THE MISSIONARY

BY

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Freeditorial

The Missionary

PROLOGUE

"Oh—Eny!"

"Well, you needn't be angry, Vane. I kissed you this morning, you know."

"That's no reason why you should kiss that chap, too! You're my sweetheart."

"Is she? Well, she won't be much longer, because I'm going to have her."

"Are you? Shut up, or I'll punch your head."

"You can't—and, anyhow, you daren't."

Smack!

It was a good swinging blow with the open hand across the cheek, and it left a vivid flush behind it on the somewhat sallow skin.

"Oh, if you're going to fight I shall go away, and I shan't be friends with either of you."

But as the two lads closed, the blue-eyed, golden-haired little beauty only shrank back a little nearer to the after-wheelhouse of the homeward bound P. and O. liner whose deck was the scene of this first act of the tragedy of three lives. A bright flush came into her cheeks, and a new light began to dance in her eyes as the first look of fright died out of them. The breath came and went more quickly between the half-opened lips with a low sibilant sound. They were pretty, well-cut lips, the upper short and exquisitely curved, and the lower full with the promise of a sensuous maturity.

She was only seven, but she was woman enough already to know that these two lads were fighting for her—for the favour of her smiles and the right to her kisses—and so she stayed.

She had heard in India how the tigers fought for their mates, and, with the precocity of the Anglo-Indian child, she recognised now the likeness between tigers and men—and boys. She was being fought for. These two lads, albeit they had neither of them seen their eleventh birthday, were using all their strength against each other, hammering each other's faces with their fists, wrestling and writhing, now upstanding and now on the deck at her feet, were not unlike the tigers she had heard her father tell her mother about.

She saw the hatred in their eyes, red and swollen by the impact of well-planted blows. She watched the gleam of their teeth between their cut and bleeding lips. They hated each other because they loved her—or, in their boyish way, most firmly believed they did. Their lips were cut and bleeding because she had kissed them.

The fascination of the fight grew upon her. The hot young blood began to dance in her veins. She found herself encouraging now one and then the other—always the one who was getting the worst of it for the time being—and when at last the younger and slighter but more wiry and active of them, the one who had caught the other kissing her, took adroit advantage of a roll of the ship and pitched his antagonist backwards so heavily against the wheelhouse that he dropped half-stunned to the deck, she looked proudly at the panting, bleeding victor, and gasped:

"Oh, Vane, I'm so glad you've won. You haven't quite killed him, have you? I suppose the captain would hang you if you did. I'm so sorry it was all about me. I'll never let any one else but you kiss me again. Really I won't. You may kiss me now if you like. Take my handkerchief. Oh, I don't mind the cuts. You did it for me. There! It was brave of you, for he's bigger than you. Poor Reggie, let's help him up. I suppose you'll both have to go to the doctor."

"We shall both get a jolly good licking more likely. Still, I don't care as long as you won't let him kiss you again."

"No, Vane, indeed I won't, nor anyone else for ever and ever if you'll only forgive me this time."

And then, for the first time since the fight began, her big bright blue eyes filled and grew dim with tears.

CHAPTER I

It was the evening of Boat-race day, and as usual that province of Vanity Fair whose centre is Piccadilly Circus was more or less completely given over to joyously boisterous troops of undergraduates and 'Varsity men of all academic ranks whom the great event of the year had brought together from all parts of the kingdom, and even from lands beyond the sea.

The mild saturnalia which London annually permits in honour of the historic struggle between the rival blues was at its height. The music halls were crowded to their utmost capacity, and lusty-voiced undergraduates joined enthusiastically, if not altogether tunefully, in the choruses of the songs; but the enthusiasm was perhaps highest and the crowd the greatest at the Palace, where start and race and the magnificent finish with which the struggle had ended were being shown by the American Biograph.

As the series of pictures followed each other on the screen, the cries which a few hours before had been roaring along the two banks of the river from Putney to Mortlake burst out anew from pit and gallery, circles and stalls and boxes. Cambridge had won for once after a long series of defeats, but the Oxford boys and men were cheering just as lustily and yelling themselves just as hoarse as the others, for they were all Englishmen and therefore good sportsmen.

The crush in the First Circle was terrific, but for the moment Vane Maxwell was conscious neither of the heat nor the crowding. His whole soul was in his eyes as he watched the weirdly silent and yet life-like phantoms flitting across the screen. It was only when the finish had faded into swift darkness and the thunders of applause had begun to die down that he became aware of the fact that someone was standing on one of his feet, and that just behind him someone else had got hold of his arm and was holding it with a convulsive sort of clutch.

Just then there was a lull in the applause, and he caught a faintly murmured "Oh, dear" in a feminine voice. He wrenched his foot free, and turned round just in time to slip his arm round the waist of a fainting girl and save her from falling.

The crush was loosening now, for the great attraction of the evening had passed, and a general move was being made towards the bars.

"If you please there, this young lady's fainting. Give her as much room as you can, please," he said loudly enough to be heard for some little distance round.

A number of undergraduates of both Universities managed to immediately clear a space about them, and one of his own college chums at Balliol who had come in with him said, "Take her to the bar, Maxwell, and give her a drop of brandy. Now, move up there, you fellows. Room for beauty in distress—come along!"

A couple of the stalwart attendants had also arrived on the scene by this time, and so a lane was easily made to the nearest bar. The girl opened her eyes again, looked about her for a moment, and then murmured:

"Oh, thank you so much, I think I can walk. I am getting all right now. It was the crowd and the heat. Please don't trouble. It's very good of you."

"It's no trouble at all," said Maxwell. "Come and let me give you a drop of brandy. That'll put you all right."

As they went into the bar they were followed by not a few curious glances. Men and lads looked at each other and smiled, and women looked at them and each other, also smiling, but with plainer meaning, and one or two expressed themselves openly as to the neatness with which the whole affair had been managed.

Crowded as the bar was, Maxwell had no difficulty in getting a couple of brandies and a split soda for himself and his companion. Two men sitting at one of the tables had got up to let her sit down. One of them held out his hand to Maxwell and said:

"Why, Vane, old man, is it you? In luck, as usual, I see." He said this with a glance towards the girl which brought the blood to Maxwell's cheeks. Still, he took the other's hand, and said good- humouredly:

"Good evening, Garthorne. Up for the race, I suppose? Fine fight, wasn't it? I'm glad you won, it was getting a bit monotonous. Thanks for letting us have the table. This young lady is not very well, felt a bit faint in the crowd."

"I see," said Garthorne, with another look at her which Maxwell did not altogether like. "Well, good night, old man. Be as good as you can."

As the two moved away Maxwell's memory went back to a scene which had occurred behind the wheelhouse of a P. and O. liner about ten years before, and, without exactly knowing why, he felt as if it would give him a certain amount of satisfaction to repeat it. Then he turned to the girl and said:

"I beg your pardon; I hope you haven't been waiting. You should have taken a drink at once."

"Oh, thanks, that's all right. I'm a lot better now," she said, taking up the tumbler and smiling over it at him. "Well, here's luck! It was awfully good of you to get me out of that crowd. I believe I should have fallen down if it hadn't been for you."

"Oh, please don't mention that," he said; "only too happy—I mean I was very glad I was there to do it. Here's to your complete recovery."

As he drank their eyes met over the glasses. Until now he had not really looked at her; things had been happening rather too rapidly for that. But now, as he put his glass down and began to scrutinize the half-saucy, half-demure, and altogether charming face on the other side of the table, it suddenly dawned upon him that it was exceedingly like his own.

The nut-brown hair was almost the same shade as his, but it had a gleam of gold in it which his lacked. The dark hazel eyes were bigger and softer, and were shaded by longer and darker lashes than his, but their colour and expression were very similar. The rest of the face, too, was very similar, only while his nose was almost perfectly straight, nearly pure Greek in fact, hers was just the merest trifle retroussé.

The mouths and chins were almost identical save for the fact that firmness and strength in his were replaced by softness and sweetness in hers. Not that hers were lacking in firmness, for a skilled physiognomist would have put her down at the first glance as a young lady of very decided character; but the outlines were softer, the lips were more delicate and more mobile, and, young as he was, there was a gravity in his smile which was replaced in hers by a suspicion of defiant recklessness which was not without its mournful meaning for those who had eyes to see.

"That's done me a lot of good," she said, as she finished her brandy and soda. "Now, I mustn't keep you from your friends any longer. I'm very much obliged to you indeed. Good night!"

He rose as she did, and took the neatly-gloved little hand that she held out to him over the table.

"I don't see why we should say good night just yet unless you particularly wish it," he said. "I only came here with a lot of our fellows to see the Biograph, and I shan't stop now that's over. I'm getting jolly hungry, too. If you have no other engagement suppose we were to go and have a bit of supper somewhere?"

For some reason or other which she was quite unable to define, these words, although they were spoken with perfect politeness, and although she had

heard them scores of times before without offence, now almost offended her. And yet there was no real reason why they should.

She had been out to supper with pretty nearly all sorts and conditions of men. Why should she not go with this well-groomed, athletic-looking young fellow who had already done her a considerable service, who was obviously a gentleman, and whose face and expression had now begun to strike her as so curiously like her own?

She really had no other engagement for the evening, and to refuse would be, to say the least of it, ungracious; so, after a moment's hesitation, she took her hand away and said with a quick upward glance of her eyes:

"Very well, I was just beginning to think about supper myself when I turned up out there in that absurd way, so we may as well have it together. Where were you thinking of going? Suppose we were to try the grill-room at the Troc. Of course everywhere will be pretty crowded to-night, but we have as good a chance of getting a table there as anywhere else. Besides, I know one or two of the waiters. I often go there to lunch."

"Very well," he said; "come along." And in a few minutes more they were rolling along in a hansom down Shaftesbury Avenue.

Vane Maxwell was in very good humour that night with himself and all the world. He had taken a double first in Mods., in History and Classics, after crowning a brilliant career at Eton with a Balliol Scholarship. He was stroke of his college boat, and had worked her four places up the river. In another year he might be in the 'Varsity Eight itself, and help to avenge the defeat which the Dark Blues had just suffered. The sweetheart he had won in that Homeric little battle behind the wheelhouse had been faithful to him ever since. He had an abundance of pocket money and the prospect of a fair fortune, and altogether the world appeared to be a very pleasant place indeed to live in.

When they got into the cab the girl half expected that he would slip his arm round her as others were wont to do when they had the chance, but he didn't, and she liked him all the better for it. He did, however, put his hand through her arm and draw her just a little closer to him. Then he leant back in the cab, and, as the light from a big gin palace lamp flashed on to her face, he said:

"Well, this is jolly. I'm so glad you came. I feel just in the humour for a good supper in pleasant society."

"Thank you," she said, with a little toss of her head; "but how do you know my society is going to be pleasant?"

"Oh, it couldn't be anything else," he laughed. "You are far too pretty not to be nice."

"Thanks," she said gravely. "Are all the pretty girls you know nice? Don't you find some of them horribly conceited and dull? Lots of fellows I know say so."

"Lots of fellows!" he echoed. "Then you have a pretty extensive acquaintance——"

"Why, of course I have," she interrupted, cutting him short almost roughly. Then she went on with a swift change of tone, "Don't you see that a—a girl like me has got to know plenty of fellows? It's—well, it's business, and that's the brutal truth of it."

She turned her head away and looked out of the cab window as though she didn't want him to see the expression that came over her face as she said the last few words.

But though he did not see the change in her face, the change in her voice struck him like a jarring note in a harmony that he was beginning to find very pleasant. He felt a sort of momentary resentment. He knew, of course, that it was the "brutal truth," but just then he disliked being reminded of it—especially by her. She seemed a great deal too nice for that to be true of her. There was a little pause, rather an awkward one, during which he tried to think of the proper thing to say. Of course he didn't succeed, so he just blurted out:

"Oh, never mind about brutal truths just now, little girl."

There was another pause, during which she still kept her head turned away. Then he went on with a happy inconsequence:

"By the way, has it struck you yet that we're rather like each other?"

"Is that a compliment to me or to yourself?" she said, half gravely, and yet with a belying gleam of mischief in her eyes.

"Oh, a likeness like that could only be a compliment to me, of course," he replied, and before the conversation could proceed any farther the cab stopped at the entrance to the Trocadero.

By great good luck they procured one of the little side tables in the inner room just as another couple were leaving it. One of the waiters had recognised her as she came in, and, with the astute alacrity of his kind, had taken possession of them and pre-empted the table before anyone else could get near it. There were, in fact, others waiting who had a prior right, but the gentleman in the plum coat and gold buttons made it impossible for the superintendent of the room to interfere by saying to Maxwell in his blandest tone:

"Good evening, sir; it's all right, sir. This is the table you engaged."

"He's a smart youth, that Fritz," said the girl as they sat down. "These fellows here know which side their bread's buttered on, and they look after their own customers."

"Yes, he seems to know his business," said Maxwell, "and now I suppose the question is, what are we going to have?"

Fritz had come back, and was swiftly and rapidly removing the débris left behind by their predecessors. The girl looked up at him with an air of familiarity which Maxwell didn't altogether like, and said:

"What's good for supper, Fritz? I am hungry."

"A few oysters, miss, grilled sole, and a nice little porterhouse steak between two. How's that, miss?"

She looked across at Maxwell and nodded, and he said, "Yes, I think that will do very nicely. Let's have the oysters at once, and some brown bread and butter."

"Yes, sir, certainly. Any wine, sir?"

The list was presented, opened, of course, at the champagne page.

"You'll have something fizzy, won't you?" he said, looking up from the list.

"I suppose we may as well," she said, "only I don't want you to think me too extravagant."

"Nonsense," he laughed, and then he told the waiter to bring a bottle of Kock Fils '89.

When the man had gone on his errand Maxwell said somewhat diffidently:

"By the way, we seem to be getting to know each other pretty well, but we've not exactly been introduced. I mean we don't know each other's names yet."

"Oh, introductions are not much in fashion in the world that I live in," she said with a little flush. "Of course you don't need telling which half of the world that is."

For the moment he felt an unreasonable resentment, either at the words or the half defiant way in which she spoke them. He was quite old enough both in years and the ways of the world to know exactly what she meant, and he was perfectly well aware that she would not have accepted his invitation to supper any more than she would have been in the promenade of a music hall unescorted if she had been what is conventionally termed respectable. Yet somehow he wanted to forget the fact and treat her with the respect he would have paid to any ordinary acquaintance in his own social sphere.

This feeling was probably due both to an innate chivalry and to the fact that one of his father's favourite precepts was, "My boy, whatever company you're in, never forget that you're a gentleman." Mingled with it there may also have been a dash of masculine vanity. The more he looked at the girl the more striking did her likeness to himself appear. Really, if he had had a sister she could not have been more like him, but he knew that he was an only child, and, besides, that thought was altogether unthinkable.

After a little pause, during which their eyes met and their cheeks flushed in a somewhat boy-and-girlish fashion, he laughed a trifle awkwardly and said:

"Well, then, we shall have to introduce ourselves, I suppose. My name is Maxwell—Vane Maxwell."

"Vane!" she echoed, "how funny! My name is Vane too—Carol Vane. It's not a sham one either, such as a lot of girls like me take. It's my own—at least, I have always been called Carol, and Vane was my mother's name."

"I see," said Maxwell, after another little pause, during which the oysters came and the waiter opened the wine. When he had filled the two glasses and vanished, Maxwell lifted his and said:

"Well, Miss Carol, it is rather curious that we should both have the same names, and also, if I may say so without flattering myself too much, be so much like each other. At any rate I shall venture to hope that your little accident at the Palace has enabled me to make a very charming acquaintance."

"That's very prettily put, Mr. Vane Maxwell," she said, nodding and smiling at him over her glass. "And now that we've been introduced in a sort of way, as we haven't got any more interesting subject to talk about, suppose we talk about ourselves. Which are you, Oxford or Cambridge?"

The conversation thus started rattled merrily along for over an hour. Without thinking any disloyalty to his own Enid, who was now a fair and stately maiden of eighteen, he found it quite impossible to resist the strange charm of Miss Carol's manner. She was obviously a lady by instinct, and she had also been educated after a sort. She had read widely if not altogether wisely, and she seemed just as familiar with the literature, or, at any rate, with the fiction of France and Italy as she was with that of England.

This she explained was due to the fact that until she was about twelve, that is to say some seven years ago, she had been constantly living and wandering about in these two countries with her mother and sometimes also with a gentleman who, as she put it, was pretty probably her father. She explained further that at the mature age of thirteen she had run away from a French school in which she had been placed by some unknown agency and joined a wandering English circus-troop with which she had travelled half over Europe, leading a more or less miserable existence for some five years. She had then terminated her connection with the Ring by going into housekeeping with an English art-student in Paris. Meanwhile she had lost all trace of her mother, and had come to the conclusion that she had by this time drunk herself to death.

"I scarcely ever knew her to be quite sober," she said pathetically, and then she changed the subject.

It was not a very cheerful story, as story, but Miss Carol told it with such a quaint humour and such a vivacity of expression and gesture that, despite the under-note of tragedy, Maxwell thought it the most interesting story he had ever heard in his life.

As the courses disappeared and the empty bottle of wine was succeeded by a half bottle "just for the last," as Maxwell said, the conversation grew gayer and perhaps also a trifle freer, although Miss Carol never permitted herself any of those freedoms of expression with which too many of the so-called Daughters of Delight vulgarise themselves so hopelessly. When the half bottle was finished Maxwell wanted another, and to this Miss Carol promptly and firmly objected.

"If you will excuse me saying so to a new acquaintance," she said, "I wouldn't if I were you. We have both of us had enough of this stuff, nice and all as it is—at least, I have, and I think I'm more used to it than you. A coffee and liqueur if you like. That won't hurt us—in fact, it'll do us good; but I can see something in your eyes that shouldn't be there."

"What do you mean?" said Maxwell, a trifle offended. "Surely you're not going to accuse me of the unpardonable crime of getting drunk in the company of a lady."

"Thank you!" she said simply, and yet with a decided dignity. "No, I don't mean that. It's a funny thing, you know," she went on, leaning her elbows on the table and staring straight into his eyes, "but there's a queer kind of light coming into your eyes, a sort of dancing, jumping yellow flame that makes them look almost red. Well, your eyes are almost exactly like mine, and mine are like my mother's, and whenever she'd got so far on with drink that she couldn't stop I used to see that light in her eyes. Of course I don't say that it means anything; still, there it is. I used to call it the danger signal, and keep away from her as much as I could till it was over, and I had to nurse her back to something like life."

"That's rather approaching the creepy," said Maxwell, with an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders. He had no feeling of offence now. She looked so pretty and she spoke so earnestly that it was impossible to be offended with her. Moreover, although he was far from even getting drunk, he felt a dreamy sensation stealing over him which seemed to be sapping his self- restraint and making him utterly careless of what he did or what happened to him so long as it was only pleasant.

"Really, it is decidedly curious," he went on. "I hope I haven't got the makings of a dipsomaniac in me. But I feel quite curiously happy, and I believe I could just go on drinking and getting happier and happier until I landed in Paradise with you standing just inside the gates to welcome me."

"Don't!" she said almost sharply. "For goodness sake don't begin to talk like that. That's just how my mother used to feel, just how she used to talk, and she did go on—of course, there was no one to stop her. You should have seen her a couple of days after—a savage, an animal, a wild beast, only wild beasts don't get drunk. It's not a nice thing to say of your mother, even such a mother as mine was, but it's true, and I'm telling you because I like you, and it may do you some good."

"Thank you, Miss Carol! After that I shall certainly take your advice," he said, pouring his cognac into his coffee. "This is the last drink to-night, and that reminds me; it's getting rather late. How about going home?"

"I think it's about time," she said. "They close at twelve to-night, you know. Which way do you go?"

"Which way do you go?" he said, as he beckoned to the waiter for the bill. "By the way, I was going to ask you—I hope you have never seen that light, that danger signal, in your own eyes?"

She ignored his first question in toto, and replied:

"Yes, I saw it once when I got home after a pretty wild supper. It frightened me so that I went 'T.T.' for nearly a month, and just now I wouldn't drink another glass of that champagne if you gave me a thousand pounds to drink it."

"Well, I'm sure I shan't ask you after what you've said," he laughed, as he threw a couple of shillings on the plate which the waiter presented, and took up his bill. Then he got up and helped her on with her cloak, and as she shook her shapely shoulders into it he went on:

"But you haven't answered my question yet."

"Which question?" she said, turning sharply round.

"Which way do you go—or do you intend to stop out a bit later?" he replied rather haltingly. "I thought perhaps I might have the pleasure——"

"Of seeing me home?" she said, raising her eyes to his and flushing hotly. "I'm afraid that's impossible. But go and get your coat and hat, and let's go outside. It's horribly close in here."

He paid his bill at the pay-box near the door, and when they got out into the street he took her by the arm and said, as they turned down towards the Circus:

"And may I ask why it is impossible, Miss Carol. I thought just now you said that you liked me a bit."

"So I do," she replied, with a little thrill in her voice; "and that's just why, or partly why—and besides, we're too much alike. Why, we might be brother and sister——"

"That is quite out of the question," he interrupted quickly; "I never had a sister. I am an only child, and my mother died soon after I was born. She died in India nearly twenty years ago."

"I can't help it," she said, almost passionately. "Of course we can't possibly be any relation, the idea's absurd; but still, it's no use—I couldn't, I daren't. Besides, have you forgotten what you were telling me about your fight on the steamer with that man we met at the Palace? Aren't you in love with the girl still? I quite understood you were engaged to her."

"Yes," said Maxwell frankly, "I am, and perhaps I ought to be ashamed of myself. That is two lessons you've taught me to-night, Miss Carol, and I shan't forget either them or you. Still, I don't see why we shouldn't be friends. Honestly, I like you very much, and you've said you like me—why shouldn't we?"

"Yes, that's true; I like you all right," she replied with almost embarrassing frankness; "but for all that it's something very different from love at first sight. It's funny, but do you know, Vane—I suppose if we're going to be friends I may call you Vane—although I think I could get to like you very much in one way, however different things were, I don't believe I could ever fall in love with you. But if you only mean friends, just real pals, as we say in my half of the world, I am there, always supposing that the friendship of such an entirely improper young person as I am doesn't do you any harm."

"Harm, nonsense!" he said. "Why should it? Well, that's a bargain, and now perhaps you won't object to tell me where you live."

"Oh, no, not now," she said. "I live at 15, Melville Gardens, Brook Green, with a very nice girl that you may also be friends with if you're good."

"Brook Green! Why, that's off the Hammersmith Road. We, that is to say dad and myself, live in Warwick Gardens, a bit this side of Addison Bridge, so if you really mean to go home we may as well get a hansom, and you can drop me at Warwick Gardens and go on."

"Of course I mean to go home, and I think that would be a very good arrangement."

They had crossed over to the pavement in front of the Criterion as she said this. It was on the tip of Maxwell's tongue to ask her to come in and have another drink. He certainly felt a greater craving for alcohol than he had ever done in his life before, and if he had been alone he might have yielded to it; but he was ashamed to do so after what he had just said to her, so he hailed an empty cab that was just coming up to the kerb. As he was

handing his companion in, the door of the buffet swung open, and Reginald Garthorne came out with two other Cambridge men. They were all a trifle fresh, and as Garthorne recognised him he called out:

"By-by, Maxwell. Don't forget to say your prayers."

Maxwell turned round angrily with his foot on the step. If he had had that other drink that he wanted there would have been a row, but, as it was, a word and a gesture from Miss Carol brought him into the cab. There was an angry flush on her cheeks and a wicked light in her eyes, but she said very quietly, "Do you know, I am glad you thrashed that fellow once. He ought to be ashamed of himself shouting a thing like that out here. I suppose he thinks himself a gentleman, too."

"Oh, that's all right," said Vane. "Garthorne's a bit screwed, that's all. Everyone is to-night. But he's not at all a bad fellow. His father was a soldier in India, and did some very good service. He has a staff appointment at home. He's a baronet too—one of the old ones. His mother comes of a good stock as well. We've been very good chums since that first row. Fellows who fight as boys generally are."

"Oh, I daresay he's all right, but I didn't like it," said Miss Carol, leaning back in the cab. "And now suppose you tell me something more about yourself."

When the cab pulled up at the corner of Warwick Gardens and he said good-night, he asked her for a kiss. She blushed like a fourteen-year-old school girl as she replied:

"That's a great compliment, Vane, for I know how you mean it. But if you don't mind I really think I'd rather not, at least not just yet. You see, after all we've only known each other two or three hours. Wait until you know me at least a little better before you ask again, and then perhaps we'll see."

"Well, I daresay you're right, Miss Modesty," he laughed, as he got out. "In fact, you always seem to be right. Good- night, Carol."

"Good-night, Vane." As he stepped backwards from the cab she leant forward and smiled and waved her hand. A gentleman walking quickly from the direction of the bridge looked up and saw her pretty laughing face as the light of a lamp fell upon it. He stopped almost as suddenly as though he had run up against some invisible obstacle, and passed his hand across his eyes. Then the cab doors closed, the face vanished back into the shadow of the interior, and, to his utter amazement, Maxwell heard his father's voice say:

"God bless my soul. What a marvellous likeness!"

CHAPTER II

"Well, Vane!"

"Well, dad!"

"May I ask who that young lady in the cab with you was?"

Vane saw at once that he was in for it, and even if he had wished for any concealment, it was impossible under the circumstances. As a matter of fact, however, he had already made up his mind to tell his father the whole story of his little adventure, and so he said very gravely and deliberately:

"That, dad, is a young lady whose acquaintance I made to-night at the Palace. She nearly fainted in the crush just after the Biograph was over. She happened to be close behind me, and so of course she held on to me. I took her into one of the bars and gave her a brandy and soda. Then we noticed mutually how curiously like each other we were, and then—well, then I asked her to supper and she came. We have just driven here from the Trocadero. She has gone on to where she lives in Melville Gardens, Brook Green. I can tell you a lot more about her afterwards, if you like."

Sir Arthur Maxwell, Bart., K.C.B., K.C.S.I., looked keenly into his son's face while he was giving this rapid summary of his evening's adventure. There was and always had been the most absolute confidence between them. Ever since Vane had been old enough they had been companions and chums, rather than father and son, and so Sir Arthur had not the slightest doubt but that Vane was telling the absolute truth. He was only looking to see whether the telling of the truth embarrassed him or not, and he was well pleased to see that it did not.

"Quite an interesting experience, I must say," he said, a little gruffly. "Well, I'm glad to see, at any rate, that you didn't accompany the young lady home. I presume you were invited."

"On the contrary, dad," replied Vane, this time with a little hesitation in his tone, "to tell you the honest truth——"

"That was a needless opening, Vane. My son could not tell anything else. Go on."

"Well, the fact is, dad, it was the other way about. I suggested it, and she refused point blank. I'm afraid I'd had rather too much fizz on top of too many brandies and sodas before supper."

"That will do, Vane," said his father, a little stiffly. "At any rate, thank God you are not drunk or anything like it. But this is hardly the sort of thing to discuss in the street. We'll go into the Den and have a chat and a smoke before we go to bed. You know I'm not squeamish about these things. I know that a lad of twenty is made of flesh and blood just as a man of thirty or forty is, and although I consider what is called sowing wild oats foolish as well as a most ungentlemanly pastime, still, I equally don't believe in the innocence of ignorance, at least not for a man."

"You seem to forget, dad," replied Vane, answering him in something very like his own tone, "just as I'm sorry to say I forgot for a minute or two to-night that I am engaged to Enid."

"Quite right, boy," said his father as they went in at the gate. "I didn't forget it though, and I'm glad you remembered it."

"Only I ought to have said that it was the girl who reminded me of it," said Vane, as he put his latch-key into the door.

When they got into the Den, which was a sort of combination room, partly a library and partly study and smoking-room with a quaint suggestion of Oriental fantasy about it, Sir Arthur, according to his wont at that time of night, unlocked the spirit case, and mixed himself a whiskey and soda. As he did so, Vane found his eyes fixed on one of the bright cut-glass bottles which contained brandy. He would have given anything to be able to mix a brandy and soda for himself and drink it without believing, or at any rate fearing, that after all there might be something in Miss Carol's warning.

As Sir Arthur lit his cigar, he said in a rather forced tone:

"I suppose after what you've said it's no use asking you to have a nightcap, Vane?"

There was a little pause, during which Vane looked hard at the spirit- case. Then, with the gesture of one under strong emotion, he got up from his chair and said in a voice whose tone made his father look quickly towards him:

"I don't think I've ever knowingly disobeyed you in my life, dad, but if you were to order me to drink a drop of spirit to-night, I shouldn't do it."

"Why not, Vane?"

"Just look into my eyes, dad, and tell me if you see anything strange about them."

"What on earth do you mean, boy—there's nothing the matter with your eyes, is there?" said Sir Arthur, looking up with a visible start, "what has put that idea into your head?"

"I'll tell you afterwards, dad, meanwhile, just have a look," replied Vane, coming and standing under the light.

He felt his father's hands tremble as he laid them on his shoulder, and as he looked into his eyes a tinge of greyness seemed to steal underneath the sun-bronze of his skin. In the clear depths of the lad's hazel eyes he saw a faint, nickering, wavering light, which gave a yellow tinge to them.

A reflection from the flames of hell itself could not have had a more awful meaning for him than that faint little yellow glimmer, but Arthur Maxwell was a strong man, a man who had fought plague and famine, storm and flood, treachery and revolt in the service of his Queen, and after a moment or two he was able to say quite quietly:

"Well, what's the matter, Vane? They look, perhaps, a little brighter than usual; but I don't suppose that's anything more than the excitement of the evening."

"Don't you see something like a little yellow flame in them?"

"Well, yes, I do," said Sir Arthur, looking away, "a reflection from the gaslight, probably. But come, Vane, what is all this about? Sit down and tell me. And, by the way, I want to hear the story of this new acquaintance of yours. Take a cigar; that won't hurt you."

Vane took a cheroot and lit it and sat down in an easy chair opposite his father, his eyes still wandering as though of their own accord towards the spirit-case. Then he began somewhat inconsequentially:

"Dad, what do you think that girl's name is?"

"Naturally, I haven't the remotest notion," replied his father. "I only know that she is exceedingly good looking, and I must say that from the glimpse I had of her, she seems very like yourself."

"Is that what you meant, dad, when you said, 'Bless my soul what a likeness,' or something like that when the cab stopped?"

Sir Arthur did not reply at once. His eyes were gazing vacantly up at a wreath of blue smoke from his cigar, then he replied suddenly:

"Eh? Oh, well, probably. You see, my boy, I was just a bit startled at seeing you get out, and when I saw your two faces in the lamplight, I confess that I was decidedly struck by the likeness."

Vane did not find this reply entirely convincing, for he remembered that as he got out of the cab his back was towards his father, and that Carol's face was no longer visible when he turned round and faced him. Still, he was far too well bred to put his father through anything like a cross- examination, and so he went on.

"Well, as I told you, I met this young lady—for although she is what respectable Society in its mercy call 'an unfortunate'—I am certain she is a lady—at the Palace, and we went and had supper in the Grill Room at the Trocadero, and there, as we had no one to introduce us, we introduced ourselves."

"The usual thing under such circumstances, I believe," said Sir Arthur, taking a sip at his whiskey. "Well?"

"I told her that my name was Vane Maxwell, and she said, 'Now that's curious, my name's Vane, too.'"

"What is that—her name!" said Sir Arthur with a start that nearly made him drop his glass. "Vane is not a girl's name."

"No, that's her surname. Her whole name is Carol Vane. Pretty, isn't it? Vane, she says, was her mother's name, and a nice sort of person she seems to have been. Poor Carol herself must have had a terrible time of it. There was no possibility of doubting a word of her story, she told it all so simply and so naturally, and yet it was tragedy all through.

"Well, we'd had a large bottle of fizz and a small one between us, and I'm afraid I was getting a bit on, for I wanted another. I wasn't drunk, you know, or anything like it. It didn't seem as though I could get drunk; only more and more gorgeously happy, and when I told Miss Carol, she put her elbows on the table and stared into my eyes and told me that they were just like her mother's, and that there was a light coming into them which she always used to see in hers when she was starting on one of her drinking bouts.

"Then she told me point blank that I'd had enough and said that she wouldn't drink another glass of fizz for a thousand pounds. We wound up with a coffee and liqueur, and afterwards when we came out I felt an almost irresistible craving for a brandy and soda, but I also felt convinced that if I took one I should go on all night.

"Still, somehow, what Miss Carol had been saying, although it hadn't exactly frightened me, certainly stopped me going into the Criterion and having one; besides, she was with me still, and I knew if I asked her she'd say 'No,' and somehow I daren't leave her and go in by myself. So as she lives out Brook Green way, we got into a cab and drove home. And, would you believe it, she wouldn't even give me a kiss when we said good-night. She is a most extraordinary girl, I can quite imagine any fellow falling really and honestly in love with her."

While Vane was telling his story, his father had sat motionless, staring hard into the fireplace. He had apparently taken not the slightest interest in what he was saying. He had never once looked up, but as the story went on his face had grown greyer and greyer, and the lines in it harder and deeper, and every now and then the hand on which his cheek was leaning had trembled a little.

When Vane stopped speaking he looked up with a start, like a man waking out of an evil dream, and said in a husky, unsteady voice, which was quite strange to Vane:

"It is quite possible, my boy, that this girl, whatever else she may be, was really your guardian angel to-night. At your age, a craving for drink is a very terrible thing, and you must exert the whole strength of your nature to conquer it. You must fight against it and pray against it as you would against the worst of sins. You have a splendid career before you, but drink would ruin it and you. Still, we won't talk any more about this to- night. I am not feeling particularly well. I went round to dine with Raleigh, in Addison Gardens, to-night—by the way, Enid's coming back in a few days—and perhaps I caught a little chill walking home. I think I'd better turn in."

As he said this he took up the whiskey and soda and drained it, and Vane heard his teeth clink against the edge of the glass.

"And I think it's time I went, too," said Vane. "You certainly don't look very fit to-night, dad. Hope I haven't made you uncomfortable by what I've been saying. You needn't be afraid though. I don't think I shall forget the lesson I've had to-night."

"No, no, I don't think you will, Vane. Well, good-night. Put the spirits and cigars away, will you?"

"Good-night, dad! I hope you'll be all right in the morning."

As the door closed behind his father, Vane went to the table on which the open spirit-stand stood. His father had forgotten to replace the stopper in

the whiskey decanter, and the aroma of the ripe old spirit rose to his nostrils. Instantly a subtle fire seemed to spread through his veins and mount up to his brain. The mad craving that he had felt outside the Criterion came back upon him with tenfold force. He raised the decanter to his nostrils and inhaled a long breath of the subtle, vaporous poison. He looked around the room with burning eyes.

He was alone. There was no guardian angel near him now. Moved by some impulse other than his own will, he took his father's glass and poured out half a tumblerful of whiskey, filled it with soda water from the syphon, and drank it down with quick feverish gulps. Then he set the glass on the table and went and looked at himself in an Indian mirror over the mantel-piece. The pupils of his eyes seemed twice their size, and in each a yellow flame was leaping and dancing.

His face seemed transfigured. It was rather that of a handsome satyr than of an English lad of twenty. The lips were curled in a scornful sneer, the nostrils were dilated and the eyebrows arched. He laughed at himself—a laugh that startled him, even then. He went back to the table and poured out more whiskey, smelt it and drank it down raw.

His blood was liquid flame by this time. He was no longer in the room. The walls and ceiling had vanished, and all round him vivid pictures were flitting, pictures of things that he had seen during the day, flickering and flashing like those of the Biograph; but Carol's face and soft brown eyes seemed somehow to be in the middle of all of them.

He dropped into a chair and felt about half blindly for the decanter. When he got hold of it he emptied it partly into the glass and partly over the table-cloth. He lifted the glass to his lips with both hands, drained it half chokingly, and then the pictures stopped moving and grew dim. A black pall of darkness seemed to come down and crush him to the earth. He lurched out of the chair on to the hearth-rug, rolled on to his back, and lay there motionless with arms outstretched.

An hour later the door opened and Sir Arthur came in in his dressing gown. A glance at the empty decanter and the prostrate figure on the hearth- rug, showed him the calamity that had fallen upon his house. He staggered forward and dropped on his knees beside Vane, crying in a weak, broken voice:

"My boy, my boy! Good God! what have I done? Why didn't I tell him at once?"

CHAPTER III

Vane was utterly insensible either to voice or touch. His father knelt over him and loosened his tie and collar, for his breath was coming hard and irregularly. Then he rose to his feet, looked down at him for a few moments, and went away to summon Koda Bux, his old Pathan bearer, to help him to take him up to bed. He knew that he could trust him not to gossip, and he would not for worlds have had it said about the house the next day that Master Vane had been carried to bed drunk.

Koda Bux was awake the moment his master touched his shoulder. He rose at once and followed him. When they reached the library Sir Arthur pointed without a word to where Vane lay. He looked at him and then at the decanters, and said, without moving a feature save his lips:

"Truly, Huzur, the young sahib is exceeding drunk, and he must sleep. To-morrow the fires of hell will be burning in his brain and in his blood. It is a thing that no others should know of. He shall sleep in his bed, and thy servant shall watch by him until he is well, and neither man nor woman shall come near him."

"That is my wish, Koda," said Sir Arthur. "Now I will help you to take him upstairs."

"There is no need that thou, O protector of the poor, shouldst trouble thyself. This is but one man's work."

With that he stooped down, got his arms under Vane's knees and shoulders, and lifted him up as easily as if he had been a lad of ten. Sir Arthur took up the candle which he had brought down with him, and went in front to his son's room.

Koda laid him on the bed, and at once went to work with the deft rapidity of a practised hand to remove his clothes. He saw that he could do no more good, so, after laying his hand for a moment on Vane's wet, cold brow, he turned away towards the door with a deep sigh, which was not lost on Koda.

"Trust him to me and sleep in peace, Huzur," he said. "I know how to fight the devil that is in him and throw him out. To- morrow Vane Sahib shall be as well as ever."

"Do your best for him, Koda. This is the first time, and I hope the last. Good-night."

"Good-night, friend of the friendless," replied the Pathan, standing up and stretching out his hands palms downwards. "Fear nothing. May your sleep be as the repose of Nirvana."

But there was neither rest nor sleep for Sir Arthur Maxwell that night. That vision of the girl's face looking out of the cab had been to him a vision half of heaven and half of hell. It was the face of the girl he had wooed and worked for and won nearly thirty years before—a girl whose hands for a brief space had opened the gates of Paradise to him. But it was also the face of a woman who had brought into his life something worse than the bitterness of death.

As he paced up and down his bedroom through the still, lonely hours of the night, he asked himself again and again what inscrutable fate had brought this girl, the fresh, bright, living image of the woman who was worse than dead, and his son Vane, the idol of his heart, and the hope of his life, together.

Why had this girl, this outcast bearing the name which he both loved and hated, been the first to see in his son's eyes that fatal sign which he knew so well, a sign which he had himself seen in eyes into which he had once looked as a lad of twenty-four with anxious adoration to read his fate in them. For years that flickering, wavering light had been to him like the reflected glare from the flames of hell, and now this girl had seen it as he had seen it, mocking and devilish in the eyes of his only son.

It would have been better—he saw that now—to have braced himself to the task of telling Vane the whole of the miserable, pitiful story at once, as soon, indeed, as Vane's own story had convinced him that he had not escaped the curse which some dead and gone ancestor of his mother's had transmitted to his unborn posterity.

But it was a hard thing for a father to tell his son of his mother's shame. As hard, surely, as it had been for Jephtha to keep his rash vow and drive the steel into his daughter's breast. He had hoped that the resolves which Vane had taken, enforced by a serious and friendly talk the next day, would have been enough to avert the danger.

He did not know, as he knew now, that the demon of inherited alcoholism laughs at such poor precautions as this. Measures infinitely more drastic would be needed, and they must be employed at no matter what cost either to himself or Vane.

And yet it was an awful thing to do. Year after year he had shrunk from it, hoping that it would never be necessary; but now the necessity had come at last. There could be no doubt of that. He had left his son sane and strong,

with brave, wise words on his lips. An hour after he had gone back and found him a senseless thing, human only in shape. There could be no hesitation after that. It must be done.

Like many men of his kind, men whose lives have been passed in wrestling with the barbarisms, the ignorance and the superstitions of lower races, as well as with the blind forces of nature and the scourges of pestilence and famine in distant lands, Arthur Maxwell was a man of deep though mostly silent religious convictions, and if ever there was a time when such a man could find strength and guidance in prayer surely this was such a time, and yet he had walked up and down his room, which since he had entered it had been his Gethsemane, for hours before he knelt down by his bedside and lifted up his heart, if not his voice, in prayer.

He rose from his knees with clearer sight and greater strength to see and face the terrible task which lay before him. It was quite plain to him now that the task must be faced and carried through, and he was more strongly determined than ever that before the next day was over Vane should know everything that he could tell him. Still, there was no rest for him yet, and for hours longer he walked up and down the room thinking of the past and the future; but most of the past.

About seven sheer physical fatigue compelled him to lie down on his bed, and in a few minutes he fell off into an uneasy sleep. Just about this time Vane woke—his mouth parched, his brain burning and throbbing, and every nerve in his body tingling. As soon as he opened his eyes he saw Koda Bux standing by his bedside.

"What on earth's the matter, Koda?" he said in a voice that was half a groan. "Great Scott, what a head I've got! Ah, I remember now. It was that infernal whiskey. What the devil made me drink it?"

"You are right, Vane Sahib," said Koda sententiously; "it was the whiskey, which surely is distilled from fruits that grow only on the shores of the Sea of Sorrow. Now your head is wracked with the torments of hell, and your mouth is like a cave in the desert; but you shall be cured and sleep, and when you wake you shall be as though you had never tasted the drink that is both fire and water."

He went away to the dressing-table, shook some pink powder out of a little bottle into a glass, and came back to the bedside with the glass in one hand and the water-bottle in the other. Then he poured the water on to the powder and said:

"Drink, sahib, and sleep! When you wake you will be well."

The water seemed to turn into something like pink champagne as the powder dissolved. Vane seized the glass eagerly, and took a long, delicious drink. He had scarcely time to hand the glass back to Koda and thank him before his burning brain grew cool, his nerves ceased to thrill, a delightful languor stole over him, and he sank back on the pillow and was asleep in a moment. The Pathan looked at him half sternly and half sorrowfully for a few moments, then he laid his brown hand upon his brow. It was already moist and cool.

He turned away, and set to work to put the room in order and get out Vane's clothes and clean linen for the day. Then he went downstairs and brewed Sir Arthur's morning coffee as usual. This was always the first of his daily tasks. When he took it up he found Sir Arthur still fully dressed, lying on the bed, moving uneasily in his sleep.

"The follies of the young are the sorrows of the old!" he murmured. "He has not slept all night; still, this is a sleep which rests not nor refreshes. His coffee will do him more good, and then he can bathe and rest."

He laid his hand lightly on Sir Arthur's shoulder. He woke at once and drank his coffee. Then he asked how Vane was, and when he knew that he was sleeping again, and would not wake for some hours, he got up, undressed, and had a bath and dressed again.

Then, after a not very successful attempt at breakfast, he went out and turned into the Hammersmith Road in the direction of Brook Green. He remembered the address that Miss Carol had given Vane just as he remembered every other word of the conversation. He had determined to call upon her, and to make as sure as possible that his dreadful suspicions were correct before he told Vane the truth.

He found No. 15, Melville Gardens, one of a row of neat little detached houses; not much more than cottages, but cosy and comfortable-looking, each with a tiny little plot of ground in front and behind, and with a row of trees down each side of the road which seemed to stand in apologetic justification of the title of gardens.

The door was opened by a neatly-dressed, motherly-looking woman of about forty instead of by the dishevelled, smutty-faced maid-of-all-work that he half expected to find.

"Does Miss Carol Vane live here?" he asked, with a curious feeling of nervousness.

"Yes, sir, she and Miss Murray are just finishing breakfast. Will you come in and sit down, sir? Miss Vane won't be long."

"Thank you, yes," he said, going in. "I wish to see her rather particularly."

"What name shall I say, sir?" said the woman, as she showed him into a prettily-furnished little sitting-room opening out into the back garden with French windows.

"Sir Arthur Maxwell," he replied. "If you will give my compliments to Miss Vane, and tell her that she will do me a great service by giving me about half-an-hour's conversation, I shall be much obliged to you."

The housekeeper made something like a little curtsey as she left the room. She was distinctly impressed by the stately presence and old-world courtesy of this bronzed, white-haired gentleman. He was so very different from the general run of visitors at No. 15; but she had half guessed his errand before she knocked at the door of the front room in which Miss Carol and her friend and house-mate, Dora Murray, were finishing their last cup of tea.

"Well, Mrs. Ford," said Miss Carol, looking up from the letter she was reading, "who might that be? This is pretty early for a morning call."

"The gentleman's name is Sir Arthur Maxwell, Miss."

"What!" said Miss Carol, colouring up and rising quickly from her chair. "Sir Arthur Maxwell. What on earth does he want?"

"He said, miss, that he'd be very much obliged to you if you could give him the pleasure of half-an-hour's conversation."

"Oh, dear, I suppose he was the gentleman who stopped at the corner last night just when my new acquaintance got out. His father, of course. I suppose he's come to row me about making friends with his son and heir last night."

"One of the penalties of your fascinations, dear," said Dora, with a smile which parted a pair of eminently kissable lips and showed a very pretty set of teeth behind them.

Dora was nearly a couple of inches taller than Miss Carol, and some three years older. She had soft, lightish-brown hair, brown eyebrows, a trifle browner, perhaps, than nature had painted them, and dark blue eyes, which made a very pretty contrast.

"Well," she went on, "I suppose there's nothing for you but to go and interview the irate papa. But whatever did young hopeful want to go and tell him all about it for, and even give him your address!"

"If you'll excuse me, Miss," said the housekeeper, "I don't think that's it. The gentleman isn't at all angry. He was as polite and nice to me as ever could be. Such a nice gentleman."

"Dear me, Mrs. Ford, you seem quite impressed," said Miss Carol, gathering up her correspondence. "Well, I'd better go and have it over, whatever it is. I don't suppose I shall be very long. Meanwhile, Dora, you may as well make yourself useful and dust the bikes. The old gentleman won't eat me, I suppose. In fact, if Master Vane told him everything, he ought to be very much obliged to me for my virtuous reserve."

And then, with a saucy smile at her own reflection in the glass as she passed the mantelpiece, she walked towards the door.

Carol, being a young lady of many and various experiences, did not often find herself in a situation, however awkward it might be, which gave her much cause for embarrassment. There were not many circumstances under which she did not feel capable of taking perfect care of herself. Still, she confessed to Dora afterwards that when she went into the little sitting-room and faced the stately old gentleman who was waiting for her she felt distinctly nervous—in short, "in something very like a tremble," as she put it later on.

