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JOHN SHERMAN

AND

DHOYA

GANCONAGH

JOHN SHERMAN

AND

DHOYA

SECOND EDITION

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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GANCONAGH'S APOLOGY.

THE maker of these stories has been told that he must not bring them to you himself. He has asked me to pretend that I am the author. I am an old little Irish spirit, and I sit in the hedges and watch the world go by. I see the boys going to market driving donkeys with creels of turf, and the girls carrying baskets of apples. Sometimes I call to some pretty face, and we chat a little in the shadow, the apple basket before us, for, as my faithful historian O'Kearney has put it in his now yellow manuscript, I care for nothing in the world but love and idleness. Will not you, too, sit down under the shade of the bushes while I read you the stories? The first I do not care for because it deals with dull persons and the world's affairs, but the second has to do with my own people. If my voice at whiles grows distant and dreamy when I talk of the world's affairs, remember that I have seen all from my hole in the hedge. I hear continually the songs of my own people who dance upon the hill-side, and am content. I have never carried apples or driven turf myself, or if I did it was only in a dream. Nor do my kind use any of man's belongings except the little black pipes which the farmers find now and then when they are turning the sods over with a plough.

GANCONAGH.

PART I.

JOHN SHERMAN LEAVES BALLAH.

I.

IN the west of Ireland, on the 9th of December, in the town of Ballah, in the Imperial Hotel there was a single guest, clerical and youthful. With the exception of a stray commercial traveller, who stopped once for a night, there had been nobody for a whole month but this guest, and now he was thinking of going away. The town, full enough in summer of trout and salmon fishers, slept all winter like the bears.

On the evening of the 9th of December, in the coffee-room of the Imperial Hotel, there was nobody but this guest. The guest was irritated. It had rained all day, and now that it was clearing up night had almost fallen. He had packed his portmanteau: his stockings, his clothes-brush, his razor, his dress shoes were each in their corner, and now he had nothing to do.

He had tried the paper that was lying on the table. He did not agree with its politics.

The waiter was playing an accordion in a little room over the stairs. The guest's irritation increased, for the more he thought about it the more he perceived that the accordion was badly played. There was a piano in the coffee-room; he sat down at it and played the tune correctly, as loudly as possible. The waiter took no notice. He did not know that he was being played for. He was wholly absorbed in his own playing, and besides he was old, obstinate, and deaf. The guest could stand it no longer. He rang for the waiter, and then, remembering that he did not need anything, went out before he came.

He went through Martin's Street, and Peter's Lane, and turned down by the burnt house at the 7
corner of the fish-market, picking his way towards the bridge. The town was dripping, but the rain was almost over. The large drops fell seldomer and seldomer into the puddles. It was the hour of ducks. Three or four had squeezed themselves under a gate, and were now splashing about in the gutter of the main street. There was scarcely any one abroad. Once or twice a countryman went by in yellow gaiters covered with mud and looked at the guest. Once an old woman with a basket of clothes, recognizing the Protestant curate's *locum tenens*, made a low curtsey.

The clouds gradually drifted away, the twilight deepened and the stars came out. The guest, having bought some cigarettes, had spread his waterproof on the parapet of the bridge and was now leaning his elbows upon it, looking at the river and feeling at last quite tranquil. His 8
meditations, he repeated, to himself, were plated with silver by the stars. The water slid noiselessly, and one or two of the larger stars made little roadways of fire into the darkness. The light from a distant casement made also its roadway. Once or twice a fish leaped. Along the banks were the vague shadows of houses, seeming like phantoms gathering to drink.

Yes; he felt now quite contented with the world. Amidst his enjoyment of the shadows and the river—a veritable festival of silence—was mixed pleasantly the knowledge that, as he leant there with the light of a neighbouring gas-jet, flickering faintly on his refined form and nervous face and glancing from the little medal of some Anglican order that hung upon his watch-guard, he must have seemed—if there had been any to witness—a being of a different kind to the 9
inhabitants—at once rough and conventional—of this half-deserted town. Between these two feelings the unworldly and the worldly tossed a leaping wave of perfect enjoyment. How pleasantly conscious of his own identity it made him when he thought how he and not those whose birthright it was, felt most the beauty of these shadows and this river? To him who had read much, seen operas and plays, known religious experiences, and written verse to a waterfall in Switzerland, and not to those who dwelt upon its borders for their whole lives, did this river raise a tumult of images and wonders. What meaning it had for them he could not imagine. Some meaning surely it must have!

As he gazed out into the darkness, spinning a web of thoughts from himself to the river, from the river to himself, he saw, with a corner of his eye, a spot of red light moving in the air at the 10
other end of the bridge. He turned towards it. It came closer and closer, there appearing behind it the while a man and a cigar. The man carried in one hand a mass of fishing-line covered with hooks, and in the other a tin porringer full of bait.

"Good evening, Howard."

"Good evening," answered the guest, taking his elbows off the parapet and looking in a preoccupied way at the man with the hooks. It was only gradually he remembered that he was in Ballah among the barbarians, for his mind had strayed from the last evening gnats, making circles on the water beneath, to the devil's song against "the little spirits" in "Mefistofele." Looking down at the stone parapet he considered a moment and then burst out—

"Sherman, how do you stand this place—you who have thoughts above mere eating and sleeping and are not always grinding at the stubble mill? Here everybody lives in the eighteenth 11
century—the squalid century. Well, I am going to-morrow, you know. Thank Heaven, I am done with your grey streets and grey minds! The curate must come home, sick or well. I have a religious essay to write, and besides I should die. Think of that old fellow at the corner there, our most important parishioner. There are no more hairs on his head than thoughts in his skull. To merely look at him is to rob life of its dignity. Then there is nothing in the shops but school-books and Sunday-school prizes. Excellent, no doubt, for any one who has not had to read as many as I have. Such a choir! such rain!"

"You need some occupation peculiar to the place," said the other, baiting his hooks with worms out of the little porringer. "I catch eels. You should set some night-lines too. You bait them with 12
worms in this way, and put them among the weeds at the edge of the river. In the morning you find an eel or two, if you have good fortune, turning round and round and making the weeds sway. I shall catch a great many after this rain."

"What a suggestion! Do you mean to stay here," said Howard, "till your mind rots like our most important parishioner's?"

"No, no! To be quite frank with you," replied the other, "I have some good looks and shall try to turn them to account by going away from here pretty soon and trying to persuade some girl with

money to fall in love with me. I shall not be altogether a bad match, you see, because after she has made me a little prosperous my uncle will die and make me much more so. I wish to be able always to remain a lounger. Yes, I shall marry money. My mother has set her heart on it, and I am not, you see, the kind of person who falls in love inconveniently. For the present——” 13

“You are vegetating,” interrupted the other.

“No, I am seeing the world. In your big towns a man finds his minority and knows nothing outside its border. He knows only the people like himself. But here one chats with the whole world in a day’s walk, for every man one meets is a class. The knowledge I am picking up may be useful to me when I enter the great cities and their ignorance. But I have lines to set. Come with me. I would ask you home, but you and my mother, you know, do not get on well.”

“I could not live with any one I did not believe in,” said Howard; “you are so different from me. You can live with mere facts, and that is why, I suppose, your schemes are so mercenary. Before this beautiful river, these stars, these great purple shadows, do you not feel like an insect in a flower? As for me, I also have planned my future. Not too near or too far from a great city I see myself in a cottage with diamond panes, sitting by the fire. There are books everywhere and etchings on the wall; on the table is a manuscript essay on some religious matter. Perhaps I shall marry some day. Probably not, for I shall ask so much. Certainly I shall not marry for money, for I hold the directness and sincerity of the nature to be its compass. If we once break it the world grows trackless.” 14

“Good-bye,” said Sherman, briskly; “I have baited the last hook. Your schemes suit you, but a sluggish fellow like me, poor devil, who wishes to lounge through the world, would find them expensive.”

They parted; Sherman to set his lines and Howard to his hotel in high spirits, for it seemed to him he had been eloquent. The billiard-room, which opened on the street, was lighted up. A few young men came round to play sometimes. He went in, for among these provincial youths he felt *recherché*; besides, he was a really good player. As he came in one of the players missed and swore. Howard reproved him with a look. He joined the play for a time, and then catching sight through a distant door of the hotel-keeper’s wife putting a kettle on the hob he hurried off, and, drawing a chair to the fire, began one of those long gossips about everybody’s affairs peculiar to the cloth. 15

As Sherman, having set his lines, returned home, he passed a tobacconist’s—a sweet-shop and tobacconist’s in one—the only shop in town, except public-houses, that remained open. The tobacconist was standing in his door, and, recognizing one who dealt consistently with a rival at the other end of the town, muttered: “There goes that *gluggerabunthaun* and Jack o’ Dreams; been fishing most likely. Ugh!” Sherman paused for a moment as he repassed the bridge and looked at the water, on which now a new-risen and crescent moon was shining dimly. How full of memories it was to him! what playmates and boyish adventures did it not bring to mind! To him it seemed to say, “Stay near to me,” as to Howard it had said, “Go yonder, to those other joys and other sceneries I have told you of.” It bade him who loved stay still and dream, and gave flying feet to him who imagined. 16

II. 17

HE house where Sherman and his mother lived was one of those bare houses so common in country towns. Their dashed fronts mounting above empty pavements have a kind of dignity in their utilitarianism. They seem to say, “Fashion has not made us, nor ever do its caprices pass

Your sand-cleaned doorsteps.” On every basement window is the same dingy wire blind; on every door the same brass knocker. Custom everywhere! “So much the longer,” the blinds seem to say, “have eyes glanced through us”; and the knockers to murmur, “And fingers lifted us.”

No. 15, Stephens’ Row, was in no manner peculiar among its twenty fellows. The 18
chairs in the drawing-room facing the street were of heavy mahogany with horsehair cushions worn at the corners. On the round table was somebody’s commentary on the New Testament laid like the spokes of a wheel on a table-cover of American oilcloth with stamped Japanese figures half worn away. The room was seldom used, for Mrs. Sherman was solitary because silent. In this room the dressmaker sat twice a year, and here the rector’s wife used every month or so to drink a cup of tea. It was quite clean. There was not a fly-mark on the mirror, and all summer the fern in the grate was constantly changed. Behind this room and overlooking the garden was the parlour, where cane-bottomed chairs took the place of mahogany. Sherman had lived here with his mother all his life, and their old servant hardly remembered having lived anywhere else; and soon she would absolutely cease to remember the 19
world she knew before she saw the four walls of this house, for every day she forgot something fresh. The son was almost thirty, the mother fifty, and the servant near seventy. Every year they had two hundred pounds among them, and once a year the son got a new suit of clothes and went into the drawing-room to look at himself in the mirror.

On the morning of the 20th of December Mrs. Sherman was down before her son. A spare, delicate-featured woman, with somewhat thin lips tightly closed as with silent people, and eyes at once gentle and distrustful, tempering the hardness of the lips. She helped the servant to set the table, and then, for her old-fashioned ideas would not allow her to rest, began to knit, often interrupting her knitting to go into the kitchen or to listen at the foot of the stairs. At last, 20
hearing a sound upstairs, she put the eggs down to boil, muttering the while, and began again to knit. When her son appeared she received him with a smile.

“Late again, mother,” he said.

“The young should sleep,” she answered, for to her he seemed still a boy.

She had finished her breakfast some time before the young man, and because it would have appeared very wrong to her to leave the table, she sat on knitting behind the tea-urn: an industry the benefit of which was felt by many poor children—almost the only neighbours she had a good word for.

“Mother,” said the young man, presently, “your friend the *locum tenens* is off to-morrow.”

“A good riddance.”

“Why are you so hard on him? He talked intelligently when here, I thought,” answered her son.

“I do not like his theology,” she replied, “nor his way of running about and flirting with this 21
body and that body, nor his way of chattering while he buttons and unbuttons his gloves.”

“You forget he is a man of the great world, and has about him a manner that must seem strange to us.”

“Oh, he might do very well,” she answered, “for one of those Carton girls at the rectory.”

“That eldest girl is a good girl,” replied her son.

“She looks down on us all, and thinks herself intellectual,” she went on. “I remember when girls were content with their Catechism and their Bibles and a little practice at the piano, maybe, for an accomplishment. What does any one want more? It is all pride.”

“You used to like her as a child,” said the young man.

“I like all children.”

Sherman having finished his breakfast, took a book of travels in one hand and a trowel in the 22
other and went out into the garden. Having looked under the parlour window for the first tulip shoots, he went down to the further end and began covering some sea-kale for forcing. He had not been long at work when the servant brought him a letter. There was a stone roller at one side of the grass plot. He sat down upon it, and taking the letter between his finger and thumb began looking at it with an air that said: “Well! I know what you mean.” He remained long thus without opening it, the book lying beside him on the roller.

The garden—the letter—the book! You have there the three symbols of his life. Every morning he worked in that garden among the sights and sounds of nature. Month by month he planted and hoed and dug there. In the middle he had set a hedge that divided the garden in two. Above the hedge were flowers; below it, vegetables. At the furthest end from the house, lapping broken 23
masonry full of wallflowers, the river said, month after month to all upon its banks, “Hush!” He dined at two with perfect regularity, and in the afternoon went out to shoot or walk. At twilight he set night-lines. Later on he read. He had not many books—a Shakespeare, Mungo Park’s

travels, a few two-shilling novels, “Percy’s Reliques,” and a volume on etiquette. He seldom varied his occupations. He had no profession. The town talked of it. They said: “He lives upon his mother,” and were very angry. They never let him see this, however, for it was generally understood he would be a dangerous fellow to rouse; but there was an uncle from whom Sherman had expectations who sometimes wrote remonstrating. Mrs. Sherman resented these letters, for she was afraid of her son going away to seek his fortune—perhaps even in America. 24
Now this matter preyed somewhat on Sherman. For three years or so he had been trying to make his mind up and come to some decision. Sometimes when reading he would start and press his lips together and knit his brows for a moment.

