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THE INSIDE OF THE CUP

By Winston Churchill

Volume 3.

CHAPTER IX

THE DIVINE DISCONTENT

I

It was the last Sunday in May, and in another week the annual flight to the seashore and the mountains would have begun again. The breezes stealing into the church through the open casements wafted hither and thither the odours of the chancel flowers, and mingled with those fainter and subtler perfumes set free by the rustling of summer gowns.

As on this day he surveyed his decorous and fashionable congregation, Hodder had something of that

sense of extremity which the great apostle to the Gentiles himself must have felt when he stood in the midst of the Areopagus and made his vain yet sublime appeal to Athenian indifference and luxury. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." . . Some, indeed, stirred uneasily as the rector paused, lowering their eyes before the intensity of his glance, vaguely realizing that the man had flung the whole passion of his being into the appeal.

Heedlessness—that was God's accusation against them, against the age. Materialism, individualism! So absorbed were they in the pursuit of wealth, of distraction, so satisfied with the current philosophy, so intent on surrounding themselves with beautiful things and thus shutting out the sterner view, that they had grown heedless of the divine message. How few of them availed themselves of their spiritual birthright to renew their lives at the altar rail! And they had permitted their own children to wander away . . . . Repent!

There was a note of desperation in his appeal, like that of the hermit who stands on a mountain crag and warns the gay and thoughtless of the valley of the coming avalanche. Had they heard him at last? There were a few moments of tense silence, during which he stood gazing at them. Then he raised his arm in benediction, gathered up his surplice, descended the pulpit steps, and crossed swiftly the chancel . . . .

He had, as it were, turned on all the power in a supreme effort to reach them. What if he had failed again? Such was the misgiving that beset him, after the service, as he got out of his surplice, communicated by some occult telepathy . . . . Mr. Parr was awaiting him, and summoning his courage, hope battling against intuition, he opened the door into the now empty church and made his way toward the porch, where the sound of voices warned him that several persons were lingering. The nature of their congratulations confirmed his doubts. Mrs. Plimpton, resplendent and looking less robust than usual in one of her summer Paris gowns, greeted him effusively.

"Oh, Mr. Hodder, what a wonderful sermon!" she cried. "I can't express how it made me feel—so delinquent! Of course that is exactly the effect you wished. And I was just telling Wallis I was so glad I waited until Tuesday to go East, or I should have missed it. You surely must come on to Hampton and visit us, and preach it over again in our little stone church there, by the sea. Good-by and don't forget! I'll write you, setting the date, only we'd be glad to have you any time."

"One of the finest I ever heard—if not the finest," Mr. Plimpton declared, with a kind of serious 'empressement', squeezing his hand.

Others stopped him; Everett Constable, for one, and the austere Mrs. Atterbury. Hodder would have avoided the ever familiar figure of her son, Gordon, in the invariable black cutaway and checked trousers, but he was standing beside Mr. Parr.

"Ahem! Why, Mr. Hodder," he exclaimed, squinting off his glasses, "that was a magnificent effort. I was saying to Mr. Parr that it isn't often one hears a sermon nowadays as able as that, and as sound. Many clergymen refrain from preaching them, I sometimes think, because they are afraid people won't like them."

"I scarcely think it's that," the rector replied, a little shortly.
"We're afraid people won't heed them."

He became aware, as he spoke, of a tall young woman, who had cast an enigmatic glance first at Gordon Atterbury, and then at himself.

"It was a good sermon," said Mr. Parr. "You're coming to lunch, Hodder?"

The rector nodded. "I'm ready when you are," he answered.

"The motor's waiting," said the banker, leading the way down the steps to the sidewalk, where he turned. "Alison, let me introduce Mr. Hodder. This is my daughter," he added simply.

This sudden disclosure of the young woman's identity had upon Hodder a certain electric effect, and with it came a realization of the extent to which—from behind the scenes, so to speak—she had gradually aroused him to a lively speculation. She seemed to have influenced, to a greater or less degree, so many lives with which he had come into touch! Compelled persons to make up their minds about her! And while he sympathized with Eldon Parr in his abandonment, he had never achieved the full condemnation which he felt—an impartial Christian morality would have meted out.

As he uttered the conventional phrase and took her hand, he asked himself whether her personality justified his interest. Her glance at Gordon Atterbury in the midst of that gentleman's felicitations on the sermon had been expressive, Hodder thought, of veiled amusement slightly tinctured with

contempt; and he, Hodder, felt himself to have grown warm over it. He could not be sure that Alison Parr had not included, in her inner comment, the sermon likewise, on which he had so spent himself. What was she doing at church? As her eyes met his own, he seemed to read a challenge. He had never encountered a woman—he decided—who so successfully concealed her thought, and at the same time so incited curiosity about it.

The effect of her reappearance on Gordon Atterbury was painfully apparent, and Mrs. Larrabbee's remark, "that he had never got over it," recurred to Hodder. He possessed the virtue of being faithful, at least, in spite of the lady's apostasy, and he seemed to be galvanized into a tenfold nervousness as he hustled after them and handed her, with the elaborate attention little men are apt to bestow upon women, into the motor.

"Er—how long shall you be here, Alison?" he asked. "I don't know," she answered, not unkindly, but with a touch of indifference.

"You treat us shamefully," he informed her, "upon my word! But I'm coming to call."

"Do," said Alison. Hodder caught her eye again, and this time he was sure that she surprised in him a certain disdain of Mr. Atterbury's zeal. Her smile was faint, yet unmistakable.

He resented it. Indeed, it was with a well-defined feeling of antagonism that he took his seat, and this was enhanced as they flew westward, Mr. Parr wholly absorbed with the speaking trumpet, energetically rebuking at every bounce. In the back of the rector's mind lay a weight, which he identified, at intervals, with what he was now convinced was the failure of his sermon. . . Alison took no part in the casual conversation that began when they reached the boulevard and Mr. Parr abandoned the trumpet, but lay back in silence and apparently with entire comfort in a corner of the limousine.

At the lunch-table Mr. Parr plunged into a discussion of some of the still undecided details of the new settlement house, in which, as the plan developed, he had become more and more interested. He had made himself responsible, from time to time, for additional sums, until the original estimate had been almost doubled. Most of his suggestions had come from Hodder, who had mastered the subject with a thoroughness that appealed to the financier: and he had gradually accepted the rector's idea of concentrating on the children. Thus he had purchased an adjoining piece of land that was to be a model playground, in connection with the gymnasium and swimming-pool. The hygienic department was to be all that modern science could desire.

"If we are going to do the thing," the banker would, remark, "we may as well do it thoroughly; we may as well be leaders and not followers."

So, little by little, the scheme had grown to proportions that sometimes appalled the rector when he realized how largely he had been responsible for the additions,—in spite of the lukewarmness with which he had begun. And yet it had occasionally been Mr. Parr who, with a sweep of his hand, had added thousands to a particular feature: thus the dance-hall had become, in prospect, a huge sun-parlour at the top of the building, where the children were to have their kindergartens and games in winter; and which might be shaded and opened up to the breezes in summer. What had reconciled Hodder to the enterprise most of all, however, was the chapel —in the plan a beautiful Gothic church—whereby he hoped to make the religious progress keep pace with the social. Mr. Parr was decidedly in sympathy with this intention, and referred to it now.

"I was much impressed by what you said in your sermon to-day as to the need of insisting upon authority in religious matters," he declared, "and I quite agree that we should have a chapel of some size at the settlement house for that reason. Those people need spiritual control. It's what the age needs. And when I think of some of the sermons printed in the newspapers to-day, and which are served up as Christianity, there is only one term to apply to them—they are criminally incendiary."

"But isn't true Christianity incendiary, in your meaning of the word?"

It was Alison who spoke, in a quiet and musical voice that was in striking contrast to the tone of Mr. Parr, which the rector had thought unusually emphatic. It was the first time she had shown an inclination to contribute to the talk. But since Hodder had sat down at the table her presence had disturbed him, and he had never been wholly free from an uncomfortable sense that he was being measured and weighed.

Once or twice he had stolen a glance at her as she sat, perfectly at ease, and asked himself whether she had beauty, and it dawned upon him little by little that the very proportion she possessed made for physical unobtrusiveness. She was really very tall for a woman. At first he would have said her nose was straight, when he perceived that it had a delicate hidden curve; her eyes were curiously set, her dark hair parted in the middle, brought down low on each side of the forehead and tied in a Grecian

knot. Thus, in truth, he observed, were seemingly all the elements of the classic, even to the firm yet slender column of the neck. How had it eluded him?

Her remark, if it astonished Hodder, had a dynamic effect on Eldon Parr. And suddenly the rector comprehended that the banker had not so much been talking to him as through him; had been, as it were, courting opposition.

"What do you mean by Christianity being incendiary?" he demanded.

"Incendiary, from your point of view—I made, the qualification," Alison replied, apparently unmoved by his obvious irritation. "I don't pretend to be a Christian, as you know, but if there is one element in Christianity that distinguishes it, it is the brotherhood of man. That's pure nitroglycerin, though it's been mixed with so much sawdust. Incendiary is a mild epithet. I never read the sermons you refer to; I dare say they're crude, but they're probably attempts to release an explosive which would blow your comfortable social system and its authority into atoms."

Hodder, who had listened in amazement, glanced at the banker. He had never before heard him opposed, or seen him really angry.

"I've heard that doctrine," cried Mr. Parr. "Those who are dissatisfied with things as they are because they have been too stupid or too weak or self-indulgent to rise, find it easy to twist the principles of Christianity into revolutionary propaganda. It's a case of the devil quoting Scripture. The brotherhood of man! There has never been an age when philanthropy and organized charity were on such a scale as to-day."

A certain gallant, indomitable ring crept into Alison's voice; she did not seem in the least dismayed or overborne.

"But isn't that just where most so-called Christians make their mistake?" she asked. "Philanthropy and organized charity, as they exist to-day, have very little to do with the brotherhood of man. Mightn't it be you who are fooling yourselves instead of the incendiaries fooling themselves So long as you can make yourselves believe that this kind of charity is a logical carrying out of the Christian principles, so long are your consciences satisfied with the social system which your class, very naturally, finds so comfortable and edifying. The weak and idiotic ought to be absurdly grateful for what is flung to them, and heaven is gained in the throwing. In this way the rich inevitably become the elect, both here and hereafter, and the needle's eye is widened into a gap."

There was on Mr. Parr's lips a smile not wholly pleasant to see. Indeed, in the last few minutes there had been revealed to Hodder a side of the banker's character which had escaped him in the two years of their acquaintance.

"I suppose," said Mr. Parr, slowly, drumming on the table, "you would say that of the new settlement house of St. John's, whereby we hope to raise a whole neighbourhood."

"Yes, I should," replied Alison, with spirit. "The social system by which you thrive, and which politically and financially you strive to maintain, is diametrically opposed to your creed, which is supposed to be the brotherhood of man. But if that were really your creed, you would work for it politically and financially. You would see that your Church is trying to do infinitesimally what the government, but for your opposition, might do universally. Your true creed is the survival of the fittest. You grind these people down into what is really an economic slavery and dependence, and then you insult and degrade them by inviting them to exercise and read books and sing hymns in your settlement house, and give their children crackers and milk and kindergartens and sunlight! I don't blame them for not becoming Christians on that basis. Why, the very day I left New York a man over eighty, who had been swindled out of all he had, rather than go to one of those Christian institutions deliberately forged a check and demanded to be sent to the penitentiary. He said he could live and die there with some self-respect."

"I might have anticipated that you would ultimately become a Socialist,
Alison," Mr. Parr remarked—but his voice trembled.

"I don't know whether I'm a Socialist or an Anarchist," she answered. Hodder thought be detected a note of hopelessness in her voice, and the spirit in it ebbed a little. Not only did she seem indifferent to her father's feeling—which incidentally added fuel to it—but her splendid disregard of him, as a clergyman, had made an oddly powerful appeal. And her argument! His feelings, as he listened to this tremendous arraignment of Eldon Parr by his daughter, are not easily to be described. To say that she had compelled him, the rector of St. John's, at last to look in the face many conditions which he had refused to recognize would be too definite a statement. Nevertheless, some such thing had occurred. Refutations sprang to his lips, and died there, though he had no notion of uttering them. He saw that to

admit her contentions would be to behold crumble into ruins the structure that he had spent a life in rearing; and yet something within him responded to her words—they had the passionate, convincing ring of truth.

By no means the least of their disturbing effects was due to the fact that they came as a climax to, as a fulfilment of the revelation he had had at the Fergusons', when something of the true nature of Mr. Plimpton and others of his congregation had suddenly been laid bare. And now Hodder looked at Eldon Parr to behold another man from the one he had known, and in that moment realized that their relationship could never again be the same. . . Were his sympathies with the daughter?

"I don't know what I believe," said Alison, after a pause. "I've ceased trying to find out. What's the use!" She appeared now to be addressing no one in particular.

