrasting her fortunes with Nataly's, on her way downstairs, she had comforted herself by saying, that at least she had a husband. She was not aware that she dealt a hurt until she had found a small consolation in the indulgence: for Captain Dartrey Fenellan admired this commanding figure of a woman, who could not legally say that which the woman he admired less, if at all, legally could say.

'I must leave you to interpret,' Nataly remarked.

Mrs. Blathenoy resented her unbecoming queenly style. For this reason, she abstained from an intended leading up to mention of the 'singular-looking lady' seen riding with Miss Radnor more than once; and as to whom, Miss Radnor (for one gives her the name) had not just now, when questioned,

spoken very clearly. So the mother's alarms were not raised.

And really it was a pity, Mrs. Blathenoy said to Dartrey subsequently; finding him colder than before Mrs. Radnor's visit; it was a pity, because a young woman in Miss Radnor's position should not by any possibility be seen in association with a person of commonly doubtful appearance.

She was denied the petulant satisfaction of rousing the championship bitter to her. Dartrey would not deliver an opinion on Miss Radnor's conduct. He declined, moreover, to assist in elucidating the telegram by 'looking here,' and poring over the lines beside a bloomy cheek. He was petulantly whipped on the arm with her glove, and pouted at. And it was then—and then only or chiefly through Nataly's recent allusion—that the man of honour had his quakings in view of the quagmire, where he was planted on an exceedingly narrow causeway, not of the firmest. For she was a pretty little woman, one of the prize gifts of the present education of women to the men who are for having them quiescent domestic patterns; and her artificial ingenuousness or candid frivolities came to her by nature to kindle the nature of the gentleman on the other bank of the stream, and witch him to the plunge, so greatly mutually regretted after taken: an old duet to the moon.

Dartrey escaped to the Club, where he had a friend. The friend was Colonel Sudley, one of the modern studious officers, not in good esteem with the authorities. He had not forgiven Dartrey for the intemperateness which cut off a brilliant soldier from the service. He was reduced to acknowledge, however, that there was a sparkling defence for him to reply with, in the shape of a fortune gained and where we have a Society forcing us to live up to an expensive level, very trying to a soldier's income, a fortune gained will offer excuses for misconduct short of disloyal or illegal. They talked of the state of the Army: we are moving. True, and at the last Review, the 'march past' was performed before a mounted generalissimo profoundly asleep, head on breast. Our English military 'moving' may now be likened to Somnolency on Horseback. 'Oh, come, no rancour,' said the colonel; 'you know he's a kind old boy at heart; nowhere a more affectionate man alive!'

'So the sycophants are sure of posts!'

'Come, I say! He's devoted to the Service.'

'Invalid him, and he shall have a good epitaph.'

'He's not so responsible as the taxpayer.'

'There you touch home. Mother Goose can't imagine the need for defence until a hand's at her feathers.'

'What about her shrieks now and then?'

'Indigestion of a surfeit?'

They were in a laughing wrangle when two acquaintances of the colonel's came near. One of them recognized Dartrey. He changed a prickly subject to one that is generally as acceptable to the servants of Mars. His companion said: 'Who is the girl out with Judith Marsett?' He flavoured eulogies of the girl's good looks in easy garrison English. She was praised for sitting her horse well. One had met her on the parade, in the afternoon, walking with Mrs. Marsett. Colonel Sudley had seen them on horseback. He remarked to Dartrey:

'And by the way, you're a clean stretch ahead of us. I've seen you go by these windows, with the young lady on one side, and a rather pretty woman on the other too.'

'Nothing is unseen in this town!' Dartrey rejoined.

Strolling to his quarters along the breezy parade at night, he proposed to himself, that he would breathe an immediate caution to Nesta. How had she come to know this Mrs. Marsett? But he was more seriously thinking of what Colney Durance called 'The Mustard Plaster'; the satirist's phrase for warm relations with a married fair one: and Dartrey, clear of any design to have it at his breast, was beginning to take intimations of pricks and burns. They are an almost positive cure of inflammatory internal conditions. They were really hard on him, who had none to be cured.

The hour was nigh midnight. As he entered his hotel, the porter ran off to the desk in his box, and brought him a note, saying, that a lady had left it at half-past nine. Left it?—Then the lady could not be the alarming lady. He was relieved. The words of the letter were cabalistic; these, beneath underlined address:

'I beg you to call on me, if I do not see you this evening. It is urgent; you will excuse me when I explain. Not late to-morrow. I am sure you will not fail to come. I could write what would be certain to

bring you. I dare not trust any names to paper.'

The signature was, Judith Marsett.

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOWS HOW THE SQUIRES IN A CONQUEROR'S SERVICE HAVE AT TIMES TO DO KNIGHTLY CONQUEST OF THEMSELVES

By the very earliest of the trains shot away to light and briny air from London's November gloom, which knows the morning through increase of gasjets, little Skepsey was hurried over suburban chimneys, in his friendly third-class carriage; where we have reminders of ancient pastoral times peculiar to our country, as it may chance; but where a man may speak to his neighbour right off without being deemed offensive. That is homely. A social fellow knitting closely to his fellows when he meets them, enjoys it, even at the cost of uncushioned seats he can, if imps are in him, merryandrew as much as he pleases; detested punctilio does not reign there; he can proselytize for the soul's welfare; decry or uphold the national drink; advertize a commercial Firm deriving prosperity from the favour of the multitude; exhort to patriotism. All is accepted. Politeness is the rule, according to Skepsey's experience of the Southern part of the third-class kingdom. And it is as well to mark the divisions, for the better knowledge of our countrymen. The North requires volumes to itself.

The hard-grained old pirate-stock Northward has built the land, and is to the front when we are at our epic work. Meanwhile it gets us a blowzy character, by shouldering roughly among the children of civilization. Skepsey, journeying one late afternoon up a Kentish line, had, in both senses of the word, encountered a long-limbed navvy; an intoxicated, he was compelled by his manly modesty to desire to think; whose loathly talk, forced upon the hearing of a decent old woman opposite him, passed baboonish behaviour; so much so, that Skepsey civilly intervened; subsequently inviting him to leave the carriage and receive a lesson at the station they were nearing. Upon his promising faithfully, that it should be a true and telling lesson, the navvy requested this pygmy spark to flick his cheek, merely to show he meant war in due sincerity; and he as faithfully, all honour, promising not to let it bring about a breakage of the laws of the Company, Skepsey promptly did the deed. So they went forth.

Skepsey alluded to the incident, for an example of the lamentable deficiency in science betrayed by most of our strong men when put to it; and the bitter thought, that he could count well nigh to a certainty on the total absence of science in the long-armed navvy, whose fist on his nose might have been as the magnet of a pin, was chief among his reminiscences after the bout, destroying pleasure for the lover of Old England's might. One blow would have sent Skepsey travelling. He was not seriously struck once. They parted, shaking hands; the navvy confessing himself to have 'drunk a drop'; and that perhaps accounted for his having been 'topped by a dot on him.'

He declined to make oath never to repeat his offence; but said, sending his vanquisher to the deuce, with an amicable push at his shoulder, 'Damned if I ever forget five foot five stretched six foot flat!'

Skepsey counted his feet some small amount higher; but our hearty rovers' sons have their ballad moods when giving or taking a thrashing. One of the third-class passengers, a lad of twenty, became Skepsey's pupil, and turned out clever with the gloves, and was persuaded to enter the militia, and grew soon to be a corporal. Thus there was profit of the affair, though the navvy sank out of sight. Let us hope and pray he will not insult the hearing of females again. If only females knew how necessary it is, for their sakes, to be able to give a lesson now and then! Ladies are positively opposed. And Judges too, who dress so like them. The manhood of our country is kept down, in consequence. Mr. Durance was right, when he said something about the state of war being wanted to weld our races together: and yet we are always praying for the state of peace, which causes cracks and gaps among us! Was that what he meant by illogical? It seemed to Skepsey—oddly, considering his inferior estimate of the value of the fair sex—that a young woman with whom he had recently made acquaintance; and who was in Brighton now, upon missionary work; a member of the 'Army,' an officer of advancing rank, Matilda Pridden, by name; was nearer to the secret of the right course of conduct for individual citizens and the entire country than any gentleman he knew.

Yes, nearer to it than his master was! Thinking of Mr. Victor Radnor, Skepsey fetched a sigh. He had knocked at his master's door at the office one day, and imagining the call to enter, had done so, and had seen a thing he could not expunge. Lady Grace Halley was there. From matters he gathered, Skepsey guessed her to be working for his master among the great folks, as he did with Jarniman, and

Mr. Fenellan with Mr. Carling. But is it usual; he asked himself—his natural veneration framing the rebuke to his master thus—to repay the services of a lady so warmly?—We have all of us an ermined owl within us to sit in judgement of our superiors as well as our equals; and the little man, notwithstanding a servant's bounden submissiveness, was forced to hear the judicial pronouncement upon his master's behaviour. His master had, at the same time, been saying most weighty kind words more and more of late: one thing:—that, if he gave all he had to his fellows, and did all he could, he should still be in their debt. And he was a very wealthy gentleman. What are we to think? The ways of our superiors are wonderful. We do them homage: still we feel, we painfully feel, we are beginning to worship elsewhere. It is the pain of a detachment of the very roots of our sea-weed heart from a rock. Mr. Victor Radnor was an honour to his country. Skepsey did not place the name of Matilda Pridden beside it or in any way compare two such entirely different persons. At the same time and most earnestly, while dreading to hear, he desired to have Matilda Pridden's opinion of the case distressing him. He never could hear it, because he could never be allowed to expound the case to her. Skepsey sighed again: he as much as uttered: Oh, if we had a few thousands like her!—But what if we do have them? They won't marry! There they are, all that the country requires in wives and mothers; and like Miss Priscilla Graves, they won't marry!

He looked through sad thoughts across the benches of the compartments to the farther end of the carriage, where sat the Rev. Septimus Barmby, looking at him through a meditation as obscure if not so mournful. Few are the third-class passengers outward at that early hour in the winter season, and Skepsey's gymnastics to get beside the Rev. Septimus were unimpeded; though a tight-packed carriage of us poor journaliers would not have obstructed them with as much as a sneer. Mr. Barmby and Skepsey greeted. The latter said, he had a holiday, to pay a visit to Miss Nesta. The former said, he hoped he should see Miss Nesta. Skepsey then rapidly brought the conversation to a point where Matilda Pridden was comprised. He discoursed of the 'Army' and her position in the Army, giving instances of her bravery, the devotion shown by her to the cause of morality, in all its forms. Mr. Barmby had his fortunes on his hands at the moment, he could not lend an attentive ear; and he disliked this Army, the title it had taken, and the mixing of women and men in its ranks; not to speak of a presumption in its proceedings, and the public marching and singing. Moreover, he enjoyed his one or two permissible glasses: he doubted that the Chiefs of the Army had common benevolence for the inoffensive pipe. But the cause of morality was precious to him; morality and a fit of softness, and the union of the happiest contrast of voices, had set him for a short while, before the dawn of Nesta's day, hankering after Priscilla Graves. Skepsey's narrative of Matilda Pridden's work down at the East of London; was effective; it had the ring to thrill a responsive chord in Mr. Barmby, who mused on London's East, and martyrly service there. His present expectations were of a very different sort; but a beautiful bride, bringing us wealth, is no misleading beam, if we direct the riches rightly. Septimus, a solitary minister in those grisly haunts of the misery breeding vice, must needs accomplish less than a Septimus the husband of one of England's chief heiresses:—only not the most brilliant, owing to circumstances known to the Rev. Groseman Buttermore: strangely, and opportunely, revealed: for her exceeding benefit, it may be hoped. She is no longer the ignorant girl, to reject the protecting hand of one whose cloth is the best of cloaking. A glance at Dudley Sowerby's defection, assures our worldly wisdom too, that now is the time to sue.