It will now be seen why the garden, the book, and the letter were the three symbols of his life, summing up as they did his love of out-of-door doings, his meditations, his anxieties. His life in the garden had granted serenity to his forehead, the reading of his few books had filled his eyes with reverie, and the feeling that he was not quite a good citizen had given a slight and occasional trembling to his lips.

He opened the letter. Its contents were what he had long expected. His uncle offered to take him into his office. He laid it spread out before him—a foot on each margin, right and left—and looked at it, turning the matter over and over in his mind. Would he go? would he stay? He did 25
not like the idea much. The lounger in him did not enjoy the thought of London. Gradually his mind wandered away into scheming—infinite scheming—what he would do if he went, what he would do if he did not go.

A beetle, attracted by the faint sunlight, had crawled out of his hole. It saw the paper and crept on to it, the better to catch the sunlight. Sherman saw the beetle but his mind was not occupied with it. “Shall I tell Mary Carton?” he was thinking. Mary had long been his adviser and friend. She was, indeed, everybody’s adviser. Yes, he would ask her what to do. Then again he thought—no, he would decide for himself. The beetle began to move. “If it goes off the paper by the top I will ask her—if by the bottom I will not.”

The beetle went off by the top. He got up with an air of decision and went into the tool-house 26
and began sorting seeds and picking out the light ones, sometimes stopping to watch a spider; for he knew he must wait till the afternoon to see Mary Carton. The tool-house was a favourite place with him. He often read there and watched the spiders in the corners.

At dinner he was preoccupied.

“Mother,” he said, “would you much mind if we went away from this?”

“I have often told you,” she answered, “I do not like one place better than another. I like them all equally little.”

After dinner he went again into the tool-house. This time he did not sort seeds—only watched the spiders.

III. 27

TOWARDS evening he went out. The pale sunshine of winter flickered on his path. The wind blew the straws about. He grew more and more melancholy. A dog of his acquaintance was chasing rabbits in a field. He had never been known to catch one, and since his youth had never seen one for he was almost wholly blind. They were his form of the eternal chimera. The dog left the field and followed with a friendly sniff.

They came together to the rectory. Mary Carton was not in. There was a children’s practice in the school-house. They went thither.

A child of four or five with a swelling on its face was sitting under a wall opposite the school 28
door, waiting to make faces at the Protestant children as they came out. Catching sight of the dog she seemed to debate in her mind whether to throw a stone at it or call it to her. She threw the stone and made it run. In after times he remembered all these things as though they were of importance.

He opened the latched green door and went in. About twenty children were singing in shrill

voices standing in a row at the further end. At the harmonium he recognized Mary Carton, who nodded to him and went on with her playing. The white-washed walls were covered with glazed prints of animals; at the further end was a large map of Europe; by a fire at the near end was a table with the remains of tea. This tea was an idea of Mary's. They had tea and cake first, afterwards the singing. The floor was covered with crumbs. The fire was burning brightly. 29
Sherman sat down beside it. A child with a great deal of oil in her hair was sitting on the end of a form at the other side.

"Look," she whispered, "I have been sent away. At any rate they are further from the fire. They have to be near the harmonium. I would not sing. Do you like hymns? I don't. Will you have a cup of tea? I can make it quite well. See, I did not spill a drop. Have you enough milk?" It was a cup full of milk—children's tea. "Look, there is a mouse carrying away a crumb. Hush!"

They sat there, the child watching the mouse, Sherman pondering on his letter, until the music ceased and the children came tramping down the room. The mouse having fled, Sherman's self-appointed hostess got up with a sigh and went out with the others.

Mary Carton closed the harmonium and came towards Sherman. Her face and all her 30
movements showed a gentle decision of character. Her glance was serene, her features regular, her figure at the same time ample and beautifully moulded; her dress plain yet not without a certain air of distinction. In a different society she would have had many suitors. But she was of a type that in country towns does not get married at all. Its beauty is too lacking in pink and white, its nature in that small assertiveness admired for character by the uninstructed. Elsewhere she would have known her own beauty—as it is right that all the beautiful should—and have learnt how to display it, to add gesture to her calm and more of mirth and smiles to her grave cheerfulness. As it was, her manner was much older than herself.

She sat down by Sherman with the air of an old friend. They had long been accustomed to 31
consult together on every matter. They were such good friends they had never fallen in love with each other. Perfect love and perfect friendship are indeed incompatible; for the one is a battlefield where shadows war beside the combatants, and the other a placid country where Consultation has her dwelling.

These two were such good friends that the most gossiping townspeople had given them up with a sigh. The doctor's wife, a faded beauty and devoted romance reader, said one day, as they passed, "They are such cold creatures." The old maid who kept the Berlin-wool shop remarked, "They are not of the marrying sort," and now their comings and goings were no longer noticed. Nothing had ever come to break in on their quiet companionship and give obscurity as a dwelling-place for the needed illusions. Had one been weak and the other strong, one plain and the other handsome, one guide and the other guided, one wise and the other foolish, love might 32
have found them out in a moment, for love is based on inequality as friendship is on equality.

"John," said Mary Carton, warming her hands at the fire, "I have had a troublesome day. Did you come to help me teach the children to sing? It was good of you: you were just too late."

"No," he answered, "I have come to be your pupil. I am always your pupil."

"Yes, and a most disobedient one."

"Well, advise me this time at any rate. My uncle has written, offering me £100 a year to begin with in his London office. Am I to go?"

"You know quite well my answer," she said.

"Indeed I do not. Why should I go? I am contented here. I am now making my garden ready for spring. Later on there will be trout fishing and saunters by the edge of the river in the evening 33
when the bats are flickering about. In July there will be races. I enjoy the bustle. I enjoy life here. When anything annoys me I keep away from it, that is all. You know I am always busy. I have occupation and friends and am quite contented."

"It is a great loss to many of us, but you must go, John," she said. "For you know you will be old some day, and perhaps when the vitality of youth is gone you will feel that your life is empty and find that you are too old to change it; and you will give up, perhaps, trying to be happy and likeable and become as the rest are. I think I can see you," she said, with a laugh, "a hypochondriac, like Gorman, the retired excise officer, or with a red nose like Dr. Stephens, or growing like Peters, the elderly cattle merchant, who starves his horse."

"They were bad material to begin with," he answered, "and besides, I cannot take my mother 34
away with me at her age, and I cannot leave her alone."

"What annoyance it may be," she answered, "will soon be forgotten. You will be able to give her many more comforts. We women—we all like to be dressed well and have pleasant rooms to sit in, and a young man at your age should not be idle. You must go away from this little backward place. We shall miss you, but you are clever and must go and work with other men and have your talents admitted."

"How emulous you would have me. Perhaps I shall be well-to-do some day; meanwhile I only

wish to stay here with my friends.”

She went over to the window and looked out with her face turned from him. The evening light cast a long shadow behind her on the floor. After some moments, she said, “I see people 35
ploughing on the slope of the hill. There are people working on a house to the right. Everywhere there are people busy,” and, with a slight tremble in her voice, she added, “and, John, nowhere are there any doing what they wish. One has to think of so many things—of duty and God.”

“Mary, I didn’t know you were so religious.”

Coming towards him with a smile, she said, “No more did I, perhaps. But sometimes the self in one is very strong. One has to think a great deal and reason with it. Yet I try hard to lose myself in things about me. These children now—I often lie awake thinking about them. That child who was talking to you is often on my mind. I do not know what will happen to her. She makes me unhappy. I am afraid she is not a good child at all. I am afraid she is not taught well at home. I try hard to be gentle and patient with her. I am a little displeased with myself to-day; so I have 36
lectured you. There! I have made my confession. But,” she added, taking one of his hands in both hers and reddening, “you must go away. You must not be idle. You will gain everything.”

As she stood there with bright eyes, the light of evening about her, Sherman for perhaps the first time saw how beautiful she was, and was flattered by her interest. For the first time also her presence did not make him at peace with the world.

“Will you be an obedient pupil?”

“You know so much more than I do,” he answered, “and are so much wiser. I will write to my uncle and agree to his offer.”

“Now you must go home,” she said. “You must not keep your mother waiting for her tea. There! I have raked the fire out. We must not forget to lock the door behind us.”

As they stood on the doorstep the wind blew a whirl of dead leaves about them. 37

“They are my old thoughts,” he said; “see, they are all withered.”

They walked together silently. At the vicarage he left her and went homeward.

The deserted flour store at the corner of two roads, the house that had been burnt hollow ten years before and still lifted its blackened beams, the straggling and leafless fruit-trees rising above garden walls, the church where he was christened—these foster-mothers of his infancy seemed to nod and shake their heads over him.

“Mother,” he said, hurriedly entering the room, “we are going to London.”

“As you wish. I always knew you would be a rolling stone,” she answered, and went out to tell the servant that as soon as she had finished the week’s washing they must pack up everything, 38
for they were going to London.

“Yes, we must pack up,” said the old peasant; she did not stop peeling the onion in her hand—she had not comprehended. In the middle of the night she suddenly started up in bed with a pale face and a prayer to the Virgin whose image hung over her head—she had now comprehended.

IV.

ON January the 5th about two in the afternoon, Sherman sat on the deck of the steamer *Lavinia* enjoying a period of sunshine between two showers. The steamer *Lavinia* was a cattle boat. It had been his wish to travel by some more expensive route, but his mother, with her old-fashioned ideas of duty, would not hear of it, and now, as he foresaw, was extremely uncomfortable below, while he, who was a good sailor, was pretty happy on deck, and would have been quite so if the pigs would only tire of their continual squealing. With the exception of a very dirty old woman sitting by a crate of geese, all the passengers but himself were below. This old woman made the journey monthly with geese for the Liverpool market.

Sherman was dreaming. He began to feel very desolate, and commenced a letter to Mary Carton in his notebook to state this fact. He was a laborious and unpractised writer, and found it helped him to make a pencil copy. Sometimes he stopped and watched the puffin sleeping on the waves. Each one of them had its head tucked in in a somewhat different way.

“That is because their characters are different,” he thought.

Gradually he began to notice a great many corks floating by, one after the other. The old woman saw them too, and said, waking out of a half sleep—

“Misther John Sherman, we will be in the Mersey before evening. Why are ye goin’ among them savages in London, Misther John? Why don’t ye stay among your own people—for what have we in this life but a mouthful of air?”

PART II.

MARGARET LELAND.

I.

SHERMAN and his mother rented a small house on the north side of St. Peter's Square, Hammersmith. The front windows looked out on to the old rank and green square, the windows behind on to a little patch of garden round which the houses gathered and pressed as though they already longed to trample it out. In this garden was a single tall pear-tree that never bore fruit.

Three years passed by without any notable event. Sherman went every day to his office in Tower Hill Street, abused his work a great deal, and was not unhappy perhaps. He was probably a bad clerk, but then nobody was very exacting with the nephew of the head of the firm.

The firm of Sherman and Saunders, ship brokers, was a long-established, old-fashioned house. Saunders had been dead some years and old Michael Sherman ruled alone—an old bachelor full of family pride and pride in his wealth. He lived, for all that, in a very simple fashion. His mahogany furniture was a little solider than other people's perhaps. He did not understand display. Display finds its excuse in some taste good or bad, and in a long industrious life Michael Sherman had never found leisure to form one. He seemed to live only from habit. Year by year he grew more silent, gradually ceasing to regard anything but his family and his ships. His family were represented by his nephew and his nephew's mother. He did not feel much affection for them. He believed in his family—that was all. To remind him of the other goal of his thoughts hung round his private office pictures with such inscriptions as "S.S. *Indus* at the Cape of Good Hope," "The barque *Mary* in the Mozambique Channel," "The barque *Livingstone* at Port Said," and many more. Every rope was drawn accurately with a ruler, and here and there were added distant vessels sailing proudly by with all that indifference to perspective peculiar to the drawings of sailors. On every ship was the flag of the firm spread out to show the letters.

No man cared for old Michael Sherman. Every one liked John. Both were silent, but the young man had sometimes a talkative fit. The old man lived for his ledger, the young man for his dreams.

In spite of all these differences, the uncle was on the whole pleased with the nephew. He noticed a certain stolidity that was of the family. It sometimes irritated others. It pleased him. He saw a hundred indications besides that made him say, "He is a true Sherman. We Shermans begin that way and give up frivolity as we grow old. We are all the same in the end."

Mrs. Sherman and her son had but a small round of acquaintances—a few rich people, clients of the house of Sherman and Saunders for the most part. Among these was a Miss Margaret Leland who lived with her mother, the widow of the late Henry Leland, ship-broker, on the eastern side of St. Peter's Square. Their house was larger than the Shermans, and noticeable among its fellows by the newly-painted hall door. Within on every side were bronzes and china vases and heavy curtains. In all were displayed the curious and vagrant taste of Margaret Leland. The rich Italian and mediæval draperies of the pre-Raphaelites jostling the brightest and vulgarest products of more native and Saxon schools. Vases of the most artistic shape and colour side by side with artificial flowers and stuffed birds. This house belonged to the Lelands. They had bought it in less prosperous days, and having altered it according to their taste and the need of their growing welfare could not decide to leave it.

