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The benefactor; a tale of a small circle.



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THE BENEFACTOR.

THE BENEFACTOR

A TALE OF A SMALL CIRCLE

BY

FORD MADOX HUEFFER,

AUTHOR OF "THE CINQUE PORTS," "THE SOUL OF LONDON," ETC.

"It is no easy thing to drive sheep thro' the traffic of streets. I have known the most expert drover come to terrible grief,"—*The Drovers' Manual*.

LONDON
BROWN, LANGHAM & CO.,
MCMV.

TO
W. M. ROSSETTI,
AFFECTIONATELY AND WITH
GRATITUDE.

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THE BENEFactor.



PART I.

THE JEWELLER AND HIS STONES,

THE BENEFCTOR.

PART I.

THE JEWELLER AND HIS STONES.

I.

"OH, I don't suspect him—What's his name? Hailes?—of an eye to your spoons," Mrs. Gregory Moffat said to her husband's brother; "but I've said a hundred times, George, that I don't see why you should turn your house into an asylum. What claim has he?"

George Moffat said: "Everyone has claims of one sort or another," with his large air of peaceable and majestic obstinacy. He had argued the matter too often.

"Precisely," Mrs. Moffat snapped in her high, convicting voice. "I suppose he writes, or something. You'd do much more good if you did some work of your own" (George made a placid and amused gesture of negation) "instead," Mrs. Moffat finished, "of wasting all your time and most of your money on these creatures. You know they usually turn out rank impostors."

She cast meaning glances, first at her husband, then at Mrs. Henwick. Her husband, Gregory Moffat, beamed through gold-rimmed spectacles. He held his head as the

very short-sighted do, and seemed on the point of uttering a small joke. He did not. Mrs. Henwick, with the air, not so much of a tiny marchioness as of an enlarged, but still tiny, *marquise*, pointed a little foot at the brilliant carpet. She might have been pointing at it as a proof that George Moffat was still the same. His drawing-room was not up-to-date, yet it was still gloriously sumptuous, and, in a grand way, "artistic." George had given a unique price for his carpet to one of his Arts-and-Crafts portégés—the two ladies called them parasites, and said they had ruined George.

Mrs. Moffat had not seen her brother-in-law for some years, but she recognised that he remained emphatically the same. He had not aged markedly, though he was beginning to suggest that softening of the outlines that the middle age confers—he was quite turned forty-five. But George was the same, glamour and all. Mrs. Moffat had long since outlived her appreciation of the glamour, but her meaning glances to her companions indicated that she very much acknowledged George's sameness. Everyone, save those who for the moment were sufficiently new to him to lie under his inevitable and tremendous spell, always indicated that George was the same. They indicated it by glances, shrugs or smiles. Yet it can hardly be said that Mrs. Moffat sighed. George's famous show house stood

just outside a little town right down on the extreme south coast. Mrs. Moffat, in coming to see him, had taken roads that her *chauffeur* had desolately intimated would ruin the entrails of *any* automobile. She had dragged with her her husband, who didn't express any desire to see his brother, and her friend who had already been mixed up in one of the mysterious broils that seemed always to move in the vicinity of George ; she had made a curve of seventy miles on these disastrous south-eastern roads. She herself did not quite know what she wanted of George. Perhaps it was only a curiosity to see how he was "getting on"—to see whether it might be practicable to use him at last as a "lion." For all she knew, he might have published something lately, or might be going to do so soon. He had begun his career so well, and the articles that he still very occasionally wrote for the more majestic reviews were received, she believed, with much respect. She knew he had some standing of a desirable, rather donnish kind. The trouble was that you couldn't tell just where he stood.

She had formulated a mere strategetic idea. She was one of those leading ladies in whose great drawing-rooms new religions are born, and new feminine-social-political and generally-in-the-swim movements serve to make transitory notorieties. It might be a pleasant feature of her autumn campaign if George, re-

united to his wife, could be got to figure among her guests. Of his making an impression she had no doubt.

He certainly overwhelmed anyone who was new to him. And Mrs. Moffat could claim triumphantly that all her acquaintance—except her permanent body-guard of the really good people—were the very newest of the very new. They couldn't possibly have had either time or opportunity to let George's attractions be exercised and lose their charm.

She would even receive George not re-united to Mrs. George.

There had been nothing piquant about the rupture of her brother-in-law and his wife. Mrs. George had complained of no infidelities. They simply could not get on together. George was said to have acted nobly—to have placed two-thirds of his capital in the hands of his departing wife. Mrs. Moffat knew the truth of this because her husband was Mrs. George Moffat's trustee. George's few remaining thousands had continued to pass steadily into the hands of George's innumerable hangers-on; whilst Mrs. George's "managing" had as steadily added to her share. She led a determined, forceful life, in a large, bleak, white house, in the recesses of a northern moor, among her own people.

Mrs. Gregory Moffat's world was a matter of a western hill in Town, and a house in a western

county where fourteen gardeners raised things under glass in the season, and ladies, caucus-meetings in the shooting months. She shivered at the thought of Mrs. George's life, though she recognised the eligibility, for those who could stand it, of her old-fashioned county familydom.

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She looked round George's drawing room, wondering how in the world he managed to exist. The oak beams of the ceiling—George was understood to have paid a fabulous price for them—remained. But the more noticeable of George's treasures had vanished. Sir Graham's famous "Heloise" had departed from above the great open hearth. A number of Grigson-Turner's pictures of lamp-flames still hung out their green-gold frames, but they were such remarkably premature efforts of that master as to be practically valueless in the sale room. Grigson-Turner had been one of the very earliest of the innumerable strugglers George had helped to fame. Before Grigson-Turner had finally and so lamentably dropped poor George, George had—she could do Turner *that* justice—possessed some really representative third period Turners. But in one of his blazes George had given them to that odious Lamley Smith—to improve Smith's sense of line, George said. That had, as usual, been just before Smith had become famous, and, as usual, just before his disgraceful treatment of poor George. Smith's own contribu-

tion—George had paid about four times the market value for it—remained. It was the giant oak book-case with carvings rendering bubbly sea-weed. A motto: "Troth bideth frendeshepe," sprawled large red Gothic letters in a diagonal droop across the glass and seriously interfered with the view of the books. It stood in a dim corner of the magnificent room. The white vellum book backs of the poets since become notorious, and the yellow and blacks of the novelists now forgotten nearly three seasons ago, had given place to a number in colours as yet unfamiliar. These represented presentation copies in repayment, mostly of loans from George to the crop of young lions who would roar this year, next year, were just beginning to roar, or might never roar at all. George had the gift for discovering new talent. The pity was that as soon as the men he had helped stood on their own feet they invariably dropped George and generally insulted him.

It irritated her that George himself had never aped them. "Heaven knows," she thought, "He's nursed so many litters of lions that he might have caught the trick of roaring." Yet, for "reception" purposes George's soft, indefinite, yet most undoubted eminence was well worth having.

George apparently couldn't and wouldn't fade. He was always somebody—the Mr. Moffat. Even if no one in her large drawing room which overlooked twelve miles of park,

chimney-tops, and smoke ; even if no one knew exactly what George *had* done, they had at least a feeling that the want of knowledge left them inferior. It was true there were the dangers.

George's rare visits at Campden Hill had been followed by incomprehensible imbroglis. The affairs sometimes involved families, sometimes whole coteries. On the last occasion her best friend, Mrs. Henwick ; Mrs. Henwick's husband, who normally counted no more than her own ; and Mr. Frewer Hoey, her own particular friend, had, as it were, rushed violently to George's magnet. They evolved three political pamphlets between them—George correcting the "style"—and then parted with all sorts of mutual injuries. The pamphlets had even shaken some of her own "tail." Yet that George himself had been to blame she was not prepared to advance ; it might have been coincidence. George always was a magnet ; people generally rushed to him. They as generally quarrelled, but, most frequently, with George himself.

She accepted George's invitation to stay the night, and sent her husband out to tell the *chauffeur* that he could put himself up at the inn. Left alone with Mrs. Henwick and George, she returned to the charge.

"I really should have thought you would have learned, George, not to pick up these

young strays, after all the eye-openers you have had." Her brother-in-law stirred his considerable form uneasily, and Mrs. Moffat noticed that one of his cuffs was very minutely frayed. It reminded her of Mrs. George's despairing :—

"He would give the shirt off his back. He's incorrigible."

"My dear Ella," he got under weigh, "this young man, Hailes, if the matter's really worth discussing, has a quite genuine talent. He's, as the saying is, at a loose end. Well, I'm tiding him over. If I didn't, he'd probably *never* have a chance." He uttered his slang words with the amused, and as if savouring, air of a man very choice in his language. He could afford to condescend.

George Moffat excused his incorrigibility by his tradition. He was the elder son of Sir Graham Moffat, the late great portrait painter. Sir Graham had left a highly respectable fortune to be divided between George and Gregory, and a sister who had quarrelled with George at a very early period. But Sir Graham had known days of extreme want. He had been one of a brilliant young band who had undoubtedly established a sort of tradition—that of giving lifts to youth and brilliance even at the cost of their shirts. It was all recorded in the biography of Sir Graham by George. The traces of loans,

offered more often than repaid, formed a great proportion of Sir Graham's earlier correspondence, and George, in struggling through the mass of his father's letters to get material for his book, had had the great tradition constantly before his eyes. And during his childhood George's father had impressed upon him that you must never lose a chance of helping any lame dog over a stile, because you never know what he might not become. But whether that alone was responsible for George's generosity, was much debated in his family. His sister Mary said that meddlingness was at the bottom of his character.

George had attempted to advise her in her first love affair. She had had a slight quarrel with her suitor—about the right of women to vote—and George had given her hints as to how the man should be managed. The first lover, worn out by George's subtle handling, had accepted an official position on the Gold Coast, and had died there. Unfortunately, he had never had a successor, and Mary had not spoken to her brother for twenty years.

George inherited a reputable fortune from his father. He wrote an official biography, splendid in appearance and notable for its avoidance of delicate topics. The members of the brilliant young band had quarrelled lamentably when they had reached maturity and eminence. Afterwards George found a certain glamour descend upon him, a glamour, if not

distinct from that of his father, at least partially his own. His verse was considered to give tone to the best of the magazines and reviews of those old-fashioned days ; but he wrote very little, and his writing was so very little an essential part of the man that, as Mrs. Moffat said, hardly any of her own friends knew that he wrote at all.

Tall, with hair that waved away from his forehead, and in his moments of inspiration appeared almost like the wings on a Hermes' cap ; with a chestnut beard that in the early 'eighties was called Vandyke ; with a nose and forehead that might pass as Grecian, yet with an air that one might have mistaken for Southern French, George had married years ago a brilliantly beautiful Scottish girl in the young softness of her strong character. She had appealed to him because the simplicity and directness of her speech and her decision of character made a quaint contrast with her youth and suppleness. Her family accepted him because of the brilliance of his father, who passed his summers on their moors.

On her adolescent eyes George had produced the effect of a godhead. In his father's studio he had seen all the world sitting for its portrait, and he had splendid anecdotes of the great. He rather disliked the deerstalkers and heather-forest lords, who were his wife's people, and he carried away to the south his bride and her emotions. Long before then he had

selected a unique spot for them to live in. Wickham was a town that had dwindled to a village. Glorious panoplies of history seemed there to moulder and to die tenderly, among the wall-flowers on gateways, and ruins that were crumbling and quaint rather than architectural, grand or complete.

He bought the best house in the place. It was old, battered, rat-ridden, and spacious. It had been a fortified dwelling. It had been a manor house, and, when George bought it, it had sunk into the hands of three families of agricultural labourers. It had been plastered and tarred in places, but its old stones were intact, and, under the whitewash and paper of the inside, George discovered the ancient beams and fireplaces as large as small rooms. It was the house in which later the interview with Mrs. Gregory Moffat had taken place. It stood beyond a strip of park, at the end of a gapped and spacious street of cottages. Its buttresses rose to the roof line, and a background of immense elms sheltered it, fan-like, from the west winds.

To Mrs. George, for the first few years, the house was a palace of romance. She was excited at finding the old fireplaces and carved corbels, and to discover primitive and ugly frescoes under coatings of wall-paper seemed the most important thing in life. She was very young; she admired looking up to her husband; she came to it out of a dull northern

castle, where turnip fields ran almost up to the drawing-room windows, and where her family had been so considerable that there had been no one she could talk to within fifteen miles of moor roads.

But gradually she became very religious, and the marriage turned out a lamentable mistake. George's tolerance made her horribly unhappy, and in the conversations of the young men whom he aided she imagined constantly that she detected loose ideas and impiety. She grew at last to consider that, in helping them to write, George was committing a sacrilege. She left him after five years that were miserable to them both.

George's large and tolerant figure had, in fact, got on her nerves. She could not stand it. She went back to her own people—the people whose scientific farming carried turnips up to their back windows. Charity she could understand, a whole-hearted district visiting, a bestowing to help the deserving poor of a tithe of one's goods. But it seemed to her that with George it was give, give, give—to the undeserving as to the meritorious, a continual giving of his time, his counsel, his brains, his money, and, above all, of his excuses. He would find pity for an adulteress, she said, and he would give the shirt off his back. He could not give any reason for it, and she could not believe that it did any good.

Her brother approached him on the subject of a separate establishment. George gave her not her jointure alone, but a considerably larger sum. It left him almost poor, but she accepted the sacrifice because she considered that the money would otherwise dwindle into the hands of his parasites. Her family made efforts to reconcile them, and George wrote to her at times, but as the years went on she grew more and more intolerant. One day George's name headed a petition for the release of a man who had been committed to gaol for militant agnosticism. The petition was successful, and after that she did not answer his letters.

Gregory Moffat, George's younger brother, was a silent figure. He had no glamour, no physique, and no anecdotes to speak of. His clipped golden whiskers, slightly bald head, and peeringly jocular manner permitted him to attract no attention in his own house. He passed an unobtrusive life between his "business" and his "study." Extraordinarily noisy "meetings," which, his wife's voice windily dominated, set the tone of his lofty white and ormolu reception rooms, were echoed in reverberations on the tall white and gilt-brass staircases, and eddied in overflows during the day-time round the empty dining-room tables.

When he came in from business, ambling up to dress, he brushed against groups of ladies

still debating on the landings, or effaced himself against the gilt dados as they brushed downwards past him. He beamed upon them through spectacles at the extreme tip of his button nose. Hardly more than two or three of them were even hazily aware of his identity. Half their number would have disputed the assertion that a certain Mr. Frewer Hoey was not Mr. Moffat—was not, in fact, *the* Mr. Moffat, “who, don’t you remember, wrote that delightful” and then a pause of doubt as to what it was he *had* written.

Mr. Frewer Hoey was seen with her everywhere, a dark person with an extremely rigid spine, acting as her private secretary in her political activities. He was a quite good composer of ballads in his leisure moments. The confusion of identities, inextricable as it was, was excusable.

There was Mr. Gregory Moffat, who was a lay figure ; there was *the* Mr. Moffat, who had written something. That was George. There was also *the* Mrs. Moffat. Had she not all but engineered the famous “Lady’s Qualification, &c., Act” through the lower house ? And were not her considerable figure, that remotely suggested a gathering of pillows tightly packed, her large hats and gestures, her great mass of golden hair, whose genuineness not even her friends questioned, her brilliant cheeks and pronounced eyebrows, and her high voice familiar to everybody, every-

where that anyone went? It was a pardonable error to mistake the usual companion of Mrs. Moffat for Mr. Moffat, and Mr. Moffat for *the* Mr. Moffat. One had seen Mr. Frewer Hoey carrying her wraps. He collected paper slips when there was any voting; at the meetings he stood like a stiff, dark sentry beside her pulpit; he directed the fourteen gardeners in the West.

But Mr. Frewer Hoey had vanished two months before Mrs. Moffat sat in George's drawing room. The noise of the final rupture—or at least Mrs. Moffat's part of it—was said to have penetrated the walls of the adjoining house at Campden Hill. He had been seen carrying the cloak of a tall, swaying, reedy lady, a Mrs. Minver, of Queen's Gate. What Mrs. Moffat felt when she swept past them in her victoria is not recorded. Neither is what Mr. Moffat said. Apparently he had never said anything that mattered since his marriage, and no one appears to have known him before that union.

He had been educated by Sir Graham as a solicitor, and his name appeared with others of weight on a brass door-plate in Bedford Row. His person accorded with the plate, he looked like a family adviser. But he was known to have some connection with a gallery that had lately blazed into being in Bond Street. He had a manner of closely peering at objects of art and *vertu* whenever he came across them,

and this had got him, even among his wife's friends, the reputation of a connoisseur. It is certain that the enormous aggravation of his income had taken place about the time that "really smart" people discovered the value of Raeburns and Hoppners.

He, however, never discoverably unbosomed himself. He may or may not have engineered the "boom" in those artists. A marquis, an earl, and several honourables directed the affairs of the Bond Street Gallery, and perhaps it was only a coincidence that they also directed the taste of the public that counted in such matters. Gregory Moffat had perhaps inherited the prodigious *flair* that the gallery undoubtedly possessed for the discovery of the decorative bric-a-brac that was going to be the rage. It might be going too far to say that the peers in question admitted into the elect Wyndham Chetwynd set only those new people who paid record prices for works of art exhibited in the gallery. That was said, though. Gregory Moffat's income certainly became considerable, and he was undoubtedly adviser to the Marquis and the Earl. There was, for instance, the affair of a quite hopelessly unpaying journal called the *Salon*. People knew that it was the property of Mr. Gregory Moffat. It was edited by a queer, hirsute, unpresentable personage, Thwaite, author of the "Love Poems of Sidonia," which were creating a prodigious and deserved flutter. Thwaite was,

however, said to be one of Mrs. Moffat's young men. He had certainly once made an appearance in Mrs. Moffat's drawing room.

Thwaite really was one of George's young men. He had been recommended to Gregory by George when the purchase of the *Salon* had been made by Gregory a year before.

Thwaite, in fact, had been and remained George's one ewe-lamb. With a delicately sensitive talent he had passed through an extravagantly bad time. When he first came to see George he had looked almost like a tramp. He had been carrying the MS. of the famous "Love Poems," practically his sole possession, in a rather dirty German knapsack. George had played the good Samaritan, and Thwaite had the singular merit of having been the one person who had never in any way kicked over poor George's traces. His week remained divided between the office of the *Salon* itself and a tiny slice of weather-boarded cottage in George's town.

As an editor he had shown no signs of being a success. Under his rule the *Salon* boasted no new "features"—not even a prize competition. Its 2,000 a week circulation continued to dwindle steadily. The more knowing ones, non-readers, wondered a little. On the face of it, here was an organ owned by Gregory and—presumably—run by Mrs. Moffat. Yet it contained no single puff of the Raeburns and Hoppners. Gregory's gallery

published at odd moments enormously costly works of belles-lettres: the *Salon* chaffed them quite good humouredly. As for Mrs. Moffat's high-pitched propaganda, it never noticed them at all. What was to be made of such a situation?

When the Marquis, on the velvet carpet of the marble staircase in the Bond Street establishment, laid his small gloved hand on Gregory's sleeve, and asked, in his high, delicate voice, "Moffat, *what* are you up to with that paper of yours?" Gregory, with his spectacles on the end of his nose, beamed on the great man's Murillo face, fur-lined coat, and darkly gleaming monocle. His myopic smile might have indicated inaudible chuckling over a humorous thought. But he said nothing. He probably would have said no more had he been interrogated on the subject of Mrs. Moffat, Mr. Frewer Hoey, his brother George, Thwaites, or even Mrs. Henwick.

II.

MRS. HENWICK herself, the tiny Pompadour Marquise in a Gainsborough hat, never to all intents and purposes did anything but go about with Mrs. Moffat. She had a house of great size, modelled, as far as decorations went, on Mrs. Moffat's, and she had a husband, also modelled on Mrs. Moffat's. He was something professional. No one knew why Mrs. Henwick went about with Mrs. Moffat. She did not speak at the meetings ; she did not even vote. She had seemed content to appear as the complement of Mr. Frewer Hoey before the defection of that gentleman.

Since then she had been, as it were, the sole supporter of a florid coat of arms. She sat about as still as a mouse, and pointed her little shoe at the carpet.

Beneath the dark beams, before the great stone hearth, in the pleasant light from the elaborately leaded windows, she sat still, whilst George delivered his overwhelming and only partly comprehensible defence of Mr. Hailes. "He had a real and quite genuine talent ; he was at a loose end ; George was tiding him over."

Mr. Hailes had very obligingly taken a telegram for Mrs. Moffat, after that lady had decided

to stay the night at George's. She had launched into her warning to George the moment the door had closed behind him. She hadn't liked Hailes' looks.

"Oh, I don't say anything about *that*," George smiled amiably. "I don't care—I haven't considered whether he's personally very estimable. Perhaps he isn't; but he's got a talent, and he needs a lift."

Mr. Hailes re-entered the room, and, with a quiet and efficient air, remarked to Mrs. Moffat—

"Yes, it went for sixpence." He raised his hand nonchalantly to the thin and stiff black hair on his crown. "One can generally save a fair percentage at the post if one knows the ropes." He gave the impression of knowing a great many things of all kinds, and of being aware that he could be very, and very quietly, useful to ladies.

He was thirty-five. One noticed most that his very black eyes—he remotely suggested a Japanese—moved continually from one's own to one's waistcoat buttons, and back again. He wore a navy blue suit, a bark blue tie with small white spots, and a tall, very shiny collar, open at the throat. There was a striking glitter of white teeth under a black moustache when he spoke, which he did—it was his misfortune—with an air of leaning against something and practising the confidence trick. He was tall, square shouldered, and almost painfully thin.

He sat down and pulled at the knees of his trousers.

George rose and said that, bachelor like, he had "matters to see to." There was a suggestion of things brewing as he closed the door on Mr. Hailes, Mrs. Moffat, and on Mrs. Henwick, who remained silent.

George took a walk with his brother. There was between the two a subtle resemblance, like that of two carriage horses, which, though radically different apart, become an excellent pair in double harness. Having taken a look at Gregory's rounded shoulders and short-sighted amble, George, perhaps unconsciously, squared himself, and marched erect and lightly. If a man be as young as he feel, George, who at that moment was distinctly near to fifty, was by many years the younger of the two.

He walked well ; he swung his stick ; he looked sanguinely and straight at the horizon. The broad brow remained unwrinkled ; the nose, passably Grecian ; the lips, full and fresh. Where his brother's face was a matter of bumps and buttons, his own formed one of those combinations of oval curves that, for obscure reasons, please and subtly stir us to happiness in the contemplation. It gave the effect of a landscape of flowing hill-lines, one melting into another.

The house still stood, mellow, grey and buttressed, square and strong, at the end of its

hundred yards or so of park-turf, sheltered by its great elms, and looking through the bars of its high gate right down the main street of the tiny bright town. Its owner had the privilege of looking into the very heart of the little old place, suggestively and friendlily, with an interested glance that was not the cold criticism of a squire. That, precisely, was as George would have had it.

The few leaves fallen on the short drive served only to emphasise the crisp whiteness, the evenness of its surface. There wasn't a sign of decay there, and, assuredly, there was none in George himself. It was his idea to keep things going "just so"—until they stopped dead. There would be no slackening, no slowing down. If, for instance, he kept no trap, it was because brisk walking kept him in his excellent condition.

There wasn't another "house" in the little town. It had dwindled to the merest village. There were clap board cottages painted white, others with red tiled gables, others with cream-coloured walls, the remains of an immense church in a wide square, the *beaux restes* of a mediæval, grey stone town hall, a grocer's shop, a doctor's, a parsonage. The main road ran through the town above the church square, white and level; the other broad streets had suggestions of blades of grass here and there among the flints.

"You see," George said, pointing at them, "we can't keep out these 'little brothers.' They'll get the upper hand one day," he laughed, gently and gaily.

Taken as he was, walking through the mellowed and gently crumbling buildings of the wide, straight streets, there was not a more hale man in a more charming place. It was the early autumn, towards sun-down.

Whilst they strolled on the high road, down the perspective of a sloping avenue of immense trees they met a young girl and an elder. George's face became more subtle in line, his step more elastic, his shoulders more square. He paused before them and asked after the health of their father. It was one of his bad days, it appeared. He invited them to dine with himself and the Moffats, refused excuses, and passed on with his brother. Gregory had beamed from a little distance.

"You shall meet Mr. Thwaites at last," George said over his shoulder to the younger sister. She was a fair, oval-faced slip of a girl, with that loose combing back of fair hair, swing of the shoulders, and slight, rather engrossed manner of moving the chin forward, that denote one newly come from a girl's college.

She said, "Oh, I should like to, so much," flushed a little, and passed on with her elder sister.

"A singular set of circumstances about that family," George said, rejoining his brother.

Gregory said nothing. "The father was Vicar of Eastfield, about ten miles to the west. He had to resign. The mother had died about a year before." Gregory turned his spectacles slightly towards George. "The father," George continued—"The name's Brede, a good name about here"—"got it into his head that he had killed the mother by his impatience. An effect of grief, you know. A magnificent figure of a man, heavy, ponderous, like a sort of Titan. It's an awful spectacle, one of his fits of depression. The young girl's in love with Thwaite, your editor of the *Salon*."

Gregory turned his attention to a branch that, prematurely autumned, made a spray of vivid yellow against a mass of green. Afterwards he said :

"I imagine you have been consoling them."

George made a gentle gesture of deprecation.

"She's had a bad time," he said. "They *all* have." Somewhat later he added :

"One *has* to give a lift to people like that."

Gregory asked :

"Why in the world ?"

"Dora, the younger Miss Brede," George went on, "you understand, is not in love with Thwaite personally. It's as author of the 'Love Poems of Sidonia.' I've never been able to bring them together. I shall to-night, though, if I can catch Thwaite."

They were both silent for a little while.

"Yes, a very singular family," George recommenced. "Very lovable and essentially conscientious. That's their note. Extraordinarily conscientious." He pointed his stick over the palings. "I've had some elms cut down there."

"Essentially—morbidly that, in the father," he began again, meditatively. "The mother left all her money to Clara, the elder—did you notice her?—with a sort of proviso that she was to apply it as she thought fit, for the benefit of her sisters."

Gregory uttered an "um" of disapprobation.

"Why? Is it unusual?" George asked.

Gregory said grimly: "That sort of thing's the fortune of a certain type of legal practitioner."

"Oh, there hasn't been any kind of quarrelling," George retorted, amusedly, "in the Brede family. And only Dora remains to be provided for."

Gregory asked if that were the exact wording of the will.

Gregory laughed gaily.

"Oh, it won't come into any Court. Dora worships her sister, and if Thwaite did marry her, he'd be the last person in the world to cause any sort of trouble."

Gregory said, "Um." They went under an old archway into the open country. It fell dusk.

A heavy silence descended upon the brothers. Mrs. Moffat had tired George. In his brother's

society he had the blissful feeling that there was no need for conversation, and because that gave him a great feeling of ease, he was fond of his brother. Suddenly Gregory said :

“ I don't like Hailes.”

George ground his stick violently into the stony road, and then took up the defence of his last protégé.

Hailes, it appeared, had hitherto wasted his great gifts as editor of an Author's Directory. George drew a moving picture of the man : navy blue suit, spotless collar, white spotted bow and cuffs protected by sheaths of paper, bent all day over an office desk covered with slips recording dates of birth, of marriage, clubs, and books written during the current year by thousands of authors. These little slips Hailes had cut out and pasted on to sheets with emendations and additions for the printer. It obviously *was* a duty to give him a lift. He was wasting his youth.

“ He came to see me,” George said, “ incidentally because I had neglected to fill up one of his atrocious slips.” George never had filled up slips. On his first visit Hailes had confidingly, but with a proper shyness, shown George little things of his own, small anecdotes in the style of an author lately deceased. They were written on sheets of grey paper that had a red border-line.

“ They were derivative, of course,” George admitted, “ but the real man only needed

bringing out. Where he did himself justice was in his extraordinary aptness of illustration—of figurative speaking."

Gregory grunted slightly once more.

"I remember," George went on, "speaking of ——'s books" (he named an author, whose covers were millions of red spots on two continents). "He said the array reminded him of a Saturday night whelk-stall with the kerosene lamps flaring."

Gregory was in labour with a remark :

"A poor return for a quarter's board and lodgings," it came at last.

"Oh, but there were others," George answered, "in plenty."

"He's caught the trick," Gregory drove home. "It's like a rather inferior remark of your own."

George had a moment of discouragement. He really had housed Hailes for the last three months. During that time a brilliant novel was officially supposed to be in the writing. And there was no reason why, in the course of many midnight torrents of words, Hailes should not have caught George's trick. George disquietedly understood that. Indeed, he was not absolutely certain that Hailes had not caught the whelk-stall simile itself. He had had a hazy notion of having uttered something like it two nights before Hailes had brought it out. But, even to himself, he had credited it loyally to his young friend.