Several times while Mr. Barmby made thus his pudding of the desires of the flesh and the spirit, Skepsey's tales of Matilda Pridden's heroism caught his attention. He liked her deeds; he disliked the position in which the young woman placed herself to perform them; and he said so. Women are to be women, he said.

Skepsey agreed: 'If we could get men to do the work, sir!'

Mr. Barmby was launching forth: Plenty of men!—His mouth was blocked by the reflection, that we count the men on our fingers; often are we, as it were, an episcopal thumb surveying scarce that number of followers! He diverged to censure of the marchings and the street-singing: the impediment to traffic, the annoyance to a finely musical ear. He disapproved altogether of Matilda Pridden's military display, pronouncing her to be, 'Doubtless a worthy young person.'

'Her age is twenty-seven,' said Skepsey, spying at the number of his own.

'You have known her long?' Mr. Barmby asked.

'Not long, sir. She has gone through trouble. She believes very strongly in the will:—If I will this, if I will that, and it is the right will, not wickedness, it is done—as good as done; and force is quite superfluous. In her sermons, she exhorts to prayer before action.'

'Preaches?'

'She moves a large assembly, sir.'

'It would seem, that England is becoming Americanized!' exclaimed the Conservative in Mr. Barmby. Almost he groaned; and his gaze was fish-like in vacancy, on hearing the little man speak of the present intrepid forwardness of the sex to be publicly doing. It is for men the most indigestible fact of our century: one that—by contrast throws an overearthly holiness on our decorous dutiful mothers, who contentedly worked below the surface while men unremittingly attended to their interests above.

Skepsey drew forth a paper-covered shilling-book: a translation from the French, under a yelling title of savage hate of Old England and cannibal glee at her doom. Mr. Barmby dropped his eyelashes on it, without comment; nor did he reply to Skepsey's forlorn remark: 'We let them think they could do it!'

Behold the downs. Breakfast is behind them. Miss Radnor likewise: if the poor child has a name. We propose to supply the deficiency. She does not declare war upon tobacco. She has a cultured and a beautiful voice. We abstain from enlargeing on the charms of her person. She has resources, which representatives of a rival creed would plot to secure.

'Skepsey, you have your quarters at the house of Miss Radnor's relatives?' said Mr. Barmby, as they emerged from tunnelled chalk.

'Mention, that I think of calling in the course of the day.'

A biscuit had been their breakfast without a name.

They parted at the station, roused by the smell of salt to bestow a more legitimate title on the day's restorative beginning. Down the hill, along by the shops, and Skepsey, in sight of Miss Nesta's terrace, considered it still an early hour for a visitor; so, to have the sea about him, he paid pier-money, and hurried against the briny wings of a South-wester; green waves, curls of foam, flecks of silver, under low-flying grey-dark cloud-curtains shaken to a rift, where at one shot the sun had a line of Nereids nodding, laughing, sparkling to him. Skepsey enjoyed it, at the back of thoughts military and naval. Visible sea, this girdle of Britain, inspired him to exultations in reverence. He wished Mr. Durance could behold it now and have such a breastful. He was wishing he knew a song of Britain and sea, rather fancying Mr. Durance to be in some way a bar to patriotic poetical recollection, when he saw his Captain Dartrey mounting steps out of an iron anatomy of the pier, and looking like a razor off a strap.

'Why, sir!' cried Skepsey.

'Just a plunge and a dozen strokes,' Dartrey said; 'and you'll come to my hotel and give me ten minutes of the "recreation"; and if you don't come willingly, I shall insult your country.'

'Ah! I wish Mr. Durance were here,' Skepsey rejoined.

'It would upset his bumboat of epigrams. He rises at ten o'clock to a queasy breakfast by candlelight, and proceeds to composition. His picture of the country is a portrait of himself by the artist.'

'But, sir, Captain Dartrey, you don't think as Mr. Durance does of England!'

'There are lots to flatter her, Skepsey! A drilling can't do her harm. You're down to see Miss Nesta. Ladies don't receive quite so early. And have you breakfasted? Come on with me quick.' Dartrey led him on, saying: 'You have an eye at my stick. It was a legacy to me, by word of mouth, from a seaman of a ship I sailed in, who thought I had done him a service; and he died after all. He fell overboard drunk. He perished of the villain stuff. One of his messmates handed me the stick in Cape Town, sworn to deliver it. A good knot to grasp; and it 's flexible and strong; stick or rattan, whichever you please; it gives point or caresses the shoulder; there's no break in it, whack as you may. They call it a Demerara supple-jack. I'll leave it to you.'

Skepsey declared his intention to be the first to depart. He tried the temper of the stick, bent it a bit, and admired the prompt straightening.

'It would give a good blow, sir.'

'Does its business without braining.'

Perhaps for the reason, that it was not a handsome instrument for display on fashionable promenades, Dartrey chose it among his collection by preference; as ugly dogs of a known fidelity are chosen for companions. The Demerara supple-jack surpasses bull-dogs in its fashion of assisting the master; for when once at it, the clownish-looking thing reflects upon him creditably, by developing a refined courtliness of style, while in no way showing a diminution of jolly ardour for the fray. It will deal you the stroke of a bludgeon with the playfulness of a cane. It bears resemblance to those accomplished natural actors, who conversationally present a dramatic situation in two or three spontaneous

flourishes, and are themselves again, men of the world, the next minute.

Skepsey handed it back. He spoke of a new French rifle. He mentioned, in the form of query for no answer, the translation of the barking little volume he had shown to Mr. Barmby: he slapped at his breast-pocket, where it was. Not a ship was on the sea-line; and he seemed to deplore that vacancy.

'But it tells both ways,' Dartrey said. 'We don't want to be hectoring in the Channel. All we want, is to be sure of our power, so as not to go hunting and fawning for alliances. Up along that terrace Miss Nesta lives. Brighton would be a choice place for a landing.'

Skepsey temporized, to get his national defences, by pleading the country's love of peace.

'Then you give-up your portion of the gains of war—an awful disgorgement,' said Dartrey. 'If you are really for peace, you toss all your spare bones to the war-dogs. Otherwise, Quakerly preaching is taken for hypocrisy.'

'I 'm afraid we are illogical, sir,' said Skepsey, adopting one of the charges of Mr. Durance, to elude the abominable word.

'In you run, my friend.' Dartrey sped him up the steps of the hotel.

A little note lay on his breakfast-table. His invalid uncle's valet gave the morning's report of the night.

The note was from Mrs. Blathenoy: she begged Captain Dartrey, in double underlinings of her brief words, to mount the stairs. He debated, and he went.

She was excited, and showed a bosom compressed to explode: she had been weeping. 'My husband is off. He bids me follow him. What would you have me do?'

'Go.'

'You don't care what may happen to your friends, the Radnors?'

'Not at the cost of your separation from your husband.'

'You have seen him!'

'Be serious.'

'Oh, you cold creature! You know—you see: I can't conceal. And you tell me to go. "Go!" Gracious heavens! I've no claim on you; I haven't been able to do much; I would have—never mind! believe me or not. And now I'm to go: on the spot, I suppose. You've seen the man I 'm to go to, too. I would bear it, if it were not away from . . . out of sight of I'm a fool of a woman, I know. There's frankness for you! and I could declare you're saying "impudence" in your heart—or what you have for one. Have you one?'

'My dear soul, it 's a flint. So just think of your duty.' Dartrey played the horrid part of executioner with some skill.

Her bosom sprang to descend into abysses.

'And never a greater fool than when I sent for you to see such a face as I'm showing!' she cried, with lips that twitched and fingers that plucked at her belt. 'But you might feel my hatred of being tied to—dragged about over the Continent by that . . . perhaps you think a woman is not sensible of vulgarity in her husband! I 'm bothering you? I don't say I have the slightest claim. You never made love to me, never! Never so much as pressed my hand or looked. Others have—as much as I let them. And before I saw you, I had not an idea of another man but that man. So you advise me to go?'

'There's no other course.'

'No other course. I don't see one. What have I been dreaming of! Usually a woman feeling . . .' she struck at her breast, 'has had a soft word in her ear. "Go!" I don't blame you, Captain Dartrey. At least, you 're not the man to punish a woman for stripping herself, as I 've done. I call myself a fool—I'm a lunatic. Trust me with your hand.'

'There you are.'

She grasped the hand, and shut her eyes to make a long age of the holding on to him. 'Oh, you dear dear fellow!—don't think me unwomanly; I must tell you now: I am naked and can't disguise. I see you are ice—feel: and if you were different, I might be. You won't be hurt by hearing you've made yourself dear to me—without meaning to, I know! It began that day at Lakelands; I fell in love with you the very

first minute I set eyes on you! There's a confession for a woman to make! and a married woman! I'm married, and I no more feel allegiance, as they call it, than if there never had been a ceremony and no Jacob Blathenoy was in existence. And why I should go to him! But you shan't be troubled. I did not begin to live, as a woman, before I met you. I can speak all this to you because—we women can't be deceived in that—you are one of the men who can be counted on for a friend.'

'I hope so,' Dartrey said, and his mouth hardened as nature's electricity shot sparks into him from the touch and rocked him.

'No, not yet: I will soon let it drop,' said she, and she was just then thrillingly pretty; she caressed the hand, placing it at her throat and moving her chin on it, as women fondle birds. 'I am positively to go, then?'

'Positively, you are to go; and it's my command.'

'Not in love with any one at all?'

'Not with a soul.'

'Not with a woman?'

'With no woman.'

'Nor maid?'

'No! and no to everything. And an end to the catechism!'

'It is really a flint that beats here?' she said, and with a shyness in adventurousness, she struck the point of her forefinger on the rib. 'Fancy me in love with a flint! And running to be dutiful to a Jacob Blathenoy, at my flint's command. I'm half in love with doing what I hate, because this cold thing here bids me do it. I believe I married for money, and now it looks as if I were to have my bargain with poverty to bless it.'

'There I may help,' said Dartrey, relieved at sight of a loophole, to spring to some initiative out of the paralysis cast on him by a pretty little woman's rending of her veil. A man of honour alone with a woman who has tossed concealment to the winds, is a riddled target indeed: he is tempted to the peril of cajoleing, that he may escape from the torment and the ridicule; he is tempted to sigh for the gallant spirit of his naughty adolescence. 'Come to me—will you?—apply to me, if there's ever any need. I happen to have money. And forgive me for naming it.'