A servant entered with a card, and the banker's hand shook perceptibly as he put down his claret and adjusted his glasses.

"Show him into my office upstairs, and tell him I'll see him at once," he said, and glanced at the rector. But it was Alison whom he addressed. "I must leave Mr. Hodder to answer your arguments," he added, with an attempt at lightness; and then to the rector: "Perhaps you can convince her that the Church is more sinned against than sinning, and that Christians are not such terrible monsters after all. You'll excuse me?"

"Certainly." Hodder had risen.

II

"Shall we have coffee in the garden?" Alison asked. "It's much nicer outside this time of year."

For an instant he was at a loss to decide whether to accede, or to make an excuse and leave the house. Wisdom seemed to point to flight. But when he glanced at her he saw to his surprise that the mood of abstraction into which she had fallen still held her; that the discussion which had aroused Eldon Parr to such dramatic anger had left her serious and thoughtful. She betrayed no sense of triumph at having audaciously and successfully combated him, and she appeared now only partially to be aware of Hodder's presence. His interest, his curiosity mounted suddenly again, overwhelming once more the antagonism which he had felt come and go in waves; and once more his attempted classification of her was swept away. She had relapsed into an enigma.

"I like the open air," he answered, "and I have always wished to see the garden. I have admired it from the windows."

"It's been on my mind for some years," she replied, as she led the way down a flight of steps into the vine-covered pergola. "And I intend to change parts of it while I am out here. It was one of my first attempts, and I've learned more since."

"You must forgive my ignorant praise," he said, and smiled. "I have always thought it beautiful: But I can understand that an artist is never satisfied."

She turned to him, and suddenly their eyes met and held in a momentary, electric intensity that left him warm and agitated. There was nothing coquettish in the glance, but it was the first distinct manifestation that he was of consequence. She returned his smile, without levity.

"Is a clergyman ever satisfied?" she asked.

"He ought not to be," replied Hodder, wondering whether she had read him.

"Although you were so considerate, I suppose you must have thought it presumptuous of me to criticize your, profession, which is religion."

"Religion, I think, should be everybody's," he answered quietly.

She made no reply. And he entered, as into another world, the circular arbour in which the pergola ended, so complete in contrast was its atmosphere to that of the house. The mansion he had long since grown to recognize as an expression of the personality of its owner, but this classic bower was as remote from it as though it were in Greece. He was sensitive to beauty, yet the beauty of the place had a perplexing quality, which he felt in the perfect curves of the marble bench, in the marble basin brimming to the tip with clear water,—the surface of which, flecked with pink petals, mirrored the azure sky through the leafy network of the roof. In one green recess a slender Mercury hastily adjusted

his sandal.

Was this, her art, the true expression of her baffling personality? As she had leaned back in the corner of the automobile she had given him the impression of a languor almost Oriental, but this had been startlingly dispelled at the lunch-table by the revelation of an animation and a vitality which had magically transformed her. But now, as under the spell of a new encompassment of her own weaving, she seemed to revert to her former self, sinking, relaxed, into a wicker lounge beside the basin, one long and shapely hand in the water, the other idle in her lap. Her eyes, he remarked, were the contradiction in her face. Had they been larger, and almond-shaped, the illusion might have been complete. They were neither opaque nor smouldering,—but Western eyes, amber-coloured, with delicately stencilled rays and long lashes. And as they gazed up at him now they seemed to reflect, without disclosing the flitting thoughts behind them. He felt antagonism and attraction in almost equal degree —the situation transcended his experience.

"You don't intend to change this?" he asked, with an expressive sweep of his hand.

"No," she said, "I've always liked it. Tell me what you feel about it."

He hesitated.

"You resent it," she declared.

"Why do you say that?" he demanded quickly.

"I feel it," she answered calmly, but with a smile.

"'Resent' would scarcely be the proper word," he contended, returning her smile, yet hesitating again.

"You think it pagan," she told him.

"Perhaps I do," he answered simply, as though impressed by her felicitous discovery of the adjective.

Alison laughed.

"It's pagan because I'm pagan, I suppose."

"It's very beautiful—you have managed to get an extraordinary atmosphere," he continued, bent on doing himself an exact justice. But I should say, if you pressed me, that it represents to me the deification of beauty to the exclusion of all else. You have made beauty the Alpha and Omega."

"There is nothing else for me," she said.

The coffee-tray arrived and was deposited on a wicker table beside her.
She raised herself on an elbow, filled his cup and handed it to him.

"And yet," he persisted, "from the manner in which you spoke at the table—"

"Oh, don't imagine I haven't thought? But thinking isn't—believing."

"No," he admitted, with a touch of sadness, "you are right. There were certain comments you made on the Christian religion—"

She interrupted him again.

"As to the political side of it, which is Socialism, so far as I can see. If there is any other side, I have never been able to discover it. It seems to me that if Christians were logical, they should be Socialists. The brotherhood of man, cooperation—all that is Socialism, isn't it? It's opposed to the principle of the survival of the fittest, which so many of these so-called Christians practise. I used to think, when I came back from Paris, that I was a Socialist, and I went to a lot of their meetings in New York, and to lectures. But after a while I saw there was something in Socialism that didn't appeal to me, something smothering,—a forced cooperation that did not leave one free. I wanted to be free, I've been striving all my life to be free," she exclaimed passionately, and was silent an instant, inspecting him. "Perhaps I owe you an apology for speaking as I did before a clergyman—especially before an honest one."

He passed over the qualification with a characteristic smile.

"Oh, if we are going to shut our ears to criticism we'd better give up being clergymen," he answered. "I'm afraid there is a great deal of truth in what you said."

"That's generous of you!" she exclaimed, and thrilled him with the tribute. Nor was the tribute wholly

in the words: there had come spontaneously into her voice an exquisite, modulated note that haunted him long after it had died away . . . .

"I had to say what I thought," she continued earnestly; "I stood it as long as I could. Perhaps you didn't realize it, but my father was striking at me when he referred to your sermon, and spiritual control —and in other things he said when you were talking about the settlement-house. He reserves for himself the right to do as he pleases, but insists that those who surround him shall adopt the subserviency which he thinks proper for the rest of the world. If he were a Christian himself, I shouldn't mind it so much."

Hodder was silent. The thought struck him with the force of a great wind.

"He's a Pharisee," Alison went on, following the train of her thought. "I remember the first time I discovered that—it was when I was reading the New Testament carefully, in the hope of finding something in Christianity I might take hold of. And I was impressed particularly by the scorn with which Christ treated the Pharisees. My father, too, if he had lived in those days, would have thought Christ a seditious person, an impractical, fanatical idealist, and would have tried to trip him up with literal questions concerning the law. His real and primary interest—is in a social system that benefits himself and his kind, and because this is so, he, and men like him, would have it appear that Christianity is on the side of what they term law and order. I do not say that they are hypocritical, that they reason this out. They are elemental; and they feel intuitively that Christianity contains a vital spark which, if allowed to fly, would start a conflagration beyond their control. The theologians have helped them to cover the spark with ashes, and naturally they won't allow the ashes to be touched, if they can help it."

She lay very still.

The rector had listened to her, at first with amazement, then with more complicated sensations as she thus dispassionately discussed the foremost member of his congregation and the first layman of the diocese, who was incidentally her own father. In her masterly analysis of Eldon Parr, she had brought Hodder face to face with the naked truth, and compelled him to recognize it. How could he attempt to refute it, with honesty?

He remembered Mr. Parr's criticism of Alison. There had been hardness in that, though it were the cry of a lacerated paternal affection. In that, too, a lack of comprehension, an impotent anger at a visitation not understood, a punishment apparently unmerited. Hodder had pitied him then—he still pitied him. In the daughter's voice was no trace of resentment. No one, seemingly, could be farther removed from him (the rector of St. John's) in her opinions and views of life, than Allison Parr; and yet he felt in her an undercurrent, deep and strong, which moved him strangely, strongly, irresistibly; he recognized a passionate desire for the truth, and the courage to face it at any cost, and a capacity for tenderness, revealed in flashes.

"I have hurt you," she exclaimed. "I am sorry."

He collected himself.

"It is not you who have hurt me," he replied. "Reflections on the contradictions and imperfections of life are always painful. And since I have been here, I have seen a great deal of your father."

"You are fond of him!"

He hesitated. It was not an ordinary conversation they were dealing with realities, and he had a sense that vital issues were at stake. He had, in that moment, to make a revaluation of his sentiments for the financier—to weigh the effect of her indictment.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "I am fond of him. He has shown me a side of himself, perhaps, that other men have not seen,—and he is very lonely."

"You pity him." He started at her word. "I guessed that from an expression that crossed your face when we were at the table. But surely you must have observed the incongruity of his relationship with your Church! Surely, in preaching as you did this morning against materialism, individualism, absorption in the pursuit of wealth, you must have had my father in mind as the supreme example! And yet he listened to you as serenely as though he had never practised any of these things!

"Clergymen wonder why Christianity doesn't make more progress to-day; well, what strikes the impartial observer who thinks about the subject at all, as one reason, is the paralyzing inconsistency of an alliance between those who preach the brotherhood of man and those who are opposed to it. I've often wondered what clergymen would say about it, if they were frank—only I never see any

clergymen."

He was strongly agitated. He did not stop—strangely enough—to reflect how far they had gone, to demand by what right she brought him to the bar, challenged the consistency of his life. For she had struck, with a ruthless precision, at the very core of his trouble, revealed it for what it was.

"Yes," he said, "I can see how we may be accused of inconsistency, and with much justice."

His refusal to excuse and vindicate himself impressed her as no attempt at extenuation could have done. Perhaps, in that moment, her quick instinct divined something of his case, something of the mental suffering he strove to conceal. Contrition shone in her eyes.

"I ought not to have said that," she exclaimed gently. "It is so easy for outsiders to criticize those who are sincere—and I am sure you are. We cannot know all the perplexities. But when we look at the Church, we are puzzled by that—which I have mentioned—and by other things."

"What other things?" he demanded.

She hesitated in her turn.

"I suppose you think it odd, my having gone to church, feeling as I do," she said. "But St. John's is now the only place vividly associated with my mother. She was never at home here, in this house. I always go at least once when I am out here. And I listened to your sermon intently."

"Yes."

"I wanted to tell you this: you interested me as I had not been interested since I was twenty, when I made a desperate attempt to become a Christian—and failed. Do you know how you struck me? It was as a man who actually had a great truth which he was desperately trying to impart, and could not. I have not been in a church more than a dozen times in the last eight years, but you impressed me as a man who felt something —whatever it is."

He did not speak.

"But why," she cried, "do you insist on what you cell authority? As a modern woman who has learned to use her own mind, I simply can't believe, if the God of the universe is the moral God you assert him to be, that he has established on earth an agency of the kind you infer, and delegated to it the power of life and death over human souls. Perhaps you do not go so far, but if you make the claim at all you must make it in its entirety. There is an idea of commercialism, of monopoly in that conception which is utterly repugnant to any one who tries to approach the subject with a fresh mind, and from an ideal point of view. And religion must be idealism—mustn't it?

"Your ancient monks and saints weren't satisfied until they had settled every detail of the invisible world, of the past and future. They mapped it out as if it were a region they had actually explored, like geographers. They used their reason, and what science they had, to make theories about it which the churches still proclaim as the catholic and final truth. You forbid us to use our reason. You declare, in order to become Christians, that we have to accept authoritative statements. Oh, can't you see that an authoritative statement is just what an ethical person doesn't want? Belief—faith doesn't consist in the mere acceptance of a statement, but in something much higher—if we can achieve it. Acceptance of authority is not faith, it is mere credulity, it is to shirk the real issue. We must believe, if we believe at all, without authority. If we knew, there would be no virtue in striving. If I choose a God," she added, after a pause, "I cannot take a consensus of opinion about him,—he must be my God."

Hodder did not speak immediately. Strange as it may seem, he had never heard the argument, and the strength of it, reenforced by the extraordinary vitality and earnestness of the woman who had uttered it, had a momentary stunning effect. He sat contemplating her as she lay back among the cushions, and suddenly he seemed to see in her the rebellious child of which her father had spoken. No wonder Eldon Parr had misunderstood her, had sought to crush her spirit! She was to be dealt with in no common way, nor was the consuming yearning he discerned in her to be lightly satisfied.

"The God of the individualist," he said at length—musingly, not accusingly.

"I am an individualist," she admitted simply. "But I am at least logical in that philosophy, and the individualists who attend the churches to-day are not. The inconsistency of their lives is what makes those of us who do not go to church doubt the efficacy of their creed, which seems to have no power to change them. The majority of people in St. John's are no more Christians than I am. They attend service once a week, and the rest of the time they are bent upon getting all they can of pleasure and profit for themselves. Do you wonder that those who consider this spectacle come inevitably to the conclusion

that either Christianity is at fault, is outworn, or else that it is presented in the wrong way?"