The moment she looked at his face she could see his likeness to Vane, and therefore in a measure to herself. She had, of course, nothing to be afraid of, and therefore there was no cause for fear, but for some reason or other she felt less at ease than she had done in many more difficult situations.

The same was almost equally true of Sir Arthur. In fact, when the door opened and Miss Carol, looking exquisitely neat and pretty in a dainty, grey, tailor-made cycling costume, walked into the room, he was unable to restrain a very visible start. It was, indeed, as much as he could do to keep himself from uttering an exclamation of astonishment.

As he looked at her, more than thirty years vanished in a second, and he saw himself a lad of twenty-four with his brand new Oxford degree, and his first place on the Indian Civil Service list only just published, walking down a country lane by the side of a girl, who, but for the difference in costume, might have been this very girl standing before him.

"Good morning! Our housekeeper tells me that you wish to speak to me."

Yes, the voice was the same, too, and so were the expression, the intonation, the attitude, everything. But the words brought him back to the present, and to the recollection of all that had happened since that walk in the country lane.

"Yes, Miss Vane," he heard himself saying, "I have taken the liberty of calling to ask you if you would have any objection to a little conversation with me. I won't detain you more than half an hour."

"With pleasure," she said; "but won't you sit down?" she went on, seating herself on the sofa. "I suppose I am right in thinking that you are Mr. Vane Maxwell's father, and I suppose, too, you are the gentleman who was at the corner of Warwick Gardens when he got out of the cab? I'm afraid you were a good bit shocked," she continued, smiling rather faintly.

"I was not by any means so much shocked as astonished," Sir Arthur replied gravely, "and, to avoid any misunderstanding, I had better say at once that, though I was naturally a little bit startled, I was infinitely more astonished, by the marvellous likeness——"

"What, to him!" said Miss Carol, interrupting him with a pretty little gesture of deprecation. "Yes, of course, I can quite understand that a gentleman like you would be a bit disgusted to find a likeness between your son and a girl like me, for I suppose he told you all about me? I mean, you know the sort of disreputable person that I am?"

Miss Carol said this with a distinct note of defiance in her voice. A note which seemed to say, "I know what I am, and so do you, and if you don't want to talk to me any longer you needn't." But she was considerably astonished when Sir Arthur, leaning forward in his chair and speaking very gravely, said:

"My dear child—you are younger than Vane, you know, and I may call you that without offence—I do know what you are, or perhaps it would be more just to say what circumstances have made you. I don't want you to think that I have come here to preach at you. That is no business of mine. Still, I am deeply grieved, though I daresay you have no notion why—I mean no notion of the real reason. I am afraid I am expressing myself very awkwardly, but just now I don't quite seem to be able to keep my thoughts in order."

There was something in the gentle gravity of his tone and manner which inspired Miss Carol with an unaccountable desire to go away and cry. She didn't exactly know why, but she was certainly experiencing a very uncomfortable feeling which was more like apprehension than anything else.

She couldn't think of anything else to say at the moment, and so she said simply:

"I don't know why you should be grieved, I mean in particular about me. There are plenty of others like me, you know, a good many thousands in London alone, I believe, and I suppose you would feel sorry for any of them. There are lots worse off than I am, I can tell you. But why should you be sorry for me particularly?"

As she said this she crossed her legs and folded her hands over her knee, leaning forward slightly and looking keenly at him.

"Because," he replied, with a little quaver in his voice, but looking steadily into her eyes, "because you are the living image of the woman who was once my wife. A little over thirty years ago—by the way, may I ask how old you are?"

"I was eighteen last September," she said, "that is to say, I am getting on for nineteen."

"And your birthday?" he said. "You will forgive me asking you so many questions, I know, when I tell you why I ask them; but of course, you needn't answer them unless you choose."

"There is no reason why I shouldn't," she said, "as far as I know. I was born on the twentieth of September. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say that if my wife, I mean I should rather say the woman who was my wife, could be put beside you now as she was thirty years ago, dressed as you are now, it would be almost impossible to tell the difference between you. You told my son, I think, that you take your name Vane from your mother."

"Yes," replied Miss Carol, "she told me that that was her name. I don't know whether I was ever really christened or not, but an English musician in Dresden, one of my mother's friends, called me Carol when I was quite a little mite of a thing because I was always singing, and as that was as good a name as any other, I suppose it stuck to me."

"Do you know whether your mother was ever married?"

"She had been, because she used to talk about it and about all she had lost and all that sort of thing, you know, when she was drunk," replied Miss Carol with a simple directness which went straight to Sir Arthur's heart. "Of course, that was when I was quite a little thing, about eight or nine. Then I

was sent to a sort of boarding-school, half a school and half a convent, and I didn't like that, so I ran away from it, as I told your son last night."

"I went home and found the house shut up. The concierge told me that my mother had gone away in a carriage with two gentlemen—he said one looked like a police agent—nearly a month before. He didn't know where she'd gone to, and from that day to this I've never heard anything more of her. I told your son the rest of it and I daresay he has told you, so there's no need for me to go over it again."

"Yes," said Sir Arthur, nodding slowly, "Vane told me, so if you please I will ask you one or two more questions, and then I won't detain you any longer."

"I am in no hurry," she replied. "Please ask me any number you like."

Her manner was now one of deep interest, for a suspicion was already forming in her mind that this bronzed, grave-faced man had once been her own mother's husband.

"Thank you," he said. "I should like to ask you first whether you happen to have any photograph of your mother?"

Miss Carol shook her head decisively, and said:

"No. I had one once in a locket, but when I went home and found she'd gone away and left me all alone in Paris—that's where we were then—I was so angry that I took it out and tore it up. I daresay it was very wrong of me, but I couldn't help it, and to tell you the honest truth, I can't say that I ever was as fond of her as a daughter should have been."

"I don't wonder at it," said Sir Arthur, with a sigh.

Miss Carol looked up wonderingly as he said this, but he took no notice and said:

"But I suppose you would recognise a photograph of her if you saw one?"

"Yes, if it was taken anywhere about the time that I knew her."

"Quite so," said Sir Arthur, taking a leather letter-case out of his pocket. "This was taken quite twenty years ago, a year or two after we were married, in short. It is, or was, my wife."

As he took out the photograph he got up, crossed the room, and held it out to her. Miss Carol got up too, and as she took it she saw that his hand was trembling. She took the old-fashioned, faded photograph and looked at it. He

saw that her face flushed as she did so. She gave it back to him and said simply:

"Yes, that is my mother."

As he took the photograph from her he looked at her with sad, grave eyes across the gulf of sin and shame in which the one great love of his life had been lost. She was the daughter of his wife, and yet she was not his daughter—and she was an outcast. The sting of the old shame came back very keenly. The old wound was already open and bleeding again. All the pride and hope and love of his life were centred now on his brilliant son. A few hours before he had learnt that his mother had transmitted to him the terrible, perhaps the fatal taint of inherited alcoholism; and now he had just proved beyond doubt that Vane's half-sister—for she was that in blood if not in law—was what she had just so frankly, so defiantly even, admitted herself to be.

And yet, how sweet and dainty she looked as she stood there before him, a bright flush on her cheeks and a soft, regretful expression in those big hazel eyes which were so wonderfully like hers! No one seeing her and Vane together could possibly take them for anything but brother and sister—and but for this marvellous likeness; but for the subtle instinct of kindred blood which had spoken in this outcast's heart the night before, would not a still deeper depth have opened in the hell of that old infamy? There was at least that to be thankful for.

"I suppose you don't know where she is now—and don't care, most likely?" Carol added, raising her eyes almost timidly to his.

"I do," he replied, slowly, "To tell you the truth, I was one of the men who took her away from the house in the Rue St. Jean——"

"You were!" she exclaimed, recoiling a little from him. "Then it was really you who turned me out homeless into the streets of Paris?"

"Yes, it was, I regret to say," he replied, almost humbly, "but I need hardly tell you that I did it in complete ignorance. My——your mother was making my name, my son's name, a scandal throughout Europe. She was a hopeless dipsomaniac. I had, believe me, I had suffered for years all that an honourable man could endure rather than blast my son's prospects in life by taking proceedings for divorce, and so proclaiming to the world that he was the son of such a woman."

"Yes," said Carol, quietly, with a little catch in her voice, "I understand—such a woman as I suppose I shall be some day. Of course, it was very hard

on you and your son. And I don't suppose it made much difference to me after all. She'd have sold me to someone as soon as I was old enough; and instead of that I had to sell myself. When women take to drink like that they don't care about anything. What did you do with her?"

"The man with me," replied Sir Arthur, "was an officer of the French Courts. He had a warrant authorising her detention in a home for chronic inebriates. She is there still, little better than an imbecile, I regret to say, and with no hope of recovery. The physicians I consulted told me that she must have had the germs of alcoholic insanity in her blood from her very birth. She told us that she had a daughter, and we traced you to the school, though she obstinately refused to tell us anything that would help us to find you. But we were too late; you had run away. We hunted all Paris over for you, but you were utterly lost."

"Well," said Carol, gently, "I wish I'd stopped now, or that you'd found me. Things might have been different; but, of course, it can't be helped now."

"It was a terrible pity," he began, "but still, even now perhaps, something may be done——"

"We won't talk about that now, if you please, sir," she interrupted, so decisively that he saw at once that there was no discussion of the subject possible.

"Pardon me," he said, quickly, "I fear I have annoyed you. Nothing, I assure you, could be farther from my intention. Now I have troubled you enough, and more than enough, and I am afraid I have recalled some very unpleasant memories——"

"Not anything like as bad for me as for you, sir," she said, as he paused for a moment. "If I have been of any service to you, I'm very glad, though it's a miserable business altogether."

"Yes, and worse than miserable," he replied, with a slow shake of his head. Then, glancing through the French windows he saw Dora rubbing one of two bicycles down with a cloth in the little back garden, and he went on: "But I see you are getting ready to go for a ride. I must not keep you any longer, I am deeply grateful to you, believe me, and I hope our acquaintance may not end here. And now, good-morning."

He held out his hand with the same grave courtesy with which he would have offered it to the noblest dame of his acquaintance. She looked up sharply as though to say, "Do you really mean to shake hands with me?"

Then her eyes dropped, and the next moment her hand was lying, trembling a little, in his.

CHAPTER IV

When he left Melville Gardens, Sir Arthur did not go straight home. He knew that Vane would not be awake for two or three hours yet, and after a few moments' hesitation he decided to go and call on his old friend, Godfrey Raleigh, with whom he had been dining the night before, and, if he found him at home, put the whole case frankly before him and ask his advice.

He had just retired with a well-earned K.C.S.I. from the Bench of the Supreme Court of Bengal, but he was one of those men on whom neither years nor climate seem to take any effect, and at sixty-five his body was as vigorous and his brain as active and clear as they had been at thirty-five. He had married rather late, and Enid, the Helen of that Iliad of the Wheelhouse, was his only child—and therefore naturally the very apple of his eye and the idol of his heart.

Her engagement to Vane had seemed to both the fathers and to her mother the most natural and the most desirable arrangement that could have been made. Vane would take a brilliant degree, he would enter the Diplomatic Service under the best of auspices, and when Enid had completed her education with a couple of years on the Continent they were to be married on her twentieth birthday. That was the promise of these two bright young lives. What would the fulfilment be?

Sir Godfrey was, as he believed, the only one of his acquaintance in England who knew the truth of the tragedy of his life. They had been chums at Eton and Oxford. They had gone out to India together, Sir Godfrey with a judicial appointment, and Sir Arthur as Political Agent to one of the minor Independent States, both of them juniors with many things to learn and many steps to climb before they took a really active and responsible part in the propulsion of that huge and complicated machine which is called the Indian Government.

The Fates had thrown them a good deal together, and they had got to know each other well, not quickly, because men who are men need a great deal of knowing; but as the months had grown into years, and the years into a decade or more, they had really learnt to know each other. They had gone home together on the same ship to marry the girls who had been waiting for them since their troths had been plighted during their university days. They had come back with their brides on the same ship to India; Godfrey Raleigh had been godfather to his friend's first-born son. Three years later, after the shadow had fallen upon his own life, he had performed the same office for his friend's daughter, the successor of a baby girl who had died during the Rains.

These two children were now the youth and maiden who, within the next two or three years were to be man and wife. But after the events of the last twelve hours or so, Sir Arthur felt that it would not be either loyal to his old friend, or just to him and his daughter not to go and tell him frankly what he had learnt, and to take, not only his opinion, but also his advice on the subject.

He found Sir Godfrey at home, and the judge quickly saw that he had not called upon any ordinary concern, so he asked him to come and smoke a pipe in his den, and there Sir Arthur, taking up the thread where it had been dropped years before, told him in a few straight, short sentences the rest of the story to the end of his interview with Miss Carol.

"Of course, you will understand, Raleigh," he said, when he had finished, "I have told you this because I thought it was only right to do so. My boy is engaged to marry your girl. It is quite plain, I am sorry to say, that this alcoholic taint is in him, and as I have told you this Miss Carol Vane, charming and all as I must confess her to be from what I have seen of her, is after all Vane's half-sister, and she is also what I told you she was."

"Well, my dear Maxwell, I must confess that that is a very difficult problem indeed for us to decide. Very difficult indeed," Sir Godfrey had replied.

"You see, to put it quite plainly, and, if as an old lawyer I may say so, from the judicial point of view, there are two courses open to us. First, we may or, I would rather say, we might adopt the strictly scientific view of the matter and say that, since the unfortunate woman who was once your wife has apparently transmitted the taint of alcoholism to your son, it would therefore be improper for him to marry Enid for fear that he should further transmit this taint to his own offspring.

"That, I suppose, is the way in which a coldblooded scientist would put it; but on the other hand I think the matter should also be considered from the purely human point of view, and here, I speak again as an old judge. When you married your wife you had no notion that she had inherited this taint of insanity, as we may well call it, from some unknown ancestor. Now the same thing might have happened with my wife, or in fact, with any other woman.

"It is perfectly well known that this poison, as one is obliged to call it, may lie latent for generations; may, in fact, die out altogether. On the other hand, what might have been only a vice in the grandfather or the father may develop as insanity in the grandson or the son. It is not for us to decide these things, at least, that is my view.

"You and I have more experience, more judgment; but I think that your son and my daughter will have more accurate instincts and keener intuitions. My own judgment I reserve entirely, and I advise you to do the same.

"Go home and tell Vane everything. Don't spare yourself or him, for in a case like this truth, the whole truth, is, after all, the greatest mercy. I will tell my wife the whole story this afternoon, and she will tell Enid when she gets back from Paris. Then I think the best that we can do will be to leave them to find a solution of the problem between them. Depend upon it that, whatever solution they do arrive at, it will be more accurate and will stand the test of time better than any arbitrary action which you or I might take."

And so ended the only false—utterly and hopelessly false—judgment which Sir Godfrey Raleigh had ever delivered.

Sir Arthur took it as gospel, it all seemed so clear and so logical, so fair to everybody; just the sort of judgment, in fact, which might have been expected from a man of such vast and varied experience. Both of them had the best of intentions, for were not the happiness, the earthly fates of their two only children bound up in it?

Under such circumstances, though the advice might be mistaken, it was absolutely impossible that it could be anything else but honest and sincere. It was not for them to see into the future, nor yet to solve those impossibly intricate problems of human passion, of human strength and weakness, which, in defiance of all laws human and divine, break through the traditions of ages, make a mockery of all commonplace laws, and finally solve themselves with an accuracy as pitiless as it is precise.

Sir Arthur left his friend's house with the firm conviction that the only thing to be done under the circumstances was to follow his advice. When he got back to his house in Warwick Gardens, the door was opened by Koda Bux, and the first thing he said to him was:

"Is Mr. Vane awake?"

"Sahib, he is, and well. He is even as though he had never drunk of the liquor of fire. He is in the library awaiting your return."

It was then getting on for one o'clock, the lunch-time of Sir Arthur's household, and the table was already laid in what was called the breakfast-room, that is to say a room looking out upon one of the long, back gardens which are attached to the houses in Warwick Gardens.

Vane was sitting in the library waiting, something in shame and something in fear, for his father's return. He more than half-expected that his father would come in and begin at once to haul him over the coals on account of what had happened the night before. He did not feel altogether satisfied about his adventure with Miss Carol, and he was very much ashamed of himself, indeed, for what had happened afterwards. But as yet, he had no suspicion of the terrible secret which in the almost immediate future was to decide his destiny in life. The dreadful fact of inherited alcoholism was yet to be revealed to him. He thought that his father was simply going to rate him for having exceeded the bounds of prudence during his night out, for coming home in a cab with such a person as Miss Carol, and then, worse than all, to tell him that he had made a beast of himself by beginning to drink whiskey when he was alone after having refused to take anything while his father was in the room. It was that that he was really afraid of.

He had no idea of what had happened since the time that he had fallen from his chair on to the hearth-rug, saving only the brief awakening in his bed with Koda Bux standing beside him, the drinking of the crimson-coloured effervescing liquid, and then the long, calm sleep which had spread itself like a gulf between the agony of the one awakening and the peace of the next.

He was sitting in one of the big arm-chairs in the library when his father came in. He got up and stood before him, something as a criminal might do before his judge, expecting to hear something like a sentence from his lips. He was very much ashamed of himself, and being so was perfectly prepared to take his punishment which would probably come in the shape of a few cold words of reproof, and a hard look in his father's eyes which he had seen before. But, instead of that, when he got up out of the arm-chair, and began somewhat falteringly:

"Dad, I'm awfully sorry——" his father stopped him, and said with a look at the clock on the mantel-piece: "I think it is about lunch time, isn't it? Yes, there is the gong. How's your appetite?"

"Well, better than I thought it would be," said Vane, "better, in fact, than it deserves to be. That stuff that Koda gave me this morning has worked wonders——"

"Very well, then," said Sir Arthur, cutting him short, "I think we may as well go and have some lunch."

The meal was eaten in a somewhat awkward silence, broken by odds and ends of talk which were obviously spoken and replied to, not for the purpose

of conversation, but to fill up time. Both father and son were as unhappy as men could very well be, and yet the ancient custom which forbids the Anglo-Saxon race to talk about unpleasant things at meal-times, prevented Sir Arthur from saying what he had to say, and Vane from asking what he wanted to ask.

At last, when Koda came in and said that coffee was served in the Den they got up, both of them feeling a certain sense of relief, although both knew that the worst was yet to come.

When they got into the Den, Sir Arthur said to Koda in Urdu:

"The house is empty. There is no one here. The door is bolted. No one must enter, till I say so."

He opened the door, spread the palms of his hands outwards, inclined his head, and said in the same language: "Thou art obeyed, Huzur. It is already done." Then he backed out of the door and shut it.

Sir Arthur got up out of his chair, turned the key in the lock, and said to Vane in a tone whose calmness astonished him almost as much as the words did:

"Vane, why did you drink that whiskey last night? You know I asked you to have some, and you said that although you had never disobeyed me before, if I had ordered you to have some you would not have done it. And yet, after I had left the room you emptied the decanter. Why was that?"

Vane had expected anything but this, for his father had spoken as quietly as if he had been asking him about the most ordinary concern of their daily life. He remembered dimly those few dreadful minutes after the subtle aroma from the whiskey decanter had reached his nostrils, the swift intoxication, the brilliant series of visions which had passed before his eyes, and then the dead, black night which had fallen over his senses, and after that nothing more until he had awakened with parched mouth and burning brain, and Koda standing by his bedside.

"I'm afraid, dad, I was very drunk last night, but why, I don't know. I was sober enough when I came in, you know that yourself. But somehow, just when you had gone out of the room and told me to put the spirit case away, I took up the whiskey decanter and smelt it. There seemed to be some infernal influence in it which made me simply long to drink. I did not want to in the ordinary way, and as I had been having brandy and soda and champagne before, of course, whiskey was the very worst thing I could possibly have drunk. Yet it seemed somehow to get hold of me. I felt as

though I had to drink. It didn't matter what it was so long as it was alcohol. It was the smell of it that intoxicated me first, and when I had once smelt it I went on, till I was dead drunk, and I suppose that is the way that you found me. That is all that I know about it. I am horribly ashamed of myself, and I can only promise you that, if I can help it, it will never occur again."

"Sit down, Vane, and let us talk this over," said Sir Arthur, seating himself in the arm-chair on the other side of the fire-place. "I suppose you thought when I came back that I was going to give you the usual sort of lecture that a father would give his son under the circumstances. Well, I am not going to do that. I am sorry to say that it is a great deal more serious than that."

"What do you mean, dad?" said Vane, getting up out of the arm- chair into which he had thrown himself, as though resigned to receive his sentence. "More serious than that? Surely it is bad enough for a fellow to come home as I did last night, and then get drunk on whiskey and have to be carried to bed. There can't be anything very much worse than that."

"There might have been," said Sir Arthur, "if you had not stopped the cab where you did. What would you say if I told you that that girl—you remember what you said to me about her likeness to yourself—what would you say if I were to tell you that that girl is your sister?"

"Good God! Dad, you don't mean that, do you? It can't be. I never had a sister. You have always told me that I am the only child. Mother died twenty years ago, didn't she? And that girl was only about nineteen. No, you can't mean it!"

"Yes," said Sir Arthur, in a tone which seemed very strange to his son. "I do mean it. When I told you that your mother had died a few months after you were born, I did not tell you the truth. She died to me and to you, but that was all. She is alive still. That girl that you drove up in the cab with last night was her daughter, but not mine."

No more terrible words than these could have Vane turned white to his lips as he heard them, and for a moment he looked into his father's grey stern face with a glance that had something of hate in it. His fists even clenched and his shoulders squared as though the impulse was on him to raise his hands against him. But there was such an infinite sadness in Sir Arthur's eyes and such an expression of unspeakable suffering on his hard- set features, that as he looked at him the anger died out of Vane's eyes and his hands fell limp and open by his side.

It was some time before he was able to command his voice sufficiently to shape coherent words, but at length he managed to say in a hard, half-choking tone:

"Of course it is impossible that you could tell me anything but the truth, dad. And so I am the son of a disgraced woman, am I? Poor Eny, what will she think of me now? Of course it will be all over between us?"

His instinct had spoken, as Sir Godfrey Raleigh had said it would, and spoken truly. But Sir Arthur said quickly:

"No; my boy. It is bad enough, God knows, but it may not be as bad as that. I have been to see Miss Vane this morning, and when I had satisfied myself of the relationship between you, I went on to Raleigh and told him the whole story, as I thought it was only right to do. He said, very properly I think, that it was a matter for you and Enid to decide between yourselves, for after all it is the happiness of your lives which is in question, and therefore the decision ought to rest with you."

"I don't see how there can be any decision but one," said Vane, who had sat down again, and, with his elbows on his knees and his face between his hands, was staring with blank eyes down at the carpet. "And so I am the son of that girl's mother, am I? Well, it couldn't be very much worse than that, and yet, God help us, she is my mother after all."

Then he threw himself back in his chair, let his hands fall limply over the arms and stared up at the ceiling.

"You may as well tell me the whole of the story, now dad," he went on, in a broken, miserable voice. "You had better tell me, and then I shall know where I am."

His father looked at him for a moment or two in silence, and then he said, with a note of reproof in his tone:

"That is a hasty judgment, Vane, but a natural one, I admit. When I have told you the story you will see what I mean. The mother who bore you was as good and pure a woman as ever lived when she became your mother, and this girl, from what I have seen of her this morning, I am perfectly certain is thoroughly good and honest in herself. I am satisfied that it is her fate that has made her what she is; not her fault."

"Yes," said Vane, "I was wrong. After all I have no right to judge my mother. I remember nothing about her, and as for Carol, she is a good girl whatever else she may be. Can't something be done for her, dad? I mean something to

get her out of that horrible life. It is too awful to think of, isn't it? We must do something."

"That's just what I should have expected you to say, Vane," said his father, "and anything that I can do shall be done. But I'm afraid it won't be very easy. I did suggest something of the sort, of course, but she cut me short very quickly. She simply said that she could not discuss the subject then, and there was an end of it. I am quite certain that anything which had even a suggestion of charity about it would be quite out of the question."

"Of course it would," said Vane, almost angrily. "After all, she is my sister. However, that can wait. Now tell me what you were going to tell me. How did all this begin? Do you know who the man was, because if so I want to go and see him?"

"No, I don't, Vane," his father replied, slowly. "To tell you the truth, I never even attempted to find out. We were living at Simla at the time, and Simla is, as perhaps you know, not the most moral of places. You were nearly three years old, and for about a year your mother had shown signs of what doctors call now Alcoholic Insanity. I shall never forget the first time that I found her drunk——"

"Never mind that, dad," Vane interrupted, with a sharp catch in his voice, "I don't want to hear about it, it's bad enough already. Was Carol right about that light which she used to see in her eyes and which I suppose you saw in mine last night?"

"Yes, perfectly," replied Sir Arthur. "I used to think it beautiful once, before I knew what a dreadful meaning it had. When she had had a glass or so of champagne, her eyes—and they were just like yours and Carol's—used to light up marvellously. People used to speak of them as the most beautiful eyes in the East; but afterwards, that light in them began to burn brighter, and when at last she gave way completely, it became something horrible, although, somehow, it was still beautiful—damnably beautiful."

"Well, one night," Sir Arthur went on, leaning back in his chair and staring into vacancy, "she went out to spend the evening, as she told me, with a friend; as a matter of fact it was Raleigh's sister. She had been drinking a little during the afternoon, but I felt that she would be safe there, for both Raleigh and his sister knew of this miserable failing of hers. Unfortunately, I had a lot of work to do that evening, and I was unable to go with her. I went about eleven o'clock to bring her home. I found she had not been there at all. I went back and sat up the whole night, I needn't tell you Vane what my thoughts were. She didn't come. She never came.

"A month afterwards I got a letter from her written from Bombay. She confessed that for over a year she had been deceiving me; that another man had stolen her love from me; that she could never face me or look upon you again, and that was all. She gave no address, no sign that I could trace her by. If she had done I would have forgiven her and asked her to come back for your sake. But it was over ten years before I saw her again, and then it was in a house in a wretched street in Paris.

"Then she was a drunkard, a hopeless drunkard, lost to all sense and shame. She had taken my name again and was making it infamous, and for your sake I was forced to take some decided steps. I took proceedings in the French Courts, and got authority to confine her in an asylum for inebriates, and she is there now, almost an imbecile."

"And what about Carol?" said Vane, in a hard, strained voice, "doesn't she know who her father is, and couldn't you have got a divorce?"

"Carol does not know for certain who her father is," said Sir Arthur. "There was someone who went about the Continent a good deal with her mother when she was very young, and she thinks that he was. It is quite possible that he may have been the scoundrel, whoever he was, who took her away from Simla. As for the divorce, of course I could have got one, but I had no desire to marry again, and I preferred to let the thing rest as it was, rather than drag our name through the cesspool of the Divorce Court and the newspapers. Everybody was very good to me, and in time I lived it down and it was forgotten. In fact, I suppose if it hadn't been for that chance meeting of yours last night, it might never have been heard of again."

"Then that," said Vane, "is, I suppose, the secret of my drinking the whiskey last night, and the explanation of the light which Carol saw in my eyes when I had drunk too much champagne. My blood is poisoned, and so, when I've drunk a certain amount, the smell of alcohol is irresistible. There's one thing perfectly certain, I don't like whiskey and I never have liked it, and I'm quite sure I never wanted it less than I did last night; and yet when I smelt it, the smell somehow seemed to get up into my brain and force me to drink it.

"I tried my best to resist it. Honestly I did, dad, but it was no use. I tasted it, and then I took a long drink of it, and then I took another. I didn't seem to get drunk, I went mad. I saw some magnificent visions, they seemed to be all round the room, nickering like the Biograph, then, all of a sudden, they vanished, and I don't remember anything more until I woke and found Koda standing beside me. Now was that the sort of thing that used to happen to my mother?"

"It was," replied his father, "exactly, and when she came to her senses after one of her bouts, she used to implore me to keep the smell, even the sight, of liquor away from her. Of course I did. I gave up drinking myself, and what I had in the house for friends I kept constantly under lock and key. It seemed to be successful for a time, and then she began to get liquor from somewhere else. I never could find out how or where she did it. I had her watched, but it was no use. Weeks would pass and she would be perfectly sober. Then, without the slightest warning, she would go out for a walk or to pay some calls and come back, not drunk, but getting drunk.

"We used to have some terrible scenes then, as you may believe. I dismissed four butlers because she had either bribed or frightened them into giving her the keys of the wine cellar. I had the best medical men in India for her, and at last I got her to consent to go into a Sanitorium. That, however, was merely a blind to keep my suspicions quiet. It was only a few days before she was to have gone there that she disappeared."

"And you never had any suspicion about the scoundrel that she went away with? I expect if the truth was known, she got the liquor secretly through him after you had stopped it. I am beginning already to have a presentiment that I shall meet that man some day, and if I do, may God have mercy on him, for I won't!"

"No, no, Vane, don't say that, my boy! Remember what is written—'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Whoever he is his sin will find him out, if it has not done so already."

Sir Arthur spoke with the absolute conviction of a deeply religious man. He believed his own words honestly; and yet, if he could have seen how his own prophecy was to be fulfilled, he would have given his right hand, nay, he would even have shaken hands with the man who had so deeply wronged him, rather than that they should have had so terrible a fulfilment.

Indeed, even while he was speaking the wheels of Fate had already begun to revolve.

When Carol and Dora returned from their ride Dora found a letter waiting for her. She opened it, glanced quickly over the page and then said:

"Carol, how will this suit you for this evening? I think a night out would do you good after your little shake-up this morning. Listen—

"DEAR DORA,

"Yesterday I became a happy bachelor for a fortnight. Encumbrances gone to Folkestone. If you have nothing better to do, meet me at the 'West End' at 7.30 this evening, and, if possible, bring Miss Vane, as I am bringing a friend, who, after my description of her—don't be jealous!—is quite anxious to meet her. He is good looking and very well off, and I think she will like him.

"Hoping you will both be able to come,

"Yours ever,

"BERNARD."

"That sounds promising," said Miss Carol. "If he's that sort, and nice as well, and has plenty of the necessary, I shouldn't mind if he took me on as a sort of permanence. Somehow, after last night and this morning, I've got sick of this general knocking- about. Besides, it's no class. All right, I'll come. A bit of a kick-up will do me good, I think. That talk with the old gentleman this morning gave me quite a number 25 hump, though the ride has worked a good bit of it off. Now let's feed, I'm hungry enough to dine off cold boiled block ornaments."

Mr. Bernard Falcon, the writer of the letter to Dora, was principal partner in the somewhat incongruously named firm of solicitors, Messrs. Falcon and Lambe, of Mansion House Chambers, E.C. The firm did all sorts of work, provided only that it paid; the highest class under their style, and the other sorts—the money-lending and "speculative business"—through their own "jackals," that is to say seedy and broken-down solicitors who had made a failure of their own business, but had managed to keep on the Rolls and were not above doing "commission work" for more prosperous firms.

Mr. Lambe, away from his business, was a most excellent person; a good husband and father, a regular church-goer, and a generous supporter of all good works in and about Denmark Hill, where he lived. He was one of those strangely constituted men—of whom there are multitudes in the world—who will earn money by the most questionable, if not absolutely dishonest, methods, without a qualm of conscience, and give liberally of that same money without recognising for a moment that what they honestly believe they are giving to God, is a portion of the Wages of Sin—which, as good Christians, they ought never to have earned.

Mr. Bernard Falcon, on the other hand, in his private life, aimed at nothing more than respectability in the worst sense of the word. His wife and his two little girls went to church. He himself went on Sunday mornings when he had no more pressing engagements. His name appeared regularly on the

subscription lists published in connection with St. Michael's, Brondesbury, his parish church, and he also paid the rent of No. 15, Melville Gardens, Brook Green, in addition to one hundred and fifty pounds a year as what he would have called "a retainer" to Miss Dora Russell—to say nothing of certain milliner's and jeweller's bills which he liquidated, sometimes cheerfully and sometimes grudgingly, according to his humour and their amount.

When Carol and Dora got out of their cab at the door of the "West End" and went into the little vestibule-bar to the left, they found two men in evening dress waiting for them. One of them—a man of about forty, bald on the temples, of medium height, well-fed and well-groomed, and not by any means bad-looking, though of an entirely mediocre type—Carol greeted with the easy familiarity of old acquaintance, for she had known him for nearly a year as Dora's 'particular friend.' The other, tall, well-built, handsome, and with that unmistakable stamp of breeding on him which Mr. Bernard Falcon totally lacked, she instantly recognised as Reginald Garthorne, her intended companion for the evening.

The first thing he did when they had been introduced by Bernard Falcon, was to apologise for what he had said in front of the Criterion the night before. He did it with admirably calculated deference, and in such perfectly chosen words, that it was quite impossible for her not to accept his apology and "make friends."

During the evening he became completely fascinated, not only by her beauty, but far more so by the extraordinary charm of her manner. He was a man who, apart from his physical qualities and good looks, could, when he chose, make himself very pleasing to women, and, without showing a trace of effort, he did his very best to please Miss Carol, and succeeded so completely, that when, a few days later, he made a proposal of a partly domestic nature to her, she, after a brief consultation with Dora, accepted it.

At the end of the month the house in Melville Gardens was to let, and Carol and Dora were installed in a flat in Densmore Gardens, South Kensington, for the rent of which Reginald Garthorne and Mr. Bernard Falcon were jointly responsible—of course, under other names. The only condition that Carol had made with Garthorne, was that, whatever happened, he would not tell Vane of her change of address, and he, for very good reasons of his own, had promised unconditionally.

CHAPTER V

The next day Enid Raleigh came home.

Almost the first thing she said to her mother, who had met her at the station with the carriage, was:

"Well, and where is Master Vane, please? He is in town, isn't he? Why didn't he come to meet me? I shall have to make him do penance for this."

The words were lightly spoken, spoken in utter unconsciousness of the deep meaning which Fate had put into them. So far as Enid herself was concerned, and as, in fact, she was just thinking at the moment, all they meant was that at their next meeting she would refuse Vane his long-accustomed lover's kiss, and then, after an explanation occupying some three or four minutes at most, surrender at discretion, after which would come the luxury of playing at being offended and standing on her dignity for a few minutes more, and then enjoying the further luxury of making it up.

"Yes, dear," said her mother, "Vane is in town still. I think he doesn't go back to Oxford until the end of the week, but he hasn't been very well lately——"

"Not well!" exclaimed Enid, sitting up out of the corner of the carriage into which she had leaned back with that easy abandon which comes so naturally to people accustomed to comfort all their lives. "Ill! Why, Vane's never been ill in his life. What's the matter? It isn't anything serious, is it? You don't mean that he's really ill, mother, do you?"

There was no mistaking the reality of the anxiety in her tone. Her mother recognised it instantly, but she also saw that a brougham rattling over the streets of London was not exactly the place to enter upon such explanations as it was her destiny and her duty to make to this brilliant, beautiful, spoilt darling of a daughter who was sitting beside her.

So far as she knew, every hope, every prospect of Enid's life, that bright young life which, in the fuller acceptation of the term, was only just going to begin, was connected more or less intimately with Vane Maxwell.

Ever since they had come home together from Bombay on that memorable voyage, she and Vane had been sweethearts. They were very much in love with each other, and so far their love had been a striking exception to that old proverb which comes true only too often. Saving only those lovers' quarrels which don't count because they end so much more pleasantly than they begin, there had never been a cloud in that morning-sky of life towards

which they had so far walked hand in hand. It seemed as though the Fates themselves had conspired to make everything pleasant and easy for them; and of course it had never struck either of them that when the Fates do this kind of thing, they always have a more or less heavy account on the other side—to be presented in due course.

Lady Raleigh knew this, and her daughter did not. She knew that the terrible explanation had to come, but she very naturally shrank from the inevitable—and so, woman-like, she temporised.

"Really, dear," she said, "I can't talk with all this jolting and rattle. When we get home I will tell you all about it. Vane himself is not ill at all. He is just as well as ever he was. It isn't that."

"Then I suppose," said Miss Enid, looking round sharply, "my lord has been getting himself into some scrape or other—something that has to be explained or talked away before he likes to meet me. Is that it?"

"No, Enid, that is not it," replied her mother gravely, "but really, dear, I must ask you to say nothing more about it just now. When we get home we'll have a cup of tea, and then I'll tell you all about it."

"Oh, very well," said Enid, a trifle petulantly. "I suppose there's some mystery about it. Of course there must be, or else he'd have come here himself, so we may as well change the subject. How do you like the new flat, and what's it like?"

As she said this she threw herself back again into the corner and stared out of the opposite window of the brougham with a look in her eyes which seemed to say that for the time being she had no further interest in any earthly affairs.

Lady Raleigh, glad of the relief even for the moment, at once began a voluble and minute description of the new flat in Addison Gardens into which they had moved during her daughter's last sojourn in Paris, and this, with certain interjections and questions from Enid, lasted until the brougham turned into the courtyard and drew up in front of the arched doorway out of which the tall, uniformed porter came with the fingers of his left hand raised to the peak of his cap, to open the carriage door.

Sir Godfrey was out, and would not be back until dinner time; so, as soon as they had taken their things off, Lady Raleigh ordered tea in her own room, and there, as briefly as was consistent with the gravity of the news she had to tell, she told Enid everything that her husband had heard from Sir Arthur.

Enid, although she flushed slightly at certain portions of the narrative, listened to the story with a calmness which somewhat surprised her mother.

The little damsel for whose kisses those two boys had fought ten or eleven years ago, had now grown into a fair and stately maiden of eighteen, very dainty and desirable to look upon, and withal possessing a dignity which only comes by birth and breeding and that larger training and closer contact with the world which modern girls of her class enjoy. Young as she was, hers was not the innocence of ignorance. She had lived too late in the century, and had already been too far afield in the world for that.

"It comes to this, then," she said quietly, almost hardly, "instead of being dead, as we have believed all along, Vane's mother is alive; an imbecile who has become so through drink, and who seems to have misbehaved herself very badly when Vane was a baby. She is in an asylum, and will probably remain there till she dies. No one but ourselves and this interesting young person, Miss Carol Vane, appears to know anything about it, and I really don't see why Vane is to be held responsible for his mother's insanity—for I suppose that's what it comes to.

"And then there is Miss Carol herself. Of course she's not a particularly desirable family connection; but I don't suppose Vane would expect me to meet her, much less fall upon her neck and greet her as his long- lost sister. I suppose, too, that between us we could manage to do something for her, and put her in a more respectable way of living and induce her to hold her tongue.

"As for Vane getting drunk that night, of course it's very improper and all that sort of thing from the Sunday School point of view; but I don't suppose he was the only undergraduate who took too much to drink that night. Probably several hundreds of them did, and I daresay a good many of them were either engaged or going to be. Would they consider that a reason why they should go and break off their engagements? I'm afraid there wouldn't be many marriages nowadays if engagements were broken off on that account.

"Of course, mam, dear, what you've told me is not exactly pleasant to hear, but still, after all, I really can't see anything so very dreadful in it. Most families have a skeleton of some sort, I suppose, and this is ours, or will be when Vane and I are married. We must simply keep the cupboard door shut as closely as possible. It's only what lots of other people have to do."

"Well, my dear," said her mother, "I must say I'm very glad to see you take it so reasonably. I'm afraid I could not have done so at your age, but then girls

are so different now, and, besides, you always had more of your father's way of looking at things than mine. Then, I suppose, Vane may come and see you. I think it was very nice of him not to come until you had been told everything."

"May come!" said Enid. "I should think so. If he doesn't I shall be distinctly offended. I shall expect him to come round and make his explanations in person before long, and when he does we will have a few minutes chat à deux—and I don't think I shall have very much difficulty in convincing him of the error of his ways, or, at any rate, of his opinions."

"What an extremely conceited speech to make, dear!" said her ladyship mildly, and yet with a glance of motherly pride at the beauty which went so far towards justifying it. "Well, perhaps you are right. Certainly, if anyone can, you can, and I sincerely hope you will. It would be dreadful if anything were to happen to break it off after all these years."

The colour went out of Enid's cheeks in an instant, and she said in quite an altered voice:

"Oh, for goodness sake, mamma, don't say anything about that! You know how fond I am of Vane. I simply couldn't give him up, whatever sort of a mother he had, and if he had a dozen half-sisters as disreputable as this Miss Carol Vane—the very idea of her having the impudence to use his name! No, I shan't think of that—I couldn't. If Vane did that it would just break my heart—it really would. It would be like taking half my life away, and it would simply kill me. I couldn't bear it."

She honestly meant what she said, not knowing that she said it in utter ignorance of the self that said it.

It was in Enid's mind, as it also was in her mother's, to send a note round to Warwick Gardens to ask both Vane and his father to come round to an informal dinner, and to discuss the matter there and then; but neither of them gave utterance to the thought. Lady Raleigh, knowing her daughter's proud and somewhat impetuous temperament, instinctively shrank from making a suggestion which she would have had very good grounds for rejecting, more especially as she had already given such a very decided opinion as to Vane's scruples.

As for Enid herself, she honestly thought so little of these same scruples that she felt inclined to accuse Vane of a Quixotism which, from her point of view at least, was entirely unwarrantable. It was, therefore, quite impossible for her to first suggest that they should meet after a parting during which

they might have unconsciously reached what was to be the crisis of both their lives.

The result was that the thought remained unspoken, and Enid, after spending the evening in vexed and anxious uncertainty, went to bed; and then, as soon as she felt that she was absolutely safe in her solitude, discussed the whole matter over again with herself, and wound the discussion up with a good hearty cry, after which she fell into the dreamless slumber of the healthy and innocent.

When she woke very early the next morning, or, rather, while she was on that borderland between sleeping and waking where the mind works with such strange rapidity, she reviewed the whole of the circumstances, and came to the conclusion that she was being very badly treated. Vane knew perfectly well that she was coming back yesterday afternoon, and therefore he had no right to let these absurd scruples of his prevent him from performing the duties of a lover and meeting her at the station. But, even granted that something else had made it impossible for him to do so, there was absolutely no excuse for his remaining away the whole afternoon and evening when he must have known how welcome a visit would have been.

Meanwhile Vane had been doing the very last thing that she would have imagined him doing.

After his fateful conversation with his father he had left the house in Warwick Gardens to wander he knew and cared not whither. His thoughts were more than sufficient companionship for him, and, heeding neither time nor distance, he walked as he might have walked in a dream, along the main road through Hammersmith and Turnham Green and Kew, and so through Richmond Hill till he had climbed the hill and stopped for a brief moment of desperate debate before the door of the saloon bar of the "Star and Garter." The better impulse conquered the worse, and he entered the park, and, seating himself on one of the chairs under the trees, he made an effort to calmly survey the question in all its bearings.

It was the most momentous of all human tasks—the choosing of his own future life-path at the parting of the ways. One of them, flower- bordered and green with the new-grown grass of life's spring-time, and the other dry, rugged and rock-strewn—the paths of inclination and duty: the one leading up to the golden gates of the Paradise of wedded love, and the other slanting down to the wide wilderness which he must cross alone, until he passed alone into the shadows which lay beyond it.

A few days before he had seen himself well on the way to everything that can make a man's life full and bright and worthy to be lived. He was, thanks to his father's industry, relieved from all care on the score of money, and, better still, he had that within him which made him independent of fortune, perfect health and great abilities, already well-proved, although he had yet to wait nearly a year for his twenty-first birthday.

He had great ambitions and the high hopes which go with them. The path to honour and distinction, even to fame itself, had lain plainly open before him—and now everything was so different. The sun which he had thought was only rising was already setting. He knew now that the fruit which looked so sweet and luscious had the canker-worm feeding on the core; that the flesh which seemed so healthy was really tainted and leprous; and that, worse than all, the brightest and sweetest promise of his life, a promise infinitely sweeter and dearer than even the fulfilment of his highest material ambition, was now no longer a promise but a denial, a life-sacrifice demanded, not only by his honour as a man, but by his love as a lover.

He sat thus thinking until the buzzing of a motor-car woke him from his day-dream. He looked at his watch, and found that he had about time to get across the park to Sheen Gate; but he fell to dreaming again on the way, and when he reached the gate it was closed.

He turned back with the idea of asking a keeper to unlock the gate and let him out, but after a few strides he halted and sat down again on a seat. After all, were he to go home, he could not sleep, and it better suited his mood to keep vigil in the open air than within the four walls of his room.

And so he passed the night, walking half awake, and then sitting, half asleep, dimly reviewing this sudden crisis of his fate again and again from all possible aspects. And again and again the determination to adhere to the decision which duty had marked out so clearly seemed to beat itself deeper and deeper into his brain.

The taint of alcoholism was in his blood, and matrimony and parentage were not for him. In the morning he would go straight to Enid's father and admit that, although ties reaching back into her childhood and his had to be broken, yet it was impossible for the engagement between him and Enid to be continued.

The night passed, and the park gates were again opened, but still Vane sat on, until, noticing the suspicious glances of some of the early pedestrians, he decided to get home, have a tub, and pay his fateful visit to Sir Godfrey Raleigh.

As it happened, however, that visit was never to be paid. Enid had found her waking thoughts unpleasant, if not almost intolerable, and, being too perfectly healthy to indulge in anything of the nature of moping or sulks, she came to the conclusion that a good sharp spin on her bicycle would be the best mental tonic she could have; so she got a cup of coffee and a biscuit, took out her machine, and started away to work off, as she hoped, the presentiment of coming trouble which seemed to have fastened itself upon her.

Thus it happened that she entered Richmond Park by Sheen Gate just as Vane, physically weary yet still mentally sleepless, was coming out of it.

During his night's vigil he had nerved himself, as he thought, to meet every imaginable trial but this one—this vision of his well- beloved, not waiting for him, but coming to him fresh and radiant in her young beauty, delightful and desirable, tempting almost beyond the powers of human resistance, and his, too, his own sweetheart, pledged to him ever since that memorable afternoon when he had fought for her and won her behind the wheelhouse in the midst of the Indian Ocean.

When her wonder had given way to complete recognition Enid dismounted and waited, naturally expecting that he would greet her; but he stood silent, looking at her as though he were trying to find some words of salutation.

"Well, Vane," she said at last, "I suppose we may shake hands. I did not expect to see you here. Cannot you look a little more cheerful? What is the matter? You look as if you hadn't been home all night."

He took her hand mechanically, and, as he held it and looked down into the sweet upturned face with a bright flush on the cheeks and the dawning of an angry light in the gentle eyes, he felt an almost irresistible desire to take her in his arms just as he had done at their last meeting and kiss into silence the tempting lips which had just shaped those almost scornfully spoken words.