She groaned: 'Don't! I'm, sure, and I thought it from the first, you're one of the good men, and the woman who meets you is lucky, and wretched, and so she ought to be! Only to you should I! . . . do believe that! I won't speak of what excuses I've got. You've seen.'

'Don't think of them: there'll be danger in it.'

'Shall you think of me in danger?'

'Silly, silly! Don't you see you have to do with a flint! I've gone through fire. And if I were in love with you, I should start you off to your husband this blessed day.'

'And you're not the slightest wee wee bit in love with me!'

'Perfectly true; but I like you; and if we're to be hand in hand, in the time to come, you must walk firm at present.'

'I'm to go to-day?'

'You are.'

'Without again.'

The riddled target kicked. Dartrey contrasted Jacob Blathenoy with the fair wife, and commiseratingly exonerated her; he lashed at himself for continuing to be in this absurdest of postures, and not absolutely secure for all that. His head shook. 'Friends, you'll find best.'

'Well!' she sighed, 'I feel I'm doomed to go famished through life. There's never to be such a thing as, love, for me! I can't tell you no woman could: though you'll say I've told enough. I shall burn with shame when I think of it. I could go on my knees to have your arms round me once. I could kill myself for saying it!—I should feel that I had one moment of real life.—I know I ought to admire you. They say

a woman hates if she's refused. I can't: I wish I were able to. I could have helped the Radnors better by staying here and threatening never to go to him unless he swore not to do them injury. He's revengeful. Just as you like. You say "Go," and I go. There. I may kiss your hand?'

'Give me yours.'

Dartrey kissed the hand. She kissed the mark of his lips. He got himself away, by promising to see her to the train for Paris. Outside her door, he was met by the reflection, coming as a thing external, that he might veraciously and successfully have pleaded a passionate hunger for breakfast: nay, that he would have done so, if he had been downright in earnest. For she had the prettiness to cast a spell; a certain curve at the lips, a fluttering droop of the eyelids, a corner of the eye, that led long distances away to forests and nests. This little woman had the rosy-peeping June bud's plumpness. What of the man who refused to kiss her once? Cold antecedent immersion had to be thanked; and stringent vacuity; perhaps a spotting ogre-image of her possessor. Some sense of right-doing also, we hope. Dartrey angrily attributed his good conduct to the lowest motives. He went so far as to accuse himself of having forbore to speak of breakfast, from a sort of fascinated respect for the pitch of a situation that he despised and detested. Then again, when beginning to eat, his good conduct drew on him a chorus of the jeers of all the martial comrades he had known. But he owned he would have had less excuse than they, had he taken advantage of a woman's inability, at a weak moment, to protect herself: or rather, if he had not behaved in a manner to protect her from herself. He thought of his buried wife, and the noble in the base of that poor soul; needing constantly a present helper, for the nobler to conquer. Be true man with a woman, she must be viler than the devil has yet made one, if she does not follow a strong right lead:—but be patient, of course. And the word patience here means more than most men contain. Certainly a man like Jacob Blathenoy was a mouthful for any woman: and he had bought his wife, he deserved no pity. Not? Probably not. That view, however, is unwholesome and opens on slides. Pity of his wife, too, gets to be fervidly active with her portrait, fetches her breath about us. As for condemnation of the poor little woman, her case was not unexampled, though the sudden flare of it startled rather. Mrs. Victor could read men and women closely. Yes, and Victor, when he schemed—but Dartrey declined to be throwing blame right or left. More than by his breakfast, and in a preferable direction, he was refreshed by Skepsey's narrative of the deeds of Matilda Pridden.

'The right sort of girl for you to know, Skepsey,' he said. 'The best in life is a good woman.'

Skepsey exhibited his book of the Gallic howl.

'They have their fits now and then, and they're soon over and forgotten,' Dartrey said. 'The worst of it is, that we remember.'

After the morning's visit to his uncle, he peered at half a dozen sticks in the corner of the room, grasped their handles, and selected the Demerara supple-jack, for no particular reason; the curved knot was easy to the grasp. It was in his mind, that this person signing herself Judith Marsett, might have something to say, which intimately concerned Nesta. He fell to brooding on it, until he wondered why he had not been made a trifle anxious by the reading of the note overnight. Skepsey was left at Nesta's house.

Dartrey found himself expected by the servant waiting on Mrs. Marsett.

CHAPTER XXXII

SHOWS HOW TEMPER MAY KINDLE TEMPER AND AN INDIGNANT WOMAN GET HER WEAPON

Judith Marsett stood in her room to receive Nesta's hero. She was flushed, and had thinned her lips for utterance of a desperate thing, after the first severe formalities.

Her aim was to preserve an impressive decorum. She was at the same time burning to speak out furious wrath, in words of savage rawness, if they should come, as a manner of slapping the world's cheek for the state to which it reduces its women; whom one of the superior creatures can insult, and laugh.

Men complaining of the 'peace which is near their extinction,' have but to shuffle with the sex; they will experience as remarkable a change as if they had passed off land on to sea.

Dartrey had some flitting notion of the untamed original elements women can bring about us, in his short observant bow to Mrs. Marsett, following so closely upon the scene with Mrs. Blathenoy.

But this handsome woman's look of the dull red line of a sombre fire, that needed only stir of a breath to shoot the blaze, did not at all alarm him. He felt refreshingly strung by it.

She was discerned at a glance to be an aristocratic member of regions where the senses perpetually simmer when they are not boiling. The talk at the Club recurred to him. How could Nesta have come to know the woman? His questioning of the chapter of marvellous accidents, touched Nesta simply, as a young girl to be protected, without abhorrently involving the woman. He had his ideas of the Spirit of Woman stating her case to the One Judge, for lack of an earthly just one: a story different from that which is proclaimed pestilential by the body of censors under conservatory glass; where flesh is delicately nurtured, highly prized; spirit not so much so; and where the pretty tricking of the flesh is taken for a spiritual ascendancy.

In spite of her turbulent breast's burden to deliver, Mrs. Marsett's feminine acuteness was alive upon Dartrey, confirming here and there Nesta's praises of him. She liked his build and easy carriage of a muscular frame: her Ned was a heavy man. More than Dartrey's figure, as she would have said, though the estimate came second, she liked his manner with her. Not a doubt was there, that he read her position. She could impose upon some: not upon masculine eyes like these. They did not scrutinize, nor ruffle a smooth surface with a snap at petty impressions; and they were not cynically intimate or dominating or tentatively amorous: clear good fellowship was in them. And it was a blessedness (whatever might be her feeling later, when she came to thank him at heart) to be in the presence of a man whose appearance breathed of offering her common ground, whereon to meet and speak together, unburdened by the hunting world, and by the stoneing world. Such common ground seems a kind of celestial to the better order of those excluded from it.

Dartrey relieved her midway in a rigid practice of the formalities: 'I think I may guess that you have something to tell me relating to Miss Radnor?'

'It is.' Mrs. Marsett gathered up for an immediate plunge, and deferred it. 'I met her—we went out with the riding-master. She took to me. I like her—I could say' (the woman's voice dropped dead low, in a tremble), 'I love her. She is young: I could kneel to her. Do you know a Major Worrell?'

'Worrell? no.'

'He is a-calls himself a friend of my—of Captain Marsett's. He met us out one day.'

'He permitted himself to speak to Miss Radnor?'

She rejoiced in Dartrey's look. 'Not then. First let me tell you. I can hardly tell you. But Miss Radnor tells me you are not like other men. You have made your conclusions already. Are you asking what right I had to be knowing her? It is her goodness. Accident began it; I did not deceive her; as soon as ever I could I—I have Captain Marsett's promise to me: at present he's situated, he—but I opened my heart to her: as much as a woman can. It came! Did I do very wrong?'

'I'm not here to decide: continue, pray.'

Mrs. Marsett aimed at formal speech, and was driving upon her natural in anger. 'I swear I did it for the best. She is an innocent girl . . . young lady: only she has a head; she soon reads things. I saw the kind of cloud in her. I spoke. I felt bound to: she said she would not forsake me.—I was bound to! And it was enough to break my heart, to think of her despising me. No, she forgave, pitied;—she was kind. Those are the angels who cause us to think of changeing. I don't care for sermons, but when I meet charity: I won't bore you!'

'You don't.'

'My . . . Captain Marsett can't bear—he calls it Psalmody. He thinks things ought always to be as they are, with women and men; and women preachers he does detest. She is not one to preach. You are waiting to hear what I have to tell. That man Major Worrell has tried to rob me of everything I ever had to set a value on:—love, I 'd say;—he laughs at a woman like me loving.'

Dartrey nodded, to signify a known sort of fellow.

'She came here.' Mrs. Marsett's tears had risen. 'I ought not to have let her come. I invited her—for once: I am lonely. None of my sex— none I could respect! I meant it for only once. She promised to sing to me. And, Oh! how she sings! You have heard her. My whole heart came out. I declare I believe girls exist who can hear our way of life—and I'm not so bad except compared with that angel, who heard me,

and was and is, I could take oath, no worse for it. Some girls can; she is one. I am all for bringing them up in complete innocence. If I was a great lady, my daughters should never know anything of the world until they were married. But Miss Radnor is a young lady who cannot be hurt. She is above us. Oh! what a treasure for a man!—and my God! for any man born of woman to insult a saint, as she is!—He is a beast!

'Major Worrell met her here?'

'Blame me as much as you like: I do myself. Half my rage with him is at myself for putting her in the way of such a beast to annoy. Each time she came, I said it was to be the last. I let her see what a mercy from heaven she was to me. She would come. It has not been many times. She wishes me either to . . . Captain Marsett has promised. And nothing seems hard—to me when my own God's angel is by. She is! I'm not such a bad woman, but I never before I knew her knew the meaning of the word virtue. There is the young lady that man worried with his insulting remarks! though he must have known she was a lady:—because he found her in my rooms.'

'You were present when, as you say, he insulted her?'

'I was. Here it commenced; and he would see her downstairs.'

'You heard?'

'Of course, I never left her.'

'Give me a notion . . .'

'To get her to make an appointment: to let him conduct her home.'

'She was alone?'

'Her maid was below.'

'And this happened . . .?'

'Yesterday, after dark. My Ned—Captain Marsett encourages him to be familiar. I should be the lowest of women if I feared the threats of such a reptile of a man. I could tell you more. I can't always refuse his visits, though if Ned knew the cur he is! Captain Marsett is easy-going.'

'I should like to know where he lives.'

She went straight to the mantelpiece, and faced about with a card, handing it, quite aware that it was a charge of powder.

Desperate things to be done excused the desperate said; and especially they seemed a cover to the bald and often spotty language leaping out of her, against her better taste, when her temper was up.

'Somewhere not very distant,' said Dartrey perusing. 'Is he in the town to-day, do you know?'

'I am not sure; he may be. Her name . . .'

'Have no fear. Ladies' names are safe.'

'I am anxious that she may not be insulted again.'