The rector rose abruptly, walked to the entrance of the arbour, and stood staring out across the garden. Presently he turned and came back and stood over her.

"Since you ask me," he said slowly, "I do not wonder at it."

She raised her eyes swiftly.

"When you speak like that," she exclaimed with an enthusiasm that stirred him, despite the trouble of his mind, "I cannot think of you as a clergyman,—but as a man. Indeed," she added, in the surprise of her discovery, "I have never thought of you as a clergyman—even when I first saw you this morning. I could not account then for a sense of duality about you that puzzled me. Do you always preach as earnestly as that?"

"Why?"

"I felt as if you were throwing your whole soul into the effort-=oh, I felt it distinctly. You made some of them, temporarily, a little uncomfortable, but they do not understand you, and you didn't change them. It seemed to me you realized this when Gordon Atterbury spoke to you. I tried to analyze the effect on myself—if it had been in the slightest degree possible for my reason to accept what you said you might, through sheer personality, have compelled me to reconsider. As it was, I found myself resisting you."

With his hands clasped behind him, he paced across the arbour and back again.

"Have you ever definitely and sincerely tried to put what the Church teaches into practice?" he asked.

"Orthodox Christianity? penance, asceticism, self-abnegation—repression —falling on my knees and seeking a forgiveness out of all proportion to the trespass, and filled with a sense of total depravity? If I did that I should lose myself—the only valuable thing I've got."

Hodder, who had resumed his pacing, glanced at her involuntarily, and fought an inclination to agree with her.

"I see no one upon whom I can rely but myself," she went on with the extraordinary energy she was able to summon at will, "and I am convinced that self-sacrifice—at least, indiscriminate, unreasoning self-sacrifice—is worse than useless, and to teach it is criminal ignorance. None of the so-called Christian virtues appeals to me: I hate humility. You haven't it. The only happiness I can see in the world lies in self-expression, and I certainly shouldn't find that in sewing garments for the poor.

"The last thing that I could wish for would be immortality as orthodox Christianity depicts it! And suppose I had followed the advice of my Christian friends and remained here, where they insisted my duty was, what would have happened to me? In a senseless self-denial I should gradually have, withered into a meaningless old maid, with no opinions of my own, and no more definite purpose in life than to write checks for charities. Your Christianity commands that women shall stay at home, and declares that they are not entitled to seek their own salvation, to have any place in affairs, or to meddle with the realm of the intellect. Those forbidden gardens are reserved for the lordly sex. St. Paul, you say, put us in our proper place some twenty centuries ago, and we are to remain there for all time."

He felt sweeping through him the reverse current of hostility.

"And what I preach," he asked, "has tended to confirm you in such a mean conception of Christianity?"

Her eye travelled over the six feet of him—the kindling, reflecting eye of the artist; it rested for a moment on the protesting locks of his hair, which apparently could not be cut short enough to conform; on the hands, which were strong and sinewy; on the wide, tolerant mouth, with its rugged furrows, on the breadth and height of the forehead. She lay for a moment, inert, considering.

"What you preach—yes," she answered, bravely meeting his look. "What you are—no. You and your religion are as far apart as the poles. Oh, this old argument, the belief that has been handed down to the man, the authority with which he is clothed, and not the man himself! How can one be a factor in life unless one represents something which is the fruit of actual, personal experience? Your authority is for the weak, the timid, the credulous,—for those who do not care to trust themselves, who run for shelter from the storms of life to a 'papier-mache' fortress, made to look like rock. In order to preach that logically you should be a white ascetic, with a well-oiled manner, a downcast look lest you stumble in your pride; lest by chance you might do something original that sprang out of your own soul instead of being an imitation of the saints. And if your congregation took your doctrine literally, I can see a

whole army of white, meek Christians. But you are not like that. Can't you see it for yourself?" she exclaimed.

"Can't you feel that you are an individual, a personality, a force that might be put to great uses? That will be because you are open-minded, because there is room in you for growth and change?"

He strove with all his might to quell the inner conflagration which she had fanned into leaping flames. Though he had listened before to doubt and criticism, this woman, with her strange shifting moods of calm and passion, with her bewildering faculty of changing from passive to active resistance, her beauty (once manifest, never to be forgotten), her unique individuality that now attracted, now repelled, seemed for the moment the very incarnation of the forces opposed to him and his religion. Holder, as he looked at her, had a flash of fierce resentment that now, of all times, she should suddenly have flung herself across his path. For she was to be reckoned with. Why did he not tell her she was an egoist? Why didn't he speak out, defend his faith, denounce her views as prejudiced and false?

"Have I made you angry?" he heard her say. "I am sorry."

It was the hint of reproach in her tone to which the man in him instantly responded. And what he saw now was his portrait she had painted. The thought came to him: was he indeed greater, more vital than the religion he professed? God forbid! Did he ring true, and it false?

She returned his gaze. And gradually, under her clear olive skin, he saw the crimson colour mounting higher . . . . She put forth her hand, simply, naturally, and pressed his own, as though they had been friends for a lifetime . . . .

CHAPTER X

THE MESSENGER IN THE CHURCH

I

The annual scourge of summer had descended pitilessly upon the city once more, enervating, depressing, stagnating, and people moved languidly in the penetrating heat that steamed from the pores of the surrounding river bottoms.

The rector of St. John's realized that a crisis had come in his life, —a crisis he had tried to stave off in vain. And yet there was a period during which he pursued his shrunken duties as though nothing had happened to him; as a man who has been struck in battle keeps on, loath to examine, to acknowledge the gravity of his wound; fearing to, perhaps. Sometimes, as his mind went back to the merciless conflict of his past, his experience at the law school, it was the unchaining of that other man he dreaded, the man he believed himself to have finally subdued. But night and day he was haunted by the sorrowful and reproachful face of Truth.

Had he the courage, now, to submit the beliefs which had sustained him all these years to Truth's inexorable inspection? Did he dare to turn and open those books which she had inspired,—the new philosophies, the historical criticisms which he had neglected and condemned, which he had flattered himself he could do without,—and read of the fruit of Knowledge? Twice, thrice he had hesitated on the steps of the big library, and turned away with a wildly beating heart.

Day by day the storm increased, until from a cloud on the horizon it grew into a soul-shaking tempest. Profoundly moved Parr's he had been on that Sunday afternoon, in Eldon Parr's garden, he had resolutely resolved to thrust the woman and the incident from his mind, to defer the consideration of the questions she had raised—grave though they were—to a calmer period. For now he was unable to separate her, to eliminate the emotion—he was forced to acknowledge—the thought of her aroused, from the problems themselves. Who was she? At moments he seemed to see her shining, accusing, as Truth herself, and again as a Circe who had drawn him by subtle arts from his wanderings, luring him to his death; or, at other times, as the mutinous daughter of revolt. But when he felt, in memory, the warm touch of her hand, the old wildness of his nature responded, he ceased to speculate or care, and he longed only to crush and subdue her by the brute power of the man in him. For good or bad, she had woven her spell.

Here was the old, elemental, twofold contest, carnal and spiritual, thoroughly revived! . . .

He recalled, in his musings, the little theological school surrounded by southern woods and fields, where he had sometime walked under autumn foliage with the elderly gentleman who had had such an influence on his life—the dean. Mild-mannered and frail, patient in ordinary converse, —a lion for the faith. He would have died for it as cheerfully as any martyr in history. By the marvels of that faith Holder had beheld, from his pew in the chapel, the little man transformed. He knew young men, their perplexities and temptations, and he dealt with them personally, like a father. Holder's doubts were stilled, he had gained power of his temptations and peace for his soul, and he had gone forth inspired by the reminder that there was no student of whom the dean expected better things. Where now were the thousands of which he had dreamed, and which he was to have brought into the Church? . . .

Now, he asked himself, was it the dean, or the dean's theology through which his regeneration had come? Might not the inherent goodness of the dean be one thing, and his theology quite another? Personality again! He recalled one of the many things which Alison Parr had branded on his memory, —"the belief, the authority in which the man is clothed, and not the man!" The dean's God had remained silent on the subject of personality. Or, at the best, he had not encouraged it; and there were —Hodder could not but perceive—certain contradictions in his character, which were an anomalistic blending of that of the jealous God of Moses and of the God of Christ. There must be continuity—God could not change. Therefore the God of infinite love must retain the wrath which visited sins of the fathers on the children, which demanded sacrifice, atonement,—an exact propitiation for his anger against mankind. An innocent life of sorrow and suffering!

And again, "You and your religion are as far apart as the poles!" Had he, Hodder, outgrown the dean's religion, or had it ever been his own? Was there, after all, such a thing as religion? Might it not be merely a figment of the fertile imagination of man? He did not escape the terror of this thought when he paused to consider his labour of the past two years and the vanity of its results. And little by little the feeling grew upon him, such being the state of his mind, that he ought not to continue, for the present at least, to conduct the services. Should he resign, or go away for a while to some quiet place before he made such a momentous decision? There was no one to whom he could turn; no layman, and no clergyman; not even the old bishop, whom he had more than once mentally accused of being, too broad and too tolerant! No, he did not wish a clergyman's solution. The significance of this thought flashed through him—that the world itself was no longer seeking clergymen's solutions. He must go off alone, and submit his faith to the impartial test.

It was in a vigil of the night, when he lay in the hot darkness, unable to sleep, that he came at length to this resolve. And now that he had cut the knot he was too just to blame Alison Parr for having pointed out —with what often had seemed a pitiless cruelty—something of which he had had a constantly growing perception yet had continually sought to evade. And he reviewed, as the church bells recorded the silent hours, how, little by little, his confidence had crumbled before the shocks of the successive revelations—some of them so slight that they had passed unnoticed: comparisons, inevitably compelled; Dalton Street; the confessions of Eleanor Goodrich and Mrs. Constable; Mr. Plimpton and his views of life—Eldon Parr! Even the slamming of the carriage doors in Burton Street had had a significance!

Might it not prove that this woman had let fall into the turbid waters of his soul the drop that was to clear them forever? He would go away. He would not see her again.

Over the sleeping city, unapprehended, stole the dawn.

He arose, but instead of falling on his knees he went to the window and lifted his face to the whitening sky . . . . Slowly out of the obscurity of the earth's shadow emerged the vague outlines of familiar things until they stood sharply material, in a silence as of death. A sparrow twittered, and suddenly the familiar, soot-grimed roofs were bathed in light, and by a touch made beautiful . . . .

Some hours later the city was wide awake. And Hodder, bathed and dressed, stood staring down from his study window into the street below, full now of young men and girls; some with set faces, hurrying, intent, others romping and laughing as they dodged the trucks and trolley cars; all on their way to the great shoe factory around the corner, the huge funnels of which were belching forth smoke into the morning air. The street emptied, a bell rang, a whistle blew, the hum of distant machinery began . . . .

II

Later that morning Hodder sat in his study. The shutters were closed, and the intensity of the tropical glare without was softened and diffused by the slanting green slats. His eye wandered over the long and comfortable room which had been his sanctuary in the feverish days of his ministry, resting affectionately on the hospitable chairs, the wide fireplace before which he had been wont to settle

himself on winter nights, and even on the green matting—a cooling note in summer. And there, in the low cases along the walls, were the rows of his precious books,—his one hobby and extravagance. He had grown to love the room. Would he ever come back to it?

A step sounded in the hall, a knock, and the well-known gaunt form and spectacled face of McCrae appeared in the doorway.

"Ye wished to see me?" he asked.

"McCrae," said the rector, "I am going off for a while."

His assistant regarded him a moment in silence. Although Hodder had no intention of explaining his reasons, he had a curious conviction that it were superfluous to do so, that McCrae had guessed them.

"Why shouldn't ye? There's but a handful left to preach to in this weather."

"I wouldn't go, in this sudden way, if it were not imperative," Hodder added, trying to speak calmly.

"Why shouldn't ye?" McCrae repeated, almost fiercely.

Hodder smiled in spite of himself.

"There's no reason," he said, "except the added work put on you without warning, and in this heat."

"Ye'll not need to worry," his assistant assured him, "the heat's nothing to me." McCrae hesitated, and then demanded abruptly, "Ye'll not be visiting?"

The question took Hodder by surprise.

"No," he answered quickly, and not quite steadily, and hesitated in his turn, "I shan't be visiting."

"It's a rest ye need, I've been wanting to say it." McCrae took a step forward, and for a moment it seemed as though he were at last about to break the bonds of his reserve. Perhaps he detected an instinctive shrinking on the rector's part. At any rate, there was another instant of silence, in which the two men faced each other across the desk, and McCrae held out his hand. "Good luck to ye," he said, as Hodder took it, "and don't have the pariah on your mind. Stay till ye're rested, and come back to us."