It dawned upon her in the same moment that he was looking as she had never seen him look before. His face was perfectly bloodless. The features were hard-set and deep-lined. There were furrows in his forehead and shadows under his eyes. When she had last seen his face it was that of a boy of twenty, full of health and strength, and without a care on his mind. Now it was the face of a man of thirty, a man who had lived and sinned and sorrowed.

In that instant her mood and her voice changed, and she said:

"Vane, dear, what is it? Why don't you speak to me? Are you ill?"

He took her bicycle from her, and, turning, walked with her back into the park. After a few moments' silence he replied in a voice which seemed horribly strange to her:

"Yes, Enid, I am. I am ill, and I am afraid there is no cure for the disease. I have not been home. In fact, I have been in the park all night. I was shut in by accident, and I remained from choice, trying to think out my duty to you."

"Oh, nonsense!" she replied. "I know what you mean. It's about you getting drunk the other night—and—and your unfortunate mother and this newly-found half-sister of yours. Well, of course, I suppose it was exceedingly wrong of you to get so very drunk. And the rest—I mean about your mother—that is very sad and terrible. But, bad as it is, I think you are taking it a great deal too seriously. I've talked it all over with mamma, and she thinks just as I do about it."

When she had said this Enid felt that she had gone quite as far as her self-respect and maidenly pride would permit her to go. As she looked up at him she saw the pallor of his face change almost to grey. His hand was resting lightly on her arm, and she felt it tremble. Then he drew it gently away and said:

"I know what you mean, Enid, and it is altogether too good and generous of you; but I don't think you quite understand—I mean, you don't seem to realise how serious it all is."

"Really, Vane, I must say that you are acting very strangely. What is the good of going all over it again? You can't tell me anything more, I suppose, than I have heard already from mamma. Surely you don't mean that you intend that everything is to be over between us—that we are only to be friends, as they say, in future?"

"I quite see what you mean," he said, his lips perceptibly tightening; "and that, too, in a certain sense, is what I mean also."

"What!" she exclaimed. "Do you really mean that I am not to be any more what I have been to you, and that if we meet again it must only be as ordinary acquaintances, just friends who have known each other a certain number of years? Surely, Vane, you don't mean that—dear?"

The last word escaped her lips almost involuntarily. She tried to keep it back, but it got out in spite of herself. It was only the fact that they were

walking on the public highway that prevented her from giving way altogether to the sense of despair that had come over her. As his face had changed a few moments before so did hers now, and as she looked at him he stopped momentarily in his walk.

But the lessons which he had learnt during the last few days, and most of all during this last night of lonely wandering and desperate questioning with himself, had ground the moral into his soul so deeply that not even the sight of her so anxiously longing for just one word from him to bring them together again, and make them once more as they had always been—almost since either of them could remember anything—was strong enough to force him to speak it.

He involuntarily wheeled the bicycle towards the middle of the road, as though he was afraid to trust himself too near her, and said, speaking as a man might speak when pronouncing his own death sentence:

"Yes, Enid, that is what I do mean. I mean that there is a great deal more, something infinitely more serious in what has happened during the last few days, in what I have learnt and you have been told, than you seem to have any idea of."

Enid made a gesture as though she would interrupt him, but he went on almost hotly:

"Listen to me, Enid, and then judge me as you please—only listen to me. Four days ago, after I had seen the Boat Race, I did as a good many other fellows from the 'Varsity do—I went West. By sheer accident I met a girl so like myself that—well, I didn't know then that I had a sister. Yesterday I learnt, then, that I have one—not my father's daughter, only my mother's—and you know what that means. We had supper together at the Trocadero——"

"Really, Vane, I do think you might spare me these little details," said Enid, with a sort of weary impatience. "I have heard of this half-sister of yours already. Suppose we leave her out for the present?"

"Yes," he said, again stopping momentarily in his walk. "We will leave her out for the present. In fact, as far as you are concerned, Enid, she may be left out for ever."

"Why—what do you mean, Vane?" she exclaimed, stopping short.

"I mean," he said, beginning quickly and then halting for a moment. "I mean that, considering everything that has happened during the last few days, I have no intention of asking you to become her half- sister—even in law."

The real meaning of his utterance forced itself swiftly enough upon her now, and for a minute rendered her incapable of speech. She, however, like others of her blood and breed, had learned how to seem most careless when she cared most, and so she managed to reply not only steadily but even stiffly:

"Of course, after that there is very little to be said, Mr. Maxwell. I'm afraid I have not properly understood what has happened. Perhaps, though, it would have been better for you to have seen my father and talked this over with him first."

The "Mr. Maxwell" cut him to the quick. It was the first time he had ever heard it from her lips. Yet it did not affect the decision which was, as he had for the time being, at least, convinced himself, inevitable, and so miserable was he that even her scornful indignation was something like a help to him.

He was even grateful that this interview, which he had looked forward to with dread, had taken place in the open air rather than in the drawing-room of Sir Godfrey Raleigh's house, for if she had simply sat down and cried, as, perhaps, nine out of ten girls in her position would have done, his task would have been infinitely more difficult, perhaps even impossible of accomplishment. Her present attitude, however, seemed to appeal to his masculine pride and stimulate it. He turned slightly towards her, and said, with a sudden change in his voice which she felt almost like a blow:

"Yes, Miss Raleigh, you are quite right. I will spare you the details; at least, those which are not essential. But there are some which are. For instance," he went on, with a note of vehemence in his tone which made it impossible for her to interrupt him, "four nights ago I was lying on the floor of the Den at home, blind, dead drunk—drunk, mind you, after this sister of mine had seen in my eyes the sign of drunkenness which she had seen in her mother's—that was my mother, too, an imbecile dipsomaniac, remember—who had sunk to unspeakable degradation before she became what she is. I was as sober as I am now when I told my father this—I mean what Carol had told me. I noticed that there was something strange about him while I was telling him, but I thought that was just a matter of circumstances, you know——"

"Yes, I think I know, or at any rate I can guess," said Miss Enid, with angry eyes and tightened lips.

"Very well, then," he went on, "and after that—after my father had asked me to have a glass of whiskey with him—after I had refused and he had gone to bed and I was putting the spirit-case away without any idea of drinking again, one smell of the whiskey seemed to paralyse my whole mental force. It turned me from a sane man who had had a solemn warning into a madman who had only one feeling—the craving for alcohol in some shape. I smelt again, and the smell of it went like fire through my veins. I tasted it, and then I drank. I drank again and again, until, as I suppose your mother has told you, I fell on the rug, no longer a man, but simply a helpless, intoxicated beast. I was utterly insensible to everything about me, I didn't care whether I lived or died. When I woke and thought about it I would a thousand times rather have been dead.

"It wasn't that I wanted the liquor. I didn't get drunk because I wanted to. I got drunk, Enid, because I had to; because there was a lurking devil in my blood which forced me to drink that whiskey just because it was alcohol, because it was drink, because it was the element ready to respond to that craving which I have inherited from this unhappy mother of mine.

"Do you know what that means, Enid? I don't think you do. It means that my blood has been poisoned from my very birth. Of course, you don't know this. Your parents don't know it, any more than they know that it is too late to redeem the ruin which has fallen upon me. That, at least, I can say with a clear conscience is no fault or sin of mine. Since then I have thrashed this miserable thing out in every way that I can think of. I have talked it over with my father, and he has talked it over with yours. I have been wandering about the park all night trying to find out what I ought to do—and I think I have found it."

"From which I suppose I am to understand," she replied, in a voice which was nothing like as firm as she intended it to be, "you mean, Vane—or perhaps I ought to say Mr. Maxwell now—that henceforth—I mean that we are not going to be married after all."

"What I mean is this, Enid," he replied, "that dearly as I love you, and just because I love you so dearly, because I would give all the world if I had it to have you for my wife, I would not make you the wife of a man who could become the thing that was lying on the hearthrug of the Den four nights ago—a man drunk against his own will, a slave to one of the vilest of habits—no, something much worse than a habit, a disease inherited with tainted, poisoned blood!

"What would you think of your parents and my father if they allowed you to marry a lunatic? Well, with that taint in my blood I am worse, a thousand

times worse, than a lunatic, and I should be a criminal as well if I asked you or any other girl for whom I had the slightest feeling of love or respect to marry me.

"Think what the punishment of such a crime might be!" he went on even more vehemently. "Every hour of our married life I should be haunted by this horrible fear. Tempted by a devil lurking in every glass of wine or spirits that I drank, or even looked at—the same devil which had me in its grip the other night. Enid, if you could have seen me then, I think you would have understood better; but if, which God forbid, you could have gone through what I went through after I swallowed that first drink of whiskey, you would as soon think of marrying a criminal out of jail or a madman out of a lunatic asylum as you would of marrying me. I daresay all this may seem unreasonable, perhaps even heartless, to you; but, dear, if you only knew what it costs to say it——"

He broke off abruptly, for as he said this a note of tenderness stole for the first time into his voice, and found an instant echo in Enid's heart. So far she had borne herself bravely through a bitterly trying ordeal, but as she noticed a change in his tone a swift conviction came to her that if she remained many more minutes in his company she would certainly break down and there would be "a scene," which, under the circumstances, was not to be thought of. So she stopped him by holding out her hand and saying in a voice which cost her a terrible effort to keep steady:

"No, Vane, we have talked quite enough. I see your mind is made up, and so there is, of course, nothing more to be said except 'good- bye.' I think we had better not meet again until we both have had more time to think about it all."

This was as far as she could get. They had by this time reached Sheen Gate again, and Enid took her bicycle from him. She did not look at him, and, indeed, could not even trust herself to say "thank you." She mounted and rode through the comparatively lonely roads in a sort of dream until the traffic at Hammersmith Bridge and Broadway mercifully compelled her to give her whole attention to the steering of her machine.

When she got home she gave her bicycle to the porter, went straight to her own room, took off her hat and gloves and jacket, and then dropped quietly on the bed and laid there, staring with tearless eyes up at the ceiling, wondering vaguely what it all meant, and if it was really true.

Vane stood and watched her until she swept round a bend in the road, and then walked on with the one thought echoing and re-echoing in the

emptiness of his soul—the thought of the course which he was bound to follow by the dictates of both love and duty. He had reached the Surrey end of Hammersmith Bridge when the strong smell of alcoholic liquor coming through the open door of a public-house caused him to stop for a moment. Would a drink do him any harm after what had happened? He had passed a sleepless night in the open air, and felt almost fainting—surely a drop of brandy would do him no harm under the circumstances? Then he remembered the hearthrug in the Den, and turned towards the bridge with something between a sneer and a curse on his lips.

Was he always to be beset by temptation in this way—and would he always have strength to successfully combat the evil influence? If Fate had really marked him out for a dipsomaniac, was it any use his fighting against what must inevitably be his destiny? His thoughts were interrupted by the rumbling of a 'bus which was coming towards him, and, seeing that it was one which went through Kensington, he jumped on it and went home.

He alighted at Warwick Gardens, and on reaching the house found that his father had just come in for lunch.

"It's all right, dad," he said, anticipating his inevitable question. "I got shut in Richmond Park by accident, and did a night in the open. But I'll tell you all about it at lunch. I'm going to have a tub now."

Lunch was ready by the time Vane came downstairs, re-clothed and refreshed, and when they were alone he repeated to his father almost verbatim the conversation he had had with Enid.

"Well, my boy," he said when he had concluded. "I cannot but think that as far as you can see now you have acted rightly. It is terribly hard on you, but I will help you all I can. And perhaps, after all, the future may prove brighter than it looks now for all of us."

CHAPTER VI

It was the end of Term, nearly two years after that interview in Richmond Park which, as both Vane and Enid had then believed, was for them the parting of the ways. Vane was sitting in a deep-seated, Russian wicker-chair in his cosy study, and opposite him, in a similar chair, was another man with whom he had been talking somewhat earnestly for about an hour.

To-morrow would be Commemoration Day—"Commem," to use the undergraduate's abbreviation. There would be meetings from far and wide of people gathered together, not only from all over the kingdom, but from the ends of the earth as well; men and women glorying, for their own sakes and their sons', in the long traditions of the grand old University, the dearly-loved Alma Mater, nursing-mother of their fathers and fathers' fathers. Here a man who had been a tutor and then a Fellow, and was now one of His Majesty's judges; there another, who walked with sober mien in the leggings and tunic of a Bishop, and who, in his time, had dodged the Proctor and his bull-dogs as nimbly as the most irresponsible undergraduate of the moment—and so on through the whole hierarchy of the University.

The Lists were just out. Vane had fulfilled the promise of his earlier career and had taken a brilliant double-first. He had read for Classics and History, but he had also taken up incidentally Mental Science and Moral Philosophy, and he had scored a first in all. If it had then been possible for him to have had a Treble-First, it would have been his. As it was he had won the most brilliant degree of his year—and there he was, sitting back in his chair, blowing cloud after cloud of smoke out of his mouth, and every now and then taking a sip out of a big cup of tea and looking with something more than admiration at the man opposite; a man who had only achieved a first, and who, if he had been some other kind of man, would have been very well contented with it.

It would not, however, have needed a particularly keen student of human nature to discover that this was not the kind of man who could rest contented with anything like a formal success; and, after all, even a double-first, to say nothing of a single, although a great achievement as the final triumph of an educational course, is still only the end of the beginning. That done, the student, armed cap-à-pie in his intellectual armour, goes forth to face something infinitely sterner and more pitiless than tutors or proctors, ay, even than Masters and Chancellors themselves—the presiding genius of that infinitely greater University called the World, where taking your degree means anything that human fortune can give you, and where being plucked may mean anything from a clerkship in an office to selling matches in the gutter.

"I am sorry you missed your double, old man!" said Vane, continuing the conversation after a pause that had lasted for two or three minutes. "Still, at any rate, you've got your first, and, after all, a first in Classics and a second in History is not to be sneezed at, and I don't suppose it would have mattered a hang to you whether you had come out anywhere or not."

As he said this there was a sudden contraction of his companion's jaw, which resulted in the clean biting through of the vulcanite mouthpiece of his pipe. He spat the pieces out into the fireplace, and said in a perfectly smooth voice:

"I wonder what I did that for! I suppose that is one of the circumstances in which people say that it does a man good to swear."

"I should certainly have sworn under the circumstances," said Vane, "or at least, I should have said something that one would not say in the presence of one's maiden aunt, but then, of course, you Ernshaw—you're above all that sort of thing. You have your feelings so well under control that you don't even need to swear to relieve them. However, that's not quite the subject. What am I to do? Am I to go back to her, repenting of the evil of my ways, ask her to pardon a passing madness, and lay my academic honours at her feet—as God knows I would be only too glad to do——"

"Wait a moment, Maxwell. Don't say anything more just now, and let me think a bit. We have been over this subject a good many times already, but now we have come to the crisis, to the cross-ways, in fact. You have made me your confidant in this matter. The future of your life and hers depends upon what you decide to do now, and, not only that, but there is your father and her father and mother—the completion, that is to say, of three other lives. It is very, very serious. It is more than serious, it is solemn. Wait a moment, let me think."

Vane leant back in his chair, dropped his pipe quietly on the floor, and waited. He knew that Mark Ernshaw, his chum at Eton and his friend at Balliol—this tall, sparely-built man, with dark hair, high, somewhat narrow forehead, and big, deep-set, brown eyes, delicate features, and the somewhat too finely-moulded chin which, taken together, showed him to the eye that sees to be the enthusiast as well as the man of intellect, perhaps of genius—was not thinking in the ordinary meaning of the word. He was praying, and when he saw that this was so he folded his hands over his eyes, and for nearly ten minutes there was absolute silence, Vane was thinking and his friend was praying. Perhaps, in another sense, Vane was praying too, for the strong religious bias which he had inherited from his

father had, since the great crisis of his life had been passed, and during his close intimacy with Mark Ernshaw, grown stronger than ever.

He had told him everything. They had gone over the whole of the dismal history again and again. They had thrashed out the problem in all its bearings, now arguing with and now against each other, and here was the last day. To- morrow in the Theatre they would receive the formal acknowledgment which would crown their academic careers. Vane's self-imposed probation would then be over, the crisis would be passed, and his life's course fixed for good and all.

"Well, old man," said Vane, at length, "have you settled it? Upon my word I feel almost like a man under sentence of death waiting for a reprieve. But, after all, why should I? I haven't touched a drop of alcohol for over a year. I needn't say anything about the work I have done, for you know as much about that as I do myself. I am as sane and healthy as any man of my age need want to be. Of course, as I have told you, it was mutually agreed between us, or rather, between her parents and my father, that we should not meet or correspond until after I had taken my degree. I've kept the bargain both ways. I haven't written to her or had a word from her all the time. And now, what is the future to be? Shall I take up the threads of the old life and marry and live happily ever afterwards, as they say in the story-books—or shall I——? No, I don't think I could do that. Don't you think I've shown strength of mind enough to counteract the weakness of that one night? For the sake of all you've ever loved, old man, don't look so serious. You're not going to tell me that it really is all over, and that I shall have to give her up after all?"

"Yes, you must," said Ernshaw. "If you have any faith worthy of the name in God or man, it is your duty, not only as a man but as a Christian, to say good-bye to her as man to woman. It is your duty, and you must."

"No, by God, I can't!" cried Maxwell, springing to his feet and facing him with clenched teeth, set features, and hands gripped up into fists as though he were facing an enemy rather than a friend.

Ernshaw rose slowly from his seat. His face seemed to Vane to be transfigured. He looked him straight in the eyes, and said, in a voice only a little above a whisper, and yet thrilling with an intense emotion:

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain! You have asked for my advice and my guidance, Maxwell. I have given them to you, but not before I have sought for advice and counsel from an infinitely higher Source. I believe I have had my answer. As I have had it so I have given it to you. I

have spent a good many hours thinking over this problem of yours—and a harder problem few men have ever had to solve—but my fixed and settled conviction is that during this last conversation of yours with Miss Raleigh you bore yourself like a man; you did your duty; you put your hand to the plough. You are not going to look back now, are you?"

Vane dropped back into his seat and folded his hands over his eyes again, and said with a note of weariness in his voice:

"Well, yes, old man, I suppose you're right, and yet, Ernshaw, it's very hard, so hard that it seems almost impossible. They're coming up to 'Commem' to-morrow—I was obliged to ask them, you know. I should only have to hold out my hand and feel hers in it and say that—well, that I'd thought better of it, and everything would be just as it was before. We could begin again just as if that had never happened.

"You know it's all I've thought about, all I've worked for, ever since we came back from India together. Honestly, old man, she really is—of course, with the exception of the Governor—everything there is in the world for me now. If I have to give her up, what else is there? You know what I was going to do. Now that I've got my degree I should have a splendid opening in the Foreign Office. The way would be absolutely clear before me—a mere matter of brains and interest—and I know I've got the interest—and I should be an Ambassador, perhaps a Prime Minister some day, and she would be my wife—and yet without her it wouldn't be worth anything to me. Ernshaw, isn't it a bit too much to ask a man on the threshold of his real life to give up all that for the sake of an idea—well, a scientific conviction if you like."

"Strait is the Gate, and Narrow is the Way!" exclaimed Ernshaw. He seemed to tower above him as he stood over his chair; Vane looked up and saw that his eyes were glowing and his features set. His lips and voice trembled as he spoke. His whole being seemed irradiated by the light of an almost divine enthusiasm.

"Maxwell, will you be one of the few that find it, or one of the many that miss it, and take the other way? As a good Christian, as the son of a Christian man, you know where that one leads to.

"After all, Maxwell," he continued, more quietly, "the trials of life are like lessons in school. You needed this experience or you would not have got it. In every fight you must win or lose. In this one you can and must be the victor. I think, nay, I know, that I am pointing out to you the way to victory, the way to final triumph over all the evils that have forced you to a choice

between following your own most worthy inclinations, and what you now think an intolerable misery and an impossible sacrifice."

He held out his hand as he spoke. Vane did not know it at the time, but in reality it was a hand held out to save a drowning man. It was a moment in which the fate of two lives was to be decided for right or wrong, for good or ill, and for all time—perhaps, even for more than Time. Vane gripped Ernshaw's hand, and, as the two grips closed, he looked straight into the deep- brown eyes, and said:

"Ernshaw, that will do. By some means you have made me feel to- night just as I did that day when I was talking with her the last time. Yes, you are right. You have shewn me the right way, and, God helping me, I'll take it. I suppose if she doesn't marry me she'll marry Garthorne; but still, I see she mustn't marry me. They are coming down for 'Commem' to-morrow. I shall see her then, and I'll tell her that I have decided that there must be an end of everything except friendship between us. Yes, that is the only way after all—and, now, one other word, old man."

"And that is?" said Ernshaw, smiling, almost laughing, in the sheer joy of his great triumph, as he so honestly believed it to be, over the Powers of Evil.

"Well, it's this," said Vane, "my own life is settled now. I can't marry Enid and, of course, I'll marry no one else. I shall do as you have often advised me to do—take Orders and do the work that God puts nearest to my hand. I know that the governor will agree with me when I put it to him in that way. But then there's some one else."

"Your sister, you mean," said Ernshaw.

"My half——"

"Your sister, I said," Ernshaw interrupted, quickly. "Well, what about her?"

"It's this way," continued Vane, somewhat awkwardly, "you see—of course, as you say, she is my sister in a way, but she has absolutely refused everything that the governor and I have offered her. We even asked her to come and live with us, we offered, in short, to acknowledge her as one of the family."

"And what did she say to that?"

"She simply refused. She said that she had not made her life, but that she was ready to take it as it is. She said that she wasn't responsible for the

world as it's made, she'd never owed anyone a shilling since she left her mother—and mine—and she never intended to. We tried everything with her, really we did, and, of course, the governor did a great deal more than I did, but it wasn't a bit of use. It's a horrible business altogether, isn't it?"

"On the contrary, it is anything but that," replied Ernshaw, slowly and deliberately as though he were considering each word as he uttered it. "Maxwell, you have just decided to take Orders. I made up my mind to do that long ago. We are both of us fairly well off. I have eight or nine hundred a year of my own, and I daresay you have more, so we can go and do our work without troubling about the loaves and fishes."

"Yes," replied Vane, "certainly, but that's not quite answering my question, old fellow:—I mean about Carol."

"Quite so," he replied, "because I am going to ask you another. Do you think you know me and like me well enough to have me for a brother-in-law?"

"Good Heavens, you don't mean that, Ernshaw, do you?"

"I do," he said, "that is if she likes me well enough. Of course, I haven't seen her yet, and she might refuse me; but from all that you've told me about her, I'm half in love with her already, and—well, we needn't say anything more about that just now. Take me up to Town with you after Commem., introduce me to her and leave the rest to me and her. If ever a girl was made for the wife of such a man as I hope to be some day, that girl, Maxwell, is your sister."

"But, Ernshaw, that is impossible. It may be only your good nature that prompted you to say this, or it may be that, without intention, I have somehow led you to look upon her as part of my destiny; but you forget, or perhaps, I have not told you that we have lost her utterly for the time being at least, she disappeared quite suddenly. My father and I have made every effort to trace her, but without the slightest success."

"Then try again," replied Ernshaw, "and I will help in the search. At any rate, when we do find her, as I am sure we shall some day, if she will have me, I will ask her to be my wife."

CHAPTER VII

It was the morning of Commemoration Day and Vane was dressing for the great ceremony in the Sheldonian Theatre, the conferring of honours and degrees, the placing of the Hall-mark of the University upon those who had passed its tests and proved themselves to be worthy metal. Over the end of the bed hung the brand-new bachelor's gown and silken hood, which, to-day, for the first time, he would be entitled to wear. They were the outward material symbols of the victory which he had won against all competitors.

He was looking far back into his school-boy days and recalling the dreams he had dreamt of the time when, if the Fates were very kind to him, he would have taken his degree and would be able to walk about in all the glory of cap and gown and hood as the masters did on Sundays and Saints' days.

And now it had come to pass. He had taken as good a degree as the best of them. In an hour or two he would appear capped and gowned and hooded on the closing scene of his University career. On one side of him would be the Chancellor and all the great dignitaries of the University; on the other the great audience—the undergraduates in the upper galleries; graduates, tutors and fellows, proud fathers and mothers, delighted sisters and other feminine relatives, including cousins and others, together with desperately envious younger brothers making the most earnest resolves to henceforth eschew all youthful dissipations, to foreswear idleness for ever, and to 'swat' day and night until they too had achieved this glorious consummation—vows, alas! to be broken ere the next school term was many days old, and yet, with not a few of them, to be renewed later on and honestly kept.

He knew that, to use a not altogether inappropriate theatrical simile, he would be playing a principal part that day. The cheers and the plaudits which would burst out from the throats of his fellow-students, and, indeed, from the whole audience, when he came on to doff his cap and kneel before the Chancellor to take from his hands the honours he had won, would be given in recognition of the most brilliant degree of the year.

And she, too, would be there with her father and mother, and his father, all sharing in his triumph, all glorying in his success, in this splendid fruition of the labours, which, for so many years, they had watched with such intensely sympathetic interest.

Under any other circumstances this would have meant to him even more than the mere formal triumph; for though he had worked honestly and single-heartedly for the prizes of his academic career, he had also worked for them as an athlete might have striven for his laurels in the Olympian

Games, or a knight of the Age of Chivalry might have fought for his laurels to lay them at the feet of his lady-love.

Now he had won them—and after all what were they worth? This was not only to be a day of triumph for him. It was to be a day of hardest trial and most bitter sacrifice as well; a trial which, as he knew even now, would strain his moral fibre very nearly to the breaking point. It was a struggle for which he had been bracing himself ever since that last conversation which he had had with Enid. From that day to this he had never clasped her hand or looked into her eyes.

That had been the agreement between them, and also between his father and her parents. They were not to meet again until he had finished his university career and taken his degree. That, as they thought, would give them both time enough to think—to remain faithful, or to think better of it, as the case might be—and, most important of all for Vane, to determine by the help of more deliberate thought and added experience, and by converse with minds older and more deeply versed in the laws of human nature than his own, whether or not that resolve, which he had taken when he first discovered that there was a taint of poison in his blood, should be kept or not.

But now it was all over—although it ought only to have been just beginning. This day, which ought to have been the brightest of his life, was, in reality, to be the darkest. The golden gates of the Eden of Love lay open before him, but, instead of entering them, he must pass by with eyes averted, and enter instead the sombre portals of his life's Gethsemane; there to take up his cross and to bear it until the time came to lay it down by the side of the grave.

He had thought it all out long and earnestly in solitary communion with his own soul, and during many long and closely-reasoned conversations with Ernshaw, and the one of the night before had decided him—or it might be more correct to say that it had completed the sum of the convictions which had been accumulating in his soul for the last two years.

The path of duty—duty to her, to himself and to Humanity—lay straight and plain before him. He had nothing to do with the world now. He had come to look upon that taint in his blood as a taint akin to that of leprosy; an inherited curse which forbade him to mix with his kind as other men did. He must stand aloof, crying "unclean" in his soul if not with his voice. Henceforth he must be in the world and not of it—and this, as he thought, he had already proved by his resolve to renounce definitely and for ever the greatest treasure which the world could give him, a treasure which had been

his so long, that giving it up was like tearing a part of his own being away with his own hands.

Still, it was all very hard and very bitter. Despite his two years' preparation, the stress of that last struggle all through the long hours of the night which should have been filled with brightest dreams of the morrow, had left him, not only mentally worn out, but even physically sick. He felt as though the scene which would mark the culminating triumph of his academic career, the end of his youth and the beginning of his manhood, was really an ordeal too great, too agonising, to be faced.

His scout had brought up an ample breakfast, with, of course, many congratulations on the coming honours of the day; but he had only drunk some of the coffee and left the food untouched. As he stood in front of the glass, putting on his collar, his face looked to him more like that of a man going to execution, than to take the public reward of many a silent hour of hard study. His hands trembled so that he could hardly get his necktie into decent shape.

His coffee on the dressing-table. Would a teaspoonful of brandy in it do him any harm? For two years he had not tasted alcohol in any shape, though he had kept it in his rooms for his friends. He and Ernshaw, who was also a rigid teetotaler, had sat with them and seen them drink. He had smelt the fumes of it in the atmosphere of the room, first with temptation which he had fought against and overcome in the strength of the memory of that terrible night in Warwick Gardens. Then the subtle aroma had become merely a matter of interest to him, a thing to be studied as a physician might study the symptoms of a disease for which he has found the cure.

He had seen his friends leave his rooms somewhat the worse for liquor, and he had reasoned with them afterwards, not priggishly or sanctimoniously, but just as a man who had had the same weakness and had overcome it because he thought it necessary to do so, and they had taken it all very good-humoredly and gone away and done the same thing again a few nights afterwards, seeming none the worst for it.

But surely now he had conquered the deadly craving. Surely two years of hard mental study and healthy physical exercise—two years, during which not a drop of alcohol had passed his lips—must have worked the poison out of his blood. Henceforth he was entitled to look upon alcohol as a servant, as a minister to his wants, and not as a master of his weaknesses.

His mental struggle had so exhausted him that his physical nature craved for a stimulant, cried out for some support, some new life, new energy, if

even for an hour or so, so imperiously, that his enfeebled mental stamina had not strength enough left to say "no."

He had got his collar on and his tie tied, and his hands and fingers were trembling as though he were just recovering from an attack of malarial fever.

"It can't possibly do me any harm now," he said, as he moved away from the glass towards the door of his sitting-room. "I've conquered all that. I haven't the slightest desire for it as drink—I haven't had for over a year now—I only want it as medicine, as a patient has it from a doctor. I can't go on without it, I must have something or I shall faint in the Theatre or do something ridiculous of that sort, and as for meeting Enid—good heavens, how am I to do that at all! Yes, I think a couple of teaspoonsful in that coffee will do me far more good than harm."

He went towards the sideboard on which stood his spirit-case. He unlocked it and took out the brandy decanter. As he did so the memory of that other night came back to him, and he smiled. He had conquered now, and he could afford to smile at those old fears. He took the stopper out of the decanter and deliberately raised it to his nostrils. No, it was powerless. The aroma had no more effect upon him than the scent of, say, eau de Cologne would have had. That night in Warwick Gardens, it had been like the touch of some evil magician's wand. Then, in an instant, it had transformed his whole nature; but now his brain remained cool and calm, and his senses absolutely unmoved. Yes, he had conquered. He needed a stimulant, merely as an invalid might need a tonic, and he could take it with just as much safety.

He took the decanter into his bedroom and poured a couple of teaspoonsful into his coffee, stirred it, lifted the cup, and, after one single priceless moment's hesitation, put it to his lips and drank it off.

"Ah, that's better!" he said, as he put the cup down and felt the subtle glow run like lightning through his veins. "Hallo, who's that? Confound it, I hope it isn't Ernshaw. I don't want to begin the day with a lecture on backsliding."

He put the stopper back, went into the sitting-room, and replaced the decanter in the stand before he said in answer to a knock at his door:

"Come in! Is that you Ernshaw?"

The door opened, and Reginald Garthorne came in.

"No, it's me. That's not quite grammatical, I believe, but it's usual. Good-morning, Maxwell," he went on, holding out his hand. "I've come round early

for two reasons. In the first place I want to be the first to congratulate you, and in the second place I want you to give me a brandy and soda. I got here rather late last night with one or two other Cambridge men, and one of them took us to a man's rooms in Brazenose, and we had a rather wet night of it. Not the proper thing, of course, but excusable just now."

"As for the congratulations, old man," said Maxwell, "thanks for yours and accept mine for what you've done in the Tripos, and as for the brandy and soda, well, here you are. Open that cupboard, and you'll find some soda and glasses."

As he said this, he unlocked the spirit case again, and put the brandy decanter on the table.

"I've just been having a spoonful myself in my coffee," he went on, with just a little flash of wonder why he should have said this. "The fact is, I suppose, I've been overdoing it a bit lately, and that, and the anxiety of the thing, has rather knocked me up. I felt as nervous as a freshman going in for his first viva voce, when I got up this morning."

"I don't wonder at it," said Garthorne, helping himself. "You must have been grinding infernally hard. So have I, for the matter of that, although, I didn't aspire to a double first. You really do look quite knocked up. By the way," he continued, looking at Vane with a smile whose significance he might have seen had it not been for those two spoonsful of brandy, "I suppose you've quite got over that—well, if you'll excuse me saying so—that foolishness about inherited alcoholism and that sort of stuff, and therefore you'll lay all your laurels at the feet of the fair Enid without a scruple? Of course, you remember that juvenile hiding you gave me on the "Orient"? Quite romantic, wasn't it? Well, I must admit that you proved yourself the better boy then, and as you've taken a double first and I have only got a single, you've proved yourself the better man as well. Here's to you, Maxwell, won't you join me? You know you have quite an ordeal to go through to-day, and just one won't hurt you—do you good, in fact. You look as if you wanted a bracer."

Vane listened to the tempting words, so kindly and frankly spoken, as he might have listened to words heard in a dream. All the high resolves which had shaped themselves with such infinite labour during the past two years, seemed already to have been made by someone else—a someone else who was yet himself. He had made them and he was proud of them, and, of course, he meant to hold to them; but he had conquered that deadly fear which had held him in chains so long. He was a free man now, and could do as he liked with his destiny.

His long probation was over, and he had come through it triumphant. He was to see Enid again that day for the first time for two years. He would hear her voice offering him the sweetest of all congratulations, and when it was all over, there would be a little family gathering in his rooms, just their fathers and themselves, and he would tell them everything frankly, and they should help him to choose—for after all, it was only their right, and she, surely, had the best right of all to be consulted. Meanwhile, now that he had fought and conquered that old craving for alcohol, there would be no harm, especially on such a morning as this, in joining Garthorne in just one brandy and soda.

It never struck him how strangely inverted these thoughts were; what an utter negation of his waking thoughts, as they flashed through his mind while Garthorne was speaking. They seemed perfectly reasonable to him, and—so subtle was the miracle wrought by those two spoonsful of brandy—perfectly honest.

"Well, really, I don't see why I shouldn't," he said, taking up the decanter and pulling one of the two glasses which Garthorne had put on the table towards him. "I think I have got over that little weakness now. At any rate, for the last two years I haven't touched a drop of anything stronger than coffee, and I've sat here and in other men's rooms with fellows drinking in an atmosphere, as one might say, full of drink and tobacco smoke; and except for the smoking—of course I haven't dropped that—I've never felt the slightest inclination to join them, at least, after the first month or so—so I think I'm pretty safe now."

"Oh, of course you are!" said Garthorne. "As a matter of fact, you know, I never thought that there was anything serious in that idea of yours that you'd inherited the taint from some ancestor of yours. You got screwed one night for the first time in your life, and it gave you a fright. But the fact that you've been able to swear off absolutely for two years, is perfectly clear proof that the craving really existed only in your own imagination. If it had been real, you couldn't possibly have done it. Well, here's to us, old man, and to someone else who shall be nameless just now!"

Vane, in the recklessness of his new confidence, had mixed himself a pretty stiff dose. As he raised his glass with Garthorne's, something seemed to drag upon his arm, and something in his soul rose in revolt; but the old lurking poison was already aflame in his blood. He nodded to Garthorne and said:

"Thanks, old man. Here's to us and her!"

A few minutes before the words would have seemed blasphemy to him, now they sounded like an ordinary commonplace. He put the glass to his lips and emptied it in quick, hungry gulps.

CHAPTER VIII

"By Jove, that's good," he said, as he put the empty glass down and drew a long, deep breath. "You only really appreciate that sort of thing after a long abstinence like mine."

"I should think so," laughed Garthorne, putting down his own empty glass; "although good and all as a brandy and soda is, especially after a rather hot night, I should hardly think it was worth while to be T.T. for two years just to get the full flavour of it. If you don't mind I'll have another."

"Certainly, old fellow, help yourself," said Vane, pushing the decanter towards him. "That's made a new man of me. When I got up this morning I couldn't eat a scrap of breakfast, but that's made me absolutely hungry. The bacon's cold, of course, but there's a nice bit of tongue and some brawn, and there's some toast and brown bread and butter. Sit down and have a bite. The coffee's cold, but I can soon get up some hot if you'd like it."

"Oh, never mind about that," said Garthorne. "I'm getting a bit peckish myself, and I'll have a bite with you with pleasure; but I'm afraid hot coffee on the top of brandy and soda at this time of the morning would produce something of a conflict in the lower regions. I think another B. and S. would go ever so much better with it."

As he said this he helped himself and pushed the decanter back towards Vane, saying, "and if you'll take my advice you'll do the same. It can't hurt you, especially if you're eating."

"Still, I think I'd better eat something first," said Vane, as he set out the breakfast things and began to carve. "The hot plates are cold, so there will be enough for both. By Jove, that stuff has given me an appetite!"

"Yes, I thought it would do you good," said Garthorne. "Get something solid inside you and have another drink, and you'll be able to face your most reverend Chancellor with as much confidence as though you were his father-in- law. I'll mix you another if you'll allow me while you're carving. Give me about half and half, please."

"But don't give me half and half," said Vane, with a laugh that sounded rather strangely in his own ears, and then, without looking round, he went on carving.

Garthorne poured a much more liberal quantity of brandy into Vane's glass than he had done into his own, and at once filled it up with soda-water from the syphon.

"I think you'll find that about right," he said, putting it down beside him.

"Thanks, old fellow," said Vane; "much obliged!" He put the knife and fork down, lifted the glass and took a sip. "Yes, that's about right, I think," he said, without even noticing the strength of the mixture. And then, with the unnatural appetite which the unaccustomed spirit had roused in him, he took up his knife and fork and began to eat ravenously, taking a gulp of the brandy and soda almost between each mouthful.

They laughed and chatted merrily over the old days as they went on eating and drinking; and as glass succeeded glass Vane became more and more communicative and Garthorne more and more cordial. He quickly learnt the truth of many things which so far he had only suspected, and at last he managed to lead the conversation adroitly up to a point at which Vane said in a somewhat thick, unsteady voice:

"By the way, Garthorne, yes, that reminds me. You remember that night at the Empire when we had a bit of a row, Boat-race night, you know—that girl that I got out of the crowd—pretty girl, wasn't she?"

"Yes," replied Garthorne, repressing a desire to laugh out openly. "I remember her quite well; a very pretty girl, and, if I may say so without paying you a compliment, very like your noble self. In fact, if such a thing hadn't been utterly impossible, she might almost have been——"

"My sister!" said Vane, as he drank off the remains of his fourth brandy and soda and put the glass down with a thump on the table. "Yes, that's it, my sister, or at least not quite my sister, but—at least—well, half- sister, you understand—my mother's daughter, but not my father's—see?"

"I see, I see," said Garthorne, and then, before he could get any farther, there was a quick knock at the door. Vane looked dreamily round, and said:

"Come in."

The door opened, and Ernshaw entered, followed by Sir Arthur Maxwell.

"Good heavens, Maxwell! what on earth does this mean?" exclaimed Ernshaw, with something like a gasp in his voice, as he saw Vane sitting at the table in his shirt-sleeves—the friend with whom he had sat in this same room the night before and had that long solemn talk—the friend who had given him such solemn pledges.

The table was littered and disordered, the coffee pot had got knocked over; there was a cup lying on its side in the saucer; a dish of bacon containing a

couple of rashers and two eggs congealed in fat, and scraps of meat and broken bits of bread and butter lay about on the cloth.

This was like anything but one of the many orderly breakfasts which he had shared with Maxwell at the same table; but what startled Ernshaw more than anything else was the sight of the empty glass beside his friend's plate, the brandy decanter with less than a wine-glassful in it, and the two empty soda syphons on the table.

"Good morning, Ernshaw! Morning, dad! Jolly glad to see you. Come in and sit down and have a drink—I mean, a bit of breakfast. The coffee's cold, but I can get you some more if you wouldn't rather have brandy and soda—plenty more brandy in the cupboard, soda too. Get it out and help yourselves. Dad, you know Garthorne, of course. Ernshaw, you don't; let me introduce you—very good fellow—old rival of mine in love—you know who with, the fellow I had a fight with on the steamer—both kids—first man to come and congratulate me this morning. Admits that I licked him then as a boy, and have licked him since as a man—took better degree than he did. Still, nice of him to come, wasn't it? Come on, Ernshaw; don't stand there staring. Come on and have a drink, too, and congratulate, you old stick. Never mind about last night, I've got that all under now; fought it for two years and beaten it. Can take a drink now without fear of consequences. Taken lots this morning, and look at me, sober as the Chancellor. Why, dad, what's the matter?"

Sir Arthur Maxwell had come up to Oxford to see his own old academic triumphs repeated with added brilliance by his son. He had fully approved of all that Vane had done during the two years' probation which he had set himself, and he had firmly believed that the end of it all would be, as he had many a time said to Enid's father, that the hard study, the strenuous mental discipline, and the stress of healthy emulation, would utterly destroy the germs of that morbid feeling which, for a time at least, had poisoned the promise of his son's youth. He had only arrived from Town, bringing Enid and her father, that morning, as they had found it impossible to get rooms in Oxford over night. He had met Ernshaw in the High, and they had come together to Vane's rooms to find this!

Like a flash that other scene in Warwick Gardens came back to him. While his son was speaking he had looked into his eyes and seen that mocking, dancing flame which he had now a doubly terrible reason to remember, and to see it there in his eyes now on the morning of the crowning day of his youth, shining like a bale-fire of ruin through the morning sky of his new life. It was like looking down into hell itself.

As Vane came towards him he staggered back as though he hardly recognised him. Then, for the first time for nearly thirty years since a well-remembered night among the Indian Hills, the room swam round him and the light grew dark. He made a couple of staggering steps towards the sofa, tripped over the edge of a rug, and rolled over, half on and half off the sofa.

The sight sobered Vane instantaneously, though only for an instant.

"Dad, what's the matter?" he cried again. "My God, Ernshaw, what is it? Tell me, what is it—what have I done? Let me go and see what's wrong with him."

Then with stumbling steps he tried to get round the table. The corner of it caught his thigh. He lurched sideways and dropped to the floor like a man shot through the brain.

Garthorne was already kneeling by the sofa on to which he had lifted Sir Arthur's head and shoulders, and had loosened his tie and collar.

"Poor Vane," he said, looking round. "I'm afraid the excitement of this morning has been a bit too much for him. If we're going to get them round in time, perhaps you'd better ring up his scout and send him for a doctor."

"Yes," said Ernshaw, looking up from where he was kneeling by Vane. "I suppose that's about the best thing to do, since the crime which you have committed is unfortunately not one which warrants me in sending for a policeman as well."

"Crime, sir, what the devil do you mean?" cried Garthorne, springing to his feet.

"I mean," said Ernshaw slowly and without moving, "exactly what I say. I feel perfectly certain from what I know of Maxwell that this could not possibly have occurred unless he had been deliberately tempted to drink. Your motives, of course, are best known to yourself and to Him who will judge them."

"So that's it, is it?" said Garthorne, with a harsh laugh. "You think I made him drunk for some purpose of my own, a man that I've been friends with ever since we punched each other's heads as boys. Well, you've been a good chum to Maxwell, so for his sake I'll pass over that idiotic remark of yours, and tell you for your information that he had been drinking before I came into the room at all."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Ernshaw, springing to his feet and going towards the bell. "Nothing on earth could make me believe that." And then he rang the bell.

"I'm not accustomed to being called a liar," said Garthorne very quietly, "without resenting it in practical form; but as you don't seem to be quite yourself, and as there is so much physical difference in my favour, I'll take the trouble to convince you that I am speaking the truth."

He went into the bedroom and brought out Vane's coffee-cup.

"Smell that," he said.

Ernshaw took the cup and raised it to his nose. The strong smell of brandy rising from the dregs was unmistakable. Then there came a knock at the door, and Vane's servant came in.

"Oh, good Lord, gentlemen, whatever is the matter?" he exclaimed, looking at Sir Arthur's prostrate form on the sofa and Vane's on the floor.

"Never mind about that just now," said Garthorne curtly; "help us to carry Mr. Maxwell to his room. Then you'd better undress him and get him to bed. I suppose you can see what's the matter, and I hope also that you've learnt to hold your tongue."

"Yes, sir," said the scout. "No man ever served a better master than Mr. Maxwell, and I hope I know my duty to him."

Then the three of them picked up Vane's limp, loose-jointed form from the floor and carried him into his bedroom and laid him on the bed.

"Now," Garthorne continued, "I want you to tell Mr. Ernshaw whether I came here after or before Mr. Maxwell had his coffee."

"A good half-hour after, I should say, sir," said the scout, looking a little mystified. "You see, I brought it up about a quarter past eight, and he was up then and half dressed. He must have drunk it soon after, because he never will drink coffee unless it's hot. If it had got cold he'd have had some more up, and you came a bit before nine, sir. He must have drunk it before then."

"Very well," said Garthorne. "Now, can you remember whether the decanters in the spirit-case were filled up last night?"

"No, sir," said the scout. "I filled them up the first thing this morning myself, thinking that Mr. Maxwell would have some friends come to see him on a day like this."

"Thank you," said Garthorne; "that'll do, I think. Now you'd better get Mr. Maxwell undressed."

"Yes," said Ernshaw. "But what about Sir Arthur? Surely we ought to get a doctor for him as soon as possible."

"I am going for a doctor at once," said Garthorne, "if you will tell me where I can find one. I have given him a spoonful of brandy, and I'm going to give him another. Just come in here for a moment, please. You can't do anything for Maxwell yet."

Ernshaw followed him into the sitting-room, and as he took up the decanter Garthorne went on, holding up the brandy decanter, which had only a few spoonfuls left in it:

"Look at that. You heard what his man said. Do you mean to tell me that I could have drunk even half of that since nine o'clock and be as sober as I certainly am? The idea is absurd."

Then he poured out a little into a wine-glass, put his hand under Sir Arthur's head, and let a few drops trickle between his lips. Sir Arthur, who had been gradually regaining consciousness, drew a deep breath which ended in a cough. Then he opened his eyes and said:

"What's the matter? Where am I? Where's Vane?"

"You have had a great shock, Sir Arthur," said Garthorne, in a tone so gentle and kindly that Ernshaw started at it. "Vane has been taken ill, too, and we are putting him to bed. I'm just going for a doctor."

Then he laid Sir Arthur's head back on the cushion and said, rising to his feet:

"Now, Mr. Ernshaw, I think that's about all I can do for the present. If you will tell me where I can find Maxwell's doctor I'll go and send him, and then I'll go on and tell Sir Godfrey, not what has really taken place, but that something has happened which may prevent Maxwell leaving his rooms to-day."

Ernshaw scribbled the name and address of the doctor on the back of an envelope and gave it to Garthorne, saying, rather hesitatingly:

"There it is, Mr. Garthorne. I'm afraid I've been too hasty in what I said to you, and I must confess that you've taken it as very few men would have done. But if you only knew all that Vane has been to me during the last two years, and how awful this seems to me——"

"My dear sir, don't say any more about it," Garthorne interrupted good-humouredly. "I know enough of poor Vane's story to see exactly what you mean. We'll consider it all unsaid, and now I must be off."