Sherman was an occasional caller at the Lelands, and had certainly a liking, though not a very deep one, for Margaret. As yet he knew little more about her than that she wore the most fascinating hats, that the late Lord Lytton was her favourite author, and that she hated frogs. It is clear that she did not know that a French writer on magic says the luxurious and extravagant hate frogs because they are cold, solitary, and dreary. Had she done so, she would have been more circumspect about revealing her tastes.

For the rest John Sherman was forgetting the town of Ballah. He corresponded indeed with Mary Carton, but his laborious letter writing made his letters fewer and fewer. Sometimes, too, he heard from Howard, who had a curacy in Glasgow and was on indifferent terms with his parishioners. They objected to his way of conducting the services. His letters were full of it. He would not give in, he said, whatever happened. His conscience was involved.

II.

ONE afternoon Mrs. Leland called on Mrs. Sherman. She very often called—this fat, sentimental woman, moving in the midst of a cloud of scent. The day was warm, and she carried her too elaborate and heavy dress as a large caddis-fly drags its case with much labour and patience. She sat down on the sofa with obvious relief, leaning so heavily among the cushions that a clothes-moth in an antimacassar thought the end of the world had come and fluttered out only to be knocked down and crushed by Mrs. Sherman, who was very quick in her movements.

As soon as she found her breath, Mrs. Leland began a long history of her sorrows. Her daughter Margaret, had been jilted and was in despair, had taken to her bed with every resolution to die, and was growing paler and paler. The hard-hearted man, though she knew he had heard, did not relent. She knew he had heard because her daughter had told his sister all about it, and his sister had no heart, because she said it was temper that ailed Margaret, and she was a little vixen, and that if she had not flirted with everybody the engagement would never have been broken off. But Mr. Sims had no heart clearly, as Miss Marriot and Mrs. Eliza Taylor, her daughter's friends, said, when they heard, and Lock, the butler, said the same too, and Mary Young, the housemaid, said so too—and she knew all about it, for Margaret used to read his letters to her often when having her hair brushed.

"She must have been very fond of him," said Mrs. Sherman.

"She is so romantic, my dear," answered Mrs. Leland, with a sigh. "I am afraid she takes after an uncle on her father's side, who wrote poetry and wore a velvet jacket and ran away with an Italian countess who used to get drunk. When I married Mr. Leland people said he was not worthy of me, and that I was throwing myself away—and he in business, too! But Margaret is so romantic. There was Mr. Walters, the gentleman farmer, and Simpson who had a jeweller's shop —I never approved of him!—and Mr. Samuelson, and the Hon. William Scott. She tired of them all except the Hon. William Scott, who tired of her because some one told him she put belladonna in her eyes—and it is not true; and now there is Mr. Sims!" She then cried a little, and allowed herself to be consoled by Mrs. Sherman.

"You talk so intelligently and are so well informed," she said at parting. "I have made a very pleasant call," and the caddis-worm toiled upon its way, arriving in due course at other cups of tea.

III.

THE day after Mrs. Leland's call upon his mother, John Sherman, returning home after his not very lengthy day in the office, saw Margaret coming towards him. She had a lawn tennis racket under her arm, and was walking slowly on the shady side of the road. She was a pretty girl with quite irregular features, who though really not more than pretty, had so much manner, so much of an air, that every one called her a beauty: a trefoil with the fragrance of a rose.

"Mr. Sherman," she cried, coming smiling to meet him, "I have been ill, but could not stand the house any longer. I am going to the Square to play tennis. Will you come with me?"

"I am a bad player," he said.

"Of course you are," she answered; "but you are the only person under a hundred to be found this afternoon. How dull life is!" she continued, with a sigh. "You heard how ill I have been? What do you do all day?"

"I sit at a desk, sometimes writing, and sometimes, when I get lazy, looking up at the flies. There are fourteen on the plaster of the ceiling over my head. They died two winters ago. I sometimes think to have them brushed off, but they have been there so long now I hardly like to."

"Ah! you like them," she said, "because you are accustomed to them. In most cases there is not much more to be said for our family affections, I think."

"In a room close at hand," he went on, "there is, you know, Uncle Michael, who never speaks."

"Precisely. You have an uncle who never speaks; I have a mother who never is silent. She went to see Mrs. Sherman the other day. What did she say to her?"

"Nothing."

"Really. What a dull thing existence is!"—this with a great sigh. "When the Fates are weaving our web of life some mischievous goblin always runs off with the dye-pot. Everything is dull and grey. Am I looking a little pale? I have been so very ill."

"A little bit pale, perhaps," he said, doubtfully.

The Square gate brought them to a stop. It was locked, but she had the key. The lock was stiff, but turned easily for John Sherman.

"How strong you are," she said.

It was an iridescent evening of spring. The leaves of the bushes had still their faint green. As Margaret darted about at the tennis, a red feather in her cap seemed to rejoice with its wearer. Everything was at once gay and tranquil. The whole world had that unreal air it assumes at beautiful moments, as though it might vanish at a touch like an iridescent soap-bubble.

After a little Margaret said she was tired, and, sitting on a garden seat among the bushes, began telling him the plots of novels lately read by her. Suddenly she cried—

"The novel-writers were all serious people like you. They are so hard on people like me. They always make us come to a bad end. They *say* we are always acting, acting, acting; and what else do you serious people do? You act before the world. I think, do you know, *we* act before ourselves. All the old foolish kings and queens in history were like us. They laughed and beckoned and went to the block for no very good purpose. I dare say the headsmen were like you."

"We would never cut off so pretty a head."

"Oh, yes, you would—you would cut off mine to-morrow." All this she said vehemently, piercing him with her bright eyes. "You would cut off my head to-morrow," she repeated, almost fiercely; "I tell you you would."

Her departure was always unexpected, her moods changed with so much rapidity. "Look!" she said, pointing where the clock on St. Peter's church showed above the bushes. "Five minutes to five. In five minutes my mother's tea-hour. It is like growing old. I go to gossip. Good-bye."

The red feather shone for a moment among the bushes and was gone.

IV.

THE next day and the day after, Sherman was followed by those bright eyes. When he opened a letter at his desk they seemed to gaze at him from the open paper, and to watch him from the flies upon the ceiling. He was even a worse clerk than usual.

One evening he said to his mother, “Miss Leland has beautiful eyes.”

“My dear, she puts belladonna in them.”

“What a thing to say!”

“I know she does, though her mother denies it.”

“Well, she is certainly beautiful,” he answered.

“My dear, if she has an attraction for you, I don’t want to discourage it. She is rich as girls go nowadays; and one woman has one fault, another another: one’s untidy, one fights with her servants, one fights with her friends, another has a crabbed tongue when she talks of them.”

Sherman became again silent, finding no fragment of romance in such discourse.

In the next week or two he saw much of Miss Leland. He met her almost every evening on his return from the office, walking slowly, her racket under her arm. They played tennis much and talked more. Sherman began to play tennis in his dreams. Miss Leland told him all about herself, her friends, her inmost feelings; and yet every day he knew less about her. It was not merely that saying everything she said nothing, but that continually there came through her wild words the sound of the mysterious flutes and viols of that unconscious nature which dwells so much nearer to woman than to man. How often do we not endow the beautiful and candid with depth and mystery not their own? We do not know that we but hear in their voices those flutes and viols playing to us of the alluring secret of the world.

Sherman had never known in early life what is called first love, and now, when he had passed thirty, it came to him that love more of the imagination than of either the senses or affections: it was mainly the eyes that followed him.

It is not to be denied that as this love grew serious it grew mercenary. Now active, now latent, the notion had long been in Sherman’s mind, as we know, that he should marry money. A born lounger, riches tempted him greatly. When those eyes haunted him from the fourteen flies on the ceiling, he would say, “I should be rich; I should have a house in the country; I should hunt and shoot, and have a garden and three gardeners; I should leave this abominable office.” Then the eyes became even more beautiful. It was a new kind of belladonna.

He shrank a little, however, from choosing even this pleasant pathway. He had planned many futures for himself and learnt to love them all. It was this that had made him linger on at Ballah for so long, and it was this that now kept him undecided. He would have to give up the universe for a garden and three gardeners. How sad it was to make substantial even the best of his dreams. How hard it was to submit to that decree which compels every step we take in life to be a death in the imagination. How difficult it was to be so enwrapped in this one new hope as not to hear the lamentations that were going on in dim corners of his mind.

One day he resolved to propose. He examined himself in the glass in the morning; and for the first time in his life smiled to see how good-looking he was. In the evening before leaving the office he peered at himself in the mirror over the mantlepiece in the room where customers were received. The sun was blazing through the window full on his face. He did not look so well. Immediately all courage left him.

That evening he went out after his mother had gone to bed and walked far along the towing-path of the Thames. A faint mist half covered away the houses and factory chimneys on the further side; beside him a band of osiers swayed softly, the deserted and full river lapping their stems. He looked on all these things with foreign eyes. He had no sense of possession. Indeed it seemed to him that everything in London was owned by too many to be owned by any one. Another river that he did seem to possess flowed through his memory with all its familiar sights—boys riding in the stream to the saddle-girths, fish leaping, water-flies raising their small ripples, a swan asleep, the wallflowers growing on the red brick of the margin. He grew very sad. Suddenly a shooting star, fiery and vagabond, leaped from the darkness. It brought his mind

again in a moment to Margaret Leland. To marry her, he thought, was to separate himself from the old life he loved so well.

Crossing the river at Putney, he hurried homewards among the market gardens. Nearing home, the streets were deserted, the shops closed. Where King Street joins the Broadway, entirely alone with itself, in the very centre of the road a little black cat was leaping after its shadow.

"Ah!" he thought, "it would be a good thing to be a little black cat. To leap about in the moonlight and sleep in the sunlight, and catch flies, to have no hard tasks to do or hard decisions to come to, to be simple and full of animal spirits." 66

At the corner of Bridge Road was a coffee-stall, the only sign of human life. He bought some cold meat and flung it to the little black cat.

V.

67

SOME more days went by. At last, one day, arriving at the Square somewhat earlier than usual, and sitting down to wait for Margaret on the seat among the bushes, he noticed the pieces of a torn-up letter lying about. Beside him on the seat was a pencil, as though some one had been writing there and left it behind them. The pencil-lead was worn very short. The letter had been torn up, perhaps, in a fit of impatience.

In a half-mechanical way he glanced over the scraps. On one of them he read: "My dear Eliza,—What an incurable gossip my mother is. You heard of my misfortune. I 68
nearly died——" Here he had to search among the scraps; at last he found one that seemed to follow. "Perhaps you will hear news from me soon. There is a handsome young man who pays me attention, and——" Here another piece had to be found. "I would take him though he had a face like the man in the moon, and limped like the devil at the theatre. Perhaps I am a little in love. Oh! friend of my heart——" Here it broke off again. He was interested, and searched the grass and the bushes for fragments. Some had been blown to quite a distance. He got together several sentences now. "I will not spend another winter with my mother for anything. All this is, of course, a secret. I had to tell somebody; secrets are bad for my health. Perhaps it will all come to nothing." Then the letter went off into dress, the last novel the writer had read, and so forth. A 69
Miss Sims, too, was mentioned, who had said some unkind thing of the writer.

Sherman was greatly amused. It did not seem to him wrong to read—we do not mind spying on one of the crowd, any more than on the personages of literature. It never occurred to him that he, or any friend of his, was concerned in these pencil scribblings.

Suddenly he saw this sentence: "Heigho! your poor Margaret is falling in love again; condole with her, my dear."

He started. The name "Margaret," the mention of Miss Sims, the style of the whole letter, all made plain the authorship. Very desperately ashamed of himself, he got up and tore each scrap of paper into still smaller fragments and scattered them far apart.

That evening he proposed, and was accepted.

VI.

FOR several days there was a new heaven and a new earth. Miss Leland seemed suddenly impressed with the seriousness of life. She was gentleness itself; and as Sherman sat on Sunday mornings in his pocket-handkerchief of a garden under the one tree, with its smoky stem, watching the little circles of sunlight falling from the leaves like a shower of new sovereigns, he gazed at them with a longer and keener joy than heretofore—a new heaven and a new earth, surely!

Sherman planted and dug and raked this pocket-handkerchief of a garden most diligently, rooting out the docks and dandelions and mouse-ear and the patches of untimely grass. It was the point of contact between his new life and the old. It was far too small and unfertile and shaded in to satisfy his love of gardener's experiments and early vegetables.

Perforce this husbandry was too little complex for his affections to gather much round plant and bed. His garden in Ballah used to touch him like the growth of a young family.

Now he was content to satisfy his barbaric sense of colour; right round were planted alternate holyhock and sunflower, and behind them scarlet-runners showed their inch-high cloven shoots.

One Sunday it occurred to him to write to his friends on the matter of his engagement. He numbered them over. Howard, one or two less intimate, and Mary Carton. At that name he paused; he would not write just yet.

VII.