"Anyhow, the man's a bit of a genius," he maintained.

"More than a bit of a cur," Gregory stood it out.

"He *didn't* do it," George said, hotly. "It was I who advised him to give the thing up because he was wasting himself."

The story went that Hailes, with the idea of confirming his position in the firm of Hills, the owner of the Author's Directory, had more pressingly ingratiated himself with his proprietor's wife than his proprietor liked. "I tell you it was by my advice," George said. "He resigned of his own accord."

Gregory said, "Um."

A little later they met Thwaite, the author of "The Love Poems of Sidonia," and the editor of Gregory Moffat's journal, the *Salon*.

Gregory suddenly, and to George's surprise, shot at Thwaite the question :

"Been doing anything original ?"

Thwaite answered :

"Why, no ; I'm kept too busy."

"For me ?" Gregory asked. "Um."

George pressed Thwaite to come to dinner with them all. Thwaite evaded him—he had work, he would have to be at the office next day by noon. He had no dress clothes.

George said that no one had.

Thwaite laughed : "It's quite impossible," and George mentioned Dora Brede.

"Oh, dear," Thwaite said.

George explained hastily :

"The young lady admires your poems. And you know that there is nothing so good for a talent as admiration. Besides, a little human contact of just the right sort would do you all sorts of good. . . . Isn't it so, Gregory?"

George was anxious that his friend should make a good impression on Gregory, who, after all, was his employer. He waved his stick round the outline of Thwaite, and said, with affectionate banter :

"I seem to see under all this something quite smooth and polished. It's in his work, it's in all his thoughts and all his expressions delicacy."

Gregory peered at Thwaite, but did not commit himself. Seen in the half light of the sunken lane at sunset, Thwaite bore out George's description. He exaggerated it. The knotted stick that he carried was like a club ; his boots covered and seemed to crush a quite unnecessary amount of ground. His hair and beard were going grey, and you might have thought the greyness a purposed exaggeration. It was as if he set himself the task of looking like a tramp. His voice and mannerisms were soft.

George turned upon Thwaite :

"You do want a little contact with ordinary people, regular meals, that order of thing. Supposing that you were the best product of

your type of life, it wouldn't harm that to come in contact with the best products of other types of humanity."

He chuckled. A big man as he walked in the dusk between the two smaller, emphasising his remarks with flourishes of his stick, George had the air of some teacher of classic philosophy strolling between two disciples.

"Don't you see, my dear fellow," he apostrophised Thwaite, "you've knocked about, you've starved ; you've lived with gipsies, and been a journeyman carpenter ; you've existed on bread and raisins for six months in Tuscany—He lived for six months on four pounds, Gregory, in peasants' huts—You've done all sorts of out-of-the-way and irresponsible things. Do me a favour now. . . ."

"Oh, there's no standing against you," Thwaite said, good humouredly. "Let me at least post these reviews. But I don't see, and I can't see, why you should put yourself out for me."

"Don't you see that someone must, as it were, look after the dress clothes of you poets ?" George bantered.

He continued, out of earshot, to Gregory :

"Something good must result from bringing nice people in contact."

"Haven't you grown out of that pathetic illusion ?" Gregory answered.

III.

AT the resulting dinner, George wore a white waistcoat and a black velvet coat. Doing the honours, he lived up to his attire ; shone upon by wax candles in serpentine silver branches, he radiated light himself.

Nothing pleased him better than to make a number of very ill-assorted people meet and appreciate each other. It was as if he rejoiced in performing a fine conjuring trick.

Mrs. Moffat had certainly reconciled herself to Hailes. They sat side by side ; Hailes was enlightening her as to the precise significance of St. Thomas Aquinas, who had somehow turned up in the conversation. Hailes was extravagantly many-sided. He could answer questions upon subjects so unrelated as to be in the nature of conundrums—or he gave that effect.

There was in George's sister-in-law a great rawness in a sensitive part—a rawness that had persisted unhealed from the date of the defection of Mr. Frewer Hoey. There was also a hatred for that gentleman. It was this hatred which had caused her diatribes against Hailes at the first view. Hailes was physically so like Frewer Hoey that

he had given her a shock. There was even in both a singular occasional jerk backwards of the head that resembled nothing so much as the action of a pigeon afflicted with a certain fidgetting complaint. And, in both, there were the darkness, the air of discreteness, the vivid flash of white teeth under a black moustache. All these things were pronounced in Hailes, but Hailes had not Mr. Frewer Hoey's almost alarmingly distinct spot, like a tonsure, in the jetty black of his cranium. Hoey had been useful; but Hailes, in two minutes, could give a lady the idea that, socially speaking, he was one of those gentlemen who, in great emporiums, glide forward and assure us that they have in stock every article that any self-respecting person could desire. Undoubtedly there is a price to pay.

Vaguely and titillatingly feeling that he was dangerous, the large lady with her tawny mane, her accentuatedly flashing eyes, her accentuatedly brilliant cheeks, succumbed to a craving that Hoey's departure had left in her. Mrs. Henwick, the silent attendant at so many of the séances, had been silent at one more. She doubtless was by this time aware of what she was "in for."

Hailes, it had appeared, could drive motor cars of all builds and all forms of propulsion. It was not so much matter for wonder that one small head could carry all he knew, as that he should have contrived to pick up so much

whilst ostensibly editing an Author's Directory. It was one of life's little puzzles. Mrs. Moffat's *chauffeur*, a blue-in-the-faced, black spectaclled person, like a monkey from cross-channel, had been more than usually, and much more than bearably, insolent during the run from London. With an astonishing swiftness it became arranged that the driver was to be sent, with a flea in his ear, back to town. Mr. Hailes was to take his place and whirl the car the rest of the way to the house with the fourteen gardeners. Thus, whilst Mr. Moffat and George were still strolling, Mrs. Moffat, squired by Mr. Hailes, had walked swiftly across the church square to the Inn where the lady in a grandly negligent manner *had* packed off the driver.

"You'll have to pay the insolent creature, I suppose," she sent in her high voice across the dining table to her husband. Gregory jerked his head rather more abruptly than usual in her direction. But he said nothing.

The other feasters—it was a feast—Mrs. Moffat quite naively ignored. There were her husband and Mrs. Henwick; there was George shedding a glamour that *surely* didn't matter; there was Thwaite, whom she detested—in his capacity of driver of her journal he was quite as insolent a creature as the *chauffeur* she had just dismissed.

There were also the two Brede girls. As far as she was concerned they didn't exist, and

certainly didn't matter any more than thoroughbred mares, cocker-spaniels, shorthorns, or anything else thoroughbred. They had blue eyes that looked at you ; they gave a certain impression of being clean-run, healthy, quite English, and nothing in particular. They certainly would never set the Thames on fire for any particular set, or fringe of a set.

For George, they undoubtedly existed as much as twin stalks of corn ; straight, tall, a pale golden. And, given the right strength of wind, the right sky, the right texture of clod underfoot, stalks of corn may be precious enough. One goes, as he put it, to them for the daily bread one prays for daily, for breakfast, dinner, and tea ; they are the products of air, of rain, of sun and the earth—the one thing one cannot dispense with when all the feasting is over and done.

Dora, the younger sister, with her round young face a little flushed and with delighted blue eyes, leaned a little forward listening to Thwaite, who, across the table, was talking about "the Abruzzi" to Mrs. Henwick and Gregory Moffat.

Thwaite, if he had felt any shyness, had lived it down. Dora—it was wonderful to George in what a degree she had the inestimable gift of youth—listened with rapt softness.

The Abruzzi are mountains in the kingdom of Naples, and certainly as Thwaite

talked of them they seemed to get an astonishing intimacy with an "atmosphere" of goat-skins, tanned shoulders and faces, vine-garlands and sandal-thongs.

George had a moment's doubt whether Thwaite were not doing it *too* well. He himself would have called for a little more of a contrast, a little less of the poet. But he reflected that Thwaite's personal appearance probably gave Dora a sufficiency of shock. It would be the occasion for saying that "when you get accustomed to him," that, like a little initial check, is the almost necessary opening to a rapid run down-hill into a blessed and inevitable intimacy. He let the matter alone, and devoted himself to the elder sister.

Between Dora and herself ran a quite unrememberable string of Christian names—Harry, who was in Singapore ; Willie, who was going out to join him ; Marian, in Yorkshire, with two children ; and Kate, married to an excellent young man, who was planting oranges in California. There was also a Rose who was dead. Clara Brede had always struck him as being "like her sister." There were two of them, but, as far as type went, he had noted no more than one. There were features and lines on Clara's face, where, in her sister's, there was only a soft roundness. She might have been thirty ; she might have been less or more. But she, too, and in her way, had her

gift of youth—of not having lived. He knew that, for many years, she had been bound hand and foot attendant on a hopelessly, and very querulously, invalid mother. And he was prepared to read resignation in her face.

But, rather suddenly, it seemed to him that she had been asleep for a long time—as if she must have endlessly waited on her mother in a dream. He began to talk to her very particularly, because, he thought, she must have had great griefs, a sad life. He exerted himself to give her, as far as he could, a happy half-hour of forgetfulness. He had been talking about Thomas Aquinas, having caught the name from Hailes. She said, with conviction :

“Oh, one can’t exist at the bottom of a sand-pit all one’s life. Everyone has to *live* sooner or later. I’m convinced of it.”

George asked :

“And Fra Angelico?”

She answered :

“Oh, either they have lived already, your monks. Or, if they are caught quite young, they’ll—I don’t mean kick up their heels ; it probably never gets to the surface. But in their minds.”

Her intonation was clear cut, and, in a way, determined. You could tell that she had once sat under professors and held arguments. No doubt she had had aspirations before the sick room had swallowed her. It startled George ;

it made him wonder in what particular still watches of her invalid's nights she had thought her thoughts, but it relieved him and released his tongue. He had been holding himself down to platitudes out of deference for what he had imagined to be a good girl wanting in comprehension. After that he let himself go. As she listened, she reminded him of her sister listening to Thwaite. There was the same expression.

He accepted it as a tribute to the excellence of his dinner, and it pleased him. He had all sorts of theories as to dining, and when he took the trouble he drilled his house-keeper with a vigilance that ladies, ranging from the precisest of old maids to Mrs. Moffat herself, had envied. It was a matter of the just meat inciting to the just wine, and both to a flow of joyful speech, with flowers here and there.

The door opened, and a tremendous, spectacled head, with a vast black beard, glared suddenly at them all. It was Mr. Brede, the father. His big, jarring voice, said gloomily, but without a touch of embarrassment :

"Oh, I didn't know."

"I thought you were too ill to come," George said ; "we'll make room."

The big voice answered, "No."

The head withdrew, and George hurried anxiously after it. The Reverend Mr. Brede, in the dim hall, appeared a gigantic figure.

He said suddenly, in his deep voice :

"It's no good ; I shall cut my throat." He raised his great hands in a gesture of despair, and his shadow flitted away into the recesses of the stone hall, and seemed to run swiftly to vanish in the darkness of the black, carved staircase.

The interview was like a dash of cold water to George. It was a case of aggravated neurotics ; maybe it overstepped the bounds of sanity. In blowing up a stable-boy with his tremendous voice, Mr. Brede had seriously alarmed his wife. She had been dying of a nervous complaint. Perhaps he had not accelerated her death ; he, on the other hand, was certain that he had.

George had argued the point with him endlessly, in the very early mornings, for hours of the daytime, for almost whole nights. He had wrestled in spirit when Mr. Brede was listlessly hopeless ; when he was savagely contemptuous ; when, as if hunted by Até, he raved with his immense arms waving over his head.

George went to work again. He had uttered three words when Mr. Brede, violently contorting his black bulk, exclaimed :

"The brand of Cain is upon me."

Clara Brede came out of the brilliant room and became a dim figure beside them. She said suddenly :

"Father, are we *never* to have a moment's pleasure ?"

Her voice had a great hardness, and Mr. Brede became instantly like a dog that has very often been whipped. The change was almost extravagant.

"Mr. Moffat is so good," she said, "but you . . ."

Mr. Brede, with the gait of an immense Newfoundland, made off for the front door.

"I shall have to go with him," she said, grudgingly enough; "don't come."

George followed her.

There was, outside, the pearly light of a shrouded moon, and they walked under lighted cottage windows that, with shadows of lattice and flower-pots, looked exactly like a stage set for domestic drama. She said:

"He'll never do anything. You ought not to fear it."

Brede, muffling his great voice in his great beard, said bitterly:

"No one understands me; no one cares." When he reached his cottage he threw the garden gate violently back, and went obscurely crashing into a dark bit of shrubbery.

"What will he do?" George asked.

She answered:

"I think he will go to bed. When he finds he can't worry you." She paused. A moment after she said: "What do you do it all for? No one ever thanks you."

Mr. Brede in the shrubbery was tearing at the twigs like a sinister and gigantic

ape. Quite suddenly he loomed out upon them.

"What I wanted to tell you," his deep and muffled voice boomed at George, "is that Dora can never marry. I forbid it." He had spoken with passionate fatalism. "Never." He hastened back to the darkness.

Clara Brede's head drooped dispiritedly. To George's "What does he mean?" she answered:

"I think, because we are *his* children, he thinks we shall inherit madness."

George, remotely shocked, interrupted her:

"Oh, I will talk him out of that idea." He felt intensely concerned for her. "You mustn't let it worry you," he added, comfortingly. "He will be better soon. I will talk to him."

She looked him very straight in the eyes. In the light of the moon that had just unveiled, her face was pale, strongly defined, full of emotions. It was as if he were looking at it through deep water that quivered slightly.

"You are such a good man," she said.

"Oh, I will make it all right," George repeated. He was thinking of the intense sadness of her position. He must, of course, make it all right. He must, and he felt that he could, by sheer force of words, bring Mr. Brede back to reason.

Going back through the moonlight, walking quite slowly and looking at his shadow, George

wondered vaguely whether he really were "such a good man, and why he did it all." He reached no solution. At the corner of the churchyard there was a black knot of lounging villagers. When he had passed them a boy's hoarse voice called :

"There goes old '*That's what you want.*'" It was George's nickname in the village, conferred upon him in return for an infinite amount of material assistance, and an almost more boundless quantity of advice. "A dozen of port," or "a few books to read," or "a larger window in the bedroom, that's what you want," distinguished so many of his chats with the villagers.

The harsh "*Old That's what you want,*" and the soft, bitter "No one ever thanks you," vibrated in his ears together as he went the rest of his way.

In the drawing room Hailes was relating to Mrs. Moffat and Mrs. Henwick some engrossing anecdotes of Lady Carrie Jones. Thwaite and Dora Brede, with their heads close together, were talking beside the great fire-place. Gregory, his hands beneath his coat tails, was poking his spectacles up against the glass of one of Grigson-Turner's pictures of lamp flames. He was beamingly making the tour of the room. It was said that he had once discovered an authentic Wilkie under the daubings of a later student by recognising a hair that, having come out of one of the peculiar

brushes Wilkie used, had showed through the later coat of paint. That is probably untrue.

But it is indubitable that no one had missed George.

IV.

NEXT morning they all flew away as quickly and completely as a puff of sparrows from a roadway. The recalcitrant *chauffeur* was supposed to have maliciously "deranged the entrails" of the imposing automobile, but its repair was only a matter of a few minutes to Hailes. The car, like an immense phenomenal black-beetle, spat and gurgled spasmodically in front of George's high stone steps, surrounded by a small horseshoe of children in pink pinafores, hoops, and with fingers in their mouths. Hailes, who had an engrossed air, ran round it with spanners, and even disappeared under it. Mrs. Moffat sat opulently on the front seat, the bright wind stirring the black cock's feathers of her great drooping hat. Her husband and Mrs. Henwick had strolled forward along the western road.

After final jerks of misgiving, the motive power settled to its sustained buzz. Hailes reappeared, admirably calm, with no perceptible flush on his pallid, slightly Japanese face, and no visible elation. He jerked his head back to its rigid erectness, brushed some dust off the knees of his navy blue trousers, adjusted

his cap, and began to put the spanners back into their box. He hadn't even soiled his hands, which were like pallid alabaster fins. George came down the steps and said to him :

"I've been thinking over those passages in your chapter four. Mind you, I think they want keying down—bringing in tone." He was talking of the novel he had for so long been helping Hailes to write. "Because it seems to me that if you get the opening chapters so strong—as they undoubtedly are—you won't have anything left for the end . . . in the way of effect."

Hailes was tired of his novel, and still more tired of George's ceaseless incitements to all sorts of technical excellencies. He answered : "Yes," with the air of one engrossed with more important things. He slammed the lid of the spanner box, cast a watchful eye along the side of the car, and then made for his seat. "I'll think about it," he added, climbing in beside Mrs. Moffat. "Good-bye."

The particular noise of the motor changed to another equally particular ; it started spasmodically ; turned in short compass, whizzed violently, and went off. George had expected some sort of farewell moment. Mrs. Moffat had waved a plump, gloved hand ; her light-coloured eyes, brilliantly relieved, and her brilliantly relieved, high-coloured cheeks had flashed for a moment at George. Her high

voice had pealed out : " Good-bye, George, don't fall in love with . . ." The rest was lost in the clatter, dust and east wind.

Hailes' rigid head had been devoted to his steering wheel. The ostler was grinning as he began to lout back towards the inn.

George rather groaned, turning into his empty house. For Hailes' defection he might have been prepared ; for his sister-in-law's vulgarity, too. Hailes had simply dropped him and the novel along with any associations ; deference, even politeness, he might have been expected to show to a distinguished and surely benevolent figure. He had behaved like any servant in changing places. George could see that his own considerable personality must have oppressed Hailes ; Hailes had merely submitted to him in order to obtain board and lodging, and, perhaps, " introductions." Now he had got an introduction. But for the moment he could not see exactly where Hailes expected to get to.

There were undoubtedly loose ends of rope hanging about the triumphal car of the Gregory Moffat's, and Hailes, having taken hold of one, would probably see to it that he got himself dragged some way along the road.

George, of course, did not sigh, but his gentle, large personality acknowledged, by a general slackening of fibre, the slap in the face.

I suppose he was really always in quest of the perfect disciple. It was not going to be Hailes. Indeed, George, except in his most romantic moments, had hardly expected it to be. But time was getting on, the sands running out, the bank balance, too.

And the quest was incredibly difficult. You have naturally to differentiate between material personality and artistic capacity—I mean, to allow for a man who will rob a bed-ridden mother whilst he is writing a supreme Ode to the Infinite. George allowed for this. Hailes, from his very first appearance with a slip of the Author's Directory in his hand, had revealed himself as having precisely that *morale* of the domestic servant, that he had so ingenuously displayed at the parting. He had kicked down George's ladder after climbing into Mrs. Moffat's motor car. That was the sort of thing George had expected from the first. But George had passed all that over—for the sake of the novel he was going to drill Hailes into writing. As he had put it to Mrs. Moffat: he didn't care, he hadn't considered whether Hailes were personally estimable. He had thought he had talent; he knew he "wanted a lift." Now Hailes had dropped the novel as well; probably for the sake of something Mrs. Moffat had to give.

George turned into his drawing room. In the far, dim corner, his house-keeper, a formidable collection of alpaca, grey curls, and

remotely contemptuous nose, was impatiently dusting the books in the portentous book-case. The remaining volumes leaned one against the other in place of standing erect.

"Mr. Hailes, Sir," she said, pausing in running a purple duster over the gilt top of a book that had leather sides and green ribbon bows, "took four of these big books, and those two water colours from beside the clock."

George said : "Mr. Hailes?" mildly.

"He said you told him to take them," the house-keeper said. "He packed them in the Venice box from the blue bedroom."

George said : "Oh."

"They're all addressed to go to Shaftesbury Avenue," Mrs. McNutt added.

George's face fell a little. It was not the loss of the books, the water - colours and the Venice box, so much as the mention of Shaftesbury Avenue. Undoubtedly he had said about the books and the pictures, "You can have them if you like," to Hailes at a moment of midnight expansion. And he could picture Hailes, with the hidden dislike that servant has to master, going about the house picking up these perquisites. That, of course, was in the day's journey.

But he was reminded of another moment—of equal expansion, but more serious in effect. . . . A friend of Hailes, a young Mr. Spendle, lately of the Lambeth School of Art, had started along with Hailes a press which was

to turn out editions of Renaissance *de luxe* in a new and particularly decorative type, the joint design of Hailes and Spendle. They had intensely and very badly wanted a couple of thousand.

Hailes had brought down Spendle, a young man with very low collars and a vivid red tie. He had wild spectacles that did not much mitigate a cast in his agate blue eyes, and wild pale hair that was not mitigated at all. He had talked with tremendous vivacity, and an obviously honest enthusiasm. It was so honest and infectious that George had ultimately consented to find the couple of thousand.

He didn't do it without a twinge. But he *wanted* to help them. Spendle appealed to him. Hailes, pulling at his thin black moustache, said :

"Of course, you needn't find the money at once. Probably not at all." He eyed George coolly, and with a certain caution. "I know people who will give us all the credit we shall need, if they understand you're backing us !"

Spendle burst in : "After all, look what jolly capital letters we've got."

George smiled indulgently, as if at a child. He was trying to listen to Hailes.

"In fact," Hailes began. He leaned back against the mantel-piece with his air suggestive of "trying it on"—"the way would be to make over the whole concern to you. You would employ Spendle and myself."

Spendle said : "The 'G' alone would make the fortune of any Press."

"Oh, I couldn't think of sapping your brains like that," George said, and Hailes answered, nonchalantly—

"Of course, you can be as liberal as you like with our salaries. It's a way of giving security."

The matter had been arranged on that basis, and the Renaissance Press had opened terracotta-faced offices in Shaftesbury Avenue some months before. It had set about producing in black letter one of Scudéry's romances in nine volumes. Hailes, now business manager without anything to manage, had predicted that the Press would shortly pay a dividend of 215 per cent. Other presses of the sort had done it.

But their more ornamental capitals, that covered both pages of the book, could not be induced to fold properly. George had gently hinted to Hailes that he might spare his promises of dividends. He would be more than contented if he got his money back. His experience made him see well enough the nebulousness of such expected golden comet-tails. Hailes, on the other hand, could not see why George should have lent the money if he didn't expect a large profit. It seemed too much like the "happy ever afterwards" of a fairy tale. He really could not understand what George was "getting at." He had gone off on the automobile still puzzled as to the point, and

uncertain as to what George really had expected to get out of him.

George was confronted by the weekly household bills that his housekeeper laid before him on the great oak table, and by the fact that in a month or two he wouldn't know where to go to lay hands for certain on a couple of hundred or so. He very decidedly wished that he had not guaranteed the money. With him it was like drink—and he knew it. He came across men, vivid, real, with strong outlines, with intense hopes, and he entered into their desires and hopes, and made them more than his own. He went casting about, really taking unheard of troubles, and racking his brains. He did not want to do something for them so much as to set them in the position of their ideal as they represented it, or as he figured it.

Once, walking down the broad western avenue, he had come upon a particularly merry tramp seated on the grass, re-bandaging a damaged toe. The man was singing some of the recitative from "*Rigoletto*." George discovered that he had been an Irish squireen, particularly good with whiskey punch, Irish epigrams, and that horseflesh which had carried him to sit at the roadside. George set him up in life ; he rented a cottage for him, bought him a horse and cart, and launched him as a kind of carrier—a higgler. The Irishman pursued his business for perhaps two

months ; he paid George back £2 10s., which he subsequently re-borrowed, and gave many reasons for satisfaction. A carrier of his sort had been much needed in the little town. One dark night he had driven off with his cart and horse, the more moveable of his furniture, and the daughter of the grocer, and the contents of the grocer's till.

The affair had caused George some unpopularity, because the grocer's daughter had been much sought after by the youth of the place.

He directed his housekeeper as to the meals for the day. He was dispirited. To use a figure of speech, he was possessed by a graveyard full of tombstones of that kind, glimmering at him in the flashlight of Hailes' departure. Like all great men, all our great figures, George, in fact, was romantic.

He was that even in his treatment of his housekeeper. She was a worthy and stonily upright lady. But George had got it into his head that the upper servants of single gentlemen are exposed to singular temptations—that they almost inevitably rob their masters, in fact. Frequently they drink. He put himself out to make this impossible for Mrs. McNutt by checking her accounts down to the last halfpenny. He acquired considerable knowledge of the prices of such things as butcher's meat. He took credit to himself for having kept the lady virtuous

by dint of never letting her have a chance to be the reverse.

It gave him a great deal of trouble even to affect to cast an eye down her numerous "books," but he did it, and doubtless with profit. His personal expenses were of the very smallest. He might be regarded as an ascetic of choice—one of your great Cardinals who with a *cordon bleu* in their kitchens at the service of all and sundry, live on dry apples, but like to hear their tables praised. He had not in all this any consideration of saving, except in the most incidental manner ; but it had undoubtedly enabled him to keep going for so long.

He considered absent-mindedly a red leather book that had a gilt cow stamped on the cover, and small particles of suet adhering to its edges. Mrs. McNutt gently jingled the keys in her alpaca apron pockets. He was making a resolve. Just as any other man vows to reduce the number of pipes a day, he determined definitely to break off all indulging in assistance to people like Hailes. He had made the same resolve many times before. He went into his study. A letter with a conspicuous heading caught his eye. It came from the editor of a new quarterly to be called "The Higher Things." George was floridly begged to write a sonnet for the first page of the first number—a sonnet on the higher things. As a matter of fact, George never had written a

sonnet in his life. The letter called for a reply. It had lain unanswered for nearly a week.

He went to see how the Reverend Mr. Brede had passed the night. He felt convinced it must have been one of extreme anguish.

One of the local flies was driving away from the gate of the Brede's cottage. He could see in it the hats of Mr. Brede and of both daughters. It rattled vigorously on the stony road, the driver limply swished his whip, and the whole swept round a corner in the direction of the station. George felt discontented and nipped by the east wind. It was one of those radiant, cold autumn days when brilliant trails of scarlet creeper shook on grey walls all over the town ; all the shadows were very blue, and small whirlwinds of dust arose at the street corners.

There simply was not a conversable resident left in the town if the Bredes had gone for any space of time. Thwaite was at his office. There remained only several old maids and a widow, who were not on terms one with another. They united, however, in regarding George as "so sarcastic."

George pulled his cap on more, and walked briskly in the teeth of the wind to the little watchhouse, a tarred shelter of planks on a stone platform. It hung over the brow of the steep hill. Formerly, there had been ramparts there. Far below was a great expanse of green

marshland threaded by dykes. In the distance there was the brilliant blue sea, and some small white houses on the shingle of the beach. He sat down discontentedly on a plank seat in its lea.

In front of him, an extravagantly tall young man and a young girl were leaning against the low brick parapet, and looking over the flats. They talked animatedly in a language that George did not understand, and pointed over the great expanse, speaking very fast and with much enthusiasm. George regarded them with tacit disfavour.

They had a singularly exotic air, tempered by a kind of misery of the wind that swept every visible object as dry, bare, and cold as a clean-picked bone. The young man was an immensely tall, cadaverous figure of plaintiveness. His mobile eyebrows quivered, his hands shivered and hesitated on the hook of his stick. It had a large horn for handle, and was extravagantly gold-mounted. His buff waistcoat boasted a protentious crossing of gold eyeglass and watch-chains. His long, trembling fingers had many rings upon them.

He pointed his noticeable stick at the little group of huts on the edge of the distant, slaty sea, and said something. The young girl was fair, florid, and unformed; had large, prominent, nervous eyes, and had very evidently only lately "put her hair up" in some foreign style. She seemed to contradict him; they

fell into an excited argument. The young man, fumbling very uncertainly in his pocket, produced a map that he unfolded tremulously. It blew into a fluttering sheet of green and pink and blue. He spread his fingers across it, and peered between them at the names. George still regarded them with disfavour.

The young man turned his head, which was bent over the map, and scanned George with the furtive glance of a beast that has been much hunted. He looked ; then looked again straight into George's eyes—rather authoritatively. He drew himself very straight, and marched towards George with a military salute that suggested the greeting of a royal personage to defiling troops.

"Do I see," he said quickly, with a soft, guttural accent, "do I see the great poét, the great mastéhr ?"

He began addressing his sister very animatedly, ignoring George's slight motion of deprecation. "We, my people, owe a great debt to you, sir, we Moldauers to you, sir. I come to Paris to fetch my sister after our revolution."

His sister began animatedly :

"*Monsieur mon frère veut dire, monsieur . .*"

The brother recommenced : "Your great song, your famóse poém. I have let him be translated. I give one hundred thousand copies to sing roun' the camp fire with music of the balalaika . . in the great

mountains all through our revolution just ended."

"You are quite aware of my identity?" George hazarded stiffly.

"We have seen so many, many portraits," the young man said enthusiastically, "and your house, this little town where in old days great fighting was too, is it not?"

"My name is——" George began again.