CHAPTER IX

Ernshaw's first care, after Garthorne had left the room, was to see to the comfort of Sir Arthur, who had now quite recovered consciousness, but was still feeling faint and ill. He told him as much of the truth about Vane as he knew, and while he was doing so, Jepson, the scout, came in from the bedroom, and said with an air of deferential confidence:

"If you please, sir, I don't think there'll be any need for a doctor to Mr. Maxwell. He's come round a bit, and I think I know what his complaint is. Being excited, as he might well be on a morning like this, he's taken a drop too much on an empty stomach, and that led him to drink brandy and soda with his breakfast instead of sending for some more coffee. I've often seen this sort of thing before, sir, you see, and I've found the physic that will cure him on the mantelpiece. It's this."

He held up a little stoppered bottle full of strong ammonia, which Vane had got for cleaning up the bindings of some old books.

"Twenty drops of this," he went on, "in a wine-glassful of water, and he'll be as sober as ever he was in half an hour. Then I'll make him some strong coffee, and he'll be as right as a trivet. Only you mustn't let him take any more drink afterwards, or he'll just bring his boots up. I suppose I may try, sir? At any rate it won't do him any harm."

"Certainly," said Ernshaw, "I've heard of it before. Do the best you can for him, Jepson."

Jepson shut the door with a "Thank you, sir," and proceeded to treat his patient.

Before the doctor arrived Sir Arthur had almost entirely recovered, and Vane was sitting up in bed, supported by the faithful Jepson's arm, gasping and coughing, but perfectly sober, and wondering dimly what had happened during the last hour or two—or was it weeks, or months, or what? He felt horribly sick and ill, and he was trembling in every limb, but the clouds of intoxication had cleared away from his mind; memory was returning to him, and he was asking Jepson disjointed questions as to what had happened.

"Never you mind about that, sir," said Jepson. "Everything's all right now. Sir Arthur is coming round nicely, and now you've got that down, you just lay back and keep quiet, and I'll go and make your coffee, and before an hour's over you'll be ready and fit to go to the Sheldonian and face the Chancellor as though you hadn't tasted a drop."

Vane, still wondering at his apparently miraculous recovery, did as he was told and lay back upon the pillows, and Jepson went off to brew him an "extra special" pot of coffee.

"It's very unfortunate for Mr. Maxwell," he said, when he got into his own den, "very unfortunate, and on Degree Day too, but if I know anything about him and Sir Arthur, and I can get him to the Theatre dressed and compos mentis and all that sort of thing—well, it's a fiver at least in my pocket, so it's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

The doctor arrived while he was making the coffee. Ernshaw explained quickly what had happened. He went in and looked at Vane, felt his pulse, asked him in a kindly tone why he had made such a fool of himself on such a day, then he said that he couldn't improve on Jepson's treatment under the circumstances, and went in to look at Sir Arthur, who now, thanks to Ernshaw's care, was almost himself again.

"Curious business this," he said, after he had felt Sir Arthur's pulse and found that he was practically all right. "Your son's case, I mean. I've known him nearly all the time that he's been up, and I've always considered that he was a teetotaller from principle. Of course it would be simply absurd to attempt to conceal from you what has been the matter with him this morning. He's been drunk, dead drunk, by about half-past nine in the morning. At the same time we must remember that when a man has been in hard training for a boat race, or anything of that sort, or if he has been reading hard on tea, which is almost as vicious a habit as alcoholism, he can get drunk on very little alcohol when the strain is taken off. In fact, I have known a man get drunk on a pint of bitter and a beef-steak; but there doesn't seem any reason of that sort for what happened this morning. Still, fortunately, that man of his knew what to do, and he's done it—a rather heroic remedy certainly, but one can risk that with a good constitution.

"Still, I can't quite understand it, I must confess. If there was any taint of what we now call alcoholic insanity in his blood, it would, of course, be perfectly plain. However, we needn't go into that now. There can't be any idea of that, and I think when he's had his coffee, and you've had a mild brandy and soda, Sir Arthur, and kept quiet for half an hour or so, I think you will be able to go and see your son take the honours which he has won, and won very well, too. I suppose no idea of this has gone beyond these rooms?"

"I'm afraid they have," said Ernshaw. "Garthorne, a Cambridge man, the man, you know, Sir Arthur, who was here with Vane when you came in, the same man who went for you, Doctor, said that he would go on and tell Sir

Godfrey that Vane had been taken ill and wouldn't be able to come out of his rooms to- day. In short, that he would have to receive his degree by proxy."

"The devil he did," said Sir Arthur, getting up from the sofa with the strength of a sudden access of anger and moving towards the bedroom door. "Look here, doctor, you have just said that Vane is getting round. Well, if he is, the old blood in him will tell, and he'll take his place and play his part with the rest of them. Mr. Ernshaw, I know your friendship for my son; I know what you have done for him, and how you have helped him. Now, will you do me another favour and take my compliments to Sir Godfrey Raleigh, and say that the matter is not anything like as serious as we thought it was, and that both Vane and myself will be ready to go through the day's programme as arranged. If you will be good enough to do that, the doctor and I will be able to arrange the rest, I think."

"I shall be only too glad," said Ernshaw, taking up his hat. "I shall just have about time to do it, and then get to my rooms and dress. Au revoir, then, until after the ceremony," and with that, he opened the door just as Jepson knocked at it, bringing in the coffee.

Ernshaw found Garthorne already at Sir Godfrey's rooms in close conversation with Enid. He had, of course, heard much about her from Vane, but this was the first time he had seen her. She had more than fulfilled the promise of two years before, and Ernshaw, ascetic as he was, had still too strong an artistic vein in his temperament to be insensible to her beauty. In fact, as she rose to greet the closest friend of the man who had been her lover, and who, as she fondly hoped, would be so once more after to-day, he started and coloured ever so slightly. He had never seen anything like her before as she stood there with outstretched hand, gently-smiling lips, and big, soft, deep eyes, in all the pride and glory of her dawning womanhood.

It was this, then, that Vane had to give up. This was the priceless treasure which, if he kept his vow, he would have to surrender to another man. As the thought crossed his mind, he looked at Garthorne, and he saw the possibility that, after all, he might be the victor in that struggle which had begun years ago on the deck of the steamer.

Certainly, as far as physical conditions went, there could hardly be a better match; but as he looked back to Enid, a darker thought stole into his mind. Garthorne had, superficially at least, rebutted the charges he had made against him in Vane's rooms; but though he had apologised for what he had said, the conviction that he had deliberately tempted Vane to drink came

back to him, now that he saw how great a temptation Garthorne had to commit such an infamy.

No doubt he knew perfectly well that Enid herself would overlook Vane's second lapse as she had done his first, and would be quite content to marry him on the strength of his promise that he would never get drunk again; but he also knew that, after what had happened that morning, Vane's determination to give her up would be tenfold strengthened, and that, when once he had definitely done so, the psychological moment would have arrived for him to begin his own suit—at first, of course, from a deferential distance, from which he might hope to approach her heart through the avenue of her injured pride.

"Good morning, Mrs. Ernshaw!" she said, "I am glad to meet such an old and good friend of Vane's. I have heard a great deal about you, and, I need hardly say, nothing but good. I hope you have come to tell me that Vane is better and also that you will tell me what has really been the matter with him. Mr. Garthorne, here, has been very rude; he has absolutely refused to say anything about it, and I am quite offended with him. I really can't see why there should be any mystery about it. What is it?"

Ralph Ernshaw was one of those men who can no more tell a direct lie, or even prevaricate, than they can get outside their own skins. He held even the white lies of conventionality to be unworthy of anyone who held the truth as sacred, and yet for the life of him he could not look this lovely girl in the face and tell her that the man whom she had loved ever since she knew what love was, had been lying drunk on the floor of his room less than an hour before, and that the sight of him had shocked his father into a fainting fit.

"I think, Miss Raleigh," he said, after a little hesitation, "that Vane would rather tell you that himself. In fact, to be quite candid with you, it is not a subject upon which I should care to touch even at your request, simply because I think that it is a matter which could be very much better discussed and explained between Vane and yourself; and I think Mr. Garthorne will agree with me in that view."

"Certainly I do," said Garthorne, "I think that is the most sensible way of putting it. Enid, if you'll take my advice you'll take Ernshaw's, and let Vane do his own explaining after Commem."

"Really, I think it's very horrid of both of you," said Enid. "I certainly can't see why there should be all this mystery. If it's anything really serious, surely I have a right to know. However, I suppose I must control my

feminine impatience, at any rate it can't be anything very bad if he'll be able to be at the Theatre and Sir Arthur can come with him. I suppose I shall hear all about it at dinner to- night."

"I have no doubt that you will, Miss Raleigh," said Ernshaw, "and now, if you will excuse me, I must be off to my rooms to get ready for my own share of the proceedings. Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Ernshaw," replied Enid, a trifle stiffly. "That reminds me how rude I have been, I've not congratulated you yet."

"Oh, I haven't done anything," said Ernshaw, "at least, not in comparison with what Vane has done. You'll see the difference in the Theatre. Good morning again. Good morning, Mr. Garthorne."

"Good morning—we shall see you later, I suppose?" replied Garthorne, as the door closed, and then he turned to Enid and went on: "He's a thundering good fellow that Ernshaw. Quite a character, I believe, enthusiast, and all that sort of thing, but everyone here seems to think he'll be a shining light some day."

"Yes, he seems very nice," said Enid, "but, as a matter of fact, I can't say that I'm particularly fond of shining lights or people who are too good, and from what papa tells me, this Mr. Ernshaw has been making or trying to make Vane a great deal too good for me. I even hear that he has been trying to make Vane become a parson. Fancy Vane, with all his talents and prospects, a curate! The idea is absurd, even more absurd than this two years' probation idea."

"I quite agree with you," said Garthorne, "but still, think of the test of constancy and the delight of knowing that you have both stood it so well."

At this moment the door opened, and Sir Godfrey came in, not altogether to Garthorne's satisfaction, and so put an end to further developments of the conversation.

A couple of hours later Enid was sitting with her father, a unit of the vast audience which filled the Sheldonian Theatre. After Ernshaw's visit, neither she nor her father had received any message either from Vane or Sir Arthur. She had expected that Vane, at least, would have come to her before the beginning of the ceremonies, or that, at least, Sir Arthur would have come and told her something about him, but no, not a word; and there she sat between Garthorne and her father, angry and yet expectant, waiting for the moment of his appearance.

"Ah, here he is at last," whispered Garthorne, as his name and honours were called out in Latin.

Enid held her breath as the familiar figure, clad in the unfamiliar academic garb, walked towards the Chancellor's throne. She could see that he was deadly pale, and that his eyes were shining with an unnatural brightness. He never even once looked towards her. The wild outburst of cheering which greeted his appearance seemed as utterly lost upon him as if he had been stone deaf and blind. He listened to the Chancellor's address with as little emotion as though it concerned some one else. Then he knelt down, the hood, the outward and visible sign of his intellectual triumph, was put over his shoulders; the Chancellor spoke the magic words without his hearing them. He never felt the three taps given with the New Testament on his head, and he rose from his knees and moved away from the scene of the crowning triumph of his youth as mechanically as though the proceedings had no more interest for him than if they had been taking place a thousand miles away.

All through the afternoon Enid and her father waited for them to come, but there was no sign from either of them until just before tea-time Jepson presented himself with two letters, one addressed to Sir Godfrey and one to Enid. Both were very short. Sir Godfrey's was from Sir Arthur, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR RALEIGH,

"I hope that you and your daughter will forgive the apparent discourtesy of our absence from you this afternoon and evening. I find it necessary to take Vane to London at once. His letter to Enid will explain the reason.

"Faithfully yours,

"ARTHUR MAXWELL."

"There is evidently something very serious the matter," said Sir Godfrey, as he handed the note to Enid. "Maxwell wouldn't write like that without good reason. That's from Vane, I suppose. What does he say?"

"Say," exclaimed Enid, with a flash of anger through her fast gathering tears. "That's what he says. It's too bad, too cruel—and after leaving me alone for two years—it's miserable!" And with that, she made a swift escape out of the room and shut the door behind her with an emphatic bang.

Sir Godfrey picked the note up from the table where she had flung it. There was no form of address. It simply began:

"I was drunk this morning. Drunk without meaning to be so, after being two years without touching alcohol and without experiencing the slightest craving for it. Last night I had finally come to the conclusion that it would be a sin to ask you to keep your promise to me. Now I am convinced that it would be absolute infamy to do so. I dare not even face you to tell you this, so utterly unworthy and contemptible am I in my own sight. Whatever you hear to the contrary, remember that what has happened this morning is no fault of anyone but myself. If ever we meet again I hope I shall find you the wife of a man more worthy of you than I am now, or, with this accursed taint in my blood, ever could be. Perhaps in those days we may be friends again; but for the present we must be strangers.—Vane."

CHAPTER X

Yet another twelve months had passed since Vane had taken his degree; since Enid had seen him vanish like a spectre out of her life, and had waited vainly for his coming, only to receive instead that letter of farewell which, the instant she had read it, she knew to be final and irrevocable.

In such a nature as hers the tenderest spot was her pride. She had been his sweetheart since they were boy and girl together, and when the time came they had become formally engaged. For nearly four years now she had considered herself as half married to him. Other men attracted by her physical beauty and her mental charm had approached her, as they had a perfect right to do, in open and honest rivalry of Vane, but she had given them one and all very clearly to understand that she had definitely plighted her troth, and had no intention of breaking it. In other words she had been absolutely faithful even in thought.

She had never considered his feelings as to what he called his inherited alcoholism as anything else than the somewhat fine-drawn scruples of a highly- strung, and rather romantic nature. She had not troubled herself about the deadly scientific aspect of the matter. She knew perfectly well that men got drunk sometimes and still made excellent husbands, and, more than all, she firmly believed that, once Vane's wife, she would speedily acquire sufficient influence over him to make anything like a recurrence of what had happened quite impossible.

Even after his second and worst breakdown on the morning of Commemoration Day she would still have received him as her lover and, after a little friendly lecture which would, of course, have ended in the usual way, she would have been perfect friends with him again on the old footing.

But that letter had ended everything between them. Moreover, it had been followed by one from Sir Arthur to her father expressing great regret at the turn which matters had taken, but saying that, after repeated conversations with Vane, he had been forced to the conclusion that his resolve to enter the Church and devote himself to a life of celibacy and mission work at home was really fixed and unalterable.

After that there was, of course, nothing more to be said or done. Enid, being a natural, simple-hearted, healthy English girl, who enjoyed life a great deal too well to worry about looking under the surface of things, therefore came to the conclusion that she had been jilted for the sake of a fine-drawn Quixotic idea. If she had been jilted for the sake of another woman it would have been quite a different matter. Then there would have been something

tangible to hate bitterly for a season, and then to get revenged on by making a much more brilliant marriage, as she could easily have done. But it was infinitely worse, and more humiliating to be thrown over like this by the man whom she had looked upon as her future husband nearly all her life, whom she had played at housekeeping with while they were children, and whom she had never looked upon as anything else but a sweetheart or a lover—and yet it was true, miserably true, and now, for the sake of a mere idea, she found herself cast off, loverless and alone.

Then, after a few weeks of secret, but exceeding bitterness, she did what nineteen out of every twenty girls would have done under the circumstances. The twentieth girl would probably have considered her life blighted for ever, and vowed the remainder of it to single-blessedness, charity and good works as a Sister of something or other. But Enid belonged to the practical majority, and so when the breaking off of the engagement became an actual social fact, and Reginald Garthorne came just at the psychological moment to tell her that never since he had earned that boyish licking on the steamer by kissing her, had he been able to look with love into the eyes of any other woman, she had told him with perfect frankness that, as it was quite impossible for her to marry Vane, and as she certainly liked him next best, and had not the slightest intention of remaining single, she was perfectly content to marry him. If he chose to take her on those terms he might go and talk the matter over with Sir Godfrey, and if he and her mother said "yes," she would say "yes," too.

It was a somewhat prosaic wooing, perhaps, but Reginald Garthorne had been hungering for her in his heart for years. Outwardly he had been friends with Vane, but in his soul he had hated him consistently as boy and man ever since that scene behind the wheelhouse of the Orient. He was, therefore, perfectly content. He had longed for her, and he didn't care how he got her. The rest would come afterwards.

He was rich, far richer than Vane ever would be. He had inherited a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand pounds from his mother's side of the family when he came of age. On his father's death he would succeed to the title and a fine old country house in the Midlands, with a rent-roll and mining royalties worth over thirty thousand a year. He would be able to make her life a continuous dream of pleasure, amidst which she would very soon forget the visionary who was throwing away his manhood and all the best years of his life just because he had learnt that he was the son of a drunken and abandoned woman, and had himself got drunk twice in his life.

The interview with Sir Godfrey and Lady Raleigh had been entirely satisfactory. They both considered in their hearts that their daughter had

been very badly treated. From every social point of view this was a match which left nothing to be desired, and so they said "yes," and Garthorne went back to Enid, and said, triumphantly, as he kissed her for the first time since that memorable kiss on the steamer:

"And so, you see, darling, I've won, after all!"

It was thus that it came about that, on the same day, as the Fates would have it, two ceremonies were being performed at the same hour, one in St. George's, Hanover Square, and one before the altar at Worcester Cathedral.

The Bishop, in full canonicals, surrounded by his attendant clergy, sat inside the altar rails in front of the Communion Table, and on the topmost step before the rails knelt two young men wearing surplices and the hoods of Bachelors of Arts of Oxford.

It was the Feast of St. James the Apostle, and in his exhortation the Archdeacon, who was preacher for the day, had taken for his text the collect:

"Grant, O merciful God, that, as Thine holy Apostle St. James, leaving his father and all that he had without delay, was obedient unto the call of Thy Son Jesus Christ and followed Him, so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow Thy holy commandments, through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

One of the men kneeling at the altar rails was Mark Ernshaw, and the other was Vane Maxwell.

Among the somewhat scanty congregation which had remained after the usual morning service, sat Sir Arthur Maxwell. A year ago he would have been inclined to laugh at the idea of his son sacrificing all his brilliant worldly prospects to enter the Church. He was, as has already been said, a deeply religious man himself, but still, he was a man of the world, a man who had made his own way through the world, and won by sheer hard work some of the prizes which it has to give, and, like many others of his class, he had come to look upon the clerical profession somewhat as the refuge of the intellectually destitute.

But as the time had gone on since that scene in his son's rooms at Oxford, he had come to believe that with Vane it was not a mere question, as it is with too many other men, of taking Orders to secure a profession and a position. He was entering the Church as the men of more earnest and more faithful ages had done; because he believed that he had a duty to do, a mission to perform, a sacrifice to make, and, above all, an enemy to fight which was God's enemy as well as his own.

Therefore the words "leaving his father and all that he had," awakened no bitter echoes in his soul. True it was a sacrifice for him as well as for Vane; but for Vane's sake he had made it willingly and cheerfully, and he was able now to look forward with perfect contentment to the triumphs which, in his father's pride, he could not help believing his son would win in that higher and holier sphere of life which he had chosen.

The presentation being made and the questions as to "crime or impediment" being duly asked and answered, the Litany and Suffrages began, and every note and word of the solemn intonation, ringing through the silence of the great Cathedral, found an echo which rang true in three souls at least among the congregation:

"O God the Father of Heaven: have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

"O God the Son, Redeemer of the world: have mercy upon us,

miserable sinners.

"O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son: have

mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

"O Holy blessed and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God:

have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

"Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers: neither take thou vengeance on our sins: spare us, good Lord, spare thy people whom thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever.

"From all evil and mischief: from sin, from the crafts and assaults

of the devil: from Thy wrath and from everlasting damnation.

"From all blindness of heart: from pride, vain-glory and

hypocrisy: from envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness.

"From fornication, and all other deadly sin: and from all the

deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil.

"Good Lord deliver us!"

"Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers: neither take thou vengeance on our sins."

These, of all the words which he heard spoken on that fateful day, the day which marked for him the passing of the line which divides the World of the Flesh from the World of the Spirit—the frontier of the kingdom of this world separating it from that other Kingdom which, though worldwide, yet owns but a single Lord—seemed to fall with greater weight into Vane's soul than any others of the service. As he heard them he raised his bent head, threw it back and, with wide open eyes, looked up over the Bishop's head and the reredos behind the altar to the central section of the great stained glass window containing the figure of the Godhead crucified in the flesh, with the two Marys, Mary the Mother and Mary Magdalene, kneeling at the foot of the Cross.

Like a quiver of summer lightning across the horizon of an August sky, there came to him the thought of that mother of his whom he had never known, and of that girl who was almost his sister, long ago lost in the great wilderness of London. They were not likenesses, only the faintest of suggestions, and yet the mere recollection seemed to lend an added solemnity to the vows which he was about to take.

"I will do so, the Lord being my helper!"

As he uttered the words there was not the faintest doubt in his soul that for the rest of his life he would be able to keep both the letter and the spirit of the oath unbroken to the end of his days. Many a man and woman has rashly wished that it were possible to look into the future. Such a thought had more than once crossed Vane Maxwell's mind, but could he, in that solemn moment, have looked into the future and seen what lay before him, he would have been well content with the high destiny to which his great renunciation was to lead him.

And now the scene changes from Gloucester Cathedral, to St. George's, Hanover Square.

It was the smartest wedding of the year, and, apart from all its social brilliance, even the most rigid critics admitted that London had not seen a lovelier bride or a handsomer bridegroom than Enid Raleigh and Reginald Garthorne. The church was thronged by an audience made up of the friendly, the sympathetic, the sentimental, and the merely curious, as is usual on such occasions.

Carol Vane and Dora Russel, who had come provided with tickets indirectly supplied by the bridegroom himself, occupied seats in the left-hand gallery

at the front. In consequence of the crowd, they only got into their places just as the bridal procession was moving up the central aisle. There was the bride with her attendant bridesmaids, six little maidens dressed in pure white, the bridegroom with his pages, six counterparts dressed in the style of Charles I. Then Sir Godfrey and Lady Raleigh, and then a tall, grizzled, soldierly-looking man, and beside him a white-haired old lady, who might have stepped straight out of one of Gainsborough's pictures.

As Carol caught sight of the man beside her, she leant half her body over the front of the gallery, and stared with straining eyes down at the slowly moving procession. Dora caught her by the arm and pulled her back, saying, in a whisper:

"Don't do that; you might fall over."

Carol turned a white face and a pair of blankly staring eyes upon her, caught her by the arm with one hand and pointing downwards with the other, said in a whisper that seemed to rattle in her throat:

"See that man, there—that tall one with the old lady on his arm? That's the man who did all the ruin! That's my father—and my mother was Vane's mother, and that's his son, going to marry Vane's sweetheart. No, by God, he shan't! I'll tell the whole church full, first."

She tore herself free from Dora's hold and struggled to her feet, her lips were opened to utter words which would have instantly turned the wedding into a tragedy; but the rush of thoughts which came surging into her brain was too much for her. The swift revelation of an almost unbelievable life- tragedy struck her like a lightning-stroke; she uttered a few incoherent sounds, and then dropped back fainting into Dora's arms.

"Another of life's little tragedies, I suppose," whispered a well-dressed matron just behind her, to a companion at her side, "a petite maitresse, no doubt. It's a curious thing; they always come to see their lovers married."

CHAPTER XI

The fainting of Carol in the gallery of the church and her being carried out just before the commencement of the ceremony, was looked upon by some of the more superstitious of the immediate spectators as a sign of evil omen to the happiness of those who, in the phrase which is so often only the echo of devils' laughter, were about "to be joined together in holy matrimony."

Still, only a few had heard the broken words which the horror-stricken girl had uttered before she fell down insensible, and those only thought what the good lady behind her had said. To the rest of the congregation it was merely an incident, due to the crowd and the heat. The little flutter of excitement which it caused soon passed away, and the ceremony began and went on without any of the bridal party even knowing what had happened.

She was carried to the gallery stairs, and there Dora sat her down, supporting her with her arm, while one sympathetic young lady held a bottle of salts to her nostrils, and an older lady emptied a scent-bottle on to her handkerchief and held it to her forehead.

In a very few minutes she came round. She looked about her, and, recognising Dora, said:

"Oh, dear, what's happened? Where am I? Yes, I remember—at a wedding—and he——"

Then she checked herself, and Dora said:

"Do you think you're well enough to come down and get into a cab, and then we'll get home? It was the heat and the crush that did it, I suppose."

"Yes, I think I can," said Carol. "I'm all right now. Thank you very much for being so kind," she went on to the other two with a faint smile of gratitude.

"Oh, don't mention it," they said almost together, and then the younger one put her hand under her arm and helped her up. "Let me help you down," she said. "I daresay you'll be all right when you get into the open air."

Carol looked round at her and saw that, without being exactly pretty, she had a very sweet and sympathetic expression, and big, soft brown eyes which looked out very kindly under dark level brows. It was a face which women perhaps admire more than men; but her voice was one which would have gone just as quickly to a man's heart as to a woman's. At any rate, it went straight to Carol's, and when they had got into the cab and she leant back against the cushions she said to Dora:

"I wonder who that girl was? Did you notice what a sweet face and what a lovely voice she had? I'm not very loving towards my own sex, but as soon as I got round I felt that I wanted to hug her—and I suppose if she knew the sort of person I am she wouldn't have touched me. What a difference clothes make, don't they? Now, if I'd been dressed as some of the girls are——"

"I think you're quite wrong there, Carol," said Dora, interrupting her. "I don't believe she's that sort at all, she was much too nice, I'm certain. She had the face of a really good woman, and you know good women don't think that of us. It's only the goody-goody ones who do that, and there's a lot of difference between good and goody-goody."

"Well, yes," said Miss Carol, "I daresay you're right, after all. She had a sweet face, hadn't she? But look here, Dora," she went on with a sudden change of tone, "did you ever know anything so awful? No—I can't talk about it yet. Tell him to pull up at the Monico, and we'll have a brandy and soda. I never wanted a drink so badly in my life."

The cab had meanwhile been rolling down Regent Street, and had almost reached the Circus. Dora put her hand up through the trap and told the cabman—whose opinion of his fares underwent an instantaneous change. He nodded and said, "Yes, miss," and the next minute pulled up in front of the square entrance to the cafe. Dora got out first and helped Carol out; then she gave the cabman a shilling and they went in.

"Goes to a wedding, does a faint, comes out, and stops 'ere when they ought to have been driven 'ome. Not much class there!" the cabman soliloquised as he flicked his whip over his horse's ears and turned across towards Piccadilly. He was, perhaps, naturally disgusted at the meagre results of a job for which he had expected three or four shillings at the very least.

The big café was almost deserted, as it usually is in the morning, and the two girls found a secluded seat at one of the corner tables.

"Dora, you must pay for these," said Carol when they had given their order, "and what's more you'll have to lend me some money to go on with, for if I was starving I wouldn't spend another shilling of that man's money."

"But, my dear child, I don't suppose he knew it," said Dora. "Of course you can have anything I've got if you want it, and I quite understand how you feel. It's very dreadful, horrible, in fact, but you couldn't help it. You're not to blame, and I don't see that he is, after all's said and done."

"No, I don't say that he is," said Carol, "and of course I couldn't know, for he isn't a bit like his father. He was dark once, so I suppose the—the other one

takes after his mother. At least, he would do if she was a fair woman. But just fancy me having that feeling about Vane that night—feeling that I couldn't—and yet this one is just as near. God forgive me, Dora, isn't it awful?"

"Well, never mind, dear," said Dora, as the waiter brought the drinks. "I don't see that that matters one way or the other now. What's done is done, and there's an end of it. Well, here's fun, and better luck next time!"

"Hope so!" said Carol somewhat bitterly, as she took a rather long pull at her brandy and soda. "Ah, that's better," she went on, as she put her glass down. "At any rate, it couldn't be much worse luck, could it?"

"But are you perfectly certain," said Dora, "that he really was the man? You know, after all, you only saw him for quite a moment or so."

"I'm as certain as I am that I'm sitting here," said Carol, "that that was the man who lived with my mother in Paris and Vienna and Nice and a lot of other places ever since I can remember. It isn't likely that I'm going to forget when I have such good reason as I have for remembering. He's the man, right enough, and if I was face to face with him for five minutes I'd prove it. The question is whether I ought to prove it or not."

"That's a thing that wants thinking about," said Dora. "But how can you prove it?"

"Easy enough," replied Carol, "if he'd just take his coat off and turn his shirt-sleeve up. He's got two marks just above his right elbow, two white marks, and the one on the front is bigger than the one behind. I've seen them many a time when he's been sculling or playing tennis. He told me he got them from a spear thrust when he was fighting in the Zulu war. The spear went right in in front and the point came out behind, and if I had a thousand pounds I'd bet it that that man has got those marks on his arm.

"Besides, I know lots of other things about him. You know I'm not a bad mimic, for one thing, and I could imitate his voice and his way of talking before I heard him speak, and I know a photographer in Paris where I could get his photograph—one taken while he was with us. We went with him to have it taken; and, besides, I don't care whether that unfortunate mother of mine's mad or not, she'd recognise him. I'd bet any money he daren't go to the place where she is and face her. Well, now I'm better. Let's go home to lunch and think it over. It certainly isn't a thing to do anything hastily about."

"That's just what I think, dear," said Dora, finishing her brandy and soda.

"All right; we won't take another cab just yet. Let's walk along the 'Dilly for a bit; it'll do me good, I think; and besides, I may as well get familiar with the old place again," said Carol, rising from her seat.

"What nonsense!" said Dora. "The very idea of you having to go in for that sort of thing, when there are half a dozen fellows a good deal more than ready to take this man Garthorne's place."

"Well, well," said Carol, with a light laugh and a toss of her pretty head, "I don't suppose the change would be for the worse. But there's one thing certain, I shall have to snare the oof bird very shortly, for the first thing I'm going to do when we get to the flat is to send back every penny of the money that Reginald gave me when we said good-bye. Of course I didn't know anything about it, but it seems worse a good deal than if I had stolen it. Then to-night we'll go to the Empire, and you, being rather more married than I am, can chaperone me."

"All right," said Dora. "I'll send a wire to Bernard, and perhaps he'll come too and escort us."

Reginald Garthorne had behaved, as both the world and the half-world would have said, very honourably to Carol when they had said the usual good-bye before his marriage. He had paid his share of the rent of the flat for her for six months ahead, and had given her a couple of hundred pounds to go on with. Of this considerably over a hundred pounds remained. She changed the gold into notes, and even the silver into postal orders, and put the whole sum into a packet, which she registered and posted to his town address.

She gave no explanation or reason for what she was doing. In the first place she could not bring herself to tell him the dreadful truth that she had discovered; and then, again, it would only after all be a piece of needless cruelty. During her connection with him he had always treated her with kindness and courtesy, and often with generosity. She had nothing whatever against him, so why should she wreck the happiness of his honeymoon, and perhaps of his whole married life, by disclosing the secret that had been so strangely revealed to her? So she simply wrote:

"DEAR MR. GARTHORNE,

"You have been very kind to me, and I thoroughly appreciate your kindness. But something has happened to-day—I daresay you can guess what it is—which makes it unnecessary to me, and, as you know I have rather curious ideas about money matters, I hope you will understand my reasons, and not be offended by my returning it to you with many thanks.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CAROL VANE."

Under the circumstances the white lie was one which the Recording Angel might well have blotted out. Probably he did. But, as the Fates would have it, the words proved prophetic.

They went to the Empire that night under the escort of Mr. Bernard Falcon, and while they were having a stroll round the promenade during the interval he nodded and smiled a little awkwardly to a tall, good-looking young fellow in evening dress, whose bronzed skin, square shoulders and easy stride gave one the idea that he was a good deal more accustomed to the free and easy costume of the Bush or the Veld or the Mining Camp than to the swallow-tails and starched linen of after-dinner Civilisation.

"What a splendid-looking fellow!" said Dora, turning her head slightly as he passed; "the sort of man, I should say, who really is a man. Who is he, Bernard? You seem to know him!"

"That man?" said Mr. Falcon. "Well, come down into the lower bar, and we'll have a drink, and I'll tell you."

"That looks a little bit as if you didn't want to meet him again!" said Dora, a trifle maliciously. "Does he happen to be one of your clients, or someone who only knows you as a perfectly respectable person?"

Mr. Falcon did not reply immediately, but he frowned a little, as if he didn't find the remark very palatable. But when they reached the seclusion of the bar and sat down at one of the tables he said:

"Well, yes, it is something like that. The fact is we have done a little business for him, and we hope to do more. Lucky beggar, he's one of Fortune's darlings."

"That sounds interesting," said Carol. "May I ask what the good lady has done for him?"

"Well," said Mr. Falcon, folding his hands on the table and dropping his voice to a discreet monotone, "in the first place she made him the younger son of a very good family. Nothing much to begin with, of course, but then she also gave him a maiden aunt who left him five thousand pounds just after he left Cambridge in disgust after failing three times to get a pass degree. He had no special turn for anything in particular except riding and shooting and athletics of all sorts. So, like a sensible fellow, instead of

stopping in England and fooling his money away, as too many younger sons do, he put four thousand pounds into my partner's hands—Lambe, I should tell you, was his aunt's solicitor—to be invested in good securities, put the other thousand into his pocket, and started out to seek his fortune.

"That's a little over five years ago, which makes him about thirty now. Of course, I suppose he went everywhere and did everything, as such fellows do, but we heard very little of him, and he never drew a penny of the four thousand pounds, and he turned up in London a week or two ago something more than a millionaire. It seems that he was one of the first to hear of the West Australian goldfields—he was out there prospecting in the desert, and a few months later he was one of the pioneers of Kalgoorlie, and pegged out a lot of the most valuable claims. He put in nearly three years there, and now he's come back to enjoy himself. He's a very fine fellow, but I must say I'd rather not have met him here to- night."

"Oh, nonsense," laughed Dora, "he'll understand. Being a man he knows perfectly well that scarcely any of you respectable married men are half as respectable as you'd like to be thought. However, why not compromise him too? Go and fetch him and introduce him."

Mr. Falcon knew Dora well enough to take this request as something like an order. So he rose, saying:

"Well, that's not a bad idea, after all, and I daresay he won't have the slightest objection to make the acquaintance of two such entirely charming young ladies."

Mr. Falcon rather prided himself upon his way of turning a compliment, albeit his action, as they say in stable parlance, was a trifle heavy. When he had gone Dora nodded to Carol and said:

"There, dear. If I'm not very much mistaken this is the reward of virtue."

"Which is its own reward, and generally doesn't get it," laughed Carol, colouring slightly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Dora, "that only to-day you made yourself penniless from the most laudable of motives, and here, this very night, comes Prince Charming from the Fortunate Isles, with all his pockets and both hands full of money, and a splendid-looking fellow as well. I think that's a bit mixed, but still it's somewhere about the fact. Ah, here they come."

"Mr. Cecil Rayburn, Miss Dora Murray; Mr. Rayburn, Miss Carol Vane. Now we know each other," said Mr. Falcon. "Rayburn, what will you have?"

Rayburn had a brandy and soda, and before it was finished the conversation was running easily and even merrily. With the quick perception of the travelled man he speedily discovered that Dora was Falconer's particular friend; she always addressed him as "Bernie," while Carol always said "Mr. Falcon" or "Mr. F."

When they got up, all thoroughly well pleased with each other, Falcon said:

"Are you alone, Rayburn?"

"Yes," he replied. "I hadn't anything particular to do to-night, and as I was sick of playing billiards and swopping lies with the other fellows at the Carlton, I just put on a hard-boiled shirt and the other things and came over here to seek my fortune."

As he said this he looked straight at Carol, their eyes met for a moment, and then she coloured up swiftly and looked away.

The four wound up the evening with a sumptuous supper at Prince's, at which Rayburn played host to perfection, and within a week Carol and he had left Charing Cross by the eleven o'clock boat-train on a trip which had no particular objective, but which, as a matter of fact, extended round the world before Carol again saw her beloved London. In addition to her other rings she wore a new thick wedding ring, a compromise with conventionality which the etiquette of hotels and steamer saloons had rendered imperative, and thus it came to pass that Miss Carol, travelling as Mrs. Charles Redfern, vanished utterly for more than a year, and this, too, was why all the efforts of Vane and Ernshaw and Sir Arthur to find her had proved for the present unavailing.

CHAPTER XII

Enid Garthorne came back from a somewhat extended honeymoon trip to the Riviera and thence on through Northern Italy to Venice, whence she returned viâ Vienna and Paris, a very different woman from the Enid Raleigh who had cried so bitterly over that farewell letter of Vane's in her bedroom at Oxford.

She had already schooled herself to look upon her long love for Vane as, after all, only the sustained infatuation of a romantic school-girl, and upon him as a high-hearted, clean-souled but utterly impossible visionary who had sacrificed the substance for the shadow, and who, having chosen irrevocably, could only be left to work out his own destiny as he had shaped it.

Garthorne, in the first flush of his gratified love and triumph, had proved an almost ideal combination of lover and husband, and of all the brides who were honeymooning in the most luxurious resorts of the Continent that Autumn and Winter, she, with her youth and beauty, her handsome, devoted husband, and splendid fortunes, was accounted the most to be envied. As week after week went by, and the intoxication of her new life grew upon her, she gradually came to believe this herself. At the same time, something very like true affection for this man, whose love was very real and who seemed to find his only happiness in making the world the most delightful of dreamlands for her, began to grow up in her heart.

Of course, she often thought of Vane; that was inevitable. It was inevitable, too, that she should look back now and then to some of the many tender scenes that had passed between them; but as time went on, these memory-pictures grew more faint. The fast-succeeding events and the new experiences of her married life crowded swiftly and thickly upon her, until she began to look upon the past more as a dream than as a reality. Vane's figure receded rapidly into the background of her life, and, as it did so, it seemed in some way to become spiritualised, lifted above and beyond the world-sphere in which it was now her destiny to move.

They got back to England a few weeks before the season began, and, after a day or two in London for some necessary shopping, they went down to Garthorne Abbey, one of the finest old seats in the Midland counties, standing on a wooded slope in the green border which fringes the Black Country, and facing the meadows and woodlands which stretch away down to the banks of the Severn, beyond which rise the broken, picturesque outlines of the Herefordshire Hills.

Here Enid Garthorne spent an entirely delightful week exploring the stately home and the splendid domain of which she would one day be mistress. Day after day in the early clear Spring morning, she would go up alone on to a sort of terrace-walk which had been made round the roof behind the stone balustrade which ran all round the house, and look out over the green, well-wooded, softly undulating country, her heart filled with a delighted pride and the consciousness, or, at any rate, the belief, that after all the cloud which had come between her and Vane had had a silver, nay, a golden lining, and that, so far, at least, everything had been for the best.

As she looked to the eastward, she could see stretched along the horizon a low, dun-coloured line which was not cloud. It was the smoke of the Black Country, and underneath it hundreds and hundreds of men, aye, and if she had known it, women, too, were toiling in forge and mine and factory, earning the thousands which made life so easy and so pleasant for her. To the westward were the low-lying meadows, the rolling corn-lands, and the dark strips and patches of wood and coppice which lay for miles on three sides of the Home Park, and beyond these she caught bright gleams of the silver Severn rippling away to the distant Bristol Channel; then, beyond this again, the rising uplands which culminated in the irregular terraces of the Abberley Hills.

She knew nothing of it at the time, but far away, perched up in a leafy nook among them was a little cluster of old grey buildings; just a chapel, a guest-house, a refectory, and half a dozen cells forming a tiny quadrangle which was still called St. Mary's Chapel of Ease, but which in the old days when all the lands that Enid could see from her roof-walk had belonged to the ancient Abbey of Ganthony—of which her husband's name was perhaps a corruption—had been known as the House of Our Lady of Rest.

Before the dissolution of the Monasteries it had been a place of rest and retreat for servants of the Church who had exhausted themselves in her service or had found reason to withdraw themselves a while from the world and its temptations; and such, though creeds have changed, it has practically remained until now.

The little church was nominally St. Augustine's, the Parish Church of a little scattered hamlet which was sprinkled over the hillside beneath it. The living had been in the gift of the Garthorne family, but Sir Reginald's father had sold the advowson to one of the earliest pioneers of the High Church movement in England, and through this purchase it had passed into the keeping of a small Anglican Order calling itself the Fraternity of St. Augustine.

This little Brotherhood had not only maintained the traditions of the ancient Order of St. Augustine, Preacher, Saint and Martyr, but had done all that was possible to revive them in their ancient purity. The little monastery among the hills, though it had passed under another ecclesiastical rule, was still a place where priests and deacons might come either to rest from the labours which they had endured in the service of their Master, or to separate themselves from the din and turmoil of the world, and, amidst the peace and silence of nature, wrestle with the doubts or temptations that had beset them. The Vicar of the parish and Father Superior of the Retreat was an aged priest who had welcomed three generations of his younger brothers in Christ as temporary sojourners in this little sanctuary, and had sent them away comforted and strengthened to take their place again in the ranks of the army which wages that battle which began when the first prophecy was uttered in Eden, and which will only end when the sound of the Last Trump marshalls the hosts of men before the bar of the Last Tribunal.

Vane had been the occupant of one of the tiny little rooms, which had once been the monks' cells, for a little over three months when Enid came to her future home. The rooms were on the side of the quadrangle facing the valley, and from his little window he could distinctly see the great white house, with its broad terraces standing out against the dark background formed by the trees which crowned the ridge behind it. He, of course, knew perfectly well to whom it belonged and who would one day be mistress of it, and one day he saw from the Times, the only secular newspaper admitted into St. Augustine's, that Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Garthorne had returned from their wedding trip on the Continent, and, after a day or two in London, would proceed for a few weeks to Garthorne Abbey to recuperate before the fatigues of the season, of which it was generally expected Mrs. Garthorne would be one of the most brilliant ornaments.

The sight of it, the knowledge of all the splendours that it contained, of all the worldly wealth of which it was the material sign, had not affected him in the least. He had already lifted himself beyond the possibility of envying anyone the possession of such things as these. He could see over and beyond them as a man on a mountain top might look over a little spot on the plain beneath, which to those who dwelt in it was a great and splendid city.

Even the knowledge that Enid was coming to the Abbey as the wife of its future master only drew just a single quiet sigh from his lips, only caused him to give one swift look back into the world that he had left, for after all this was only what he had expected, what he knew to be almost inevitable

when he had first made up his mind to sacrifice his love to what he believed to be his duty.

She had passed out of his existence and he had passed out of hers. Henceforth their life-circles might touch, but they could never intersect each other. Of course, they would meet again in the world, but only as friends, with perhaps a warmer hand-clasp for the sake of the days that were past and gone for ever, but that was all. He had but one mistress now, the Church. He was hers body and soul to the end, for he had sworn an allegiance which could not be broken save at the risk of his own soul.

One morning, about a week after he had read the paragraph in the Times, he was out on the hillside, going from cottage to cottage of the hundred or so sprinkled round the high road across the hills, for it was his day to carry out the parochial duties of the fraternity. Every day one of the Fathers, as the villagers called them, made his rounds, starting soon after sunrise and sometimes not getting back till after dark, for Father Philip had no belief in the efficacy of fasting and meditation and prayer unless they were supplemented by a literal obedience to the commands of Him who went about doing good. When priest or deacon entered the Retreat, no matter what he was, rich or poor, wedded or single, he had to take the vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. When he left to go back into the world he was absolved from them, and was free to do what seemed best to his own soul.

Vane had just left a little farmhouse upon which a great shame and sorrow had fallen. As too often happens in this district, the only daughter of the house, discontented with the quiet monotony of the farm life, had gone away to Kidderminster to work in a carpet factory. That was nearly eighteen months ago, and the night before she had come back ragged, hungry, and penniless, with a nameless baby in her arms.

As he was walking along the road which led from this farmhouse to the next hamlet thinking of that vanished sister of his and of the poor imbecile in the French asylum, he turned a bend and saw a figure such as was very seldom seen among the villages approaching him about two hundred yards away. He stopped, almost as though he had received a blow on the chest. It was impossible for his eyes to mistake it, and with a swift sense, half of anger and half of disgust, he felt his heart begin to beat harder and quicker. It was Enid, Enid in the flesh.

He had read of her marriage, and of her return with her husband with hardly an emotion. Day after day he had looked upon her future home, the home in which she would live as the wife of another man and the mother of

his children, without a single pang of envy or regret—and now, at the first sight of her, his heart was beating, his pulses throbbing, and his nerves thrilling.

True, every heart-beat, every pulse-throb, was a sin now, for she was a wedded wife—and meanwhile she was still coming towards him. In a few minutes more, since it was impossible for him to pass her as a stranger, her hand would be clasped in his, and he would be once more looking into those eyes which had so often looked up into his, hearing words of greeting from those lips which he had so often kissed, and whose kisses were now vowed to another man.

There was a little lane, turning off to the left a few yards away. She had never seen him in his clerical dress, so she could not have recognised him yet. She would only take him for one of the clergy at the Retreat, he had only to turn down the lane—

But no, his old manhood rose in revolt at the idea. That would be a flight, a mean, unworthy flight, unworthy alike of himself and the high resolves that he had taken. It was hard, almost impossible even to think of her as a temptation, as an enemy to his soul, and yet, even if she were, as the leaping blood in his veins told him she might be, was it for him, the young soldier of the Cross, just buckling on his armour, to turn his back upon the first foe he met, even though that foe had once been his best beloved? He set his teeth and clenched his hands, and walked on past the entrance to the lane.

A minute or two later their eyes met. A look of astonished recognition instantly leapt into hers. She shifted the silver handled walking stick into her left hand, and held out the other, daintily gauntleted in tan.

"Why Vane!" she exclaimed, in a voice which was still as sweet and soft as ever, but which seemed to him to have a strange and somewhat discordant note in it, "you don't mean to say that it's you. I suppose, as a matter of fact, I ought to say Mr. Maxwell now—I mean now that you're a clergyman—but after all, those little things don't matter between such very old friends as we are, and I'm sure Reggie won't mind, in fact, I shan't let him if he does. Just fancy meeting you here! I suppose you're one of the Fathers—is that it?—at the little monastery up there. I've only been home a week, and last night I heard about this place, so I drove over to see it. But you haven't told me how you are yet, and how you like your—your new life."

As a matter of fact, she had rattled all this off so quickly that Vane had not had time to reply to her greeting. He had taken her hand and, somewhat

tremblingly, returned the frank, firm pressure. While she was speaking, he looked into her face and saw that she had already assumed the invisible but impenetrable mask in which the society woman plays her part in the tragic comedy of Vanity Fair. It was the same face and yet not the same, the same voice and yet a different one, and the sight and sound acted upon him like a powerful tonic. This was not the Enid he had loved, after all, at least, so it seemed to him. He had forgotten, or had never known that every woman is a born actress, and that even the brief training which Enid had already had was quite enough to enable her to say one thing, while thinking and feeling something entirely different.