'Did she show herself conscious of it?'

'She stopped speaking; she looked at the door. She may come again—or never! through that man!'

'You receive him, at his pleasure?'

'Captain Marsett wishes me to. He is on his way home. He calls Major Worrell my pet spite. All I want is; not to hear of the man. I swear he came yesterday on the chance of seeing—for he forced his way up past my servant; he must have seen Miss Radnor's maid below.'

'You don't mean, that he insulted her hearing?'

'Oh! Captain Fenellan, you know the style.'

'Well, I thank you,' Dartrey said. 'The young lady is the daughter of my dearest friends. She's one of the precious—you're quite right. Keep the tears back.'

'I will.' She heaved open-mouthed to get physical control of the tide. 'When you say that of her!—how

can I help it? It's I fear, because I fear . . . and I've no right to expect ever . . . but if I'm never again to look on that dear face, tell her I shall—I shall pray for her in my grave. Tell her she has done all a woman can, an angel can, to save my soul. I speak truth: my very soul! I could never go to the utter bad after knowing her. I don't—you know the world—I'm a poor helpless woman!—don't swear to give up my Ned if he does break the word he promised once; I can't see how I could. I haven't her courage. I haven't—what it is! You know her: it's in her eyes and her voice. If I had her beside me, then I could starve or go to execution—I could, I am certain. Here I am, going to do what you men hate. Let me sit.'

'Here's a chair,' said Dartrey. 'I've no time to spare; good day, for the present. You will permit me to call.'

'Oh! come'; she cried, out of her sobs, for excuse. They were genuine, or she would better have been able to second her efforts to catch a distinct vision of his retreating figure.

She beheld him, when he was in the street, turn for the district where Major Worrell had his lodgings. That set her mind moving, and her tears fell no longer.

Major Worrell was not at home. Dartrey was informed that he might be at his Club.

At the Club he heard of the major as having gone to London and being expected down in the afternoon. Colonel Sudley named the train: an early train; the major was engaged to dine at the Club. Dartrey had information supplied to him concerning Major Worrell and Captain Marsett, also Mrs. Marsett. She had a history. Worthy citizens read the description of history with interest when the halo of Royalty is round it. They may, if their reading extends, perceive, that it has been the main turbid stream in old Mammon's train since he threw his bait for flesh. They might ask, too, whether it is likely to cease to flow while he remains potent. The lady's history was brief, and bore recital in a Club; came off quite honourably there. Regarding Major Worrell, the tale of him showed him to have a pass among men. He managed cleverly to get his pleasures out of a small income and a 'fund of anecdote.' His reputation indicated an anecdotist of the table, prevailing in the primitive societies, where the art of conversing does not come by nature, and is exercised in monosyllabic undertones or grunts until the narrator's well-masticated popular anecdote loosens a digestive laughter, and some talk ensues. He was Marsett's friend, and he boasted of not letting Ned Marsett make a fool of himself.

Dartrey was not long in shaping the man's character: Worrell belonged to the male birds of upper air, who mangle what female prey they are forbidden to devour. And he had Miss Radnor's name: he had spoken her name at the Club overnight. He had roused a sensation, because of a man being present, Percy Southweare, who was related to a man as good as engaged to marry her. The major never fell into a quarrel with sons of nobles, if he could help it, or there might have been a pretty one.

So Colonel Sudley said.

Dartrey spoke musing: 'I don't know how he may class me; I have an account to square with him.'

'It won't do in these days, my good friend. Come and cool yourself; and we'll lunch here. I shan't leave you.'

'By all means. We'll lunch, and walk up to the station, and you will point him out to me.'

Dartrey stated Major Worrell's offence. The colonel was not astonished; but evidently he thought less of Worrell's behaviour to Miss Radnor in Mrs. Marsett's presence than of the mention of her name at the Club: and that, he seemed to think, had a shade of excuse against the charge of monstrous. He blamed the young lady who could go twice to visit a Mrs. Marsett; partly exposed a suspicion of her. Dartrey let him talk. They strolled along the parade, and were near the pier.

Suddenly saying: 'There, beside our friend in clerical garb: here she comes; judge if that is the girl for the foulest of curs to worry, no matter where she's found.' Dartrey directed the colonel's attention to Nesta and Mr. Barmby turning off the pier and advancing.

He saluted. She bowed. There was no contraction of her eyelids; and her face was white. The mortal life appeared to be deadened in her cold wide look; as when the storm-wind banks a leaden remoteness, leaving blown space of sky.

The colonel said: 'No, that's not the girl a gentleman would offend.'

'What man!' cried Dartrey. 'If we had a Society for the trial of your gentleman!—but he has only to call himself gentleman to get grant of licence: and your Society protects him. It won't punish, and it won't let you. But you saw her: ask yourself—what man could offend that girl!'

'Still, my friend, she ought to keep clear of the Marsetts.'

'When I meet him, I shall treat him as one out of the law.'

'You lead on to an ultimate argument with the hangman.'

We 'll dare it, to waken the old country. Old England will count none but Worrells in time. As for discreet, if you like!—the young lady might have been more discreet. She's a girl with a big heart. If we were all everlastingly discreet!

Dartrey may have meant, that the consequence of a prolonged conformity would be the generation of stench to shock to purging tempests the tolerant heavens over such smooth stagnancy. He had his ideas about movement; about the good of women, and the health of his England. The feeling of the hopelessness of pleading Nesta's conduct, for the perfect justification of it to son or daughter of our impressing conventional world—even to a friend, that friend a true man, a really chivalrous man —drove him back in a silence upon his natural brotherhood with souls that dare do. It was a wonder, to think of his finding this kinship in a woman. In a girl?—and the world holding that virgin spirit to be unclean or shadowed because its rays were shed on foul places? He clasped the girl. Her smitten clear face, the face of the second sigh after torture, bent him in devotion to her image.

The clasping and the worshipping were independent of personal ardours: quaintly mixed with semi-paternal recollections of the little 'blue butterfly' of the days at Craye. Farm and Creckholt; and he had heard of Dudley Sowerby's pretensions to; her hand. Nesta's youthfulness cast double age on him from the child's past. He pictured the child; pictured the girl, with her look of solitariness of sight; as in the desolate wide world, where her noble compassion for a woman had unexpectedly, painfully, almost by transubstantiation, rack-screwed her to woman's mind. And above sorrowful, holy were those eyes.

They held sway over Dartrey, and lost it some steps on; his demon temper urging him to strike at Major Worrell, as the cause of her dismayed expression. He was not the happier for dropping to his nature; but we proceed more easily, all of us, when the strain which lifts us a foot or two off our native level is relaxed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A PAIR OF WOOERS

That ashen look of the rise out of death from one of our mortal wounds, was caused by deeper convulsions in Nesta's bosom than Dartrey could imagine.

She had gone for the walk with Mr. Barmby, reading the omen of his tones in the request. Dorothea and Virginia would have her go. The clerical gentleman, a friend of the Rev. Abram Posterley; and one who deplored poor Mr. Posterley's infatuation; and one besides who belonged to Nesta's musical choir in London: seemed a safe companion for the child. The grand organ of Mr. Barmby's voice, too, assured them of a devout seriousness in him, that arrested any scrupulous little questions. They could not conceive his uttering the nonsensical empty stuff, compliments to their beauty and what not, which girls hear sometimes from inconsiderate gentlemen, to the having of their heads turned. Moreover, Nesta had rashly promised her father's faithful servant Skepsey to walk, out with him in the afternoon; and the ladies hoped she would find the morning's walk to have been enough; good little man though Skepsey was, they were sure. But there is the incongruous for young women of station on a promenade.

Mr. Barmby headed to the pier. After pacing up and down between the briny gulls and a polka-band, he made his way forethoughtfully to the glass-sheltered seats fronting East: where, as his enthusiasm for the solemnity of the occasion excited him to say, 'We have a view of the terraces and the cliffs'; and where not more than two enwrapped invalid figures were ensconced. Then it was, that Nesta recalled her anticipation of his possible design; forgotten by her during their talk of her dear people: Priscilla Graves and Mr. Pempton, and the Yatts, and Simeon Fenellan, Peridon and Catkin, and Skepsey likewise; and the very latest news of her mother. She wished she could have run before him, to spare him. He would not notice a sign. Girls must wait and hear.

It was an oratorio. She watched the long wave roll on to the sinking into its fellow; and onward again for the swell and the weariful lapse; and up at last bursting to the sheet of white. The far-heard roar and the near commingled, giving Mr. Barmby a semblance to the powers of ocean.

At the first direct note, the burden of which necessitated a pause, she petitioned him to be her friend,

to think of himself as her friend.

But a vessel laden with merchandize, that has crossed wild seas for this particular port, is hardly to be debarred from discharging its goods on the quay by simple intimations of their not being wanted. We are precipitated both by the aim and the tedium of the lengthened voyage to insist that they be seen. We believe perforce in their temptingness; and should allurements fail, we fall back to the belief in our eloquence. An eloquence to expose the qualities they possess, is the testification in the promise of their excellence. She is to be induced by feeling to see it. We are asking a young lady for the precious gift of her hand. We respect her; and because of our continued respect, despite an obstruction, we have come to think we have a claim upon her gratitude; could she but be led to understand how different we are from some other man!—from one hitherto favoured among them, unworthy of this prize, however personally exalted and meritorious.

The wave of wide extension rolled and sank and rose, heaving lifeless variations of the sickly streaks on its dull green back.

Dudley Sowerby's defection was hinted at and accounted for, by the worldly test of worldly considerations.

What were they?—Nesta glanced.

An indistinct comparison was modestly presented, of one unmoved by worldly considerations.

But what were they? She was wakened by a lamp, and her darkness was all inflammable to it.

'Oh! Mr. Barmby, you have done me the honour to speak before; you know my answer,' she said.

'You were then subject to an influence. A false, I may say wicked, sentiment upholding celibacy.'

'My poor Louise? She never thought of influencing me. She has her views, I mine. Our friendship does not depend on a "treaty of reciprocity." We are one at heart, each free to judge and act, as it should be in friendship. I heard from her this morning. Her brother will be able to resume his military duties next month. Then she will return to me.'

'We propose!' rejoined Mr. Barmby.

Beholding the involuntary mercurial rogue-dimple he had started from a twitch at the corner, of her lips, the good gentleman pursued: 'Can we dare write our designs for the month to come? Ah!—I will say—Nesta! give me the hope I beg to have. See the seriousness. You are at liberty. That other has withdrawn his pretensions. We will not blame him. He is in expectation of exalted rank. Where there is any shadow . . . !' Mr. Barmby paused on his outroll of the word; but immediately, not intending to weigh down his gentle hearer with the significance in it, resumed at a yet more sonorous depth: 'He is under the obligation to his family; an old, a venerable family. In the full blaze of public opinion! His conduct can be palliated by us, too. There is a right and wrong in minor things, independent of the higher rectitude. We pardon, we can partly support, the worldly view.'

'There is a shadow?' said Nesta; and her voice was lurefully encouraging.