ONE Saturday there was a tennis party. Miss Leland devoted herself all day to a young Foreign Office clerk. She played tennis with him, talked with him, drank lemonade with him, had neither thoughts nor words for any one else. John Sherman was quite happy. Tennis was always a bore, and now he was not called upon to play. It had not struck him there was occasion for jealousy.

As the guests were dispersing, his betrothed came to him. Her manner seemed strange.

"Does anything ail you, Margaret?" he asked, as they left the Square.

"Everything," she answered, looking about her with ostentatious secrecy. "You are a most annoying person. You have no feeling; you have no temperament; you are quite the most stupid creature I was ever engaged to."

"What is wrong with you?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"Don't you see," she replied, with a broken voice, "I flirted all day with that young clerk? You should have nearly killed me with jealousy. You do not love me a bit! There is no knowing what I might do!"

"Well, you know," he said, "it was not right of you. People might say, 'Look at John Sherman; how furious he must be!' To be sure I wouldn't be furious a bit; but then they'd go about saying I was. It would not matter, of course; but you know it is not right of you."

"It is no use pretending you have feeling. It is all that miserable little town you come from, with its sleepy old shops and its sleepy old society. I would give up loving you this minute," she added, with a caressing look, "if you had not that beautiful bronzed face. I will improve you. To-morrow evening you must come to the opera." Suddenly she changed the subject. "Do you see that little fat man coming out of the Square and staring at me? I was engaged to him once. Look at the four old ladies behind him, shaking their bonnets at me. Each has some story about me, and it will be all the same in a hundred years."

After this he had hardly a moment's peace. She kept him continually going to theatres, operas, parties. These last were an especial trouble; for it was her wont to gather about her an admiring circle to listen to her extravagancies, and he was no longer at the age when we enjoy audacity for its own sake.

VIII.

GRADUALLY those bright eyes of his imagination, watching him from letters and from among the fourteen flies on the ceiling, had ceased to be centres of peace. They seemed like two whirlpools, wherein the order and quiet of his life were absorbed hourly and daily.

He still thought sometimes of the country house of his dreams and of the garden and the three gardeners, but somehow they had lost half their charm.

He had written to Howard and some others, and commenced, at last, a letter to Mary Carton. It lay unfinished on his desk; a thin coating of dust was gathering upon it.

Mrs. Leland called continually on Mrs. Sherman. She sentimentalized over the lovers, and even wept over them; each visit supplied the household with conversation for a week.

Every Sunday morning—his letter-writing time—Sherman looked at his uncompleted letter. Gradually it became plain to him he could not finish it. It had never seemed to him he had more than friendship for Mary Carton, yet somehow it was not possible to tell her of this love-affair.

The more his betrothed troubled him the more he thought about the unfinished letter. He was a man standing at the cross-roads.

Whenever the wind blew from the south he remembered his friend, for that is the wind that fills the heart with memory.

One Sunday he removed the dust from the face of the letter almost reverently, as though it were the dust from the wheels of destiny. But the letter remained unfinished.

IX.

ONE Wednesday in June Sherman arrived home an hour earlier than usual from his office, as his wont was the first Wednesday in every month, on which day his mother was at home to her friends. They had not many callers. To-day there was no one as yet but a badly-dressed old lady his mother had picked up he knew not where. She had been looking at his photograph album, and recalling names and dates from her own prosperous times. As she went out Miss Leland came in. She gave the old lady in

passing a critical look that made the poor creature very conscious of a threadbare mantle, and went over to Mrs. Sherman, holding out both hands. Sherman, who knew all his mother's peculiarities, noticed on her side a slight coldness; perhaps she did not altogether like this beautiful dragon-fly. 78

"I have come," said Miss Leland, "to tell John that he must learn to paint. Music and society are not enough. There is nothing like art to give refinement." Then turning to John Sherman—"My dear, I will make you quite different. You are a dreadful barbarian, you know."

"What ails me, Margaret?"

"Just look at that necktie! Nothing shows a man's cultivation like his necktie. Then your reading! You never read anything but old books nobody wants to talk about. I will lend you three every one has read this month. You really must acquire small talk and change your necktie."

Presently she noticed the photograph-book lying open on a chair. 79

"Oh!" she cried, "I must have another look at John's beauties."

It was a habit of his to gather all manner of pretty faces. It came from incipient old bachelorhood, perhaps.

Margaret criticized each photo in turn with, "Ah! she looks as if she had some life in her!" or, "I do not like your sleepy eyelids," or some such phrase. The mere relations were passed by without a word. One face occurred several times—a quiet face. As Margaret came on this one for the third time, Mrs. Sherman, who seemed a little resentful about something, said—

"That is his friend, Mary Carton."

"He told me about her. He has a book she gave him. So that is she? How interesting! I pity these poor country people. It must be hard to keep from getting stupid."

"My friend is not at all stupid," said Sherman. 80

"Does she speak with a brogue? I remember you told me she was very good. It must be difficult to keep from talking platitudes when one is very good."

"You are quite wrong about her. You would like her very much," he replied.

"She is one of those people, I suppose, who can only talk about their relatives, or their families, or about their friends' children: how this one has got the hooping-cough, and this one is getting well of the measles!" She kept swaying one of the leaves between her finger and thumb impatiently. "What a strange way she does her hair; and what an ugly dress!"

"You must not talk that way about her—she is my great friend."

"Friend! friend!" she burst out. "He thinks I will believe in friendship between a man and a woman."

She got up, and said, turning round with an air of changing the subject, "Have you written to your friends about our engagement? You had not done so when I asked you lately." 81

"I have."

"All?"

"Well, not all."

"Your great friend, Miss——what do you call her?"

"Miss Carton. I have not written to her."

She tapped impatiently with her foot.

"They were really old companions—that is all," said Mrs. Sherman, wishing to mend matters. "They were both readers; that brought them together. I never much fancied her. Yet she was well enough as a friend, and helped, maybe, with reading, and the gardening, and his good bringing-up, to keep him from the idle young men of the neighbourhood."

"You must make him write and tell her at once—you must, you must!" almost sobbed out Miss Leland. 82

"I promise," he answered.

Immediately returning to herself, she cried, "If I were in her place I know what I would like to do when I got the letter. I know who I would like to kill!"—this with a laugh as she went over, and looked at herself in the mirror over the mantlepiece.

PART III.

JOHN SHERMAN REVISITS BALLAH.

I.

THE others had gone, and Sherman was alone in the drawing-room by himself, looking through the window. Never had London seemed to him so like a reef whereon he was cast away. In the Square the bushes were covered with dust; some sparrows were ruffling their feathers on the side-walk; people passed, continually disturbing them. The sky was full of smoke. A terrible feeling of solitude in the midst of a multitude oppressed him. A portion of his life was ending. He thought that soon he would be no longer a young man, and now, at the period when the desire of novelty grows less, was coming the great change of his life. He felt he was of those whose granaries are in the past. And now this past would never renew itself. He was going out into the distance as though with strange sailors in a strange ship.

He longed to see again the town where he had spent his childhood: to see the narrow roads and mean little shops. And perhaps it would be easier to tell her who had been the friend of so many years of this engagement in his own person than by letter. He wondered why it was so hard to write so simple a thing.

It was his custom to act suddenly on his decisions. He had not made many in his life. The next day he announced at the office that he would be absent for three or four days. He told his mother he had business in the country.

His betrothed met him on the way to the terminus, as he was walking, bag in hand, and asked where he was going. “I am going on business to the country,” he said, and blushed. He was creeping away like a thief.

II.

HE arrived in the town of Ballah by rail, for he had avoided the slow cattle steamer and gone by Dublin.

It was the forenoon, and he made for the Imperial Hotel to wait till four in the evening, when he would find Mary Carton in the schoolhouse, for he had timed his journey so as to arrive on Thursday, the day of the children's practice.

As he went through the streets his heart went out to every familiar place and sight: the rows of tumble-down thatched cottages; the slated roofs of the shops; the women selling gooseberries; the river bridge; the high walls of the garden where it was said the gardener used to see the ghost of a former owner in the shape of a rabbit; the street corner no child would pass at nightfall for fear of the headless soldier; the deserted flour store; the wharves covered with grass. All these he watched with Celtic devotion, that devotion carried to the ends of the world by the Celtic exiles, and since old time surrounding their journeyings with rumour of plaintive songs.

He sat in the window of the Imperial Hotel, now full of guests. He did not notice any of them. He sat there meditating, meditating. Grey clouds covering the town with flying shadows rushed by like the old and dishevelled eagles that Maeldune saw hurrying towards the waters of life. Below in the street passed by country people, townspeople, travellers, women with baskets, boys driving donkeys, old men with sticks; sometimes he recognized a face or was recognized himself, and welcomed by some familiar voice.

"You have come home a handsomer gentleman than your father, Misther John, and he was a neat figure of a man, God bless him!" said the waiter, bringing him his lunch; and in truth Sherman had grown handsomer for these years away. His face and gesture had more of dignity, for on the centre of his nature life had dropped a pinch of experience.

At four he left the hotel and waited near the schoolhouse till the children came running out. One or two of the elder ones he recognized but turned away.

III.

MARY CARTON was locking the harmonium as he went in. She came to meet him with a surprised and joyful air.

"How often I have wished to see you. When did you come? How well you remembered my habits to know where to find me. My dear John, how glad I am to see you."

"You are the same as when I left, and this room is the same, too."

"Yes," she answered, "the same, only I have had some new prints hung up—prints of fruits and leaves and bird-nests. It was only done last week. When people choose pictures and poems for children they choose out such domestic ones. I would not have any of the kind; children are such undomestic animals. But, John, I am so glad to see you in this old schoolhouse again. So little has changed with us here. Some have died and some have been married, and we are all a little older and the trees a little taller."

"I have come to tell you I am going to be married."

She became in a moment perfectly white, and sat down as though attacked with faintness. Her

hand on the edge of the chair trembled.

Sherman looked at her, and went on in a bewildered, mechanical way—“My betrothed is a Miss Leland. She has a good deal of money. You know my mother always wished me to marry some one with money. Her father, when alive, was an old client of Sherman and Saunders. She is much admired in society.” Gradually his voice became a mere murmur. He did not seem to know that he was speaking. He stopped entirely. He was looking at Mary Carton.

Everything around him was as it had been some three years before. The table was covered with cups and the floor with crumbs. Perhaps the mouse pulling at a crumb under the table was the same mouse as on that other evening. The only difference was the brooding daylight of summer and the ceaseless chirruping of the sparrows in the ivy outside. He had a confused sense of having lost his way. It was just the same feeling he had known as a child, when one dark night he had taken a wrong turning, and instead of arriving at his own house, found himself at a landmark he knew was miles from home.

A moment earlier, however difficult his life, the issues were always definite; now suddenly had entered the obscurity of another’s interest.

Before this it had not occurred to him that Mary Carton had any stronger feeling for him than warm friendship.

He began again, speaking in the same mechanical way—“Miss Leland lives with her mother near us. She is very well educated and very well connected, though she has lived always among business people.”

Miss Carton, with a great effort, had recovered her composure.

“I congratulate you,” she said. “I hope you will be always happy. You came here on some business for your firm, I suppose? I believe they have some connection with the town still.”

“I only came here to tell you I was going to be married.”

“Do you not think it would have been better to have written?” she said, beginning to put away the children’s tea-things in a cupboard by the fireplace.

“It would have been better,” he answered, drooping his head.

Without a word, locking the door behind them, they went out. Without a word they walked the grey streets. Now and then a woman or a child curtseyed as they passed. Some wondered, perhaps, to see these old friends so silent. At the rectory they bade each other good-bye.

“I hope you will be always happy,” she said. “I will pray for you and your wife. I am very busy with the children and old people, but I shall always find a moment to wish you well in. Good-bye now.”

They parted; the gate in the wall closed behind her. He stayed for a few moments looking up at the tops of the trees and bushes showing over the wall, and at the house a little way beyond. He stood considering his problem—her life, his life. His, at any rate, would have incident and change; hers would be the narrow existence of a woman who, failing to fulfil the only abiding wish she has ever formed, seeks to lose herself in routine—mournfulest of things on this old planet.

This had been revealed: he loved Mary Carton, she loved him. He remembered Margaret Leland, and murmured she did well to be jealous. Then all her contemptuous words about the town and its inhabitants came into his mind. Once they made no impression on him, but now the sense of personal identity having been disturbed by this sudden revelation, alien as they were to his way of thinking, they began to press in on him. Mary, too, would have agreed with them, he thought; and might it be that at some distant time weary monotony in abandonment would have so weighed down the spirit of Mary Carton, that she would be merely one of the old and sleepy whose dulness filled the place like a cloud?

He went sadly towards the hotel; everything about him, the road, the sky, the feet wherewith he walked seeming phantasmal and without meaning.

He told the waiter he would leave by the first train in the morning. “What! and you only just come home?” the man answered. He ordered coffee and could not drink it. He went out and came in again immediately. He went down into the kitchen and talked to the servants. They told him of everything that had happened since he had gone. He was not interested, and went up to his room. “I must go home and do what people expect of me; one must be careful to do that.”

Through all the journey home his problem troubled him. He saw the figure of Mary Carton perpetually passing through a round of monotonous duties. He saw his own life among aliens going on endlessly, wearily.

From Holyhead to London his fellow-travellers were a lady and her three young daughters, the eldest about twelve. The smooth faces shining with well-being became to him ominous symbols.