He smiled for the first time as their hands parted, and said, in a voice whose calm frankness surprised himself:

"Good morning, Mrs. Garthorne!"—he absolutely couldn't trust himself to pronounce the word "Enid"—"Thanks, I'm very well, and, as you have guessed, I am located for the present up in the Retreat yonder. I confess I was a little startled to see you coming up the road, although I saw from the Times the other day that you had come back from the Continent and were coming down here to the Abbey. Of course, you would hear of the Retreat sooner or later, and as it's a bit of a show place in its humble way, I had an idea that you would come over some time to see it."

"Oh, but I suppose you don't allow anything so unholy as a woman to enter the sacred precincts, do you?"

The artificial flippancy of her tone annoyed him perhaps even more than it shocked him. There was a sort of scoff in it which rightly or wrongly he took to himself. It seemed to say "You, of course, have done with women now and for ever; henceforth, you must only look upon us as temptations to sin, and so I can say what I like to you."

"On the contrary," he replied, forcing a smile, "the Retreat is as open for visiting purposes to women as it is to men. It is nothing at all like a monastery, you know, although report says it is. It is simply a place where clergymen who have need of it can go and rest and think and pray in peace, and act as curates to the Superior who is also vicar of the parish. In fact, it has been known for mothers and sisters of the men to take rooms in the villages, and they are even invited to lunch."

"Dear me," she said, "how very charming! Of course, you will come over to the Abbey and have dinner some evening, and sleep, and the next morning I shall expect you to let me drive you over here and invite me to lunch."

"Of course, I shall be delighted," he said, purposely using the most conventional terms, "but I ought to tell you that there is a condition attached to our hospitality."

"Oh, indeed, and what is that?" she said, glancing up at him with one of her old saucy looks. "I hope it isn't very stringent. Won't you turn and walk a little way with me and tell me all about it? There is my pony carriage coming up the hill after me. It will overtake us soon, and then I won't take up your time any longer, for I daresay you are going on some good work."

Again the half-veiled flippancy of her tone jarred upon him and made him clench his teeth for an instant.

"With the greatest pleasure," he replied, turning and walking with long, slow strides beside her. His blood was quite cool now, and a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"It is this way," he went on, speaking as calmly as though he were addressing an utter stranger. "You know, or perhaps you do not know yet, that, beautiful and almost arcadian as this place is, there is, I regret to say, a great deal of poverty and sorrow, and, I am afraid, sin too, and it is part of our duty at the Retreat to seek this out and do what we can to relieve it; but there is much of that kind of work which women can do infinitely better than men, and therefore, when a woman enters our gates as our guest, we ask her to do what she can to help us."

"I see," she said, more softly and more naturally than she had spoken before. "It is a very just and a very good condition, and I shall do my best to fulfil it; indeed, as I suppose I shall some day be Lady of the Manor here, it will be my duty to do it."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," he said, with a touch of warmth in his tone, "very glad. And if you like you can begin at once. You see that little farmhouse up the road yonder. Well, there is not only sorrow, but sin and shame as well in that house. The old people are most respectable, and they were once fairly comfortably off before the agricultural depression ruined them. They are wretchedly poor now, but they struggle on somehow. About eighteen months ago their daughter went off to Kidderminster to work in the mills. She said she would get good wages and send some of them home every week. For some months she did send them a few shillings, and then what is unfortunately only too common about here happened. For a long time they lost sight of her, and last night she came back, starving, with a baby and no husband."

He said this in a perfectly passionless and impersonal tone, just as a doctor might describe the symptoms of a disease. "If you care to, you can do a great deal of good there," he went on. "I have just been there. If you like I will take you in and introduce you."

She stopped and hesitated for a moment. It struck her as such an utter reversal of their former relationships, that it seemed almost to obliterate the line which lies between the sublime and the ridiculous. Then she moved forward again, saying, in her own old natural voice:

"Thank you, Vane. I have often wondered since what sort of circumstances we should meet under again, but I never thought of anything like this. Yes, I will come, and if there is anything I can do I will do it."

"I thought you would," he said quietly, as he strode along beside her towards the farmhouse.

CHAPTER XIII

After introducing Enid to the sorrow-stricken family, Vane took his leave of her to go about his work. He met the pony-cart coming up the hill, and told the footman to wait for his mistress outside the farmhouse. Then he went on to the other hamlet, doing his work just as well and conscientiously as ever, and yet all the while thinking many thoughts which had very little connection with it.

He got back to the Retreat just in time for supper, and when the meal was over he asked Father Philip for the favour of half an hour's conversation. The request was, of course, immediately granted, and as soon as he was alone with the old man, who was wise alike in the things of the world and in those of the spirit, he told him, not as penitent to confessor, but rather as pupil to teacher, the whole story of his meeting and conversation with Enid, not omitting the slightest detail that his memory held, from the first thrill of emotion that he had experienced on seeing her to the last word he had spoken to her on leaving the farmhouse.

Father Philip was silent for some time after he had finished his story, then, leaning back in his deep armchair, he looked at Vane, who was still walking slowly up and down the little room, and said in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice:

"I'm very glad, Maxwell, that you've told me this. As I have told you before, I have listened to a good many life-histories in this room, but I must admit that yours is one of the strangest and most difficult of them. The fact of Miss Raleigh having married the son of the lord of the manor here, and having come down while you are here, naturally makes it more difficult still. But then, you know, my dear fellow, the greater the difficulty and the danger of the strife the greater the honour and the reward of victory.

"For my own part I think that your meeting with her in the road down yonder, if not ordered by Providence, may, with all reverence, be called providential. Those emotions which you experienced on first seeing her, and for which you were inclined to reproach yourself, were after all perfectly human, and therefore natural and pardonable. I needn't tell you now that I entirely disagree with those who consider that a man should cease to be a man when he becomes a clergyman. You are young, and you are made of flesh and blood. You were once very much in love with this young lady"—there was a slight, almost imperceptible emphasis upon the "once" which somehow made Vane wince—"you might have married her, but you forewent that happiness in obedience to a conviction which would have done honour to the best of us. You would have been either more or less than human if

your heart had not beaten a little harder and your blood had not flowed a little faster when you met her unexpectedly like that in a country road.

"But," he went on, sitting up in his chair and speaking with a little more emphasis, "the very fact that you so quickly discovered such a decided change in her, and that that change, moreover, struck you as being one for the worse, is to my mind a distinct proof that your paths in life have already diverged very widely."

"And yet, Father Philip," said Vane, as the old man paused and looked up at him, "you can hardly say, surely, that it was a good thing for me to discover that change. I can tell you honestly that it was a very sad one for me."

"Possibly," said Father Philip, "and, without intending the slightest disrespect to Mrs. Garthorne, I still say that it was a good thing for you to discover it."

"But why, Father Philip? How can it be a good thing for a man to discover a change for the worse in a woman whom he has grown up with from boy and girl, whom he has loved, and who has been to him the ideal of all that was good and lovable on earth?"

"My dear Maxwell, what you have just said convinces me that you have learnt or are in course of learning one of the most valuable lessons that experience can teach you. Remember that a man can only see with his own eyes, that he can only judge from his own perceptions. I do not agree with you in thinking that the Mrs. Garthorne of the present differs so greatly from the Miss Raleigh of the past. Different in a certain degree, of course, she must be. She was a girl then, living under the protection of her father's roof. She is a wife now, with a home of her own, with new cares, new responsibilities, new prospects. In fact, the whole world has changed for her, and therefore it would be very strange if she had not changed too. But that was not the change you saw. I would rather believe that that was in yourself, that you are a different man, not that she is a different woman."

"I think I see what you mean," said Vane, seating himself on the edge of an old oak table in the middle of the room. "You mean that while she has remained the same or nearly so my point of view has altered. I see her in a different perspective, and through a different atmosphere."

"Exactly," replied Father Philip. "It is both more reasonable and more charitable to believe that you have changed for the better, and not she for the worse."

"God grant that it may be so," said Vane, slipping off the table and beginning his walk again. "If it is so, then at least my work has not been without some result, and some of my prayers have been granted. But now, Father Philip, I want your advice. What shall I do? Shall I stay here and meet her just as an old friend? Shall I accept her invitation over to the Abbey? Shall I bring her here and introduce her to you, so that you may tell her what she can do for our people? Shall I trust myself to this sort of intercourse with her, or, as my time here is nearly up, shall I go away?"

"As for trusting yourself, Maxwell," said Father Philip slowly, "that is a question I cannot answer. You must ask that of your own soul, and I will pray and you must pray that it shall answer you with an honest 'Yes.' I don't believe that the answer will be anything else. But if it is, then by all means go, go to the first work that your hand finds to do. Go and join your friend Ernshaw in his mission under Southey. But if it is 'Yes,' as I hope and believe it will be, then stop until it is time for you to take your priest's orders. Visit the Abbey, bring Mrs. Garthorne here, interest her in the good work that you have already, I hope, made her begin by taking her to the Clellens. Prove to her and her husband, and, most important of all, to yourself, that you did not take that resolve of yours lightly or in vain, that, in short, you are one of those who can, as Tennyson says, 'rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things.'

"That, Maxwell, is the best advice I can give you. When you go to your room you will, of course, ask for guidance from the Source which cannot err, and I will add my prayers to yours that it may be given you."

The next day a mounted footman brought a note from Garthorne to Vane saying that his wife had told him of her meeting with him, and also expressing his pleasure at finding that he was in the neighbourhood, and asking him to come over to dine and sleep at the Abbey the next evening. If that evening would suit him he had only to tell the messenger, and a dog-cart would be sent for him, as the distance by road over the Bewdley Bridge was considerably over seven miles.

He had been awake nearly all night. In fact, he had spent the greater part of it on his knees questioning his own soul and seeking that advice which Father Philip had advised him to seek, and when the early morning service in the little chapel was over he honestly believed that he had found it. He went back into his room, after telling the man to put his horse in the stable, and go to what was stilled called the buttery and get a glass of beer, and wrote a note thanking Garthorne for his invitation, and accepting it for the following night.

If Vane had been told a couple of years before that he would visit Enid and her husband as an ordinary guest, that he would sit opposite to her at table and hear her address another man as "dear" in the commonplace of marital conversation, that he would see her exchange with another man those little half- endearments which are not the least of the charms of the first few married years, and that he would be able to look upon all this at least with grave eyes and unmoved features, he would simply have laughed at the idea as something too ridiculous ever to come within the bounds of possibility.

Yet, to the outward view, that was exactly what happened during his stay at Garthorne Abbey. He seemed to see Enid through some impalpable and yet impenetrable medium. He could see her as he always had seen her; but to touch her, to put his hand upon her, even to dream of one of those caresses which such a short time ago had been as common as hand-shakes between them, was every whit as impossible as the present condition of things would have seemed to him then.

There were a few other people to dinner. None of them knew anything of his previous relationship to Enid, and their presence naturally, and perhaps fortunately, kept the conversation away from the things of the past; but the Fates had put him in full view of Enid at the table, and, do what he would, he could not keep his eyes from straying back again and again to that perfect and once well-beloved face, any more than he could keep his ears from listening to that voice which had once been the sweetest of music for him, rather than to the general conversation in which it was his social duty to take a part.

It was a sore trial to the fortitude and self-control of a man who had loved as long and as dearly as he had done, but the strength which his long vigils away among the hills had given him did not desert him, and he came through it outwardly calm and triumphant, however deeply the iron was entering into his soul the while. It was one of those occasions on which such a man as he would take refuge from spiritual torment in intellectual activity, and neither Enid nor her husband had ever heard him talk so brilliantly and withal so lightly and good-humouredly as he did that night.

One of the guests was the vicar of Bedminster; and a Canon of Worcester, an old friend of Sir Reginald's, happened to be staying in the house. They were both High Churchmen, the Canon perhaps a trifle "higher" than the Vicar, and they were both delighted with him. The Canon remembered his ordination at Worcester, and during the conversation, which had now turned upon the relationship between the Church and the People, he said:

"Well, Maxwell, I will say frankly if you can preach as well as you can talk, and if your doctrine is as sound as your opinion on things in general seems to be, the Church will be none the poorer when you are priested. I think I shall ask the Bishop to let you preach the Sunday after you take full orders. I suppose your Father Superior up there would let you come, wouldn't he?

"A grand man, that Father Philip, by the way," he went on, looking round the table. "In his quiet, unostentatious way, in his little room up there in the old house of Our Lady of Rest, as they used to call it, he has done more real work for the Church than, I am afraid, a good many of us have done with all our preaching in churches and cathedrals."

"That," said Enid, "would be altogether delightful. Of course, we should all come and hear your Reverence," she went on, with a half ironical nod towards Vane. "You know, Canon, Mr. Maxwell and I are quite old friends. In fact, we came home from India as children in the same ship, didn't we, Reggie?" she added, with another laughing nod, this time at her husband, "and I am sure your Reverence would have no more interested listener than I should be."

"It is quite possible, Mrs. Garthorne," Vane replied in something like the same tone, "that you might be more interested than pleased."

"Indeed," said Enid, "and may I ask why?"

There was an immediate silence round the table, everybody wondering what his answer would be.

"Because," he replied, with a change of tone so swift as to be almost startling, "as soon as I take full Orders, it is my purpose, with God's help and under Father Philip's advice, to become a missionary, not a missionary to the heathen, as we are pleased to call them, or to the infinitely more degraded heathen of our own country, but to such people as you, you who are really living in sin without knowing it. Has it ever struck you, Canon, how great a work the Church has left undone in what are called the upper ranks of Society? You know the vast majority of them really and honestly believe themselves to be good Christians, and yet, as far as practical obedience to the teaching of Christ goes, they are no more Christians than an unconverted Hottentot is."

"Oh—er—ah—yes," replied the Canon rather awkwardly, and in the midst of a long silence. "Of course, I quite understand you and—er—by the way, do you intend to apply for any preferment?"

"I shall get a curacy with Ernshaw if I can in the East End to begin with, or, perhaps, with Father Baldwin in Kensington," said Vane, unable, like Enid and her husband and one or two others, to repress a faint smile at the Canon's not very skilful change of subject. "But I shall not attempt to get a living or anything of that sort. You see, I have some private means, and so I shall be in the happy position of being able to do my work without pay. Besides, while there is such an amount of poverty in the lower ranks of the Church, I think it is little less than sinful for a man who can live without it to take a stipend which, at least, might be bread and butter to a man who has nothing."

There was a rather awkward pause after this speech, as everyone at the table save Vane knew perfectly well that both the Vicar and the Canon had considerable private means in addition to the substantial stipends they drew from their clerical offices. At length Enid looked across at her husband with a wicked twinkle in her eye, and put an end to the situation by rising. As soon as the ladies were gone, Garthorne sent the wine round and adroitly turned the conversation back again to general subjects. When they went into the drawing- room, a discussion on the prospects of the season was in full swing, and from motives of prudence, this, varied with a little music and singing, was kept up till the ladies retired for the night.

When Enid shook hands with Vane they happened to be out of earshot of the others, and as she returned his clasp with the same old frank pressure, she said in a low tone:

"You were splendid to-night, Vane, and you will be more splendid still in the pulpit, only they'll never let you preach in the Cathedral after that. Well, good-night. After all, I was wrong and you were right. You have chosen the better part. God bless you and be with you, Vane. Good- night!"

As their eyes met he fancied that he saw a faint mist in hers. Then her long lashes fell; she turned her head away and the next moment she was gone.

When the good-nights had been said, Garthorne took his male guests into the smoking-room for whisky and soda and cigars. Vane laughingly declined, and asked permission to light a pipe.

"No, thanks," he said, with perfect good temper, although the offer was not in the best of taste. "I've not forgotten the last brandy and soda I had with you at Oxford."

When bed-time came, Garthorne took Vane up to his room. As his host said "good-night," Vane followed him to the door and watched him as he went along the panelled corridor and down the great staircase to next floor, on

which the Bride-chamber of the Abbey was situated. Then he went in and locked his door.

He sat down in an easy chair in the corner of the room and covered his face with his hands. After all, had he done the right thing in accepting Garthorne's invitation? Had he not over-estimated his strength? As he sat there, he felt that he had thrown himself unnecessarily into a life and death conflict. He encountered temptations every day of his life, although to the ordinary individual it might seem that the life which he and his companions led must be singularly devoid of temptation, yet here he was confronted with a trial which he could have avoided. Ought he to have avoided it?

Then there came to his mind the remembrance of a passage in one of the sermons which Father Philip had once preached to the little community in the Retreat. The words seemed particularly appropriate to Vane at the time, and he made a note of them in a little memorandum book which he always carried with him for the purpose of writing down any sentences which he heard or read which might strengthen him in the life which he had chosen for himself. He took the book from his pocket and read:

"The ideal life is never one of rigid asceticism any more than it is one of voluptuous self-indulgence; it is an equilibrium of forces, a vital harmony, a constant symphony, in the performance of which all capabilities in all phases of expression are called into vital but never into hysterical activity. The true peace is so heroic that it only follows crucifixion of all that was once regarded as essential to human happiness."

He sat for a moment after he had read and re-read this passage. Then he went to the mirror over the mantel-piece, and drew back shocked and terrified at the sudden change which had come over his features. They reminded him strongly of the features he had seen in the glass that other night in Warwick Gardens. Then he turned away and threw himself on his knees by the bed and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his soul:

"Oh, God! it is too heavy for me! Not by my strength but by Thine alone can I bear it."

It was the only prayer he uttered. In fact, they were the only words he could speak; but when he rose from the bedside he felt relieved, so far relieved that he took from his pocket a well-worn copy of Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation," and sat and read until almost daybreak.

CHAPTER XIV

It was the morning of Trinity Sunday, and Worcester Cathedral was crowded by a congregation which, if it had been an audience in an unconsecrated building, could have been justly described as brilliant.

Trinity Sunday is usually what may, without irreverence, be called more or less of a show Sunday in all churches. To-day all the clerical light and learning of the diocese was gathered together in the grand old Cathedral. The various portions of the service were to be conducted by clergy of high rank and notable social position. No one under the rank of a Canon, at least, would take any part in the proceedings.

The first lesson would be read by the Vicar of Bedminster, who was also a Canon of the Cathedral, and the second by Canon Thornton-Moore, whose acquaintance the reader has already made at Garthorne Abbey. Both of them were men of dignified presence, and both possessed good voices and a careful elocutionary training.

The Epistle and Gospel would be read by the Archdeacon and the Dean. Organ and choir were tuned to a perfection of harmony. And finally the Bishop would preach. After that would come the administration of the Sacrament to those who had not received it at the early service, for Trinity Sunday is accredited one of those three days on which, at least, the faithful member of the Anglican Church shall communicate. Then, the communion over, the Bishop would hold an Ordination, in consideration of which he had thoughtfully and thankfully curtailed his eloquence in the pulpit.

At this ordination Mark Ernshaw, who had already won fame both as an earnest and utterly self-sacrificing missionary, in the moral and spiritual wilds of East and South London, and also as a preacher who could fill any West End Church to suffocation, was to be admitted to full orders in company with his friend, Vane Maxwell, who was so far unknown to fame save for the fact that he was locally known as one of the dwellers in the Retreat among the hills, and, therefore, as one who had sat at the feet of the far-famed Father Philip, who himself had to-day made one of his rare appearances in the world, and was occupying one of the Canons' stalls in the chancel.

All the Clergy at the Retreat were popularly supposed to have "a past" of some sort, and as Vane had come from there and was also credited with being young and exceedingly good-looking—some of the lady visitors to the Retreat had described him as possessing "an almost saintlike beauty, my dear"—he also was a focus of interest. Moreover, he was known to have

taken a brilliant degree at Oxford, and to have had equally brilliant worldly prospects which he had suddenly and unaccountably relinquished to go into the Church.

Thus it came to pass that a very different and much more numerous congregation witnessed this ceremonial than the one which had taken place at the same altar rails a little more than a twelvemonth before.

Of course, all the party from the Abbey were present, including Sir Reginald, who had come down for a few days from town. Enid and her husband had communicated. It was their first communion since their marriage. Then they had gone back to their places to await the ordination.

In one of the front rows of the transept seats there was a tall, well- dressed girl, very pretty, with dark, deep, serious eyes which, in the intervals of the service she had several times raised and turned on Enid and her husband, who were sitting on the same side towards the front, in the body of the Cathedral. She was the very last person in the world, saving only, perhaps, Carol herself, whom Garthorne would have wished to see just then and there, and as soon as he had made sure that Dora Murray really was sitting within a few yards of him he began to be haunted by ugly fears of blackmail and exposure—which showed how very little he had learnt of Dora's character during the time that Carol had shared the flat with her.

But Dora's thoughts were very different, for they were all of fear, mingled with something like horror. She looked at the sweet-faced girl sitting beside Reginald Garthorne, and thought of the ruin and desolation that would fall upon her young life, with all its brilliant outward promise, if she only knew what she could have told her. She looked at her husband and wondered what all these good people—most of whom would have given almost anything for an invitation to his home—what these grave-faced, decorous clergy, too, would think if they could see him as she had seen him only a few months before. There was Sir Arthur Maxwell, too, sitting a little farther on, and beside him Sir Godfrey and Lady Raleigh, though, of course, she did not know them, but she guessed who they were, and close to Sir Arthur sat Sir Reginald, his host for the time being.

The whole of the Abbey party had communicated together. What would happen if she were to go to Sir Arthur after the service, and tell him what Carol had told her, if he were to learn that he had been kneeling at the altar rails beside the betrayer of his wife and the dishonourer of his name?

When she had seen Sir Reginald rise from his seat and go with the rest of the party across the centre transept to the chancel, she needed all her self-

control to shut her teeth and clench her hands and prevent herself from leaving her seat and accusing him of his infamy before clergy and congregation. She thought thankfully how good a thing it was that Carol, with her fierce impetuosity and sense of bitter wrong, was not there too. There was no telling what disaster might have happened, how many lives might have been wrecked by the words which she might have flung out at him, red-hot from her angry heart.

In her way Dora was a really religious girl, as many of her class are. So religious, indeed, that she would not have dared to have approached the altar herself; because she knew that for her, wedded as she was to the pleasant careless life she led, repentance and reform were quite out of the question.

She saw no incongruity at all in this. She went to church regularly in London, offered up as simple and as earnest prayers as anyone; lifted up her beautiful voice in the hymns and psalms and responses in honest forgetfulness of the things of yesterday and to-morrow, and, for the time being at least, took the lessons of the sermon to heart with a simple faith which many of her respectable sisters in the congregation were far from feeling.

In short, though the circumstances were different, she was very much in the position of the average respectable, well-to-do church-going Christian who will strive all the week, often by quite questionable methods, to lay up for himself and his wife and family treasures upon earth, and then on Sunday go to church and listen with the most perfect honesty and the most undisturbed equanimity to the reading of the Sermon on the Mount.

But when she saw Sir Reginald go with his son and his daughter-in-law, with her parents and Vane's father up through the chancel where Vane was sitting, her heart turned sick in her breast. The sacrilege, the blasphemy of it all seemed horrible beyond belief. Again and again the words rose to her lips. Again and again an almost irresistible impulse impelled her to get up, and she was only saved from doing what all that was best in her nature urged her to do, by the knowledge that, after all, she might only be expelled from the Cathedral by the Vergers, and perhaps prosecuted afterwards for brawling. Then her real story would come out.

She was visiting her parents who lived in Worcester, and who believed that she was conducting a little millinery business in London. She had great natural skill in designing head-gear—her own hat, for instance, had been gazed on by many an envious eye since the service began—and she would

have bitten her tongue through, rather than say a word which would have undeceived them. And so for this reason as well she held her peace.

Then she had heard the sonorous voice of the officiating priest rolling down the chancel:

"Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in His holy way, draw near with faith and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort."

Then came the general confession, and as she followed it in her prayer- book she thought of that unconfessed, though, perhaps, not unrepented sin of which she alone, save Sir Reginald, in all that great congregation knew. How could this man kneel there and say these solemn words, before he had confessed his sin to the man he had wronged, to the husband from whom he had stolen a wife, to the son he had deprived of a mother? What horrible mockery and blasphemy it all was! Surely some day some terrible retribution must fall on him for this.

After the Eucharist followed, as usual on such occasions, the Ordination Service. She had never seen Vane before, but when some of the congregation had left after the Communion Service, she left her seat and took a vacant one in front of the chancel, and then, even at some distance, she recognised him immediately by his likeness to Carol. It seemed to her that she had never seen anything so beautiful in human shape when he rose in his surplice and stole and hood to take his place before the Bishop at the altar-rail. And yet how different must her thoughts have been from Enid's, as they both looked upon the kneeling figure and listened to the words which were the actual fulfilment of the vow that he had taken to take up his cross and follow Him who said: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

Then, in due course, came the fateful words, more full of fate, so far as they concerned Vane, than any who knew him in the congregation had any idea of.

"Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands from God. Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of his Holy Sacraments; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!"

"Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained!"

Saving only Vane himself, these words had a deeper meaning for Dora, the Magdalen, the sinner, and the outcast, than they had for anyone else in the congregation, and in one sense they meant even more to her than they could do to him. When he rose from his knees before the altar rails, he would rise invested, as she believed, by the authority of God through the Church, with a power infinitely greater than that of any earthly judge. It was his to forgive or retain, his to pardon or to damn. That, to her simple reasoning, was the absolute meaning of the words as the Bishop had spoken them.

Some day it might happen that Carol would be confronted with the man whom she believed to be her father. What if she were to bring Vane face to face with him and he knew him for what he was, what would he do, not as man, but as priest—forgive or retain, absolve or damn?

When the ordination service was over and the congregation was moving out of the Cathedral, Sir Arthur caught sight of Dora for the first time. They were only a few feet apart, and recognition was inevitable. She looked at him as though she had never seen him before, although she had been present at more than one interview between him and Carol at Melville Gardens, but Sir Arthur at once edged his way towards her, shook hands in that decorous fashion which is usual among departing congregations, and said, in an equally decorous whisper:

"Good morning, Miss Murray! I hope you have not come here by accident, and that you will be able to give me some news of Carol. We have looked for you everywhere."

"Except perhaps in the right place," she murmured, putting her hand into his, "and if you had found us I don't think it would have been of any use. Carol's mind was quite made up. My address is 15, Stonebridge Street, if you wish to write to me. Good morning."

And then they parted, he to go his way and she to go hers, and each with an infinite pity for the other, and yet with what different reasons? It was only a chance meeting, the accidental crossing of two widely diverging life- paths; only one of those instances in which romance delights to mock the commonplace, and yet how much it meant—and how much might it mean when the future had become the present.

Fortunately, Garthorne and Enid had been pressing on in front, and so he had not noticed the meeting between Sir Arthur and Dora, whereby the second possible catastrophe of the day was averted.

Sir Arthur was one of the house-party at the Abbey, for he and Sir Reginald had been to a certain extent colleagues in India, and had kept up their acquaintance, and now that Sir Reginald's son had married the girl whom Sir Arthur had always looked upon as a prospective daughter-in-law, the intimacy had become somewhat closer. Sir Arthur had said frankly at the first that he thought Vane had done an exceedingly foolish thing; but since he had done it and meant to stick to it, there was an end of the matter, and if Vane couldn't or wouldn't marry Enid, he would, after all, rather see her the wife of his old friend's son than anybody else's. He had, therefore, willingly accepted Sir Reginald's invitation to spend a few days at the Abbey and witness his son's admission to the full orders of the priesthood.

Vane and Ernshaw, after exchanging greetings and receiving congratulations, declined Sir Reginald's invitation to dine and sleep at the Abbey, and went straight back to the Retreat with Father Philip.

It happened that, somewhat late that night after their guests had gone to bed, Reginald Garthorne had a couple of rather important letters to write, and sat up to get them finished. When he had sealed and stamped them, he took them to the post-box in the hall. The postman's lock-up bag was standing on the hall table, and, as he knew there wouldn't be any more letters that night, he thought he might as well put what there were there into the bag and lock it with his own key. He took them out in a handful, but before he could put them into the bag they slipped and scattered on to the table. He bent down to gather them up, and there, right under his eyes, was an envelope addressed in Sir Arthur Maxwell's handwriting to Miss Dora Murray, 15 Stonebridge Street, Worcester. He would have given a thousand pounds to know what that thin paper cover concealed. The thought half entered his mind to take it away and steam it, read the letter, and then put it back again; but he was not without his own notions of honour, and he dismissed the thought before it was fully formed. He contented himself with taking out his pencil and copying the address, and as he put the letters into the bag and locked it he said to himself:

"Well, I was wondering at service what in the name of all that's unlucky brought that girl down here just now, and I suppose I shall have to find out. But what the deuce does the old man want writing to her? A nice thing if they were to discover the lost Miss Carol and present her to the world as Vane's half-sister, and then the rest of the story came out. What an almighty fool I was to do that. If I'd only known that Enid really would have me—but it's no use grizzling over that. I shall have to find out what that young woman wants down in this part of the world, and why Sir Arthur should be writing to her, that's quite certain."

CHAPTER XV

Among Garthorne's letters the next morning there chanced to be one from his solicitor in Worcester, and so this made an excellent excuse for him to get away for the day. Enid was going to drive Sir Arthur and Sir Reginald over to the Retreat, so he ordered the dogcart to take him to Kidderminster, whence he took train for Worcester.

He knew enough of Dora's circumstances with regard to her parents to recognise the imprudence of calling upon her without notice, and so he lunched at the Mitre Hotel, and sent a messenger with a note asking her to meet him at three o'clock on the River Walk. The messenger was instructed to wait for an answer if Miss Murray was in.

Miss Murray was in, and when she read the note her first notion was that Garthorne had by some means got an inkling of the truth, or, at the least, had discovered that she was in communication with Sir Arthur Maxwell and wished to know the reason. She made up her mind at once to hold her tongue on both subjects, but at the same time, she felt that it would hardly be wise to refuse to meet him. It must also be admitted that she also was possessed by a pardonable, because feminine, curiosity as to what he wanted with her. She felt, however, that in such a place as Worcester it would be most imprudent for her to meet a man so well known in the County as Reginald Garthorne on one of the public thoroughfares, and so she wrote her answer as follows:—

"DEAR MR. GARTHORNE,

"I have no idea why you should wish to see me, and I do not think that it would be prudent to meet you as you suggest. You know how I am situated here, and so I think it would be best, if you really must speak to me, as you say, for you to come and see me here, not under your own name, of course, as that is much too well known. I would therefore suggest that you should call yourself Mr. Johnson, and I will say that you are a representative of one of the big millinery houses in London, and that you have come to see me on business. I shall wait in for you till three.

"Yours sincerely,

"DORA MURRAY."

Garthorne saw the wisdom of this suggestion, and "Mr. Johnson" announced himself at half past two. Dora received him alone in a little back sitting- room, but his reception was not altogether encouraging, for when he

held out his hand and said "Good afternoon, Dora!" she flushed a little, and affecting not to see his hand, she said:

"Miss Murray, if you please, Mr. Garthorne, now and for the future. You seem to have forgotten that, for me, at least, Worcester is not London."

He was so completely taken aback by this utterly unexpected speech, as well as by the unwonted tone in which it was spoken, that his outstretched hand dropped to his side somewhat limply, and he felt himself straightening up and staring at her in blank astonishment.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Murray," he said, in a tone which sounded a great deal more awkward than he meant it to do. "Of course, I was quite wrong; I ought not to have forgotten."

"There is no necessity for an apology," she said, more distantly than before. "Will you sit down? You want to see me about something, I suppose?"

"Yes," he said, sitting down and fingering the brim of his hat somewhat nervously. "Yes, that is what I have come over to Worcester for. In fact, I have been wanting to see you for some time. In the first place, I had a rather extraordinary letter from Carol some time ago, sending back some money which I, of course, can't accept, so I've brought it with me to ask you to take it and use it in any way that you think fit."

"You mean, of course, in charity?" said Dora, looking him straight in the eyes. "You wouldn't insult me by meaning it in any other way."

"Oh, no, certainly not," he said, more awkwardly than before, and wondering what on earth had produced this extraordinary change in her manner. "I hope you know me well enough to believe me quite incapable of such a thing."

"If you only knew how well I know you!" thought Dora, "I wonder what you'd think?"

But she said aloud, and rather more kindly than before:

"You must forgive me, Mr. Garthorne, I spoke rather hastily then. I quite see what you mean. It's very good of you, and I'm sure that if Carol were here she would tell me to take the money and use it that way—so I will."

"Thank you very much, Miss Murray," he replied, taking an envelope out of his pocket-book. "There are the notes and postal orders exactly as she sent them to me. And now, may I ask where she is?"

"I can't answer that, Mr. Garthorne, because I don't know. The night that she sent you that money back she made the acquaintance of a very nice fellow who is something more than a millionaire, and since then they've been taking a sort of irregular honeymoon round the world. The last letter I had from her was from Sydney. She seems very jolly and enjoying herself immensely."

"Glad to hear it," said Garthorne, speaking the thing which was not altogether true. "She's a jolly girl, and deserves the best of luck—which she seems to have got. And the millionaire——?"

Dora shook her head, and said quietly but decisively.

"No, Mr. Garthorne, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about him. It would be a breach of confidence if I did, and so I'm sure you won't ask for it. Do you want to ask me about anything else?"

"Yes," he said, hesitatingly, "I do." There was a little pause, during which they looked at each other, he enquiringly and she absolutely impassive. Then he went on: "Of course, you saw us in the Cathedral yesterday, and I think you know Sir Arthur Maxwell personally. You met him once or twice when he went to call on Carol at Melville Gardens."

"Yes."

Then there was another pause, and, as Garthorne didn't seem able to find anything to say, Dora went on speaking very quietly, but with a curious note of restraint in her voice which puzzled him considerably.

"I do know Sir Arthur, and I tried hard to persuade Carol to do what he wanted her to do, although, all the same, I think I should have done as she did if I had been her. I don't know whether you saw Sir Arthur speak to me in the Cathedral as we were coming out, but he did. I have had a letter from him this morning, and he is coming to see me."

"Of course, you are not going to say anything——"

"No, sir, I am not," said Dora, rising from her chair white to the lips and with an ominous glitter in her eyes. She took up the envelope which Garthorne had laid on the table, and tossed it at him. "You know me for what I am in London, and it seems that you only look upon me as an animal to be hired for the amusement of people like you, not as a woman who still has her notions of honour. That is an insult which I cannot pardon. You behaved well, as things go, to Carol, but you have now shown me that, whatever you are in name and family, you are in yourself an unspeakable cad. You came

here thinking that I was going to blackmail you because I happened to know something about you which you would not like your wife to know. If you only knew what I could tell you——"

And then she checked herself, and after a little pause, she pointed to the door and said:

"You have got your money, Mr. Garthorne, and there is the door. You will oblige me by leaving the house as soon as possible."

"But really, Miss Murray——" he began, as he rose, not a little bewildered, from his chair.

"Stop!" she said. "In mercy to yourself and your wife, stop! There is the door; go, and remember that from now we are strangers, and if ever you meet Carol again—no, I won't say that. God grant that you never may see her again, for if you do——"

"Well, and suppose I do, Miss Murray, what then?" he interrupted, with his hand on the handle of the door. He had never heard such words from the lips of either man or woman before, and that personal vanity which is a characteristic even of the worst of men was grievously outraged.

"Never mind what I mean," she said, cutting him short again. "I have said all that I am going to say except this—if ever you meet Carol again, for her sake and yours, for your wife's and your children's when they come, don't see her. Now go!"

There was a something in her voice and in her manner which said even more than her lips had done. Something which not only struck him dumb for the time being, but which also drove home into his soul a conviction that this girl, outcast and social pariah as she was, not only held his fate in her hands, but that she possessed some unknown power over his destiny, that she knew something which, if spoken, might blast the bright promise of his life and overwhelm him in irretrievable ruin.

She had called him a cad, and as his thoughts flew back to that morning in Vane Maxwell's rooms at Oxford, a pang of self-conviction told him that she had spoken justly. He felt, too, that he was hopelessly in the wrong, that by his suggestion he had sorely insulted her, and that in exchange for his insult she had given him mercy. He would have given anything to know the real meaning of her words, and yet he dare not even ask her.

He looked round at her once and saw her, standing rigid and impassive waiting to be relieved of his presence. His thoughts went back a few months

to the times when those little dinners of four had been so pleasant, and when this girl, who was now looking at him like an accusing angel, had matched even Carol herself in the gaiety of her conversation and the careless use she made of her mother-wit, and he tried hard to say something which should in some way cover his retreat, but the words wouldn't come, and so he just opened the door and walked out.

Dora heard the street door bang behind him, and then her tensely-strung nerves relaxed. She dropped into an easy chair, clasped her hands over her temples, and whispered:

"Oh dear, oh dear, how is all this going to end, and what would happen if they only knew! And now I've got to see Sir Arthur. Shall I tell him everything or not? No, I daren't, I daren't. It's too awful. Was there ever anything like it in the world before?"

And then her body swayed forward, her elbows dropped on to her knees, her hands clasped her temples tighter, and the next moment she had burst into a passion of tears.

Tears are a torture to men and a relief to women, so in a few minutes she lifted her head again, the storm was over and she began to look the situation over calmly. The more she thought of it the more certain it seemed that she could do nothing but irretrievable mischief by even hinting to Sir Arthur anything of what she knew. At any rate she decided that until Carol came back she would keep her knowledge absolutely to herself.

Then the train of her thoughts was suddenly broken by the postman's knock at the door. There was a London letter addressed to herself in the familiar handwriting of Mr. Bernard Falcon. As she opened it she experienced a singular mixture of relief and vexation, tinged by a suggestion of shame.

The letter began with an inquiry as to when she was coming back to Town, and ended with an invitation to spend a week end in the round trip from London to Dover, Calais, Boulogne and Folkestone.

She had been nearly a fortnight in Worcester, and, truth to tell, she was getting a little tired of it. Falcon's letter offered her a double relief. It would save her from the ordeal of meeting Sir Arthur, and, combined with the visit of "Mr. Johnson," it would give her a good excuse to her parents for going back to Town at once; so she sat down and wrote two letters, one to Falcon telling him that he could meet her at Paddington the next evening, and the other to Sir Arthur telling him all she knew about Carol, saving only the name of her companion, and regretting that she would not be able to meet

him, as she was starting for the Continent that day. For obvious reasons she, of course, said nothing of Garthorne's visit to her.

Sir Arthur was as much disappointed with his letter as Mr. Falcon was pleased by his. Dora left Worcester the day that he received it, and while she was dining with Mr. Falcon at the Globe Restaurant, Sir Arthur was telling Vane and Mark Ernshaw, who had come over to dine and sleep at the Abbey, all that he knew of Miss Carol's latest escapade.

"I'm very, very sorry," said Ernshaw when he had finished. "We've never told you before, Sir Arthur, but I may as well tell you now that, if Miss Vane had not disappeared as mysteriously as she did, Vane was to have introduced me to her, and I was going to marry her if she would have me."

Sir Arthur looked at him in silence for a few moments, and then he took his hand and said:

"I know that is true, Ernshaw, because you have said it; though I would not have believed it from anyone else except Vane. I would willingly give everything that I possess and go back to work to make such a thing possible, but I'm afraid it isn't, and now, of course, it is more impossible than ever. Frankly, I don't believe she'd have you. It sounds a very curious thing to say, but from what I have seen of her, granted even that she fell in love with you, the more she loved you the more absolutely she would refuse to marry you. You know we offered her everything we could. Vane and I both agreed to acknowledge her and have her to live with us, but it was no use. She refused in such a way that she made me long all the more to take her for my own daughter before the world; but there was no mistaking the refusal, and the day after our last interview she clinched it by vanishing, I suppose with this young millionaire who is with her now. It's very terrible, of course, but there it is. It's done, and I'm afraid there's no mending it. Perhaps, after all, it is better for you that it should be so."

"Yes, Ernshaw," said Vane. "It's not a nice thing to say under the circumstances, but I think the governor's right."

"Possibly, but I don't agree with you," he replied. "You know I am what a good many people would call an enthusiast on the subject of this so-called social evil, for which, as I believe, Society itself is almost entirely to blame, and I am quite prepared to put my views into practice."

"Then," said Sir Arthur, smiling gravely, "I think when we get back to Town I'd better introduce you to Miss Murray, who was living with Carol in Melville Gardens, where I first saw her. She was in the Cathedral on Sunday. Her parents live in Worcester, and they believe, poor people, that

she has a little millinery business in London. She says she's going on the Continent, I suppose with this friend of hers. But she has given me an address in London where she can be found.

"Now there, Ernshaw," he went on, "there I believe you would find a far better subject for your social experiment, if you are determined to make it, than poor Carol could ever be. I don't know her history, but she is evidently a lady born and educated. She is quite as good- looking as Carol, only an entirely different type, taller, darker, and with deep, mysterious brown eyes which evidently have a soul behind them. At any rate, I'm quite convinced that she would make a much better social missionary's wife than poor Carol would.

"She, I sadly fear, is 'a daughter of delight,' as the French call them, pure and simple. She told me point blank that she preferred her present mode of life to respectability, and that she considered that taking even my money or Vane's, when she had no real claim upon us, was more degrading and would hurt her self-respect a great deal more than doing what she is doing. In other respects she's as good a girl as ever walked, and as honest as the daylight, but I'm afraid there is no hope of social regeneration for her."

"Hope was once found for one a thousand times worse than she!" said Ernshaw quietly. "But as I have seen neither of them yet, no harm can be done by my making the acquaintance of Miss Murray to begin with."

"Very well," said Sir Arthur, not at all sorry to change the subject. "And now, talking about social missionaries, Vane, have you quite made up your mind to carry out this scheme of yours, this crusade against money-making and the pomps and vanities of Society? Do you really mean to show that your own father has been living in sin all these years; that he is not, in fact, a Christian at all, because it is impossible for anyone to be decently well off and a Christian at the same time? A nice sort of thing that, Ernshaw, isn't it?"

"If Vane honestly believes, as he does, that his is the only true definition of a Christian, it is not only his right but his duty to preach it," was the young priest's reply.

"It is my belief," said Vane quietly, "and, God helping me, I will do what I believe to be my duty."

The party at the Abbey broke up a few days after this, and in another week or so Enid and her husband were in the full swing of the great merry-go-round which is called the London season. She was unquestionably the most

beautiful of the brides of the year, and she was the undisputed belle of the Drawing Room at which she was presented.

Garthorne was, of course, very proud of her, and received plenty of that second-hand sort of admiration which is accorded alike to the owner of a distinguished race-horse, a prize bull-dog, or a pretty wife.

Under the circumstances, therefore, it was perfectly natural that they should enjoy themselves very thoroughly, and though towards the end Garthorne began to get a little bored, and to think rather longingly of his yacht on the Solent and his grouse moor in Scotland, Enid, with her youth and beauty and perfect constitution, enjoyed every hour and every minute of her waking life. Society had no very distinguished lion to fall down and worship that season, and so, towards the end, things were getting a little slow, and people were thinking seriously of escaping from the heat and dust of London, when the world of wealth and fashion was suddenly thrilled into fresh life by an absolutely new sensation.

CHAPTER XVI

One Sunday morning, about the middle of June, the large and fashionable congregation which filled the church of St. Chrysostom, South Kensington, a church which will be recognised as one of the very "highest" in London, and which, to use a not altogether unsuitable term, "draws" all the year round by reason of the splendour of its ritual, as well as the simple earnest eloquence of its clergy, was startled by the preaching of such a sermon as no member of it had ever heard before.

The preacher for the morning was announced to be the Rev. Father Vane, a name which meant nothing to more than about half a dozen members of the congregation, but which every man and woman in the church had some cause to remember by the time the service was over.

Father Baldwin, as the vicar of St. Chrysostom's was familiarly known, was a very old friend of Father Philip's, and Vane's appearance as preacher that morning was the result of certain correspondence which had taken place between them, and of several long and earnest conversations which he had had with Vane himself.

The moment that Vane appeared in the pulpit, that strange rustling sound which always betokens an access of sensation in a church, became distinctly audible from the side where the women sat. As he stood there in cassock, cotta and white, gold-embroidered stole, he looked, as many a maid, and matron too, said afterwards, almost too beautiful to be human. Both as boy and man he had always been strikingly handsome, but the long weeks and months of prayer and fasting, and the constant struggle of the soul against the flesh, had refined and spiritualised him. To speak of an everyday man of the world, however good- looking he may be, as beautiful is rather to ridicule him than otherwise, but when such a man as Vane passes through such an ordeal as his had been, the word beauty may be justly used in the sense in which the feminine portion of the congregation of St. Chrysostom's unanimously used it that morning.

There was a hush of expectation as he opened a small Bible lying on the desk in front of him. Then he raised his right hand and made the sign of the Cross.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,

Amen!"

The words were not hastily and inaudibly muttered as they too often are by the clergy of the High Anglican persuasion. They rang out as clearly as the

notes of a bell through the silence of the crowded church, and the congregation recognised instantly that he possessed, at least, the first qualification of a great preacher.

Then he took up his Bible, and said in a quite ordinary conversational tone:

"It will be well if those who wish to follow what I am about to say will take their Bibles and turn to the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew."

The opening was as unpromising as it was unconventional, but more than half the congregation obeyed, and when the rustling of leaves had subsided, he began to read the Sermon on the Mount.

When the first thrill of astonishment had passed, it was noticed that, after the first few verses, he ceased to look at the Bible. Every member of the congregation had heard the words over and over again, but they had never heard them as they heard them now. It was nothing like the formal reading of the lessons to which they had been accustomed, and as the clear, pure tones of his voice rang through the church, and, as his eyes and face lighted up with the radiance of an almost divine enthusiasm, there were some in his audience who began to think that he might well have been a re-incarnation of one of those disciples of the Master who heard the words as they came from His lips that day on the Judean hillside.

He went on verse after verse, never missing a word, and unconsciously emphasising each passage with gestures, slight in themselves, but eloquent and forcible in their exact suitability to the words, and very soon every man and woman in the church was listening to him, not only with rapt attention, but with a growing feeling of uneasiness and apprehension as to what was to follow.

At length he came to the twenty-third verse of the seventh chapter:

> "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from
>
> me, ye that work iniquity."

There was an emphasis upon the last few words which sent a thrill of emotion, and, in many cases, one of angry expectation, through the crowded congregation. It was one of the wealthiest, and most fashionable in London, but, saving a comparatively few really earnest souls, it was composed for the most part of idlers and loungers, who came to St. Chrysostom's partly because it was one of the most fashionable churches in the West End, partly because it was the proper thing to attend Church on Sunday, and partly

because the music, and singing and preaching were all so good, and the elaborate ceremonial was so perfectly performed, that it afforded the means of spending a few hours on Sunday in a very pleasant way.