He was on the footing where men are precipitated by what is within them to blunder. 'On you—no. On you personally, not at all. No. It could not be deemed so. Not by those knowing, esteeming—not by him who loves you, and would, with his name, would, with his whole strength, envelop, shield . . . certainly, certainly not.'

'It is on my parents?' she said.

'But to me nothing, nothing, quite nought! To confound the innocent with the guilty! . . . and excuses may exist. We know but how little we know!'

'It is on both my parents?' she said; with a simplicity that induced him to reply: 'Before the world. But not, I repeat . . .'

The band-instruments behind the sheltering glass flourished on their termination of a waltz.

She had not heeded their playing. Now she said:

'The music is over; we must not be late at lunch'; and she stood up and moved.

He sprang to his legs and obediently stepped out:

'I shall have your answer to-day, this evening? Nesta!'

'Mr. Barmby, it will be the same. You will be kind to me in not asking me again.'

He spoke further. She was dumb.

Had he done ill or well for himself and for her when he named the shadow on her parents? He dwelt more on her than on himself: he would not have wounded her to win the blest affirmative. Could she have been entirely ignorant?—and after Dudley Sowerby's defection? For such it was: the Rev. Stuart Rem had declared the union between the almost designated head of the Cantor family and a young person of no name, of worse than no birth, impossible: 'absolutely and totally impossible,' he, had said, in his impressive fashion, speaking from his knowledge of the family, and an acquaintance with Dudley. She must necessarily have learnt why Dudley Sowerby withdrew. No parents of an attractive daughter should allow her to remain unaware of her actual position in the world. It is criminal, a reduplication of the criminality! Yet she had not spoken as one astonished. She was mysterious. Women are so: young women most of all. It is undecided still whether they do of themselves conceive principles, or should submit to an imposition of the same upon them in terrorem. Mysterious truly, but most attractive! As Lady Bountiful of a district, she would have in her maturity the majestic stature to suit a dispensation of earthly good things. And, strangely, here she was, at this moment, rivalling to excelling all others of her sex (he verified it in the crowd of female faces passing), when they, if they but knew the facts, would visit her very appearance beside them on a common footing as an intrusion and a scandal. To us who know, such matters are indeed wonderful!

Moved by reflective compassion, Mr. Barmby resumed the wooer's note, some few steps after he had responded to the salutation of Dartrey Fenellan and Colonel Sudley. She did not speak. She turned her forehead to him; and the absence of the world from her eyes chilled his tongue.

He declined the pleasure of the lunch with the Duvidney ladies. He desired to be alone, to question himself fasting, to sound the deed he had done; for he had struck on a suspicion of selfishness in it: and though Love must needs be an egoism, Love is no warrant for the doing of a hurt to the creature beloved. Thoughts upon Skepsey and the tale of his Matilda Pridden's labours in poor neighbourhoods, to which he had been inattentive during the journey down to the sea, invaded him; they were persistent. He was a worthy man, having within him the spiritual impulse curiously ready to take the place where a material disappointment left vacancy. The vulgar sort embrace the devil at that stage. Before the day had sunk, Mr. Barmby's lowest wish was, to be a light, as the instrument of his Church in her ministrations amid the haunts of sin and slime, to such plain souls as Daniel Skepsey and Matilda Pridden. And he could still be that, if Nesta, in the chapters of the future, changed her mind. She might; for her good she would; he reserved the hope. His light was one to burn beneath an extinguisher.

At the luncheon table of the Duvidney ladies, it was a pain to Dorothea and Virginia to witness how poor the appetite their Nesta brought in from the briny blowy walk. They prophesied against her chances of a good sleep at night, if she did not eat heartily. Virginia timidly remarked on her paleness. Both of them put their simple arts in motion to let her know, that she was dear to them: so dear as to make them dread the hour of parting. They named their dread of it. They had consulted in private and owned to one another, that they did really love the child, and dared not look forward to what they would do without her. The dear child's paleness and want of appetite (they remembered they were observing a weak innocent girl) suggested to them mutually the idea of a young female heart sickening, for the old unhappy maiden reason. But, if only she might return with them to the Wells, the Rev. Stuart Rem would assure her to convince her of her not being quite, quite forsaken. He, or some one having sanction from Victor, might ultimately (the ladies waiting anxiously in the next room, to fold her on the warmth of their bosoms when she had heard) impart to her the knowledge of circumstances, which would, under their further tuition concerning the particular sentiments of great families and the strict duties of the scions of the race, help to account for and excuse the Hon. Dudley Sowerby's behaviour.

They went up to the drawing-room, talking of Skepsey and his tale of Miss Pridden, for Nesta's amusement. Any talk of her Skepsey usually quickened her lips to reminiscent smiles and speech. Now she held on to gazeing; and sadly, it seemed; as if some object were not present.

For a vague encouragement, Dorothea said: 'One week, and we are back home at Moorsedge!'—not so far from Cronidge, was implied, for the administering of some foolish temporary comfort. And it was as when a fish on land springs its hollow sides in alien air for the sustaining element; the girl panted; she clasped Dorothea's hand and looked at Virginia: 'My mother—I must see her!' she said. They were slightly stupefied by the unwonted mention of her mother. They made no reply. They never had done so when there was allusion to her mother. Their silence now struck a gong at the girl's bosom.

Dorothea had it in mind to say, that if she thirsted for any special comfort, the friends about her would offer consolation for confidence.

Before she could speak, Perrin the footman entered, bearing the card of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Mr. Dudley Sowerby begged for an immediate interview with Miss Radnor.

The ladies were somewhat agitated, but no longer perplexed as to their duties. They had quitted Moorsedge to avoid the visit of his family. If he followed, it signified that which they could not withstand:—The 'Tivoli falls!' as they named the fateful tremendous human passion, from the reminiscences of an impressive day on their travels in youth; when the leaping torrent had struck upon a tale of love they were reading. They hurriedly entreated Nesta to command her nerves; peremptorily requested her to stay where she was; showed her spontaneously, by way of histrionic adjuration, the face to be worn by young ladies at greetings on these occasions; kissed her and left her; Virginia whispering: 'He is true!'

Dudley entered the drawing-room, charged with his happy burden of a love that had passed through the furnace. She stood near a window, well in the light; she hardly gave him welcome. His address to her was hurried, rather uncertain, coherent enough between the drop and the catch of articulate syllables. He found himself holding his hat. He placed it on the table, and it rolled foolishly; but soon he was by her side, having two free hands to claim her one.

'You are thinking, you have not heard from me! I have been much occupied,' he said. 'My brother is ill, very ill. I have your pardon?'

'Indeed you have—if it has to be asked.'

'I have it?'

'Have I to grant it?'

'I own to remissness!

'I did not blame you.'

'Nesta . . . !'

Her coldness was unshaken.

He repeated the call of her name. 'I should have written—I ought to have written!—I could not have expressed . . . You do forgive? So many things!'

'You come from Cronidge to-day?'

'From my family—to you.'

She seemed resentful. His omissions as a correspondent were explicable in a sentence. It had to be deferred.

Reviewing for a moment the enormous internal conflict undergone by him during the period of the silence between them, he wondered at the vastness of the love which had conquered objections, to him so poignant.

There was at least no seeing of the public blot on her birth when looking on her face. Nor when thinking of the beauty of her character, in absence or in presence, was there any. He had mastered distaste to such a degree, that he forgot the assistance he had received from the heiress for enabling him to appreciate the fair young girl. Money is the imperious requirement of superior station; and more money and more: in these our modern days of the merchant's wealth, and the miner's, and the gigantic American and Australian millionaires, high rank is of necessity vowed, in peril of utter eclipse; to the possession of money. Still it is, when assured, a consideration far to the rear with a gentleman in whose bosom love and the buzzing world have fought their battle out. He could believe it thoroughly fought out, by the prolonged endurance of a contest lasting many days and nights; in the midst of which, at one time, the task of writing to tell her of his withdrawal from the engagement, was the cause of his omission to write.

As to her character, he dwelt on the charm of her recovered features, to repress an indicative dread of some intrepid force behind it, that might be unfeminine, however gentle the external lineaments. Her features, her present aristocratic deficiency of colour, greatly pleased him; her character would submit to moulding. Of all young ladies in the world, she should be the one to shrink from a mental independence and hold to the guidance of the man ennobling her. Did she? Her eyes were reading him. She had her father's limpid eyes, and when they concentrated rays, they shot.

'Have you seen my parents, Mr. Sowerby?'

He answered smilingly, for reassuringly: 'I have seen them.'

'My mother?'

'From your mother first. But am I not to be Dudley?'

'She spoke to you? She told you?'

'And yesterday your father—a second time.'

Some remainder of suspicion in the dealing with members of this family, urged Dudley to say: 'I understood from them, you were not? . . . that you were quite . . .?'

'I have heard: I have guessed: it was recently—this morning, as it happened. I wish to go to my mother to-day. I shall go to her to-morrow.'

'I might offer to conduct you-now!'

'You are kind; I have Skepsey.' She relieved the situation of its cold-toned strain in adding: 'He is a host.'

'But I may come?—now! Have I not the right? You do not deny it me?'

'You are very generous.'

'I claim the right, then. Always. And subsequently, soon after, my mother hopes to welcome you at Cronidge. She will be glad to hear of your naming of a day. My father bids me . . . he and all our family.'

'They are very generous.'

'I may send them word this evening of a day you name?'

'No, Mr. Sowerby.'

'Dudley?'

'I cannot say it. I have to see my parents.'

'Between us, surely?'

'My whole heart thanks you for your goodness to me. I am unable to say more.'

He had again observed and he slightly crisped under the speculative look she directed on him: a simple unstrained look, that had an air of reading right in, and was worse to bear with than when the spark leaped upon some thought from her eyes: though he had no imagination of anything he concealed—or exposed, and he would have set it down to her temporary incredulosity of his perfect generosity or power to overcome the world's opinion of certain circumstances. That had been a struggle! The peculiar look was not renewed. She spoke warmly of her gratitude. She stated, that she must of necessity see her parents at once. She submitted to his entreaty to conduct her to them on the morrow. It was in the manner of one who yielded step by step, from inability to contend.

Her attitude continuing unchanged, he became sensible of a monotony in the speech with which he assailed it, and he rose to leave, not dissatisfied. She, at his urgent request, named her train for London in the early morning. He said it was not too early. He would have desired to be warmed; yet he liked her the better for the moral sentiment controlling the physical. He had appointments with relatives or connections in the town, and on that pretext he departed, hoping for the speedy dawn of the morrow as soon as he had turned his back on the house.