"Precisely—Georg Mo-fát, Mister Georg Mo-fát. You did write the great, the heroic song . . . " He recited some sonorous lines in an ungraspable language; there was great fire and much charm in his voice. Then he translated: "*When upon our mountains the foot-tread of the conquering! We are now free, we Moldavians.*" There was a fiery pride in his voice. The mistrust did not leave George. As a matter of fact he had suffered before from inroads of refugees from the Balkans. At one time they had settled round him in great swarms and caused some lamentable inconveniences in the little town. He said:

"I think you are mistaken. I cannot recall the lines at all."

The young man consulted with his sister, and she flashed shyly upon George:

"*Mais non, mais non. Il n'y a pas d'erreur, Monsieur, me se souvient il pas? 'Et quand sur nos montagnes vont les pas du conquérant' . . . "*

They both looked at him with parted lips, a great expectation. George shook his head. He could not remember ever having written lines answerable. He maintained his new pose of unsociability, the unaccustomed suspicion which in his genial romanticism he exaggerated.

"I really cannot take the credit," he closed the matter stonily.

The young girl said eagerly : "*Mais si, mais si, monsieur.*"

Her brother laid his trembling hand upon her arm with an air of tender and darkling restraint.

"You have forgotten, sir," he said ; "you wrote the great song perhaps years ago. You wrote him for another people struggling for liberty as we have struggled many years. We took it, we made it for our own." He had drawn himself up to an immense height and leaned diagonally across his stick like a great ladder. "I came to fetch my sister from Paris where she had made her studies." They had come to Wickham principally to thank George. "We have seen, we do make thanks. The great master has forgotten his great poem ; we—we will never forget, we Moldavians." He removed his hat with a rather grand air.

The young girl looked at George, her large blue eyes troubled, her large fair cheeks a little depressed. "*Ah, monsieur,*" she

said, "*monsieur mon frère vient de si loin, exprès.*"

Her brother stooped his discouraged height tenderly over her. He thrust his great hand under her arm, and, still holding his hat, drew her away.

"A good day, sir, and take our thanks," he said. They went slowly up the ascending street.

George looked moodily after them ; he had no doubt of having hurt their feelings. One of the young man's long legs was longer than the other, and he halted rather painfully. He continued to point his portentous stick at the stone-work of the house-fronts.

George had an impulse to go after them, to overwhelm them with atoning hospitalities. But he could not tell, and, for the matter of that, did not wish to tell—that they were not intent upon some Oriental form of the confidence trick. He said as much about twenty minutes afterwards to Clara Brede.

By that time he had impatiently made the tour of the ramparts of the little town. He recovered his circulation, and called at the Bredes' cottage to make enquiries. He found Miss Brede in the unpleasantly furnished sitting-room—the house was a hired one—very much engrossed with a thin book. She looked up with a gentle, rapt expression, then flushed and laid the book down upon the

marble top of a cheffonier. It had a looking-glass with a frame lavishly carved like rose wreaths for a back, and for ornaments a number of large shiny shells, reclining on green and red worsted "tidies."

She said merely :

" Oh ! "

Receiving George's apologies, she explained that she had sent her father away for two or three days.

" It was necessary for himself, and for us all," she said, with her soft determinedness. She was sitting in a cane lounge, near a fire, and she twined her hands back to back in a minutely-affected attitude, that used to characterise Cambridge students of a decade or so ago.

George, standing looking down on her, began a mild " But ? " of surprise. She smiled, and showed even white teeth.

" I have to think for my sister," she said. " These . . . manifestations, like that of last night, are so dreadfully bad for her—for a young girl." She looked, at the moment, intensely young herself. " Dreadfully bad for a young mind," she repeated slowly. " Because, of course, the sort of thing is in the family. Contact would undoubtedly bring it out in Dora."

" She has such a happy disposition," she added, then she sighed very slightly.

" But yourself, my dear young lady ? " George said.

She looked up at him gravely.

"You know," she said, "one Iphigenia in a family doesn't matter so much; but there sha'n't be two."

George pondered the remark for a moment without much fathoming it. He looked at the reflection of part of his waistcoat in the looking-glass at the back of the cheffonier. Then his eye caught the back of the thin book she had been reading. It was one of his own volumes of verse of some years back. She would naturally have a curiosity to read something of his, and would be able to borrow his books from Thwaite. "Does that queer stuff leave any impression at all?" he asked.

To him the recollection of the book was like that of leaves gone very dry, and with a faint scent. She looked past him out of the window, and then said :

"I think it was because of that I sent my father away."

George, standing with his stick in one hand, his hat in the other, jumped very slightly.

"It seemed so—so shameful that you should be taken up with our worries," she said.

George gently tapped his leg with the crook of his stick. It was equivalent to a yokel hilariously slapping his thigh. He said : "How energetic you are !" She continued, looking calmly at him—

"We are a very selfish family, hopelessly self-centred. It's a symptom of the other—the neurotic side."

George looked at her for an explanation.

"My father," she went on, "would take up your entire time. And the more skilfully you talk to him the more skilful he becomes—in the dialectics of his own misery. I would not permit it any longer."

George walked slowly to the window seat and sat down.

"You meant to give me time for work?" he asked.

"The change is very good for him, too," she said. "He has gone back to his parish to look after his *locum tenens* for two days. He's excellent at parish work."

George was silent.

"He will come back a great deal better, and afterwards I shall keep him out of your way," she said, with her soft determinedness.

George said: "Oh, don't do that. My work doesn't count. I used to blow little tunes on an oat straw; but it all went years ago."

For answer she slowly drew out a blue review from her side in the lounge, and held it accusingly at him.

"Oh, that I wrote six months ago," he said, a little guiltily.

"I am determined the loss shan't be traceable to us," she said sharply.

George said, gaily : " Oh, bother the loss," and she leant forward, with an impatience that was almost an anger.

" Do you mean to say," she said, fixing her eyes upon him, " that you don't know you're a great poet ? "

George said : " Well, I didn't know anyone followed my work like that," and then burst into quite joyful laughter. Her quaint anger, her accusing, long white hand ; her figure, of which all the lines of her coarse, dull blue dress seemed to lend themselves to her earnestness in this form of academic debate ; all these things struck him as quaintly and adorably charming. She looked at him in the same mood for a moment, and then began to laugh too.

" I get," she said, " these firmnesses from having to manage a family." She smoothed her fair hair, that drooped in a sort of Flemish band over her small ears. In her half confusion her face had the tint of a shell cameo. " But it *is* irritating," she affirmed ; " because you *are* a great poet."

George said : " Oh, you young people."

She seemed to him, perhaps on account of the *naïveté* of her attack, intensely young still. He felt himself, in proportion, ripely and mellowedly middle-aged.

V.

THEN George told her the story of the young Moldavians. He related it as an anecdote illustrating the folly of youthful enthusiasms.

"I was rather rude to him," George said, "or, at least, quite cool. He was distinctly *brusqué*. I don't know that I don't regret it."

"What a pity, oh, what a pity," Clara Brede said, with an evident and intense concern. It prepared George for a new and pleasant shock of surprise.

"He was an attractive figure," he said, "but it was stupid of him. The lines certainly aren't mine—

‘*Quand sur nos montagnes sonne
Le pas du conquérant.*’ ”

He shook his head. Clara Brede's eyes were full of an intense concern.

"Don't you remember?" she asked. . . .

"So, on that day,
When our hills feel a foreign tread,
And our slave-seed shall strive to raise
Their necks from underneath the yoke,
There shall not lack a folk to say :
Their fathers' deeds inspired our souls
With breath of freedom, and shall they
Cry unto us in vain ? ”

Her voice was full and rich ; she quoted with

the certainty of knowing the words infinitely well.

George had the swift, disturbing feeling of remembering the long since forgotten. "Oh, was it *that*?" he said.

Years before, Greece had been making one of its periodical clamours against the Turk. George had written some unbalanced verse, aimed at inducing one of the political parties to unsheath the sword against the oppressor.

"I learned them—we all learned them—when I was at college," Clara Brede said reproachfully.

"Oh, an unlicked production," George laughed.

"You mustn't say it," she answered rather fiercely. "I love these lines."

"Well, anyhow," he excused himself, "how could *I* tell that Moldavians would adopt something I had written for the Greeks? And how *could* I recognise a free translation into French from the Moldavian?"

"I am so sorry," she said, pensively, "so sorry."

George rose. "One must lunch, after all," he said. He was a little nettled. "I have been a good deal victimised," he added, as she followed him to the garden gate.

"Oh, I know," she said. "I know. I should be so very glad if you recognised it more." Her eyes were exploring the street up and down,

He went again to his study desk. He had undoubtedly the itch to write. The letter of the editor of "The Higher Things" confronted him, and the words "a great poet" still rang in his ears. He had fallen under his own spell. There was the fervent letter of the editor offering him a gratifying sum for a sonnet; there were the look, the steadfast face of Clara Brede. Her full voice, her exhortatory manner, were those of the whole-souled women who incite to great enthusiasm and to forlorn hopes.

His own attitude towards himself as poet was the inevitable one of backing and filling. It is obvious that he must have been at times obsessed by the jingle of words. But, nine days out of ten he would dismiss his work with a small motion of his hand, that, given his great personal prestige, did really extinguish it altogether. He had tried to do it with Clara Brede. He had in the nature of the case no respect for the intellects of the people for the moment enthusiastic about him. An editor is by nature an ass; a Moldavian can't be expected to judge English verse. And a young girl is a young girl. You can't give a reason for her likings. But the three together did something. Applause after all is applause; and for the moment he had that faint touch of hope, like a waft of spring wind; like a glimmer of first love—that sort of half touch of whole faith that we must sometimes have or die—the faith

that words matter, that letters survive. He dipped his pen spiritedly in the ink and held it poised above clean paper. With that pen on that paper he might write words that would outlast the stars. It had become, for the moment at least, a potentiality.

He did not, of course. The postman, jerking down from the steps of the house, jogged past. Then came the tall, halting figure of the Moldavian, half hiding his sister, and, on the further side, Clara Brede, her blue dress waving in the wind. They walked slowly, with the averted gaze and self-conscious air of persons who do not wish to look in at a window, and yet wish to look at a house. George lost himself in conjectures. They passed. A letter was brought in to him. It had a French stamp, and a hand-writing that George recognised as that of a great French writer—one of the great names. It was with a certain pleasure that he read the "*Cher Maître*" of the opening. The letter was by way of being one of recommendation of a Prince Nicholas of Moldavia—"A true hero of the grand style. Figure to yourself, he carries in his left leg two bullets of the oppressor. He has for you a true veneration; it is a veritable artist of action, and so young, with a charm so ingenious" The writer begged that George would receive the prince favourably. "But why do I talk of a favourable reception to you, who are the fine soul of hospitality?"

There was a postscript praising an article of George's that had appeared some months before. The writer said that it might be taken for the work of a Frenchman.

Five minutes later he was hurrying towards the Bredes' cottage. Once again the fly was driving away. Clara Brede was standing at the gate waving her hand in farewell to the young girl. The flyman swished his whip. From the back seat the young man was pointing his stick at a gable of the church. Then they disappeared.

Clara Brede, shading her eyes with her hand, turned to go indoors. She caught sight of George and waited.

"I went out to find them," she said valiantly, as soon as he was within hearing.

George said, "You showed them round?" mildly.

"You must not think it was meddling," she pleaded. "At least, it was meddling," she added, conscientiously, "but I mean . . ."

"It was a kind thought?" he asked.

"I didn't like it," she answered, "and I *couldn't* leave it."

"You thought it pathetic they should have come so far to meet such a rebuff?" George asked gaily.

She looked down at the ground as if still conscientiously analysing her own motives. "No, I think," she said, "I didn't like their carrying away such an impression."

"Of—of English men of letters?" George asked.

She flushed right over her face and down to where her neck ran into the severe simplicity of her blue dress at just the juncture of the shoulders.

"Of you," she said.

George said:

"Oh, dear, there's nothing to be distressed about. I don't at all resent your coming to my rescue. I *had* behaved like a bear."

"I told some lies," she said, as if relief made her suddenly glib.

"You would have to if you wanted me to seem amiable," George smiled.

"I said you had come there to meditate, and that you had had a bereavement."

"You might, you know, have said that I had deputed you to make it up. Or that you were, as it were, a buffer between me and a world of intruders."

"I did think of saying that," she admitted.

"Now that was too bad," George said. She looked at him with a sort of alarm. "Think, I mean, of how you missed impressing them with my resources," he reassured banteringly. "What an idea they might have carried away of a man with a concierge of such charm." He said the words with a bow and a "leg."

Her great-grandmother would have curtsied and riposted with a ready turned phrase ending

in "Sir." Clara Brede only said "Oh," and appeared distressed.

"You know you'll catch a dreadful cold without a cape," George ended. "But you shall, if you want to be really kind, come in and make music for me with your sister. I'm a lonely old man."

That was a "kind thought" of George's.

George was determined to play the great man, if by that pose he could give pleasure. The two Brede girls came and made music for him; he exerted himself to please. His candles again glowed; there was a great log on the andirons; the magnificent-roofed room was full of warm shadows. And George did justice to his setting. He had precisely that glow, that pleasantness, that a fire has of an early autumn night—what you might call an over-charm. He was the old, great man, exerting himself to be delightful to the young.

They made a mild, folk-ballad music—and then he talked. He was very much at his best. The Brede girls pleased him; they gave him, as it were, a stage and an audience too. And they placed him. He *was* the old great man, a sort of Scott of Abbotsford. They, in their ingenuous, delightful youth, were players to him, too.

Dora, after all, was young, silent, unformed, and, as it were, unawakened, fair, flushed, and as if tumbled after a pleasant warm sleep. But Clara, with her directness, her Puritanic con-

scientiousness, was a figure of comedy for him. Her pauses before she spoke amused his anticipation ; her uttered judgments, her directnesses, were a delight. So were her blushes, her self-consciousness. Once she condemned something George had written in support of one of his young men. But she did it with an air of distress, and at the same time revealed an inherent difficulty of either tempering or shirking the condemnation. It infinitely delighted George.

"I think the man was not worth writing about," she said.

"But, my dear young lady, he has a certain lisp of a style. And he wanted a friendly lift."

She hesitated, and said reluctantly :

"But if he was not worth writing about, I think it makes it all the worse that you have written so tremendously well about him. It seems to me like a crime."

George laughed.

"You know, you will have to be the keeper of my conscience as well as of my door," he said.

"One wants you to be always at your best," she maintained, "just because you do so very little."

"Oh, you mustn't elevate me to a cult," he said, "my feet are so obviously clay." He laughed again hilariously, when he saw Dora cast an involuntary shy glance at his feet.

After they had gone, he began to rake together fragments of verse from all sorts of drawers full of magazines. He was considering the possibility of a new volume.

VI.

ONCE a Greek scholar of repute and Fellow of his College, afterwards a clergyman noted for his public spirit and the diligence with which he administered his parish and tried to draw public attention to the wants of the agricultural labourer, Mr. Brede had, until his breakdown, gone about all his work with a fierce energy and a sort of impressive harshness of temper. Now, he walked always rather slowly and with a slight limp. The story of his wife's death was for ever on his lips. He had an almost stereotyped form of words :—

“There was my wife. The doctors had told me, as plainly as they could tell anybody anything, that in *her* state of health the least excitement would kill her. I knew it, if ever a man knew anything.” There was no stopping him. George must have heard the story at least twenty times on Mr. Brede's bad days. He would relate it in a sort of frenzy, and detail it in a gloating grief. “It was one day when she had been better than usual. She was sitting in the drawing room window to get the benefit of the sun. I saw that the knife boy hadn't cleaned my boots properly. He had a habit of blacking over the mud in

the welts." The knife boy had passed across the lawn whistling ; Mr. Brede had run out of the French window. The knife boy had "answered" him saucily. "In a rage !" Mr. Brede would foam in telling the tale. "I could have throttled the oaf. I caught hold of him." He had heard a scream ; Mrs. Brede was dead.

He would, in his bad days, talk about it by the hour together. The brain specialist he had consulted had forbidden his working any more. It was a case of complete nervous breakdown ; he had been too strenuous ; he was, in fact, paying the penalty of doing the work of several men.

His parish had been large. He had attended to it with his angry thoroughness, and he had had many other interests : a crusade against the High Church party in his diocese, and, above all, a society that he had founded for creating social life in rural districts—the Society for Promoting Rural Pleasures. He wanted to keep the peasant on the land by making his life attractive. He had had to give them all up. At his worse moments he would asseverate that he was possessed by devils and unfit to minister before the Most High. He "heard voices." At his best he was convinced that he had murdered his wife.

Clara Brede had passed from the unceasing tending of her mother to a more harassing attendance upon Mr. Brede. He had an exaggerated desire to talk about his case, and,

until at Wickham he had come upon George, he had walked about continuously with her. Then Dora had come back from college.

It added to Clara's perplexities. Dora must at all costs be kept from the sadness of her own lot, from her father's depressing influence. Mr. Brede had suddenly recovered a small interest in his classical studies. He bought a number of fac-similes of papyri, and spent some hours—it was about the time of the discovery of the *Codex Argentinensis*—in angrily demonstrating that the Strasburg decipherer was entirely in the wrong in his emendations of the missing portions.

"I will," Clara suddenly offered him on the day of his return from his short visit to the parish, "do all the copying of the Codex for you." It was in the gloomy and tiny room, like a thin-sided box, that, in the house they had hired at Wickham, served as his study. Heavy and dusty calf-bound books, relics of his fellowship, stood on the small desk that almost filled the room. On its flap lay the yellow fac-simile of the papyrus covered with crabbed uncial writing.

"You, you're no good," Mr. Brede said gloomily.

Clara looked at him seriously.

"I think I haven't forgotten everything," she said. "I can try."

Mr. Brede looked down at his papers. He had a certain respect for his daughter.

"Well, you can try," he said. "What would you say now to ἐπιδεδάγμενοι here?" He pointed a great finger to where a word had been gnawed by mice out of the papyrus. Clara turned her serious eyes to the place.

"I think the other reading's quite as good," she said, after a long pause.

He began to dictate to her: "The Strasburg professor's contention——" It was the commencement of a quite interminable correspondence about the words missing from the twenty lines of uncials.

Half the morning had passed over the silent movements of her pen when Clara said:

"I think, father, you ought not to take up so much of Mr. Moffat's time."

Mr. Brede said, violently: "Oh, nonsense."

"I'm quite ready," she went on, unwaveringly, "to give you all mine. Not, of course, as a price or a return. But I think it isn't right of us to trouble Mr. Moffat." She continued cogently and conscientiously to put before him just what she had put before George himself.

Mr. Brede grew intensely angry. He said he couldn't do without George; George was the only person that understood his case. It made him all the more angry to have to acknowledge that she was in the right.

Dora and Thwaite had seen a great deal of each other by a month after that day. They

had met at street corners ; Thwaite called at the house ; they chanced upon each other on George's steps ; the two sisters and Thwaite went walking together. Dora even, in her shy, flushed way, got lessons in book reviewing—for the *Salon*. It was a quite open and quite charming commencement of a courtship.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Brede descended upon them heavily. Dora wasn't to think of marriage. He forbade it. He was speaking to the two girls alone.

How could Dora after that see Thwaite at all ? And how could she explain the avoidance ? She avoided him. Clara had argued the matter with her father. He did not give any reasons. He forebade it to her, too. *She* was never to marry. He hadn't noticed what had been going on ; he had not realised that Thwaite was the man. As soon as he had he had spoken.

After a long fortnight of unhappiness Dora met Thwaite. It was on the station road, in the winter dusk. She had tried to pass him ; he had detained her very gently and masterfully. She had not the right to treat him in such a way. He wanted to know why she did.

It came out then, and, under the steely glitter of the winter stars, shut in by the gathering shadows, and confronted with the purple bluff of the town's little hill, which had on one shoulder a single, oblong, orange pane

of a lit cottage window, they were gloriously and glowingly warm suddenly—immensely happy and tenderly desolate ; bursting into the speech, and dumb with the irrational mournfulness of a newly-avowed and inevitably crossed love.

Eventually Thwaite had gone off to George.

Then George himself confronted Clara in the Brede's brightly lit and glowing room. She had been crying a little. She had had to listen to her sister's confession, and it had moved her a good deal. She said :

"Dora is fond of Mr. Thwaite."

"Oh, I'll make it all right with your father," George said.

She looked at him, and asked, with her hesitating and as if painful conscientiousness, "Are you sure ? do you think he's quite scrupulous—Mr. Thwaite, I mean ?"

Some days before, Thwaite, with a sort of candour of a tentative suitor, had been making to Dora, and before Clara, little admissions as to his financial prospects. It was as much as to say, "If you don't think it good enough, we had better not go any farther." He drew such and such a salary from the *Salon*. He had no debts except that he owed George a good round sum. He had owed it for a great many years. "But, of course," he added, with his winning smile, "no one ever thinks of repaying *him*."

It had given Clara a shock. She was not used to that sort of gay irresponsibility. She had even argued the matter with him. He had answered: "Oh, it's rather a large sum. I owed a lot of small things, and he took them all over. I haven't the least prospect of repaying him. He would not expect it." He mentioned the sum, and Clara noted that it was just a little more than the dowry she would have to give when Dora was married.

The episode was in her mind when she asked George—it pained her a great deal, even thus veiledly, to question a man George had commended—whether he was sure that Thwaite was quite scrupulous.

George made a large gesture with his hand.

"Oh, my dear young lady," he said, with his air of ripe knowledge, "ask if he has kind thoughts. Ask—and that's the essential thing in a journey through life—if he's sympathetic; a staunch companion, a pleasant and faithful friend. Ask if he's the imagination that will make him enter into, and be tender to, the desires, the hopes, and above all, the weaknesses of others. That's the essential quality!" He spoke with a great deal of masterful enthusiasm. He added, amusedly: "But you've only got to look at Thwaite's face to see that he's the soul of honour."

Clara Brede, with her rapt air, seemed to signify that he must be right, that he

was always right. But her lips closed as if, in spite of that, she had taken a resolve. He set before her a glowing picture of the happiness that must arise from such a marriage as that of Thwaite and Dora. It would make a charming little circle of them all in the tiny town. He certainly succeeded in convincing Clara Brede. It wasn't so easy a matter with her father. On that night—he, too, had just heard of the coming together of Thwaite and Dora—Mr. Brede abruptly refused even to see George. He wasn't going to argue the matter; his fiat was irrevocable. George had to confess as much to Thwaite, who was waiting for him.

“But, of course,” George comforted his protégé, “it won't rest there.”

“The thing's too senseless, too abominable,” Thwaite said.

His air was rather wild, his eyes fierce, and his hands nervously agitated. “An insensate piece of cruelty; the man's a brute.” He had a certain vigour of over-riding; a certain almost frenzy that a little disturbed George. He hadn't seen anything like it in Thwaite before.

VII.

CLARA BREDE was sitting on her bed. Her hands were folded in her lap ; her fair hair fell about her shoulders. Her dress, unfastened at the neck, revealed her full throat and a little of her white chest. Her blue eyes looked, unseeing, at her looking-glass, that, tilted upwards, showed her only the plain white of the ceiling. The lines of her face drooped a little, and were quite motionless. She had a tortoise-shell hairpin in one hand.

Her room was very small, the paper very pale, the coverlet, the toilet cover, the blind, the curtains, all white. Above the head of her bed hung a small photograph of her Cambridge College. The two candles on the dressing table made the place blaze. The servants in the room above were talking, and the higher notes of their voices came through the ceiling. "I wish I could see" she said suddenly. Her voice startled her. She stirred, leaned forward and laid the hairpin on the dressing table. She raised both her hands to her hair and slowly untwisted a heavy coil. But they sank again into her lap. "No, I can't go to bed," she said.

She moved one hand towards her pillow.

She was going to lie down. Then she remembered to have read somewhere that lying down fully dressed injured the complexion. "What nonsense," she said, but her hand returned to her lap. Perhaps it was true. She sat motionless. "And this is what I have come to!" she said. She sat silent for a very long time. Then she spoke: "I think he goes upon very wrong lines. I think he is dreadfully demoralising."

Her eyes rested upon the tortoise-shell hairpins. She wondered whether, if she waved her hair, it would suit her. Dora had said it would.

"No one ever thanks him," she said. She was speaking of George.)

She was twenty-seven. She had left her college six years before, on the very eve of "going up" for her "tripos." She had been sitting in her college study. Half-a-dozen other girls, her best friends, had been perched on the sofa, on the table, lying back in the lounge. They were talking about "what they were going to do" after that next week which was going to settle so much, for which they had been working hard enough, many of them. Clara was going in for teaching. It was needed so much; she had a vocation for it. She would love it; and with a little luck one might make a career. Clara—she was in these days exactly the same Clara—had sat gazing at a point in the wall, above the mantel-piece. "If I get through," she said, "but I muddle things so dreadfully."

"Oh, *you*!" her best friend said derisively. "You never made a slip since you learned your first declension in short frocks."

Clara shook her head mildly. To herself she seemed so dreadfully wanting in "nerve," in just that thing that makes one do things neatly, decidedly, and with an instinct for the right alternative. There were always so many alternatives; one could never be sure; life was so "difficult."

"Good old Clara!" one of the girls said.

Someone at the door called: "Here's a telegram for Clara Brede."

It said that her mother was very ill.

Mrs. Brede had been kept just alive for five years from that day. She had, before the telegram was sent, been struck down by a spasm of the heart. Clara, who was the only one to nurse her, had never gone back to her college. The sister next her had been married just before; the next was only eighteen; the next fifteen—that was Dora. Clara was the only one who could look after the house; it was large and rambling; there were three servants and the stables; her father needed help. She had frequently to sit up all night in her mother's room, a place all shadows, where medicine bottles clicked on the shelves at the lightest footfall. She had tried at first to "keep up her work"—reading—through those long nights by the glimmer of a shaded night-light. She had to hold her book very

close to it. She was not sure that it did her "any good."

At first she had kept up a correspondence with her best friend still at college, and with a young graduate who gave private lectures in Cambridge. He was full of generous ambitions; he, too, had a "vocation" for teaching. The best friend became secretary to a training school. After a time the young graduate married. Their letters stopped like the dying away of faint sounds from outside a closed place. Things went very quietly. The two boys went to college, then out into the world. The next sister married. Dora went away to a high school, then to college too. Her father worked strenuously; in his big parish he drove congregations to church; in the diocese he combated the Ritualists. He travelled much, giving lectures, raising his loud voice in the country at large, attempting to bind the peasant to the land. All the while Mrs. Brede lay still, or crept very gently from the bed to the window. Three times they had gone to Wickham because it was very quiet and near the sea. There already Clara had seen George at a distance. She knew him as distinguished; she had read his verse at college. Once she heard him speak. He had been asking the post-mistress about her rheumatism. He had struck Clara as being rather "finicking," too nice in his dress, and a little meddlesome. Her college training had left her the tone of contempt for

personal refinement and delicacy. She still desired people to be "purposeful." She went back to her night watches. The house moved as quietly as ever. Nothing would ever disturb it.

She was dead and buried. She did not care to think of any "afterwards," because it would have meant looking forward to her mother's death. But she thought her thoughts. Life was none the easier because she had no "vocation" for that sort of life, and she had no one to talk to.

An under housemaid would ask for an extra night out, Clara was never certain. To refuse might be harsh, to grant it, bad for discipline. The girl might get into mischief if she went; if she could not, it might be a bitter disappointment, and Clara was tender towards the disappointed.

She had Dora, too, to think for, and there was her father. She was no longer certain that she was a Christian; she was assuredly not certain that it was for the peasant's good to keep him "on the land." Sometimes she thought that any kind of propagandising was wrong. All the time, she copied out her father's sermons at night; she wrote, from dictation, his violent letters to the *Times*. He abused her handwriting. Sometimes she forgot to cross her "t's," because she was thinking so hard about all these matters.

Dora, too, seemed to be growing up "frivolous." At College she appeared to think

most of dress, of college shirts, of neat collars, and of games. She treated life so gaily ; she was always laughing. Apparently she did very little work, and never faced any of Clara's "graver issues." It worried Clara very much ; her father, engrossed in his own work, left the matter entirely in her hands. What was she to do ? She could not sympathise with Dora's irresponsibility, yet she dare not "talk to" Dora. What had the graver issues done for her, Clara Brede ? Dora now was, yes, she was, like a sun-beam. How could her sister play the cloud ? Life was so difficult.

Then her mother died. She had seemed so much better. Clara, in the last sunshine of the year, had been taking a little walk, not going a mile out of earshot of the house. Her mother was sitting dead in the chair when she came back ; her father was raving that he had killed her.

She had to face an entirely new situation. Of the old she had retained only one precious memory.

Her mother had awakened late one night, some months before, and had said : " Darling Clara, you are so good to me, so kind, so patient." They had both cried very bitterly.