The young preacher looked at the crowd of well-dressed men and women for a few moments in silence, as though he would give them time to realise the tremendous solemnity of the words they had just heard. There was dead, breathless silence at first, and then came a rustling sound, mingled with one of deep breathing. Then he began again in the same direct, conversational tone in which he had asked them to take their Bibles.

"I am addressing," he said, in a low, clear tone which could be heard as distinctly at the church doors as it could by those immediately under the pulpit, "an audience which is composed of men and women who are, nominally, at least, Christians, and now I am going to ask you, every man and woman of you, to ask your own souls the simple question, whether you really are Christians, or not.

"A good many of you, I daresay, will be a little startled, perhaps some of you may even be offended by the suggestion of such a question. With every regard for your feelings as brother men and sister women, I sincerely hope you will be. My reason for hoping that is very simple. The vast majority of people in Christian countries are Christians simply because they have been born of Christian parents, just as they are Protestants or Catholics because their parents were such before them, and their early training has strongly predisposed their minds to the acceptance—too often the blind acceptance—of a certain set of doctrines which, with all reverence, are by themselves of no more use for the purpose of saving a human soul from eternal damnation than the multiplication table would be. These doctrines, these creeds, are aids to salvation, most potent aids, but they are not essentials, since of themselves they cannot save.

"It is far too often taken for granted that, because a man has been brought up in a Christian family, has been baptised into the Church of Christ, and has later on been admitted into the communion of that Church, that, therefore, he is justified in believing himself to be a Christian. He has, as we of the Church Catholic and Universal fervently believe, been placed in the path which leads to salvation. His vision has been cleared from the mists of error. The Church, in the fulfilment of her holy mission, has caused the white light of heaven to shine upon his eyes. His feet have been set in the strait gate and on the narrow way which leads to eternal life, but not all the priests from Abraham down to our own day, nor all the Churches that ever were founded can do any more. The way must be travelled by the man himself, his own eyes must see the light, his own feet must tread the way,

no matter how steep or difficult it may be—or that man has no more right to call himself a Christian than any worshipper of any of the false gods whose reign has vanished from the earth.

"It was for the purpose of bringing this most solemn truth, this most solemn and momentous of all truth home to you that I began by repeating the words which the Greatest of all Preachers pronounced for the guidance of those who should come after Him."

He paused, and took up his Bible again. Meanwhile, a few people, both men and women, whose dress and appearance bore unmistakable signs of worldly wealth, got up and walked out of the church.

Vane watched them go, and as he did so the rest saw a complete change of expression come over his countenance. His eyes grew sombre and sorrowful, his lips tightened, and something like a frown gathered upon his brow. He not only waited in the midst of an almost unnatural silence until they had gone, but he went on waiting for some moments longer as though he would give anyone else an opportunity of leaving the church if they desired to do so. No one stirred. The look which he turned upon them from the pulpit seemed like a spell which held them to their seats. Then his lips opened, and they heard his voice, tinged with an infinite sadness, saying:

"'The young man saith unto him: All these things have I kept from

my youth up. What lack I yet?

"'Jesus saith unto him: If thou wouldst be perfect go and sell that

thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in

heaven, and come and follow me.

"'But when the young man heard that saying he went away sorrowful,

for he had great possessions.

"'Then said Jesus unto his disciples: Verily I say unto you that a

rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

Then there came another pause, during which his listeners seemed almost afraid to breathe, so strong was the spell of apprehension and expectancy which he had laid upon them, and he went on:

"You have, everyone of you, heard those words read and spoken scores and hundreds of times. Has it ever struck you that they are words which, if you are a Christian man or woman, you must believe to be the words of God himself, spoken by the lips of Infallible Wisdom, and inspired by that Omniscience which sees you sitting here in this London church as plainly as It saw that other congregation which was assembled that day on the slope of the Mount of Olives, and which reads your hearts at this moment as It read theirs then? If you do not believe that, then it follows that you do not believe in the mission or the teaching of Christ. You do not believe that He spoke the truth when He told the young man that it was not only necessary to keep the commandments, as he had done from his youth up; but that it was also necessary for him to cease to be a rich man, and to distribute his wealth in relieving the necessities of the poor.

"If you believe that Christ is very God of very God, as you say every Sunday of your lives, you cannot escape the obligation which those words put upon you except at the peril of your immortal souls. Remember that it is not by your faiths and beliefs, or by the doctrines you have held that you will be judged when you stand before the Last Tribunal. These are but instruments to be used well or ill, but the final appeal will come to your works. The last question that will be asked of you will not be 'What creed have you believed?' or 'What Church have you belonged to?' but 'What have you done?' and on the answer to that, as recorded in the books of God, will depend your fate for all eternity.

"Remember the words, 'Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.'

"Remember, too, that when you join in the services of the Church, and when you partake of her Sacraments, you are simply saying 'Lord, Lord'—a very good and righteous thing to say; but of no more use or benefit to your souls than an echo from a blank wall, unless you also do the will of Him who is in Heaven.

"I know that there are many specious sayings invented by those who have reasons of their own for trying to prove that when the Son of God spoke these words He didn't mean what He said; and those who have invented these things are amongst the worst enemies of God and His Church on earth, no matter whether they say these lying words in the drawing-room or from the pulpit. They seek to comfort their consciences and the consciences of such as you by saying that times have changed since these words were uttered; that it would be quite impossible to put a literal interpretation upon them now.

"Now the man who tells his fellow men that, no matter what his position in the world, is a liar and a hypocrite, and, what is worse, he is a maker of hypocrites, for it is my duty to tell you that every man and woman who professes Christianity before the world on Sunday and during the week disobeys the command of Christ as set forth here in His own words, is, consciously or unconsciously, a liar and a hypocrite also.

"Let us see what these sayings look like when tested by ordinary logic, by that faculty of distinguishing the right from the wrong, the true from the false, which is perhaps the greatest of all God's gifts to men.

"'Times have changed since the Son of God delivered the Sermon on the Mount.' That is one of those half-truths which are infinitely worse than a lie. Times have changed. That is to say mortal men and mortal manners have changed; but does that warrant us in believing that the mind and will of the Immutable God have changed too; that what Christ himself declared to be fatal to salvation two thousand years ago, is compatible with salvation now? That what was unlawful then is lawful now—in short, that the Omniscient God, in whose eyes a thousand years are as one day and one day as a thousand years, who read the minds of men then as He reads them now, has altered the decrees of Eternal Justice and changed Eternal Truth into a lie?

"If you believe these people, then you must believe that too. That Christ himself foresaw, as He must have done, that such false teachers as these would arise both in His Church and outside it is clearly proved by His own words:

"'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?

"'And then I will profess unto them: I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity.'

"Remember that in that day when these words will be spoken hypocrisy and self-deceit will have become impossibilities. It will not be possible then for you to persuade yourselves, as no doubt you do now, that you are good Christians, or that you are Christians at all, because you believe certain doctrines and carry out certain ecclesiastical observances. You will see your own souls naked then, and the eye of Eternal and Immutable Justice will see them too—and unless you have proved that you have obedience as well as faith; that you have not only believed but also obeyed, you will most

assuredly hear those words 'I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity!'

"But," he went on again, after another little pause during which some of his audience began to look round at each other with something like fear in their eyes, "do not forget that there is another course open to you. It may be that the things of this world, the conventions of society, the fear of poverty and the love of wealth, have taken such a hold upon you, that, although you dare not even confess it to yourselves, you prefer these things to obedience to the Divine command and all that it may bring.

"You have it in perfectly plain language and on the highest possible authority that you cannot serve God and Mammon. Those are no empty words, they are one of the most solemn pronouncements ever made, and they affect you here and to all eternity. So long as you go on striving to increase your wealth by those means which must nowadays be employed to make money, you are not and you cannot be Christians. Those are harsh words, and yet if they are not true, the words of Christ himself are false. There is no escape from this dilemma, and if you think that devoting one day a week to the nominal service of God and six to the real, practical service of Mammon, you earn the right to call yourselves Christians, that is to say, followers of Christ, you are merely practising a pitiful piece of self-deception which would be ludicrous were its consequences not so solemn.

"But, as I have said, there is another course open to you, a course which, terrible as it is, is better than the one that you are now following, because it is more honest. Be honest with yourselves and each other, and, what is of more consequence, be honest with God too. A well-known agnostic lecturer once said that no god could afford to damn an honest man, and I am not sure that he was not right; but if the words of Christ were not the empty mouthings of a charlatan or a dreamer, there cannot be the slightest doubt about the fate of the hypocrite. Remember that on the only occasion on which the gentle nature of our Lord was roused to anger he denounced in the most terrible language that human ears have ever heard those whom He called hypocrites, and, therefore, I say to you, at whatever cost, either to your pockets or to your souls, for you can take your choice which, cease to be hypocrites.

"Cease this pitiful pretence which, though it may deceive yourselves, certainly does not deceive Him from whom no secrets are hid. If you cannot forsake the service of Mammon, if you really are so tightly bound by his golden chains to the things of this world that you cannot or will not break loose from the entrancing bondage, then, in the name of honesty, say so, say to yourselves and to your fellow men: 'I cannot do this thing. If I must give

up the service of Mammon before I can call myself the servant of God, then I cannot become the servant of God, and I will make a hypocrite and a liar of myself no longer.' Then at least you would be honest and truthful, honest with yourselves and with your brother men and with your sister women and with God. You would, as I believe, and as you are now trying to make yourselves believe, have made the wrong choice, a choice whose consequences must inevitably face you on the other side of the grave, but you would, at least, be able to face the tribunal of Eternal Justice without shame, and, with all reverence I say it, I, as a Christian man, believe that for this reason the infinite mercy of God would find a means of salvation for you.

"Be honest. For God's sake and your own, be honest, even though in becoming so, you cease to be what is commonly called respectable. If you really cannot serve God with a whole soul and without reservation, give up the attempt to serve Him and say so before all men. It would be a terrible thing to do, and yet, awful as such a step would be, it might be the first one towards your ultimate salvation. The angels might weep, but I hardly think that the devils would laugh, for the worst enemy of the Father of Lies is an honest man or woman. The gentle heart of Jesus might bleed for you, but Eternal Justice would respect you and give you your due. Once more, speaking not only as a priest of God, but as your fellow man, let me as man implore you to be honest, and as priest, warn you that the penalty of hypocrisy is eternal damnation. You have no choice in the matter. One or the other you must be, and you cannot possibly be both. Wherefore I tell you that whether you elect to be the servant of God or the servant of Mammon, you must let all men know plainly which you are. If you are reasonable beings you cannot believe in yourselves or in each other, unless you do this. Remember that, however fondly you may be deceiving yourselves, you cannot blind the eyes of Omniscience. It is a hard thing to say, and yet it is only the plain truth given to us by the lips of Christ himself, that you cannot believe in God unless you do the things which He says. Living your present lives you do not do them, and therefore you are not only infidels and atheists living without God, but you are worse—you are hypocrites, and woe unto you!

"I tell you, speaking as solemnly as a priest of God can do in His house and in His presence that I would rather see this and every church in Christendom attended by a score of people—of real Christians whose daily lives throughout the week were really guided and sanctified by obedience to the teachings of the Master, than I would see them crowded with throngs of men and women like you, whose acts from Monday morning to Saturday

night consistently belie every word that your lips utter here in the house of God and in the presence of the Holy Trinity.

"No doubt, there is already anger against me in many of your hearts on account of what I have believed it my duty to say to you. I would not willingly incur the hatred of any man or woman, and yet I shall not altogether regret that anger, because it will be proof that my words have reached, not only your ears, but your hearts. I have spoken plainly and without regard to the conventionalities either of the world or of the pulpit, and I have done so because I believe that conventionality is the foe of truth, and therefore the enemy of religion. This, remember, is a subject of such awful solemnity, laden as it is with the eternal fate of every human soul that is baptised into the Church of God, that I have found it my duty to make it plain to you at any cost.

"When you leave this church, send your horses and your carriages away and walk home, for you are deliberately breaking the law of God by using them on the Sabbath, and, remember, that he who breaks one jot or tittle of the law, shall be guilty of the whole, and, instead of going to church parade in the park, you women, to excite the admiration of the men and the envy of other women by the beauty of your dress, or the splendour of your equipage, and you men, to begin the sordid work of to-morrow before you have finished the holy task of to-day, go home and take your bibles into the solitude of your own chamber. Spend the rest of God's day with God Himself. And that you may do this good thing well and truly, and find help to choose that way of life which leadeth to eternal salvation, May the peace of God which passeth all understanding be with you now henceforth and for ever, Amen."

He raised his right hand in benediction, turned towards the altar and made the sign of the Cross, and as he came down the pulpit steps and walked up the chancel to his place, some of those who saw him, said afterwards, that there was a light on his face which they had never seen on a human face before.

CHAPTER XVII

There was no communion after that service, and so the choir and priests formed for the recessional hymn. Father Baldwin, as the procession formed behind him, came to the front of the chancel and said:

"Instead of the hymn appointed, it will be better if we end the service with number 274."

"Through the night of doubt and sorrow."

The organ pealed out, the congregation rose, and the hymn began. It so happened that as Vane was passing the chairs on which Enid and her husband were sitting with several friends, the last verse but one was reached.

"Onward therefore, pilgrim brothers,

Onward, with the Cross our aid!

Bear its shame, and fight its battle,

Till we rest beneath its shade."

At the words "Bear its shame and fight its battle," she looked up. Her eyes met Vane's for a moment; but there was no look of recognition in them. A sudden dart of pain seemed to shoot into her heart. This man, this prophet-priest, as he seemed to her now, had once been hers, her promised husband. How far away from her, how far above her was he now!

She had listened to the sermon with a double interest, interest in the man as well as in the wonderful words he had just spoken—words so simple in themselves, and yet spoken with such terrible force, a force so terrible that within the space of a few minutes it had shattered all her worldly ideals and destroyed the faith that she had been brought up in, changing her whole outlook upon the world.

She had been educated on the ordinary lines of conventional Christianity, and, until now, she had, like thousands of others, honestly believed herself to be a good Christian woman, just as she believed her mother to be. But, as it happened, there was that within her soul which instantly responded to the truth which she had heard to-day for the first time; and she saw that Vane was right, hopelessly, piteously right.

And then as the procession passed she looked at her husband. He had already sat down, and was getting his hat from under the seat. The

procession streamed slowly out of sight into the vestry, and the congregation moved out into the aisles with much soft rustling and swishing of skirts and a subdued, buzzing hum of eager conversation.

As the three streams of well-dressed men and women converged towards the great doorway which led out into the street many began to ask themselves and each other if any one would obey the preacher's exhortation and send their carriages away. The carriages were lined up in the street just as they would be outside a theatre. Some of their owners got in and drove away, making very pointed remarks on the impropriety of bringing such subjects as carriages and horses into sermons and the length that young curates would go now-a-days to obtain notoriety. Others dismissed theirs and went away trying to look unconcerned; while other people stared after them, some smiling and others looking serious.

The Garthornes' victoria, drawn by a pair of beautiful light bays, drew up, and Garthorne put out his hand to help Enid in, but she drew back and said:

"No, thanks, I think I'll walk."

"Oh, nonsense, Enid!" he said impatiently. "Time is getting on, and we must have our turn in the Park. Everybody will be there, and this is about the last Sunday in the season. We haven't over much time either."

"I am not going into the Park, Reginald," she said decidedly. "I am going to walk straight home. You can go and do Church Parade if you like."

"All right, Tomkins, you can go home," he said to the coachman. "Mrs. Garthorne prefers to walk."

The coachman and footman touched their hats, and the victoria drove away.

"Surely to goodness, Enid," said Garthorne almost angrily, as they walked away together, "you are not doing this because Maxwell said it was wrong to use carriages on a Sunday! Good heavens, if we were to translate sermons into everyday life it would be rather a funny world to live in."

"Then what is the use of going to hear them, if they are not to be taken seriously?" she said, looking up quickly at him. "Why should they be preached, or why should we go to church at all?"

"Because it is the proper thing to do, I suppose, and because Society, whose slaves we are, makes it one of the social functions of the week," replied Garthorne, who had as much real religion in his composition as a South

African Bushman. "We men go because you women do, and you women go to show others how nicely you can dress, and to see what they have got on."

"My dear Reginald, that is about as true as it is original, and that is not saying very much for it. If we don't go to church for any other reasons than those it is merely mockery and wickedness to go at all. I was very glad to see that a great many people did send their carriages away. Next Sunday I hope they will have the decency to walk."

"Especially if the British climate, as it probably will, ends up the season with a pouring wet Sunday!" laughed Garthorne. "No, dear, those godly precepts are all very well when you read them in Sunday School books or hear them from the pulpit, and I am sure Vane put them most admirably to-day, although I confess I was slightly surprised to hear a really clever fellow like him preaching such hopelessly impossible nonsense. Of course I don't mean any offence to him—far from it, but really, you know, if theories like those could be put into practice they would simply turn the world upside down."

"I think you might have found a better word than nonsense," she replied a trifle sharply; "but the world of to-day certainly would have to be turned upside down or inside out to make it anything like Christian. That, at least, Vane—I mean Mr. Maxwell—taught us this morning."

"Christian according to the Reverend Vane Maxwell," he said, with the suspicion of a sneer. "Fortunately the Churches have agreed that such a violent operation is not necessary. By the way, though, won't Maxwell get himself into a howling row with the ecclesiastical powers that be! Just imagine the bench of Bishops standing anything like that!"

"Yes," she said quietly, "the preaching of the Sermon on the Mount in a fashionable London church! It does sound very terrible, doesn't it? And yet, after all, I suppose they can't take his orders away from him even for that. I wonder what would happen? It is sure to be in the papers to-morrow, and of course everybody will be talking about it."

"Yes," said Garthorne; "but if Master Vane thinks he is going to play Savanarola to this generation he will find that he has taken on a pretty large order. Are you quite sure you won't take a turn in the Park, even on foot?"

"No, I'd rather not, but don't let me keep you if you would like a stroll. I can get home all right."

"Well, if you don't mind, Enid, I think I will. There are one or two fellows I want to see particularly about something, so bye-bye for the present."

He raised his hat and turned back, and she went on towards the house in Queen's Gate with many strange thoughts in her heart.

Enid and her husband were by no means the only members of the congregation of St. Chrysostom who discussed Vane's sermon on their way home. In fact, whether people walked or rode home, it was the universal topic. Some discussed it with timorous sympathy; others, perhaps with more worldly wisdom, talked of it quietly and cynically as the outburst of a half-fledged clerical enthusiast who would very soon find out that his superiors, on whom he depended for preferment, regarded the doctrines of Christianity as one thing and the practises of the Church as something entirely different.

"He's a clever fellow, a very clever fellow and very earnest," said Lord Canore, who was a patron of several fat livings, to her ladyship and his two daughters as they drove home, "but he'll soon get those rough corners knocked off him. If they are wise they will give him a good living, and then make him a canon as soon as possible. There's nothing like preferment to sober a man down in the Church."

"Yes," sighed Lady Caroline Rosse, the elder daughter, who was getting somewhat passée, and was deeply interested in Church work; "what a beautiful voice he has, and such a wonderful face! Really, he looked almost inspired at times. He would make quite an ideal bishop, and, you know, some quite young men are being made bishops now-a-days."

"Yes," chuckled his lordship, as he lay back against the cushions, "that is the sort of thing I mean. You don't catch bishops preaching the Sermon on the Mount and sub-editing it as they go on."

"My dear Canore," said her ladyship frigidly, "I think we had better change the subject; that last remark of yours was almost blasphemous."

"Never heard such rubbish preached from a respectable pulpit in my life," said Mr. Horace Faustmann, a member of the Stock Exchange, director of several limited companies and a most liberal contributor to the offertories, and all Church effort in the parish of St. Chrysostom, to his wife as they rolled smoothly in their cee-spring, rubber-tyred victoria towards Hyde Park Corner.

"Why, if you can't make plenty of money and still be a Christian, where are subscriptions coming from, and what price the Church endowments? It seems absolutely absurd to me. I wonder what on earth Baldwin was thinking about to let him preach a sermon like that in the smartest church in the West End. If he goes on in that style he will just ruin the show.

Anyhow, he gets no more of my money if he is going to insult rich people in the pulpit. Any more of that sort of thing, my dear, and we'll go somewhere else, won't we?"

"I should think so," said the beautiful Mrs. Faustmann. She was the daughter of a poor aristocrat, and had made a very good social and financial bargain. She was one of the smartest women and most successful entertainers in London. There was another man eating his heart out on her account in the Burmese jungle, and sometimes, in her tenderest moment, she gave him a thought and a little sigh—about as much thought and sigh as her engagements permitted.

"Yes, Father Baldwin will really ruin the Church if he allows that sort of thing. Of course all the good people will give it up. In fact, you saw the Steinways, the Northwicks, the Athertons and several more leave the church before he was half way through his harangue, for really you could hardly call it a sermon. All the same, the church will be thronged to-night and next Sunday, because people will go there just for the sensation of the thing, and to see if anything else is going to happen; but poor Father Baldwin will simply be inundated with letters from the best of his people, and I don't think he'll find them very pleasant reading. I am going to write, and, although I respect the dear man very much, I shall tell him exactly what I think."

"Quite right," said her husband, as they turned into the Park. "You give it to him straight. If you don't, I shall drop him a line myself and tell him that if he wants any more of my money, and he has had a good bit, he will have to keep his half-broken clerical colts a bit better in hand; I'm not going to support a church to be insulted in it."

Many other similar conversations were going on just then in the Park, in fact, Vane and his sermon were already being discussed by half fashionable London, so fast does the news of so startling an event travel from lip to lip when a crowd of somewhat blasé people, who have nothing in particular to talk about, get together. Most of the comments were quite similar to those just quoted, for Society felt generally by dinner time that night that it had been deliberately insulted, outraged, in fact, through its representatives in the congregation of St. Chrysostom.

Nevertheless the church was packed to its utmost capacity at evening service. It was known that Father Baldwin was to preach, but it was hoped that Vane would take some part in the service, and of course everyone wanted to see him; still, the audience went away disappointed. Vane was far away, helping Ernshaw at his mission in Bethnal Green, and was telling his

congregation truths just as uncompromising and perhaps as unpalatable as those he had told to his wealthy and aristocratic hearers in the morning.

Father Baldwin preached, but his sermon was rather a homily on the duties of the rich towards the poor, especially at a time when the rich were about to migrate like gay-plumaged birds of passage to other lands and climes in search of pleasure, leaving behind the millions of their fellow mortals and fellow Christians, whose ceaseless life-struggle left no leisure for the delights which they had come to look upon as the commonplaces of their existence.

He only made one brief allusion to Vane's sermon. He knew perfectly well that these thronging hundreds of people had not come to hear him. He felt, not without sorrow, that quite half of them had come to hear, or at least see, the man whose name was already the talk of fashionable London.

"Some of you," he said, "who are present now heard this morning from this pulpit words which must have sunk deep into the heart of every man and woman who feels an earnest desire to follow in the footsteps of the Master as closely as imperfect human nature will permit you. It is not for me to tell you to what extent those words must be taken literally. They were spoken earnestly and from the inmost depths of the preacher's own soul—may they sink into the inmost depths of yours! They put the most vital interest of human life plainly, nay, uncompromisingly before you; how far you can or will follow them in your daily lives is a matter which rests between yourselves and your Redeemer."

The next morning nearly all the papers contained more or less lengthy reports of a sermon of which half London was already talking. Ernest Reed, a smart young reporter with strong freethought tendencies, who made a Sunday speciality of reporting sermons of all sorts, especially the extreme ones, and who wrote caustically impartial comments on them in the rationalist papers, had instantly grasped the true significance of such a sermon being preached to such a congregation, and, moreover, he had himself been deeply affected by the solemn earnestness with which the momentous words had been spoken.

"A Daniel come to judgment! A parson who believes in his own creed at last!" was his mental comment, as he closed his note-book. "That chap's worth following. I wonder where he is going to preach to-night. I'll find out."

Of course he did find out and followed Vane to Bethnal Green, with the result that he made what is professionally termed "a scoop," since he was the only reporter who was able to give both sermons verbatim. The Daily

Chronicle was the only morning paper smart enough to print them word for word in parallel columns under the title:

WEIGHTY WORDS TO RICH AND POOR.

The Rev. Vane Maxwell

Asks Mayfair and Bethnal Green

If they are Christian?

The consequence was, that all London and a very considerable part of England too, stared wonderingly over its breakfast table and asked itself whether there was really anything in these plain, almost homely, and yet terribly pregnant words. Certainly there was no getting away from the pitiless logic of them. If Vane Maxwell was right, England was not a Christian country, save in name, and its citizens were Christians only because they had been baptized into one or other of the churches and so called themselves Christians by a sort of courtesy title. For the moment at least, Christianity assumed a shape as tangible and a meaning almost as serious as party politics. In other words Vane's sermon, even when read in cold print, put the question: Are you really a Christian? so plainly, so uncompromisingly, and so unavoidably to every man or woman calling himself or herself a Christian, that hundreds of thousands of people all over the country, to say nothing of a million or two in London, felt a sudden, and, as it seemed to them, somewhat unaccountable obligation to give an equally plain answer to it. What was the answer to be?

"Yes or no?"

It certainly was a very serious matter to millions who had never thought of asking the question for themselves, and whose pastors and spiritual masters had mostly contented themselves with lecturing and teaching in soul-soothing, instead of soul-searching, words.

They, good folk, had really never troubled themselves very much about the matter. They had their business affairs to attend to, their wives and families to keep out of the workhouse or to maintain in comfort or luxury, as the case might be, and a good many of them had certain social duties to perform; and so they had got into the way of letting the churches and chapels, the bishops, priests, deacons and so forth, look after these things.

They were paid to do so. That was rather an ugly thought. At least, it seemed to be so, after reading the words of Jesus Christ, and His servant Vane Maxwell; but still it was a fact; and some of them were very highly

paid. They were living in charming houses and had very comfortable investments in companies which made money anyhow, so long as they made it. Others were wretchedly paid, it was true, mostly half-starved and inevitably in debt; but still, neither of these facts affected the main question, which, of course, was the personal one: Are you—rich man or poor man—you who read these words, a Christian? Are you, as the preacher had asked in those five terrible words, honest before God and man?

Then to the scores and hundreds of thousands of people who read this, came, in a whispering terror, the further question:

"Do you think you can cheat God, even if you are cheating yourself and other people like you—the God Whom you have been taught to believe in as knowing all things, the God to whom all secrets are known?"

It was a distinctly ugly question to answer, and more Bibles were searched throughout the United Kingdom than had been for many a long year past; but no searcher found any answer that satisfied his own soul, if he had one, save the one that was given from the Mount of Olives:

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

As the young preacher had said, there was no compromise. There was certainly the alternative of being honest one way or the other; but that sort of honesty had a very appalling prospect to the respectable British citizen, especially those, who, in any way, resembled the young man who came to Christ and asked Him what he should do to be saved. It was, in short, a case of becoming comparative paupers, and only having the bare necessaries of life, or keeping what they had, and saying honestly to themselves, the world, and God:

"I can't be a Christian at that price, and so, instead of remaining a Christian humbug, I will be an honest atheist."

A very terrible dilemma, certainly, and yet, if the Gospels were true, and if the Son of God had really preached the Sermon on the Mount, it was one from which there was no escape but this. It was a plain matter of belief or disbelief, honesty or dishonesty, and, if they believed in God, dishonesty was impossible, save under the penalty of eternal damnation.

CHAPTER XVIII

That day the clergy-house of St. Chrysostom was, of course, deluged with newspapers and cuttings, and the flood continued for two or three days, during which Vane, unconscious or careless of the fact that he was already the clerical lion of London, and, perhaps, the most discussed man for the time being in England and the sister kingdoms, was working hard helping his friend, Ernshaw, to organize an entirely unsectarian twentieth century crusade throughout the poorer districts of London. He seldom read newspapers, for he preferred the living fact to the written word, and, besides, such work as his left little time for reading. He had seen his name on the placards of the morning and evening papers, and he had bought some which he had not found time to do more than glance over.

He was, of course, glad that his sermon had attracted so much attention, but he knew enough of newspapers and their readers not to hope for too much on this account, and so he was not a little surprised when Father Baldwin said to him on his return to the clergy-house on the Friday evening:

"Well, Maxwell! glad to see you back, although you have brought a nice hornet's nest about our ears, and started something like a social and religious earthquake in Kensington and the adjacent lands of Mayfair and Belgravia, to say nothing of a distinct fluttering in what I may, perhaps, without irreverence call the upper and more spacious dove-cotes of the Church."

"Have I really?" said Vane, quietly, "I didn't know I had, but if I have done so, I am very glad. It was exactly what I intended to do, though I confess I had little hope of doing so. What is the matter? I hope I haven't got you into any unpleasantness, Father Baldwin."

"It doesn't very much matter if you have," replied the older priest, leaning back in his chair and looking at him keenly from under his thick, iron- grey eyebrows. "You only said what has been in the hearts and souls of a good many of us for a long time, but it was given to you to say it and, let us hope, also the inspiration to say it in the proper way."

"Please God!" said Vane. "And now what have I done; I mean as regards yourself and St. Chrysostom?"

"To begin with," replied Father Baldwin, "about half the wealthiest members of the congregation, men and women, but mostly men, have written to say that if they are to be publicly insulted from the pulpit, and told that they are liars and hypocrites, and not Christians, save in name, they will leave the

church and withdraw all their subscriptions—which, of course, from quite a worldly point of view, would be somewhat a serious matter for the church."

"That simply proves that they are not Christians," said Vane, "and the church is better without their money. They practically confess that they never have been giving their money honestly for the service of God, but merely for self-advertisement or as a social obligation. It would be no loss to us, and little gain to anybody else they gave it to."

"Yes, I believe you are right," replied Father Baldwin. "It seems rather a hard thing to say, but people who would leave a church because the Sermon on the Mount was preached from its pulpit, must be a strange sort of Christians."

"They are not Christians at all!" exclaimed Vane, with a burst of righteous wrath, "they are the bane and curse of Christianity, and have been ever since Constantine made it official and fashionable. They are responsible for every corruption that has crept into the Church, for every blot that defiles the purity of the Creed. They are not Christians, and they never have been, for they cannot be what they are and followers of Christ at the same time. They and the wealthy clergy of all the churches are responsible for the unfaith, tacit and avowed, of what we are pleased to call the lower classes; the classes who compose the majority of Christ's Congregation; and they are responsible for all the cynicism of the open and active enemies of our faith. It is they who make it possible for the infidel and the atheist to point the finger of scorn at us and say, 'See how these Christians love to do the Will of their Master.'"

"I fully appreciate everything you say, Maxwell," replied Father Baldwin, with some little hesitation in his tone; for, although he was as good a Christian as ever gave up everything to serve his Master, and as earnest a priest as ever stood before the altar, yet he was getting on in years and found it hard to break away from the traditions amidst which he had grown up, and which he had accepted as a young man with little or no inquiry. "At the same time, I must candidly admit that I was a trifle startled by your absolutely uncompromising rendering of our Lord's words. Did you really intend that they should be taken literally?"

"It is not what I intended, Father Baldwin," replied Vane, rising from his seat and beginning to walk up and down the plainly furnished, book-lined common-room, "the question is what He intended, and surely no Christian in his senses could believe for a moment that our Lord intended to quibble with words and to play with double meanings. If He did not mean what He said, and intend those who followed Him to do what He said, what becomes

of our faith? If that is not so, surely there is nothing left for us but to give up the doctrine of the Trinity altogether, and go back to the old Hebrew creed—which certainly did not forbid the accumulation of riches."

"May I come in?" said Sir Arthur Maxwell's voice through the open door, "they told me you were here, Vane. Good evening, Father Baldwin. Well, this is a nice sort of commotion that this son of mine has been kicking up. Do you know, Sir," he went on, turning to Vane, "that you have suddenly made yourself one of the most famous, or, perhaps, I should say notorious, persons in London by that sermon of yours? It was very fine I admit, and most desperately to the point, but I suppose you know that all the world and the newspapers are asking where does that point point to?"

"That is just what I was asking your son, Sir Arthur," said Father Baldwin. "Granted that he is right in his contention that the Sermon on the Mount is to be taken literally, it means nothing short of a religious as well as a social revolution."

"That is exactly what the papers and everybody are saying," said Sir Arthur. "In fact, people are beginning to look at one another and ask some very awkward questions. For instance, here am I, that boy's father, I am not a rich man, but I have worked hard and my old age is comfortably provided for, and when I die what I have would naturally go to Vane, who, on his own showing, couldn't have it; in fact, as you know, he has given up about a thousand a year as it is that he had from my brother Alfred."

"You will not get much sympathy from Father Baldwin on that score, father," laughed Vane, "you know he gave up nearly twice as much."

"There is nothing in that," said Father Baldwin, hastily, as though he would stop them saying any more, "that is a point on which I entirely agree with you. When a man has money of his own, and devotes himself to the service of the Church, he should devote his money to it also. As a Christian and a priest he can have no lawful use for it, save in the work of the Church."

"Unless he happens to be married and have a family," said Sir Arthur. "What ought he to do then, Father Baldwin?"

"In that case, Sir Arthur," he replied, "I think he would do better to keep out of the ministry and devote himself honestly to the affairs of his own household. You remember, of course, what the Apostle Paul tells us, that the man who neglects those is worse than an infidel. Of course, it is not a good translation, and it reads very badly now that infidel has come to mean one who does not believe in creeds. It should, of course, read unfaithful, I mean, unfaithful to the solemn responsibilities he has taken upon himself;

and, although I may be wrong, I find it difficult to see how a man can faithfully discharge those obligations and those of a priest of the Church, but that opens a very wide question, and there is a very great deal to be said on both sides of it."

"There I quite agree with you," said Sir Arthur, "you know, of course, better than I do, that there are hundreds of hard-worked parsons in this country—especially in poor parishes—who can't afford curates, who simply couldn't get on without their wives, and I know one or two myself who say that their wives are worth a couple of curates. I'm fairly certain that in most poor country parishes the parson's wife is the good angel of the place."

"There is not the slightest doubt about it," replied Father Baldwin, "I have seen quite enough of church work to convince me of that, and this is, of course, the very strongest argument, and a very convincing one, too, in a certain degree, against the celibacy of the clergy. But, still, Sir Arthur," he went on, with a change of tone, "I suppose you didn't come here to discuss theology and church matters. Of course, you want to see your son. My study is quite at your service, if you want to have a talk."

"Thanks, very much, Father," said Sir Arthur, "what I really came for was to ask Vane to come round and have a bit of dinner with me. I have a good many things to talk over with him, and I have a guest or two coming whom I am anxious for him to meet. What do you say, Vane, can you come?"

"Of course I can, dad," replied Vane. "I am taking a holiday till Sunday, and I couldn't spend it much better than at the old place. On Sunday I am going to deliver two lectures at the Hall of Science, Old Street, the head-quarters of the National Secular Society."

"The what, Maxwell?" exclaimed Father Baldwin, with a note of something more than astonishment in his voice, "the Hall of Science—why, that was Bradlaugh's place—the head- centre of London infidelity."

"Excuse me, Father," said Vane, gravely, "do you not think that is a word we are accustomed to use too vaguely? Is it quite fair or logical to call these people infidels? Are they not rather faithful to their convictions, however wrong they may be? Surely we must, at least, give them the credit of believing in their disbelief. Last night I heard an informal confession—one of the strangest, perhaps, that a priest ever heard—from a young fellow, of about twenty-two, who reported my sermon here, and then followed me to Bethnal Green and sent in both accounts to the papers.

"He is well educated, very clever, and the son of a clergyman. He is also what people call an infidel, and yet he made a confession of faith to me that

would have melted the soul of a financier, if he had one. After that I shall never hear these people called infidels without a protest. And, besides, is it not a good thing that a priest of God should speak the truth that is in him in the temple of the unbelievers? How many of our churches would permit one of their lecturers to speak from the pulpit, or even from the platform of one of our schoolrooms."

"You are quite right, Maxwell," said Father Baldwin, "I used the word unthinkingly, therefore conventionally. I am very glad you are going, but I am afraid if your friends advertise it at all, half Kensington and Mayfair will be off to Old Street, and crowd them out of their own place. As I tell you, they didn't like what you said, but for all that, they are dying to hear what you are going to say next."

"Exactly," said Sir Arthur, "that is the worst of becoming suddenly notorious, Vane. You have made yourself, in a most righteous manner, the talk of London, and London will follow you now wherever you go. However, that can't be helped, it is one of the penalties of fame, and now if you have nothing more to say to Father Baldwin, you might put on your hat, and come, I have got a hansom at the door."

CHAPTER XIX

On the way from the Clergy-House to Warwick Gardens Vane tried more than once to get his father to tell him something about the evening's entertainment which he had invited him for, but Sir Arthur only laughed, albeit somewhat seriously, and said:

"My dear boy, I am not going to let you spoil a pleasant little surprise. I don't say that it will be altogether a pleasant one, yet I know that it will not be an entirely unpleasant one. To a certain extent, as you will find afterwards, it is one of the many results of that precious sermon of yours, and, as certain things had to be done, I thought they would be better done at home than elsewhere."

And in reply to Vane's second attempt his father said simply:

"No, Vane, this is a surprise party, as they say in the States, and I am not going to give the names of my guests away. You really must possess your soul in patience for the present. Meanwhile tell me what Father Baldwin thinks of the position you have taken up?"

"You mean, of course, about this new heresy of mine?" replied Vane with a laugh—"a heresy, by the way, which is as old as Christianity. Well, dad, to tell you the truth I think the dear old Father is a little bit frightened, but he is too strong a man to go back from the position, and too good a Christian to want to do so. He sees that I am right, or, I should say of course, that this is after all the only possible doctrine and belief for a Christian. He gave me permission to preach that sermon from his pulpit, but I don't think he quite realised, as a matter of fact I didn't myself, what an effect it would have, and perhaps the consequences have worried him a little; but he is perfectly staunch, and so are Moran and Webley."

"And so, I suppose," replied Sir Arthur, "St. Chrysostom's will not be a pleasant Sunday morning and evening resort for rich people any longer. That is, perhaps, a somewhat flippant way of putting it, but of course you know what I mean."

"Yes, I quite see what you mean, dad," said Vane rather more seriously. "I don't think it will be, but I do think that before very long we shall have a better congregation of Christians than we have ever had before, people who, I mean, will have lost their delusions about fashionable Christianity—just as if there could be such a thing!—and who come to hear the Word of God as it is, and not as most people would like it to be. By the way, have you heard that the Canon, I mean Canon Thornton-Moore, of Worcester, a man that I met at dinner at the Abbey, has accepted the presentation of All Saints,

Densmore Square? It is supposed to be a little higher even than St. Chrysostom, and if possible the congregation is even more disgustingly rich and fashionable and everything that is not Christian."

"I must say, Vane, that you have all the uncompromising severity of the true enthusiast, and the way in which you include your old father with these hopeless sinners is really almost unfilial. I think I can tell you this much, that to-night you are going to meet a very much greater sinner than I am, a sinner to the extent of millions, and yet, from what I have learned of him on the best possible authority, as honest a man, as good-hearted a fellow, as ever fought the world single-handed and beat it."

"Just as you did, dad," said Vane in a tone which reminded his father of the old days. "I suppose there is nothing to be said of the other two persons of the Infernal Trinity."

"Not at present," said Sir Arthur, with a sudden change in his voice which made Vane look round at him. His face had changed with his tone. He was leaning with his arms on the door of the cab, staring up at the sky over the roofs of the houses. Vane noticed a little twitching of the lip under the long grey moustache, and thought it well to hold his peace.

Fortunately, perhaps, for both, the cab at that moment swung round out of the main road into Warwick Gardens. Vane looked at the familiar corner at which he had stopped that other hansom cab on that memorable Boat Race night and got out, after Carol had denied him the kiss he asked for, to meet his father on the pavement. Sir Arthur remembered it too, and he had good reasons to, for he said as the cab swung round:

"Vane, when my lease is up I am going to leave this place. I never can pass that corner without thinking of what no man ought to be obliged to think of."

"I know what you mean, dad," cried Vane. "It was horrible enough, or at least it might have been and yet it wasn't, and because it wasn't——"

"Well, at any rate," interrupted Sir Arthur as the cab pulled up, "let us thank God that it wasn't."

As they got out another cab drove up just behind theirs, and somewhat to his astonishment Vane saw Ernshaw get out.

"My dear Ernshaw," he said, as they shook hands, "isn't this great extravagance?"

"Only a shilling's worth," laughed Ernshaw in reply, "and I think justifiable; a little kiddy was knocked down in Addison Road there by a butcher's cart, and I picked her up and took her to the hospital in Hammersmith Road, and this good fellow won't charge me more than a shilling for both journeys, although it is out of the radius."

"Oh, he won't, won't he?" said Sir Arthur, putting his hand into his pocket and pulling out a couple of half-crowns.

"You take that, my man, not for yourself if you won't have it, but for your wife and your children if you have got any; you can't say no for them."

"No, sir, thankee, I won't say no to them," said the cabby, taking the half-crowns and touching his hat. "It's the best fare I've earned to-day. Good-night, sir, and thank you, sir. Come up, old girl."

The whip flicked, and the old mare went round to begin another of those endless journeys through London streets which horses, if they reason at all, must find so utterly incomprehensible and aimless.

"Is this the beginning of the surprises, dad?" said Vane, as the two cabs drove away. "This is certainly one of the last places in London that I should have expected to meet Ernshaw in, after seeing him up to his neck in work at Bethnal Green yesterday. It must have been a pretty strong attraction, Ernshaw, that got you as far west as this."

"My dear Maxwell," said Ernshaw, "surely the worst of us are entitled to a holiday now and then. Why, even Father Philip goes to Norway for a fortnight every year, to say nothing of an occasional run up to Town now and then, and he confessed to me not very long ago that he enjoys no earthly pleasure better than a good 'Varsity match at Lord's."

"There is nothing better," said Sir Arthur, "except a good Indian polo match. Well, come in. I have just got time for a wash and a change before our other guests arrive. You clerics don't want a change, so you can have a wash and a cigarette if you want one in the Den."

As the door opened Koda Bux came along the hall and made his salaam; his grave, deep eyes made no sign as he recognised Vane in his clerical garb; he only salaamed again and welcomed Vane back to the house of his father and his mother. That was Koda Bux's way of putting it in his Indian fashion. He would have put it otherwise if he had known what such a welcome meant to him.

"This is the place of the debacle," said Vane to Ernshaw when they met in the Den after they had had their wash; "there's the hearthrug—yes, and there's the same spirit-case. It is a curious thing, Ernshaw, but since then, or rather, since that other ghastly collapse at Oxford, I've lectured in club rooms reeking with alcohol; I've gone with you as you know where everyone was sodden with the gin and stank of it, and even into bars where you could smell nothing but liquor and unwashed humanity, and yet that intoxication has never come back to me."

"Of course not," said Ernshaw; "you have prayed and fought since then, and as you have won your battles your prayers have been answered."

"Yes," said Vane, "I hope you are right; in fact, I am sure you are. I don't suppose a sniff at that whiskey decanter would affect me any more than a few drops of eau de cologne on my handkerchief."

As he said this he went towards the spirit-case on the little old oak sideboard and took out the whiskey decanter.

"Take care, Vane!" said Ernshaw. "I hope you are not forgetting the old doctrine of association. Remember what you were saying just now about this room. There is a sense, you know, in which places are really haunted."

"My dear Ernshaw, I believe you are even more ideal than I am," laughed Vane, as he took the stopper out and raised the decanter to his nostrils. As he did so the front door bell tinkled, and the hand of a practised footman played a brief fantasia on the knocker. In the middle of an inhalation Vane stopped and put the bottle down; but even as he did so the mysterious force of association against which Ernshaw had warned him had begun to work upon his imagination. The familiar room, with its pictures and furniture and simple ornaments, the feel of the cut-glass decanter, which was the same one that he had held in his hand that fatal night, the smell of the whiskey—all these elements were rapidly combining in those few moments to produce an effect partly mental and partly physical which might have more than justified Ernshaw's sudden fear.

"Ah, there are the mysterious guests, I suppose!" he said, putting the decanter back into the case. "I suppose you don't happen to know who they really are, Ernshaw?"

"My dear fellow, if I did I shouldn't tell you," was the distinctly non-committal reply. "I think it will be very much more interesting for you to find out yourself."

By this time Koda Bux, in his capacity of major-domo and general factotum to Sir Arthur, had opened the door, and at the same moment Sir Arthur himself came downstairs. Vane heard him say:

"Good evening, ladies; I am sorry that I have no hostess to receive you, but Mrs. Saunders, who helps Koda Bux to take care of me, will take you upstairs."

Then there was a low murmur of a woman's voice, a rustle of skirts up the stairs, and Sir Arthur went on:

"Now, Mr. Rayburn, if you will come with me I will show you where to put your hat and coat and have a rinse if you like."

"Thanks, Sir Arthur," replied a voice which was strange to Vane.

"And who might Mr. Rayburn be?" he said to Ernshaw. "I didn't know the governor knew anyone of that name. Still, from the sound of his voice he is a gentleman, and, I should say, a man."

"I think when you meet him you will find him both," said Ernshaw.

"Ah," laughed Vane, "I think I caught you out there. So you are in this conspiracy of mystery, are you? Now, look here, Ernshaw, what is it all about?"

"Guilty, but shan't tell," replied his friend. "Now here comes Sir Arthur; perhaps he will tell."

"Vane," said Sir Arthur as the door opened, "this is Mr. Cecil Rayburn, and I want you to be very good friends; you will soon find out why."

Vane looked up and saw a man apparently a year or two older than himself, about the same height and build, but harder and stronger, and possessing that peculiar erectness of carriage and alertness of movement that is owned only by those who have worked or fought, or done both, in the outlands of the earth. But a glance at his face confirmed Vane in the opinion he had formed when he heard his voice; he was undeniably both a gentleman and a man. He held out his hand and said:

"Good evening, Mr. Rayburn. Of course a friend of my father's has to be my friend also."

To his astonishment Cecil Rayburn made no movement to take his hand; on the contrary he drew back half a pace and said with a note of something like

nervousness in his voice—a note which sounded strangely in the speech of a man who had never known what fear was:

"Thank you, Mr. Maxwell; I hope we shall be friends, but I am afraid I can't shake hands with you yet—I mean, I shouldn't like you to regret it afterwards."

Before Vane had found any words to shape a reply, Sir Arthur said:

"Mr. Ernshaw, suppose we go into the drawing-room to receive the ladies, and leave these two to have it out. We shan't have dinner for half an hour, and I think they will manage to understand each other before then."