No, not he the man to have pity of women underfoot! That was the thought, unrevolved, unphrased, all but unconscious, in Nesta: and while her heart was exalting him for his generosity. Under her present sense of the chilling shadow, she felt the comfort there was in being grateful to him for the golden beams which his generosity cast about her. But she had an intelligence sharp to pierce, virgin though she was; and with the mark in sight, however distant, she struck it, unerring as an Artemis for blood of beasts: those shrewd young wits, on the lookout to find a champion, athirst for help upon a desolate road, were hard as any judicial to pronounce the sentence upon Dudley in that respect. She raised him high; she placed herself low; she had a glimpse of the struggle he had gone through; love of her had helped him, she believed. And she was melted; and not the less did the girl's implacable intuition read with the keenness of eye of a man of the world the blunt division in him, where warm humanity stopped short at the wall of social concrete forming a part of this rightly esteemed young

citizen. She, too, was divided: she was at his feet; and she rebuked herself for daring to judge—or rather, it was, for having a reserve in her mind upon a man proving so generous with her. She was pulled this way and that by sensibilities both inspiring to blind gratitude and quickening her penetrative view. The certainty of an unerring perception remained.

Dorothea and Virginia were seated in the room below, waiting for their carriage, when the hall-door spoke of the Hon. Dudley's departure; soon after, Nesta entered to them. She swam up to Dorothea's lap, and dropped her head on it, kneeling.

The ladies feared she might be weeping. Dorothea patted her thick brown twisted locks of hair. Unhappiness following such an interview, struck them as an ill sign.

Virginia bent to the girl's ear, and murmured: 'All well?'

She replied: 'He has been very generous.'

Her speaking of the words renewed an oppression, that had darkened her on the descent of stairs. For sensibilities sharp as Nesta's, are not to be had without their penalties: and she who had gone nigh to summing in a flash the nature of Dudley, sank suddenly under that affliction often besetting the young adventurous mind, crushing to young women:—the fascination exercised upon them by a positive adverse masculine attitude and opinion. Young men know well what it is: and if young women have by chance overcome their timidity, to the taking of any step out of the trim pathway, they shrink, with a sense of forlornest isolation. It becomes a subjugation; inciting to revolt, but a heavy weight to cast off. Soon it assumed its material form for the contention between her and Dudley, in the figure of Mrs. Marsett. The Nesta who had been instructed to know herself to be under a shadow, heard, she almost justified Dudley's reproaches to her, for having made the acquaintance of the unhappy woman, for having visited her, for having been, though but for a minute, at the mercy of a coarse gentleman's pursuit. The recollection was a smart buffet.

Her lighted mind punished her thus through her conjuring of Dudley's words, should news of her relations with Mrs. Marsett reach him:—and she would have to tell him. Would he not say: 'I have borne with the things concerning your family. All the greater reason why I must insist'—he would assuredly say he insisted (her humour caught at the word, as being the very word one could foresee and clearly see him uttering in a fit of vehemence) on her immediate abandonment of 'that woman.'

And with Nesta's present enlightenment by dusky beams, upon her parentage, she listened abjectly to Dudley, or the opinion of the majority. Would he not say or think, that her clinging to Mrs. Marsett put them under a kind of common stamp, or gave the world its option to class them together?

These were among the ideas chasing in a head destined to be a battle-field for the enrichment of a harvest-field of them, while the girl's face was hidden on Dorothea's lap, and her breast heaved and heaved.

She distressed them when she rose, by saying she must instantly see her mother.

They saw the pain their hesitation inflicted, and Dorothea said: 'Yes, dear; any day you like.'

'To-morrow—I must go to her to-morrow!'

A suggestion of her mother's coming down, was faintly spoken by one lady, echoed in a quaver by the other.

Nesta shook her head. To quiet the kind souls, she entreated them to give their promise that they would invite her again.

Imagining the Hon. Dudley to have cast her off, both ladies embraced her: not entirely yielding-up their hearts to her, by reason of the pernicious new ideas now in the world to sap our foundations of morality; which warned them of their duty to uphold mentally his quite justifiable behaviour, even when compassionating the sufferings of the guiltless creature loved by them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

All through the afternoon and evening Skepsey showed indifference to meals by continuing absent: and he was the one with whom Nesta would have felt at home; more at home than with her parents. He and the cool world he moved in were a transparency of peace to her mind; even to his giving of some portion of it, when she had the dear little man present to her in a vivid image of a fish in a glass globe, wandering round and round, now and then shooting across, just as her Skepsey did: he carried his head semihorizontally at his arrowy pace; plain to read though he was, he appeared, under that image created of him, animated by motives inducing to speculation.

She thought of him till she could have reproached him for not returning and helping her to get away from the fever of other thoughts:—this anguish twisting about her parents, and the dreadful trammels of gratitude to a man afflictively generous, the frown of congregated people.

The latter was the least of evils; she had her charges to bring against them for injustice: uncited, unstirred charges, they were effective as a muffled force to sustain her: and the young who are of healthy lively blood and clean conscience have either emotion or imagination to fold them defensively from an enemy world; whose power to drive them forth into the wilderness they acknowledge. But in the wilderness their souls are not beaten down by breath of mortals; they burn straight flame there up to the parent Spirit.

She could not fancy herself flying thither;—where to be shorn and naked and shivering is no hardship, for the solitude clothes, and the sole true life in us resolves to that steady flame;—she was restrained by Dudley's generosity, which held her fast to have the forgiveness for her uncommitted sin dashed in her face. He surprised her; the unexpected quality in him seemed suddenly to have snared her fast: and she did not obtain release after seeing behind it;—seeing it, by the light of what she demanded, personal, shallow, a lover's generosity. So her keen intellect saw it; and her young blood (for the youthful are thus divided) thrilled in thinking it must be love! The name of the sacred passion lifted it out of the petty cabin of the individual into a quiring cathedral universal, and subdued her. It subdued her with an unwelcome touch of tenderness when she thought of it as involving tenderness for her mother, some chivalrous respect for her mother. Could he love the daughter without some little, which a more intimate knowledge of her dear mother would enlarge? The girl's heart flew to her mother, clung to her, vindicated her dumbly. It would not inquire, and it refused to hear, hungering the while. She sent forth her flights of stories in elucidation of the hidden; and they were like white bird after bird winging to covert beneath a thundercloud; until her breast ached for the voice of the thunder: harsh facts: sure as she was of her never losing her filial hold of the beloved. She and her mother grew together, they were one. Accepting the shadow, they were the closer one beneath it. She had neither vision nor active thought of her father, in whom her pride was.

At the hour of ten, the ladies retired for the enjoyment of their sweet reward. Manton, their maid, came down to sit with Nesta on the watch for Skepsey. Perrin, the footman, returning, as late as twenty minutes to eleven, from his tobacco promenade along the terrace, reported to Manton 'a row in town'; and he repeated to Nesta the policeman's opinion and his own of the 'Army' fellows, and the way to treat them. Both were for rigour.

'The name of "Army" attracts poor Skepsey so, I am sure he would join it, if they would admit him,' Nesta said.

'He has an immense respect for a young woman, who belongs to his "Army"; and one doesn't know what may have come,' said Manton.

Two or three minutes after eleven, a feeble ring at the bell gained admission for some person: whispering was heard in the passage.

Manton played eavesdropper, and suddenly bursting on Skepsey, arrested him when about to dash upstairs. His young mistress's voice was a sufficient command; he yielded; he pitched a smart sigh and stepped into her presence for his countenance to be seen, or the show of a countenance, that it presented.

'Skepsey wanted to rush to bed without saying good night to me?' said she; leaving unnoticed, except for woefulness of tone, his hurried shuffle of remarks on 'his appearance,' and 'little accidents'; ending with an inclination of his disgraceful person to the doorway, and a petition: 'If I might, Miss Nesta?' The implied pathetic reference to a surgically-treated nose under a cross of strips of plaster, could not obtain dismissal for him. And he had one eye of sinister hue, showing beside its lighted-grey fellow as if a sullen punished dragonwhelp had couched near some quick wood-pigeon. The two eyes blinked rapidly. He was a picture of Guilt in the nude, imploring to be sent into concealment.

The cruelty of detaining him was evident.

'Yes, if you must,' Nesta said. 'But, dear Skepsey, will it be the magistrate again to-morrow?'

He feared it would be; he fancied it would needs be. He concluded by stating, that he was bound to appear before the magistrate in the morning; and he begged assistance to keep it from the knowledge of the Miss Duvidneys, who had been so kind to him.

'Has there been bailing of you again, Skepsey?'

'A good gentleman, a resident,' he replied; 'a military gentleman; indeed, a colonel of the cavalry; but, it may so be, retired; and anxious about our vast possessions; though he thinks a translation of a French attack on England unimportant. He says, the Germans despise us most.'

'Then this gentleman thinks you have a good case?'

'He is a friend of Captain Dartrey's.'

Hearing that name, Nesta said: 'Now, Skepsey, you must tell me everything. You are not to mind your looks. I believe, I do always believe you mean well.'

'Miss Nesta, it depends upon the magistrate's not being prejudiced against the street-processionists!

'But you may expect justice from the magistrate, if your case is good?'

'I would not say no, Miss Nesta. But we find, the opinion of the public has its effect with magistrates—their sentences. They are severe on boxing. They have latterly treated the "Army" with more consideration, owing to the change in the public view. I myself have changed.'

'Have you joined it?'

'I cannot say I am a member of it.'

'You walked in the ranks to-day, and you were maltreated? Your friend was there?'

'I walked with Matilda Pridden; that is, parallel, along the pavement.'

'I hope she came out of it unhurt?'

'It is thanks to Captain Dartrey, Miss Nesta?'

This time Nesta looked her question.

Manton interposed: 'You are to speak, Mr. Skepsey'; and she stopped a flood of narrative, that was knocking in his mind to feel its head and to leap—an uninterrupted half-minute more would have shaped the story for the proper flow.

He began, after attending to the throb of his bruises in a manner to correct them rather than solace; and the beginning was the end: 'Captain Dartrey rescued us, before Matilda Pridden suffered harm, to mention—the chin, slight, teeth unshaken; a beautiful set. She is angry with Captain Dartrey, for having recourse to violence in her defence: it is against her principles. "Then you die," she says; and our principles are to gain more by death. She says, we are alive in them; but worse if we abandon them for the sake of living.—I am a little confused; she is very abstruse.—Because, that is the corruptible life, she says. I have found it quite impossible to argue with her; she has always a complete answer; wonderful. In case of Invasion, we are to lift our voices to the Lord; and the Lord's will shall be manifested. If we are robbed, we ask, How came we by the goods? It is unreasonable; it strikes at rights of property. But I have to go on thinking. When in danger, she sings without excitement. When the blow struck her, she stopped singing only an instant. She says, no one fears, who has real faith. She will not let me call her brave. She cannot admire Captain Dartrey. Her principles are opposed. She said to him, "Sir, you did what seemed to you right." She thinks every blow struck sends us back to the state of the beasts. Her principles . . .'

'How was it Captain Dartrey happened to be present, Skepsey?'

'She is very firm. You cannot move her.—Captain Dartrey was on his way to the station, to meet a gentleman from London, Miss Nesta. He carried a stick—a remarkable stick—he had shown to me in the morning, and he has given it me now. He says, he has done his last with it. He seems to have some of Matilda Pridden's ideas about fighting, when it's over. He was glad to be rid of the stick, he said.'

'But who attacked you? What were the people?'

'Captain Dartrey says, England may hold up her head while she breeds young women like Matilda

Pridden: right or wrong, he says: it is the substance.'