He left the room abruptly. Hodder remained motionless, looking after him, and then, moved apparently by a sudden impulse, started toward the door,—only to halt and turn before he got to it. Almost he had opened his lips to call his assistant back. He could not do it—the moment had come and fled when it might have been possible. Did this man hide, under his brusqueness and brevity of speech, the fund of wisdom and the wider sympathy and understanding he suspected? Hodder could have vouched for it, and yet he had kept his own counsel. And he was struck suddenly by the significance of the fact, often remarked, that McCrae in his brief and common-sense and by no means enlivening sermons had never once referred in any way to doctrine or dogma!

He spent half an hour in collecting and bestowing in two large valises such articles as his simple needs would demand, and then set out for a railroad office in the business portion of the city, where he bought his ticket and berth. Then, after a moment of irresolution on the threshold of the place, he turned to the right, thrusting his way through the sluggish crowds on Tower Street until he came to the large bookstore where he had been want to spend, from time to time, some of his leisure moments. A clerk recognized him, and was about to lead the way to the rear, where the precious editions were kept, when Hodder stopped him.

In casting about for a beginning in his venture over unknown seas, there had naturally come into his mind three or four works which were anathema to the orthodox; one of which, in seven volumes, went back to his seminary days, and had been the subject of a ringing, denunciatory sermon by the dean himself. Three of them were by Germans of established reputations, another by a professor of the University of Paris. The habit of years is strong.

And though he knew that many clergymen read these books, Hodder found it impossible to overcome a nervous sense of adventure,—nay (knowing his resolution), of apostasy, almost of clandestine guilt when he mentioned them. And it seemed to him that the face of the clerk betrayed surprise. One of the works was not in stock; he would send the others that afternoon. Mr. Hodder would take them? They made a formidable parcel, but a little handle was supplied and the rector hurried out, swinging himself on a Tower Street car.

It must not be thought that the whole of what is called modern criticism was new to Hodder. This would indeed be too much of a reflection on the open-mindedness of the seminary from which he had

graduated. But he found himself, now, pondering a little cynically on that "open-mindedness"; on that concession—if it had been a concession—to the methods of science. There had been in truth a course of lectures on this subject; but he saw now, very clearly, what a concerted effort had been put forward in the rest of the teaching to minimize and discredit it. Even the professor who gave the lectures had had the air of deploring them. Here it is, but on the whole one would better let it alone,—such was the inference. And he had let it alone, through all these years.

In the seminary, too, volumes by semi-learned clergymen had been thrust into his hands, efforts which Hodder recalled now, in spite of his mental state, with a smile. These invariably championed the doctrine of the virgin birth as the pillar on which the Incarnation depended. A favourite argument declared that although the Gospel texts in regard to it might be proven untrustworthy, the miraculous birth must have happened anyway! And one of these clerical authors whom he had more recently read, actually had had the audacity to turn the weapons of the archenemy, science, back upon itself. The virgin birth was an established fact in nature, and had its place in the social economy of the bee. And did not parthenogenesis occur in the silk moth?

In brief, the conclusion impressed upon him by his seminary instruction was this: that historical criticism had corrected some ideas and put some things in their right place. What these things were remained sufficiently vague. But whenever it attacked a cherished dogma it was, on general principles, wrong.

Once again in his cool study, he cut the cord with a trembling hand, and while he was eating the lunch his housekeeper had prepared, dipped into one of the larger volumes. As he read again the critical disproofs he felt an acute, almost physical pain, as though a vital part of him were being cut away, as his mind dwelt upon those beautiful legends to which he had so often turned, and which had seemed the very fountain of his faith. Legends! . . . .

He closed the book. The clock on the mantel struck three; his train was to leave at five. He rose and went down into the silent church he had grown to love, seating himself in one of the carved stalls of the choir, his eye lingering in turn on each beautiful object: on the glowing landscape in the window in memory of Eliza Parr, portraying the delectable country, with the bewildered yet enraptured faces of the pilgrims in the foreground; on the graceful, shining lectern, the aspiring arches, the carved marble altar behind the rail, and above it the painting of the Christ on the cross.

The hours of greatest suffering are the empty hours. 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' The hours when the mysterious sustaining and driving force is withdrawn, and a lassitude and despair comes over us like that of a deserted child: the hours when we feel we have reached the limit of service, when our brief span of usefulness is done. Had God brought him, John Hodder, to the height of the powers of his manhood only to abandon him, to cast him adrift on the face of the waters—led him to this great parish, with all its opportunities, only that he might fail and flee?

He sat staring at the face of the Man on the cross. Did he, in his overwrought state, imagine there an expression he had never before remarked, or had the unknown artist of the seventies actually risen above the mediocrity of the figure in his portrayal of the features of the Christ? The rector started, and stared again. There was no weakness in the face, no meekness, no suggestion of the conception of the sacrificed Lamb, no hint of a beatific vision of opening heavens—and yet no accusation, no despair. A knowing—that were nearer—a knowing of all things through the experiencing of all things, the suffering of all things. For suffering without revelation were vain, indeed! A perfected wisdom that blended inevitably with a transcendent love. Love and wisdom were one, then? To reach comprehension through conquering experience was to achieve the love that could exclaim, "they know not what they do!"

Human or divine? Man or God? Hodder found himself inwardly repeating the words, the controversy which had raged for nineteen hundred years, and not yet was stilled. Perfection is divine. Human! Hodder repeated the word, as one groping on the threshold of a great discovery . . . .

III

He was listening—he had for a long time been listening to a sound which had seemed only the natural accompaniment of the drama taking place in his soul, as though some inspired organist were expressing in exquisite music the undercurrent of his agony. Only gradually did he become aware that it arose from the nave of the church, and, turning, his eyes fell upon the bowed head and shoulders of a woman kneeling in one of the pews. She was sobbing.

His movement, he recalled afterward, did not come of a conscious volition, as he rose and descended

the chancel steps and walked toward her; he stood for what seemed a long time on the white marble of the aisle looking down on her, his heart wrung by the violence of her grief, which at moments swept through her like a tempest. She seemed still young, but poverty had marked her with unmistakable signs. The white, blue-veined hands that clung to the railing of the pew were thin; and the shirtwaist, though clean, was cheap and frayed. At last she rose from her knees and raised a tear-stained face to his, staring at him in a dumb bewilderment.

"Can I do anything for you?" he said gently, "I am the rector here." She did not answer, but continued to stare uncomprehendingly. He sat down beside her in the pew.

"You are in trouble," he said. "Will you let me try to help you?" A sob shook her—the beginning of a new paroxysm. He waited patiently until it was over. Suddenly she got rather wildly and unsteadily to her feet.

"I must go!" she cried. "Oh, God, what would I do if—if he wasn't there?"

Hodder rose too. She had thrust herself past him into the aisle, but if he had not taken her arm she would have fallen. Thus they went together to the door of the church, and out into the white, burning sunlight. In spite of her weakness she seemed actually to be leading him, impelled by a strange force and fled down the steps of the porch to the sidewalk. And there she paused, seeing him still beside her. Fortunately he had his hat in his hand.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To take you home," he replied firmly, "you ought not to go alone."

A look of something like terror came into her eyes.

"Oh, no!" she protested, with a vehemence that surprised him. "I am strong. Oh, thank you, sir,—but I can go alone. It's Dicky—my little boy. I've never left him so long. I had gone for the medicine and I saw the church. I used to go to church, sir, before we had our troubles—and I just went in. It suddenly came over me that God might help me—the doctor can do nothing."

"I will go with you," he said.

She ceased to resist, as one submitting to the fatality of a superior will.

The pavements that afternoon, as Hodder and the forlorn woman left the cool porticoes of St. John's, were like the floor of a stone oven, and the work horses wore little bonnets over their heads. Keeping to the shady side, the rector and his companion crossed Tower Street with its trolley cars and its awninged stores, and came to that depressing district which had reproached him since the first Sunday of his ministry when he had traversed it with Eldon Parr. They passed the once prosperous houses, the corner saloons pandering to two vices, decked with the flamboyant signs of the breweries. The trees were dying along the asphalt and in the yards, the iron fences broken here and there, the copings stained with rust and soot. Hodder's thoughts might have been likened to the heated air that simmered above the bricks.

They were in Dalton Street! She seemed to have forgotten his presence, her pace quickened as she turned into a gate and flew up a flight of dirty stone steps, broken and sagging. Hodder took in, subconsciously, that the house was a dingy grey, of three stories and a Mansard roof, with a bay window on the yard side, and a fly-blown sign, "Rooms to Rent" hanging in one window. Across the street, on a lot that had once held a similar dignified residence, was the yellow brick building of the "Albert Hotel," and next door, on the east, a remodelled house of "apartments" with speaking tubes in the doorway.

The woman led him up another flight of steps to the open door of the house, through a hallway covered with a ragged carpet, where a dilapidated walnut hat-rack stood, up the stairs, threading a dark passage that led into a low-ceiled, stifling room at the very back. A stout, slatternly person in a wrapper rose as they entered, but the mother cast herself down beside the lounge where the child was. Hodder had a moment of fear that she was indeed too late, so still the boy lay, so pathetically wan was the little face and wasted the form under the cotton nightgown. The mother passed her hand across his forehead.

"Dicky!" she whispered fearfully, "Dicky!"

He opened his eyes and smiled at her; feebly.

The, stout woman, who had been looking on with that intensity of sympathy of which the poor are capable, began waving gently the palm-leaf fan. She was German.

"He is so good, is Dicky. He smile at me when I fan him—once, twice.
He complains not at all."

The mother took the fan from her, hand.

"Thank you for staying with him, Mrs. Breitmann. I was gone longer than I expected." The fact that the child still lived, that she was again in his presence, the absorbing act of caring for him seemed to have calmed her.

"It is nothing, what I do," answered Mrs. Breitmann, and turned away reluctantly, the tears running on her cheeks. "When you go again, I come always, Mrs. Garvin. Ach!"

Her exclamation was caused by the sight of the tall figure and black coat of the rector, and as she left the room, Mrs. Garvin turned. And he noticed in her eyes the same expression of dread they had held when she had protested against his coming.

"Please don't think that I'm not thankful—" she faltered.

"I am not offering you charity," he said. "Can you not take from other human beings what you have accepted from this woman who has just left?"

"Oh, sir, it isn't that!" she cried, with a look of trust, of appeal that was new, "I would do anything—I will do anything. But my husband—he is so bitter against the church, against ministers! If he came home and found you here—"

"I know—many people feel that way," he assented, "too many. But you cannot let a prejudice stand in the way of saving the boy's life, Mrs. Garvin."

"It is more than that. If you knew, sir—"

"Whatever it is," he interrupted, a little sternly, "it must not interfere. I will talk to your husband."

She was silent, gazing at him now questioningly, yet with the dawning hope of one whose strength is all but gone, and who has found at last a stronger to lean upon.

The rector took the fan from her arrested hand and began to ply it.

"Listen, Mrs. Garvin. If you had come to the church half an hour later,
I should have been leaving the city for a place far distant."

"You were going away? You stayed on my account?"

"I much prefer to stay, if I can be of any use, and I think I can. I am sure I can. What is the matter with the child?"

"I don't know, sir—he just lies there listless and gets thinner and thinner and weaker and weaker. Sometimes he feels sick, but not often. The doctor don't seem to know."

What doctor have you?"

"His name is Welling. He's around the corner."

"Exactly," said the rector. "This is a case for Dr. Jarvis, who is the best child specialist in the city. He is a friend of mine, and I intend to send for him at once. And the boy must go to a hospital—"

"Oh, I couldn't, sir."

He had a poignant realization of the agony behind the cry. She breathed quickly through her parted lips, and from the yearning in her tired eyes —as she gazed at the poor little form—he averted his glance.

"Now, Mrs. Garvin, you must be sensible," he said. "This is no place for a sick child. And it is such a nice little hospital, the one I have in mind, and so many children get well and strong there," he added, cheerfully.

"He wouldn't hear of it." Hodder comprehended that she was referring to her husband. She added inconsequently: "If I let him go, and he never came back! Oh, I couldn't do it—I couldn't."

He saw that it was the part of wisdom not to press her, to give her time to become accustomed to the idea. Come back—to what? His eye wandered about the room, that bespoke the last shifts of poverty, for he knew that none but the desperate were driven to these Dalton Street houses, once the dwellings

of the well-to-do, and all the more pitiful for the contrast. The heated air reeked with the smell of stale cooking. There was a gas stove at one side, a linoleum-covered table in the centre, littered with bottles, plates, and pitchers, a bed and chairs which had known better days, new obviously bruised and battered by many enforced movings. In one corner was huddled a little group of toys.

He was suddenly and guiltily aware that the woman had followed his glance.