He hated them. They were symbolic of the indifferent world about to absorb him, and of the vague something that was dragging him inch by inch from the nook he had made for himself in the chimney corner. He was at one of those dangerous moments when the sense of personal identity is shaken, when one's past and present seem about to dissolve partnership. He sought refuge in memory, and counted over every word of Mary's he could remember. He forgot the present and the future. "Without love," he said to himself, "we would be either gods or vegetables."

The rain beat on the window of the carriage. He began to listen; thought and memory became a blank; his mind was full of the sound of rain-drops.

PART IV.

THE REV. WILLIAM HOWARD.

I.

AFTER his return to London Sherman for a time kept to himself, going straight home from his office, moody and self-absorbed, trying not to consider his problem—her life, his life. He often repeated to himself, "I must do what people expect of me. It does not rest with me now—my choosing time is over." He felt that whatever way he turned he would do a great evil to himself and others. To his nature all sudden decisions were difficult, and so he kept to the groove he had entered upon. It did not even occur to him to do otherwise. He never thought of breaking this engagement off and letting people say what they would. He was bound in hopelessly by a chain of congratulations.

A week passed slowly as a month. The wheels of the cabs and carriages seemed to be rolling through his mind. He often remembered the quiet river at the end of his garden in the town of Ballah. How the weeds swayed there, and the salmon leaped! At the week's end came a note from Miss Leland, complaining of his neglecting her so many days. He sent a rather formal answer, promising to call soon. To add to his other troubles a cold east wind arose and made him shiver continually.

One evening he and his mother were sitting silent, the one knitting, the other half-asleep. He had been writing letters and was now in a reverie. Round the walls were one or two drawings, done by him at school. His mother had got them framed. His eyes were fixed on a drawing of a stream and some astonishing cows.

A few days ago he had found an old sketch-book for children among some forgotten papers, which taught how to draw a horse by making three ovals for the basis of his body, one lying down in the middle, two standing up at each end for flank and chest, and how to draw a cow by basing its body on a square. He kept trying to fit squares into the cows. He was half inclined to take them out of their frames and retouch on this new principle. Then he began somehow to remember the child with the swollen face who threw a stone at the dog the day he resolved to

leave home first. Then some other image came. His problem moved before him in a disjointed way. He was dropping asleep. Through his reverie came the click, click of his mother's needles. She had found some London children to knit for. He was at that marchland between waking and 106
dreaming where our thoughts begin to have a life of their own—the region where art is nurtured and inspiration born.

He started, hearing something sliding and rustling, and looked up to see a piece of cardboard fall from one end of the mantlepiece, and, driven by a slight gust of air, circle into the ashes under the grate.

"Oh," said his mother, "that is the portrait of the *locum tenens*." She still spoke of the Rev. William Howard by the name she had first known him by. "He is always being photographed. They are all over the house, and I, an old woman, have not had one taken all my life. Take it out with the tongs." Her son after some poking in the ashes, for it had fallen far back, brought out a somewhat dusty photograph. "That," she continued, "is one he sent us two or three months ago. 107
It has been lying in the letter-rack since."

"He is not so spick and span looking as usual," said Sherman, rubbing the ashes off the photograph with his sleeve.

"By the by," his mother replied, "he has lost his parish, I hear. He is very mediæval, you know, and he lately preached a sermon to prove that children who die unbaptized are lost. He had been reading up the subject and was full of it. The mothers turned against him, not being so familiar with St. Augustine as he was. There were other reasons in plenty too. I wonder that any one can stand that monkeyish fantastic family."

As the way is with so many country-bred people, the world for her was divided up into families rather than individuals.

While she was talking, Sherman, who had returned to his chair, leant over the table and began to write hurriedly. She was continuing her denunciation when he interrupted with—"Mother, I 108
have just written this letter to him:—

> "'My dear Howard:
>
> "'Will you come and spend the autumn with us? I hear you are unoccupied just now. I am engaged to be married, as you know; it will be a long engagement. You will like my betrothed. I hope you will be great friends.
>
> "'Yours expectantly,
>
> "'John Sherman.'"

"You rather take me aback," she said.

"I really like him," he answered. "You were always prejudiced against the Howards. Forgive me, but I really want very much to have him here."

"Well, if you like him, I suppose I have no objection."

"I do like him. He is very clever," said her son, "and knows a great deal. I wonder he does not 109
marry. Do you not think he would make a good husband?—for you must admit he is sympathetic."

"It is not difficult to sympathize with every one if you have no true principles and convictions."

Principles and convictions were her names for that strenuous consistency attained without trouble by men and women of few ideas.

"I am sure you will like him better," said the other, "when you see more of him."

"Is that photograph quite spoilt?" she answered.

"No; there was nothing on it but ashes."

"That is a pity, for one less would be something."

After this they both became silent, she knitting, he gazing at the cows browsing at the edge of their stream, and trying to fit squares into their bodies; but now a smile played about his lips.

Mrs. Sherman looked a little troubled. She would not object to any visitor of her son's, but 110
quite made up her mind in no manner to put herself out to entertain the Rev. William Howard. She was puzzled as well. She did not understand the suddenness of this invitation. They usually talked over things for weeks.

II.

NEXT day his fellow-clerks noticed a decided improvement in Sherman’s spirits. He had a lark-like cheerfulness and alacrity breaking out at odd moments. When evening came he called, for the first time since his return, on Miss Leland. She scolded him roundly for having answered her note in such a formal way, but was sincerely glad to see him return to his allegiance. We have said he had sometimes, though rarely, a talkative fit. He had one this evening. The last play they had been to, the last party, the picture of the year, all in turn he glanced at. She was delighted. Her training had not been in vain. Her barbarian was learning to chatter. This flattered her a deal.

“I was never engaged,” she thought, “to a more interesting creature.”

When he had risen to go Sherman said—“I have a friend coming to visit me in a few days; you will suit each other delightfully. He is very mediæval.”

“Do tell me about him; I like everything mediæval.”

“Oh,” he cried, with a laugh, “his mediævalism is not in your line. He is neither a gay troubadour nor a wicked knight. He is a High Church curate.”

“Do not tell me anything more about him,” she answered; “I will try to be civil to him, but you know I never liked curates. I have been an agnostic for many years. You, I believe, are orthodox.”

As Sherman was on his way home he met a fellow-clerk, and stopped him with—

“Are you an agnostic?”

“No. Why, what is that?”

“Oh, nothing! Good-bye,” he made answer, and hurried on his way.

III.

THE letter reached the Rev. William Howard at the right moment, arriving as it did in the midst of a crisis in his fortunes. In the course of a short life he had lost many parishes. He considered himself a martyr, but was considered by his enemies a clerical coxcomb. He had a habit of getting his mind possessed with some strange opinion, or what seemed so to his parishioners, and of preaching it while the notion lasted in the most startling way. The sermon on unbaptized children was an instance. It was not so much that he thought it true as that it possessed him for a day. It was not so much the thought as his own relation to it that allured him. Then, too, he loved what appeared to his parishioners to be the most unusual and dangerous practices. He put candles on the altar and crosses in unexpected places. He delighted in the intricacies of High Church costume, and was known to recommend confession and prayers for the dead.

Gradually the anger of his parishioners would increase. The rector, the washerwoman, the labourers, the squire, the doctor, the school teachers, the shoemakers, the butchers, the seamstresses, the local journalist, the master of the hounds, the innkeeper, the veterinary surgeon, the magistrate, the children making mud pies, all would be filled with one dread—popery. Then he would fly for consolation to his little circle of the faithful, the younger ladies, who still repeated his fine sentiments and saw him in their imaginations standing perpetually before a wall covered with tapestry and holding a crucifix in some constrained and ancient attitude. At last he would have to go, feeling for his parishioners a gay and lofty disdain, and for himself that reverend approbation one gives to the captains who lead the crusade of ideas against those who merely sleep and eat. An efficient crusader he certainly was—too efficient, indeed, for his efficiency gave to all his thoughts a certain over-completeness and isolation, and a kind of hardness to his mind. His intellect was like a musician's instrument with no sounding-board. He could think carefully and cleverly, and even with originality, but never in such a way as to make his thoughts an allusion to something deeper than themselves. In this he was the reverse of poetical, for poetry is essentially a touch from behind a curtain.

This conformation of his mind helped to lead him into all manner of needless contests and to the loss of this last parish among much else. Did not the world exist for the sake of these hard, crystalline thoughts, with which he played as with so many bone *spilikins*, delighting in his own skill? and were not all who disliked them merely—the many?

In this way it came about that Sherman's letter reached Howard at the right moment. Now, next to a new parish, he loved a new friend. A visit to London meant many. He had found he was, on the whole, a success at the beginning of friendships.

He at once wrote an acceptance in his small and beautiful handwriting, and arrived shortly after his letter. Sherman, on receiving him, glanced at his neat and shining boots, the little medal at the watch-chain and the well-brushed hat, and nodded as though in answer to an inner query. He smiled approval at the slight, elegant figure in its black clothes, at the satiny hair, and at the face, mobile as moving waters.

For several days the Shermans saw little of their guest. He had friends everywhere to turn into enemies and acquaintances to turn into friends. His days passed in visiting, visiting, visiting. Then there were theatres and churches to see, and new clothes to be bought, over which he was as anxious as a woman. Finally he settled down.

He passed his mornings in the smoking-room. He asked Sherman's leave to hang on the walls one or two religious pictures, without which he was not happy, and to place over the mantlepiece, under the pipe-rack, an ebony crucifix. In one corner of the room he laid a rug neatly folded for covering his knees on chilly days, and on the table a small collection of favourite books—a curious and carefully-chosen collection, in which Cardinal Newman and Bourget, St. Chrysostom and Flaubert, lived together in perfect friendship.

Early in his visit Sherman brought him to the Lelands. He was a success. The three—Margaret, Sherman, and Howard—played tennis in the Square. Howard was a good player, and seemed to admire Margaret. On the way home Sherman once or twice laughed to himself. It was like the clucking of a hen with a brood of chickens. He told Howard, too, how wealthy Margaret was said to be.

After this Howard always joined Sherman and Margaret at the tennis. Sometimes, too, after a little, on days when the study seemed dull and lonely, and the unfinished essay on St. Chrysostom more than usually laborious, he would saunter towards the Square before his friend's arrival, to find Margaret now alone, now with an acquaintance or two. About this time also press of work, an unusual thing with him, began to delay Sherman in town half an hour after his usual time. In the evenings they often talked of Margaret—Sherman frankly and carefully, as though in all

anxiety to describe her as she was; and Howard with some enthusiasm: “She has a religious vocation,” he said once, with a slight sigh.

Sometimes they played chess—a game that Sherman had recently become devoted to, for he found it drew him out of himself more than anything else.

Howard now began to notice a curious thing. Sherman grew shabbier and shabbier, and at the same time more and more cheerful. This puzzled him, for he had noticed that he himself was not cheerful when shabby, and did not even feel upright and clever when his hat was getting old. He also noticed that when Sherman was talking to him he seemed to be keeping some thought to himself. When he first came to know him long ago in Ballah he had noticed occasionally the same 121
thing, and set it down to a kind of suspiciousness and over-caution, natural to one who lived in such an out-of-the-way place. It seemed more persistent now, however. “He is not well trained,” he thought; “he is half a peasant. He has not the brilliant candour of the man of the world.”

All this while the mind of Sherman was clucking continually over its brood of thoughts. Ballah was being constantly suggested to him. The grey corner of a cloud slanting its rain upon Cheapside called to mind by some remote suggestion the clouds rushing and falling in cloven surf on the seaward steep of a mountain north of Ballah. A certain street corner made him remember an angle of the Ballah fish-market. At night a lantern, marking where the road was fenced off for mending, made him think of a tinker’s cart, with its swing can of burning coals, that used to stop on market days at the corner of Peter’s Lane at Ballah. Delayed by a crush in the Strand, he 122
heard a faint trickling of water near by; it came from a shop window where a little water-jet balanced a wooden ball upon its point. The sound suggested a cataract with a long Gaelic name, that leaped crying into the Gate of the Winds at Ballah. Wandering among these memories a footstep went to and fro continually and the figure of Mary Carton moved among them like a phantom. He was set dreaming a whole day by walking down one Sunday morning to the border of the Thames—a few hundred yards from his house—and looking at the osier-covered Chiswick eyot. It made him remember an old day-dream of his. The source of the river that passed his garden at home was a certain wood-bordered and islanded lake, whither in childhood he had often gone blackberry-gathering. At the further end was a little islet called Inniscrewin. Its rocky 123
centre, covered with many bushes, rose some forty feet above the lake. Often when life and its difficulties had seemed to him like the lessons of some elder boy given to a younger by mistake, it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out, rowing to and fro, fishing, or lying on the island slopes by day, and listening at night to the ripple of the water and the quivering of the bushes—full always of unknown creatures—and going out at morning to see the island’s edge marked by the feet of birds.

These pictures became so vivid to him that the world about him—that Howard, Margaret, his mother even—began to seem far off. He hardly seemed aware of anything they were thinking and feeling. The light that dazzled him flowed from the vague and refracting regions of hope and 124
memory; the light that made Howard’s feet unsteady was ever the too glaring lustre of life itself.

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IV.

N the evening of the 20th of June, after the blinds had been pulled down and the gas lighted, Sherman was playing chess in the smoking-room, right hand against left. Howard had gone out with a message to the Lelands. He would often say, “Is there any message I can deliver for you? I

know how lazy you are, and will save you the trouble." A message was always found for him. A pile of books lent for Sherman's improvement went home one by one.