Clara had never thought of herself as kind or patient. She had done her work without any idea that she did it well. She had done her best, but not as to any manner born. So her mother's words were very precious. After-

wards her mother had made her will. There was a respectable sum for the children. Clara was to divide it as she thought fit, giving to one more than to another, as their circumstances seemed to her to warrant, or not to give it at all if she liked. It marked her mother's perfect trust in Clara, but it was one more responsibility, and she had her father upon her hands.

She had one more very bad year to pass through before they had settled down at Wickham. Horrible moments stood out. She had gone with her father to consult a Harley Street specialist. Mr. Brede had been moaning to her until seven in the morning, in the sitting room of a London hotel. She had had no sleep, they had had to wait a very long time in the specialist's ante-room. Afterwards she had received long instructions as to the management of her father. She was to find a *locum tenens* for him, she was to take him abroad, she was to keep his mind engaged, she was to watch him unceasingly. He might become light-headed at times. She was to secure always rooms opening out of his. In foreign hotels it was a good thing to have a night porter within easy call. All the while she had been wanting to call out at the doctor : 'And I ? And I ? What's to become of me ? Is *my* life worth nothing ? Haven't *I* got a sanity to lose ?'

But she had appointed the *locum tenens* ; she had gone abroad with her father. It re-

mained in her mind as a long agony of trying to interest him in great pictures that made her eyes ache, by artists whose names seemed to be all like "Caravaggio."

Mr. Brede grew a little better. They came to settle at Wickham. It all went on just the same. Then Dora came back ; one day they met George. Mr. Brede had once or twice called on him, in the old days, when he had been trying to beat up recruits for the Society for keeping the peasant on the land. So when they met, George asked her father how the Society went. Mr. Brede had replied with his whole lamentable story. It had been one of his bad days, and he had shouted a good deal. It had shocked Clara. She was used to his outbreaks before strangers, but George was different, a distinguished man who would not stand intruders. She had had that idea of George.

George, however, had almost taken her father off her hands. He had become the centre of their lives.

She had the smallest room in the house, because from it she could hear through the wall the slightest sounds that her father made. It was so low that she could not take her dress off without rubbing her hands against the ceiling. She had not thought much about it before, but suddenly it struck her as abominable.

George had hardly noticed her. She would have said he had not really looked at her until

that evening. When he had spoken about Thwaite he had really, as it were, tried to come in contact with her. He had always had a very kind tone, but an amused one, as if she were a person who had never thought about life. He had said: "A concierge of such a charm!" bantering things like that.

"I think I do not agree with him about Thwaite," she said. His doctrine seemed to be immoral. He had told her not to trouble about a man's scrupulousness; the main thing was whether he was sympathetic. "I couldn't subscribe to such a doctrine," she said.

But, at least, he had spoken to her about life, about things that mattered, not only of books and flowers, and the gossip of the place. She wondered why gossip amused him. She had always thought that one ought to be above it. But he was interested in people's lives. She sat speculating for a long time . . .

"Thwaite is unscrupulous," she maintained. "He's charming. I think he would make Dora an excellent defender, a splendid companion. But ought I to let Dora marry him?" He would be unscrupulous for her against all the world. But was that what most a woman needed? Would it be moral? What ought she to do? Mr. Moffat said that they would make such a charming family circle. But was that an excuse?

"Oh, if only——" she began. She was talking to herself again. It startled and

shocked her. It was a sign that her mind, too, was yielding to a strain. Or was that idea, too, only self-consciousness?

"Yet, heaven knows," she said, "I've no one else to talk to. No one."

The pure lines of her fair face hardened; her eyes gazed more intently in front of her.

"He might have taken an interest in me!" she said. He never had. A hot glow had come over her one day while George had been taking his immense pains over her father. It had done her father no good; it had only made him talk the more and think the more about his own misery. She had wanted to say to George: "Why not talk to *me*?"

Ah, why not? No one, not ever, seemed to think that she could suffer. She had listened to her mother, to her father, to her sisters. Her girl friends had built, before her, their castles in the air. But they seemed always to cool at once if she began to talk about herself. "You?—you can do what you like," they had always seemed to say. Why? Why should she be always credited with this cool efficiency? Why did no one—even George, who could see into so many hearts—ever see that she needed sympathy, help, counsel? Besides, she dare not really speak to Dora. She could not be certain that she had not "morbid" ideas, that it was not right for a child like Dora to share. She could not be certain. There was no one she could open

her heart to. She needed it so much—ah, she needed it so much. She bowed her head, and sat for a long time lost in gazing at her hands. Her nails were very pink and delicate, her hands were very long. She laid them one within another, and thought that, surely, they were graceful.

But her dress was dreadfully coarse blue stuff. She had thought it so nice when she had bought it before they came to Wickham. Why shouldn't she have some better things? She had money now. Besides, they could afford it. She had always made her own. Why shouldn't she manage to run up to town for an afternoon now to a dressmaker's? Surely Dora could look after her father for one day. Dora had plenty of things.

"He took an interest in Dora," she said, suddenly. He worried himself about her, about Thwaite—even about that hateful Hailes, who had always made her shudder. What could he see in such a creature, such a manifest leech? Why should he help such people? Why not her? What was the matter, that she appealed to no one?

"Oh, if only ——" she began again. If only she could talk, just once, just once open her heart to some good man like that! If only he would listen to her for awhile, just once, just to ease herself of her intolerable load of—"of silly nothings," she said, sharply.

She must put a stop to these morbid self-

analyses. There was nothing in her to attract the notice of such a great man. Hundreds of other girls had been trampled under, dried up, became dust at last without ever speaking. She, too, would have to in the end.

"But if only——" No, it was no good. She couldn't even speak to herself. What was the good? One has to give up day dreams at last. One has to come to renunciations. She opened a drawer and stood looking into it abstractedly. She had a few treasures, some old brooches of her mother's, a pearl necklace. She took it out, and stood fingering the pearls. They were wonderfully soothing to the touch, delicate, silky. She put it round her neck and stood thinking. It came over her gently, like something precious, that she knew more about George than anyone there. Even Thwaite did not know that he was a poor man. She had overheard that hateful Mrs. Gregory Moffat talking about it—to Hailes. A horrible, bare-faced thing to do! "Oh, I assure you," Mrs. Moffat's high voice had said, "George can't last another year. This place is mortgaged up to the hilt—What? Oh, I don't suppose he's in debt; he's too ridiculously considerate of his tradesmen." Clara had been coming in by the private way, over the turf in the dusk, behind a tall, quickset hedge that George was proud of. It had arcaded openings, round arches cut in it. Mrs. Moffat had been talking, in her

high, contemptuous voice on the other side. Clara had paused with one foot drawn back. She had heard a great deal more.

It had shocked her horribly at first. She had watched George's face intently for signs of worry. She thought she had made them out. But how splendidly he concealed it !

Afterwards, when Thwaite had spoken light-heartedly of owing a large sum to George, it had sickened her. It was too dreadful, too heartless. But Thwaite evidently knew nothing. George was keeping his sorrow to himself. What would he do ? What was he going to do ? It would be dreadful for him. He was used to all these fine things. It was impossible to imagine him without them. Supposing he intended to kill himself !

She paused, bending over another drawer that she had opened. It was full of her mother's beautiful old china silks. She remembered that there was some old, very fine lace beneath the silks. She began to take them carefully out, and lay them on the bed. They had only been relics for her. What was she to do ? What ought she to do ? She had not money enough to be worth offering to George. And how could she offer it. It wasn't possible. And all these people had been preying upon him. Her father, too, had been taking up time when George might have been working. Well, she had stopped all that ! She was going to go on as she had begun, on the very next day—

keeping her father away from George. *They*, assuredly, were not going to prey on him.

She began to take out from the drawer a long strip of broad lace; it fell voluptuously, a delicate yellow, over her arm; it depended in a broad fold to her feet. She remembered for a minute that lace was coming in again. This, she believed, was priceless.

No! They were not going to prey on George. If Thwaite were going to become a member of their family, he, too, would have to leave off. She would insist on that—if George could persuade her father to consent to the marriage. She wondered vaguely if he would. If not, poor Dora.

She herself liked Thwaite; in many things he was so "genuine." But, if he were to marry Dora, he must work to pay George back. He must. They couldn't be indebted. But she couldn't explain to Thwaite; she could not tell him why it was so urgent. George wanted no one to know. She sat down again on her bed and began to loosen her dress. She tilted the glass down, to catch sight of herself.

What, then, was to be done? She had only her own money—and Dora's. Of her mother's bequest she had given away by now all but their two shares. Perhaps, after all, George might not be ruined. She undid the hooks of her cuffs; her dress began to slip down.

Thwaite owed George all this money. If he married Dora, then—— She sat up very straight; her dress slid down, her white shoulders appeared, dazzling and solid.

“Dora’s money ought to pay Mr. Moffat,” she said. The whole position took shape before her, as if snow had fallen to outline a dim landscape.

That was it; that was obviously it. In some form. But in what?

Dora’s money will just pay Mr. Moffat,” she said. She considered for a long time. She could not tell Thwaite—that George was in need of money. It might be a great blow for Thwaite. Perhaps it would. She was convinced that Thwaite was fond of money. She did not want to hurt Thwaite’s feelings. What ought she to do?

She was draping the yellow lace upon her white shoulders. The touch of it was like a caress.

“I could give Mr. Moffat my own money,” she said. But no. That wasn’t possible. It would do Thwaite good—to have a reverse. He had had too easy a time of it; he had been too long a parasite. Things had “turned up” for him too easily. It was demoralising.

That was precisely it; George was demoralising. He helped people too much; they could not do without him at last. He meddled, too. It would have been meddling in a man less fine. She pursued remorselessly her con-

scientific reasoning. It must lead to evil in the end. People victimised him. That was degrading to them. He hadn't the right to usurp the functions of Providence. No man had.

She sat down in front of her mirror. She shook her hair loose about her shoulders. Her face had the freshness, her flesh the lustrous transparence, in the bright light, of a white-heart cherry. The white of her shoulders looked velvety and soft through the old ivory of the lace. Yes ; she was beautiful, like that. Why wouldn't people see it ? Why had she never attracted anyone ? Was it only the matter of dress, or hadn't she had the will ?

"If I had this lace made up," she thought, "and did my hair so as to get the full value of it." She half closed her eyes and pictured herself walking, tall, straight, fair, her cheeks flushed, her eyes dancing, a soft smile curving the clear lines of her mouth. She had seen women like that with—with . . . "with an *ensemble*," she remembered George had said of a lady they had once seen—a tourist, looking at the church. She sighed, the tenseness relaxed. She wondered what sort of a woman his wife could have been.

"Why have people always treated him so badly ?" she asked herself. He had probably spoilt his wife. That was it. He spoiled everybody he met. He was too good. People

could not appreciate him.) They *must* treat him badly. It was inevitable.

"I ought to put these things away," she said, but she was too tired. She had used up all her energy. Then she said determinedly: "Thwaite sha'n't escape." It was perfectly right. Her mother had given her the money. This was precisely a case for her to use her discretion.

"But ought I?—ought I?" She felt instinctively that something, somewhere, was biasing her. "If only I had someone to talk to!" But she couldn't talk, even to George, about this matter. To him least of all.

It would do Thwaite good. That was something. The thing was beginning to worry her horribly. It needn't hurt Dora. If Dora ever needed money, she, Clara, would give her her own. How *did* it work out? It was surely perfectly right. Mr. Moffat *ought* to be paid. Her sister could not be indebted to him. But supposing he never needed the money? Supposing that Mrs. Moffat had been lying? She was that sort of woman.

She drew up her blind, and looked through the low diamond-paned window at the pale night. She extinguished her candles, and a blazing moon, a great bright star, the silver band of the distant, tranquil sea, existed suddenly behind the wintering branches of trees. It was all so still, so steadfast, so definite.

"I suppose I must let it slide," she said, bitterly. "Then I shall have to act. But I'm always doing things. I can never get to the bottom of anything."

She had become, in her little room, a white, dim figure in the shadows. Her hair caught the reflection of the moon in broad bands. She said—"Never!"

But she debated these things for long after.

George was prepared to go to any lengths to make Mr. Brede consent to the marriage of Dora and Thwaite. He thought he understood Mr. Brede's mental trouble; he was not prepared to call him a brute. There was undoubtedly a logic underlying the unreasonableness.

"But it's absurd," he fulminated. Mr. Brede had at last come to see him, after perhaps a week of gloomy and obstinate silence at home. "Even if, for the sake of argument, we allow that you did cause your wife's death, *that's* not the kind of sin that's visited on the children. Besides, it would be for Thwaite to object."

Mr. Brede shook his head gloomily.

"It isn't that," he said. "I don't want to talk about it."

George caught him resolutely. "I won't talk about anything else."

He implied, distinctly enough, that if Mr. Brede would not listen to reason, he, George,

would have no more to say to him. Mr. Brede said, rather lamentably :

"But, Moffat——" There was a great appeal in his voice.

George shook his head.

Mr. Brede's heavy features sank towards his chest. Suddenly he raised his brows and shot a piercing, rather wild glance at George.

"I'm—I tell you I'm going——" he muttered rather thickly, and then, with a swift intonation, "I'm not the sort of man whose children ought to marry. There are more than enough creatures like me."

George laughed robustly and comfortingly. "It's just such strenuous natures as yours that we need so dreadfully. People who can work themselves out—right out, as you have done. Now, of course you're taking a rest ; but you'll begin again. I'm not certain that you oughtn't soon."

Mr. Brede shook his head gloomily. "I've no mind left," he said. "You don't know what it is."

George laughed rather brilliantly.

"You know, you are—you are really—a little outrageous with your self-questioning. It's conscientiousness carried to a logical absurdity. But you must really get back to work again. That's what you want."

Mr. Brede looked at him with a suggestion of awakened trusting that irresistibly suggested Clara's.

"You think *that*," he said.

"Oh, I'm sure of it," George answered.

Mr. Brede rose suddenly to his immense height. "I'll never consent to their marriage," he said, vehemently. His manner had entirely changed. "Never. It's not fitting that my children should marry. A mark is set upon me." He rushed out of the room.

But after a week, during which George resolutely refused to see him, he wrote a note to George. "Heaven, if it cares about me any more, knows that I don't wish to be cruel to my girls. But I'm a man sorely tried."

George felt extremely pleased. "Oh, I'll take all the responsibilities," he went round to say to him.

There was going to be such a pleasant circle in that little town. He himself would take Mr. Brede in hand, and would get him back to himself. And he had begun his new volume.

THE BENEFACTOR.



PART II.

THE GOLDEN CIRCLE.

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THE GOLDEN CIRCLE.

I.

WHILST he was ferretting in drawers and turning over in his mind fragments of uncompleted verse, George came upon a novel that he had written a great many years before. He had been dissatisfied with it, and the manuscript had remained ever since at the bottom of a drawer. He read it out of curiosity, and it left him gasping and ashamed to think that he had ever been so callow and so crude. It was like looking at a portrait of himself in his boyhood, though it was not really ten years old.

It had been a mediæval-renaissance story ; it was romantically concerned with the discovery of America, the opening up of new and mysterious worlds ; it was "justified" according to George's own psychological ideas. The hero analysed his emotions hair-splittingly. He thought whole pages full between the uplifting and downfall of a battle axe ; he was filled with quite modern world pain as he walked in cloisters, strayed in

Virginian forests, or saw outrages committed on the high seas. It was, in fact, that *Wilderspin* which half the world that reads has since read.

It had filled George with the shame of a suddenly remembered youthful indiscretion. He left it lying, a heap of paper, open to the oak beams of his study on the top of the bureau at which he wrote. Sometimes whilst he was working at the new volume he looked at the heap; the dust was settling down on it again. Then one day Clara Brede came in and borrowed it to read. But *Wilderspin* or no *Wilderspin*, there was undoubtedly a fever in George. He thought of Clara's finding revealed its vulgarities, its life, its positiveness and its youth, and that spurred him to those fits of impatience in which, spasmodically, a man catches at the pen, and can't write fast enough. It carried him into the New Year, too.

"My dear fellow," he said suddenly to Thwaite, "the fact is you're all, all of you, working along wrong lines. What we want is your commonplaces."

It was a January night after supper. Candle-light from under green shades in two places of the dusky room fell on the respective blotting-pads of George and of the Editor of the *Salon*. Thwaite had undoubtedly ensued the civilising touches of George's "best type." He had had his beard well trimmed; it gave

him a certain air of Henry IV. of France, and a certain air of knowing it. He was by then definitely affianced to Dora. Mr. Brede had never again mentioned the subject. They were to be married in the summer holidays; peace had descended upon the little circle.

"Oh, if you want my commonplaces," he said good humouredly, looking up from the slip on his knees, "listen!" He began to read the book announcements from the *Salon*: "Messrs. Killingworth are publishing an interesting volume on . . ."

George said: "Killingworths have asked for this volume," and Thwaite answered:

"Oh, they aren't the least use for verse."

"Where I mean your mistake lies," George took up again, "is in your view of the attitude of the poet—you want so damnably to *be* poets, to get the poetic point of view."

Thwaite laid his pad on the ground beside his cane chair, crossed his legs, and began to tap his delicate white fingers one on the other. He said: "Well?"

"The poetic point of view," George said, with a slight sniff, "and to 'get' it . . . But don't you see, my dear fellow? A man either is or is not a poet. If he is, his commonplace *is* the poetic point of view. If he isn't . . ."

Thwaite said: "Oh, but . . ." and stirred slightly. His chair creaked in the dim warmth of the room.

"I fall upon you," George said animatedly, "because the idea is a new one; a new canon, a new motive, a light through all sort of dimnesses—to me, I mean. I've never seen it put as clearly as I want to put it. And upon you because here——" he let a heavy fist fall upon a copy of the *Salon*, "here I find you writing those absurd words: An unfortunate has published a first volume; you recommend him to keep firmly before him 'the poetic point of view.'"

Thwaite said: "Oh, I'm not a good critic. *That's* commercialism—that's penny-a-lining. Those reviews represent tables and chairs for the cottage."

"You're writing a great deal too much, my dear boy," George said with sudden gravity. "This rag of a paper isn't worth it."

"You mean I've a delicate thin pipe of a talent," Thwaite mocked at him.

"You have," George affirmed. "I don't want to see you blunt it."

Thwaite leaned forward.

"The *Salon* people—(I fancy it's principally your sister-in-law)—have given hints of displeasure," he said. "They think I'm not worth my salt. I been trying to prove I am."

"You've been writing it pretty well from cover to cover," George accused. "It's too much, too much."

"It's a matter of death or nothing," Thwaite laughed. "If they give me notice, how the

deuce am I to marry Dora? She's next to nothing; I've practically not a cent."

"It's not as bad as that, surely?" George asked.

"Bad," Thwaite answered gloomily, "why, one has to look things in the face. I couldn't take that child into starvation. I don't want anything for myself."

George interjected: "No, no," as if he were asking a question.

"I explained the matter to the father—to Mr. Brede," Thwaite went on, "and he said the whole thing was in Clara's hands."

George nodded confidently.

"Clara — Clara's so incomprehensible." Thwaite uttered an ejaculation of intense vexation. "I thought she approved of me. Why the deuce shouldn't she? But—but—" he paused—"I believe she's as mad as her father," he said.

"You're talking absolute nonsense," George interrupted angrily.

Clara had acted on Christmas Eve. She and her sister had been sitting over the fire in Dora's room, at night.

Dora had said: "Oh, Clara, I shan't see another Xmas at home."

Clara looked absently at the red coals. It was the first time Dora had spoken directly of leaving home. But she had been talking about it with Thwaite. And sitting now with her

sister, on that anniversary, she began to make her plans before Clara. She loved Clara very much, because Clara was so good and so gentle. She was going to marry Thwaite in July ; that was the time when Thwaite could take his holiday, because people didn't publish books much in the summer. They were going to live in Thwaite's cottage. She would spend some of her money in doing it up. They could make it lovely.

Clara said suddenly : " I may not be able to let you have your money."

She had reflected about it all that time, and ten minutes before she hadn't arrived at any conclusion. Now the words were out.

Dora was saying : " Oh, but, Clara, . . . why ? "

It was not against Clara that she felt resentment, but against whatever it was that forced Clara.

Clara said : " I can't give you any reason. I have one. I may not be able to let you have the money."

Her voice sounded horribly cold to herself ; the short, sharp sentences had a ring like the command of an officer. Dora's blue eyes were round with surprise. It wasn't anger. She was too young to understand quite what not having the money meant.

Clara felt suddenly horribly mean. " I've a claim upon me," she said.

" But *what* ? " Dora said.

"I can't give you any reason," Clara answered again.

She continued looking at the red coals. She remained quite motionless. But it was as if she were out of breath after a desperate struggle. She had acted!

She was not going to give Dora her money. She was going to wait to see what happened to George. She was not going to explain, because that would be to betray George. It was settled. But what was going to happen? She felt sudden tears in her eyes. She did not know why they were there. She looked round and said to Dora, "Darling child, I will give you whatever you want out of my own money." It came suddenly into her mind: "This means that I am giving my money to George Moffat. And Dora will get her money, but I shall be keeping a hold over it." She could not trust Thwaite. These thoughts made her more firm. She had no more doubts.

Dora could not understand. She consulted Thwaite, and he was angry. Dora said, "Oh, but Clara says there is a claim."

Her words made him still more angry. He could not see why Dora should so implicitly trust her sister. The money was Dora's. He had thought of speaking to Clara. Then he had decided to consult George first. Now he was doing it. He tried to restrain his anger.

"But it's at least annoying," he said. "We certainly had expected the money."

George said, "What are Clara's reasons?"

"I don't know." Thwaite poured out his heart. "It's the most incomprehensible thing. She's given Dora a hundred pounds towards doing up the cottage." His handsome, peak-bearded face expressed an honest puzzlement. "She says that if something happens a claim on her will arise. . . . She can't ignore it even for her sister's sake."

"Only don't," George urged, "only don't take the odious family view of these things. Don't drop down to that level. If Clara says she has a claim, she certainly has. She's essentially"—he paused for a word—"scrupulous," he added.

Thwaite laughed. "It's easier for you than for me to see that she has a fine character. She has, of course she has." He paused and then broke out again, "But that's why I'm doing so much to keep in the good books of the *Salon* people. I simply *must*. Dora and I are both set on—on living happily ever afterwards. Good Lord, I wouldn't have believed it of myself a year ago."

George frowned. "You are not to overwrite yourself," he said; "you will be ruining your style."

Thwaite laughed. "At any rate I'll make Dora happy," he said; "it's a responsibility."

George pondered. He took up his pen and

began listlessly scrawling the letters of the alphabet A B C . . . A B C. Then C ; then B ; then a more ornate C and a finer B. He did not much like this mood of Thwaite's. Here he was talking like a householder, about his "responsibilities." George was romantic enough to prefer the joyous Bohemian, the vagabond with the knapsack. But after all it was his own doing. It struck him that his capital C's had not a sufficiently weighty look. He wrote "Clara Brede" heavily and majestically with the full weight of his strong hand. He looked at the name uncomprehendingly, and then with a certain alertness at Thwaite.

"I'll speak to Clara Brede," he said, "and to my brother. He's an enigmatic person ; but he sha'n't turn you off the *Salon*."

He would have to keep these worries out of Thwaite's way. They would spoil any man. He was not going to let them spoil Thwaite. "Dora shan't come within measurable distance of a pinch."

Thwaite said, "Oh, I can't cadge on you for ever."

George waved his hand plutocratically. "It's a point of honour," he said. "I'm responsible. I brought you together." It went through his mind that to do anything effectual for Dora he would have to sell his house.

Thwaite laughed. "Someone said of you that you would give the shirt off your back."

"Who?" George asked.

"Oh, I heard it from Clara," Thwaite said. Clara had heard it from Mrs. Gregory Moffat.

George came into the Bredes' drawing room next morning. The front door stood always open, and he had the run of the house. Clara was standing in front of the tall glass. It ran from floor to ceiling, and was the only one in which she could see her full figure. Her new dress had come down from Town that morning. It had fitted very badly on the shoulders, and she had been for a long time moving and removing the hooks and eyes of the lace in the collar. She had been looking forward to it—she had only that moment discovered how ardently. She drew a long breath; it was very charming now.

The dressmaker had told her that her old lace would work into it beautifully. And it did. It was set in square round the shoulders, and fell gracefully right down to her feet. Yes, it made her look . . . it made her look . . . she couldn't think of any word. She was a little ashamed to be thinking of such things at all. It wasn't *like* her.

She squared her shoulders involuntarily: "Taller, more graceful, imposing—but this glass always flattered me"—the under bodice was cut low beneath the lace; she wondered if it were not too low. She couldn't tell. She had never had anything like it before. A

London dressmaker wouldn't have sent her anything immodest. "And for evening wear. . . ."

George said behind her :

"I want to speak to you about Thwaite."

Her heart beat wildly. What was going to happen ? Did he know ? Did he guess why she had refused Dora her money ? But he couldn't. Was he angry ?

She faced him. He was smiling. He said :

"Oh, what a pretty dress." He sat down comfortably beside the piano, and rested one arm on the end of the keys. His dark eyes seemed to see right through her, and she felt unreasonably tremulous. She said :

"I can't talk about Thwaite." She had acted once more !

She felt a profound feeling of thankfulness. Then, suddenly, she thought that she had been horribly rude to him, and cold, and brutal. He asked :

"You think I'm presumptuous because I interfere."

She answered : "Oh, *no*."

And he said : "I take an interest in you all. But, of course, I *am* meddling."

He thought how calm she was and how very reasonable. He *hadn't* any right to speak to her.

"I can't talk about the matter," she said. Her voice was trembling. "I believe I'm acting rightly." She couldn't trust herself to say

any more. She had wanted so much to talk to him, just once. Now he was offering to talk to her about the one thing she could not talk about. She leaned against the mantelpiece. It relieved her to have even a material support. She became more nervous. Supposing she should think out loud. She might say : "It's because I want the money for you." She shivered. She remembered her dress. Oh, supposing those words came out. Suddenly she found herself wishing that she dared say them. If only she could say them and have done with it. . . .

He flicked his cap gently on his knee.

"Well, I suppose that settles it," he said. He had never been treated like that before. It was as if she had told him to mind his own business, and it pleased him. It made him feel like a lion confronted by a sparrow defending its nest. She was most refreshing ; he certainly hadn't a right to meddle, and she told him so.

She thought : "Now I have made him hate me. He is smiling to hide his anger." Then she thought, proudly : "But I'm doing the right thing."

He said :

"I suppose I shall find your father in the study."

He was on his feet, and she was thinking desperately of something to say to keep him a moment longer. She had wanted so much to

speak to him. Now he was going. She said :
“ I was only trying this dress on.”

He smiled and answered :

“ Well, it's very charming,” and she wondered how in the world she could have said such a thing. She must have been trying to excuse the splendour of it.

He paused at the door and added :

“ I thought it might have been that old matter—Thwaite's lack of scruples. That's unfounded, I assure you.” It occurred to him oddly that he had been pleading his own cause. If he had to support Dora it meant selling his furniture.

“ I ventured because poor Thwaite is a good deal worried just now.” The door closed upon him.

To her it was like a knell. She had offended him mortally. He would never speak to her again. Suddenly she thought, with a mutinous rage :

“ He thinks about Thwaite's worries. He never imagines I have any.” Her head fell upon her chest. “ I never let him ! ” She had prevented his talking.

But he had noticed her dress.

II.

GEORGE took up his parable of the poetic point of view some nights later. The thing was running in his head. It simply meant his salvation, he said, and he felt, he went on, a desperate desire to *be* saved. He didn't know why. "At my age it seems childish. But there it is."

Thwaite was still correcting proofs. He nodded.

"Dora has been prodding me on to write great works. It's in the Brede family," he said, "*to* prod you on. In me you might call it love."

"I've always felt so hopelessly dull, so commonplace," George said. But it had come as a revelation to him that his commonplaces might be the poetry of A, B and C. "So that if I accept myself on those lines I may do something yet." He stopped, and then repeated: "Something yet."

"I've always been too honest, or too contemptuous to 'write poetic.'" It had always seemed to him that consequently he hadn't anything worth saying. "But you fellows insist that I (I'm a wealth of boredom to myself) am really somebody, a personality, a poet——"

Thwaite made an energetic forward movement. George said hastily that he didn't deny it. It was a thing they couldn't discuss—"I have it or I haven't it—this personal magnetism, this power of hypnotising crowds." But it was his duty to be natural, not to pose, not to cast about for a poetic point of view. That was it, wasn't it? Thwaite said that he wasn't any good at Socratic argument.

That day, to avoid a troublesome draught of some years' standing, George had had his desk moved some yards further from the window. A mirror above the fireplace threw the reflection of his own face in profile, warmly lit up by the glow of light on the papers in front of him, into a large glass on the opposite wall.

"By jove, how young I look!" he exclaimed. He felt a sudden warmth of joy, of thankfulness, as it were. He saw a head that appealed to him very much; that was sympathetic, massive, full of energy and expressive.