CHAPTER XX

"Well, Mr. Rayburn," said Vane, "this is a rather curious sort of introduction, but I see that you are—I mean that I am quite satisfied that you must have some very good reason for refusing to shake hands with me. You are the first man who has ever done so, and as you have come here as my father's guest, I may presume that it is not a personal objection."

Vane could not help speaking formally; there was a strangeness about the situation which forced him to do so.

"That would be impossible, Mr. Maxwell," replied the other, in a low, hesitating tone. "I knew that I should meet you here when I accepted Sir Arthur's invitation; in fact, we—I mean I came here on purpose to meet you, and, to shorten matters, the reason why your father has left us alone, is that I have a very serious and I am afraid a very difficult confession to make to you."

"A confession!" said Vane, drawing himself up and looking Rayburn straight in the eyes. "Do you wish me to hear it as a man, or a priest, because if I am to hear it as a priest, it would be better kept for a more suitable time and place?"

"I want you to hear it both as man and priest," replied Rayburn, returning his look with perfect steadiness, "and I want you to hear it—and, in fact, unless we are to go away at once, you must hear it now."

"Very well," said Vane, a dim suspicion of the truth beginning to steal into his soul, "it is a little mysterious to me, but I daresay we shall soon understand each other."

He paused for a moment, and then, with a visible effort which made Rayburn love and honour him from that moment forth, he went on:

"And perhaps it would simplify matters for both of us if you began by telling me who we are?"

"Your sister, or rather your half-sister," Rayburn began falteringly, and then stopped.

He saw Vane wince and heard his teeth come together with a snap, and he saw his hands clench up into fists and his face pale, already turned ashen grey white that denotes utter bloodlessness. It was the face of a corpse with living eyes that looked at him with an expression which could not be translated into human words. Rayburn had looked death in the face many a

time and laughed at it, but he didn't laugh now. As he said afterwards, he would have given anything to be a couple of miles away from Vane just then. He didn't speak because he had nothing to say, his thoughts would not be translated into language, and so there was nothing for it but to wait for Vane to speak.

For a few moments more the two men faced each other in silence, yet each reading the other's thoughts as accurately as though they had been talking with perfect frankness. Then Vane spoke in a slow, hard, grating voice which none of the congregation of St. Chrysostom would have recognised as that of the eloquent preacher of the Sermon on the Mount, to which Rayburn, who had heard that sermon, listened with a shock, which, as he told Carol later, sent a shiver through him from head to foot.

"Yes, Mr. Rayburn, I think I understand more fully now. My sister Carol—she has come here with you to-night, and I suppose I am right in thinking that you were to some extent responsible, quite innocently no doubt, for her disappearance about a year ago. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Rayburn, "that's so, and that's why I wouldn't shake hands with you. I did take her away. She has been round the world with me, travelling with me as my wife, and she isn't my wife, and—well, that is about all there is."

"And why isn't she your wife?" exclaimed Vane, with an unreasoning burst of anger. Then, after a little pause, he went on in a tone that was almost humble.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Rayburn, that was a foolish thing to say, as most things said in haste and anger are. You only did what any other man with no ties and plenty of money would have done under the circumstances. Forgive me! Only the hand of Providence itself saved me from committing, without knowledge, an infinitely greater sin than yours. I suppose Carol has told you how I met her and what happened, and, of course, my father has told you about my getting out of the cab that night at the top of the Gardens? No, no, I have nothing to forgive, nothing to say except, as Carol's brother, to ask you why you have brought her here? That, at least, I think I am entitled to ask."

"Maxwell," replied Rayburn, pulling himself together as a man might do after being badly beaten in a fight, "I have been in a good many bad places in my lifetime, but this has been about the worst, and I'd a damned sight sooner—I beg your pardon, you know what I mean—I would very much rather been

talking to a South American Dago with a pistol at my head, than having this talk with you, but it's got to be done.

"You know, I suppose, or at any rate your father knows, how I met Carol and how we fixed it up to go away together. I admit, without any reserve, that I did take her just as any man like myself, who had had a pretty hard time for a few years and had come back with a ridiculous superfluity of money, would have taken such a girl under such circumstances; that is brutal, but at any rate, it is honest. Well, we went round the world together, and it was only a fortnight ago—we've been back three weeks now—that I found out who she was."

"Not from her?" exclaimed Vane, with almost pitiful eagerness.

"No," replied Rayburn, "she would have died first. Over and over again I tried to get her to tell me who and what she was, because of course it was perfectly easy to see—well, you know what I mean—but she wouldn't. It was the one confidence that she never gave me; in fact, when I was trying to insist upon it, she told me if I opened the subject again, she would leave me there and then, whatever happened to her."

"Then how did you find out?" asked Vane, in the same dry, hard voice. "I more than believe you when you say she would never have told you."

"Through the merest accident," replied Rayburn. "A day or two after we landed, we went to dinner at Verrey's, and we had hardly sat down before a friend of hers, Miss Russell, came in—well—with a friend, as they say. She came and spoke to Carol, and the four of us dined together. The next day Miss Russell came to see Carol, and you know, or perhaps you don't know, that it was Miss Russell's friend who introduced me to Carol. I got hold of Miss Russell afterwards—she's as clean-hearted a girl as ever the Fates—however, you won't agree with me there perhaps, you don't believe in Fate, I do. But that's neither here nor there. I told her what I am going to tell you, and she told me Carol's story, and that is why I am here to- night."

There was a good deal of meaning in the words, but for Vane there was infinitely more in Rayburn's voice and the half-shamed manner in which he spoke. Vane felt that if this talk went on much longer, the strain would be too much for him to bear, for it was his sister, or at least the daughter of his own mother that this man was talking about. He put out his hand again and said:

"I think I know now, Mr. Rayburn, what you were going to say, and if I am right, let me, her brother, say it for you and for her, you won't refuse my hand this time, will you?"

"No," said Rayburn, "I won't, and for the matter of that," he went on as their hands met, "I don't think there is much more for either of us to say, except just for me to ask you one question."

"Yes," said Vane, "and what is that?"

"You are her brother and a priest. Will you take me for your brother-in- law and marry us?"

Their hands were still clasped; each was looking straight into the other's eyes, and the two faces, so different individually, and yet for the moment so strangely alike, fronted each other in silence. Then Vane dropped Rayburn's hand, put his hands on his shoulders, and said:

"You cannot be lying, you haven't the mouth or the eyes of a man who tells lies. You have sinned, sinned deeply, for you have bought with your money what should have no other price than lawful love; but love has come to you, and love has made lawful and right what was sinful before. You told me at first that you wanted to confess to me both as man and priest. Very well, as man, as Carol's brother I forgive you, if you have done anything that I have to forgive, and as a priest of God I will marry you, and when you have taken the Sacrament of Matrimony from my hands, as a priest, I will absolve you from your sin. It is a miracle——"

"Yes," said Rayburn, "it is. I am not altogether of your way of thinking, you know, but there, I am with you; it is a miracle in more ways than one. I know I am expressing myself horribly badly, but, to put it as shortly as I can, it is the sort of miracle that only a good, clean- souled, pure-hearted girl like Carol, could have worked upon a fellow like myself. I tell you, Maxwell, honestly, that if she wouldn't have me now, I'm damned if I know what I should do. She is everything that is good to me. I am worth nearly a couple of millions, and not a cent of it would be worth anything to me if I lost her. And so you really will marry us?"

"I will," said Vane. "Thank God and you into whose heart He has put this saving thought of righteousness."

"Yes," said Rayburn, "I see what you mean, but really, the credit isn't mine at all, it is all Carol's. Do you know, Maxwell, that I am going to have one of the most delightful wives man ever won? If I could only tell you just exactly how I fell in love with her—but of course a man could never tell another man that, and after all it doesn't matter. I've got the one girl in the world I want——"

There was another little pause, and then Rayburn went on, speaking as shyly and hesitatingly as a schoolboy confessing a peccadillo:

"There's one other thing I should like to say, Maxwell, but I hardly know how to say it."

He stopped again, and Vane said, smiling for the first time during the interview:

"Then say it, as one man would say it to another. I think we understand each other now. What is it?"

"Well, it's this," replied Rayburn, flushing like a girl under the tan of his skin, "you know Carol and I met quite by chance, and I took her away just as what she seemed to be. Then, after a month or two—you'll hardly believe me, but it is the Lord's own truth—I began to fall in love with her, honestly I mean, and in quite a different way. One evening, it was in Japan, and we were coming back from a trip to Fuji. I couldn't stand it any longer, I felt such a hopeless sweep, and I told her. It was a queer sort of courtship, and it took me about six weeks to bring her round—and then at last—we were in the Rockies then—she gave in and confessed that she loved me in the same way that I loved her. I kissed her. I could never tell you how different that kiss was from all the others."

"Of course it was," said Vane, gently. "It was a pure one, a holy one, and God was very near you, Rayburn, in that moment."

"I believe He was," replied Rayburn, simply, "for from that moment, we were both absolutely changed. Since that kiss, Carol has been as sacred to me as my own sister would be if I had one. That is what I wanted to tell you."

"And God bless you for telling me!" said Vane, solemnly. "If I had any doubts before, I have none now. After that, knowing all I do, I would give you the blessed Sacrament to-morrow."

"On Sunday I hope you will give it to us both," replied Rayburn.

At that moment the door opened, and Sir Arthur came in.

"Dinner is nearly ready," he said. "Are you about ready for it? Ah, yes, I see, you understand each other, don't you?"

"Yes, Sir Arthur," said Rayburn, swinging round with an almost military precision of movement. "I've made my confession, and I am to receive absolution when the happiest moment of my life comes, and you know when that will be."

"I think I do," said Sir Arthur, with a look at Vane, who was staring vacantly down into the flower-filled fireplace. "Then you have settled it all between you, is that so, Vane?"

"Yes, with God's help, we have," he replied, and then, with a swift change of tone and manner he went on: "and now as we have got our family affairs settled to a certain extent, I suppose we can go and join the ladies. I am longing to see Carol again."

"And so am I," said Rayburn, "let us go."

CHAPTER XXI

Rayburn went out first and Vane followed him, feeling, as he said to himself afterwards, as though he was walking across the boundary between one world and another. He knew that Carol and Dora were in the drawing-room. Dora he had never seen before. Carol he had not seen since the night of the University Boat Race. Ernshaw, with the memory of what he had said in Vane's room at Oxford fresh in his mind, caught him by the arm and said:

"Maxwell, I believe I am going to meet my fate to-night as you met yours in another way. Was there ever such a complication in the life-affairs of little mortals like ourselves?"

"I don't know," said Vane, "and I don't care," gripping his arm hard as they crossed the hall. "Wait, it may be the Providence that shapes our ends."

"Rough-hew them as we will," said Rayburn, looking backward.

"Ah, well, since we understand each other, as I think we do now, Vogue la galère! And, Mr. Ernshaw," he went on, "I have heard things and things. I am not giving any confidences away, but by the same token you and I will soon be sailing in the same boat or something very like it——"

"Oh, yes," said Ernshaw, "I see what you mean!" Then he gripped his arm a little harder before they went into the drawing-room. Vane went on with his father, and Ernshaw said:

"Look here, Maxwell, you have passed your crisis, you and Rayburn, I'm only getting near mine. What am I to do, what can I do?"

"That I can't tell you. You see, to put it into the twentieth- century language, the Eternal Feminine is here, and you have got to reckon with her just as Rayburn has done. Come now, if you've made your mind up, go and meet your fate."

As he said this Vane pushed the door of the drawing-room open. Sir Arthur and Rayburn had gone in just before him.

"Carol!"

"Vane! and is it really you—you?"

"Yes," he said, taking a few swift strides towards her and for the first time putting his arms round her. "Yes, dear, your brother."

"Really brother, Vane? Do you truly mean it—will you really take me for your sister now that you know everything—I mean all about Cecil and myself?"

"Yes, Carol, and because I do know, because he as a man has told me everything. I am going to marry you soon, and no man, no priest could marry his sister to his friend with more hope for happiness than I shall marry you and Rayburn."

He took hold of her left hand, and stretched out his hand to Rayburn and said:

"Come now, sister and brother, as you are going to be!"

He took their two hands and joined them. Over the two hands he clasped his own, and looking swiftly from one to the other he said:

"Afterwards I will say the words that I cannot speak here." And then, with a sudden change of tone and manner which came as a quick surprise to both Carol and Rayburn, he went on:

"Rayburn, this is my sister. Carol, Rayburn tells me that he wants to marry you, and I suppose——"

"You needn't suppose anything at all, Vane. I've said yes already. If you and Sir Arthur will only say yes too——"

Vane drew back from her, and looked round toward Sir Arthur and Dora. Rayburn, having gone through the formalities of introduction which Vane's tact had made necessary, held out his hand and they shook hands.

"It is rather unceremonious, Miss Maxwell," he said, addressing her for the first time by a name that was not her own, "but——"

"But, my dear Carol, you are forgetting that you are hostess to- night," said Sir Arthur, "and I think there are two of our guests who have not been, as one would say in Society, properly introduced."

"Oh, of course; I'm so sorry," said Carol. "Dora, forgive me. I know you will. I was too happy just now to think of anything else. Mr. Ernshaw, this is Dora. Dora, this is Mr. Ernshaw. I hope you will be very good friends. That's a rather unconventional way of introduction, I must say."

As the last words left her laughing lips, and she was looking exquisitely dainty and desirable in a quietly magnificent costume which had cost as much as many much advertised wedding dresses, Dora and Ernshaw faced each other for the first time. She had seen him with Vane at the ordination

service in Worcester Cathedral, but they had never met before under the sanction of social acquaintance.

She looked at him and he looked at her, and as their eyes met some impulse in the soul of both made them hold out their hands as people do not usually do when they are introduced in ordinary drawing-room style. Ernshaw's went out straight.

"Miss Russell," he said, even while her hand was moving slowly towards his.

"My dear Mr. Ernshaw, whatever you have to say, I'm afraid I will have to ask you to keep it just for a little," said Sir Arthur, as the door swung open. "Here is Koda Bux, and he does not allow me to be late for dinner; he has many virtues, but that is the best of them. Mr. Rayburn, you will take Carol in? Mr. Ernshaw, will you give your arm to Miss Russell, and Vane and I will bring up the rear."

"Dad," said Vane, as he gripped his father's arm, "you have helped to do God's work to-night; look at them!"

"You did more when you got out of the cab at the top of the gardens here," he whispered in reply.

"I didn't do that, dad; she did. She knew, and I didn't. God bless her."

"Amen," said his father. "And now we will return to earth and go and eat."

There were not many more delightful dinners eaten in London that night than what Cecil Rayburn called his betrothal feast. He and Carol now understood each other thoroughly. Vane and his father also knew the circumstances so far as they were concerned, and a little more. Ernshaw and Dora, each knowing just a little more than the others did, began to make friends fast, and therefore rapidly, but Dora was still declassée. Carol had already been lifted beyond the confines of that half-sphere which is inhabited by so many thousands of women who are neither maiden, wife, nor widow. Dora was still a dweller in it, knowing all its infamy and shame, and knowing, too, that awful necessity which is so often at once the equivalent and the excuse for sin.

Everyone took Sir Arthur's hint, and the conversation rattled on around the table as lightly as it might have around any other dinner table in London. Carol and Sir Arthur and Rayburn had it mostly to themselves at first, but after a little the conversation grew more general. Dora and Carol engaged in a really brilliant discussion on the subject of Mrs. Lynn Linton's last book,

with the result that Carol said that she wouldn't live for ever at any price, to which Dora replied with just a suspicion of a note of sadness in her voice.

"Yes, Carol, I quite agree with you, or at least if I were you I should do."

"Which," said Ernshaw, "is, I think, as nearly as possible the same thing. Surely if one cannot agree with one's self——"

"No, Mr. Ernshaw," said Dora, putting her elbows on the table and her chin between her hands. "No, I'm afraid I can hardly agree with you there. After all, our worst enemies are those of our own household, by which of course I mean our immediate surroundings. It is this awful necessity to live, to eat and to have a place to sleep in. Of course you are thinking of what Talleyrand said to the young aristocrat who wanted to live for nothing."

"Yes," said Ernshaw, "I know that. He said he didn't see the necessity, and I am not altogether certain that he was wrong, but you——"

"Yes, I," she replied in a tone that had a thrill of angry reproach running through it, "I, as you know, am—well—a superfluous woman, one who isn't wanted, a sort of waste product of the factory that we call civilisation."

"I am afraid you people are getting far too serious in your conversation," said Carol from her end of the table opposite Sir Arthur. "No, Dora, I really can't allow it; social problems are not in the menu to-night, and you and Mr. Ernshaw will have to keep them for some other time. Meanwhile, suppose we leave the rest for their smokes, and you come with me and run through that song you are going to sing; we haven't tried it together for quite a long time, as Mr. Rayburn said when we were on the other side of the Atlantic. Come along."

As she rose from her chair, Koda Bux, who had been standing immovable behind his master, opened the door, and as Carol, daintily and yet most plainly dressed, passed through, his sombre eyes lit up as though by an inspiration of long past days, and his teeth came together and he said in his soul:

"It is the daughter of the Mem Sahib; what marvel is this! If there is vengeance to be done, may mine be the hand. Inshallah! I should die content, even if it was only a minute afterwards. He has his kismet, and I have mine. Allah will give it to me; but they may be the same. Once the roomal round his neck, and his breath would be already in his mouth. Dog and son of a dog, he would be better dead!"

It had been arranged that Carol and Dora should take up their abode with Sir Arthur, so that Carol might be married from her father's house. Under the circumstances it was only natural that the wedding was to be absolutely private, and it was already decided that immediately after the wedding Rayburn and Carol should leave for a month in Paris, and then go on to Western Australia, where most of Rayburn's mining properties were. He also owned one side of a street in Perth and a country estate with a big bungalow-built house on the eastern hills overlooking the Swan River.

The only difficulty appeared ahead to Sir Arthur was some mysterious connection with the Raleighs and the Garthornes. It was, of course, impossible that the wedding could take place without their knowledge, if Sir Arthur was to give Carol away as he intended to do, and yet the moment that Garthorne's name was mentioned Carol had turned white to the lips and a look of deadly fear had come into her eyes.

"No, no," she said, "not them, I can't tell you why, and you mustn't ask me. You have been very good to me, and you are going to do more for me than ever was done to a girl like me before, but sooner than meet them I would run away again as I did from Melville Gardens. I would, really, but you must not ask me why; there are some things that cannot be told."

After this Sir Arthur, finding it impossible to get any inkling of the mystery from Carol, asked Dora if she could tell him the meaning of it, and she too turned white. She did not reply for a few moments, and then she said:

"No, Sir Arthur, I cannot tell you. All I can say is that Carol is perfectly right. It would be utterly impossible for her to meet either Sir Reginald Garthorne or his son, and of course she could not meet Mrs. Garthorne without meeting her husband. There is a reason, and a very solemn one, too, for this, but I can assure you, Sir Arthur——"

"That is enough, Miss Russell," said Sir Arthur gravely. "I am perfectly satisfied, and I have no right to ask for an explanation. The wedding shall be absolutely private; no one shall be asked except ourselves. Vane shall marry them early in the morning, we will come back here for lunch, and then they will go straight off to Paris. I will tell the Garthornes about it afterwards."

"Yes," said Dora, "I think that would be best."

That night Carol and Dora had a talk in Carol's room. It was rather a discussion perhaps than a conversation, and the question was whether Sir Arthur and Vane should be told the dreadful secret which Carol had discovered at Reginald Garthorne's wedding. Carol, clean-hearted and straightforward as she was naturally, shrank in horror from such a

revelation as this; but Dora, whose nature was deeper, and who had a stronger religious bias, felt that at all hazards the truth should be told, horrible as it was.

"That man Garthorne," she said, "is a brute. I am perfectly certain that he deliberately made your brother drunk that day at Oxford—I mean that he took advantage of the weakness that you discovered to tempt him to go on drinking, so that he might get drunk on the most important morning of his life. He knew very well what he was doing. He knew if he could only make him drunk that morning, everything would be at an end between him and Miss Raleigh."

"But, my dear Dora, suppose that is so, and I hope it isn't," replied Carol, "how on earth can you have found that out? Of course, if it really is so, Vane and Sir Arthur ought to know of it, and, well, I suppose of the other thing too, dreadful and all as it is, but——"

"I see what you mean," said Dora, "and I will tell you why. In the first place, when we were at the flat, Bernard—I mean Mr. Falcon—told me one or two things Mr. Garthorne had said to him when they were getting confidential over their whiskies, and I had a few minutes' talk with Mr. Ernshaw this evening which—well, what Mr. Falcon told me and what he said were the two and two that made four. I am afraid that is not very grammatical, but it is true. Of course he wouldn't have told me if I had not said something about it; but the moment he told me about your brother's collapse that morning the truth came to me like a flash. Reginald Garthorne is a scoundrel, and his father is worse, for he is a hypocrite as well as a scoundrel. He pretends to be Sir Arthur's friend—he has done so for years. He has allowed his son to steal Vane's life-long love from him, knowing all that he himself did—and, well, no—I can't say the rest."

"You mean," said Carol quietly, and with a note of hardness in her voice, "you mean that he is my father. It is very dreadful, isn't it?"

"Yes, Dora, it is, but you are not to blame after all; you didn't know, and of course we must admit that Mr. Garthorne didn't know so morally. You are both quite innocent there, but there is someone else just now. We've been friends and comrades now for a long time, tell me, dear, does Mr. Rayburn know?"

"I have told him everything," replied Carol, with an effort which she could not conceal, even from Dora.

"Yes, everything, even the very worst. You know when, as he says, he fell in love with me and, as I told you, began to treat me altogether differently, and

then asked me to marry him, I said 'No.' I felt that I couldn't say 'Yes' honestly unless he knew everything. I had got very fond of him, and I suppose that was the reason why. I felt that I had to tell him the truth, and so I told him. Of course it wouldn't have been the straight thing to do anything else. If he had been like other men——"

"But he isn't," said Dora; "all men are not men, you know, and he's a man, and you are just about as lucky a girl as ever got a real man for her husband. Now I see what you mean. Yes, of course, it would be wicked to tell the truth just now. In a week you will be married and away to Australia to live a new life in a new world. Then no one will know Mrs. Rayburn, the wife of the millionaire, except as Mrs. Rayburn, but after that vengeance must be done."

"But why, Dora—why not let things stop just as they are? What is the use of bringing all these things up again and making misery for everybody?"

"Simply because the truth should be known, because a man who has done another the greatest possible injury should not be allowed to remain his friend even in appearance. The truth ought to be told, and it must be told."

"Very well," said Carol, "tell it, Dora, after I am gone. I have told him all the truth, but you know I am like a girl coming out of hell into heaven."

"And do you think that I would spoil your heaven?" said Dora. "No, you are too good for that."

"I am not half so good as you," said Carol. "I have only had infinitely more good fortune than I deserve."

"I don't think that," replied Dora. "I have known you too long and too well. I believe, after all, that everyone does get in this world just about what they deserve if everything was understood, which of course it isn't; but I am quite certain about you. Good-night, Carol, and pleasant dreams—as of course they will be if you have any."

"Good-night, Dora!" laughed Carol, with one of her swift changes of manner. "By the way, I have quite forgotten to ask you how you like Mr. Ernshaw?"

Dora looked at her straight in the eyes for a moment, her cheeks flushed ever so slightly, and she said almost stiffly:

"I am afraid, Carol, you have begun to dream already."

As the door closed Carol went and stood in front of the long mirror in the wardrobe, and still smiling at herself, as well she might, she said:

"Well, it is all very wonderful, and part of it very terrible, and I certainly have got a great deal more than I deserve. If Dora only gets what she deserves it will make things a little more equal. Good- night—Mrs. Rayburn!"

CHAPTER XXII

On the following Sunday evening London had another theological sensation. The National Secular Society had advertised far and wide that the preacher of the famous sermon at St. Chrysostom had consented to deliver an address at the Hall of Science, and that the chair was to be taken by the President of the Society, who was one of the most eloquent and uncompromising exponents of free- thought and rationalism in the world.

Not only in the Anglican churches but also among Catholics and Nonconformists a perfect tempest of indignation had burst forth during the past few days. A hurriedly summoned but crowded meeting was held at Exeter Hall on the same night that Vane had welcomed Carol and her lover into the family circle. It was mainly expressive of evangelical opinion, and was addressed with indignant eloquence by several of the principal Low Church and Nonconformist divines in London. Their principal theme was ritualism and atheism, with special reference to the connection that appeared to exist between them in the person of the Rev. Vane Maxwell.

To begin with, he had joined a confraternity of Anglican priests whose practises were notoriously and admittedly illegal, and he had taken advantage of his position in the pulpit to preach a sermon which had sent a thrill of indignation through the hearts of all the most generous supporters of Church and mission work throughout the United Kingdom and abroad.

He had taken upon himself to put a brutally literal construction on the words of Christ which it would be absolutely impossible to carry out in practice unless the whole of Christendom were pauperised—and what, then, would become of the work of the churches, and, particularly, of those vast missionary movements which had spread the light of Christianity in so many dark places of the earth? How would they continue to exist without the vast sums which Christians of wealth so generously contributed? What was to happen, even to the churches of all denominations in England itself, if they accepted the preposterous doctrine that a man could not enjoy the fruit of his own labour, or inherit that of his ancestors, and at the same time remain a Christian? It was totally out of the question, far beyond the bounds of all practical common sense, and therefore it could not be Christian, since, if such a doctrine were true, Christianity would be impossible.

And now, not content with preaching from a Christian pulpit a heresy which, if accepted by Christians, would make Christianity a practical impossibility, this headstrong, unthinking visionary, reckless of all the best traditions of his Church and his cloth, was going to address an assembly of infidels and atheists, and, as a minister of the Gospel, make friends with

those who blasphemed the name of God every time they used it, and did their utmost to destroy the edifice of Christianity and to uproot the foundations of the Christian faith.

It was monstrous, it was horrible, and the general sense of the speeches, and of the resolutions which were unanimously and enthusiastically carried at the end of the meeting, was that the man who could preach heresy in a Christian pulpit, then, the next Sunday, associate himself deliberately with infidels and atheists, was not worthy to remain within the fold of the Christian Ministry.

Of course, the speeches were duly reported in the papers the next morning with, in some cases, a considerable amount of editorial embroidery, and nowhere were they read with greater interest than at the breakfast-table of Sir Arthur's house in Warwick Gardens, especially as, side by side with them, came the announcement that another meeting of protest was to be held at St. James's Hall on the Saturday evening, under the auspices of a committee of members of the English Church Union. The chair was to be taken by Canon Thornton-Moore, and several of the leading lights of High Anglicanism were to speak.

"What a very wicked person you must be, Vane," said Carol, who had swiftly skimmed through some of the speeches and the comments on them. "The Low Church people seem to have excommunicated you altogether, and now the High Church are going to do it. Why don't you go to this meeting to-night and give them a bit of your mind? I believe they are all frightened of you and your new doctrines, and that is why they are making such a fuss about it."

"My doctrines are not new, Carol," replied Vane, with a smile which seemed to her very gentle and sweet. "They are just as old as Christianity itself, and they are not mine, but the Master's. No, I don't think I shall go to the meeting. I am afraid there will be quite trouble enough without me, and, besides, personal controversy seldom does any good at all. I only hope, indeed, that these good people will keep away from the Hall of Science on Sunday night. It is the greatest of pities that it was made public. I simply wanted to have a quiet talk with the usual audience."

"I am afraid you won't have many more quiet talks with any audiences now, Vane," laughed Sir Arthur. "This sudden jump that you have made into fame has made it impossible. You will have to pay the usual penalty of greatness."

"It appears," said Carol, "in this case, to be mostly abuse and misunderstanding."

"I don't think there is much misunderstanding, Carol," said Dora. "It seems to me to be quite the other way about. These people understand Mr. Maxwell only too well for their own comfort. They see quite plainly that if he is right, as, of course, he is, wealth and real Christianity cannot go together; therefore, equally, of course, fat livings and bishoprics and archbishoprics at ten and fifteen thousand a year will also be impossible. It may be very wicked to say so, but I think a lot of these good people are worrying themselves much more about salaries and endowments and that sort of thing than real Christianity."

"Of course they are," said Carol. "I wonder how many of them will do what Vane has done, give up everything he had——"

"My dear Carol," interrupted Vane, gently, "that is not quite the point. You must remember that these men have their opinions just as I have mine, and they may not think it their duty to do that. I do not believe that it is right for a man to be a priest of the Church and possess more than the actual necessaries of life. They believe that it is right."

"And a very convenient belief, too!" said Carol, with a look of admiration. "Well, I am not as charitable as you are, and I don't believe that they do believe it. Now, there's Cecil and the carriage. Dear me! how very punctual he is."

"There's not much to wonder at in that," said Sir Arthur. "Well, now, I suppose you young ladies are going to have a morning in Paradise—the one that is bounded by Oxford Street on the north and Piccadilly on the south. Vane, we will go and have a cigar with Mr. Rayburn while they are getting ready."

The meeting at St. James's Hall was much less crowded, and, as some thought, much more decorous than the one at Exeter Hall. Canon Thornton-Moore, a man of stately presence, high social standing and very considerable wealth—he had married the daughter of one of the most successful operators in the Kaffir Circus—made an ideal chairman. He was a High Churchman and the son of a Bishop. He was the incarnation of the most aristocratic section of the Anglican Church. He was supported by the presence of a Duke and two High Church peers on the platform, and half a dozen vicars and curates, all eloquent preachers and fashionable exponents of ritualistic doctrine, were announced to speak in advocacy of the protest which the meeting had been called to make.

The proceedings were very quiet and dignified—and very churchy. It was the Church from beginning to end; it never seemed to strike either the speakers

or the audience that there was anything that might fairly be called Christianity outside the Church. In fact, the words Christ and Christianity were not used at all from the platform.

The only approach to unseemliness occurred when, in response to a formal intimation that "discussion within reasonable limits" would be permitted, one of the Kilburn Sisters, a woman who had given up a fortune and relinquished a title, got up and asked the chairman point-blank what his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount was, and further, if any of the noble and reverend gentlemen on the platform could give a better exposition of it as a rule of Christian life than Vane Maxwell had done?

She had hardly uttered her question before murmurs of angry protest began to run from lip to lip through the hall; but when she went on to ask why the preacher of the now famous sermon should be denounced by his fellow priests for giving an address to free-thinkers in a free-thought hall, when Christ himself, for his own good purposes, associated himself with publicans and sinners and thought none too low or too utterly lost to take by the hand, her voice was at once drowned by a chorus of "Oh! Oh's!" amidst which the chairman rose and said in his most dignified manner:

"I hope that I have the sense and feeling of the meeting with me when I say that the questions asked by our most respected sister seem to have been asked under a total misconception of the circumstances. It is obvious that they raise issues which could not possibly be discussed in such a place, and on such an occasion as this. I would remind our dear friend that this edifice is not a church, and this platform not a pulpit; and that, therefore, I do not feel myself justified, even if time and other circumstances permitted, to enter upon a doctrinal subject which involves so many far-reaching considerations as this one does."

The Canon sat down amidst a many-voiced murmur of approval, and the Duke said audibly to him:

"A very proper way, my dear Canon, of dealing with a most improper question. The dear lady seems to think that we are not capable of reading our Bibles for ourselves."

After that the chairman put to the meeting the resolution of protest to the effect that if the Reverend Vane Maxwell persisted in carrying out his intention to proceed from a pulpit of the church to the platform of an infidel lecture hall, he would make it the painful duty of his canonical superiors to take his conduct into most serious consideration, and, further, should he persist in this deplorable resolution, he would arouse the gravest suspicions

in the minds of all loyal churchmen as to his fitness for dispensing the sacred functions of his office.

The Kilburn Sister and a few others walked out amidst a chilling silence, and under a silent fire of glances which ought to have made them feel very uncomfortable. Perhaps it did.

The resolution was put and passed without a dissentient voice, and when the proceedings were over and Lady Canore, who had been one of the most energetic organisers of the meeting, got back into her carriage, she said to her husband:

"I think the dear Canon's reply was most dignified and proper. That woman ought to be ashamed of herself—and a Kilburn Sister, too! Donald, I shall certainly go and hear what this Mr. Maxwell has to say to these—ah—these people at, where is it? the Hall of what? Oh, yes! Science, and you must manage to get a seat. I believe you pay for them just as you do in a theatre. It is, of course, very shocking, but I think it will be most interesting."

A good many other members of the audience said practically the same thing in other ways, and so it came about that the Hall in Old Street was packed as it had not been since the most famous days of Charles Bradlaugh, and packed, too, with a most strangely assorted audience of democrats and aristocrats, socialists and landowners, freethinkers of the deistic, the atheistic, and the agnostic persuasions, and Christians of even more varying shades of opinion, from the most rigidly Calvinistic evangelical, to the most artistically emotional of the High Anglican cult.

The President rose amidst the usual applause, but it hushed the moment he began to speak, in clear incisive tones which sent every syllable distinctly from end to end of the hall:

"Friends, I intend to say very little, because we are going to hear to- night what we very seldom hear in a secular lecture-hall. We are going to hear an address which you are waiting for as eagerly as I am, an address delivered by a man who, as a Priest of the Church of England, last Sunday sent a thrill of astonishment, of amazement, I might almost say of horror, through Christian England."

A burst of applause, coming chiefly from the back of the hall, interrupted the speaker, but he put his hand up, and went on:

"No, please! I must ask you not to applaud. For one thing, there is not time for it. Just let me get my say said, and then, when Mr. Maxwell gives us the message he has brought us from what we are, perhaps, too ready to believe

the enemy's camp, applaud him as much as you like. What I want to do now is to say as far as possible without offence, and without hurting the feelings of the many members of Christian churches who have come amongst us to-night, that it is to be our privilege to listen here in what has been recently called the head- quarters of infidelity—an insulting epithet which I, with you and all true rationalists indignantly repudiate—a man, a Christian clergyman, a priest of the Church of England who has, as you already know, raised a hurricane of criticism throughout this Christian country by daring to tell Christians just what Jesus of Nazareth meant—if plain words mean anything—when he preached the Sermon on the Mount. He has dared to say from a Christian pulpit what we have been saying from these platforms of ours ever since we had them—that Christendom is not Christian, and that it cannot be so until it is prepared to be honest with itself and its God.

"Mr. Maxwell has come amongst us to-night with other thoughts, other faiths, other beliefs than ours, but from what I see of the audience he will not speak to freethinkers only. I believe that there are more professing Christians in this hall to-night than there ever have been before. Let us remember that. It may be that Mr. Maxwell will teach us some lessons as unpalatable as those which he taught from the pulpit of St. Chrysostom; but do not let us forget this that we shall be listening to a man who is a missionary in the best sense of the word, a man who has justified his faith by the sacrifice of his worldly prospects, and who has taken upon himself a task infinitely more difficult, infinitely more thankless than that of the missionary who, as we believe, carries at an immense expense of money which could be better spent in the charity that begins at home, a message of salvation, as he no doubt honestly believes it to be, to savages who cannot understand it, or to the people who were civilized when we were savages, and who don't want it and won't have it.

"Mr. Maxwell has taken upon himself, if I may say so without offence, a far nobler mission than this, a greater task, if possible, than that of the noble men and women of all creeds, and no creed, who minister to the wants of our own savages, by which I mean those who have been kept in a state of savagery infinitely worse than that of the negro slave of seventy years ago, by the necessities of the civilization which is no more Christian than it is humane.

"Mr. Maxwell, by preaching that one famous sermon of his, has constituted himself a missionary to the rich, to those who profess and call themselves Christians, and yet are content to live utterly and hopelessly unchristian lives. Friends, the man beside me has begun to make himself the Savonarola of the twentieth century. Whether his creed is ours or not, we must all agree

that that sermon of his is the beginning of a great and noble work. He told his wealthy and fashionable hearers last Sunday that they could not be Christians unless they were honest with God and their fellow men. As regards the first part, some of us have different beliefs to his, but as regards the second, we are with him heart and soul. If he can teach us to be honest with ourselves and each other, he will have done more to conquer sin and vice, more to make earth that human paradise that the poets and dreamers and prophets of all ages have longed for and foretold, than all the churches and all the creeds have done for the last two thousand years. It is a godly because it is a goodly work, and—if there is a God—that God will bless him and help him in it."

CHAPTER XXIII

As the President sat down and Vane rose to his feet, quite a tumult of mingled applause, "hear, hears," hissings and hootings rose up from the strangely assorted audience.

Vane faced the half-delighted, half-angry throng with the perfect steadiness of a man who has decided upon a certain course and means to pursue it at all hazards. Curiosity reduced one portion of the audience to silence, and a respectful anticipation the other. In the sea of faces before him, Vane recognised several that were familiar to him. His father, Carol, Dora, Ernshaw and Rayburn were there as a matter of course. Several clerics, high and low, Anglican and Nonconformist, were dotted about the audience, some with folded arms and frowning brows as though they were expecting the worst of heresies, others smiling in bland and undisguised contempt, believing that they had come to see one of their own cloth, who had already made himself an even more disagreeable subject of reflection to them than even the infidels in whose house the magic of Vane's sudden fame had brought them together, do that which would make it impossible for him to again commit such an offence in the pulpit of an English church.

For a moment or two there was a hush of intense silence of mental suspense and expectation as Vane faced his audience and looked steadily about him before he began to speak, and when he did begin, the silence changed to an almost inaudible murmur and movement which is always the sign of relaxed tension among a large body of human beings.

His first words were as unconventional as they were unexpected.

"Brother men and sister women; some of you, like myself, believe in God, in the existence of an all-wise, over-ruling Providence, which shapes the destinies of mankind, and yet at the same time allows each man and woman to work out his or her own earthly destinies for good or ill, as he or she chooses—by reason or desire, by inclination or passion—and we also believe in the efficacy of the sacrifice which was consummated on Calvary. There are others listening to me now to whom these beliefs are merely idle dreams, the inventions of enthusiasts, or the deliberate frauds of those who brought them into being and imposed them by physical force upon those who had no means of resistance, for their own personal and political ends.

"I have not come here to make any attempt to settle these differences between us. As a priest of the Church, I wish, with all my soul, that I could. As a man, I know that I can't. But there is one ground at least upon which we can meet as friends, whatever our opinions may be as regards religion

and theology—two terms which, I think every one here will agree with me, are very far from meaning the same thing."

"As a priest of the Church, I cannot hear that without protest!" cried a tall, high-browed, thin-featured, deep-eyed clergyman, springing to his feet in the middle of the hall. "If theology, the Science of God, does not mean the same thing as religion, the word religion has no meaning. More dangerous, I had almost said more disgraceful, words never fell from the lips of a man calling himself a priest of the Church of God."

The last sentence was spoken in a high, shrill voice, which rose above the angry murmurs which came from all parts of the hall, but these Vane silenced in a moment, by holding up his hand and smiling as some of the audience had never seen a man smile before.

"I am glad," he went on, in slow, very distinct tones, "that such an objection has been raised so early by a brother priest. It will help us to understand each other more clearly, and so I will try to answer him at once. The difference between religion and theology is the difference between the whole and the part; but theology is not a science, for there is no science of the Infinite. It is only the study of the many different conceptions which men of all nations and races have formed as to the nature of the over- ruling Power of the universes—of all the attempts to solve the insoluble and to answer the unanswerable.

"There are two sayings, one Arabian and one Italian, which I hope I may quote without offence. One is, 'God gives us the outline of the picture, we fill it in. We cannot change the outline, but we are responsible for every stroke of the brush. In the end God judges the picture.'

"The other was the saying of a famous Italian artist, 'Children and fools should not see work half done.'

"Now let us grant for the sake of argument that there is a Creator, and therefore a scheme of creation. How much can we, dwellers upon a world which is but as a grain of sand washed hither and thither by the tide-flow of the ocean of Infinity, know about the workings of the Will in obedience to which, as some of us believe, that tide ebbs and flows through the uncounted ages of Eternity, and over the measureless expanse of Infinity? Faced with such a colossal problem as this, must we not all confess ourselves to be but as children and fools, since we do not and cannot see even half of the work, but only an immeasurably tiny fragment of it? For this reason I feel justified in saying that those who deny the existence of the

Divine Architect of the universe and those who claim to know all about His plans, are, at least, equally mistaken.

"But that, although I have been glad of the opportunity of saying it, is not quite what I came here to say, and, therefore, we will drop that part of the subject. Last Sunday I preached a sermon which—I say it both with wonder and gladness—has produced a very much wider and deeper effect than I could have hoped it would do. That was a sermon preached in a Christian church to a congregation, which, at least, professed and called itself Christian. To-night I am going to ask you to listen to a secular sermon preached from the same text. It will be very brief, because I know that you have a custom, and a very good one, of following discourses with discussion, and as I am going to raise a few distinctly controversial subjects, I want to leave plenty of our available time over for the discussion.

"The theme of my sermon last Sunday at St. Chrysostom's may be summed up in one word—Honesty. The essence of the Sermon on the Mount is just honesty. I suppose everyone here has read it, and therefore you will remember that from beginning to end there is not a word of dogma in it. In other words it is absolutely untheological. Perhaps this fact, a very important one, has never struck some of you before. When the Master preached that sermon, he, as I believe, deliberately left out every reference to dogma or doctrine, creed or church, so that men, whatever their belief, their nation or their race, could equally accept it as a universal rule of life and conduct.

"Some of us here believe in miracles, some do not. I do, and, so believing, I think that the Sermon on the Mount is the greatest of all miracles. It is a greater thing to preach a doctrine to which all honest men, coming whithersoever they may from the ends of the earth, will and must subscribe if they are honest—a doctrine which is true for all time and for all men, than to cleanse the leper or to raise the dead to life.

"I will ask you to let me put this point in another way, and in a certainly more attractive form. Let me read you the expression of this universal truth in the words of two English poets separated from each other by more than two hundred years of time and many mountain ridges and deep valleys of changing thought and opinion:

"Father of all! in every age,

In every clime adored,

By saint, by savage, and by sage,

Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!

"Thou great First Cause, least understood,

Who all my sense confined

To know but this, that Thou art good,

And that myself am blind.

"Yet gave me, in this dark estate,

To see the good from ill;

And, binding nature fast in fate,

Left free the human will.

"Those lines are from Pope's immortal poem 'The Universal Prayer'; these are from Rudyard Kipling's 'Hymn Before Action.'

"High lust and froward bearing,

Proud heart, rebellious brow—

Deaf ear and soul uncaring,

We seek Thy mercy now!

The sinner that forswore Thee,

The fool that passed Thee by,

Our times are known before Thee—

Lord, grant us strength to die!

"For those who kneel beside us

At altars not Thine own,

Who lack the lights that guide us,

Lord, let their faith atone!

If wrong we did to call them,

By honour bound they came;

Let not Thy wrath befall them,

But deal to us the blame!

"Those, perhaps, are the most solemn and deep-meaning words that have been written or spoken since Jesus of Nazareth preached the Sermon on the Mount, and the inner sense, as I read it, is the same. In life, in death, be honest with yourself, with your brother-man and your sister-woman, and with your God if you believe in one.

"Last Sunday in the pulpit I quoted the words of Colonel Ingersoll, 'God cannot afford to damn an honest man.' That phrase has always seemed to me a marvellous mixture of blasphemy, ignorance, and sound common sense. From my point of view it is blasphemous, because it is the utterance of the atom trying to understand the universe. It is ignorant, because it is impossible for that human atom who uttered it to form any adequate conception of the infinitely great whole of which he was an infinitely small part. And yet, humanly speaking, it is the soundest and hardest of common sense. If God is honest He must respect honesty, no matter whether it is the honesty of belief, or of disbelief, always supposing that the belief and the disbelief are honest.

"The man who calls himself a Christian and does not conduct his daily life in accordance with the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, is one of two things—a fool who cannot understand the meaning of plain words, or a knave, who, for many reasons, which most of my hearers will understand, pretends to be that which he is not. I may remind you here that knavery is not by any means confined to the limits of what is conventionally termed criminality. For every crime that puts a man or a woman into prison, there are a hundred others committed in every-day life with absolute impunity, and yet they are just as serious, and they merit a similar if not a heavier punishment than those which the law punishes with social degradation and the miseries of penal servitude.

"I wonder whether it has occurred to any of you who are listening to me now—whether you are Christians, professed or real, atheists or agnostics—to ask yourselves if, under the present conditions of what we are pleased to call civilization, an honest world would be possible, and that, I may say, is just the same thing as asking whether Christians can or cannot live their lives in accordance with the teachings of Him who went about doing good? Of course we all call ourselves honest, and some of us really believe that we are. At any rate, most of us would feel very much insulted if any one else told us that we were not. But are we? Let us put our pride in our pockets for a moment and try to answer that pregnant question. Honesty, like many

other terms, of which immorality is one, has, through its conventional use, acquired a very restricted and therefore a quite unreal meaning. We have, by some vicious process of thought, got accustomed to call a man or a woman who transgresses the social law in a certain direction immoral, and in the same way we have come to apply the word dishonesty to practices which mean stealing or the attempt to steal property of a concrete form.

"But I think you will all agree with me that both these words have come to be used in a sense which is so narrow, that it destroys their original meaning. For every man or woman who transgresses the social law and is therefore called immoral—of course after being found out—there are a hundred or more who break the moral law every hour of their waking lives. All of you, no doubt, possess bibles. Read the 27th and 28th verses of the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and you will understand what I mean.

"But there is another immorality than this, and, as I believe, a greater immorality, for this, so far as it concerns our sister women, is often not immorality at all. It is the surrender of a feeble nature to a pitiless necessity, the necessity to live, the only alternative, in too many cases, to self-murder. There is another immorality infinitely worse than this, which when, as we Christians believe, the hosts of men are ranged before the Bar of Eternal Justice will spell damnation, hopeless and irrevocable, and that is the immorality which means a dishonesty that deliberately deceives—not always for the purpose of gain, for this kind of dishonesty is generally practised by those whom, to put it plainly, it would not pay to steal.

"A French philosopher once said that there is that within the heart of every man which, if known, would make his dearest friend hate him. That, I am afraid, is true, not only of men but of women. It is not the fault of the men or the women; it is due simply to artificial conditions of life and to the individual ignorance and stupidity which make reform impossible. Until what we call civilised and Christian Society can make up its mind to conduct its personal, its national, and its international affairs on the broad and simple lines laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, no man can afford to be quite honest. In other words, if Christendom would be really Christian, it would also be honest; honest with itself and with its God, with the God whom it now only pretends to worship, saying loudly, 'Lord, Lord,' and doing not the things which He saith!

"It would not matter—and this I say with all reverence and with a full sense of my responsibilities as a Priest of the Church—it would not matter whether Society called itself Christian or not, as long as it was honest."