"We had them in Alder Street," she said. "We might have been there yet, if we hadn't been foolish. It's a pretty street, sir—perhaps you know it—you take the Fanshawe Avenue cars to Sherman Heights. The air is like the country there, and all the houses are new, and Dicky had a yard to play in, and he used to be so healthy and happy in it. . . We were rich then,—not what you'd call rich," she added apologetically, "but we owned a little home with six rooms, and my husband had a good place as bookkeeper in a grocery house, and every year for ten years we put something by, and the boy came. We never knew how well off we were, until it was taken away from us, I guess. And then Richard—he's my husband—put his savings into a company—he thought it was so safe, and we were to get eight per cent—and the company failed, and he fell sick and lost his place, and we had to sell the house, and since he got well again he's been going around trying for something else. Oh, he's tried so hard,—every day, and all day long. You wouldn't believe it, sir. And he's so proud. He got a job as porter, but he wasn't able to hold it—he wasn't strong enough. That was in April. It almost broke my heart to see him getting shabby—he used to look so tidy. And folks don't want you when you're shabby." . . .

There sprang to Hodder's mind a sentence in a book he had recently read: "Our slums became filled with sick who need never have been sick; with derelicts who need never have been abandoned."

Suddenly, out of the suffocating stillness of the afternoon a woman's voice was heard singing a concert-hall air, accompanied by a piano played with vigour and abandon. And Hodder, following the sound, looked out across the grimy yard—to a window in the apartment house opposite.

"There's that girl again," said the mother, lifting her head. "She does sing nice, and play, poor thing! There was a time when I wouldn't have wanted to listen. But Dicky liked it so . . . . It's the very tune he loved. He don't seem to hear it now. He don't even ask for Mr. Bentley any more."

"Mr. Bentley?" the rector repeated. The name was somehow familiar to him.

The piano and the song ceased abruptly, with a bang.

"He lives up the street here a way—the kindest old gentleman you ever saw. He always has candy in his pockets for the children, and it's a sight to see them follow him up and down the sidewalk. He takes them to the Park in the cars on Saturday afternoons. That was all Dicky could think about at first—would he be well enough to go with Mr. Bentley by Saturday? And he was forever asking me to tell Mr. Bentley he was sick. I saw the old gentleman on the street to-day, and I almost went up to him. But I hadn't the courage."

The child moaned, stirred, and opened his eyes, gazing at them feverishly, yet without seeming comprehension. She bent over him, calling his name . . . . Hodder thrust the fan into her hand, and rose.

"I am going to telephone Dr. Jarvis," he said, "and then I shall come back, in order to be here when he arrives."

She looked up at him.

"Oh, thank you, sir,—I guess it's for the best—"

Her voice died away, and the rector, seeking for the cause, saw that a man had entered the room. He walked up to the couch and stood for a moment staring moodily at the child, while the woman watched him, transfixed.

"Richard!" she said.

He paid no attention to her. She turned to Hodder. "This is my husband, sir. . . . Richard, I went into the church—just for a moment—I—I couldn't help it, and this gentleman—the minister—came home with me. He wanted to—he thought I was sick. And now he's going out to get the best doctor in the city for Dicky."

The man turned suddenly and confronted the rector.

"Why don't you let him die, you and your church people?" he asked.
"You've done your worst to kill him."

The woman put her hand fearfully, imploringly on the man's arm.

"Richard!" she whispered.

But as Hodder glanced from the derelict beside him a wave of comprehension passed through him that swept him clean of indignation, of resentment. And this man had been prosperous and happy!

"There is but one way to save the boy's life, Mr. Garvin," he said, "and that is to put him in charge of Dr. Jarvis."

The man made no reply, but went over to the window, staring out into the yard. There was something vaguely ominous in his attitude. The rector watched him a moment, and then turned to the mother.

"You must not lose hope," he told her.

She looked at him with terror-stricken eyes that sought to be grateful. He had picked up his hat from a corner of the littered table, and started to leave, when Garvin, by a sudden movement, planted himself in the doorway. Whether he had been drinking, or whether he were merely crazed by misfortune and the hopeless search in the heat for employment, and by lack of proper nourishment, Hodder could not say. There was a light in his eyes like that in a wounded animal's; and although he was thin and slight, he had the concentrated power of desperation.

"Say, what church do you come from?" he demanded.

"From St. John's," said the rector.

"Eldon Parr's church?"

Hodder started, in spite of himself, at the name.

"Mr. Parr is a member of the congregation."

"Come off! He owns it and runs it, the same as he does everything else in this town. Maybe you don't think I read the Sunday papers. Say, I was respectable once, and had a good place. You wouldn't believe it, would you?"

Hodder hesitated. There was obviously no way to pass the man except by using physical force.

"If you have anything to say to me, Mr. Garvin, I shall be glad to talk to you later. You must not stop me now," he said with a touch of severity.

"You'll listen to me, right here and now," cried Garvin. "If you think I am going to let Eldon Parr's minister, or any one else belonging to him, save that boy's life, you've got another guess comin'. That's all. I'd rather have him die—d'ye hear? I'd rather have him die."

The woman behind them whimpered . . . . The name was ringing like a knell in Hodder's head—Eldon Parr! Coming, as it had, like a curse from the lips of this wretched, half-demented creature, it filled his soul with dismay. And the accusation had in it the profound ring of truth. He was Eldon Parr's minister, and it was Eldon Parr who stood between him and his opportunity.

"Why do you speak of Mr. Parr?" he asked, though the question cost him a supreme effort.

"Why do I speak of him? My God, because he ruined me. If it hadn't been for him, damn him, I'd have a home, and health and happiness to-day, and the boy would be well and strong instead of lying there with the life all but gone out of him. Eldon Parr did for me, and now he's murdered my son—that's why I mention him."

In the sudden intensity of his feeling, Hodder seized Garvin by the arms —arms that were little more than skin and bone. The man might be crazed, he might be drunk: that he believed what he was saying there could be no question. He began to struggle violently, but the rector was strong.

"Be still," he commanded. And suddenly, overcome less by the physical power than by the aspect of the clergyman, an expression of bewilderment came into his eyes, and he was quiet. Hodder dropped his arms. "I do not intend to go until I hear what you have to say. It would be useless, at any rate, since your child's life is at stake. Tell me how Mr. Parr has ruined you."

Garvin stared at him, half in suspicion, half in amazement.

"I guess you never knew of his ruining anybody, did you?" he demanded sullenly. "Well, I'll tell you all right, and you can go and tell him.

He won't care much—he's used to it by this time, and he gets square with God by his churches and charities. Did you ever hear of a stock called Consolidated Tractions?"

Consolidated Tractions! In contrast to the sordid misery and degradation of this last refuge of the desperate Hodder saw the lofty, panelled smoking room at Francis Ferguson's, and was listening again to Wallis Plimpton's cynical amusement as to how he and Everett Constable and Eldon Parr himself had "gat out" before the crash; "got out" with all the money of the wretch who now stood before him! His parishioners! his Christians! Oh God!

The man was speaking in his shrill voice.

"Well, I was a Traction sucker, all right, and I guess you wouldn't have to walk more than two blocks to find another in this neighbourhood. You think Eldon Parr's a big, noble man, don't you? You're proud to run his church, ain't you? You wouldn't believe there was a time when I thought he was a big man, when I was kind of proud to live in the same city with him. She'll tell you how I used to come home from the store and talk about him after supper, and hope that the kid there would grow up into a financier like Eldon Parr. The boys at the store talked about him: he sort of laid hold on our imaginations with the library he gave, and Elmwood Park, and the picture of the big organ in your church in the newspapers—and sometimes, Mary and me and the boy, in the baby carriage, on Sunday afternoons we used to walk around by his house, just to look at it. You couldn't have got me to believe that Eldon Parr would put his name to anything that wasn't straight.

"Then Consolidated Tractions came along, with Parr's, name behind it. Everybody was talking about it, and how it was payin' eight per cent. from the start, and extra dividends and all, and what a marvel of finance it was. Before the kid came, as soon as I married her, we began to save up for him. We didn't go to the theatres or nothing. Well, I put it all, five thousand dollars, into Consolidated. She'll tell you how we sat up half the night after we got the first dividend talking about how we'd send the kid to college, and after we went to bed we couldn't sleep. It wasn't more than a year after that we began to hear things—and we couldn't sleep for sure, and the dividends stopped and the stock tumbled. Even then I wouldn't believe it of him, that he'd take poor people's money that way when he had more than he knew what to do with. I made up my mind if I went down to see him and told him about it, he'd make it right. I asked the boss for an hour off, and headed for the Parr building—I've been there as much as fifty times since—but he don't bother with small fry. The clerks laugh when they see me comin' . . . I got sick worryin', and when I was strong enough to be around they'd filled my job at the grocery, and it wasn't long before we had to move out of our little home in Alder Street. We've been movin' ever since," he cried, and tears of weakness were in his eyes, "until we've come to this, and we'll have to get out of here in another week. God knows where we'll go then."

Hodder shuddered.

"Then I found out how he done it—from a lawyer. The lawyer laughed at me, too. Say, do you wonder I ain't got much use for your church people? Parr got a corporation lawyer named Langmaid—he's another one of your millionnaire crooks—to fix it up and get around the law and keep him out of jail. And then they had to settle with Tim Beatty for something like three hundred thousand. You know who Beatty is—he owns this city—his saloon's around here on Elm Street. All the crooks had to be squared. Say," he demanded aggressively, "are Parr and Langmaid any better than Beatty, or any of the hold-up men Beatty covers? There's a street-walker over there in those flats that's got a million times more chance to get to heaven—if there is any—than those financiers, as they call 'emselves —I ain't much on high finance, but I've got some respect for a second story man now—he takes some risks! I'll tell you what they did, they bought up the short car lines that didn't pay and sold 'em to themselves for fifty times as much as they were worth; and they got controlling interests in the big lines and leased 'em to themselves with dividends guaranteed as high as eighteen per cent. They capitalized the Consolidated for more millions than a little man like me can think of, and we handed 'em our money because we thought they were honest. We thought the men who listed the stock on the Exchange were honest. And when the crash came, they'd got away with the swag, like any common housebreakers. There were dummy directors, and a dummy president. Eldon Parr didn't have a share—sold out everything when she went over two hundred, but you bet he kept his stock in the leased lines, which guarantee more than they earn. He cleaned up five million, they say.... My money—the money that might give that boy fresh air, and good doctors ....Say, you believe in hell, don't you? You tell Eldon Parr to keep his charity, —he can't send any of it in here. And you'd better go back to that church of his and pray to keep his soul out of hell." . . .

His voice, which had risen even to a higher pitch, fell silent. And all at once, without warning, Garvin sank, or rather tumbled upon the bed, sobbing in a way that was terrible to see. The wife stole across the room, sat down beside him, and laid her hand on his shoulder. . . .

In spite of the intensity of his own anguish, Hodder was conscious of a curious detachment; and for months afterward particular smells, the sight of a gasoline stove, a certain popular tune gave him a sharp twinge of pain. The acid distilling in his soul etched the scene, the sounds, the odours forever in his memory: a stale hot wind from the alley rattled the shutter-slats, and blew the door to; the child stirred; and above the strident, irregular weeping rose main, in ironical contrast, the piano and the voice across the yard. In that glimpse he had into the heart of life's terrible mystery he momentarily understood many things: he knew that behind the abandon of the woman's song was the same terror which reigned in the room in which he stood . . . .

There were voices in the passageway without, a woman saying in a German accent,—"It is here, sir."

There was a knock at the door . . . .

CHAPTER XI

THE LOST PARISHIONER

I

Hodder opened the door. In the dingy passageway he perceived a tall figure which immediately turned out to be that of an old gentleman. In spite of the heat, he wore a long coat and an old-fashioned, high collar, a black tie, under which was exposed a triangle of immaculate, pleated linen. In one hand he held a gold-headed stick, a large tall hat of which the silk nap was a little rubbed, a string sustaining a parcel, the brown paper wrapping of which was soaked: in the other, a manila bag containing lemons.

His head was bent forward a little, the high dome of it was bald, but the white hair clustered thickly behind the temples. The face was clean-shaven, the cheeks touched with red, the nose high and dominating, distinctly philanthropic. And the blue eyes rested on the clergyman with a benevolence unfeigned.

"Good afternoon, sir," the old gentleman said; "I am told Mrs. Garvin lives here."

Before the rector could reply Mrs. Garvin herself stood between them.

"It's Mr. Bentley!" she exclaimed.

"I fear I'm intruding, ma'am," he said. "But some of Dicky's little friends have just informed me that he is ill, and I have taken the liberty of calling to inquire."

Mr. Bentley entered the room,—simple words to express that which was in some sort an event. He laid his parcels on the table, his hat and stick on a chair, and stood looking down in silence at the thin little form on the couch. Presently he turned.

"I'm afraid he's very ill, ma'am," he said gently. "You have your own doctor, no doubt. But if you will permit me, as a friend, to make a suggestion, we have in the city one of the best child specialists in the United States, who is never weary of curing these little ones,—Dr. Jarvis, and I shall be happy to ask him to come and see Dicky."

Mrs. Garvin glanced at Hodder, who came forward.

"I was just about to telephone for Dr. Jarvis, Mr. Bentley, when you arrived. I am Mr. Hodder, of St. John's."