"Didn't you know?" Thwaite laughed. "You're a child. The youngest of us all."

George paused for a long time. If he were as young as that—if he still had that life, that power of taking an interest in life, which is more than life itself, he had still a chance. He might still—— What? What was it that he wanted? The minutest examination of the mirror didn't reveal a wrinkle. His eyes shone.

"I don't know what in the world has come

over me," he said vehemently. "I seem to have been talking of myself for hours. I'm beginning a stage. What stage? What is it? Senile decay? A final flicker of the candle before it drops into the socket?" He was speaking in his large, bantering manner. He looked down at his work. "I shall have something to show you in a minute."

"I'm so extremely glad," Thwaite said with a gush of pleasure. "We shall all be."

"It's three-quarters finished," George said. "But wait a minute." He vigorously erased three lines of manuscript. Then his eyebrows contracted, and he interlined little words.

"One minute," he repeated abstractedly.

Thwaite looked intently and affectionately at George's engrossed face. "If only he *could* really take an interest in himself," he thought. He felt immense pleasure. He had been waiting for the announcement so very long. George hadn't had "anything to show" anybody for a period that had melted from months into years.

If only he would pull himself together, and deliver one blow to clench all the staves of the barrel. He ran over in his mind the desultory output of George's life. "There are volumes enough, and it's all good stuff; it's got charm; it's got his own individuality." It hadn't failed of its success of esteem; but in the light of George's personality the success did not seem good enough.

George, with an abstracted expression, held his pen poised over a missing word.

"No, there isn't any reason," Thwaite thought. "He should make pots of money if there *isn't* any budding publisher he wants to give a lift to. He may do the trick this very time."

His mind went rapidly over the engineering of the trick. He saw himself running about from reviewer to reviewer. There were the hundreds of fellows George had helped. Thwaite would force them, for shame, to give George a shove. That was how these things are worked. He saw advertisements in enormous letters. He would bully George into letting him fill the *Salon* with them.

"It all turns on what he's writing now," he thought, excitedly. And then, "No, it doesn't matter a straw what he's writing; it's a sure thing."

The pen of the unconscious George began to scratch swiftly over the paper.

"Yes, if only he'd succeed now," Thwaite thought. He thought of the immense sums that George ought to make. His mind lost itself in details of publishers' agreements. Thwaite was fond of money, and he had a settled idea—George let himself be victimised by these people. It irritated him horribly. There ought to be a definite clause in the next agreement; the publishers must spend a stipulated sum on advertisements. He grew impa-

tient. "Why can't he show me the back pages, and let me catch him up?"

The pen slackened its pace, and George looked meditatively up the page. "It's coming now."

The tramp of heavy feet sounded on the cobbles outside the window; it was followed by the sound of a clumsy hand on the portentous iron fastenings of the front door. The noise penetrated even to the absent mind of George. He threw down his pen with a gesture of impatience.

"Our excellent friend," he said.

Mr. Brede loomed darkly into the room.

"You're busy?" he asked, with a shade of apology in his tone. "I couldn't do without some company. I'll listen to your talk." He dropped his great bulk into a low chair.

"We'd been discussing," George said with his suave collectedness, "the reason for the degeneracy of us modern poets."

"Ah, give me the poets of my young days," said Mr. Brede. "And the classics, of course."

Thwaite moved across the room in his desultory manner. He sloped a long arm and caught at the manuscript before George.

"Let me look," he said.

"There's dry rot everywhere," Mr. Brede boomed. "Only money matters."

"There were some points I wanted to make clear," George said a little regretfully to

Thwaite. He had very much wished for a quiet talk with Thwaite.

"Look all round you," Mr. Brede boomed cheerfully.

Thwaite carried the pile of manuscript to the sofa at the far end of the room, and Mr. Brede continued his philippic. It meant that it was quite one of his best days, for on his bad ones he hadn't a thought to bestow outside his own condition. George felt that it was a little more than hard to have him when he was well, since he was ready enough to give his time when Mr. Brede needed cheerful society. He caught sight of his own reflection again. Thwaite, suddenly absorbed in the manuscript, lay on the sofa beneath his reading-lamp. George saw his own friendly smile at Mr. Brede. "It's such a very relative matter," he was saying.

Mr. Brede repeated dogmatically, "Everything's falling to pieces. Look at the Dissenters." He began to laugh ponderously. "I was talking to an old woman this morning. She asked me: 'Mister, if so be things were as they usedn't to be——'"

He mimicked rather spiritedly the drawl of a very old woman.

Suddenly he said: "It's no good."

There was a harshness in his voice that took George aback.

"What's no good?" he asked involuntarily.

"I—I—I," Mr. Brede answered, clenching his enormous fist. "I'm no good."

He had had a relapse. It was usual with him.

George sighed. With his new preoccupations, with Thwaite absorbed in the new work, with the new desire to talk of his own aims and aspirations, there descended upon him a new weariness in setting to cast off Mr. Brede's portentous shadows. He felt an intense desire to say: "I can't be bothered; I've my own worries."

Mr. Brede muttered: "Clara says I'm not to trouble you. I have to wait till she's in bed before coming round. Did you ever hear of such a thing?" He looked ferociously at George. "You're the only person that does me any good. What's the use of Clara? She's been working with me all day. But she doesn't understand. She's no sympathy."

"Aren't you a little hard on people?" George asked.

"Hard," Mr. Brede groaned. "Yes, I know I'm hard; a burden to all the world. And myself!"

A sudden vision of Clara Brede, bent over the fac-simile of the mutilated papyrus, appeared to George. It was too bad.

"I didn't know Clara was helping you," he said. "The subject's not very interesting."

"Most engrossing," Mr. Brede said, dogmatically. "Most en——" He did not finish

his word, which, as if it had touched a spring of discontent, ended in a plaintive groan.

"But I can't take an interest in anything."

He proclaimed triumphantly that it was a bad sign that he was no longer engrossed by a find so remarkable as that of the Fragment of Strasburg. "How can I keep my mind on anything?" he thundered. "I am a murderer. The brand of Cain is on my brow. I shall murder someone else. I'm going mad."

George said hastily: "Nothing of the sort," and Mr. Brede began his long monologue: "There was my wife. I knew, if ever a man knew anything, that the least excitement would kill her——"

Thwaite and his work seemed to disappear together from George's mind. He felt that he would have to give them up for a long time at least. This was a nervous crisis, as serious as any that had gone before. He would have to devote weeks to the society of Mr. Brede. He wanted to save the man. He was such a fine creature; so real, so vivid—a man who might be so useful to the world.

"But what's the good of talking to these oafs," Mr. Brede was wandering on. He had reached the episode of the knife-boy and the boots. His voice had that odd expression of hard contempt that one finds in the country clergy talking of its flocks. "What's the good of trying to show them how to do things?"

"They're like animals——" He continued his stereotyped and miserable story.

George saw his way quite clearly. The thing was to divert his mind—to lure him back to his real work, as a clergyman. He mustn't be allowed to brood any more. It would be a struggle to get him to do it. But that was to be George's task ; he was up to it.

Mr. Brede's voice rose : " I don't know what I should have done to the young devil. But I heard a scream. My God, such a scream. She was dead."

He looked at the floor, then at George again, his eyes suffused with blood, his face suddenly rigid.

" I believe I'm possessed by a devil," he whispered.

George affected a laugh : " You don't believe anything of the sort."

" I don't know what I believe," Brede retorted gloomily. " I hear voices. You don't know what it is."

" It's a purely physical delusion," George answered cheerfully.

" It's awful," Brede said, " awful." There was an expression of stony fatalism in his voice.

" I think you want work," George said carefully. He would have to give up his own. " Something you can get engrossed in. More vital than the Greek aorists or fragments of papyrus."

Mr. Brede looked at him attentively.

"I know what you mean," he said, "but I'm not fit. How can I go to the altar? They're whispering to me: 'Had Nimshi peace who slew his master?' How can I, a man possessed by devils."

George said: "Oh, now . . ." and Brede made a sudden motion.

"I didn't mean to speak of it," he muttered. "It slipped out."

"That isn't the point," George said.

Undoubtedly he meant that in the end Mr. Brede should again take up his priestly functions. If he ever reached that stage he would be cured for good. It would want a great deal of leading up to. Months, perhaps years. "No, it isn't the point I mean," he repeated. "Don't go among your people as a minister of God, but as a man. Get interested in their sorrows; get engrossed in their endeavours. God knows, human endeavours and sorrows are interesting enough to take a man out of himself."

"They're such a debased, dissolute lot," Mr. Brede said gloomily; "not more interesting than animals."

"It's desperately wanted, your organising power," George said, as if guilelessly. "Village life is dying out for want of it."

"Well, no one knows that better than I." Brede began to talk of the Society for Promoting Rural Pleasures. He had forced it into notoriety

throughout the country. He had collected statistics ; he had whipped up local gentry and members of both houses. " But goodness only knows what sort of a muddle they'll have got into. There are too many women in it ; they were always quarrelling. The Rural Dean here has asked me to read a paper on my experiences."

George had roused some of the old fire in him.

Mr. Brede looked at him with a slightly awakened air of nibbling at a bait. " You think it would do me good to mix in these things again ? "

In the far corner of the room, Thwaite sighed over the manuscript.

George looked at him absently. " It will save your reason," he said.

Mr. Brede rose suddenly, and his shadowy form towered over George.

" Come home with me for a moment," he said. " I've something I want to show you."

George looked hesitatingly at Thwaite, who was getting to the end of his reading. He wanted to hear Thwaite's verdict.

" I won't keep you a minute," Mr. Brede said. His voice was shaking with eagerness, and his eyes rolled.

III.

"YES, I'm going mad," he thundered. He caught violently at George's coat-lapel ; they were in his tiny room.

" I'm going mad. You've said the word."

He kept George for two hours in the dim light of a solitary candle. It was past one. On the flap of the bureau lay the fac-simile of the papyrus, beside it one of Clara's gloves. Cheering him, distracting his mind and soothing his nerves, seemed an endless task. The little black hands of the strident clock crept round the dial.

George noticed the glove beside the yellow paper. He twisted it round his fingers and flicked the buttoned end absently at Mr. Brede, emphasising his remarks. Once the click of a door lock sounded above them ; footsteps creaked on the stairs ; a skirt brushed against the wall. George wondered if Clara Brede would come in. The sounds retreated after a moment. He felt some disappointment. He realised with conviction that she had become alarmed. Her nerves must be always on the stretch. She was trying to hear if her father were talking to himself in a sudden paroxysm. She listened just long

enough to satisfy herself that he was not alone. He seemed to know her so very well.

Mr. Brede read him his notes for a sermon on the evilness of the age. He dragged them, panting, out of ill-fitting drawers of the bureau, and talked of them with animation. His eyes sparkled.

"You're the only person that does me any good," he asseverated. "I feel better already. That specialist said my brain couldn't stand any kind of strain."

George twisted Clara's glove more tightly round his middle finger. "You ought to see him again," he said.

"No, no," the clergyman snorted. "Never! He frightened me out of my wits. That's what's the matter with me."

George reflected. He didn't like the responsibility. The specialist ought to be consulted.

"What you want," he said at last, "is precisely not to let these things be a strain. Only work at them enough to keep your mind employed. It's your duty—if you have any kind of message for the times—to deliver that message. But you ought to see the specialist."

Mr. Brede eluded the injunction. The specialist had frightened him.

"The point is : Am I fit ? Have I the right, morally, after——"

"Oh, I'll help you," George said cheerfully. "I'm an essential idler."

Clara Brede had heard in her sleep the deep boom of her father's voice. She had found herself running out of her door and creeping down the stairs. She hardly knew whether she was frightened ; she was breathlessly anxious that there should be no outcry. He was such a large man. One day he would be more violent than she could control, and then she would have to call for help.

That was her constant dread—a public disclosure of the fact that her father was mad. She had no personal fears, but that kept her awake many nights. She heard George's voice, and suddenly she felt quite safe. It was very cold. She crept back to her room, found in the darkness her blue cloak, and, covering herself with it, she leaned over the banisters at the stair-head and listened to the voices. They seemed to soothe her ; it was pleasant to think they were so near. The rest of the house was very quiet and it was quite dark, with the heavy, soundless blackness of a mid-winter midnight, when all the world is as if frozen and dead. She had nothing to think of ; she remained perfectly motionless.

"How I love him," she whispered, and to herself it seemed like a loud and startling cry. A great peace descended upon her soul ; it was as if all the sleeping world were suddenly at one with itself and with her. She put her hands before her face and began to cry

silently, as if with the restfulness of it. Her tears fell between her fingers.

No thoughts came to her. There was only the feeling that he was there, quite near her, and that everything was well. He was there, almost within hand touch ; she could hear his voice. And she loved him ; the world outside her small, dark circle of hopelessness seemed again to have sent a ray towards her. She was no longer alone, and she was at rest ; she wanted to sleep, to sink into unconsciousness ; then, with the warmth of her hands upon her face.

The door below her feet clicked open, a thin fillet of light ran up the wall ; the voices gushed up to her. She caught her father's : " Have I the right, morally ? "

She leaned forward and looked down. She caught sight of George's shoulder and of the light shining on his hair. She drank in his voice thirstily, the vibrating, comforting, joyous tones, " Oh, I'll help you."

What a *good* man he was ! He moved slightly ; disappeared. He had such a light foot that she could not hear his steps in the hall. The minutest sounds seemed of immense importance. She heard none. A rush of cold air came. She heard her father's : " Ph——, what a cold night ! " then a sort of murmur, a single footstep on the bricked path. The front door clanged to. It struck her as a shame that her father had not waited until George was out

of the gate. Everyone treated him so badly ! She had been expecting blissful and impossible things to happen. She heard a fumbling with the chains and bolts. It was all over, then ! She couldn't believe it. She slipped noiselessly into her room.

George walked erectly and elatedly home as the church clock drowsily chimed and struck two. In the study the pile of manuscript lay on the sofa ; Thwaite had gone home. He stood for some minutes gazing at the fire and still flicking Clara's glove up and down. He had carried it off absent-mindedly. He threw it on to his desk. He couldn't give any reason at all for his elation.

He had, next morning, a letter from his brother Gregory. "No," it said (George had asked whether he had an idea of dismissing Thwaite from the *Salon*), "I haven't the least. He need not break his back with hack work. I'm not a sweater." George went hurriedly round the churchyard to Thwaite's cottage. He had not even breakfasted. The cottage faced the friendly ruins of the great church. A weather-boarded, two-storied shanty, once run up for a yeomanry occupation during a Napoleonic invasion scare, it had, with its little, long and attenuated strip of garden in front, the air of being sandwiched in, an extravagant toy, a heightened doll's house, between two rather pretentious brick and tile dwellings.

George was swinging the garden gate briskly ajar when a man sprang out of a passing fly, straight at him. He made a sort of flash of brown ulster and red beard cut nattily into a spade shape.

"I guess you're Mr. Moffat," he said, holding out a nervous hand. "I'm George P. Beale—the Philadelphia Book Company."

He had friendly blue eyes that looked amusedly at the world in general and George in particular.

He jerked out, "I heard from Mr. Hailes that you've a book on hand. I *want* it."

George faced him squarely and solidly, "I'm not aware that I have."

"Well, we can't talk business in the open air," Mr. Beale said, cheerfully. "Haven't breakfasted even. I came straight on from Mr. Hailes' rooms. Early morning train."

George sent him home to await his own coming, and offered him a share of his own breakfast.

"I'm going to *have* that book," the American called, as he jumped back into the fly. "I thought that was your shanty. Queer erection. But there's no knowing *what* you English Pre-Raphaelites won't rejoice in."

"I'll be with you in a minute," George called. The fly drove off. He went smiling up the long, narrow garden path. He was used to people who came to him with absurd requests, and Mr. Beale had amused him. He seemed

to promise a cheerful hour at breakfast. He could not think what Hailes had meant by sending the man after a book. Hailes had not heard of the new volume before he went, and he hadn't taken the trouble to write to George since. Standard roses had been newly planted along the paths; round new, circular beds in the grass, new crocuses peeped perfunctory yellow flames at the March wind.

"You've been getting the garden into shape for Dora," George said to Thwaite.

It had been for years an untended tangle of weeds and briars.

"Oh, Dora likes pretty things," Thwaite answered. "You won't know this house when we're done with it." He was bending over some bacon in a frying-pan that sizzled and sent out a sharp, joyful odour. "It's going to be like your room. Look at the ceiling." He pointed a fork backwards over his shoulder.

He read the letter from Gregory, joyfully letting small drops of fat fall from the prongs on to his sackcloth apron. The plaster had been stripped from the ceiling, laying bare the floor joists above; they undoubtedly imitated George's famous beams. A large, rough oak table that someone had begun to polish had a pile of books for review on it.

"Dora *wants* it to look like your room," Thwaite commented. He was still intent on the letter. "She's a tenderly imitative spirit."

He removed the frying pan from the fire, and placed it among his papers.

"Your brother's a good sort," he commented. "I suppose he knows his business." And what a good sort George was to have come round before breakfast. It took a weight off his mind to know that things were settled—that little room would look really pretty when all the furniture was in it. They had arranged to have a general servant and a knife boy to sleep out.

George laughed.

"One has to arrange these things," Thwaite admonished him. "It's a serious business." He pointed to the trying-pan among the papers. "And I'm certainly acquiring a distaste for that sort of thing."

George said: "Ah!" and moved towards the door.

"Oh, I know you think I'm deteriorating," Thwaite jeered at him, "but one can't always be a tramp. Don't abandon me, though."

George lifted the latch. "I've got an American publisher descended out of the heavens to breakfast," he smiled.

"Don't let him swindle you with your absurd good nature," Thwaite came to the door to call after him. "I haven't had time to speak about your work. But it's going to be a valuable asset."

George waved a comfortable hand from the gate. He was immensely pleased to think that Thwaite's post on the *Salon* was safe; it was going to be an ideal little ménage in that cottage.

IV.

HAILES and Mrs. Moffat had finished breakfast in the large, shining dining room at Campden Hill. The folded *Times* and half a score of letters beside a silver kettle hissing on a tripod awaited Gregory.

Mrs. Moffat was poring, flushed and anxiously, above a sale catalogue of Christie's, the fine art auctioneers; she made feverish marks with a pencil against several numbers. Hailes stood with his back to the light in one of the three tall white window spaces. His air of unconcern, his noticeable, dark, spick and spanness, and the slight backward ricking of the neck were precisely those that had deserted George four months before.

"I don't see where anything's to come from," he said, "I really don't."

Mrs. Moffat looked at him as if with a pang of anguish.

"Oh, as a last resort we can always go to *him*." She looked disdainfully towards the place of the absent Gregory.

Hailes slightly squared his noticeably squared shoulders.

"If we can carry on till May——"

"That Astley woman ought to be made to

pay up," Mrs. Moffat said angrily. "I've had her here; Lady Clo's presented her. What are these people for?"

Hailes swung a window cord knob like an acorn round and round in the air.

"You might as well ask what are we all here for?" he asked sardonically.

Mrs. Moffat looked at him, her eyes full of anger.

"You haven't any heart," she said.

Gregory Moffat appeared at the door. He beamed at them through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and sat down to breakfast. Hailes was gazing at the trees that, outside, swung in the fresh breeze. A sparrow flew upwards, carrying a straw. Mrs. Moffat resumed her reading in the catalogue.

Five minutes later she said in her clear, windy voice: "Gregory, I must have a cheque."

Her husband peered, as if with the end of his nose, over a blue letter lying across his plate. He did not move.

"Over and above the household expenses," Mrs. Moffat explained, as if she were talking to a stupid child. "I can't get along without it. I've tried."

Gregory peered, at first over, then through his glasses.

"A woman must have money," his wife protested angrily.

Gregory slightly shrugged one of his

shoulders, and looked down again at his letter. When he went out of the room he pointed short-sightedly at a large Gainsborough portrait that hung above the imposing sideboard. "That's to go down to the Gallery this morning. There's a Troyon coming to take its place. You can come down about eleven for the cheque."

"By Jove, I wish I had his luck," Hailes said, looking appreciatively at the Gainsborough after Gregory's noiseless disappearance. "I suppose that's sold to some fool." He remained looking moodily at the fire for some minutes. "He cut up rather rusty about the cheque, didn't he?"

Mrs. Moffat, looking with gloomy abstraction at the table-cloth, muttered: "Oh, *he*——"

Hailes pulled a tiny, gilt-edged note-book from his upper waistcoat pocket. "Thirty—no, twenty-eight at a pinch," he said, beneath his mongolian moustache.

"I'll do him the justice to say he's not close with money," she said scornfully. "He's never refused me a penny. There's something else on his mind."

Hailes put his note-book up.

"I don't ask for much. And you'll admit we've not been very successful these last few months."

"It's the fault of your tip about Barberton Reefs," Mrs. Moffat said.

Hailes paced abstractedly up and down the border of the enormous Oriental carpet.

"The fact is, you've been going on wrong lines," he said, authoritatively.

From his assured manner and quiet pose of being used to the household it wouldn't have been guessed that he had been Mrs. Moffat's private secretary for certainly not half a year.

"I used to keep myself in pocket money very well before," Mrs. Moffat said, almost plaintively. She was thinking of the Mr. Frewer Hoey who had preceded Mr. Hailes. "And with much less trouble."

Hailes put his hand to the back bottom rim of his waistcoat, pulled it a little, and jerked his head back.

"That only proves that the game was played out," he said. "And it's so niggling at the best of times. I'm almost ashamed to be seen going to these sales and snapping up a thing here and there to sell to wretched parvenus who want to get into Lady Clo's set. And Lady Clo wants such a devil of a commission."

Mrs. Moffat, with instinctive conservatism, said that it was in any case better than Mr. Hailes' tip about Barberton Reefs.

Mr. Hailes, in no way listening, went on : "Now my Spanish project is a certain thing."

Mrs. Moffat sighed slightly, and, leaning her arms on the table, prepared to listen to the Spanish project.

The coming of Mr. Hailes had very much changed her life. In the old days—in Mr. Frewer Hoey's—she had, like so many ladies in her set, dabbled in a branch of the antique furniture business. She went with Mr. Hoey to occasional sales, as a rule in large country mansions, and purchased the more costly lots of bric-a-brac that “went cheaply.” These Mr. Hoey had afterwards, through discreet tradesmen, disposed of to the people Mr. Hailes called “wretched parvenus who wanted to get into the set of” Lady Clo, or any other of Mrs. Moffat's bosom friends.

Mrs. Moffat had hardly considered the money side of the matter. It had comfortably supplemented the income of Mr. Hoey himself. To her it meant more frequent *têtes-a-tête* with him—in railway carriages to and from the country mansions, pleasant drives in the country, and the pleasing excitement of picking up bargains. The pursuit had had the glamour of romance and sentiment. It had caused, too, only occasional intervals between the once incessant “meetings.”

Mr. Hailes had changed all this. The “meetings” had become the scarce interludes in his almost sinister pursuit of money in large quantities. He had even hinted that politics itself was *vieux jeu*. If Mrs. Moffat really wanted to keep herself in any sort of set at all she might have to face weaning herself from

the public life of a sort that she so delighted windily to dominate.

It all caused her a certain amount of disquietude, the precursor of the mental agony of being superannuated, on the shelf, used up and leading nothing. Hailes terrorised her, as it were, by veiled hints, the merest suggestions that if she were undocile he would cut himself adrift. He terrorised her. She most desperately did not want to lose him. Perhaps it was his sinister personal charm ; perhaps the mere necessity for close and intimate union with some man, and the feeling that, Hailes once lost, no more in all probability would take his place. I don't know. She was on that indefinite, wrong side of forty-five, when for a woman everything that is lost is gone for ever. To Mrs. Moffat the measure of rule, of tyranny, that she had enjoyed had meant a very great deal.

Listening to Hailes' Spanish project she sighed vaguely.

"I tell you it's a certain thing," he was saying. "I know the Duke of Medina's master of the horse. He would give us all the instructions and introductions we should want. Why, even the figures that I got from the little dealer in Clarges Street mean a profit of four hundred per cent. And properly boomed, as you and your people could do it, there's a fortune in it. All these old Spanish families part with their old furniture for next to nothing.

There's a painter in Portugal now—an old master called *Il Gran Vasco*. Why, he——"

Hailes, in fact, was merely elaborating the principle of purchasing objects of *vertu* at local sales and disposing of them at enhanced prices in London. His idea was that half the old furniture in Spain—old cloth of gold, ancient tapestries, and gorgeous Portuguese carvings and lace—might be purchased for a few hundred pounds from the country *casas* of the nobles in out of the way places. The nobles would be only too glad of a chance of re-furnishing with Tottenham Court Road and Rue de Rivoli stuff.

"It's all there waiting," he said. "Afterwards we open little Kleinkampf's gallery with the best of the stuff and a few borrowed Goyas and Velasquez. *Il Gran Vasco's* pictures—we'll buy them up at old rag prices—will be *the* discovery of the year. He's quite unknown. The Bond Street *Peninsular Gallery*! It's a little fortune if we get the right people interested. And that's easy."

"It's rather like Gregory's undertakings," Mrs. Moffat said, negligently.

"Oh, of course, he's too big a man for us to fly at," Hailes answered.

"It's on the same lines, though. The only thing we want is capital."

He said, after a time: "Get everything you can out of him; every penny. What will he stand—a thousand?"

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Moffat answered, a little wearily; "I don't in the least know. He's always given me whatever I asked. I daresay he will."

Mr. Hailes looked as if he envied her. "Well, get the last penny," he said.

"If we have to go away in April," Mrs. Moffat hesitated, "I shall miss the Women's Parliamentary Protection Meetings." She had always taken the chair unopposed. They were the chief source of her power.

"Of course, you can't be in Spain and here, too," Mr. Hailes said, in his reasonable way. "I can go alone, though. Lady Clo and Semples will be in Madrid. We can work it all right."

"The meetings must go," Mrs. Moffat said sharply. She did not like the idea of Hailes and Lady Clo in Madrid.

They drove down to Bond Street, through the park, behind the horses that looked as if they had been French-polished.

Mr. Hailes said: "I wish you'd contrive to make that beggar Thwaite and the *Salon* a little more useful. I always thought the paper was *your* property."

Mrs. Moffat's large feathered hat waved in the breeze; she had recovered a great deal of her serenity.

"I don't know; frankly I don't know," she said, rather uninterestedly. It had occurred

to her that, if she got from her husband the sinews of war that Hailes needed, his allegiance to her must be as rivetted as she could desire. And, lying back among the cushions, she felt that she could torment Hailes as much as she liked. "When Gregory bought the *Salon* I naturally thought it would be an organ for my causes."

Hailes gnawed at his moustache and meditated. A fat policeman stopped the cross-park traffic for their passage; the boughs above them, brightened by heavy, tight buds, and shot by windy sunlight, shook in the vigour of the spring. Enormous pink and white clouds lumbered high above the clumsy Bayswater houses, across a limpid blue sky.

"It hasn't been," she said, negligently.

"I always hated that supercilious ass, Thwaite," Hailes snarled. "I saw enough of him at George Moffat's. You must really get rid of him if anything's to be done."

Mrs. Moffat looked at the back buttons of the footman's coat. She smiled faintly. Probably Thwaite *had* irritated Hailes at George's. She could imagine them together. She said, a little contemptuously:

"Well, the creature has ideas about art. He wouldn't admit things I wanted put in."

"It's a pretty state of affairs," Hailes sneered. Then he, too, became meditative.

"After all," he commented, "it's just as well the *Salon* wasn't devoted to the shrieking sister-

hood. It *has* a sort of tone. That's what's wanted."

"What do *you* want, then?" Mrs. Moffat returned his sneer.

"Oh, I shall have to begin to boom the Spanish project."

"You think he'll insert *you*?" Mrs. Moffat asked, with a shade of irony.

"He'll have to," Hailes answered. "We'll throw him out if he doesn't."

Mrs. Moffat raised her eyebrows.

"You *can*, can't you?" Hailes asked. "Any one but a fool could edit so as to make money out of it. It's a good salary, too."

"Better than the Spanish idea?" Mrs. Moffat asked, a little anxiously.

"Oh, no, we'll work that too," Hailes answered with his air of cheerful competence. "We'll work everything. You shall see."

She dropped him outside the small gallery at the top of Bond Street. It was for the time tenanted by an Oriental-German called Klein-kampf. Hailes intended to convert it into his Peninsular Gallery. In imagination he already saw his sandwichmen with the name scrawled across their backs, and elevated above their uniform caps. "We'll do the thing in style," he said to himself. He disappeared into the swing-doors. Mrs. Moffat caught a glimpse of the venerable, grey-bearded proprietor who was lying in wait. At the same moment,

Gregory himself, jostled in the crowd, recognised his equipage and hopped in beside his wife. She wondered uneasily if he had seen Hailes going in ; if he suspected anything, and what he would do if he did. "I was just coming to you," she vouchsafed. He beamed sideways at a large, gilt sign across an upper window. He said nothing, but friendlyly patted her hand. It was a habit of his, and it intensely disgusted her. A minute afterwards he handed her out, fumblingly, in front of the Gallery. He ambled away before her towards a carter's arch that was some distance from the gilt and marble of the facing. Mrs. Moffat intensely disliked her husband's side entrance. She followed some yards behind his awry figure ; in the intense draught of the arch, her immense hat was uncomfortably lifted, nearly from her head. Her face had an expression of disgust.