"That is absolute atheism and blasphemy!" exclaimed a well- known Nonconformist preacher, springing up and holding his hands out towards the platform. "The man who could speak those words cannot be either a Christian or a minister of the Gospel. I call upon the speaker to be honest now, honest with himself and us, and confess that he is not a Christian, and therefore unworthy to be a preacher of any Christian creed."

A storm of mingled expressions of approval and assent burst out from every part of the crowded hall. Vane stood immovable and listened to it with a smile hovering round his lips. The President rose at once and said:

"I must remind the reverend gentleman who has made this interruption—an interruption which, if made in a church or a chapel, would render him liable to imprisonment—is entirely out of order. We welcome discussion, but it must come in its proper place. We cannot tolerate interruption, and we won't."

The rebuke was too just and too pointed not to be felt, even by the bigot who had deserved it. He sat down, and when the thunder of applause which greeted the President's brief but pregnant interlude had died away, Vane went on without a trace of emotion in his voice:

"I cannot say that I am sorry that that interruption was made, because it makes it possible for me to ask whether there is really any difference between Christianity and honesty?"

Again he was interrupted, this time by half the audience getting on to its feet and cheering. The other portion sat still, and the units of it began to look at each other very seriously. Vane was, in fact, bringing the matter down to a most uncomfortably fine point. He made a slight motion with his hand, and his hearers, having already recognised the true missionary, or bringer of messages to the souls of men, instantly became silent and expectant.

"If Christianity is not honest, or if honesty is not, for all practical purposes, the same thing as Christianity, then so much the worse for Christianity or for honesty as the case may be. A religion which is not honest is not a religion. Honesty which is not a religion—that is to say a tie between man and man—is not honest. That, I think, is a dilemma from which there is no escape."

There was another burst of applause, this time almost universal, which the President did not attempt to check. A few members of the audience looked even more uncomfortable than before, but by the time Vane was able to make himself heard again it was quite plain that the great majority of his audience, believers and unbelievers, were heart and soul with him.

"That," he went on, with a laughing note in his voice, "shows me that we have got on to friendly territory at last, on to the ground of our common humanity. I said just now, before my friend in the audience diverted my attention to another and very important point, most of us would feel very much insulted if anyone told us that we were not honest. We should jump to the conclusion that such a statement was the same thing as calling us thieves or swindlers; but that is not the question. Honesty is not by any means confined to commercial dealings. It has a social meaning and a very far reaching one too, for, as a matter of fact, the man or woman who deceives another in the smallest detail of life is not strictly honest, because it is impossible to be strictly honest without at the same time being strictly truthful.

"It has been said that half the truth is worse than a lie. It is, I think, a greater sin to tell half the truth than a deliberate and comprehensive lie, for it is possible to tell a lie with an honest, if mistaken purpose; and yet the business of the modern world is mainly conducted by half-truths. Everyone tries to deceive the person he is doing business with to some extent. It is not altogether his fault, for he knows that if he didn't do so, the other man would deceive him, and so get the better of the bargain. That is the way of the world, as it is called, and a very bad way, and, as we believe, a very unchristian way it is.

"Still, it is impossible to blame the trader and the man of commerce for this. The real fault, the real sin, is not individual, it is collective—the guilt properly belongs to Society. Men do not descend to these mean subterfuges and these despicable trickeries merely to make money, to pile on hundreds on hundreds and thousands on thousands. In their hearts all the best of them despise the methods by which they are forced to earn their incomes and make their fortunes; but the penalties which the laws of Society place on honesty are so tremendous that a really honest man will deliberately sacrifice his own honour rather than incur them. That is a very serious thing to say, and yet it is the literal truth, and the most pitiable part of the matter is that he commits these sins of unscrupulousness and dishonesty chiefly for the sake of his wife and children. The social penalties of honesty would fall most heavily on them. Their houses and their luxurious furniture, their carriages and their horses, their costly clothing and precious jewels would be theirs no longer; in a word, they would become poor, and Society has no place for people if they are poor, whatever else they may be.

"To put the question in another way, a tiger seeking for its prey and slaying it ruthlessly when it has found it is not a pleasant subject for contemplation, but before we blame the tiger we must remember that somewhere at home

in the jungle there is a Mrs. Tiger and some little tigers who have to be fed somehow. The tiger's methods of killing for food are merciful in comparison with the methods of many men who already possess enough to give the ordinary comforts of decent life to those who are depending upon them, and yet go on deceiving and swindling, for deception in commerce is swindling, in order to obtain those superfluities of life which are absolutely necessary to keep up what is called position in Society.

"I do not say that wealth and comfort would be impossible in an honest world; there is no reason why they should be, but they would be gained in greater moderation and by different methods. For instance, if Society could and would change its standards of honesty and morality, the force of public opinion would soon make crime impossible, save among the mentally and morally diseased, who would, of course, be treated in the same merciful but relentless fashion as we now treat what we call our criminal lunatics.

"It will of course be quite impossible for me to treat this vast subject in anything like detail in a single address, and therefore I shall content myself with having thrown out these few suggestions, and leave the development of it to those who will, I hope, take part in the discussion.

"But one word more in conclusion. Your President has called me a missionary, a missionary to the rich. That is the mission which I have taken on myself, and therefore I gladly accept the title, all the more gladly because it comes from one who, while he differs from me absolutely on every theological point which I believe essential to salvation, has proved his faith by giving me that title and by uttering a prayer which has, I hope, already been heard by Him to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid."

When Vane sat down there burst out a storm of applause, through which not a few hisses, mostly from clerical lips, pierced shrilly. Yet, few and simple as his words had been, it was quite evident that they had gone straight to the hearts of the majority of his audience.

The President rose when the applause subsided, and, after a brief speech, in which he frankly admitted that if all teachers of the Christian faith were like Vane Maxwell, and if there were no other sort of Christianity than his, there would be very little of what too many Christians call infidelity in the world, gave the usual notice that the meeting was now open for discussion.

Then the storm burst over Vane's devoted head. By a sort of tacit agreement the Secularists left the attack to the clergy. As a matter of fact they had practically no cause for dispute with Vane. On the contrary they delighted in

the frankness of his expression of his belief, and the uncompromising fashion in which he had denounced and repudiated that unchristian form of Christianity which, as the President had put it, was responsible through its hypocrisy and double-dealing with God and man for all the honest unbelief, and all the scoffing and scepticism, which it pretended to deplore. So the Secularists sat still and silent, enjoying hugely the series of bitter attacks that were made on Vane by cleric after cleric, Anglican and Nonconformist, for close on a couple of hours. Vane took it all very quietly, now smiling and now looking grave almost to sadness, and when the last speaker had exhausted his passion and his eloquence, and the President asked him to reply, he got up and said in slow but grave and very clear tones:

"I have no reply to make to what I have heard, save to say that I have heard with infinite sorrow from the lips of clergymen of every denomination and shade of opinion a series of statements which not one of them could justify from the teachings of Him who preached the Sermon on the Mount. There is no other criterion of Christian faith and doctrine than is to be found in the New Testament, and from the first verse in the Gospel according to St. Matthew to the last in Revelations there is not one word which contradicts what I have spoken, or which supports what they have said.

"That is a serious thing to say, but I say it with full knowledge and with perfect faith. I mean no personal offence. That would of course be impossible under the circumstances; but it is also quite impossible for me, after saying what I have said here and elsewhere, to argue seriously with those who are by profession teachers and preachers of the revelation of Jesus Christ—of the message of God to man by God incarnate in the flesh—and who are yet able to reconcile in their own souls the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth and the doings of twentieth century Christianity. We have heard the words infidel and infidelity used many times to-night. There is no infidelity in honest unbelief; and, sorrowfully as I say it, I still feel it my duty to say it, that there is more real infidelity inside the churches than there is outside, for the worst and most damnable of all infidelities is that which says with its lips 'Lord, Lord,' and does not with its heart and its hands do that which He saith."

There was a little silence, a silence of astonishment on the one part of the audience and of absolute stupefaction on the part of the other. Then the storm of applause broke out once more, but there was no hissing mingled with it this time. About a score of black-clad figures rose pale and silent amidst the cheering throng and walked out. Their example was followed by most of the West End Christians, including her ladyship of Canore and her husband and daughters, whose curiosity had been more than amply

satisfied. The cheers changed from enthusiasm to irony as the irregular procession moved towards the doors, and an irreverent Secularist at the back of the hall jumped on his seat and shouted, with an unmistakable Old Street accent:

"Got a bit more than you came for, eh? Hope you've enjoyed your lordly selves. Don't forget to say your prayers to-night. You want a lot of converting before you'll be Christians. I've 'alf a mind to put up one for you to- night myself, blowed if I 'aven't."

Then the applause changed to laughter, hearty and good-humoured, and when the President had proposed the usual vote of thanks to the lecturer, and Vane had accepted his invitation to give a series of addresses at the halls of the Society throughout the country, the most memorable meeting on record at the Hall of Science came to an end.

CHAPTER XXIV

The next Sunday, Vane, the Mayfair Missionary, as one of the evening papers had called him, preached at St. Chrysostom, and took for his text:

"Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things."

During the week, the storm of indignation against him had been growing both in strength and violence, and a movement was already on foot to arraign him before the Ecclesiastical Courts on charges of heresy and unbelief, and of bringing the priesthood into contempt by publicly associating himself as a priest with the avowed enemies of the Church.

The church was, of course, crowded, but the congregation was composed of very different elements from those which had made up his congregation a fortnight before. There were many of its richest members there, but they did not come in their carriages. Many others had come in trains or 'busses, or had walked from Mile End and Bethnal Green to hear the words of the new prophet; and scores of these had not seen the inside of a church for years, or ever dreamt of listening with anything like respect to a sermon from a Christian pulpit, yet none were more respectful and attentive than these infidels and heretics whose respectful attention and new-awakened reverence were the first fruits of Vane's mission harvest.

His sermon was a direct and uncompromising reply to the challenge to prove that he was worthy to wear the cloth of the priesthood, and when it was over, his hearers, the believers and unbelievers alike, had been driven to the conviction, unpleasant as it was to some of them, that if the preacher had drawn his conclusions right from the words of Christ and his Apostles, it was absolutely certain that neither churches or churchmen, whatever their form of doctrine might be, could at the same time be wealthy and powerful in the worldly sense, and remain anything more than nominal Christians.

After the sermon Vane assisted Father Baldwin in the administration of the Sacrament, and Carol and Rayburn took the elements from his hands; Carol for the first time in her life, and Rayburn for the first time since he had reached manhood. It was for them the consecration of their new love and the new life which was to begin next day.

Dora, who had been present at the service and had remained through the communion, had, greatly to the surprise of every one, and even to the sorrow of Carol and Vane, refused steadily to partake. She would give no reason, and therefore Carol quite correctly concluded that she had some very sufficient one.

At ten the next morning, Vane married Carol and Rayburn. The ceremony was as simple as the forms of the Church allowed, and absolutely private. Sir Arthur gave Carol away, and Ernshaw acted as Rayburn's best man. The only others present were Father Baldwin and Dora, and a few of the usual idlers to whom a wedding of any sort is an irresistible attraction, and who had no notion of the strangeness of the wooing and the winning, or of the depth of the life- tragedy which was being brought to such a happy ending in such simple fashion.

The only guests at the marriage-feast were Dora, Ernshaw, and Vane. It was just a family party, as Sir Arthur called it, so the bride and bridegroom were spared the giving and receiving of speeches. Never did a greater change take place in a girl's life more simply and more quietly than this tremendous, almost incredible change which took place in Carol's, when, from being a nameless outcast beyond the pale of what is more or less correctly termed respectable society, she became the wife of a man who had wooed, and won her under such strange circumstances, yet knowing everything, and the mistress of millions to boot.

When the brougham that was to take them to the station drew up at the door, Rayburn put his hand on Vane's arm, and led him to the study.

"Maxwell," he said, as he shut the door, "I have done the best thing to- day that a man can do. I have got a good wife, and——"

"You have done a great deal more than that, Rayburn," said Vane, "infinitely more. I needn't tell you what it is, but if ever God and his holy Saints looked down with blessing on the union of man and woman, they did upon your marriage to-day."

"I see what you mean," said Rayburn, "and for Carol's sake, I hope so with all my heart. Now, look here," he went on, in an altered tone, taking an envelope out of his pocket, "you know that I don't find myself able to believe with you on this question of the possession of wealth. Perhaps I have got too much of it to be able to do so; but what I have, I know Carol will help me to use better than I could use it myself. It is the usual thing, I believe, for a man who has just taken a wife unto himself, to make a thank-offering to the Church. Here is mine, and it is not only mine, but hers, for we had a talk about it yesterday. Open it when we have gone. And now, good-bye, brother Vane, and God speed you in your good work!"

When the last good-byes had been said, and the last kisses and handshakes exchanged, and the carriage had driven away, Vane went alone into the

study, and opened the envelope. It contained a note in Carol's writing, and a cheque. The note ran thus:

"MY DEAREST BROTHER,

"The enclosed is the result of a talk I had with Cecil last night, he also had one with Mr. Ernshaw, and I had one with Dora. I should like it to be used, under your direction, for the good of those who are as I was, but have not been so blest with such good fortune as I have been.

"Ever your most loving and grateful sister,

"CAROL."

The cheque was for twenty thousand pounds.

Vane could scarcely believe his eyes when he looked at the five figures. Then, when he had grasped the meaning of them, he murmured:

"God bless them both; they have made a good beginning," and went back to join the others in the dining-room.

He had a long talk with Ernshaw that afternoon, and they decided to bank the money in their joint name, Ernshaw absolutely refusing to have it in his name alone, as the cheque had been given to Vane, and towards the end of the talk Ernshaw said:

"I am glad to say that I should not be very much surprised now if what your father said a couple of years ago were to come true. In fact, I have broached the subject already very gently and circumspectly, of course, but she absolutely refuses even to consider the matter for at least a year. Still, she did it so gently and so sweetly that I don't by any means despair; and that girl, Maxwell, will make as good a wife as a parson ever had, and a better one than a good many have. She has given me my life-work, too. You are going to try and redeem the rich, or, at least, to show them the way of redemption. I, with God's help, and hers, am going to try and show a way of redemption to those who have lost everything, and this money of Rayburn's will give us a magnificent start, if you will agree with me that it will be devoted to it."

"Of course, it must be," said Vane, "there can't be any doubt about that. Miss Russell will naturally be at the head of the work, I suppose, and the first thing we ought to do, I think, is to get an establishment for her, and let her start as soon as may be. I suppose you have talked it over with her already?"

"Oh, yes," replied Ernshaw, "and she is more than delighted with the idea."

"I am glad to hear it," said Vane, "no one could possibly do the work better. Ernshaw, old man," he went on, more gravely, "I'm afraid for myself that with a helper, and, I hope, some day a help-meet like Miss Russell, you will have a good deal more chance of success in your work than I shall in mine."

"That, my dear fellow," replied Ernshaw, "is in other hands than ours. There lies the work to our hands, and all we have got to do is to do it. By the way, as far as mine is concerned, I hope you will help me to persuade your father to take a share in it."

"I am perfectly certain he will," said Vane; "the fact that Carol suggested it will be quite enough for that."

"Then if he does, by the time you come back from your first crusade, I think you will find things getting pretty well into order."

"I'm sure I shall," said Vane.

But it was already written that this crusade was not to begin until many other things had happened. That evening at dinner Sir Arthur said:

"Vane, I had a note from Sir Reginald this afternoon asking me to run down to the Abbey for a few days, and then join them at Cowes. You are included in the invitation, but, of course, you wouldn't go to Cowes, and I don't think I shall, the work here will be very much more interesting; but I thought perhaps you might like to run down to the Abbey and see Father Philip before you start on your mission. Garthorne and Enid are there, and her father and mother are going. It wouldn't be a bad opportunity to tell the family party the good news about Carol."

"Oh, yes," said Vane, "I should like that, immensely; in fact, I've been thinking already that if Father Baldwin agrees with me that before I do make a start on my mission to Midas, as my friend, Reed, called it the other day, the best thing I could do would be to spend a day or two at the Retreat, and go into the matter thoroughly with Father Philip."

While he was speaking, Ernshaw noticed that Dora turned deadly pale. When dinner was over Sir Arthur announced that he was going round for an hour to see Sir Godfrey Raleigh on a little Indian business. Dora felt now that her opportunity had come. It was a terrible thing to do, and yet, all things considered, present, and to come, she felt that it was her plain duty to do it, and not to permit this ghastly deception to go on any longer. Her soul revolted at the thought of Sir Arthur and Vane, Carol's half-brother,

going to the Abbey and being received as friends by Sir Reginald Garthorne. Knowing what she did, it seemed to her too hideous to be thought of, and so when Vane asked jestingly what they were going to do to amuse themselves, she got up, looking very white, and said, in a voice that had a note almost of terror in it:

"Mr. Maxwell, there is something I want to say to you; something that I must say to you. I cannot say it to you and Mr. Ernshaw together; it is bad enough to say it even to you, but when I have said it, you will be able to talk it over and try what is best to be done. I want to tell it to you first, because it concerns you most."

"By all means," said Vane, looking at her with wonder in his eyes, "come into the library. Ernshaw, I know, will excuse us; put on a pipe, and get yourself some whiskey and soda. Now, Miss Russell," he said, as he opened the door for her, "I'm at your service."

They left the room, and Ernshaw lit his pipe and sat down to speculate as to the cause of Dora's somewhat singular request, but fifteen minutes had not passed before the door was thrown open, and she came in white to the lips and shaking from head to foot, and said:

"Mr. Ernshaw, come, please, quick. Mr. Maxwell is ill, in a fit, I think. I have had to tell him something very dreadful, and it has been too much for him."

Ernshaw jumped up without a word and ran into the library. Vane was lying in a low armchair and half on the floor, his body rigid, his hands clenched, his eyes wide open and sightless, and a slight creamy froth was streaked round his lips.

"A fit!" said Ernshaw. "You must have given him some terrible shock. Run and fetch Koda Bux and we will get him to bed; then tell a servant to go for Doctor Allison; we will have him round all right before Sir Arthur comes back."

In a couple of minutes Vane was on his bed, and Koda Bux had opened his teeth and was dropping drop by drop, a green, syrupy fluid into his mouth, while Ernshaw was getting his boots off ready for the hot-water bottle that the housekeeper was preparing. By the time the Doctor had arrived, Koda Bux's elixir had already done its work. His eyes had closed and opened again with a look of recognition in them, his jaws had relaxed and his limbs were loosening. The Doctor listened to what Ernshaw had said while he was feeling his almost imperceptible pulse and Koda was wrapping his feet up in a blanket with a hot- water bottle.

"Yes, I see," said the Doctor, "intensely nervous, high- strung temperament, just what we should expect Mr. Vane Maxwell to be now.

"A very great mental shock and a fit. No, not epileptic, epileptoid, perhaps. Did you say that this man gave him something which brought him round? One of those Indian remedies, I suppose—very wonderful. I wish we knew how to make them. I suppose you won't tell us what it is, my man?"

Koda Bux's stiff moustache moved as though there were a smile under it, and he bowed his head and said:

"Sahib, it is not permitted; but by to-morrow the son of my master shall be well, for he is my father and my mother, and my life is his."

"I thought so," laughed the Doctor, who was an old friend of Sir Arthur's. "I know you, Koda Bux, and I think I can trust you. I'll look in again in a couple of hours, Mr. Ernshaw, just to see that everything is right, but I don't think that I shall be wanted."

When the Doctor left Koda Bux took charge of the patient as a right, and when they got back into the dining-room, Dora said after a short and somewhat awkward silence:

"Mr. Ernshaw, after what has happened, I suppose it is only fair that I should tell you what I told Mr. Maxwell, because when he gets better, of course, he will talk it over with you, which is very dreadful, almost incredible. I promised Carol that I should not say anything about it until she was out of England. Of course, she told Mr. Rayburn; she wouldn't marry him until he knew the whole story, and so I'm not breaking any confidence in telling you."

"Yes," he said, "I can fully understand that. And now, what is it? It is just as well that we should all know before Sir Arthur comes back, if I am to have any share in it."

"Of course, you must have," she said, almost passionately. "You could not remain Mr. Maxwell's friend and help him in the work you are going to do if you did not know, and I had better tell you before Sir Arthur comes back, so that you can think what is best to be done."

"Very well; tell me, please."

And she told him the whole miserable, pitiful, terrible story as she had heard it from Carol from beginning to end. When she reached the part about

the flat in Densmore Gardens, his face whitened and his jaws came together, and he muttered through his teeth:

"Very awful; but, of course, they didn't know. The sins of the fathers! I am afraid Sir Reginald will have a very terrible confession to make. It is difficult to believe that a human being could be guilty of such infamy."

"Still I'm afraid there is no doubt about it," said Dora. "But what's to be done? Mr. Maxwell will never let his father go to the Abbey now without telling him what I have told you, and when he knows—no, I daren't think about it. And poor Mrs. Garthorne, too; she married Mr. Garthorne in all innocence, although I still believe she would rather have married Mr. Maxwell. What would happen to her if she knew?"

"She would go mad, I believe," said Ernshaw. "It would be the most terrible thing that a woman in her position could learn. We can only hope that she shall never learn. If she ever does, God help her!"

"Yes," said Dora. "And yet, what is to happen? How can she help knowing in the end? It must come out some time, you know."

"Yes, I am afraid it must," said Ernshaw, "but still, sufficient unto the day; we shall do no good by anticipating that. We may as well leave it, as the old Greeks used to say, on the knees of the gods."

And meanwhile the gods were working it out in their own way, using Koda Bux as their instrument. Vane had gone to sleep after a second dose of the drug which had brought him out of his fit, and, as the keen Oriental intellect of Koda Bux had more than half expected, perhaps intended, he soon began to talk quite reasonably and connectedly in his sleep, and so it came to pass that a mystery which had puzzled Koda Bux for many a long year was revealed to him.

When the Doctor came Vane was sleeping quietly, and, while he was examining him, Sir Arthur arrived, and was told that he had been taken ill shortly after dinner, and this the Doctor explained was probably due to the very severe mental strain to which he had subjected himself during the last week or so. He went up to his room and found Koda Bux on guard. Koda salaamed and said:

"Protector of the poor, it is well! To-morrow Vane Sahib shall be well, but now he must sleep."

"Very well, Koda Bux," replied Sir Arthur. "I know he can have no better nurse than you, and you will watch."

"Yes, sahib, I will watch as long as it is necessary."

Then Sir Arthur went downstairs to hear from Ernshaw and Dora the now inevitable story of the sin of the man who had been his friend for more than a lifetime. He heard it as a man who knew much of men and women could and should hear such a story—in silence; and then, saying a quiet good-night to them, he went up to his room to have it out with himself just as he had done on that other terrible night when he had found Vane drunk on the hearth-rug in the Den, and had recognised that he had inherited from his mother the fatal taint of alcoholic insanity.

When he awoke the next morning, after a few hours' sleep, Koda Bux was not there to prepare his bath and lay out his clean linen. It was the first time that it had happened for nearly twenty years, and it was not until Sir Arthur came downstairs that he heard the reason. Koda Bux had vanished. No one knew when or how he had gone, but he had gone, leaving no sign or trace behind him.

"Vane," said Sir Arthur, as soon as the truth dawned upon him, "we must go down to Worcester at once. I know where Koda Bux has gone, and what he has gone to do. Garthorne's crime was vile enough, God knows, but we mustn't let murder be done if we can possibly help it. Ah, there's an ABC, Vane, just see which train he can have got to Kidderminster. I know the next one is 9.50, which we can just catch when we have had a mouthful of breakfast; that's a fast one, too; at least, fairly fast; gets there about half past one."

"5.40, arriving 12.15, 6.30 arriving 12.20," said Vane, reading from the time-table.

"In any case, I am afraid he has more than an hour's start of us at Kidderminster. We can reduce that by taking a carriage to the Abbey because he would walk, and, of course, he may not, probably will not, be able to see Garthorne immediately, so we may be in time after all. Vane, do you feel strong enough to come?"

"Of course I do, dad," he replied. "As long as I could stand I would come."

"And may I come, too, Sir Arthur?" said Dora.

"You, Miss Russell!" he exclaimed, "but why? Surely there is no need for us to ask you to witness such a painful scene as this, of course, must be."

"I am Carol's friend, Sir Arthur," said Dora, "and I think it only right to do all that I can do to prove that her story is true. I have got the photographs, and

I know the marks by which Sir Reginald can be identified. If we are not too late, such a man will, of course, answer you with a flat denial, but if I am there I don't think he can."

"Very well," said Sir Arthur. "It is very kind of you, and, of course, you can help us a great deal if you will."

"And, of course, I will," she said.

CHAPTER XXV

Koda Bux, dressed in half-European costume, had taken the 5.40 newspaper train from Paddington to Kidderminster. He had been several times at Garthorne Abbey in attendance on Sir Arthur, and so he decided to carry out his purpose in the boldest, and therefore, possibly, the easiest and the safest way. He was, of course, well known to the servants as the devoted and confidential henchman of his master, and so he would not have the slightest difficulty in obtaining access to Sir Reginald. He walked boldly up the drive, intending to say that he had a letter of great importance which his master had ordered him to place in Sir Reginald's hand. Sir Reginald would see him alone in one of the rooms, and then a cast of the roomal over his head, a pull and a wrench—and justice would be done.

Koda Bux knew quite enough of English law to be well aware that it had no adequate punishment for the terrible crime that Sir Reginald had committed—a crime made a thousand times worse by deception of half a lifetime.

According to his simple Pathan code of religion and morals there was only one proper penalty for the betrayal of a friend's honour and his, Koda Bux's, was even more jealous of his master's honour than he was of his own, for he had eaten his salt and had sheltered under his roof for many a long year, and if the law would not punish his enemy, he would. For his own life he cared nothing in comparison with the honour of his master's house, and so how could he serve him better than by giving it for that of his master's enemy?

It was after lunch-time when he reached the Abbey. Sir Reginald had, in fact, just finished lunch and had gone into the library to write some letters for the afternoon post, when the footman came to tell him that Sir Arthur Maxwell's servant had just come from London with an urgent message from his master.

"Dear me," said Sir Reginald, looking up, "that is very strange! Why couldn't he have written or telegraphed? It must be something very serious, I am afraid. Ah—yes, Ambrose, tell him to sit down in the hall, I'll see him in a few minutes."

The door closed, and, as it did so, out of the black, long, buried past there came a pale flash of rising fear.

Sir Reginald was one of those men who have practically no thought or feeling outside the circle of their own desires and ambitions. He had lived on good terms with his fellow men, not out of any respect for them, but simply

because it was more convenient and comfortable for himself. He had committed the worst of crimes against his friend, Sir Arthur Maxwell, in perfect callousness, simply because the woman Maxwell had married and inspired him with the only passion, the only enthusiasm of which he was capable. He had never felt a single pang of remorse for it. The sinner who sins through absolute selfishness as he had done never does. In fact, his only uncomfortable feeling in connection with the whole affair had been the fear of discovery, and that, as the years had gone on, had died away until it had become only an evil memory to him. And yet, why did Koda Bux, the man who had so nearly discovered his infamy twenty-two years ago, come here alone to the Abbey to-day?

Ah, yes, to-day! A diary lay open on the writing-table before him. The 28th of June. The very day—but that of course was merely a coincidence. Well, he would hear what Koda Bux had to say. He signed a letter, put it into an envelope, and addressed it. Then he touched the bell. Ambrose appeared, and he said:

"You can show the man in now."

"Very good, Sir Reginald," replied the man, and vanished.

A few moments later the door opened again and Koda Bux came in, looked at Sir Reginald for a few moments straight in the eyes, and then salaamed with subtle oriental humility.

"May my face be bright in your eyes, protector of the poor and husband of the widow!" he said, as he raised himself erect again. "I have brought a message from my master."

"Well, Koda Bux," said Sir Reginald, a trifle uneasily, for he didn't quite like the extreme gravity with which the Pathan spoke.

"I suppose it must be something important and confidential, if he has sent you here instead of writing or telegraphing. Of course, you have a letter from him?"

"No, Sahib," replied Koda Bux, fingering at a blue silk handkerchief that was tucked into his waist-band. "The message was of too great importance to be trusted to a letter which might be lost, and so my master trusted it to the soul of his servant."

"That's rather a strange way for one gentleman to send a message to another in this country and in these days, Koda Bux," said Sir Reginald, getting up from his chair at the writing-table and moving towards the bell.

Instantly, with a swift sinuous movement, Koda Bux had passed before the fireplace and put himself between Sir Reginald and the bell.

"The Sahib will not call his servants until he has heard the message," he said, not in the cringing tone of the servant, but in the straight-spoken words of the soldier. Meanwhile, the fingers of his left hand were almost imperceptibly drawing the blue handkerchief out of his girdle.

Sir Reginald saw this, and a sudden fear streamed into his soul. His own Indian experience told him that this man might be a Thug, and that if so, a little roll of blue silk would be a swifter, deadlier, and more untraceable weapon than knife or poison, and his thoughts went back to the 28th of June, twenty-two years before.

"I am not going to be spoken to like that in my own house and by a nigger!" he exclaimed, seeking to cover his fear by a show of anger. "I don't believe in you or your message. If you have a letter from your master, give it to me, if you haven't, I shan't listen to you. What right have you to come here into my library pretending to have a message from your master, when you haven't even a letter, or his card, or one written word from him?"

"Illustrious," said Koda Bux, with a sudden change of manner, salaaming low and moving backwards towards the door, "the slave of my master forgot himself in the urgency of his message, which my lord, his friend, has not yet heard."

There was an almost imperceptible emphasis on the word "friend" which sent a little shiver through such rudiments of soul as Sir Reginald possessed. He said roughly:

"Very well, then, if you have brought a message what is it? I can't waste half the morning with you."

"The message is short, Sahib," replied Koda Bux, salaaming again, and moving a little nearer towards the door. "I am to ask you what you did at Simla two-and-twenty years ago this night—what you have done with the Mem Sahib who was faithful to my lord's honour when you, dog and son of a dog, betrayed it—and what has become of her daughter and yours? Oh, cursed of the gods, thou knowest these things as thou knowest the two marks of the African spear on thy left arm—but thou dost not know the depth of infamy which thy sin dug for thine own son to fall into."

As he was saying this Koda Bux backed close to the door, locked it behind him, and took the key out.

Bad as he was, the last words of Koda Bux hit Sir Reginald harder even than the others. His son, the heir to his name and fortune, what had he to do with that old sin of his committed before he was born?

"You must be mad or opium-drunk, Koda Bux," he whispered hoarsely, "to talk like that. Yes, it is the 28th of June, and I have two spear marks on my arm—but I am rich, I can make you a prince in your own land. Come, you know something about me. That is why you came here; but what has my son Reginald to do with it? If I have sinned, what is that to him?"

"In the book of the God of the Christians," said Koda Bux, very slowly, and approaching him with an almost hypnotic stare in his eyes, "in that book it is written that the chief God of the Christians will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children. This woman bore you a daughter; your lawful wife bore you a son. The woman who was once the wife of Maxwell Sahib was a drunkard, and now she's a mad-woman. Your own wife bore you a son, and in London your daughter and your son, not knowing each other, came together. Your daughter was what the good English call an outcast, and, knowing nothing of your sin, they lived—"

"God in heaven! can that be true?" murmured Sir Reginald, sinking back against the mantel-piece just as he was going-to pull the bell.

"No, it can't be! Koda Bux, you are lying; no such horrible thing as that could be."

"My gods are not thine, if thou hast any, oh, unsainted one!" said Koda Bux, "but, like the gods of the Christians, they can avenge when the cup of sin is full. Yes, it is true. Your son and your daughter—your son, who is now married to her who should have been the wife of Vane Sahib. There is no doubt, and it can be proved. But that is only a part of your punishment, destroyer of happiness and afflictor of many lives. That is a thought which thou wilt take to Hell with thee, and it shall eat into thy soul for ever and ever, and when I have sent thee to Hell I will tell thy son and the woman he stole from Vane Sahib when he persuaded him to take strong drink that morning at the college of Oxford. Yes, I have heard it all. I, who am only a nigger! Dog and son of a dog, is not thy soul blacker than my skin? And now the hour has struck. Thy breath is already in thy mouth!"

Koda Bux snatched the handkerchief from his waist-band and began to creep towards him, his Beard and moustache bristling like the back of a tiger, and his big, fierce eyes gleaming red. Sir Reginald knew that if he once got within throwing distance of that fatal strip of silk he would be dead in an

instant without a sound. He made a despairing spring for the bell-rope, grasped it, and dragged it from its connection.

At the same moment there was a peal at the hall bell, followed by a thunderous knocking. Enid, who was in the morning-room with her husband, saw a two-horsed carriage come up the drive at a gallop, and the moment it had stopped Vane jumped out and rang and knocked. Then out of the carriage came Sir Arthur and a lady whom she had never seen before, but whom Garthorne, looking over her shoulder out of the window, recognised only too quickly.

"What on earth can Sir Arthur and Vane have come for in such a hurry as that!" she exclaimed. "Why, it might be a matter of life and death, and only such a short time after dear old Koda Bux, too. What can be the matter, Reginald?"

But Garthorne had already left the room, his heart shaking with apprehension. He ran up into the hall to open the door before one of the servants could do it.

"Ah, Sir Arthur, Vane—and Miss Russell—I believe it is——"

"Yes, Mr. Garthorne," said Sir Arthur coldly but quickly, as they entered the hall. "We have come to stop a murder if we can. I hope we are in time. Where is your father, and has Koda Bux been here?"

"Koda Bux has been in the library with my father for about half-an- hour, I believe," said Reginald. "What is the matter?"

"It is a matter of life or death," answered Vane, looking at him with burning eyes and speaking with twitching lips. "Perhaps something worse even than that. Where are they?—quick, or we shall be too late!"

"They are in the library," said Garthorne, as Enid came running out of the morning-room, saying:

"Oh, Sir Arthur and Vane, good morning! How are you? What a very sudden visit. I knew Sir Reginald asked you, but——"

"Never mind about that now, Enid," said Garthorne almost roughly. "Come along, Sir Arthur, this is the library."

He crossed the great hall, and went down one of the corridors leading from it, and the footman was already at one of the doors trying to open it. It was locked. Garthorne hammered on it with his fists and shouted, but there was no reply.

"I heard the library bell ring, sir," said Ambrose, "just as the front door bell went—after that Indian person had been with Sir Reginald some time."

"Never mind about that," said Garthorne; "run round to the windows, and if any of them are open get in and unlock the door."

But before he had reached the hall door the library door was thrown open. Koda Bux salaamed, and, pointing to the lifeless shape of Sir Reginald, lying on the hearth-rug, he said to Sir Arthur:

"Protector of the poor, justice has been done. The enemy of thy house is dead. Before he died he confessed his sin. Has not thy servant done rightly?"

"You have done murder, Koda Bux," said Sir Arthur sternly, pushing him aside and going to where Sir Reginald lay. He tried to lift him, but it was no use. There was the mark of the roomal round his neck, the staring eyes and the half-protruding tongue. Justice, from Koda Bux's point of view, had been done. There was nothing more to do but to have him carried up to his room and send for the police. Garthorne gripped hold of Koda Bux, and called to one of the servants for a rope to tie him up until the police came, but the Pathan twisted himself free with scarcely an effort.

"There is no need for that, Sahib; I shall not run away," said Koda Bux, drawing himself up and saluting Sir Arthur for the last time. "I came here to give my life for the one I have taken, so that justice might be done, and I have done it. In the next worlds and in the next lives we may meet again, and then you will know that neither did I kill your father nor die myself without good cause. Of the rest the gods will judge."

He made a movement with his jaws and crunched something between his teeth. They saw a movement of swallowing in his throat. A swift spasm passed over his features; his limbs stiffened into rigidity, and as he stood before them so he fell, as a wooden image might have done. And so died Koda Bux the Pathan, loyal avenger of his master's honour.

For a few moments there was silence—every tongue chained, every eye fixed by the sudden horror of the situation. Garthorne, roused by fear and anger, for a swift instinct told him that Dora had not come to the Abbey for nothing, was able to speak first. He was Sir Reginald now—but why, and how? When a man of this nature is very frightened, he often takes refuge in rage, and that is what Garthorne did. He turned on Sir Arthur and Vane, his hands clenched, and his lips drawn back from his teeth, and said, in a voice which Enid had never heard from him before:

"What does all this mean, Sir Arthur? My father murdered in his own house; his murderer tells you that he has 'done justice,' and avenged your honour—then poisons himself. If any wrong has been done, how did that nigger servant of yours get to know of it? Why should he have been let loose to murder my father? If you had anything against him, why didn't you charge him with it yourself, as a man and gentleman should? You must have been in it the whole lot of you or you wouldn't have been here!

"But, perhaps," he went on, with a sudden change of tone, "you would rather tell the police when they come; there must be some reason, I suppose, for your bringing that woman, a common prostitute, into my house, and into the presence of my wife."

"Oh, you fool, you hypocrite, you have asked for the punishment of your sin, and you shall have it!"

Dora had taken a couple of strides towards him, and faced him—cheeks blazing, and eyes flaming.

"Prostitute! yes, I was; but how do you know it? Because you lived in the same house with me. Yes, up to the very week of your wedding, with me and that man's daughter. You have asked why he was killed. He was killed righteously, because he wasn't fit to live. No, you didn't know that then, and so far you are innocent; but you are guilty of a crime nearly as great. Your father stole Carol's mother from her husband; you stole your wife from the man she loved and would have married but for you.

"It was you who made Vane Maxwell drunk that morning at Oxford, in the hope of wrecking his career. You didn't do that, but you gained your end all the same, and your sin is just as great. How do I know this—how do we know it? I will tell you. Carol Vane, Mr. Maxwell's sister, and yours, went to your wedding. Carol recognised him as her father. Look, there is his photograph taken with her, when Carol was ten years old. If you don't believe that, look at his left arm, and you will find two spear stabs on it, and if that is not enough, I can bring police evidence from France to prove that he committed the crime for which he has died, and now, you—son of a seducer, libertine and thief of another man's love—you have got your answer and your punishment!"

Dora's words, spoken in a moment of rare, but ungovernable passion, had leaped from her lips in such a fast and furious torrent of denunciation, that before the first few moments of the horror she had caused were passed, she had done.

Enid heard her to the end, her voice sounding ever farther and farther away, until at last it died out into a faint hum and then a silence. Vane ran to her, and caught her just as she was swaying before she fell, and carried her to a sofa. It was the first time he had held her in his arms since he had had a lover's right to do so, and all the man-soul in him rose in a desperate revolt of love and pity against the coldly calculating villainy of the man who had used the vilest of means to rob him of his love.

The moment he had laid her on the sofa, Dora was at her side, loosening the high collar of her dress and rubbing her hands. Garthorne, crushed into silence by the terrible vehemence of Dora's accusation, had dropped into an armchair close by his father's body. Sir Arthur, half-dazed with the horror of it all, threw open the door with a vague idea of getting into the fresh air out of that room of death. As he did so, the hall door opened, and an Inspector of Police followed by two constables and a gentleman in plain clothes entered. The sight of the uniformed incarnation of the Law brought him back instantly to the realities of the situation. The Inspector touched his cap, and said, briefly, and with official precision:

"Good morning, Sir Arthur. This is Dr. Saunders, the Coroner. I met him on my way up from the village, and asked him to come with me. Very dreadful case, Sir; but I hope the bodies have not been disturbed?"

"Oh, no," said Sir Arthur, "they have not been touched, but Mrs. Garthorne is lying in the same room in a faint. I suppose we may take her out before you make your examination?"

"Why, certainly, Sir Arthur," said the Coroner. "Of course, we will take your word for that. But I believe Mr. Reginald Garthorne is at the Abbey, is he not?"

"Yes," replied Sir Arthur, in a changed tone, "he is there, in the library, but of course—well, I mean—what has happened has affected him terribly, and I don't think he will be able to give you very much assistance at present. In fact, he is almost in a state of collapse himself."

"That is only natural, under the very painful circumstances," said the Inspector, "please don't put him about at all, Sir Arthur. The last thing we should wish would be to put the family to any inconvenience or unpleasantness, and I am sure Dr. Saunders will arrange that the inquest will be as private and quiet as possible."

And so it was, but, somehow, the ghastly truth of it all leaked out, and for a week after the inquest the horrible story of Sir Reginald's crime and its consequences made sport of the daintiest kind for the readers of the gutter

rags, those microbes of journalism, which, like those of cancer and consumption, can only live on the corruption or decay of the body-corporate of Society.

Only one name and one fact never came out, and that was due to Ernest Reed's uncompromising declaration that he would shoot any man who said anything in print about the identity of Carol Vane with the daughter of Sir Reginald Garthorne's victim. He worked by telegraph and otherwise for twenty-four hours on end, and the result was that his brother pressmen all over the country, being mostly gentlemen, recognised the chivalry of his attempt, and so chivalrously suppressed that part of the truth. And so effectually was it suppressed, that it was not until about a year afterwards that Mr. Ernest Reed found a rather difficult matrimonial puzzle solved for him by the receipt of Mr. Cecil Rayburn's cheque for a thousand pounds.

EPILOGUE

A little more than a year had passed since the inquest on Sir Reginald and Koda Bux. For Vane Maxwell, the Missionary to Midas, as every one now called him, it had been a continued series of tribulations and triumphs. From Land's End to John o' Groats, and from Cork Harbour to Aberdeen he had preached the Gospel that he had found in the Sermon on the Mount. He had, in truth, proved himself to be the Savonarola of the twentieth century, not only in words, but also in the effects of his teaching.

He had asked tens and hundreds of thousands of professing Christians, just as he had asked the congregation of St. Chrysostom, to choose honestly between their creed and their wealth, to be honest, as he had said then, with themselves or with God; to choose openly and in the face of all men between the service of God and of Mammon. And his appeal had been answered throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Never since the days of John Wesley had there been such a re-awakening of religious, really religious, feeling in the country. Just as the rich Italians brought their treasures of gold and silver and jewels and heaped them up under the pulpit of Savonarola in the market-places, so hundreds of men and women of every social degree recognised the plain fact that they could not be at the same time honestly rich and honestly Christians, and so, instead of material treasure, they had sent their cheques to Vane.

Before the year was over he found himself nominally the richest man in the United Kingdom. He had more than five millions sterling at his absolute disposal, almost countless thousands of pounds given up for conscience' sake because he had said that honest Christians could not own them; and he and Father Philip, Father Baldwin and Ernshaw, having given many hours and days of anxious consideration to the very pressing question as to which was the best way of disposing of this suddenly, and, as they all confessed, unexpectedly acquired wealth, decided to devote it to the extirpation, so far as was possible in England, of that Cancer in Christianity which Christians of the canting sort call the Social Evil.

As Jesus of Nazareth had said to the woman taken in adultery, "Go thou and sin no more!" so the Missionary and his helpers said:

"You have sinned more through necessity than choice, and the Society which denies you redemption is a greater sinner than you, since it drives you into deeper sin. There is no hope for you here. Civilization has no place for you, save the streets or the 'homes,' which are, if anything, more degrading than the streets.

"Those who are willing to save themselves we will save so far as earthly power can help you. We will give you homes where you will not be known, where, perhaps, you may begin to lead a new life, where it may be that you will become wives and mothers, as good as those who now, when they pass you in the street, draw their skirts aside fearing lest they should touch

yours. And, if not that, at least we will save you from the horrible necessity of keeping alive, by living a life of degradation."

The foregoing paragraphs are, to all intents and purposes, a précis of a charter of release to the inhabitants of the twentieth century Christian Inferno which was drawn up by Dora Russell the day before she yielded to Ernshaw's year-long wooing, and consented to be his helpmeet as well as his helper.

It was scattered broadcast in hundreds of thousands all over the country. Storms of protest burst forth from all the citadels of orthodoxy and respectability. It seemed monstrous that these women, who had so far defied all the efforts of official Christianity to redeem them, should be bribed—as many put it—bribed back into the way of virtue, if that were possible, with the millions which had been coaxed out of the pockets of sentimental Christians by this Mad Missionary of Mayfair—as one of the smartest of Society journals had named him.

But, for all that, the Mad Missionary said very quietly to Ernshaw a few hours before he intended to marry him to Dora:

"These good Christians, as they think themselves, are wofully wrong. It seems absolutely impossible to get them to see this matter in its proper perspective. They can't or won't see that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is one of absolute necessity—the choice between that and misery and starvation. They don't see that this accursed commercial system of ours condemns thousands of girls——"

"Yes," interrupted Dora, "I know what you are going to say. I was a shop- girl myself once, a slave, a machine that was not allowed to have a will or even a soul of its own, and I——"

Before she could go on, the door of the Den at Warwick Gardens—where the conversation had taken place—opened, and Sir Arthur came in with some letters in his hands.

"I just met the postman on the doorstep," he said, "and he gave me these.

"Here's one for you, Vane. There's one for me, and one for Miss Russell—almost the last time I shall call you that, Miss Dora, eh?"

Vane tore his envelope open first. As he unfolded a sheet of note-paper, a cheque dropped out. The letter was in Carol's handwriting. His eye ran over the first few lines, and he said:

"Good news! Rayburn and Carol are coming home next week and bringing a fine boy with them—at least, that is what the fond mother says—and—eh?—Rayburn has made another half million out there, and, just look, Ernshaw—yes, it is—a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds, to be used, as she says here in the postscript, 'as before.'"

"Oh, I'm so glad," exclaimed Dora, as she was opening her own envelope. "Fancy having Carol back again. Mark, I won't marry you till she comes. You

must put everything off. I won't hear of it and—oh—look!" she went on, after a little pause, "Sir Arthur, read that, please. Isn't it awful?"
"The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceeding small," said Sir Arthur when he had looked over the sheet of note-paper. "Shall I read it, Miss Russell?"
Dora nodded, and he read aloud:
"I have just heard that my husband, whom, as you know, I have not seen since that terrible day at the Abbey, has died in a fit of delirium tremens. The lawyers tell me that everything will be mine. If so, Garthorne Abbey shall go back to the Church if Vane will take it, and if you will let me come and help you in your work."

"Thank God!" said Sir Arthur, as he gave the letter back, "not for his death, for that was, after all that we have heard, inevitable; but for what Enid has done. Vane, she is your latest and, perhaps, after all, your worthiest convert. And now, what's this?"

He tore open his own envelope, which was addressed in the handwriting of one of his solicitor's clerks. The letter was very brief and formal, but before he had read it through his face turned grey under the bronze of his skin. He passed it over to Vane, and left the room without a word.

Vane looked at the few formal lines, and, as he folded the letter up with trembling fingers, he said almost in a whisper:

"The tragedy is over. My mother is dead."

THE END

Freeditorial