"How do you do, sir?" The kindly eyes, alight with a gentle flame, rested upon the rugged figure of the rector. "I am glad that you, too, agree that Dr. Jarvis is advisable, Mr. Hodder."

There was a sound from the bed. Garvin had got to his feet and was staring wildly, with reddened lids.

"Are you Horace Bentley?" he demanded.

"That is my name, sir," Mr. Bentley replied. His expression of surprise was only momentary. And in all his life Hodder had never beheld a greater contrast in human beings than between that gracious and

courtly old man and the haggard, unkempt, unshaved, and starving outcast facing him. Something like a film came over Garvin's eyes.

"He ruined you, too, twenty years back—Eldon Parr did for you, too. Oh, I know his record, I've followed his trail—he got all the Grantham stock that would have made you a millionnaire!"

"Ah," replied Mr. Bentley, smiling to humour him, "that's something I have no wish to be, sir,—a millionaire." He met the frightened gaze of the wife. "Good day, ma'am. If you will allow me, I'll come to-morrow morning to learn what Dr. Jarvis will have had to say. Have courage, ma'am, have courage. You may have faith in Dr. Jarvis."

The poor woman was incapable of speech. Mr. Bentley picked up his hat and stick.

"I've taken the liberty of bringing Dicky a little ice and a few lemons."
His eyes rested again on the couch by the window. Then he turned to
Garvin, who stood mutely, staring. "Good evening, sir," he said.
"We must look for the best."

II

They went down the stairs of the shabby and battered house, stairs by the side of which holes had been knocked through the faded wall-paper—scars of frequent movings. The sound and smell of frying came out of the open door of what once had been the parlour, and on the front steps a little girl darted past them with a pitcher of beer. When they reached the sidewalk Mr. Bentley halted.

"If you were intending to telephone Dr. Jarvis, Mr. Hodder, there is a public station in the drug store just above here. I know that clergymen are busy persons, and I am passing it, if you are pressed for time."

"My only concern is to get Jarvis here," said the rector.
"If I may go with you—"

Once again in the hot sunlight, reaction had set in. Hodder was suddenly unstrung, and the kindly old gentleman beside him seemed for the instant the only fixture in a chaotic universe. It was not until later reflection that he realized Mr. Bentley might, by an intuitive sympathy, a depth of understanding, have drained something of his state, since the incidents which followed were to be accounted for on no other grounds. In such elemental moments the frail conventions are swept away: Mr. Bentley, whoever he might be, was no longer a stranger; and it seemed wholly natural to be walking with him up the street, to hear him saying, —not with perfunctory politeness but in a tone that was itself an invitation,—"With pleasure, sir, we'll go together. And let us trust that the doctor will be at home."

Nor did Hodder stop to wonder, then, why Mr. Bentley should have sought in his conversation to dissipate something of the hideous blackness of a tragedy which must have moved him profoundly. How fortunate, he declared, that they should have arrived before it was too late! For it was plain to be seen that these Garvins were good people who had been broken by adversity . . . . The boy had struck him particularly—a lovable, merry little fellow whose clothes, Mr. Bentley observed, were always neatly mended, betokening a mother with self-respect and character. He even spoke of Garvin: adversity, worry, the heat, constant brooding over a happier past and an uncertain future—was it surprising that the poor man's mind had become unhinged? They must make some plan for Garvin, said Mr. Bentley, get the man and his wife into the country for a while amongst kindly people. This might no doubt be arranged....

"Here we are, sir."

The familiar smell of drugs, the sound of the trickling water in the soda fountain roused Hodder to reality, to action, and he hurried into the telephone booth, fumbled in the dog-eared book, got Dr. Jarvis's number and called it. An eternity seemed to elapse before he had a reply, heard his coin jangling in the bog, recognized the voice of the great doctor's secretary. Yes, the doctor was in would he speak to Mr. Hodder, of St. John's? . . . An interval, during which Hodder was suddenly struck with this designation of himself. Was he still of St. John's, then? An aeon might have elapsed since he had walked down the white marble of its aisle toward the crouching figure in the pew. He was not that man, but another—and still Mr. Hodder, of St. John's. . . . Then he heard the specialist say, "Hello, Mr. Hodder, what can I do for you?" Heard his own voice in reply, explaining the case. Could the doctor find time? The doctor could: he was never too busy to attend to the poor,—though he did not say so: he would be there—by half-past six. The rector hung up the receiver, opened the door of the booth and mopped his brow, for the heat was stifling.

"The doctor will go," he explained in answer to Mr. Bentley's inquiring look.

"Now, sir," said the old gentleman, when they were out of the store, "we have done all that we can for the time being. I do not live far from here. Perhaps you would give me the pleasure of taking supper with me, if you have no other engagement."

No other engagement! Not until then did Hodder remember his empty rooms in the parish house, and the train which was to have borne him away from all this already speeding northward. He accepted gratefully, nor did he pause to speculate upon the mystery by which the stream of his life seemed so suddenly to have been diverted. He had, indeed, no sense of mystery in the presence of this splendidly sane, serene old man, any more than the children who ran after him from the dingy yards and passages, calling his name, clinging to the skirts of his coat. These accepted him simply as an anomalous fact in their universe, grinned at his pleasantries, and held up grimy little hands for the kidney-shaped candy beans he drew forth from his capacious pockets. In the intervals he reminisced to the rector about the neighbourhood.

"It seems but a short while ago when the trees met overhead—magnificent trees they were. The asphalt and the soot killed them. And there were fruit trees in that yard"—he pointed with his stick to a littered sun parched plot adjoining a battered mansion—"all pink and white with blossoms in the spring. Mr. Hadley lived there—one of our forgotten citizens. He is dead and gone now and his family scattered. That other house, where the boy lies, belonged to Mr. Villars, a relation of the Atterbury family, and I can recall very well a little girl with a pink sash and a white dress who used to come running out to meet me with flowers in her hands. Incredible as it may seem, she picked them in that yard. I thought of her as I went in, how fresh and happy she used to be, and what a different place this was for children then. She must have some of her own by this time."

The character of the street had changed to what might be called shabby-genteel, and they stopped before a three-story brick house—one of a row—that showed signs of scrupulous care. The steps were newly scrubbed, the woodwork neatly painted.

"This is where I live, sir," said Mr. Bentley, opening the door with a latchkey and leading the way into a high room on the right, darkened and cool, and filled with superb, old-fashioned rosewood furniture. It was fitted up as a library, with tall shelves reaching almost to the ceiling.

An old negro appeared, dressed in a swallow-tailed coat. His hair was as white as his master's, and his face creased with age.

"Sam," said Mr. Bentley, "I have brought home a gentleman for supper."

"Yassah, Misteh Ho'ace. I was jest agwine to open up de blin's."

He lifted the wire screens and flung back the shutters, beamed on the rector as he relieved him of his hat, and noiselessly retired. Curiosity, hitherto suppressed by more powerful feelings, awoke in Hodder speculations which ordinarily would have been aroused before: every object in the room bespoke gentility, was eloquent of a day when wealth was honoured and respected: photographs, daguerreotypes in old-fashioned frames bore evidence of friendships of the past, and over the marble mantel hung a portrait of a sweet-faced woman in the costume of the thirties, whose eyes reminded Hodder of Mr. Bentley's. Who was she?

Hodder wondered. Presently he found himself before a photograph on the wall beyond, at which he had been staring unconsciously.

"Ah, you recognize it," said Mr. Bentley.

"St. John's!"

"Yes," Mr. Bentley repeated, "St. John's." He smiled at Hodder's glance of bewilderment, and put his hand on the younger man's arm. "That picture was taken before you were born, sir, I venture to say—in 1869. I am very fond of it, for it gives the church in perspective, as you see. That was Mr. Gore's house"—he indicated a square, heavily corniced mansion—"where the hotel now stands, and that was his garden, next the church, where you see the trees above the wall."

The rector turned again and looked at his host, who, was gazing at the picture thoughtfully.

"I ought to have remembered," he said. "I have seen your name in the church records, sir, and I have heard Mr. Waring speak of you."

"My dear Mr. Hodder, there is no reason why you should have known me. A great many years have passed since I was a parishioner of St. John's —a great many years."

"But it was you," the rector began, uncertainly, and suddenly spoke with conviction, "it was you who chose the architect, who did more than other men to make the church what it is."

"Whatever I may have done," replied Mr. Bentley, with simple dignity, "has brought its reward. To this day I have not ceased to derive pleasure from it, and often I go out of my way, through Burton Street, although the view is cramped. And sometimes," he added, with the hint of a twinkle in his eye, "I go in. This afternoon is not the first time I have seen you, Mr. Hodder."

"But—?" said the rector. He stared at the other's face, and the question died on his lips.

"You wonder why I am no longer a parishioner. The time came when I could not afford to be." There was no hint of reproach in his voice, of bitterness. He spoke regretfully, indeed, but as one stating an incontrovertible fact. "I lost my fortune, I could not keep my pew, so I deeded it back to the church. My old friends, Mrs. Dimock and Asa Waring, and others, too, were very kind. But I could not accept their hospitality."

Hodder bowed his head in silence. What thundered indictment of the Church of Christ could have been as severe, as wholly condemning as these few words so dispassionately uttered by the man beside him?

The old darky entered, and announced supper.

Hodder had lost his way, yet a hand had been held out to him, and he seized it. With a sense of being led, psychically as well as physically, he followed Mr. Bentley into a large bedroom, where a high, four-posted bed lifted a pleated canopy toward the ceiling. And after he had washed his hands they entered a dining-room looking out upon a little yard in the rear, which had been transformed into a garden. Roses, morning glories, and nasturtiums were growing against the walls; a hose lay coiled upon the path; the bricks, baked during the day, were splashed with water; the leaves and petals were wet, and the acrid odour of moist earth, mingling with perfumes, penetrated the room. Hodder paused in the window.

"Sam keeps our flowers alive," he heard Mr. Bentley say, "I don't know how."

"I scrubs 'em, sah," said Sam. "Yassah, I washes 'em like chilluns."

He found himself, at Mr. Bentley's request, asking grace, the old darky with reverently bent head standing behind his master; sitting down at a mahogany table that reflected like a mirror the few pieces of old silver, to a supper of beaten biscuits that burned one's fingers, of 'broiled chicken and coffee, and sliced peaches and cream. Mr. Bentley was talking of other days—not so long gone by when the great city had been a village, or scarcely more. The furniture, it seemed, had come from his own house in what was called the Wilderness Road, not far from the river banks, over the site of which limited trains now rolled on their way eastward toward the northernmost of the city's bridges. He mentioned many names, some remembered, some forgotten, like his own; dwelt on pleasures and customs gone by forever.

"A little while after I moved in here, I found that one old man could not fill the whole of this house, so I let the upper floors," he explained, smilingly. "Some day I must introduce you to my tenants, Mr. Hodder."

By degrees, as Hodder listened, he became calm. Like a child, he found himself distracted, talking, asking questions: and the intervals grew longer between the recurrent surges of fear when the memory rose before him of the events of the day,—of the woman, the child, and the man: of Eldon Parr and this deed he had done; hinting, as it did, of closed chambers of other deeds yet to be opened, of countless, hidden miseries still to be revealed: when he heard once more the tortured voice of the banker, and the question: "How would you like to live in this house —alone?" In contrast, now he beheld the peace in the face of the man whose worldly goods Eldon Parr had taken, and whom he had driven out of the church. Surely, this man had found a solution! . . . What was it?

Hodder thought of the child, of the verdict of Dr. Jarvis, but he lingered on, loth to leave,—if the truth be told—afraid to leave; drawing strength from his host's calm, wondering as to the source of it, as to the life which was its expression; longing, yet not presuming, to question. The twilight deepened, and the old darky lit a lamp and led the way back to the library.

"Sam," said Mr. Bentley, "draw up the armchair for Mr. Hodder beside the window. It is cooler there."

"I ought to go," Hodder said. "I ought to see how the child is. Jarvis will have been there by this time, and there may be necessaries—"

"Jarvis will have attended to that," Mr. Bentley replied. "Sit down, Mr. Hodder. I am not sure that, for the present, we have not done all in this case that is humanly possible."

"You mean," said the rector, "that they will accept nothing from me." It came from him, spontaneously, like a cry. He had not meant to say it. "I don't blame them. I don't blame them for losing their faith in God and man, in the Church. I ought to have seen it before, but I was blind, incredibly blind—until it struck me in the face. You saw it, sir, and you left a church from which the poor are thrust out, which refuses to heed the first precept of its Master."

"I saw it," answered Mr. Bentley, "but I could do nothing. Perhaps you can do—something."

"Ah!" Hodder exclaimed sharply, "why do you say that? The Church is paralyzed, chained. How can she reach these wretched people who are the victims of the ruthless individualism and greed of those who control her? You know—that man, Mr. Bentley." (Hodder could not bring himself to pronounce Eldon Parr's name.) "I had an affection for him, I pitied him, because he suffers—"

"Yes," echoed Mr. Bentley, "he suffers."