Hereupon Manton, sick of Miss Pridden, shook the little man with a snappish word, to bring him to attention. She got him together sufficiently for him to give a lame version of the story; flat until he came to his heroine's behaviour, when he brightened a moment, and he sank back absorbed in her principles and theories of life. It was understood by Nesta, that the processionists, going at a smart pace, found their way blocked and were assaulted in one of the sidestreets; and that Skepsey rushed to the defence of Matilda Pridden; and that, while they were engaged, Captain Dartrey was passing at the end of the street, and recognized one he knew in the thick of it and getting the worst of it, owing to numbers. 'I will show you the stick he did it with, Miss Nests'; said Skepsey, regardless of narrative; and darted out of the room to bring in the Demerara supple-jack; holding which, he became inspired to relate something of Captain Dartrey's deeds.

They gave no pleasure to his young lady, as he sadly perceived:—thus it is with the fair sex ever, so fond of heroes! She shut her eyes from the sight of the Demerara supple-jack descending right and left upon the skulls of a couple of bully lads. 'That will do—you were rescued. And now go to bed, Skepsey; and be up at seven to breakfast with me,' Nesta said, for his battle-damaged face would be more endurable to behold after an interval, she hoped; and she might in the morning dissociate its evil look from the deeds of Captain Dartrey.

The thought of her hero taking active part in a streetfray, was repulsive to her; it swamped his brilliancy. And this distressed her, by withdrawing the support which the thought of him had been to her since mid-day. She lay for sleepless hours, while nursing a deeper pain, under oppression of repugnance to battle-dealing, bloodshedding men. It was long before she grew mindful of the absurdity of the moan recurring whenever reflection wearied. Translated into speech, it would have run:

'In a street of the town! with a stick!'—The vulgar picture pursued her to humiliation; it robbed her or dimmed her possession of the one bright thing she had remaining to her. So she deemed it during the heavy sighs of night; partly conscious, that in some strange way it was as much as tossing her to the man who never could have condescended to the pugnacious using of a stick in a street. He, on the contrary, was a cover to the shamefaced.

Her heart was weak that night. She hovered above it, but not so detached as to scorn it for fawning to one—any one—who would offer her and her mother a cover from scorn. And now she exalted Dudley's generosity, now clung to a low idea of a haven in her father's wealth; and she was unaware, that the second mood was deduced from the first. She did know herself cowardly: she had, too, a critic in her clear head, to spurn at the creature who could think of purchasing the world's respect. Dudley's generosity sprang up to silence the voice. She could praise him, on a review of it, for delicacy, moreover; and the delicacy laid her under a more positive obligation. Her sense of it was not without a toneless quaint faint savour of the romantic, that her humour little humorously caught at, to paint her a picture of former heroes of fiction, who win their trying lady by their perfection of good conduct on a background of high birth; and who are not seen to be wooden before the volume closes. Her fatigue of sleeplessness plunged her into the period of poke-bonnets and peaky hats to admire him; giving her the kind of sweetness we may imagine ourselves to get in the state of tired horse munching hay. If she had gone to her bed with a noble or simply estimable plain image of one of her friends in her heart, to sustain it, she would not have been thus abject. Skepsey's discoloured eye, and Captain Dartrey's behaviour behind it, threw her upon Dudley's generosity, as being the shield for an outcast. Girls, who see at a time of need their ideal extinguished in its appearing tarnished, are very much at the disposal of the pressing suitor. Nesta rose in the black winter morn, summoning the best she could think of to glorify Dudley, that she might not feel so doomed.

According to an agreement overnight, she went to the bedroom of Dorothea and Virginia, to assure them of her having slept well, and say the good-bye to them and their Tasso. The little dog was the growl of a silken ball in a basket. His mistresses excused him, because of his being unused to the appearance of any person save Manton in their bedroom. Dorothea, kissing her, said: 'Adieu, dear child; and there is home with us always, remember. And, after breakfast, however it may be, you will, for our greater feeling of security, have—she has our orders—Manton— your own maid we consider too young for a guardian—to accompany you. We will not have it on our consciences, that by any possibility harm came to you while you were under our charge. The good innocent girl we received from the hands of your father, we return to him; we are sure of that.'

Nesta said: 'Mr. Sowerby promised he would come.'

'However it may be,' Dorothea repeated her curtaining phrase.

Virginia put in a word of apology for Tasso's temper he enjoyed ordinarily a slumber of half an hour's longer duration. He was, Dorothea feelingly added, regularity itself. Virginia murmured: 'Except once!'

and both were appalled by the recollection of that night. It had, nevertheless, caused them to reperuse the Rev. Stuart Rem's published beautiful sermon ON DIRT; the words of which were an antidote to the night of Tasso in the nostrils of Mnemosyne; so that Dorothea could reply to her sister, slightly by way of a reproof, quoting Mr. Stuart Rem at his loftiest: "Let us not bring into the sacred precincts Dirt from the roads, but have a care to spread it where it is a fructification." Virginia produced the sequent sentence, likewise weighty. Nesta stood between the thin division of their beds, her right hand given to one, her left to the other. They had the semblance of a haven out of storms.

She reflected, after shutting the door of their room, that the residing with them had been a means of casting her—it was an effort to remember how—upon the world where the tree of knowledge grows. She had eaten; and she might be the worse for it; but she was raised to a height that would not let her look with envy upon peace and comfort. Luxurious quiet people were as ripening glass-house fruits. Her bitter gathering of the knowledge of life had sharpened her intellect; and the intellect, even in the young, is, and not less usefully, hard metal rather than fallow soil. But for the fountain of human warmth at her breast, she might have been snared by the conceit of intellect, to despise the simple and conventional, or shed the pity which is charity's contempt. She had only to think of the kindness of the dear good ladies; her heart jumped to them at once. And when she fancied hearing those innocent souls of women embracing her and reproaching her for the knowledge of life she now bore, her words down deep in her bosom were: It has helped me to bear the shock of other knowledge! How would she have borne it before she knew of the infinitely evil? Saving for the tender compassion weeping over her mother, she had not much acute personal grief.

For this world condemning her birth, was the world tolerant of that infinitely evil! Her intellect fortified her to be combative by day, after the night of imagination; which splendid power is not so serviceable as the logical mind in painful seasons: for night revealed the world snorting Dragon's breath at a girl guilty of knowing its vilest. More than she liked to recall, it had driven her scorched, half withered, to the shelter of Dudley. The daylight, spreading thin at the windows, restored her from that weakness. 'We will quit England,' she said, thinking of her mother and herself, and then of her father's surely following them. She sighed thankfully, half way through the breakfast with Skepsey, at sight of the hour by the clock; she was hurriedly sentient of the puzzle of her feelings, when she guessed at a chance that Dudley would be delayed. She supposed herself as possibly feeling not so well able to keep every thought of her head brooding on her mother in Dudley's company.

Skepsey's face was just sufferable by light of day, if one pitied reflecting on his honest intentions; it ceased to discolour another. He dropped a few particulars of his hero in action; but the heroine eclipsed. He was heavier than ever with his Matilda Pridden. At the hour for departure, Perrin had a conveyance at the door. Nesta sent off Skepsey with a complimentary message to Captain Dartrey. Her maid Mary begged her to finish her breakfast; Manton suggested the waiting a further two or three minutes. 'We must not be late,' Nesta said; and when the minute-hand of the clock marked ample time for the drive to the station, she took her seat and started, keeping her face resolutely set seaward, having at her ears the ring of a cry that was to come from Manton. But Manton was dumb; she spied no one on the pavement who signalled to stop them. And no one was at the station to greet them. They stepped into a carriage where they were alone. Dudley with his dreaded generosity melted out of Nesta's thoughts, like the vanishing steam-wreath on the dip between the line and the downs.

She passed into music, as she always did under motion of carriages and trains, whether in happiness or sadness: and the day being one that had a sky, the scenic of music swung her up to soar. None of her heavy burdens enchained, though she knew the weight of them, with those of other painful souls. The piping at her breast gave wings to large and small of the visible; and along the downs went stateliest of flowing dances; a copse lengthened to forest; a pool of cattle-water caught grey for flights through enchantment. Cottage-children, wherever seen in groups, she wreathed above with angels to watch them. Her mind all the while was busy upon earth, embracing her mother, eyeing her father. Imagination and our earthly met midway, and still she flew, until she was brought to the ground by a shot. She struggled to rise, uplifting Judith Marsett: a woman not so very much older than her own teens, in the count of years, and ages older; and the world pulling at her heels to keep her low. That unhappiest had no one but a sisterly girl to help her: and how she clung to the slender help! Who else was there?

The good and the bad in the woman struck separate blows upon the girl's resonant nature. She perceived the good, and took it into her reflections. The bad she divined: it approached like some threat of inflammation. Natures resonant as that which animated this girl, are quick at the wells of understanding: and she had her intimations of the world's wisdom in withholding contagious presences from the very mangy of the young, who may not have an, aim, or ideal or strong human compassion, for a preservative. She was assured of her possessing it. She asked herself in her mother's voice, and answered mutely. She had the certainty: for she rebuked the slavish feverishness of the passion, as betrayed by Mrs. Marsett; and the woman's tone, as of strung wires ringing on a rage of the wind. Then

followed her cry for the man who could speak to Captain Marsett of his duty in honour. An image of one, accompanying the faster beats of her heart, beguiled her to think away from the cause. He, the one man known to her, would act the brother's part on behalf of the hapless creature.

Nesta just imagined her having supplicated him, and at once imagination came to dust. She had to thank him she knelt to him. For the first time of her life she found herself seized with her sex's shudder in the blood.

CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH AGAIN WE MAKE USE OF THE OLD LAMPS FOR LIGHTING AN ABYSMAL DARKNESS

And if Nesta had looked out of her carriage-window soon after the train began to glide, her eagle of imagination would have reeled from the heights, with very different feelings, earlier, perhaps a captive, at sight of the tardy gentleman rushing along the platform, and bending ear to the footman Perrin, and staring for one lost.

The snaky tail of the train imparted to Dudley an apprehension of the ominous in his having missed her. It wound away, and left regrets, which raised a chorus of harsh congratulations from the opposite party of his internal parliament.

Neither party could express an opinion without rousing the other to an uproar.

He had met his cousin Southweare overnight. He had heard, that there was talk of Miss Radnor. Her name was in the mouth of Major Worrell. It was coupled with the name of Mrs. Marsett. A military captain, in the succession to be Sir Edward Marsett, bestowed on her the shadow of his name.

It could be certified, that Miss Radnor visited the woman at her house. What are we to think of Miss Radnor, save that daughters of depraved parents! . . . A torture undeserved is the Centaur's shirt for driving us to lay about in all directions. He who had swallowed so much—a thunderbolt: a still undigested discharge from the perplexing heavens jumped frantic under the pressure upon him of more, and worse. A girl getting herself talked of at a Club! And she of all young ladies should have been the last to draw round her that buzz of tongues. On such a subject!—The parents pursuing their career of cynical ostentation in London, threw an evil eye of heredity on their offspring in the egg; making anything credible, pointing at tendencies.