"Look here," said Howard's voice in the doorway, "I have been watching you for some time. You are cheating the red men most villainously. You are forcing them to make mistakes that the white men may win. Why, a few such games would ruin any man's moral nature."

He was leaning against the doorway, looking, to Sherman's not too critical eyes, an embodiment of all that was self-possessed and brilliant. The great care with which he was dressed and his whole manner seemed to say, "Look at me; do I not combine perfectly the zealot with the man of the world?" He seemed excited to-night. He had been talking at the Lelands, and talking well, and felt that elation which brings us many thoughts.

"My dear Sherman," he went on, "do cease that game. It is very bad for you. There is nobody alive who is honest enough to play a game of chess fairly out—right hand against left. We are so radically dishonest that we even cheat ourselves. We can no more play chess than we can think altogether by ourselves with security. You had much better play with me."

"Very well, but you will beat me; I have not much practice," replied the other.

They reset the men and began to play. Sherman relied most upon his bishops and queen. Howard was fondest of the knights. At first Sherman was the attacking party, but in his characteristic desire to scheme out his game many moves ahead, kept making slips, and at last had to give up, with his men nearly all gone and his king hopelessly cornered. Howard seemed to let nothing escape him. When the game was finished he leant back in his chair and said, as he rolled a cigarette—

"You do not play well." It gave him satisfaction to feel his proficiency in many small arts. "You do not do any of these things at all well," he went on, with an insolence peculiar to him when excited. "You have been really very badly brought up and stupidly educated in that intolerable Ballah. They do not understand there any, even the least, of the arts of life; they only believe in information. Men who are compelled to move in the great world, and who are also cultivated, only value the personal acquirements—self-possession, adaptability, how to dress well, how even to play tennis decently—you would be not so bad at that, by the by, if you practised—or how to paint or write effectively. They know that it is better to smoke one's cigarette with a certain charm of gesture than to have by heart all the encyclopedias. I say this not merely as a man of the world, but as a teacher of religion. A man when he rises from the grave will take with him only the things that he is in himself. He will leave behind the things that he merely possesses, learning and information not less than money and high estate. They will stay behind with his house and his clothes and his body. A collection of facts will no more help him than a collection of stamps. The learned will not get into heaven as readily as the flute-player, or even as the man who smokes a cigarette gracefully. Now you are not learned, but you have been brought up almost as badly as if you were. In that wretched town they told you that education was to know that Russia is bounded on the north by the Arctic Sea, and on the west by the Baltic Ocean, and that Vienna is situated on the Danube, and that William the Third came to the throne in the year 1688. They have never taught you any personal art. Even chess-playing might have helped you at the day of judgment."

"I am really not a worse chess-player than you. I am only more careless."

There was a slight resentment in Sherman's voice. The other noticed it, and said, changing his manner from the insolent air of a young beauty to a self-depreciatory one, which was wont to give him at times a very genuine charm—

"It is really a great pity, for you Shermans are a deep people, much deeper than we Howards. We are like moths or butterflies on rather rapid rivulets, while you and yours are deep pools in the forest where the beasts go to drink. No! I have a better metaphor. Your mind and mine are two arrows. Yours has got no feathers, and mine has no metal on the point. I don't know which is most needed for right conduct. I wonder where we are going to strike earth. I suppose it will be all right some day when the world has gone by and they have collected all the arrows into one quiver."

He went over to the mantlepiece to hunt for a match, as his cigarette had gone out. Sherman had lifted a corner of the blind and was gazing over the roofs shining from a recent shower, and thinking how on such a night as this he had sat with Mary Carton by the rectory fire listening to the rain without and talking of the future and of the training of village children.

"Have you seen Miss Leland in her last new dress from Paris?" said Howard, making one of his rapid transitions. "It is very rich in colour, and makes her look a little pale, like St. Cecilia. She is wonderful as she stands by the piano, a silver cross round her neck. We have been talking about you. She complains to me. She says you are a little barbarous; you seem to look down on style, and sometimes—you must forgive me—even on manners, and you are quite without small talk. You must really try and be worthy of that beautiful girl, with her great soul and religious genius. She told me quite sadly, too, that you are not improving."

“No,” said Sherman, “I am not going forward; I am at present trying to go sideways like the crabs.”

“Be serious,” answered the other. “She told me these things with the most sad and touching voice. She makes me her confidant, you know, in many matters, because of my wide religious experience. You must really improve yourself. You must paint or something.”

“Well, I will paint or something.”

“I am quite serious, Sherman. Try and be worthy of her, a soul as gentle as St. Cecilia’s.”

“She is very wealthy,” said Sherman. “If she were engaged to you and not to me you might hope to die a bishop.”

Howard looked at him in a mystified way and the conversation dropped. Presently Howard got up and went to his room, and Sherman, resetting the chess-board, began to play again, and, letting longer and longer pauses of reverie come between his moves, played far into the morning, cheating now in favour of the red men now in favour of the white.

V.

THE next afternoon Howard found Miss Leland sitting, reading in an alcove in her drawing-room, between a stuffed paroquet and a blue De Morgan jar. As he was shown in he noticed, with a momentary shock, that her features were quite commonplace. Then she saw him, and at once seemed to vanish wrapped in an exulting flame of life. She stood up, flinging the book on to the seat with some violence.

“I have been reading that sweet ‘Imitation of Christ,’ and was just feeling that I should have to become a theosophist or a socialist, or go and join the Catholic Church, or do something. How delightful it is to see you again! How is my savage getting on? It is so good of you to try and help me to reform him.”

They talked on about Sherman, and Howard did his best to console her for his shortcomings. Time would certainly improve her savage. Several times she gazed at him with those large dark eyes of hers, of which the pupils to-day seemed larger than usual. They made him feel dizzy and clutch tightly the arm of his chair. Then she began to talk about her life since childhood—how they got to the subject he never knew—and made a number of those confidences which are so dangerous because so flattering. To love—there is nothing else worth living for; but then men are so shallow. She had never found a nature deep as her own. She would not pretend that she had not often been in love, but never had any heart rung back to her the true note. As she spoke her face quivered with excitement. The exulting flame of life seemed spreading from her to the other things in the room. To Howard’s eyes it seemed as though the bright pots and stuffed birds and plush curtains began to glow with a light not of this world—to glimmer like the strange and chaotic colours the mystic Blake imagined upon the scaled serpent of Eden. The light seemed gradually to dim his past and future, and to make pale his good resolves. Was it not in itself that which all men are seeking, and for which all else exists?

He leant forward and took her hand, timidly and doubtingly. She did not draw it away. He leant nearer and kissed her on the forehead. She gave a joyful cry, and, casting her arms round his neck, burst out, “Ah! you—and I. We were made for each other. I hate Sherman. He is an egotist. He is a beast. He is selfish and foolish.” Releasing one of her arms she struck the seat with her hand, excitedly, and went on, “How angry he will be! But it serves him right! How badly he is

dressing. He does not know anything about anything. But you—you—I knew you were meant for me the moment I saw you."

That evening Howard flung himself into a chair in the empty smoking-room. He lighted a cigarette; it went out. Again he lighted it; again it went out. "I am a traitor—and that good, stupid fellow, Sherman, never to be jealous!" he thought. "But then, how could I help it? And, besides, it cannot be a bad action to save her from a man she is so much above in refinement and feeling." He was getting into good-humour with himself. He got up and went over and looked at the photograph of Raphael's Madonna, which he had hung over the mantlepiece. "How like Margaret's are her big eyes!"

VI.

THE next day when Sherman came home from his office he saw an envelope lying on the smoking-room table. It contained a letter from Howard, saying that he had gone away, and that he hoped Sherman would forgive his treachery, but that he was hopelessly in love with Miss Leland, and that she returned his love.

Sherman went downstairs. His mother was helping the servant to set the table.

"You will never guess what has happened," he said. "My affair with Margaret is over."

"I cannot pretend to be sorry, John," she replied. She had long considered Miss Leland among accepted things, like the chimney-pots on the roof, and submitted, as we do, to any unalterable fact, but had never praised her or expressed liking in any way. "She puts belladonna in her eyes, and is a vixen and a flirt, and I dare say her wealth is all talk. But how did it happen?"

Her son was, however, too excited to listen.

He went upstairs and wrote the following note—

"My dear Margaret:

"I congratulate you on a new conquest. There is no end to your victories. As for me, I bow myself out with many sincere wishes for your happiness, and remain,

"Your friend,

"John Sherman."

Having posted this letter he sat down with Howard's note spread out before him, and wondered whether there was anything mean and small-minded in neatness—he himself was somewhat untidy. He had often thought so before, for their strong friendship was founded in a great measure on mutual contempt, but now immediately added, being in good-humour with the world, "He is much cleverer than I am. He must have been very industrious at school."

A week went by. He made up his mind to put an end to his London life. He broke to his mother his resolve to return to Ballah. She was delighted, and at once began to pack. Her old home had long seemed to her a kind of lost Eden, wherewith she was accustomed to contrast the present. When, in time, this present had grown into the past it became an Eden in turn. She was always ready for a change, if the change came to her in the form of a return to something old. Others place their ideals in the future; she laid hers in the past.

The only one this momentous resolution seemed to surprise was the old and deaf servant. She waited with ever-growing impatience. She would sit by the hour wool-gathering on the corner of a chair with a look of bewildered delight. As the hour of departure came near she sang continually in a cracked voice.

Sherman, a few days before leaving, was returning for the last time from his office when he saw, to his surprise, Howard and Miss Leland carrying each a brown paper bundle. He nodded good-humouredly, meaning to pass on.

"John," she said, "look at this brooch William gave me—a ladder leaning against the moon and a butterfly climbing up it. Is it not sweet? We are going to visit the poor."

"And I," he said, "am going to catch eels. I am leaving town."

He made his excuses, saying he had no time to wait, and hurried off. She looked after him with a mournful glance, strange in anybody who had exchanged one lover for another more favoured.

“Poor fellow,” murmured Howard, “he is broken-hearted.”

“Nonsense,” answered Miss Leland, somewhat snappishly.

PART V.

JOHN SHERMAN RETURNS TO BALLAH.

I.

THIS being the homeward trip, SS. *Lavinia* carried no cattle, but many passengers. As the sea was smooth and the voyage near its end, they lounged about the deck in groups. Two cattle merchants were leaning over the taffrail smoking. In appearance they were something between betting men and commercial travellers. For years they had done all their sleeping in steamers and trains. A short distance from them a clerk from Liverpool, with a consumptive cough, walked to and fro, a little child holding his hand. Shortly he would be landed in a boat putting off from the shore for the purpose. He had come hoping that his native air of Teeling Head would restore him. The little child was a strange contrast—her cheeks ruddy with perfect health. Further forward, talking to one of the crew, was a man with a red face and slightly unsteady step. In the companion house was a governess, past her first youth, very much afraid of seasickness. She had brought her luggage up and heaped it round her to be ready for landing. Sherman sat on a pile of cable looking out over the sea. It was just noon; SS. *Lavinia*, having passed by Tory and Rathlin, was approaching the Donegal cliffs. They were covered by a faint mist, which made them loom even vaster than they were. To westward the sun shone on a perfectly blue sea. Seagulls come out of the mist and plunged into the sunlight, and out of the sunlight and plunged into the mist. To the westward gannets were striking continually, and a porpoise showed now and then, his fin and back gleaming in the sun. Sherman was more perfectly happy than he had been for many a day, and more ardently thinking. All nature seemed full of a Divine fulfilment. Everything fulfilled its law—fulfilment that is peace, whether it be for good or for evil, for evil also has its peace, the peace of the birds of prey. Sherman looked from the sea to the ship and grew sad. Upon this thing, crawling slowly along the sea, moved to and fro many mournful and slouching figures. He looked from the ship to himself and his eyes filled with tears. On himself, on these moving figures, hope and memory fed like flames.

Again his eyes gladdened, for he knew he had found his present. He would live in his love and the day as it passed. He would live that his law might be fulfilled. Now, was he sure of this truth? —the saints on the one hand, the animals on the other, live in the moment as it passes. Thitherward had his days brought him. This was the one grain they had ground. To grind one grain is sufficient for a lifetime.

II.

A FEW days later Sherman was hurrying through the town of Ballah. It was Saturday, and he passed down through the marketing country people, and the old women with baskets of cakes and gooseberries and long pieces of sugarstick shaped like walking-sticks, and called by children “Peggie’s leg.”

Now, as two months earlier he was occasionally recognized and greeted, and, as before, went on without knowing, his eyes full of unintelligent sadness because the mind was making merry afar. They had the look we see in the eyes of animals and dreamers. Everything had grown simple, his problem had taken itself away. He was thinking what he would say to Mary Carton. Now they would be married, they would live in a small house with a green door and new thatch, and a row of beehives under a hedge. He knew where just such a house stood empty. The day before he and his mother had discussed, with their host of the Imperial Hotel, this question of houses. They knew the peculiarities of every house in the neighbourhood, except two or three built while they were away. All day Sherman and his mother had gone over the merits of the few they were told were empty. She wondered why her son had grown so unpractical. Once he was so easily pleased—the row of beehives and the new thatch did not for her settle the question. She set it all down to Miss Leland and the plays, and the singing, and the belladonna, and remembered with pleasure how many miles of uneasy water lay between the town of Ballah and these things.