She rejoined him at the tail of a black-hooded van that, by the agency of men in green aprons, was discharging immense flat packing-cases into an opening that had glass doors painted white. A man with one arm was superintending the unloading. He was normally a commissionaire of considerable presence, now in his shirt-sleeves and a sack-cloth apron, a four days' grizzled beard and a screw-driver stuck across his mouth. He removed a dirty cloth cap and bowed to Mrs. Moffat, then went on to talk to Gregory.

They were getting ready for an interim exhibition before the full-dress Spring show. Mrs. Moffat, ignoring their existence, swept into the opening that for the moment was free of men and cases. She went swiftly past a series of rectangular, ill-lit stone cellars, and emerged, ill-temperedly, in a subterranean board room. It had iron bars before windows looking on nothing, and an immense red baise table, surrounded by cane chairs, and dotted with ink pots and blotting pads.

A man with a particularly nice waistcoat and a genial, incompetent air came suddenly out of a side door up to Gregory.

"That immense big Rubens," he said, smoothing the hair that was plastered across his forehead—"Good morning, Mrs. Moffat—has got an immense big nail hole through the cheek of one of the Sabine women——Yes, of course it's a loan, sir." He referred to a printed invoice. "An immense big hole."

He fingered his watch chain, and looked at Gregory, who smiled amiably, and said nothing.

"Of course I ballyragged the carriers. The owner's that Jeaffreson, of Birmingham; he's as crusty as the devil. He'll bring all the law-suits in the world. An unpleasant business."

Gregory appeared to reflect upon the state of the inkpots. "Who's the forwarding agent?" he asked.

The secretary referred again to the invoice. "Wyllie, of King Street, sir," he answered,

"Oh, let them re-back it, and fill up the hole," Gregory decided.

The secretary said : "Certainly, sir. And not tell the owner anything at all?"

"Why certainly not. An unpleasant business, very," he explained to Mrs. Moffat, who was not listening. "It makes other owners so chary of lending. Charming weather."

He disappeared.

Gregory already had his head in the safe that stood between the barred windows. He produced a cheque book, and looked at his wife interrogatively. She sank voluminously into a chair, and faced him across the red table. She was a little nervous ; she never *had* sounded Gregory.

"What can you make it?" she asked. "I'm pretty deep. Deeply hit, I mean."

Gregory dipped a pen into ink and laid the cheque book on a blotting pad. His face questioned her again.

"After all, you've nothing to grumble at," his wife protested. "I'm not as bad as a thousand women in our set."

"There aren't so many," Gregory chuckled suddenly ; "there aren't a thousand."

She looked down meditatively at a gold bangle on her tight wrist of her black glove.

"I've dropped a pot of money on Barberton Reefs. I suppose you'd mean me to face the music."

Gregory said, "Oh."

"A couple of thousand will set me quite straight," she said. The sudden thought of Hailes had advanced her hopes and her demands. "You can make me a present of *that*, I should think. I haven't asked you for anything for myself for two years."

"It makes a thousand a year," Gregory chuckled. His pen was already at work on a cheque. "Pin money? Eh?"

Mrs. Moffat thought with intense disgust: "While I was at it I might have asked him for the double. But you never know with a man. You'd almost think he was *fond* of me."

She said: "Well, you can't grumble. I'm not extravagant."

Gregory paused in the middle of his signature.

"I wish," he said, without displaying any emotion at all, "you would get rid of that Hailes. I don't like him."

Sheer astonishment deprived Mrs. Moffat of speech.

"You," she said. And then, with sharp haughtiness: "What absurdity. I must have a private secretary. If you didn't like him, why didn't you speak before? I've engaged him for a year." She added sharply: "With a year's notice."

It was quite untrue, an after-thought.

Gregory completed his cheque.

"I shall have you interfering with the housemaids next," Mrs. Moffat snorted with the indignation of virtue.

"You can give wages in lieu of notice, you know," Gregory said with benevolent reasonableness.

Mrs. Moffat rose and caught up the cheque.

"And you complain of my extravagance? Wages in lieu of notice! How would you conduct business on such lines?"

"I *didn't* complain, you know," Gregory answered amiably.

She swept towards the further door. Gregory, roused from his absent-mindedness to a sort of impressed politeness, hurried to open it.

As they met at the top of the table Mrs. Moffat apostrophised him with expansive gestures:

"No, you don't complain, of course. You never do. That's just what *I* complain of. How do I know what you're thinking of? How can I tell? It's like living with—with—" as her eyes roamed round the room her husband regarded her with amused admiration and affection—"with a blotting-pad," she completed. "You never tell me what you think."

"I tell you I don't like Hailes," Gregory beamed amiably.

"And I tell you I don't care whether you like him or not." She swept out of the room. "I do."

Gregory closed the door noiselessly behind her.

V.

IN the dim, broad, marble-balustered staircase that led up from the Board Room to the Gallery itself, she paused in front of an immense mirror to shake her ruffled plumes into their proper storminess. She was still quivering with the extraordinariness of it.

"She had never . . . "

That was precisely it. She never had. There was something unprecedented about the whole affair. She had never before had to ask her husband for such a sum, and he had never before spoken—had never dared to speak—in such a manner. He had never so much as mentioned her companions; she had gone about with Hoey for years. And all her other friends. He must know that he himself, with his obfusque, blind silence, wasn't a proper companion for her. He had always seemed to realise that, even if he didn't hear any of the sharp truths that she lashed him with. She moved nearer to the great glass—it ran from floor to ceiling of the tall, square landing—to arrange the cock's hackle boa beneath her determined chin.

The dim, unfriendly light fell through ground glass windows from high above behind her

head. She was filled with sudden misgiving. Was it possible she looked like that—so coarse, so heavy? How could she keep a hold on people? on anybody, let alone Hailes—an immense, tawny-maned woman with a great drooping hat. It wasn't possible unless she had a personal attraction, a magnetism, something behind and above the qualities of skin, eyes and hair. She was accustomed to think of herself as striking; the hair shining, the eyes flashing. And, on top of the flush that what she felt to be Gregory's inscrutable outrage had brought to her cheeks, two round marks of the other flush seemed, as it were, to float, accentuated and betrayed.

She squared her shoulders and looked things in the face. If she could not hold Hailes by personal charm, she would have to the other way. Her fingers crumpled more nervously Gregory's cheque. And, with a rapid motion, she drew a powder puff from her reticule and dabbed it impatiently over her face; she pulled down a veil that had floated, negligently draped, among the feathers of her hat.

Her reflections flashed an immense distance back into the past and out again, like a diving bird in deep water. She paused for her face to resume composure.

Why, something like a fifth of a century (imagine such an age) ago, had she ever married Gregory? Except for the minutest striplings of time's colour brush, he had re-

mained precisely the same. In those days she had rather liked him. It even caused her something remotely resembling an *attendrissement*; her mind ran back to the days when Gregory, very young, with practically the same large spectacles and identically the same smile, had persisted in hanging dumbly round her, inscrutably intent on carrying her off, doggedly and silently in love. He hadn't violated the marriage contract by changing. He might be in love with her still for all she knew; that might account for his many and insufferable tiresomenesses. He was perfectly—and unbearably—what she ought to have expected. The very same.

"And I'm precisely the same myself," she protested, "except for *that*." She pointed at her coarse figure in the glass. "I'm exactly what I ought to have expected myself to be. And yet——"

Yes, undoubtedly, she had an *attendrissement de coeur*. She looked back upon herself, young, slim, haughty, with flashing eyes and a great contempt for the created universe; with a steep elastic as that of a race-horse, and fingers that at any motion had curved nervously, as if upon the handle of a riding whip. She had for years, insolently, "choked off" in pure irresponsibility all the eligible young men of her own exclusive set—they had been exclusive in those days; she had, as it were, whipped them with scorpions in the face and over

the back. Then she had captivated the excellent, mute, obstinate and intent Gregory. And as she looked back to that ever so long ago she suddenly stiffened her back. "Ever so long ago," she as if snorted; "the absurdity of of it. It was yesterday. It's now. I'm the same. Anyone not a fool could see what's under that." It did indeed require only a very little of that imagination that has so small a place in the world to see her--brilliant, flashing, blonde, exhortative; as if flying across the land at the head of the hunt, and contemptuously in at the death. "And yet--"

Her mind, alert and hastening, flashed through a list of hitherto despised aids--things one hears recommended, treatments, cures, systems of diet, pink candle shades, all the elixirs of youth. Except for the two red dabs on the cheek-bones, which were, so to speak, flung contemptuously at the eyes of the world, she had ignored all these things. But now. . . The proprietary Marquis of the Gallery, with a soft brown hat dominating his soft brown fur collar, and an air of leisurely going towards work in an office, strolled down the silencing, red stair-carpet beneath a marble Grace, who seemed about to drop three electric lights on to his head.

He said: "Mrs. Moffat," as if inscrutably feeling nothing at all. "How extremely astonishing."

He conducted her across the immense rooms

of the Gallery itself, looking indulgently at the immense, red-papered, empty walls, the strips of rough matting laid to cover the dancing floor, and the central ottomans draped in dull coloured hollands.

"I'm going to have a gallery for the band put there, up at the top," he said, pausing and looking with the eye of a connoisseur at the further wall.

"It's my idea, not Moffat's this time."

Mrs. Moffat said : "Oh," uninterestedly.

"Owners have complained," he said, "that chairs get put against the pictures. You'd think there'd be floor space enough here."

Mrs. Moffat said contemptuously : "When these Hampstead people want to give a ball they cram in all they can get to come." She moved on a step or two. "They want full value for their money, trust them."

"Oh, well, you know," he surveyed her indulgently through his monocle, "I want it for mine, too."

He followed her towards the door leading into the next gallery.

"I never looked at it in that way. Now what value do they get? What is the width of the room? Say——" He stopped, and then gravely paced the room from side to side; he faced round and stood considering. His Vandyke beard, swarthy, small face and grave, inherited Castilian expression, gave him an absurd air of being an old master, left un-

framed, from among the pictures gone from the walls. "Fifty, say by three hundred. Fifteen thousand, isn't it?" he appealed pleasantly to Mrs. Moffat. "Now, taking into consideration what we charge for the hire of the rooms for a dance and the number of square feet needed per waltzer, and throwing the side galleries in——"

Mrs. Moffat, impatient to be at the real problem of life, wished the amiable *dilettante* very intensely somewhere else.

He abandoned the abstruse calculation with: "And so you see they might get very good value," as he walked beside her again.

"What! the excellent Hailes?" he said, from the top of the front steps. Hailes was already seated in the victoria. "How do, Hailes?" He waved a tiny hand benignantly, and surveyed Bond Street with musing interest for a minute and a half. The doors of the gallery swung to again behind him.

"If one could only get hold of *him*," Hailes said, half to himself.

"Oh, he's no fool," Mrs. Moffat said, arranging the furs contemptuously round her.

"Henwick's dead," Mr. Hailes announced suddenly.

Mrs. Moffat looked at him incredulously, her eyes dilated.

"Henwick?" she asked. "It isn't possible."

"Well, he's dead, anyhow," Mr. Hailes answered. "Dropped dead, not ten minutes

ago, in that jeweller's opposite the Gallery. It's what you might call a coincidence our being so near."

The dilation in Mrs. Moffat's eyes did not diminish.

"How *awful*," she said. "And Felicia?"

Felicia, Mrs. Henwick, the little Marquise, was her dearest friend—one of those dearest friends that one has, for no particular reasons, rivetted by a thousand ties of going to the same shops, of lunching in the same restaurants, of leaving cards at the same doors, of hearing and telling the same scandals. And the image of Mr. Henwick—big, clumsy, fair, entirely un-presentable and entirely amiable, suddenly became intensely vivid to her, loomed up and obscured all Bond Street. Her heart seemed suddenly and incredibly compressed. And there wasn't any reason. She wasn't aware of taking the least interest in him; his going would not leave the least gap; she would not in the least, she thought, at any moment miss the amiable inanity of his smile as he hung clumsily a cloak round his wife's shoulders in one or the other of the innumerable crushes they seemed to have been always coming out of together.

Hailes was recounting onwards with the nonchalance of a man intensely bored by sudden deaths, yet interested in the coincidence—that it should have happened just there, so close to them. He had seen a little crowd as

he walked down towards the carriage. Mr. Henwick, it seems, had been buying a bracelet for Mrs. Henwick. He had been a little irritated by some detail ; it hadn't been made just as he had ordered it for her. And then . . . dead. The heart, of course. Mr. Hailes supposed that Mrs. Henwick would be pretty well off.

"And Felicia?" Mrs. Moffat asked. "Does she know?"

Mr. Hailes didn't see how she could—"You remember she was going to order a hat at Madame Rene's just about now." Mr. Hailes remembered everything. "Yes, I suppose she'll be pretty well off. Henwick was a warm man, I believe. But it was an extraordinary coincidence, wasn't it?"

In the depths of his superstitious soul a belief in Luck as the First Cause took the place of every other faith ; the coincidence, he thought, might undeniably point to *some*-thing. He was the first to hear of Mr. Henwick's death ; why shouldn't that be a supernatural indication that he was to be the first to profit by it ?

Mrs. Moffat suddenly stopped the carriage, and then, in the face of the descended footman, dropped into a fit of pondering.

"Madame Rene's," she announced at last, and then to Hailes : "We must—we *must* break it to her if we can catch her there."

Hailes said :

"Oh, very well. I thought you hated that

sort of thing. That was why I didn't send in to you at the gallery. But of course it will look better, naturally." After a cheerful pause he added :

"What did he stand ?"

Mrs. Moffat was recalled from an immense maze of shaken thoughts to a sharp wearying alertness. She answered :

"Oh . . . a thousand."

She instinctively halved what Gregory had "stood," in the desire to retain, as it were, a reserve force. Hailes' brow clouded in the slightest degree.

"From what you said," he pronounced, "I thought you could have made him make it more. We shall have to raise it somehow. The market's too good to be spoilt by a mis-fire."

Mrs. Moffat, with her eyes obsessed by the image of Mr. Henwick grotesquely half alive, half stiff and dead, looked at him with intense repulsion. He didn't in the least notice it.

"Yes, it was a coincidence," his mind reverted, "and Mrs. Henwick—she *will* be well off, I suppose ?"

"You can't," Mrs. Moffat blazed at him, "get at *her* money for your Spanish scheme." She felt suddenly the fulness of her repulsion. In essentials, her attitude of mind was lofty : she could flagellate well enough such want of imagination as Hailes was displaying.

"No, I suppose the estate couldn't be arranged in time for that," he said pensively. Mrs. Moffat's fingers drummed nervously on the side of the carriage. She did not speak again.

Hailes remained lost in thought. He ran over in his clear mind all the infinite ramification of schemes that, with just the touch of that luck which was surely in store for him, might land him in the "anywhere" of a splendour that he had not even imaged to himself.

Upon the himself of his quite near past he looked with wondering contempt. It did not seem possible that he could ever have looked upon George as a great man, a stepping stone, let alone the wife of a publisher of an author's Directory. He had come to look upon even Mrs. Moffat as irritatingly wanting in courage or initiative. She hardly seemed to *want* to make the money, of which so large a share, he would take care, should be his. What did she want, anyhow? What had she made him her private secretary for—and herself, as he very well recognised, a little egregious—if not for that?

He at least was not wanting in initiative. If things hadn't got enough in them he dropped them immediately. There had been, for instance, the Renaissance Press that he had got George to back. That was on its last legs. Well, he had long ago cleared out of that. He, obviously, could not pay up anything; he

had nothing. It would all fall upon George. And, in the light of Mrs. Moffat's revelations, he didn't see where George was going to find the money to meet the bill. George was obviously on his last legs.

"Lucky I cleared out from him when I did," Hailes mused. "He might have let me in for something. I suppose that was what he was *really* up to." Hailes, as a matter of fact, had sent Mr. George P. Beale, the Philadelphia publisher, down to George. He had a general idea that George, by selling something to Mr. Beale, might realise at least enough to satisfy the creditors of the Renaissance Press. The creditors in question were mostly friends that Mr. Hailes thought it would be desirable to keep in with—at the expense of George.

He pictured himself, after George's crash came, going about, proclaiming, "Well, I did my best for him ; I got him in with Beale's. Yes, *I* sent Beale to him. But there are some people you can't save from themselves."

Sitting there in the carriage, he thought comfortably, "And I *have* done my best for that old fool. No one can accuse me of a dishonourable act."

The carriage stopped suddenly opposite Madame Rene's. Mrs. Henwick's brougham, shining brilliantly and coquettishly, was planted in front of them.

Mr. Hailes said, cheerfully : "I suppose you'll ask her in here."

"No, I can't," Mrs. Moffat answered, curtly. "I can't tell her. I can't be bothered with scenes."

Hailes said: "Oh, I'll break it. I'm quite up to it. I'd better ask her for a lift westwards, and tell her on the way."

Mrs. Moffat nodded without speaking, and Hailes noticed that two long furrows of tears were ploughed down the brilliance of her cheeks. He was intensely astonished.

A moment later Mrs. Henwick tripped out of the blazoned doors. She took in their carriage with an alert, unastonished bird's glance, and came, smiling daintily and with a touch of pleasure, to their door.

"Oh, you two creatures," she said, "I've got such an inspiration of a hat."

"Be careful," Mrs. Moffat whispered hoarsely to him as he passed her, "I believe she was fond of him."

"Well, you are in a hurry, Ella," Mrs. Henwick said. "So am I, too. Dick's got such a charm of a surprise bracelet waiting for me, I believe. All right; I'll drop Mr. Hailes quite tenderly. Going to your bank? Well, so long."

She waved her hand daintily, and disappeared into her coupé, followed by the attentive form of Mr. Hailes.

Mrs. Moffat drove alone towards Trafalgar Square, immensely shaken, but with a feeling of momentary calm. And her intense dislike

for Hailes grew with every turn of her swift wheels. He was unbearable, insufferable. She would make him feel—— Then, suddenly, she stopped her horses, and sent them prancing back after the brougham of Mrs. Henwick.

It had occurred to her, like the stab of a long needle, “What is he doing now?” She realised that he was quite capable of commencing, with adroit consolations, a series of small, encroaching services. She knew him so well. What a devil he was——

And, inconsequently, she wondered how Mrs. Henwick would look in black, after such a shock.

END OF PART II.

THE BENEFactor.

PART III,



THE BLACKENING PEARLS.

THE BENEFACTOR.

PART III.

THE BLACKENING PEARLS.

I.

GEORGE found Mr. Beale of Philadelphia a thoroughly entertaining "type." He entered into his frankness, his brusqueness, his evident intention to get what he wanted. It would be saying too little, to put it that George found the American thoroughly sympathetic; he found him the sort of man that he himself would have wished to be.

At his return from Thwaite's cottage he discovered Mr. Beale standing before the fireplace, reading nervously and intently the manuscript that Thwaite the night before had left on the sofa.

"I say, this isn't the thing?" he immediately attacked George. "I mean the thing that's to fill two continents with awe. The novel that man Hailes was talking about." He brushed his disengaged hand nervously across his red-gold beard. "Oh, but it's there, somewhere. It's not a figment of the imagination."

"We'd better breakfast," George said pleasantly. "One can't unravel mysteries fasting."

Mr. Beale looked at him a shade savagely ; then he laughed.

"You can look at it in that way," he said.

He swiftly examined the celebrated dining-room and exclaimed : "So this is where you eat, Mr. Moffat ? It's real fine."

He folded his napkin into the opening of his waistcoat and emphasised his remarks with a bacon knife : "Let me tell you all about myself, Mr. Moffat."

George, massive and benignantly amused, let the stream pass over him. Mr. Beale explained that he was a business man, who wouldn't intrude anywhere unless he saw a good thing that he wanted.

"And when I don't see that good thing in the window, I ask for it," he concluded, fixing his clear blue eyes on George.

"But, my dear man," George said, amiably, "I don't know what it is you want."

"The American novel is played out," Mr. Beale suddenly announced. Philadelphia, in the shape of his firm, was waiting for it at the last base or he wasn't any judge of base-ball. "No, sir, the American novel racket has had its day."

"Things move so fast over there," George said. He savoured his toast in his pleasant way of tasting an ice at an opera. "But, how, if I had a novel for you to have, or if you had my novel—how, in the realms of wonder, would you affect that American phenomenon with it ?"

Mr. Beale looked at him sharply: "I thought you would come round," he said. "Why, the merit wouldn't be yours. I don't mind telling you *that* much."

George chuckled once more.

"Oh, I know you won't get riled," Mr. Beale said rapidly. "You haven't any 'side,' as they say over here. Well, it's like this—I'm going to play the Great Panjandrum card over again."

George laughed:

"You don't mean to say I'm the Great Panjandrum?"

"With the little button at the top and all," Mr. Beale confirmed. He snapped up a piece of kidney.

"But really——" George was beginning.

"You're precisely *that*," Mr. Beale said. "It's like this——" He stopped, looked at George, and then himself exploded into laughter:

"It's the most ridiculous thing. Fancy having to persuade an author that he's a big iron pot. You've gotten yourself anyhow, a sort of European-American, extra-superfine, poet's bay-leaf reputation. You needn't deny it. And that man Hailes (he *does* know you? He *has* lived in this house? Well, then——) *he* says you've gotten a novel. Now I want that novel."

George supposed it was what he was writing now.

"Oh, put that on one side," Mr. Beale answered.

George was in the pleasant humour that came over him when an ingenuous and charming child wanted his repeater watch to play with.

"Of course, I don't know why you should oblige me," Mr. Beale said suddenly ; "it isn't as if our aunts had been neighbours, or anything."

"I'd oblige you if I by any means could," George said.

"What I want is to get a big Rostand-Cyrano-de-Bergerac-real literature-all-that boom," Mr. Beale began again. He said he wanted something national and romantic—hit-the-great-heart-of-the-nation-plumb-centre. "I guess you think I'm *vulgar*, though," he added.

George laughed, and ensconsed himself cross-legged in the shelter of his great hooded chair.

"My dear fellow," he said pontifically, and as soothingly as he could, "how in the world could I appeal to your Transatlantic-national heart?"

"Why, it was about the discovery of America, wasn't it?" Mr. Beale said.

George said, "Oh."

Mr. Beale was referring to the half remembered and half again forgotten *Wilderspin*—the manuscript that had been lent to Clara Brede.

It appeared that Mr. Hailes on his departure had carried away a rather fragmentary duplicate, the existence of which George had altogether forgotten.

"I've seen it," Mr. Beale said. "I'm not after a pig in a poke. I read it at Hailes' rooms last night. Why that passage—when your hero sights the land. Why, by Jove——"

"It's atrocious," George said quickly. "It's the work of a boy of ten."

"I don't care what it is," Mr. Beale answered. "That's what I'm after. Give me the complete manuscript."

"It's out of the question," George said decidedly. "It's in the hands of another person."

Mr. Beale's face fell so dismally that George felt really concerned for him.

"But I tell you," he said grievously, "if it is *rot*, I like it, but I'm no judge; if it *is* rot, that's just what the public—our crowd—wants. Something they can *like* that's written by a real man with a reputation like yours. Full-dress, classical literature with the big L is so almighty dry as a rule. But if they can get something tender and juicy like this, by a standard man like you, they'll *fall* on it. Good Lord! No one could work that racket as I could. Why——"

He paused dejectedly.

"Can't it be arranged? The American rights, at least? My people are a wealthy crowd."

George shook his head.

"It's not a question of publication," he said. "The book's sentimental rubbish."

"Well, but where's the manuscript," Mr. Beale asked.

George waved a hand non-committally.

"Don't waste time," Mr. Beale said. "You can't bluff me."

George laughed. "I wouldn't even think of trying."

Beale looked at him frankly and appreciatively.

"I don't believe you would," he said. He paused and considered.

"I really wouldn't think of publishing it on any account," George said. "I tell you the thing's atrocious." Its glaring sentimentalisms rose up suddenly before his mind's eye. He remembered an absurd scene in which, in the wilds of an impassable Virginian forest, his hero mused on the fall of Rome, Babylon and Carthage, and on the rise of the Transatlantic empires yet to be. That was what Mr. Beale wanted. It was as if George, in the ingenuousness of his heart, had written it to glorify spread-eagleism. "It's the most childish piece of false sentiment from beginning to end," he brought out.

"I'm prepared to spend a record sum on advertising it," Mr. Beale coaxed him.

George felt the pathos of Mr. Beale's position—of his joyous enthusiasm, his delight

in a *coup* as a *coup*. He really wished that Mr. Beale might succeed in proving the justice of his theories. He felt, too, that Mr. Beale must regard the refusal as a senseless and gratuitous piece of ill-luck. The thing worried him more than a little.

He looked pensively out of the window ; Clara Brede, in her blue cloak, passed once again. She was carrying a bulky and untidy brown paper parcel. "I'm really extremely sorry," he said to Mr. Beale, "for my apparent churlishness."

"Well, but where's the manuscript of *Wilderspin*, anyhow?" Mr. Beale asked cheerfully. "We can talk about terms when I get hold of it."

George opened the door for Clara Brede. Her fresh voice said enthusiastically :

"I've brought you back the manuscript. It's splendid." She entered the room as if on the spring wind, her face full of animation.

"Oh, I didn't know you had anyone here," she said, and added : "But it's magnificent, your *Wilderspin*. Why don't you publish it?"

It was as if Mr. Beale sprang upon her. George looked at him with momentary apprehension. He didn't know—and he a little dreaded—how his mannerisms might strike Clara Brede. But Mr. Beale had suddenly become almost Parisian in his manner :

"I assure you," he said, "I've been asking

Mr. Moffat the same question for the last two hours."

"Why? What?" Clara asked. She held the manuscript as if it had been a child, tenderly, and stood framed by the doorway.

"I am what you call a publisher," said Mr. Beale gallantly. "I can't say the offer I've made him for that precise work is a princely one. He won't allow me to make an offer."

"Oh, but it's splendid," Clara Brede said. "I've never read anything like it."

George suddenly felt a great deal of pleasure.

"It's a childish performance," he maintained stoutly, "and my position's absurd."

Clara Brede came a little farther into the room.

"You don't mean to say," she suddenly attacked George—"you don't mean to say you refuse to let it be published."

"It would make his name," Mr. Beale addressed her. "It would make him famous in two, if not three, continents. I haven't arranged for Australia."

"But I don't in the least want to be famous," George said rather angrily, "on the strength of *Wilderspin*."

Clara had been listening to Mr. Beale, flushed as if an enchanter had been speaking. She flashed an "Oh! how can you?" on George. "I like the book so much. It's so real, it's so full of life, it's so kind and good and helpful."

"Exactly, exactly what I wanted to say, Miss," Mr. Beale chimed in.

George suddenly reflected on *Wilderspin* as viewed in the eyes of Clara Brede. Clara was undoubtedly romantic—and *Wilderspin*, which to him was nauseatingly sentimental, to her was real. And she found it so kind, so good and so helpful? The central character indulged in rhetorical musings ; she must have found them pleasing. Perhaps the book *was* attractive.

When he had been writing it (he remembered that it had appealed to his wife) he had meant it to be full of the open air, of the sea ; yes, certainly of romance ; of kindness, too, and a certain good-hearted braveness. Perhaps some of that young spirit of his had really expressed itself in the work. As a "piece of work" it was undoubtedly bad ; points were incredibly missed ; the subject hadn't been done justice to ; nothing had been squeezed out of it—from a writer's point of view. It wasn't the sort of subject that he was really fit to treat—romance, love, gallantry, tenderness. What had he known of these ?

But Clara Brede liked it ; then it must have merits that he himself couldn't see.

He softened towards his work whilst he stood mutely listening to their exhortations.

At last Clara said : " I'd give anything to see it published."

And Mr. Beale chimed in : " I'd give more than a few dollars to publish it.

George took the untidy bundle from Clara's arms and handed it to Mr. Beale.

" Take it," he said, " take it away. Never let me hear of it and its absurdities again."

A swift wave of pleasure went over Clara's face. Mr. Beale said :

" Well, I guess you won't be dissatisfied as to results."

George began again :

" I tell you I never want to hear of it again. You may have it as a present. I'll even correct the proofs. But I wouldn't take a penny profit if it made the biggest boom that ever——"

" *But*," Clara interrupted with immense concern. Mr. Beale laughed in sheer incomprehension. It struck him as an agreeable kind of lunacy.