An alliance with her was impossible. So said disgust. Anger came like a stronger beast, and extinguished the safety there was in the thing it consumed, by growing so excessive as to require tempering with drops of compassion; which prepared the way for a formal act of cold forgiveness; and the moment that was conceived, he had a passion to commit the horrible magnanimity, and did it on a grand scale, and dissolved his Heart in the grandeur, and slaved himself again.

Far from expungeing the doubt of her, forgiveness gave it a stamp and an edge. His renewed enslavement set him perusing his tyrant keenly, as nauseated captives do; and he saw, that forgiveness was beside the case. For this Nesta Victoria Radnor would not crave it or accept it. He had mentally played the woman to her superior vivaciousness too long for him to see her taking a culprit's attitude. What she did, she intended to do. The mother would not have encouraged her. The father idolized her; and the father was a frank hedonist, whose blood . . . speculation on horseback gallops to barren extremes. Eyes like hers—if there had not been the miserable dupes of girls! Conduct is the sole guide to female character. That likewise may be the hypocrite's mask.

Popular artists, intent to gratify the national taste for effects called realistic, have figured in scenes of battle the raying fragments of a man from impact of a cannon-ball on his person. Truly thus it may be when flesh contends. But an image of the stricken and scattered mind of the man should, though deficient in the attraction, have a greater significance, forasmuch as it does not exhibit him entirely liquefied and showered into space; it leaves him his legs for the taking of further steps. Dudley, standing on the platform of Nesta's train, one half minute too late, according to his desire before he put himself in motion, was as wildly torn as the vapour shredded streaming to fingers and threads off the upright columnar shot of the shriek from the boiler. He wished every mad antagonism to his wishes: that he might see her, be blind to her; embrace, discard; heal his wound, and tear it wider. He thanked her for the grossness of an offence precluding excuses. He was aware of a glimmer of advocacy in the very grossness. He conjured-up her features, and they said, her innocence was the sinner; they scoffed

at him for the dupe he was willing to be. She had enigma's mouth, with the eyes of morning.

More than most girls, she was the girl-Sphinx to him because of her having ideas—or what he deemed ideas. She struck a toneing warmth through his intelligence, not dissimilar to the livelier circulation of the blood in the frame breathing mountain air. She really helped him, incited him to go along with this windy wild modern time more cheerfully, if not quite hopefully. For she had been the book of Romance he despised when it appeared as a printed volume: and which might have educated the young man to read some among our riddles in the book of humanity. The white he was ready to take for silver the black were all black; the spotted had received corruption's label. Her youthful French governess Mademoiselle de Seilles was also peculiarly enigmatic at the mouth conversant, one might expect, with the disintegrating literature of her country. In public, the two talked of St. Louis. One of them in secret visits a Mrs. Marsett. The Southweare women, the Hennen women, and Lady Evelina Reddish, were artless candid creatures in their early days, not transgressing in a glance. Lady Grace Halley had her fit of the devotional previous to marriage. No girl known to Dudley by report or acquaintance had committed so scandalous an indiscretion as Miss Radnor's: it pertained to the insolently vile.

And on that ground, it started the voluble defence. For certain suspected things will dash suspicion to the rebound, when they are very dark. As soon as the charge against her was moderated, the defence expired. He heard the world delivering its judgement upon her; and he sorrowfully acquiesced. She passed from him.

When she was cut off, she sang him in the distance a remembered saying of hers, with the full melody of her voice. One day, treating of modern pessimism, he had draped a cadaverous view of our mortal being in a quotation of the wisdom of the Philosopher Emperor: 'To set one's love upon the swallow is a futility.' And she, weighing it, nodded, and replied: 'May not the pleasure for us remain if we set our love upon the beauty of the swallow's flight?'

There was, for a girl, a bit of idea, real idea, in that meaning, of course, the picture we are to have of the bird's wings in motion, it has often been admired. Oh! not much of an idea in itself: feminine and vague. But it was pertinent, opportune; in this way she stimulated. And the girl who could think it, and call on a Mrs. Marsett, was of the class of mixtures properly to be handed over to chemical experts for analysis!

She had her aspirations on behalf of her sex: she and Mademoiselle de Seilles discussed them; women were to do this, do that:—necessarily a means of instructing a girl to learn what they did do. If the lower part of her face had been as reassuring to him as the upper, he might have put a reluctant faith in the pure-mindedness of these aspirations, without reverting to her origin, and also to recent rumours of her father and Lady Grace Halley. As it was, he inquired of the cognizant, whether an intellectual precocity, devoted by preference to questions affecting the state of women, did not rather more than suggest the existence of urgent senses likewise. She, a girl under twenty, had an interest in public matters, and she called on a Mrs. Marsett. To plead her simplicity, was to be absolutely ignorant of her.

He neighboured sagacity when he pointed that interrogation relating to Nesta's precociousness of the intelligence. For, as they say in dactylomancy, the 'psychical' of women are not disposed in their sensitive early days to dwell upon the fortunes of their sex: a thought or two turns them facing away, with the repugnant shiver. They worship at a niche in the wall. They cannot avoid imputing some share of foulness to them that are for scouring the chamber; and the civilized male, keeping his own chamber locked, quite shares their pale taper's view. The full-blooded to the finger-tips, on the other hand, are likely to be drawn to the subject, by noble inducement as often as by base: Nature at flood being the cause in either instance. This young Nature of the good and the bad, is the blood which runs to power of heart as well as to thirsts of the flesh. Then have men to sound themselves, to discover how much of Nature their abstract honourable conception or representative eidolon of young women will bear without going to pieces; and it will not be much, unless they shall have taken instruction from the poet's pen: for a view possibly of Nature at work to cast the slough, when they see her writhing as in her ugliest old throes. If they have learnt of Nature's priest to respect her, they will less distrust those rare daughters of hers who are moved by her warmth to lift her out of slime. It is by her own live warmth that it has to be done: cold worship at a niche in the wall will not do it.—Well, there is an index, for the enlargement of your charity.

But facts were Dudley's teachers. Physically, morally, mentally, he read the world through facts; that is to say, through the facts he encountered: and he was in consequence foredoomed to a succession of bumps; all the heavier from his being, unlike the horned kind, not unimpressible by the hazy things outside his experience. Even at his darkest over Nesta, it was his indigestion of the misconduct of her parents, which denied to a certain still small advocate within him the right to raise a voice: that good

fellow struck the attitude for pleading, and had to be silent; for he was Instinct; at best a stammering speaker in the Court of the wiggled Facts. Instinct of this Nesta Radnor's character would have said a brave word, but for her deeds bearing witness to her inheritance of a lawlessly adventurous temperament.

What to do? He was no nearer to an answer when the wintry dusk had fallen on the promenading crowds. To do nothing, is the wisdom of those who have seen fools perish. Facts had not taught him, that the doing nothing, for a length of days after the first shock he sustained, was the reason of how it came that Nesta knitted closer her acquaintance with the 'agreeable lady' she mentioned in her letter to Cronidge. Those excellent counsellors of a mercantile community gave him no warnings, that the 'masterly inactive' part, so greatly esteemed by him for the conduct of public affairs, might be perilous in dealings with a vivid girl: nor a hint, that when facts continue undigested, it is because the sensations are as violent as hysterical females to block them from the understanding. His Robin Goodfellow instinct tried to be serviceable at a crux of his meditations, where Edith Averst's consumptive brothers waved faded hands at her chances of inheriting largely. Superb for the chances: but what of her offspring? And the other was a girl such as the lusty Dame Dowager of fighting ancestors would have signalled to the heir of the House's honours for the perpetuation of his race. No doubt: and the venerable Dame (beautiful in her old-lace frame, or say foliage) of the Ages backward, temp: Ed: III. inflated him with a thought of her: and his readings in modern books on heredity, pure blood, physical regeneration, pronounced approval of Nesta Radnor: and thereupon instinct opened mouth to speak; and a lockjaw seized it under that scowl of his presiding mistrust of Nature.

He clung to his mistrust the more because of a warning he had from the silenced natural voice: somewhat as we may behold how the Conservatism of a Class, in a world of all the evidences showing that there is no stay to things, comes of the intuitive discernment of its finality. His mistrust was his own; and Nesta was not; not yet; though a step would make her his own. Instinct prompting to the step, was a worthless adviser. It spurred him, nevertheless.

He called at the Club for his cousin Southweare, with whom he was not in sympathy; and had information that, Southweare said, 'made the girl out all right.' Girls in these days do things which the sainted stay-at-homes preceding them would not have dreamed of doing. Something had occurred, relating to Major Worrell: he withdrew Miss Radnor's name, acknowledged himself mistaken or amended his report of her, in some way, not quite intelligible. Dudley was accosted by Simeon Fenellan; subsequently by Dartrey. There was gossip over the latter gentleman's having been up before the magistrate, talk of a queer kind of stick, and Dartrey said, laughing, to Simeon: 'Rather lucky I bled the rascal';— whatever the meaning. She nursed one of her adorations for this man, who had yesterday, apparently, joined in a street-fray; so she partook of the stain of the turbid defacing all these disorderly people.

At his hotel at breakfast the next morning, a newspaper furnished an account of Captain Dartrey Fenellan's participation in the strife, after mention of him as nephew of the Earl of Clanconan, 'now a visitor to our town'; and his deeds were accordant with his birth. Such writing was enough to send Dudley an eager listener to Colney Durance. What a people!

Mr. Dartrey Fenellan's card compelled Dudley presently to receive him.

Dartrey, not debarred by considerations, that an allusion to Miss Radnor could be conveyed only in the most delicately obscure manner, spared him no more than the plain English of his relations with her. Requested to come to the Club, at a certain hour of the afternoon, that he might hear Major Worrell's personal contradiction of scandal involving the young lady's name, together with his apology, etc., Dudley declined: and he was obliged to do it curtly; words were wanting. They are hard to find for wounded sentiments rendered complex by an infusion of policy. His present mood, with the something new to digest, held the going to Major Worrell a wrong step; he behaved as if the speaking to Dartrey Fenellan pledged him hardly less. And besides he had a physical abhorrence, under dictate of moral reprobation, of the broad-shouldered sinewy man, whose look of wiry alertness pictured the previous day's gory gutters.

Dartrey set sharp eyes on him for an instant, bowed; and went.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

All of us an ermined owl within us to sit in judgement
Cannot be any goodness unless it is a practiced goodness
Eminently servile is the tolerated lawbreaker
Half designingly permitted her trouble to be seen
Happy the woman who has not more to speak
If we are robbed, we ask, How came we by the goods?
Let but the throb be kept for others—That is the one secret
Love must needs be an egoism
Not to go hunting and fawning for alliances
Portrait of himself by the artist
Put into her woman's harness of the bit and the blinkers
Share of foulness to them that are for scouring the chamber
She disdained to question the mouth which had bitten her
The face of a stopped watch
The worst of it is, that we remember
To do nothing, is the wisdom of those who have seen fools perish
We have come to think we have a claim upon her gratitude
Whimpering fits you said we enjoy and must have in books

[The End]

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