Hodder was momentarily arrested by the sadness of his tone.

"But he doesn't know why he suffers—he cannot be made to see," the rector went on. "And he is making others suffer,—hideously, while he imagines himself a Christian. He is the Church to that miserable, hopeless wretch we saw to-day, and to hundreds of the same kind whom he has driven to desperation. And I—who am supposed to be the vicar of God—I am powerless. They have a contempt for me, a just contempt. They thrust me out of their doors, bid me to return and minister to their oppressors. You were right to leave, and I should have left long since."

He had not spoken with violence, or with a lack of control. He seemed rather to have regained a mastery of himself, and felt as a man from whom the shackles have been struck, proclaiming his freedom. Mr. Bentley's eyes lighted in involuntary response as he gazed at the figure and face before him. He pressed his hands together.

"If you will forgive a curiosity, Mr. Hodder, that is somewhat due to my interest in a church with which I have many precious associations, may I ask if this is a sudden determination on your part?"

"No," Hodder said. "I have known ever since I came here that something was wrong, but at first I couldn't see it, and after that I wouldn't see it. That is about what happened, as I look back on it.

"But the farther in I went," Hodder continued, "the more tangled and bewildered I became. I was hypnotized, I think," he added with a gesture,—"hypnotized, as a man is who never takes his eyes from a pattern. I wanted to get at this neighbourhood—Dalton Street—I mean, and finally I agreed to the establishment of a settlement house over here, to be paid for largely by Eldon Parr and Francis Ferguson. I couldn't see the folly of such an undertaking—the supreme irony of it, until—until it was pointed out to me." He hesitated; the remembrance of Alison Parr ran through him, a thread of pain. "And even then I tried to dodge the issue, I tried to make myself believe that good might flow out of evil; that the Church, which is supposed to be founded on the highest ideal ever presented to man, might compromise and be practical, that she might accept money which had been wrung from a trusting public by extortion, by thinly disguised thievery such as this Consolidated Tractions Company fraud, and do good with it! And at last I made up my mind to go away, to-day, to a quiet place where I might be alone, and reflect, when by a singular circumstance I was brought into contact with this man, Garvin. I see now, clearly enough, that if I had gone, I should never have come back."

"And you still intend to go?" Mr. Bentley asked.

Hodder leaned his elbow against the mantel. The lamplight had a curious effect on Mr. Bentley's face.

"What can I do?" he demanded. The question was not aimed directly at his host—it was in the nature of a renewed appeal to a tribunal which had been mute, but with which he now seemed vaguely aware of a certain contact. "Even supposing I could bring myself to accept the compromise —now that I see it clearly, that the end justifies the means—what good could I accomplish? You saw what happened this afternoon—the man would have driven me out if, it hadn't been for you. This whole conception of charity is a crime against civilization—I had to have that pointed out to me, too,—this system of legalized or semi-legalized robbery and the distribution of largesse to the victims. The Church is doing wrong, is stultifying herself in encouraging it. She should set her face rigidly against it, stand for morality and justice and Christianity in government, not for pauperizing. It is her mission to enlighten these people, all people—to make them self-respecting, to give them some notion of the dignity of their souls and their rights before God and man."

"Aren't you yourself suggesting," said Mr. Bentley, "the course which will permit you to remain?"

Hodder was silent. The thought struck him with tremendous force. Had he suggested it? And how—why? Could it be done? Could he do it or begin it?

"We have met at last in a singular way," he heard Mr. Bentley going on, "in a way that has brushed aside the conventions, in a way—I am happy to say—that has enabled you to give me your confidence. And I am an old man,—that has made it easier. I saw this afternoon, Mr. Hodder, that you were troubled, although you tried to hide it."

"I knew that you saw it," Hodder said.

"Nor was it difficult for me to guess something of the cause of it. The same thing has troubled me."

"You?"

"Yes," Mr. Bentley answered. "I left St. John's, but the habits and affections of a lifetime are not easily severed. And some time before I left it I began to have visions of a future for it. There was a question, many years ago, as to whether a new St. John's should not be built in the West End, on a site convenient to the parishioners, and this removal I opposed. Mr. Waring stood by me. We foresaw the day when this district would be—what it is now—the precarious refuge of the unfortunate in the battle of life, of just such unhappy families as the Garvins, of miserable women who sell themselves to keep alive. I thought of St. John's, as you did, as an oasis in a desert of misery and vice. At that time I, too, believed in the system of charities which you have so well characterized as pauperizing."

"And now?"

Mr. Bentley smiled, as at a reminiscence.

"My eyes were opened," he replied, and in these simple words summed up and condemned it all. "They are craving bread, and we fling them atones. I came here. It was a house I owned, which I saved from the wrecks, and as I look back upon what the world would call a misfortune, sir, I can see that it was a propitious event, for me. The street 'ran down,' as the saying goes. I grew gradually to know these people, my new neighbours, largely through their children, and I perceived many things I had not dreamed of—before then. I saw how the Church was hampered, fettered; I saw why they disliked and distrusted it."

"And yet you still believed that it had a mission?" Hodder interrupted.
He had been listening with rapt attention.

"I still believed it," said Mr. Bentley. "My conception of that mission changed, grew, and yet it seemed further and further from fulfilment. And then you came to St. John's."

"I!" The cry was involuntary.

"You," Mr. Bentley repeated. "Sometimes," he added whimsically, "I go there, as I have told you. I saw you, I heard you preach. I talked to my friend Waring about you. I saw that your eyes were not opened, but I think I had a certain presentiment, for which I do not pretend to account, that they would be opened."

"You mean," said the rector, "that if I believe in the mission of the Church as I have partially stated it here tonight, I—should stay and fight for it."

"Precisely," Mr. Bentley replied.

There was a note of enthusiasm, almost of militancy in the old gentleman's tone that surprised and agitated Hodder. He took a turn up and down the room before he answered.

"I ought to tell you that the view I expressed a moment ago is new to me. I had not thought of it before, and it is absolutely at variance with any previous ideas I have held. I can see that it must involve, if carried to its logical conclusion, a change in the conception of Christianity I have hitherto held."

He was too intent upon following up the thought to notice Mr. Bentley's expression of assent.

"And suppose," he asked, "I were unable to come to any conclusion? I will be frank, Mr. Bentley, and confess to you that at present I cannot see my way. You have heard me preach—you know what my beliefs have been. They are shattered. And, while I feel that there is some definite connection between the view of the Church which I mentioned and her message to the individual, I do not perceive it clearly. I am not prepared at present to be the advocate of Christianity, because I do not know what

Christianity is. I thought I knew.

"I shall have to begin all over again, as though I had never taken orders, submit to a thorough test, examine the evidence impartially. It is the only way. Of this much I am sure, that the Church as a whole has been engaged in a senseless conflict with science and progressive thought, that she has insisted upon the acceptance of facts which are in violation of reason and which have nothing to do with religion. She has taught them to me—made them, in fact, a part of me. I have clung to them as long as I can, and in throwing them over I don't know where I shall land."

His voice was measured, his words chosen, yet they expressed a withering indignation and contempt which were plainly the culmination of months of bewilderment—now replaced by a clear-cut determination.

"I do not blame any individual," he continued, "but the system by which clergymen are educated.

"I intend to stay here, now, without conducting any services, and find out for myself what the conditions are here in Dalton Street. You know those people, Mr. Bentley, you understand them, and I am going to ask you to help me. You have evidently solved the problem."

Mr. Bentley rose. And he laid a hand, which was not quite steady, on the rector's shoulder.

"Believe me, sir," he replied, "I appreciate something of what such a course must mean to you—a clergyman." He paused, and a look came upon his face, a look that might scarce have been called a smile—Hodder remembered it as a glow—reminiscent of many things. In it a life was summed ups in it understanding, beneficence, charity, sympathy, were all expressed, yet seemingly blended into one. "I do not know what my testimony may be worth to you, my friend, but I give it freely. I sometimes think I have been peculiarly fortunate. But I have lived a great many years, and the older I get and the more I see of human nature the firmer has grown my conviction of its essential nobility and goodness."

Hodder marvelled, and was silent.

"You will come here, often,—every day if you can. There are many men and women, friends of mine, whom I should like you to know, who would like to know you."

"I will, and thank you," Hodder answered. Words were inadequate for the occasion . . . .

CHAPTER XII

THE WOMAN OF THE SONG

On leaving Mr. Bentley, Hodder went slowly down Dalton Street, wondering that mere contact with another human being should have given him the resolution to turn his face once again toward the house whither he was bound. And this man had given him something more. It might hardly have been called faith; a new courage to fare forth across the Unknown—that was it; hope, faint but revived.

Presently he stopped on the sidewalk, looked around him, and read a sign in glaring, electric letters, Hotel Albert. Despite the heat, the place was ablaze with lights. Men and women were passing, pausing —going in. A motor, with a liveried chauffeur whom he remembered having seen before, was standing in front of the Rathskeller. The nightly carousal was beginning.

Hodder retraced his steps, crossed the street diagonally, came to the dilapidated gate he remembered so well, and looked up through the dusk at the house. If death had entered it, there was no sign: death must be a frequent visitor hereabouts. On the doorsteps he saw figures outlined, slatternly women and men in shirt-sleeves who rose in silence to make way for him, staring at him curiously. He plunged into the hot darkness of the hall, groped his way up the stairs and through the passage, and hesitated. A single gas jet burned low in the stagnant air, and after a moment he made out, by its dim light, a woman on her knees beside the couch, mechanically moving the tattered palm-leaf over the motionless little figure. The child was still alive. He drew a deep breath, and entered; at the sound of his step Mrs. Garvin suddenly started up.

"Richard!" she cried, and then stood staring at the rector. "Have you seen my husband, sir? He went away soon after you left."

Hodder, taken by surprise, replied that he had not. Her tone, her gesture of anxiety he found vaguely disquieting.

"The doctor has been here?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered absently. "I don't know where he can be—Richard. He didn't even wait to see the doctor. And he thinks so much of Dicky, sir, he sits here of an evening—"

Hodder sat down beside her, and taking the palm-leaf from her hand, began himself to fan the child. Something of her misgiving had communicated itself to him.

"Don't worry," he said. "Remember that you have been through a great deal, and it is natural that you should be overwrought. Your husband feels strongly. I don't blame him. And the sight of me this afternoon upset him. He has gone out to walk."

"Richard is proud," she answered simply. "He used to say he'd rather die than take charity—and now he's come to it. And it's—that man, sir, who's got on his brain, and changed him. He wasn't always like this, but now he can't seem to think of anything else. He wakes up in the night . . . . And he used to have such a sweet nature—you wouldn't have known him . . . and came home so happy in the evenings in Alder Street, often with a little fruit, or something he'd bought for us, and romp with Dicky in the yard, and I'd stand and laugh at them. Even after we'd lost our money, when he was sick that time, he didn't feel this way. It grew on him when he couldn't get work, and then he began to cut things out of the papers about Mr. Parr. And I have sometimes thought that that's kept him from getting work. He talks about it, and people don't know what to make of him. They don't know how hard he'd try if they'd give him something.". . . .

"We shall find something," said the rector, striving to throw into his voice confidence and calm. He did not dare to look at her, but continued to move the fan.

The child stirred a little. Mrs. Garvin put out her hand.

"Yes, the doctor was here. He was very kind. Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "I hope you won't think us ungrateful—and that Mr. Bentley won't. Dr. Jarvis has hopes, sir,—he says—I forget the name he called it, what Dicky has. It's something uncommon. He says it was—brought on by the heat, and want of food—good food. And he's coming himself in the morning to take him out to that hospital beyond the park—in an automobile, sir. I was just thinking what a pity it is Dicky wouldn't realize it. He's always wanted to ride in one." Suddenly her tears flowed, unheeded, and she clung to the little hand convulsively. "I don't know what I shall do without him, Sir, I don't . . . . I've always had him . . . and when he's sick, among strangers." . . .

The rector rose to the occasion.

"Now, Mrs. Garvin," he said firmly, "you must remember that there is only one way to save the boy's life. It will be easy to get you a room near the hospital, where you can see him constantly."

"I know—I know, sir. But I couldn't leave his father, I couldn't leave
Richard." She looked around distractedly. "Where is he?"

"He will come back presently," said the rector. "If not, I will look for him."

She did not reply, but continued to weep in silence. Suddenly, above the confused noises of the night, the loud notes of a piano broke, and the woman whose voice he had heard in the afternoon began once more with appalling vigour to sing. The child moaned.

Mrs. Garvin started up hysterically.

"I can't stand it—I can't stand her singing that now," she sobbed.

Thirty feet away, across the yard, Hodder saw the gleaming window from which the music came. He got to his feet. Another verse began, with more of the brazen emphasis of the concert-hall singer than ever. He glanced at the woman beside him, irresolutely.

"I'll speak to her," he said.