" I won't give it to you on any other terms," George said. " I will, to oblige Miss Brede and you, commit a sin with my eyes shut, but I couldn't think of profiting by *Bad Art*."

Clara began again : " But Mr. Moffat——"

George waved a benignant hand at her. " I'm sure," he silenced, " with your scrupulous nature you won't disapprove."

Clara, with her naive, distressed air, answered after a pause :

" I think I—I don't disapprove. But," she wrestled painfully with embarrassment,

—"but have you thought that you may come to——"

"Oh, I've thought about the wretched book more than it can by any possibility deserve," George said. "The world's full of such much pleasanter topics."

"It *isn't*," Clara said with a quaint and shocked intonation. "But you do such wonderfully——"

Mr. Beale had still his air of bright non-comprehension. He said :

"Well, you can rely on me to mail the cheque for the proper sum. You can build a hospital with it if it rattles you. But good heavens——"

"Mr. Beale has had rather a bad experience of authors as such," George explained to Clara.

"Oh, this hole makes it all square," Mr. Beale said. He was going to mail the cheque, or it would give his book-keepers dyspepsia.

George laughed. He wasn't going to engage in a fantastic duel of generosity with an absurd American. The voices of Thwaite and Dora sounded in the hall.

Thwaite had more than a nodding acquaintance with Mr. Beale.

"You've emerged victoriously," he said. He had caught sight of the obvious bundle under Mr. Beale's arm.

"Oh, I'm a victor," Mr. Beale said, "but I guess I'm ashamed of my terms."

Thwaitelaughed gently. "We're all ashamed when we succeed with Mr. Moffat," he said.

They stood talking, pleasantly enough, all together in the large room. Suddenly Dora uttered an exclamation of ingenuous surprise and delight :

"Why, there's your glove, Clara."

She pointed to the glove that George had carried off the night before ; it lay on the bureau where George had thrown it. Clara (she had, Dora said, hunted high and low for it) crimsoned to the roots of her hair ; George, in his very best manner, explained the appearance. It amused him a good deal.

Thwaite, with a quick awakened air, looked from one to the other, and suddenly George noticed that Clara Brede was extremely charming

It was as if he had just rubbed his eyes. He looked at her more narrowly with his scrutinising, intensely penetrating glance, and she slowly let her eyes fall.

The other three were talking about the beauties of the town ; Mr. Beale said something about a "bully Gothic window." George missed what they were saying.

"Whoever marries this young person will get a great treasure," he thought ; Clara's blue-cloaked, gentle figure, as if submissively and proudly, seemed to offer itself for his inspection—"This young person——" He paused, vaguely aware that his habitual, playful tone of badinage wasn't appropriate, wasn't in place

any more. She had suddenly—or perhaps gradually enough—asserted an equality, as if now, for some reason, she mattered ; as if she claimed a place in his serious reflections, had due to her a certain respect, a certain deference, even in his thoughts. She had become a woman, all of a sudden, but very completely.

Her candour of eyes, of face, of form, of mind, her candour of words—had ceased gradually enough to be merely the amusing naivete of a child. It had come to mean very much more. There was not anything precisely like her in the world ; she was, as it were, a standard ; her opinions, her view of matters, seemed suddenly not risible, but necessary ; not only refreshing, but intensely salutary.

And the qualities of her mind seemed to be translated into her gestures—into the folds her dress took, into the lines of her mouth when she smiled, into the very waves of her hair. It was as if something intensely touching in the picture that she made affected him almost tenderly. A certain pathos, mingled with her candour, her grasp on life and on truth ; it had the exquisiteness of habitual renunciation, a radiance as if of many tears.

Mr. Beale, who suddenly had somehow lost the intense significance of his share of life and of candour, was asking him to walk to the station, and, on the way, to point out the glories of the little town. He had to catch the “ N.D.L.,” to-morrow ; no idling for *him*.

II.

IT had been for Clara like stepping down into an arena. She had delivered her first battle. Mr. Beale was walking beside her, before the others. He turned back ; pointed at George's house ; explained that George's elms were "bully old oaks." His turf was deliciously soft. Six hundred years old, may be !

She wondered swiftly whether she had said too much.

"I couldn't *help* what I did say," she argued with herself.

Mr. Beale said :

"What a fine chap that man is !"

He was talking of George. She assented with a faint smile and her habitual abstracted air.

Where did she stand now ? She had brought *Wilderspin* round because she had wanted to see George. She had wanted to *look* at him, to discover, if she could, what had happened to her. Last night she had said to herself that she loved him. And she had passed the night in thinking it ; she had fallen asleep smiling about it ; it remained a blissful and sublime fact. She felt that now she could wait for ever on her father without a complaint, without a murmur even to herself,

Mr. Beale hastened to open George's gate for her. She bowed her head and smiled—she had awakened smiling. It had been delightful that there was *Wilderspin* to carry back to George. It had made a pretext ready to her hand. It was like a good omen ; she had not had to cast about for an excuse. She could act at once. She had acted.

Mr. Beale said :

“ Ah, Miss, it's what one wants, to come to such a quiet place.”

For once in her life she had acted. George's house had seemed to her more mellow, more grey and more radiant, in among its tall trees. The great buttresses that held it up had seemed like symbols of absolute permanence ; the rooks had cawed among the loose sticks of their high, untidy nests, and their mere attitude had suggested ideas of the blue air, as if she herself could fly.

“ Don't you think,” she said to Mr. Beale, “ that however little one may want, it's always too infinite for one ever to attain ? ”

He said, “ Well, now ? ” interrogatively, and began to argue the point. Living in such a place would be good enough for *him*.

But what *she* wanted was that George should go on living in that place. That had made her “ speak out ” so just before. She had found him deliberately throwing away a chance. She had forced him to take it. For a minute she wondered whether she had not

said too much. Then she didn't care. She had made him give *Wilderspin* to this quaint man. Beale would be sure to pay him. She knew that Beale was honest, and the payment for *Wilderspin* would keep George going if he were really poor. With her sure instinct she knew that Beale was not a man to be mistaken. *Wilderspin* would succeed.

She was very happy because George was going to stand out before the world as the author of *Wilderspin*. She had persuaded him to. It would make him illustrious ; it would render him beloved by hundreds. She had read the book with avidity. She had cried over the tender passages ; noble phrases had elevated her. She had wondered if George could love as tenderly as his hero loved his heroine. She had wondered if that heroine had been his wife.

George was only a few yards behind. She seemed to feel an "influence" coming towards her, and making her vaguely at peace. But just as they were passing her own gate her father pounced out of it upon George. In his grey study coat he looked like an immense spider dropping out of a lurking place. He said :

"Just come in a minute. I want to consult you."

George said swiftly : "But, my dear fellow," and indicated the brilliant, brown figure of the American.

"You said you'd help me," Mr. Brede grumbled. He opened the wicket for George. "I won't keep you. You can catch them up."

George passed helplessly in.

She felt an intense impulse to run back to her father—to upbraid him and to release George. But suddenly she dared not.

Love, which had simplified so many things for Clara Brede, stopped short at that. She was a valiant soul, but she was afraid then. It wasn't public opinion she feared; it wasn't even the private reproof of her own people. Her father might know, her sister might know that she loved George helplessly and vigilantly, but *he* must not. She owed that to herself.

She had always thought it ignoble that a woman should prostrate herself before a man. Man had been, for her, the enemy—predatory, accustomed to conquer insolently, and with a hard and odious light in the eyes. She had figured him as twisting a moustache and winking at the universe, whilst a woman hung round his neck or unlaced his boots. It had not enraged her; it had not made her desire to change this for other women. She regarded them as fools; they went under, for the good of the race perhaps. It did not concern her.

George was different—the eternal exception. He had no conquering insolence. He was tender; he was "considerate." He would be always casting about to spare one

humiliation. He was a mental influence that one could feel ; a magnetic force, a radiator of joy—something she could not express, but an exception.

Nevertheless, she would not, to his face, save him from her father. She would not let him know that she was concerned for him. That would be a degradation ; as if she should cast herself prostrate before him. He must help himself ; she would not “demoralise” him. But she thought of herself as an invisible providence, keeping off from him these parasites, these thieves of his time, of his goods, of his interests, of his very life. She intended, however, to remain invisible to him.

She was walking beside Mr. Beale, and imparting information with smiles.

“No,” she said, “that is not a Renaissance window ; it’s Early Perpendicular.” They were outside the end of the church. Dora and Thwaite had forged a little ahead, and were talking intimately, with their heads bent down. She expected every minute to hear George’s footsteps behind her.

“Well, it’s bully,” Mr. Beale said. “Like Brooklyn Evangelical ; only better, I expect.” He didn’t know anything about these things, but he *loved* them.

She had his company right down the hill, along the winding road across the levels to the little station. He talked all the time. They ran

down Dora and Thwaite at the station, but his last words were addressed to Clara. He said she could rely on his booming *Wilderspin* for all it was worth, because he simply "*loved*" George. Clara tried to think of an apology for George's absence.

She expected to meet him at every turn of the homeward road. She had to make it alone, because Thwaite and Dora remembered that a mile beyond the line there was a picturesque copse they had not visited together. Thwaite looked at her so gloomily that she did not offer to go with them, and they disappeared into a green field.

She felt vaguely that if George wanted to meet her, there could be no better time. The sight of Thwaite and her sister side by side made her a little melancholy.

"He has never looked at me," she thought, bitterly. "Never once."

It was at times in her head that he must care for her, because she cared so much for him. She did not wish for his love; what could she do with it? She had her father to think of. It wasn't so much a duty; it wasn't so much affection—it was a piece of work that she had to carry through. There was no one else to do it.

She turned a corner of the road. A quarter of a mile in front of her there was a figure of a man, half hidden by a pollard willow. Her heart began to flutter; she halted irresolutely.

But it was too slight a man, and he did not walk erect enough. She stepped out quickly. Her blue cloak was blown strongly against her in the unsheltered spaces. She wanted to be back to see him. Then she remembered that he might be coming, and, if he came, she would have less far to walk back with him. She slackened her pace.

At the thought that in the end it made no difference, her face grew sad. Then she remembered that he had had her glove, and she smiled. She lingered on the bridge and looked at the small river. It was full with rain, and grey with the reflection of the March skies. She looked at the horizon. The clouds were low, the sails of a ship stood up, dim and sad, above the level of the marsh.

If only, beyond the horizon, there were a land—— But she shrugged her shoulders. This was childish nonsense. Even if there were such a land she couldn't go to it with him. He had never looked at her, and there was her father. But she imagined a place where the air was always soft, and where one lay back dreamily in long chairs. There would have to be a grey sea there, and a great sky, and perpetual twilight. And one would rest.

The little town was not a hundred yards from her. It stood on a bluff of perpendicular copse. Red roofs peeped over, and hundreds of birds were singing in the brown underwood.

She looked at where the bottom of the road struck the level. He was not at the bend. He was not coming. He had never even looked at her.

She began to walk swiftly. He might be gone back to his house if she did not hurry. She might not see him again for all the rest of that day. She had a sensation of horrible pain because he had not come. Then it struck her that it was ignoble to care so much for a man who altogether ignored her. She turned into the sloping door of a dilapidated stone cottage to order the week's potatoes. That was her business in life.

In Mr. Brede's tiny and shabby study George was listening to a "letter needing great tact"—about the affairs of the Society for Promoting Rural Pleasures. Harassing intrigues had sprung up in the Committees during Mr. Brede's retirement. A Northern countess and a Midland lady had formed two intensely hostile parties. It was a question of policy—were the peasants to pay nominal subscriptions for the books they borrowed from the village libraries whenever the libraries should get themselves established? And which of the two ladies was to be premier lady patroness?

"I shall have to get these women well in hand before beginning anything else," Mr. Brede said heavily. "Listen——" He began to read his letter. It seemed to George

suddenly wearisome that he should be at the beck of anyone for a matter so grotesque and trivial. And Mr. Brede's implicit and almost childish belief in George's own good judgment made the matter no better.

But it was, he recognised, his own fault. He had egged Mr. Brede on to divert his mind with these things. Mr. Brede, at least, was alert and bustling. He breathed excitedly through his nostrils. In the midst of these details he was like a horse turned out at last into a luxuriant meadow. His brooding was gone. There was that much gained.

"One of them will have to go into the Committee on Ways and Means," Mr. Brede said heavily. "I don't care which. I wish there weren't any women."

George, at any rate, in the course of the morning, got a very good insight into the working of Mr. Brede's Society. The quarrels had been quite extraordinary.

III.

"You may consider that man happy," George said three months later, "whose months are marked merely seasonally. I mean if his events are—say a bee that's hanging in a daffodil, or the way the days draw out and shorten. That's it—phenomena, not events, being set down in his mental journal."

"Don't you *think*," Clara Brede asked earnestly (they were conversing along a strip of wet sand, and she paused to step across a little rill that channelled its way down towards unquiet, stretched waves) "that achievements are better than either?"

George laughed. "Oh! if it came to achievements," he said comfortably, "there would be nothing left for us but——" He pointed to a company of gulls floating a long way out beyond the poles of the kettle nets. Clara pondered an exhortative reply.

"You're a gallant soul," George said. "What you set out to do you carry through. Not a doubt. But for us—for the rest of the world——"

"I think I have never succeeded in anything in all my life," Clara said suddenly, with a ring of conviction in her voice.

"Ah, you're nervous; you're run down," George said. "These marriages are enervating. But Dora and Thwaite are off; it's all over."

"Oh, it isn't *that* I mean," Clara said. "It's a continual thing. I never can—and so, I suppose I never *shall*—succeed; just really succeed in anything, not anything appreciable, but some grotesquely little thing, like arranging flowers in a vase . . ." She was speaking fast and nervously. George looked at her in his serious manner.

"You *really* feel like that?" he asked. "You strike one as being so—so tremendously effectual."

Clara was hindered in the unusual stride of her speech; she looked back at him with her eyes a little wide, and then, as it were, died down.

"You're only trying to comfort me," she said. "I know what I *am*."

George felt a sudden and immense tenderness of pity.

"You can't, you know," he said, "tell how you appear—comparatively—set against the rest of humanity."

"Oh, I know I appear harsh and unsympathetic," Clara said.

"You know you're extremely young," George said.

"I'm—*horrible*," she almost shuddered. "I've never been young; I've never really enjoyed anything. And I appear——"

A number of distant shouts were carried by the wind from behind them.

"Ah, delightfully young," George said. "I've known so many. How do you know—how can you—how you appear? I'll tell you how you do."

The shouts were wafted more insistently. A long way behind them, near the two or three bathing tents on the high wall of bright shingle, Mr. Brede, a black figure, quite tiny, agitating arms and hands, was walking swiftly towards them. Clara stepped suddenly forward, and George hastened after her. He wanted to cheer her up; he thought she ought to marry some young man—nicer even than Thwaite. Her environment was altogether too depressing. But there wasn't anyone good enough. The pleasant wind blew the gulls high into the immense vacancy of the sky before them.

"I think we must have appeared a frightful collection of savages," she suddenly brought out, "all this time of the wedding. It made me wretched."

George said, "Good heavens." There had been the little extraordinary squabbles of all her sisters and all her aunts at Dora's wedding, but it had never occurred to him that Clara had been in the least degree troubled.

"If it hadn't been for you——" she began.

George said, quickly, "Oh, please."

"And some of them were so rude to you. I'm sure my Aunt Hilda——"

It was as if Clara had suddenly touched the ground.

George laughed. "Of *course*, I got my knuckles rapped. Your aunt naturally didn't like me. Why should she? And there *will* be quarrels in that sort of gathering—especially among determined types like your amiable relatives. But I hadn't the least idea you even noticed that sort of thing."

"Oh, I don't," Clara said wearily, "I'm used to it. But when you—when another person comes among it, all the sort of violence and clumsiness, the crudeness, seems to stand out."

"I know I'm a trifle in your eyes," George said with a certain levity, "but I wasn't really crushed by them. I enjoyed it immensely."

Clara said: "I was so miserable. I'm so tired of it all. If I could only get away."

She half pointed a long, sensitive, white hand towards the sea.

"Beyond the horizon?" George asked sympathetically.

"Beyond—beyond all the horizons," she assented. She added: "If you only knew."

"Ah, one can't get away from one's own personality," George said. "It all comes round to that." He added banteringly: "You couldn't, you know, even if you were married to the nicest man in the world."

It was as if her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't want——" she began with what for her was almost passion.

George felt that he had behaved with brutality.

"I only meant," he said quite seriously, "that you ought to be out of all this."

She shook her head.

"I've wanted all my life, so intensely," she said slowly, "not to mind ; to be irresponsible ; to do things easily and gracefully."

She looked up at a gull ; it swung swiftly across the sky, as if it illustrated what she meant.

"And I've seemed always to be doing clumsy things that make one clumsy oneself. Like an agricultural labourer, if you understand what I mean."

George half shook his head.

"Ah !" She looked an immeasurable distance ahead along the sand. "I seem to have been so purposeful always ; so dull ; so plodding. Why ? Why ? I plodded at college. I took a degree. I didn't in the least want to. And I nursed my mother and I kept the home together. I'm still doing it. I don't know why, either. It may have been a sense of duty. I suppose it was. But that's not very creditable."

George said : "It's a fine thing to have *done*."

"Of course I loved my mother," she said, "but even that doesn't make it any more creditable."

"My dear child," he interrupted her.

"No, it's hopeless," she said decidedly. "I've always felt like this ; I always shall. But I'd

give anything, anything, to get away. Beyond the horizon, as you say."

"Well, you know," George said, "you'd lose all self-respect if you did."

The voice of Mr. Brede calling an intermittent "Hi — hi — hi" passed over their heads unnoticed.

"Because it would be a running away," George went on. "You were born to face things — and to face them very splendidly and mutely."

"I've been yelping," she answered bitterly, "like — like a puppy or Werther."

George laughed.

"You've had a trying time," he commented. "And it's very charming to hear you. It does me a great deal of good. You've always seemed so splendidly assured ; so certain. It is charming to find the human touch in you."

"Oh, I'm human," she said bitterly ; "I'm worrying you with my troubles, like all the rest of them. I swore I never would."

Mr. Brede hurrying after them had abandoned his calls.

"It's charming," George said, "because, *mutatis mutandis*, it's so very much my own case. We've precisely the opposite desires ; the opposite quests beyond the horizon. I mean, I feel myself so miserably wanting in the purposefulness you want to get rid of. I'm so desultory."

"You do everything so well," Clara accused him,

"Ah, my dear young lady," George sighed, "I don't *do* anything at all. But the fact remains, we're each other's complements."

She looked away from him out to sea, the corners of her mouth drawn tight.

George's "You may consider that man happy whose journal is filled with phenomena, not events," had been the moral drawn from his own life of late. His months had slipped by without external contacts. He had remarked daffodils with bees hanging in them, the sudden sound of the lawn-mowers thrilling in his garden, the immense twilight chorus of birds in April, the lengthening of the days. They were shortening again already; July was beginning. And he had undoubtedly been happy, buoyant, alert and capable of enjoying his leisures. He had seen a great deal of Clara Brede, and nothing had happened.

They had glided into July; the sea—broad, smooth and blue—the warm beach, leisurely hours beneath the sun, had swung again into the round of the year. Mr. Brede was undoubtedly better. He was humanised, and, except for alarming and violent relapses that were characteristic of him, showed the wisdom of George's treatment. He had even, at odd moments, taken an interest in his daughter's wedding. And he had been unsparing in his demands on George's time.

George himself had worked in the intervals,

held down to it by an unacknowledged desire to come to the scratch. The last proofs of *Wilderspin* had re-crossed the Atlantic more than a month ago ; the lull that precedes publication had set dumbly in. Thwaite had proclaimed that the "new volume"—it was more than three parts finished—really *might* do George's trick, and George unconsciously rejoiced in the approbation that Clara bestowed alike on his industry and on its fruits. I don't know that George himself wasn't pleased with his work.

Thwaite's marriage had approached with the gentle arriving of all the other phenomena. Preparation had been great fun. The turning of the weather-boarded cottage into a spick and span little dwelling, with a new, red chimney stack, and extremely flourishing standard roses above the tulips of circular beds, had engrossed and amused them all. And Thwaite's extreme earnestness in the whole matter had agreeably enough diverted George.

"One *has* to consider what Dora has been used to," he said, in a slightly nettled tone on the night before the wedding. George had a little rallied him on the choice of a Paris hotel.

"I should think that was precisely what one hadn't to do at this stage," George said, good humouredly.

"I couldn't take her to some back street place in the Latin quarter," Thwaite said.

"I should," George answered.

Thwaite uttered an ejaculation of impatience.

"Well, I wish to-morrow was over." He avoided the question. "That *damned* tailor."

"Oh, the things will come in the morning," George said unsympathetically, "otherwise I shouldn't have recommended him."

"He's confoundedly expensive," said Thwaite. He subsided into an uneasy murmur.

George was surveying him from the calm outer sphere of the sympathetic observer. He was touched by the pleasing pettiness of his preoccupations. One naturally expected Thwaite to rise very superior to the occasion; to soar with the unconcern of a kite right over the church, the ceremony, and the assistants. He didn't in the least. He was immensely troubled by his own beard. He ran his delicate hands through it, grasped it frantically, and made as if to tear it off.

"Heaven knows what it looks like," he groaned. "I suppose I shall appear at least fifty."

"Dora thinks it picturesque," George said. "It is."

"I don't want to look like a tramp." Thwaite writhed on the sofa.

"You used to, you know," George said. "That, after all, was what captivated her."

Thwaite sat up and apostrophised George savagely. "Look here; this is a serious matter. You don't know *how* I feel the responsibility of it."

"You'd better take a sedative and go to bed," George said. "You will look like a scarecrow if you don't."

Thwaite said : "How can I go to bed when we haven't even settled about an hotel?" He rose to his feet and stamped about the room. "It's no joke."

"It doesn't seem to be," George answered. He felt a moment of misgiving, Thwaite was so unrecognisable. He said that he couldn't take Dora to *any* sort of hotel; you never knew what sort of people you mightn't meet, or what sort of shocking scenes you mightn't see in the streets. *He* knew the Quartier Latin. At the same time he didn't want to have to pay Grand Hotel prices; it was out of the question. He wanted to find a decent middle-class hotel with a *cuisine bourgeoise*. And you couldn't tell where to find one. It would be ridiculous to arrive in Paris without knowing where they were going.

George said : "But, my dear fellow. This dreadful respectability! Dora would, I am perfectly sure, like a sort of chastened Bohemianism. And, bless my soul, all the quartier round the School of Medicine's as staid as Bloomsbury."

Thwaite said : "It's a responsibility—a young girl's soul like Dora's."

George interrupted, mildly : "But she'll have to——"

"Her—her unsullied outlook," Thwaite

caught him up, "I've got to preserve that. And she must be decently comfortable. I haven't undertaken this thing without looking it in the face."

George sighed a little. "I think you're most beautifully wrong," he said. What Dora wanted was just *not* the decent *cuisine bourgeoise* that she'd had all her life. "She expects you to give her a holiday—the rich and strange, the finer spirit. You'd get it by a little roughing it, by a softened touch of your tramping in the Abruzzi." He went on to explain that Dora, once blooded in that way, would return with all the delight in the world to his life of eminent respectability.

"But all this doesn't give me the name of an hotel," Thwaite said, with a touch of insolence.

George, in his turn, felt remotely nettled. "You'd better take her to the Grand Hotel," he said. "I daresay the marble and gilding would amuse her childish innocence."

Thwaite flashed at him pragmatically: "And pay their abominable prices?" He adopted a rather lofty tone. "You can't—you won't seem to understand that I've undertaken this affair in a serious spirit. I suppose you think that, because I've been a vagabond once, I'm always going to be one. It isn't so. I'm going to begin from the very beginning with moderation and common-sense. I've got a certain income. If it weren't for that confounded

Clara, Dora would be sure of a decent competency." He spoke with astonishing bitterness.

Clara had remained silently obdurate. To George himself she had vouchsafed no kind of explanation, and it wasn't the kind of subject that George could harp on or return to.

"What does she mean to do?" Thwaite asked. "Dora's aunt advised me to bring an action about it."

George raised his hands.

"Oh, I'm not mercenary," Thwaite said. "But it's a matter to be looked at in a serious way. You, of course, can't look at it like that. You've never had to think about a penny, and you've not got a young girl to provide for."

George's back suddenly stiffened. His gaze at Thwaite became extremely direct. Thwaite, as a matter of fact, had never seen George angry; he did not recognise the signs.

"As I say," he went on, "you can't understand; you've never had to look forward or wanted money. I'm a man of the world in some matters. I've got a certain income assured, and——"

George suddenly sat up.

"If it hadn't been for me——" he began. Then he paused and leant back in his chair. He had meant to finish with: "you wouldn't have had any position at all."

But, between word and word, the dislike for saying anything of the kind quenched his

anger suddenly. He saw the humour of the situation—the absurdity of quarrelling with a man of Thwaite's calibre, of raising an unpleasantness over the selection of an hotel.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you're rather insufferable to-night. You are, really."

"Well, I've things to worry me," Thwaite said.

George answered : "And heaven knows, so have I."

It was true enough, and perhaps Thwaite's sudden reminder of his private trouble had been the cause of his sudden anger. George had that morning received the first demand from the creditors of the Renaissance Press ; it had been for a good round sum. George's affairs *were* involved in a tangle that might unravel very blankly indeed. He had thrown the affair off his mind. He had forwarded the creditors' demand to his brother Gregory to attend to in his solicitor's capacity. But Thwaite's harping on a string of much the same tone had brought it back to his mind.

Gregory's answer might mean that the cupboard was more than bare. He remembered suddenly all sorts of manipulations of investments, all sorts of equitable mortgages, and he equally couldn't remember whether certain shares in a South American Railway had or had not been sold. They would make all the difference. He pressed the subject out of his mind once more, replacing it with his genial

fatalism. Thwaite was regarding him remorsefully enough.

"Oh, I'm immensely sorry," he said, "I really am."

George, laughing, said that it was all right; that he could make allowance for Thwaite, whose position obviously called for nervous irritation. "But really, Thwaite, your hotel needn't cause us the least worry if we can only keep a level head between us." He explained that Thwaite could drive to one of the tourist agencies in the Avenue de l'Opera, and get details of all the *cuisines bourgeoises* in the dangerous city.

Thwaite's face expressed joy; his brow unclouded. He suddenly saw prospects of hotel-board tickets at greatly reduced prices.

"I'm such a child in travelling of this sort," he said gratefully. "It would never have occurred to me."

"You certainly don't shine—without a knapsack," George said. "I can't for the life of me think why you're going to Paris at all. Dora would much rather go to a wilder place."

"It's the proper thing," said Thwaite.

Before leaving, he for a time became the old Thwaite—exaggerated a little toward a sentimentalism that, George excused him, was in the circumstances not inappropriate. He talked a great deal of his plans; aired his theories of domesticity, which strangely enough were almost Oriental. Seclusion from an unpleasant world—that ought to be the lot

of woman in life. George had a sudden vision of Dora darning stockings beneath the darkened beams of the weather-boarded cottage, whilst Thwaite read poetry aloud and rocked a cradle with his foot. It tickled his humorous nerves, and as, with his hand affectionately on Thwaite's shoulder, he saw the bridegroom out of the house, he said:

"Well, my dear boy, all these things are—aren't they?—very much on the knees of the gods. But if I were you—if I were young and very much in love, I don't think I should have all these—all these moral scruples."

"Oh, you would," Thwaite said. He added: "I wish—I wish you would try to influence Clara about that money."

He returned after he had been gone some minutes to bring out the fact that what was at the bottom of his extreme care, pecuniarily, was his desire to repay the really large sums that he owed George. "And if Clara would give Dora the money that morally (and I'm not sure that it isn't legally, too) is Dora's, I could with a clear conscience set about repaying you. Because I'm not ungrateful; I don't forget my oblations to you. I owe you everything."

It was a moment of *attendrissements*. The late-at-night emotions that Thwaite's moved voice caused in George overwhelmed his slight shudder at the recurrence of the word "money." Thwaite went on to give details of a scheme for insuring his life.

IV.

THE wedding breakfast, a sufficiently imposing affair, had taken place in George's large dining hall; the Bredes' hired house contained no room sufficiently noble. It was Thwaite's idea; Clara had opposed it strenuously, and with some show of emotion. Her ingenuous cheeks flushed, and the discussion had left her brother-in-law a no better friend. Thwaite had said that he did not wish Dora's wedding to be a hole and corner affair.

"I think," Clara had answered, "that people won't think any the better of us for imposing on a friend who is more than enough imposed on."

But George had made Thwaite's idea his own, and there wasn't any opposing George.

Relatives had accepted, in a disconcerting manner; two families of Bredes who were not on terms with each other; two sisters of Clara's, whom the care of considerable nurseries had made prematurely querulous; an Honourable Aunt Hilda on the mother's side; and a bearded, half-centaur cousin from La Plata by accident in England.