She did not know what else beside the row of beehives and the new thatch her son’s mind ran on as he walked among the marketing country people, and the gooseberry sellers, and the merchants of “Peggie’s leg,” and the boys playing marbles in odd corners, and the men in waistcoats with flannel sleeves driving carts, and the women driving donkeys with creels of turf or churns of milk. Just now she was trying to remember whether she used to buy her wool for knitting at Miss Peters’s or from Mrs. Macallough’s at the bridge. One or other sold it a halfpenny a skein cheaper. She never knew what went on inside her son’s mind, she had always her own fish to fry. Blessed are the unsympathetic. They preserve their characters in an iron safe while the most of us poor mortals are going about the planet vainly searching for any kind of a shell to contain us, and evaporating the while.

Sherman began to mount the hill to the vicarage. He was happy. Because he was happy he began to run. Soon the steepness of the hill made him walk. He thought about his love for Mary Carton. Seen by the light of this love everything that had happened to him was plain now. He had found his centre of unity. His childhood had prepared him for this love. He had been solitary, fond of favourite corners of fields, fond of going about alone, unhuman like the birds and the leaves, his heart empty. How clearly he remembered his first meeting with Mary. They were both children. At a school treat they watched the fire balloon ascend, and followed it a little way over the fields together. What friends they became, growing up together, reading the same books, thinking the same thoughts.

As he came to the door and pulled at the great hanging iron bell handle, the fire balloon reascended in his heart, surrounded with cheers and laughter.

III.

HE kept the servant talking for a moment or two before she went for Miss Carton. The old rector, she told him, was getting less and less able to do much work. Old age had come almost suddenly upon him. He seldom moved from the fireside. He was getting more and more absent-minded. Once lately he had brought his umbrella into the reading-desk. More and more did he leave all things to his children—to Mary Carton and her younger sisters.

When the servant had gone Sherman looked round the somewhat gloomy room. In the window hung a canary in a painted cage. Outside was a narrow piece of shaded ground between the window and the rectory wall. The laurel and holly bushes darkened the window a good deal. On a table in the centre of the room were evangelistic books with gilded covers. Round the mirror over the mantlepiece were stuck various parish announcements, thrust between the glass and the gilding. On a small side table was a copper ear-trumpet.

How familiar everything seemed to Sherman. Only the room seemed smaller than it did three years before, and close to the table with the ear-trumpet, at one side of the fireplace before the arm-chair, was a new threadbare patch in the carpet.

Sherman recalled how in this room he and Mary Carton had sat in winter by the fire, building castles in the air for each other. So deeply meditating was he that she came in and stood unnoticed beside him.

“John,” she said at last, “it is a great pleasure to see you so soon again. Are you doing well in London?”

“I have left London.”

“Are you married, then? You must introduce me to your wife.”

“I shall never be married to Miss Leland.”

“What?”

“She has preferred another—my friend William Howard. I have come here to tell you something, Mary.” He went and stood close to her and took her hand tenderly. “I have always been very fond of you. Often in London, when I was trying to think of another kind of life, I used to see this fireside and you sitting beside it, where we used to sit and talk about the future. Mary—Mary,” he held her hand in both his—“you will be my wife?”

“You do not love me, John,” she answered, drawing herself away. “You have come to me because you think it your duty. I have had nothing but duty all my life.”

“Listen,” he said. “I was very miserable; I invited Howard to stay with us. One morning I found a note on the smoking-room table to say that Margaret had accepted him, and I have come here to ask you to marry me. I never cared for any one else.”

He found himself speaking hurriedly, as though anxious to get the words said and done with. It now seemed to him that he had done ill in this matter of Miss Leland. He had not before thought of it—his mind had always been busy with other things. Mary Carton looked at him wonderingly.

“John,” she said at last, “did you ask Mr. Howard to stay with you on purpose to get him to fall in love with Miss Leland, or to give you an excuse for breaking off your engagement, as you knew he flirted with every one?”

"Margaret seems very fond of him. I think they are made for each other," he answered. 158

"Did you ask him to London on purpose?"

"Well, I will tell you," he faltered. "I was very miserable. I had drifted into this engagement I don't know how. Margaret glitters and glitters and glitters, but she is not of my kind. I suppose I thought, like a fool, I should marry some one who was rich. I found out soon that I loved nobody but you. I got to be always thinking of you and of this town. Then I heard that Howard had lost his curacy, and asked him up. I just left them alone and did not go near Margaret much. I knew they were made for each other. Do not let us talk of them," he continued, eagerly. "Let us talk about the future. I will take a farm and turn farmer. I dare say my uncle will not give me anything when he dies because I have left his office. He will call me a ne'er-do-weel, and say I would 159 squander it. But you and I—we will get married, will we not? We will be very happy," he went on, pleadingly. "You will still have your charities, and I shall be busy with my farm. We will surround ourselves with a wall. The world will be on the outside, and on the inside we and our peaceful lives."

"Wait," she said; "I will give you your answer," and going into the next room returned with several bundles of letters. She laid them on the table; some were white and new, some slightly yellow with time.

"John," she said, growing very pale, "here are all the letters you ever wrote me from your earliest boyhood." She took one of the large candles from the mantlepiece, and, lighting it, placed it on the hearth. Sherman wondered what she was going to do with it. "I will tell you," she went on, "what I had thought to carry to the grave unspoken. I have loved you for a long time. When 160 you came and told me you were going to be married to another I forgave you, for man's love is like the wind, and I prayed that God might bless you both." She leant down over the candle, her face pale and contorted with emotion. "All these letters after that grew very sacred. Since we were never to be married they grew a portion of my life, separated from everything and every one—a something apart and holy. I re-read them all, and arranged them in little bundles according to their dates, and tied them with thread. Now I and you—we have nothing to do with each other any more."

She held the bundle of letters in the flame. He got up from his seat. She motioned him away imperiously. He looked at the flame in a bewildered way. The letters fell in little burning fragments about the hearth. It was all like a terrible dream. He watched those steady fingers hold 161 letter after letter in the candle flame, and watched the candle burning on like a passion in the grey daylight of universal existence. A draught from under the door began blowing the ash about the room. The voice said—

"You tried to marry a rich girl. You did not love her, but knew she was rich. You tired of her as you tire of so many things, and behaved to her most wrongly, most wickedly and treacherously. When you were jilted you came again to me and to the idleness of this little town. We had all hoped great things of you. You seemed good and honest."

"I loved you all along," he cried. "If you would marry me we would be very happy. I loved you all along," he repeated—this helplessly, several times over. The bird shook a shower of seed on his shoulder. He picked one of them from the collar of his coat and turned it over in his fingers 162 mechanically. "I loved you all along."

"You have done no duty that came to you. You have tired of everything you should cling to; and now you have come to this little town because here is idleness and irresponsibility."

The last letter lay in ashes on the hearth. She blew out the candle, and replaced it among the photographs on the mantlepiece, and stood there as calm as a portion of the marble.

"John, our friendship is over—it has been burnt in the candle."

He started forward, his mind full of appeals half-stifled with despair, on his lips gathered incoherent words: "She will be happy with Howard. They were made for each other. I slipped into it. I always thought I should marry some one who was rich. I never loved any one but you. I did not know I loved you at first. I thought about you always. You are the root of my life."

Steps were heard outside the door at the end of a passage. Mary Carton went to the door and 163 called. The steps turned and came nearer. With a great effort Sherman controlled himself. The door opened, and a tall, slight girl of twelve came into the room. A strong smell of garden mould rose from a basket in her hands. Sherman recognized the child who had given him tea that evening in the schoolhouse three years before.

"Have you finished weeding the carrots?" said Mary Carton.

"Yes, Miss."

"Then you are to weed the small bed under the pear-tree by the tool-house. Do not go yet, child. This is Mr. Sherman. Sit down a little."

The child sat down on the corner of a chair with a scared look in her eyes. Suddenly she said—

“Oh, what a lot of burnt paper!”

“Yes; I have been burning some old letters.” 164

“I think,” said John, “I will go now.” Without a word of farewell he went out, almost groping his way.

He had lost the best of all the things he held dear. Twice he had gone through the fire. The first time worldly ambition left him, on the second love. An hour before the air had been full of singing and peace that was resonant like joy. Now he saw standing before his Eden the angel with the flaming sword. All the hope he had ever gathered about him had taken itself off, and the naked soul shivered.

165

IV.

THE road under his feet felt gritty and barren. He hurried away from the town. It was late afternoon. Trees cast bands of shadow across the road. He walked rapidly as if pursued. About a mile to the south of the town he came on a large wood bordering the road and surrounding a deserted house. Some local rich man once lived there, now it was given over to a caretaker who lived in two rooms in the back part. Men were at work cutting down trees in two or three parts of the wood. Many places were quite bare. A mass of ruins—a covered well, and the wreckage of castle wall—that that had 166 been roofed with green for centuries lifted themselves up, bare as anatomies. The sight intensified, by some strange sympathy, his sorrow, and he hurried away as from a thing accursed of God.

The road led to the foot of a mountain, topped by a cairn supposed in popular belief to be the grave of Maeve, Mab of the fairies, and considered by antiquarians to mark the place where certain prisoners were executed in legendary times as sacrifices to the moon.

He began to climb the mountain. The sun was on the rim of the sea. It stayed there without moving, for as he ascended he saw an ever-widening circle of water.

He threw himself down upon the cairn. The sun sank under the sea. The Donegal headlands mixed with the surrounding blue. The stars grew out of heaven.

Sometimes he got up and walked to and fro. Hours passed. The stars, the streams down in the 167 valley, the wind moving among the boulders, the various unknown creatures rustling in the silence—all these were contained within themselves, fulfilling their law, content to be alone, content to be with others, having the peace of God or the peace of the birds of prey. He only did not fulfil his law; something that was not he, that was not nature, that was not God, had made him and her he loved its tools. Hope, memory, tradition, conformity, had been laying waste their lives. As he thought this the night seemed to crush him with its purple foot. Hour followed hour. At midnight he started up, hearing a faint murmur of clocks striking the hour in the distant town. His face and hands were wet with tears, his clothes saturated with dew.

He turned homeward, hurriedly flying from the terrible firmament. What had this glimmering and silence to do with him—this luxurious present? He belonged to the past and the future. With 168 pace somewhat slackened, because of the furze, he came down into the valley. Along the northern horizon moved a perpetual dawn, travelling eastward as the night advanced. Once, as he passed a marsh near a lime-kiln, a number of small birds rose chirruping from where they had been clinging among the reeds. Once, standing still for a moment where two roads crossed on a hill-side, he looked out over the dark fields. A white stone rose in the middle of a field, a score of yards in front of him. He knew the place well; it was an ancient burying-ground. He looked at the stone, and suddenly filled by that terror of the darkness children feel, began again his hurried

walk.

He re-entered Ballah by the southern side. In passing he looked at the rectory. To his surprise a light burned in the drawing-room. He stood still. The dawn was brightening towards the east, but all round him was darkness, seeming the more intense to his eyes for their being fresh from the unshaded fields. In the midst of this darkness shone the lighted window. He went over to the gate and looked in. The room was empty. He was about to turn away when he noticed a white figure standing close to the gate. The latch creaked and the gate moved slowly on its hinges.

"John," said a trembling voice, "I have been praying, and a light has come to me. I wished you to be ambitious—to go away and do something in the world. You did badly, and my poor pride was wounded. You do not know how much I had hoped from you; but it was all pride—all pride and foolishness. You love me. I ask no more. We need each other; the rest is with God."

She took his hand in hers, and began caressing it. "We have been shipwrecked. Our goods have been cast into the sea." Something in her voice told of the emotion that divides the love of woman from the love of man. She looked upon him whom she loved as full of a helplessness that needed protection, a reverberation of the feeling of the mother for the child at the breast.

DHOYA.

I.

LONG ago, before the earliest stone of the pyramids was laid, before the Bo tree of Buddha unrolled its first leaf, before a Japanese had painted on a temple wall the horse that every evening descended and trampled the rice-fields, before the ravens of Thor had eaten their first worm together, there lived a man of giant stature and of giant strength named Dhoya. One evening Fomorian galleys had entered the Bay of the Red Cataract, now the Bay of Ballah, and there deserted him. Though he rushed into the water and hurled great stones after them they were out of reach. From earliest childhood the Fomorians had held him captive and compelled him to toil at the oar, but when his strength had come his fits of passion made him a terror to all on board. Sometimes he would tear the seats of the galley from their places, at others drive the rowers to some corner where, trembling, they would watch him pacing to and fro till the passion left him. "The demons," they said, "have made him their own." So they enticed him on shore, he having on his head a mighty stone pitcher to fill with water, and deserted him.

When the last sail had dropped over the rim of the world he rose from where he had flung himself down on the sands and paced through the forests eastward. After a time he reached that lake among the mountains where in later times Dermot drove down four stakes and made thereon a platform with four flags in the centre for a hearth, and placed over all a roof of wicker 175
and skins, and hid his Grania, islanded thereon. Still eastward he went, what is now Bulban on one side, Cope's mountain on the other, until at last he threw himself at full length in a deep cavern and slept. Henceforward he made this cavern his lair, issuing forth to hunt the deer or the bears or the mountain oxen. Slowly the years went by, his fits of fury growing more and more frequent, though there was no one but his own shadow to rave against. When his fury was on him even the bats and owls, and the brown toads that crept out of the grass at twilight would hide themselves—even the bats and owls and the brown toads. These he had made his friends, and let them crawl and perch about him, for at times he would be very gentle, and they too were sullen and silent—the outcasts from they knew not what. But most of all, things placid and beautiful 176
feared him. He would watch for hours, hidden in the leaves, to reach his hand out slowly and carefully at last, and seize and crush some glittering halcyon.