Mrs. Garvin did not appear to hear him, but flung herself down beside the lounge. As he seized his hat and left the room he had the idea of telephoning for a nurse, when he almost ran into some one in the upper hall, and recognized the stout German woman, Mrs. Breitmann.

"Mrs. Garvin"—he said, "she ought not to be left—"

"I am just now going," said Mrs. Breitmann. "I stay with her until her husband come."

Such was the confidence with which, for some reason, she inspired him, that he left with an easier mind.

It was not until the rector had arrived at the vestibule of the apartment house next door that something—of the difficulty and delicacy of the errand he had undertaken came home to him. Impulse had brought him thus far, but now he stood staring helplessly at a row of bells, speaking tubes, and cards. Which, for example, belonged to the lady whose soprano voice pervaded the neighbourhood? He looked up and down the street, in the vain hope of finding a messenger. The song continued: he had promised to stop it. Hodder accused himself of cowardice.

To his horror, Hodder felt stealing over him, incredible though it seemed after the depths through which he had passed, a faint sense of fascination in the adventure. It was this that appalled him—this tenacity of the flesh,—which no terrors seemed adequate to drive out. The sensation, faint as it was, unmanned him. There were still many unexplored corners in his soul.

He turned, once more contemplated the bells, and it was not until then he noticed that the door was ajar. He pushed it open, climbed the staircase, and stood in the doorway of what might be called a sitting room, his eyes fixed on a swaying back before an upright piano against the wall; his heart seemed to throb with the boisterous beat of the music. The woman's hair, in two long and heavy plaits falling below her waist, suddenly fascinated him. It was of the rarest of russet reds. She came abruptly to the end of the song.

"I beg your pardon—" he began.

She swung about with a start, her music dropping to the floor, and stared at him. Her tattered blue kimono fell away at her elbows, her full throat was bare, and a slipper she had kicked off lay on the floor beside her. He recoiled a little, breathing deeply. She stared at him.

"My God, how you scared me!" she exclaimed. Evidently a second glance brought to her a realization of his clerical costume. "Say, how did you get in here?"

"I beg your pardon," he said again, "but there is a very sick child in the house next door and I came to ask you if you would mind not playing any more to-night."

She did not reply at once, and her expression he found unsolvable. Much of it might be traced to a life which had contracted the habit of taking nothing on trust, a life which betrayed itself in unmistakable traces about the eyes. And Hodder perceived that the face, if the stamp of this expression could have been removed, was not unpleasing, although indulgence and recklessness were beginning to remould it.

"Quit stringin' me," she said.

For a moment he was at a loss. He gathered that she did not believe him, and crossed to the open window.

"If you will come here," he said, "I will show you the room where he lies. We hope to be able to take him to the hospital to-morrow." He paused a moment, and added: "He enjoyed your music very much when he was better."

The comment proved a touchstone.

"Say," she remarked, with a smile that revealed a set of surprisingly good teeth, "I can make the box talk when I get a-goin'. There's no stopping me this side of grand opera,—that's no fable. I'm not so bad for an enginoo, am I?"

Thus directly appealed to, in common courtesy he assented.

"No indeed," he said.

"That's right," she declared. "But the managers won't have it at any price. Those jays don't know anything, do they? They've only got a dream of what the public wants. You wouldn't believe it, but I've sung for 'em, and they threw me out. You wouldn't believe it, would you?"

"I must own," said the rector, "that I have never had any experience with managers."

She sat still considering him from the piano stool, her knees apart, her hands folded in her lap. Mockery came into her eyes.

"Say, what did you come in here for, honest injun?" she demanded.

He was aware of trying to speak sternly, and of failing. To save his life he could not, then, bring up before himself the scene in the little back room across the yard in its full terror and reality, reproduce his own feelings of only a few minutes ago which had impelled him hither. A month, a year might have elapsed. Every faculty was now centred on the woman in front of him, and on her life.

"Why do you doubt me?" he asked.

She continued to contemplate him. Her eyes were strange, baffling, smouldering, yellow-brown, shifting, yet not shifty: eyes with a history. Her laugh proclaimed both effrontery and uneasiness.

"Don't get huffy," she said. "The kid's sick—that's on the level, is it? You didn't come 'round to see me?" The insinuation was in her voice as well as in her words. He did not resent it, but felt an odd thrill of commingled pity and—fear.

"I came for the reason I have given you," he replied; and added, more gently: "I know it is a good deal to ask, but you will be doing a great kindness. The mother is distracted. The child, as I told you, will be taken to the hospital in the morning."

She reached out a hand and closed the piano softly.

"I guess I can hold off for to-night," she said. "Sometimes things get kind of dull—you know, when there's nothing doing, and this keeps me lively. How old is the kid?"

"About nine," he estimated.

"Say, I'm sorry." She spoke with a genuineness of feeling that surprised him. He went slowly, almost apologetically toward the door.

"Good night," he said, "and thank you."

Her look halted him.

"What's your hurry?" she demanded.

"I'm sorry," he said hastily, "but I must be going." He was, in truth, in a panic to leave.

"You're a minister, ain't you?"

"Yes," he said.

"I guess you don't think much of me, do you?" she demanded.

He halted abruptly, struck by the challenge, and he saw that this woman had spoken not for herself, but for an entire outlawed and desperate class. The fact that the words were mocking and brazen made no difference; it would have been odd had they not been so. With a shock of surprise he suddenly remembered that his inability to reach this class had been one of the causes of his despair! And now? With the realization, reaction set in, an overpowering feeling of weariness, a desire—for rest—for sleep. The electric light beside the piano danced before his eyes, yet he heard within him a voice crying out to him to stay. Desperately tired though he was, he must not leave now. He walked slowly to the table, put his hat on it and sat down in a chair beside it.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Oh, cut it out!" said the woman. "I'm on to you church folks." She laughed. "One of 'em came in here once, and wanted to pray. I made a monkey of him."

"I hope," said the rector, smiling a little, "that is not the reason why you wish me to stay."

She regarded him doubtfully.

"You're not the same sort," she announced at length.

"What sort was he?"

"He was easy,—old enough to know better—most of the easy ones are. He marched in sanctimonious as you please, with his mouth full of salvation and Bible verses." She laughed again at the recollection.

"And after that," said the rector, "you felt that ministers were a lot of hypocrites."

"I never had much opinion of 'em," she admitted, "nor of church people, either," she added, with emphasis.

"There's Ferguson, who has the department store,—he's 'way up' in church circles. I saw him a couple of months ago, one Sunday morning, driving to that church on Burton Street, where all the rich folks go. I forget the name—"

"St. John's," he supplied. He had got beyond surprise.

"St. John's—that's it. They tell me he gives a lot of money to it —money that he steals from the girls he hires. Oh, yes, he'll get to heaven—I don't think."

"How do you mean that he steals money from the girls?"

"Say, you are innocent—ain't you! Did you ever go down to that store? Do you know what a floorwalker is? Did you ever see the cheap guys hanging around, and the young swells waiting to get a chance at the girls behind the counters? Why do you suppose so many of 'em take to the easy life? I'll put you next—because Ferguson don't pay 'em enough to live on. That's why. He makes 'em sign a paper, when he hires 'em, that they live at home, that they've got some place to eat and sleep, and they sign it all right. That's to square up Ferguson's conscience. But say, if you think a girl can support herself in this city and dress on what he pays, you've got another guess comin'."

There rose up before him, unsummoned, the image of Nan Ferguson, in all her freshness and innocence, as she had stood beside him on the porch in Park Street. He was somewhat astonished to find himself defending his parishioner.

"May it not be true, in order to compete with other department stores, that Mr. Ferguson has to pay the same wages?" he said.

"Forget it. I guess you know what Galt House is? That's where women like me can go when we get all played out and there's nothing left in the game—it's on River Street. Maybe you've been there."

Hodder nodded.

"Well," she continued, "Ferguson pays a lot of money to keep that going, and gets his name in the papers. He hands over to the hospitals where some of us die—and it's all advertised. He forks out to the church. Now, I put it to you, why don't he sink some of that money where it belongs—in living wages? Because there's nothing in it for him —that's why."

The rector looked at her in silence. He had not suspected her of so much intellect. He glanced about the apartment, at the cheap portiere flung over the sofa; at the gaudy sofa cushions, two of which bore the names and colours of certain colleges. The gas log was almost hidden by dried palm leaves, a cigarette stump lay on the fender; on the mantel above were several photographs of men and at the other side an open door revealed a bedroom.

"This is a nice place, ain't it?" she observed. "I furnished it when I was on velvet—nothing was too good for me. Money's like champagne when you take the cork out, it won't keep. I was rich once. It was lively while it lasted," she added, with a sigh: "I've struck the down trail. I oughtn't, by rights, to be here fooling with you. There's nothing in it." She glanced at the clock. "I ought to get busy."

As the realization of her meaning came to him, he quivered.

"Is there no way but that?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Say, you're not a-goin' to preach, are you?"

"No," he answered, "God forbid! I was not asking the question of you."

She stared at him.

"Of who, then?"

He was silent.

"You've left me at the station. But on the level, you don't seem to know much, that's a fact. You don't think the man who owns these flats is in it for charity, do you? 'Single ladies,' like me, have to give up. And then there are other little grafts that wouldn't interest you. What church do you come from anyway?"

"You mentioned it a little while ago."

"St. John's!" She leaned back against the piano and laughed unrestrainedly. "That's a good one, to think how straight I've been talking to you."

"I'm much obliged to you," he said.

Again she gazed at him, now plainly perplexed.

"What are you giving me?"

"I mean what I say," he answered. "I am obliged to you for telling me things I didn't know. And I appreciate—your asking me to stay."

She was sitting upright now, her expression changed, her breath came more rapidly, her lips parted as she gazed at him.

"Do you know," she said, "I haven't had anybody speak to me like that for four years." Her voice betrayed excitement, and differed in tone, and she had cast off unconsciously the vulgarity of speech. At that moment she seemed reminiscent of what she must once have been; and he found himself going through an effort at reconstruction.

"Like what?" he asked.

"Like a woman," she answered vehemently.

"My name is John Hodder," he said, "and I live in the parish house, next door to the church. I should like to be your friend, if you will let me. If I can be of any help to you now, or at any other time, I shall feel happy. I promise not to preach," he added.

She got up abruptly, and went to the window. And when she turned to him again, it was with something of the old bravado.

"You'd better leave me alone, I'm no good;" she said. "I'm much obliged to you, but I don't want any charity or probation houses in mine. And honest work's a thing of the past for me—even if I could get a job. Nobody would have me. But if they would, I couldn't work any more. I've got out of the hang of it." With a swift and decisive movement she crossed the room, opened a cabinet on the wall, revealing a bottle and glasses.

"So you're bent upon going—downhill?" he said.

"What can you do to stop it?" she retorted defiantly, "Give me religion —-I guess you'd tell me. Religion's all right for those on top, but say, it would be a joke if I got it. There ain't any danger. But if I did, it wouldn't pay room-rent and board."

He sat mute. Once more the truth overwhelmed, the folly of his former optimism arose to mock him. What he beheld now, in its true aspect, was a disease of that civilization he had championed. . .

She took the bottle from the cupboard and laid it on the table.

"What's the difference?" she demanded. "It's all over in a little while, anyway. I guess you'd tell me there was a hell. But if that's so, some of your church folks'll broil, too. I'll take my chance on it, if they will." She looked at him, half in defiance, half in friendliness, across the table. "Say, you mean all right, but you're only wastin' time here. You can't do me any good, I tell you, and I've got to get busy."

"May we not at least remain friends?" he asked, after a moment.

Her laugh was a little harsh.

"What kind of friendship would that be? You, a minister, and me a woman on the town?"

"If I can stand it, I should think you might."

"Well, I can't stand it," she answered.

He got up, and held out his hand. She stood seemingly irresolute, and then took it.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night," she repeated nonchalantly.

As he went out of the door she called after him:

"Don't be afraid I'll worry the kid!"

The stale odour of cigarette smoke with which the dim corridor was charged intoxicated, threatened to overpower him. It seemed to be the reek of evil itself. A closing door had a sinister meaning. He hurried; obscurity reigned below, the light in the lower hall being out; fumbled for the door-knob, and once in the street took a deep breath and mopped his brow; but he had not proceeded half a block before he hesitated, retraced his steps, reentered the vestibule, and stooped to peer at the cards under the speaking tubes. Cheaply printed in large script, was the name of the tenant of the second floor rear, —MISS KATE MARCY. . . .

In crossing Tower Street he was frightened by the sharp clanging of a great electric car that roared past him, aflame with light. His brain had seemingly ceased to work, and he stumbled at the curb, for he was very tired. The events of the day no longer differentiated themselves in his mind but lay, a composite weight, upon his heart. At length he reached the silent parish house, climbed the stairs and searched in his pocket for the key of his rooms. The lock yielded, but while feeling for the switch he tripped and almost fell over an obstruction on the floor.

The flooding light revealed his travelling-bags, as he had piled them, packed and ready to go to the station.

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