Slowly the years went by and human face he never saw, but sometimes, when the gentle mood was on him and it was twilight, a presence seemed to float invisibly by him and sigh softly, and once or twice he awoke from sleep with the sensation of a finger having rested for a moment on his forehead, and would mutter a prayer to the moon before turning to sleep again—the moon that glimmered through the door of his cave. "O moon," he would say, "that wandereth in the blue cave, more white than the beard of Partholan, whose years were five hundred, sullen and solitary, sleeping only on the floor of the sea: keep me from the evil spirits of the islands of the lake southward beyond the mountains, and the evil spirits of the caves northward beyond the 177
mountains, and the evil spirits who wave their torches by the mouth of the river eastward beyond the valley, and the evil spirits of the pools westward beyond the mountains, and I will offer you a bear and a deer in full horn, O solitary of the cave divine, and if any have done you wrong I will avenge you."

Gradually, however, he began to long for this mysterious touch.

At times he would make journeys into distant parts, and once the mountain oxen gathered together, proud of their overwhelming numbers and their white horns, and followed him with great bellowing westward, he being laden with their tallest, well-nigh to his cave, and would have gored him, but, pacing into a pool of the sea to his shoulders, he saw them thunder away, losing him in the darkness. The place where he stood is called Pooldhoya to this day.

So the years went slowly by, and ever deeper and deeper came his moodiness, and more often 178
his fits of wrath. Once in his gloom he paced the forests for miles, now this way now that, until, returning in the twilight, he found himself standing on a cliff southward of the lake that was southward of the mountains. The moon was rising. The sound of the swaying of reeds floated from beneath, and the twittering of the flocks of reed-wrens who love to cling on the moving stems. It was the hour of votaries. He turned to the moon, then hurriedly gathered a pile of leaves and branches, and making a fire cast thereon wild strawberries and the fruit of the quicken tree. As the smoke floated upwards a bar of faint purple clouds drifted over the moon's face—a refusal of the sacrifice. Hurrying through the surrounding woods he found an owl sleeping in the hollow of a tree, and returning cast him on the fire. Still the clouds gathered. 179
Again he searched the woods. This time a badger was uselessly cast among the flames. Time after time he came and went, sometimes returning immediately with some live thing, at others not till the fire had almost burnt itself out. Deer, wild swine, birds, all to no purpose. Higher and higher he piled the burning branches, the flames and the smoke waved and circled like the lash of a giant's whip. Gradually the nearer islands passed the rosy colour on to their more distant brethren. The reed-wrens of the furthest reed beds disturbed amid their sleep must have wondered at the red gleam reflected in each other's eyes. Useless his night-long toil; the clouds covered the moon's face more and more, until, when the long fire lash was at its brightest, they drowned her completely in a surge of unbroken mist. Raging against the fire he scattered with his staff the burning branches, and trampled in his fury the sacrificial embers beneath his feet. 180
Suddenly a voice in the surrounding darkness called him softly by name. He turned. For years no articulate voice had sounded in his ears. It seemed to rise from the air just beneath the verge of the precipice. Holding by a hazel bush he leaned out, and for a moment it seemed to him the form of a beautiful woman floated faintly before him, but changed as he watched to a little cloud of vapour; and from the nearest of the haunted islands there came assuredly a whiff of music. Then behind him in the forest said the voice, "Dhoya, my beloved." He rushed in pursuit; something white was moving before him. He stretched out his hand; it was only a mass of white campion trembling in the morning breeze, for an ashen morning was just touching the mists on the eastern mountains. Beginning suddenly to tremble with supernatural fear Dhoya paced 181
homewards. Everything was changed; dark shadows seemed to come and go, and elfin chatter to pass upon the breeze. But when he reached the shelter of the pine woods all was still as of old. He slackened his speed. Those solemn pine-trees soothed him with their vast unsociability—many and yet each one alone. Once or twice, when in some glade further than usual from its kind arose some pine-tree larger than the rest, he paused with bowed head to mutter an uncouth prayer to that dark outlaw. But when issuing once more, as he neared his cave, into the region of mountain ash and hazel the voices seemed again to come and go, and the shadows to circle round him, and once a voice said, he imagined, in accents faint and soft as falling dew, "Dhoya, my beloved." But a few yards from the cave all grew suddenly silent.

II.

SLOWER and slower he went, with his eyes on the ground, bewildered by all that was happening. A few feet from the cave he stood still, counting aimlessly the round spots of light made by the beams slanting through trees that hid with their greenness, as in the centre of the sea, that hollow rock. As over and over he counted them, he heard, first with the ear only, then with the mind also, a footstep going to and fro within the cave. Lifting his eyes he saw the same figure seen on the cliff—the figure of a woman, beautiful and young. Her dress was white, save for a border of feathers dyed the fatal red of the spirits. She had arranged in one corner the spears, and in the other the brushwood and branches used for the fire, and spread upon the ground the skins, and now began pulling vainly at the great stone pitcher of the Fomorians.

Suddenly she saw him, and with a burst of wild laughter flung her arms around his neck, crying, “Dhoya, I have left my world far off. My people—on the floor of the lake they are dancing and singing, and on the islands of the lake; always happy, always young, always without change. I have left them for thee, Dhoya, for they cannot love. Only the changing, and moody, and angry, and weary can love. I am beautiful; love me, Dhoya. Do you hear me? I left the places where they dance, Dhoya, for thee!” For long she poured out a tide of words, he answering at first little, then more and more as she melted away the silence of so many inarticulate years; and all the while she gazed on him with eyes, no ardour could rob of the mild and mysterious melancholy that watches us from the eyes of animals—sign of unhuman reveries.

Many days passed over these strangely wedded ones. Sometimes when he asked her, “Do you love me?” she would answer, “I do not know, but I long for your love endlessly.” Often at twilight, returning from hunting, he would find her bending over a stream that flowed near to the cave, decking her hair with feathers and reddening her lips with the juice of a wild berry.

He was very happy secluded in that deep forest. Hearing the faint murmurs of the western sea, they seemed to have outlived change. But Change is everywhere, with the tides and the stars fastened to her wheel. Every blood drop in their lips, every cloud in the sky, every leaf in the world changed a little, while they brushed back their hair and kissed. All things change save only the fear of change. And yet for his hour Dhoya was happy and as full of dreams as an old man or an infant—for dreams wander nearest to the grave and the cradle.

Once, as he was returning home from hunting, by the northern edge of the lake, at the hour when the owls cry to each other, “It is time to be abroad,” and the last flutter of the wind has died away, leaving under every haunted island an image legible to the least hazel branch, there suddenly stood before him a slight figure, at the edge of the narrow sand-line, dark against the glowing water. Dhoya drew nearer. It was a man leaning on his spear-staff, on his head a small red cap. His spear was slender and tipped with shining metal; the spear of Dhoya of wood, one end pointed and hardened in the fire. The red-capped stranger silently raised that slender spear and thrust at Dhoya, who parried with his pointed staff.

For a long while they fought. The last vestige of sunset passed away and the stars came out. Underneath them the feet of Dhoya beat up the ground, but the feet of the other as he rushed hither and thither, matching his agility with the mortal’s mighty strength, made neither shadow nor footstep on the sands. Dhoya was wounded, and growing weary a little, when the other leaped away, and, crouching down by the water, began—“You have carried away by some spell unknown the most beautiful of our bands—you who have neither laughter nor singing. Restore her, Dhoya, and go free.” Dhoya answered him no word, and the other rose and again thrust at him with the spear. They fought to and fro upon the sands until the dawn touched with olive the distant sky, and then his anger fit, long absent, fell on Dhoya, and he closed with his enemy and threw him, and put his knee on his chest and his hands on his throat, and would have crushed all life out of him, when lo! he held beneath his knee no more than a bundle of reeds.

Nearing home in the early morning he heard the voice he loved, singing—

“Full moody is my love and sad,
His moods bow low his sombre crest,
I hold him dearer than the glad,
And he shall slumber on my breast.

“My love hath many an evil mood
Ill words for all things soft and fair,
I hold him dearer than the good,
My fingers feel his amber hair.

“No tender wisdom floods the eyes
That watch me with their suppliant light—
I hold him dearer than the wise,
And for him make me wise and bright.”

And when she saw him she cried, “An old mortal song heard floating from a tent of skin, as we rode, I and mine, through a camping-place at night.” From that day she was always either singing wild and melancholy songs or else watching him with that gaze of animal reverie. 188

Once he asked, “How old are you?”

“A thousand years, for I am young.”

“I am so little to you,” he went on, “and you are so much to me—dawn, and sunset, tranquility, and speech, and solitude.”

“Am I so much?” she said; “say it many times!” and her eyes seemed to brighten and her breast heaved with joy.

Often he would bring her the beautiful skins of animals, and she would walk to and fro on them, laughing to feel their softness under her feet. Sometimes she would pause and ask suddenly, “Will you weep for me when we have parted?” and he would answer, “I will die then;” and she would go on rubbing her feet to and fro in the soft skin.

And so Dhoya grew tranquil and gentle, and Change seemed still to have forgotten them, having so much on her hands. The stars rose and set watching them smiling together, and the tides ebbed and flowed, bringing mutability to all save them. But always everything changes, save only the fear of Change. 189

III.

NE evening as they sat in the inner portion of the cave, watching through the opening the paling of the sky and the darkening of the leaves, and counting the budding stars, Dhoya suddenly saw 190

stand before him the dark outline of him he fought on the lake sand, and heard at the same instant his companion sigh.

The stranger approached a little, and said, “Dhoya we have fought heretofore, and now I have come to play chess against thee, for well thou knowest, dear to the perfect warrior after war is chess.”

“I know it,” answered Dhoya.

“And when we have played, Dhoya, we will name the stake.” 191

“Do not play,” whispered his companion at his side.

But Dhoya, being filled with his anger fit at the sight of his enemy, answered, “I will play, and I know well the stake you mean, and I name this for mine, that I may again have my knee on your chest and my hands on your throat, and that you will not again change into a bundle of wet reeds.” His companion lay down on a skin and began to cry a little.

Dhoya felt sure of winning. He had often played in his boyhood, before the time of his anger fits, with his masters of the galley; and besides, he could always return to his hands and his weapons once more.

Now the floor of the cave was of smooth, white sand, brought from the sea-shore in his great Fomorian pitcher, to make it soft for his beloved to walk upon; before it had been, as it now is, of 192
rough clay. On this sand the red-capped stranger marked out with his spear-point a chess-board, and marked with rushes, crossed and recrossed each alternate square, fixing each end of the rush in the sand, until a complete board was finished of white and green squares, and then drew from a bag large chess-men of mingled wood and silver. Two or three would have made an armful for a child. Standing each at his end they began to play. The game did not last long. No matter how carefully Dhoya played, each move went against him. At last, leaping back from the board he cried, “I have lost!” The two spirits were standing together at the entrance. Dhoya seized his spear, but slowly the figures began to fade, first a star and then the leaves showed through their forms. Soon all had vanished away.

Then, realizing his loss, he threw himself on the ground, and rolling hither and thither, roared 193
like a wild beast. All night long he lay on the ground, and all the next day till nightfall. He had crumbled his staff unconsciously between his fingers into small pieces, and now, full of dull rage, arose and went forth westward. In a ravine of the northern mountain he came on the tracks of wild horses. Soon one passed him fearlessly, knowing nothing of man. The pointed end of his staff he still carried. He drove it deep in the flank, making a long wound, sending the horse rushing with short screams down the mountain. Other horses passed him one by one, driven southward by a cold wind laden with mist, arisen in the night-time. Towards the end of the ravine stood one black and huge, the leader of the herd. Dhoya leaped on his back with a loud cry that sent a raven circling from the neighbouring cliff, and the horse, after vainly seeking to throw him, rushed off towards the north-west, over the heights of the mountains where the mists floated. 194
The moon, clear sometimes of the flying clouds, from low down in the south-east, cast a pale and mutable light, making their shadow rise before them on the mists, as though they pursued some colossal demon, sombre on his black charger. Then leaving the heights they rushed wildly down that valley where, in far later times, Dermot hid in a deep cavern his Grania, and passed the stream where Muadhan, their savage servant, caught fish for them on a hook baited with a quicken berry. On over the plains, on northward, mile after mile, the wild gigantic horse leaping cliff and chasm in his terrible race; on until the mountains of what is now Donegal rose before them—over these among the clouds, driving rain blowing in their faces from the sea, Dhoya knowing not whither he went, or why he rode. On—the stones loosened by the hoofs rumbling 195
down into the valleys—till far in the distance he saw the sea, a thousand feet below him; then, fixing his eyes thereon, and using the spear-point as a goad, he roused his black horse into redoubled speed, and with a wild leap horse and rider plunged headlong into the Western Sea.

Sometimes the cotters on the mountains of Donegal hear on windy nights a sudden sound of horses’ hoofs, and say to each other, “There goes Dhoya.” And at the same hour men say if any be abroad in the valleys they see a huge shadow rushing along the mountain.

THE END.

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