The two bridesmaids came from Mr. Brede's own parish—they had been to college with

Dora. Their bustling and amiably fresh county-family mothers disapproved of the aunt, who was understood to have had a past of aristocratic and ancient liveliness. The aunt, on the other hand, disapproved, without any mincing matters, of Clara and her earlier scholastic career.

"Colleges for gals," she exclaimed in the ear of the cousin from La Plata, who had acted as best man. "It's Greek to me what they're for. And what's Greek to them? *I don't like spectacles on débutantes.*"

"I don't agree with you, ma'am," the bearded cousin exclaimed. He twirled a champagne-glass by the stalk in his enormous fingers, and spoke indulgently. "Out in the Pampas they make the best wives. They've something to think of, and don't mope. Give me that sort."

"Well, take 'em all out to the Pampas and keep them there," the aunt exclaimed with a good-natured intonation for the handsome nephew.

"You ought to remember, aunt," one of the querulous sisters interjected, "that Dora's a Girton girl. And the bridesmaids."

"Oh, Dora's married," the old lady rang back. "She'll do no more mischief. Besides, not even a college could do Dora any harm. You've got the best of the bunch, Mr.—Waite! —Thwaite! A Shropshire Thwaite—oh, I beg pardon."

Clara had smiled all the time.

Mr. Brede—it was quite one of his best days—blinked amiably, like an owl dragged from a hollow. He quoted Horace three times in a short but weighty speech. The cousin from La Plata in *his* speech remarked, swaying bulkily and easily :

“Ladies and gentlemen, I haven’t learnt the art of oration from cattle on my ranche. The bride’s charms speak for themselves. I could make a speech—an excellent quotation—if I’d to speak for the best man. As it happens, I’m that functionary myself. I should say, may the best man win.”

He sat down heavily, and with a certain air, pulling at his heavy moustache, and casting at Clara an unconcealed glance of admiration. No one laughed.

Afterwards, Mr. Brede’s two sisters, who had not met for seven years, began a formal reconciliation. It was interrupted by a violent and quite unmitigated quarrel between their husbands about “poor Jane’s will.” Clara, with her swift grace and air of patience, had separated them. “I should think, Uncle James,” George caught her saying to one immense, coal black-haired creature, “that you would be quiet in the house of a gentleman who had been kind to us——”

The uncle muttered something apologetic. Subsequently, he came up to George, and, with a deferential air, began to talk about the Highlands.

When Thwaite and Dora drove away, a period of great misery for Clara Brede came to an end. It wasn't only, as she said to George, that the violence of her relatives had "got on her nerves." It wasn't even that she was horribly distracted by the idea of what George must be thinking of them. Dora had smiled radiantly at her; Thwaite scowled and looked away. He had been scowling like that at her all these months. Once he had begun to talk to her about the money. She had answered him with a settled "No!"

It had never shown on the surface how near she was to telling him everything; and it had made her the more miserable that she could not bring herself to tell him. She could not. She had been again and again on the point, but she was always afraid. He hated her so much, that she was sure he would tell George, in order to discredit her in George's eyes. She couldn't trust Thwaite, and all the time he was trying to make Dora hate her.

She ought to have told Thwaite. She ought never to have withheld the money. She had recognised that as soon as she knew that she loved George. It was a mistake, a disaster, and, when she recognised it, it was a new calamity. She remembered that she had thought about it for a long time one night. Her reasons had seemed to her so good then—but now, all these reasons seemed to have vanished. She couldn't put them together

again. It seemed to her, when she looked back, that her only real reason had been that she was in love with George. She had not known it, but it had biassed her.

Oh, she had thought she had been acting so justly ! She wrung her hands. She craved for the real heroism that would make her confess to Thwaite. It did not come, and for all those months he had gone on hating her, and trying to make Dora hate her.

She had remained doggedly mute. She had spent all her savings on Dora ; she had bought her whatever she idly wished for. It had not appeased Thwaite. Dora, however, had not seemed to listen to him, though it made her the more in love with him because he was defending her interests. And she loved Clara more because Clara was unhappy.

On the night before the wedding Dora had been over at the cottage. She came hurrying back to Clara. Thwaite had gone into George's.

" Oh, Clara," she said. Her delighted face was flushed ; her blue eyes sparkled. " Come and see what Mr. Moffat has given us."

All round the walls of the living room there hung frames of delicate drawings, touching closely one on the other. It was George's surprise. Whilst Thwaite and Dora had been out in the afternoon he had come round to the cottage with his gardener, wheeling all the frames in a truck. He had spent the afternoon in directing the gardener where to hang them.

Clara stood motionless and looked. She saw row upon row of faces, delicately touched in and tinted, the faces of very beautiful women and of very famous men. They were intimately familiar to her, and it was like a calamity.

Dora was saying that Thwaite said they were worth some hundreds of pounds.

They were the complete series of Sir Graham's small sketches for his most famous portraits. They were practically the only things of value that George still had. They had always been in a great portfolio on a special stand in George's drawing room ; Clara had looked through them many times.

Dora said : " Mr. Moffat has given them to William, because he is his dearest friend and pupil."

Clara leant a hand against the table. There were tears warm in her eyes. She thought swiftly : " He is ruined, then. He gave them because he had nothing else to give." The bright, rich little room wavered and became invisible in the blur of her tears. Suddenly she gave one long sob. She saw Dora's alarmed young face, then she sank down on her knees and hid her own on her arms. " Don't you know he is ruined ? " she sobbed. She began to cry unrestrainedly ; the rough stuff of her sleeve smarted on her face. It was beneficent and soothing, as if he himself were there. In the abandonment of her grief she closed her eyes, to see nothing, and sought

blindly for a resting-place on her sister's breast as a child would do on its mother's. "I love him so," she said.

She told her sister everything; it was wonderful how Dora understood. It was as if Clara were talking to herself.

"You misunderstood Willie," Dora said. Of course Thwaite would have paid George if he had known.

"But I couldn't tell him," Clara said. She hadn't wished to diminish George's noble figure. She had wanted to keep the secret for her own.

"Oh, I know," Dora said. It was wonderful how she understood and how she pardoned.

It wasn't indeed a matter of pardon. She would have wanted her sister to have acted as she had done. It was romantic and it was charming. This new sensation seemed somehow to have made the cottage itself become suddenly a home, a place one already had lived in. She was open to all tender emotions because it was the night before she was to be married, and she was very happy.

Clara lay back, softly and wearily, in a long chair before the high fire-place, and Dora sat on the ground at her feet. Her arms were across her sister's knees, and Clara's hand lay on her head. The long, polished oak table reflected the light of the lamp like a brown mill-pond. The darkened joists ran parallel overhead in long lines, the air was heavy with

the scent of jasmine from the open casement. Large moths blurred suddenly, pale from out of the blue night outside. The silence was filled with the sound of gnats, faint like a dull vibration, or sharp like tiny horns.

This was to be Dora's home. The idea of Clara's loving a man filled her with young and tremulous delight. She said suddenly :

"Oh, Clara, would you go away with him if he asked you to?"

Clara said : "Yes," with her soft resoluteness, and Dora nodded her head gently. It was as if she considered for a short time, and then thought that Clara was right. She pressed Clara's knees gently in token of sympathy.

"Only I can't leave father," Clara said.

Dora answered : "Oh, Clara!"

"No one else could do for him so well," Clara said. "And I couldn't bear to let anyone else know how bad he really is."

Dora said : "Oh, Clara!" again.

"Even George doesn't really know," Clara said.

Dora suddenly had a swift and sinister glimpse of how much Clara must have suffered. She herself had heard noises in the house at night when she had been half asleep. And she could understand Clara's jealous and intense pride that wished to conceal, even from a professional attendant, that dreadful weak place in their house.

Clara said proudly now, with a pride in her lover, "He would want me to see it through."

She suddenly stopped stroking Dora's hair.

"Besides, he's never even looked at me!" she said bitterly. "He thinks I'm only a drudge; and that's all I am."

Dora said: "Oh, Clara! You're a beautiful woman, and sweet—and charming—and clever—and—and—there's no one like you, my Clara."

She rose up and took Clara's face between her hands. She kissed her many times, and said in between: "No one—no one—no one—no one." She paused to push back a wisp of her hair.

"Oh, Clara," she went on, "he *does* admire you. I have heard him say you were shamefully used. He did; and that you ought to marry some good man. But there's no one good enough."

Clara's head lay back in the chair. Her eyes were closed, and her face looked like a tranquil, pale mask of a classic head.

"And he said you had a splendid nature. I heard him."

"He means that I am an efficient housewife," Clara said, with a listless and weary disdain.

"No, no." Dora flushed. "He means that you're good and generous and clever."

Before they went home Clara said swiftly:

"Don't tell Willie!" Then she hesitated. No! she mustn't come between man and wife. She had told her sister. She must take the consequences,

“ Oh, but Willie would *understand*,” Dora said. She meant that Thwaite had a heart as romantic as her own. She thought that he would even be charmed, and that from now he *must* begin to admire Clara.

Clara shook her head slightly.

“ Why, yes ; tell him about the money,” she said. “ And that I beg his pardon. But not that I love George Moffat.”

That, at least, was her own story.

V.

CAREW, the South American cousin, was a younger son who had gone out and returned an ingenuous, public-school, University of Cambridge young man. He more than a little disturbed George, who, in the goodness of his heart and the largeness of his house, was "putting him up."

In the unharassing Pampas he had preserved his ingenuousness and his youth even more notably than Clara Brede had done. He took an immense and, as it were, filial liking to his distinguished host. He called George "Sir," and, extending his great legs and genially waving a cigar on the evening after the wedding, candidly unfolded to George his simple ideas. They depended guilelessly and entirely upon a wife. He wanted a wife.

And, apparently, like Mr. Beale, he considered 'that he was born to get what he wanted; it showed in all his gestures, and almost in the very curl of his cigar-smoke. He explained that it was a good life "out there"; that the right sort of woman would be good for it—"And it would be good for her, by jove. . . . Now, what do you think?"

George said that undoubtedly Mr. Carew himself must be the best judge.

"But I want to know what you think, Sir,"

Carew iterated. "Wouldn't it be good for a girl—the right sort of girl?"

George said: "Really——" and Carew explained himself in a burst of rugged eloquence. His hacienda was really pretty; there were passion-flowers all over the verandah, and an excellent water supply. And he himself—well, he wasn't an angel, but he thought he was a gentleman.

"And mind you, Sir, I'm not the sort of blackguard to take a girl out to the back of beyond without a reasonably filled purse and a promise of good living."

He asked George his opinion of Clara Brede. Wasn't she a rattling good sort? He explained that he hadn't got a father living; George was the only elderly man—George winced—that he had ever been able to get on terms with, or ask advice of.

George considered the matter rather earnestly, digging the point of his paper-knife into the hard wood of his desk.

"I mean," Carew began again, "that I like Clara, though there's no need for a broken heart if I don't let myself go. And women, as a rule, like me," he added. His quick eye caught a rather heavy frown settling on George's rather noticeable forehead.

"Oh, I'm not talking loosely," he hastened to explain. "I mean just that, and no more."

George had the painful conviction that his interlocutor regarded him as old-maidish. And

the disappearance of Clara Brede into the "back of beyond" would be a calamity in the face of the eternal fitnesses.

"My dear fellow," he began suddenly, with a sort of indignation. He felt as if the man had, with a surpassing and blind coolness, asked for the Venus of Milo to use as the doorstep of his stables. "No, I don't know of any objection," he said coldly.

Carew went on to dilate, with a modesty that was quite touching and young, on his own eligibility. "She's only got her father to think of now. And he can come with us." It would be the making of Mr. Brede. He could ride about all day and take services. He was sound of wind and limb, and only wanted the megrims bumped out of him.

For the very first time in his life George found himself full of a personal envy. Even at school he had hardly been able to bowl out the captain of his team—from sheer dislike for spoiling an innings.

That was what, most of all, he had always suffered from. Seeing always, clearly enough, the ends and aims of others; never having had any very conscious goal of his own, he had always been content to step out of the way, and to supply the immense incentive of applause. It was as if, recognising very fully the futility of human strivings, he were content himself to strive not at all, and had attempted to be, in a small, practical way, a tutelary of good fortune.

He had tried to supply at odd moments those little bits of unexpected luck that will change a man's moods and the tide of a man's affairs. He very certainly desired this man's failure.

It alarmed him a little ; he took refuge in a simple refusal of counsel. Perhaps that, too, was for the first time in his life.

"I simply don't know," he said twice. "I couldn't judge in such a matter."

"But you don't say no?" Carew asked.

George felt a sudden and intense impatience. What was this person to him? Let him be quiet. Let him learn manners.

"And if you don't say no, Sir," the other went on—his tone implied an enthusiastic homage paid to a man of immensely superior knowledge of the world—and of immense seniority—"if you don't say no, there can't be much wrong."

Afterwards George had to listen to a long and very detailed account of Carew's properties in South America.

"Well, I've got thirty thousand acres there, with a pretty good head of cattle, but not so many as at the other place I was telling you of, and the droughts are worse."

Next morning George walked with Clara Brede along the sand. Carew had ridden off for a two days' tour among the neighbouring cathedrals, which it "was his duty as an Englishman" to "do."

"Ah, yes, beyond the horizon," George said musingly, with his eyes on the juncture of sky and sand and sea. "My dear young lady, the question is—and it's the same for every one of us—what we should find there." It was, after all, George's manner rather than his matter that was so eminently soothing.

He let loose the platitudes that lie so inevitably close to the hand of every habitual consoler; he proved to her how very identically her case—with the inevitable *mutatis mutandis*—was that of everyone else. "I, you know, have come across so many. And it's striking how exactly the same all the cases are. It's only in the very exterior symptoms that the differences make any kind of a show." He was speaking slowly, and with a great deal of *bonhomie*. He made little soothing and emphatic gestures.

"All our stories are the same. One wants to be something—something that what identically one can't by any possibility be. Or one wants to have something that one either doesn't get, or that one doesn't care for when one gets it." He spoke his platitudes with an absent enough air, and then added more brilliantly:

"You, of course, don't want any poor ministrations of mine. You're temperamentally too brave; you bear things in silence. That, after all, is the highest of human qualities. Not to yelp. Not to disturb the neighbours."

"But I *have* been yelping," Clara smiled at him.

He made an airy gesture with his stick.

"Oh—for a yelp," he said. "It wasn't that. It was, if you like, a curse wrung out, *that's* the point. When one's put out one ought to show it." He raised his eyebrows humorously. "Don't you see, too, the immense advantages of your—your confidences?"

Clara, laughing rather brilliantly, confessed that she didn't.

"You save me from a danger of complete misapprehension. How otherwise was I to know that you weren't a goddess; not to be tired; not to be ruffled by all the squabbles of all the relations in the world? How? Isn't it a pleasure to know that you're human if—as I'm sure I hope will be the case—I'm to go on seeing a good deal of you."

Clara remonstrated:

"One would have to be stone not to be afraid that you had been disgusted by our humiliating squabbles," but any shade of bitterness had gone out of her voice.

"One might, you know," George said humorously, "be a Venus of Milo. If you'll go to the Louvre you'll see her surrounded by people excellently more trivial than your amiable relatives. Obviously, she hears their comments. But think how much more desirable she would be if——"

Clara, with her conscientious humour, said:

"Oh, please don't make me think of a Venus with a *crise de nerfs*."

"The obvious retort would be," George flashed amiably back at her, "then why do you make me?"

Mr. Brede, remotely suggesting a shortness of breath, obtruded suddenly between them.

"I wish, Moffat," he said, with some show of vexation, "you would not let Clara tire you with her nonsense."

He had seen George hardly at all for the last three days; he wanted to have the cream of George's mind for himself. "Those confounded women are still squabbling. They're all women on my Committee now."

George said: "Oh, my mind's alert enough for all the squabbles in the world." He smiled rather hilariously at the immense clergyman. Clara, too, smiled softly. She listened with an expression of engrossed contentment. He *had* talked to her. She wondered—she wondered how much he really meant. Did he find her charming? Oh, if only he sometimes spoke more seriously. But she didn't want him in the least altered. She wondered if it could be true that he was ruined. He *couldn't* talk so gaily if he were. But then, he was so wonderful; he never "yelped." George was saying that for the moment he couldn't give Mr. Brede more than that one day. He had to consult his brother upon business. Gregory, in fact, had begged him urgently to come.

Clara thought, agitatedly, "What does he mean? What is it? Is he ruined now? He can't be. It doesn't seem possible."

He couldn't be. And it didn't seem possible. She asked so very little of life. Just that he should remain there; that she might walk beside them, thinking, whilst he talked to her father. So very little. Yet, because it gave her so great joy, perhaps it was infinitely too much for her.

Her father's face had fallen lamentably. George said, laughing: "Oh, I sha'n't be long. I don't want to leave all this"—he waved his hand, taking in the sea, sky and sand—"in these glorious days." His eyes happened to be on Clara, and he smiled, friendly and brilliant. It was as if he meant that, in her, he recognised another who felt the infectious glory of these days.

She had one of her swift rushes of pure joy. That was what his smile meant. He regarded her as a kindred spirit; as if he had raised her to his own level and saluted her. Dora had said as much. And he—he too had said it. Her eyes shone; her heart fluttered wildly, and then beat tranquilly and with an assured and sustaining pulsation. She didn't care. She didn't believe that he was ruined, that he would have to go. She was not going to believe it. And he had talked to her and he had looked at her.

VI.

MRS. Moffat's house in a western county—the house with the legendary fourteen gardeners—dominated the shoulder of a hill at the angle of a bay. Below it the greatest of western watering-places displayed a white and moon-like crescent to the suns of the south. It was only Gregory's as if innate modesty that made it not one of the show places of the country.

At first, to his acquaintance, it had seemed an appropriate and modest luxury; a little later they said it was an immense folly. Afterwards they agreed that you didn't know Gregory. It had once been a rather obscure looking, rather large, rather rambling, square mansion, masked and rendered gloomy, on its hill shoulder, by awkwardly disposed timber. It had passed into Gregory's hands for an old song. A little later, for another old song, he had bought in another part of coastal England, the entire face of a great half timbered house, then in process of demolition. And this entire face, water-borne to the western county, Gregory had had fixed to the front of his obscure mansion. The gloomy surrounding trees had been bodily transplanted into very

fine clumps. These dotted sea-marks all over the shoulder of the hill ; the glass-houses of the gardeners had sprung up, and an august, walled garden. Outlying, but desirable, parings of the land had become bedecked with pleasant villas. And almost suddenly, at an astonishingly eligible and select distance from the magnificent watering-place, a great, sunny haunt of ancient peace, black and mellow white, stood up and opened out to the soft breezes. One asked as one drove past in one's fly : "What is this? What is *this*?"

It stood in fact revealed that Gregory was possessed of a "property" which the adjectives of an auctioneer could only touch with a crudity to make one blush. Gregory hadn't turned a hair in the course of the transformation. No one had even realised that he had had anything on hand.

Mr. Hailes sat smooth, cool and precise, in the deep window-seat of a spacious, panelled room ; in its bright tallness it appeared quite small and habitable. He wore his air of professional helpfulness, tinged with something masterly and dark ; he was pulling his celestial, thin moustache above a long, drooping proof sheet. He played with a blue pencil, and twice made little dabs on the paper. At the other end of the broad seat, deliciously ruffled in her widow's black, a little and quite unusually perturbed, as if with a touch of naive shyness, Mrs. Henwick was delicately patting

the back of her tiny hand against the lozenges of the high, leaded window. Beside them, curtains obscured the tall double doorway of an immensely long and immensely rich room, into which the sunlight fell in glowing patches on a brilliant, soft carpet. The window looked out on to a hopelessly blue sea a long way below.

Mrs. Henwick uttered, "Well?" in a bird-like appeal of questioning. The deep frown of a connoisseur did not leave Mr. Hailes' dead-white, narrow forehead. His eyes travelled slowly down the page. There was a slight clicking noise from the next room; the brilliant, cheerful "pink, pink" of a chaffinch sounded through an open window to the west. Its metallic clearness seemed to belong to another order of world. Mr. Hailes rested the slip on his knee.

"Oh, exquisite. Quite exquisite," he said.

His voice did not lose its authoritative, connoisseur quality.

"You really think?" Mrs. Henwick appealed, as if hardly believing her ears. Mr. Hailes appeared to come up out of a dream.

"It grips one," he said. "It undoubtedly grips one."

Mrs. Henwick said: "Oh!"

Mr. Hailes reversed his pencil, and gently emphasized his words with it: "It's derivative, of course. But that, in a first effort, is to be expected. Indeed, it's to be commended."

Mr. Hailes' remarkable memory had come to his aid. He was repeating, almost word for word, and to a certain extent the exact mannerisms of the connoisseur who had favourably greeted his own first efforts. "Derivative, but with a certain authentic touch, a delicacy, a—a savour."

Mrs. Henwick flushed with a quite honest pleasure.

"I was so distractingly afraid of showing it to anyone," she said. "I thought people might make fun of it."

It was a storiette written with an intense and quite childish yearning, and destined to face the smudgy portrait of an actress wearing the last opera cloak, in the pages of a lady's magazine. It dealt with a lady whose starry face (after she had married someone of the plutocracy) beamed out of a lit window on to a terrace where Some One Else (whom she hadn't married because he was too comparatively penniless) bent his head above his bowed arms, drank in upon his parched face the pure breezes of the night, and swore to be a better man.

She had written the story in the dead of her solitary nights with quite real tears, a quite real catching in the throat, a quite real and indescribable mournfulness. And of its own strength it had got itself placed in the pages of the *Lady's Magazine*. It filled her with an indescribable tremor of prides, of shamefaced-

ness, of embarrassment. She had not dared to show it to Mrs. Moffat, whom, in her nervous shyness, she worshipped and looked up to. But the sharp eye of Mr. Hailes had caught sight of the familiar blue wrappings of proofs on the breakfast table among Mrs. Henwick's post. He had proffered his aid, confidentially and with his air of concealed dark reliability, in the hall. Mrs. Henwick, with a new flood of warm emotions, was tremulously trying to tear off the wrapper without injuring the contents. And now Mr. Hailes, with his balanced and surely reliable taste, pronounced her work a master-piece, with only the most venial of flaws observable to the meticulous eye of the hypercritical!

It's incredible to me," he said. "Incredible. Others of us"—he was still quoting George—"work for years at tinkering, at endless patching. You come along, and, if I may use the expression, 'do the trick' at the very outset. It makes one doubt the justice of Providence."

Mrs. Henwick was mute with pleasure. Mr. Hailes, picking up the slip from his knee, moved across the window seat. His shoulder touched hers, and she minutely edged away. He accepted the reservation for the time. "I've put in a comma here," he resumed his mastery, "and deleted this 'and.' Of course, in things like these, beginners can be helped, however skilful. And it's tricks like these make all the difference."

Mrs. Henwick was profuse in her bird-like thanks."

"Half the battle's in that," Hailes said. "I've seen some of the great—the high and mighty—writers at work. They talk a great deal about art. But I can assure you—take George Moffat now—it's nothing more than a juggling of commas to make it look like no other person's writing, and an occasional change of a word to one no sane person would think of using."

Mrs. Henwick said: "Oh, but George Moffat——"

Hailes shook his head.

"If I didn't want not to appear outrageously flattering," he said, coolly, "I should say that this"—he fluttered the slip reverentially—"is worth all that George——"

Mrs. Moffat, entering the further door, brusquely ejaculated:

"Well, but——where's George?" Her brilliant eyes fell upon Hailes.

"You," she said. "I thought you were going into the town."

Hailes explained, nonchalantly, that he had changed his mind.

Mrs. Moffat cast a hard glance right up and down him, then disappeared through the curtain. They heard her high voice exclaim: "George."

Hailes went swiftly and quite silently out of the room.

George was "discovered." He was seated in a singularly gorgeous, spindle-legged chair, that when he rose displayed on its back cushions the embroidery of a chaste flower-urn. He explained to his sister-in-law how he came to be in that gallery.

"It is a gallery, you know," he said, indicating, with a slight swaying of his supple body, his admiration for the bright, palatial room. "That fire-place!" The fire-place was an enormous structure of shining marbles and alabaster.

"Oh, the things are good enough, I suppose," Mrs. Moffat said, with an indifferent and wearied swish of her skirts. "I'm sure I don't know what they all are. Gregory probably does."

George raised his eyebrows.

"One gets sick to death of living in a show-room," Mrs. Moffat said. "*I* do. But it's really nice of you to come, George."

George bowed his head gallantly and cheerfully. He didn't know exactly what to make of *that* present; he said he did not deserve praise.

"It's after all dire necessity that brings me here. Business."

Mrs. Moffat said: "But you'll stay? We see so little of you. Gregory will be so pleased."

George surveyed her with ironical, genial hilarity. He was not used to his sister-in-law in this mood. She was undoubtedly ageing.

She seemed, indeed, to be wanting—as august ladies sometimes did—to take George into her confidence to the extent of not defiantly concealing from him that she was unhappy. He laughed a little.

“I’ve brought a bag. I didn’t imagine you’d want to pack me off at once.”

Mrs. Moffat, by voice and manner indicated that George was an immensely honoured guest, and that she was shocked at his not having realised it before.

“Gregory’s in his room,” she said. “*You* may go there ; but it’s as much as anyone else’s life is worth.”

She led him, with an air almost of reverence, along a warren of queer, shining passages, flashing through glowing windows immensely bright views of flower-beds and mellowed walls. There were all sorts of odd and precious things in dark corners ; a rich brown picture here and there, set against the light.

“By jove,” George said, “there are those two Constables.” They were descending an obscure, square staircase. “What does Gregory mean by hanging them here ?”

Mrs. Moffat made a little hushing, hurried sound.

“Oh, one’s not supposed to know,” she said, with the discreet, unmistakable air that the greatest of ladies assumes when talking of her husband’s “business.” “There’s not a corner of the house that isn’t full of that sort of thing.

The servants complain that there are no cupboards left for the linen."

George, with his hands behind his back, peered upwards at the pictures in the dusk.

"Ah, what lovable things," he said. He turned to face Mrs. Moffat, and swayed gently with his fashion of eternal leisure. "I hadn't the least idea that Gregory was so like myself," he said. His genial, deprecatory smile shone out on his clear cut face.

Mrs. Moffat, leaning against the banisters a little below him, questioned him with her clear eyes.

"I mean, he too has just my—my indiscretion in this direction. The taste for anything fine. On a grander scale it's just my home over again."

Mrs. Moffat's large, coarse features drooped a little. She looked nervously at a closed door at the stair-foot.

"All this"—George good-humouredly indicated the pile of buildings that seemed to press on them—"all this is so precisely what I should have now if I'd had the resources—if I hadn't been the fool that I am, and Gregory apparently isn't."

Mrs. Moffat shook her head very minutely.

"Apart from the rather excruciating things," George went on—"that fireplace, for instance—that *do* make me shudder, but that are, I suppose, extremely valuable, this is more or less exactly my house."

Mrs. Moffat again shook her head.

"Oh, my dear lady"—George prepared to vanquish her—"don't you see? The taste's the same. It's the family resemblance—the taste for costly, fine things of a certain age, a certain mellowness. Gregory's taste——"

"Taste!" said Mrs. Moffat, with a sort of scorn of intense denial. "It's a market instinct with him." She made it suddenly blaze rather clearly before George that the house wasn't a house, but a show-room. "You don't know Gregory"—she quivered—"no one does." She indicated the doorway. In its darkness and inscrutability it appeared a symbol of his brother's intense secretiveness.

"Oh, I don't profess to," he said, amiably. "But he's a good fellow."

Mrs. Moffat's eyes blazed rather distrustfully at him.

"I'm sure *I* don't know him," she retorted.

They went down the steps to the closed door.

"You know"—Mrs. Moffat lowered her voice before she knocked—"there's not a thing in the place that isn't for sale—either someone's security for a loan or maturing for the market."

George said, soothingly: "That's more than can be said for my house, and I'm not sure that it is not a pity."

Gregory sat with his elbows propping him up over a table. He was sedulously examining

the portrait of a lady. He did not look round when the door opened. The portrait, seen in perspective, had the dead black of a lace mantilla, and striking, rather crudely white highlights.

Mrs. Moffat said : " Here's George," and Gregory, with an automatic, hasty movement, dropped a green baize flap over the portrait. His face beamed round at his brother. It was as if to both husband and wife George were a guardian angel.

The door George closed on Mrs. Moffat ; Gregory raised the flap from the portrait with a chuckling air, saying, " Pretty good, that."

It displayed a lady of mature charms and vacuous good-nature, draped, head and shoulders, in Spanish lace, and with a disturbing, masterly indication of a quite uncondoned squint.

George asked, meditatively : " Goya ? "

Gregory moved awkwardly round the room. He turned one of half-a-dozen canvases that showed dirty backs.

A long-horned bull stood elastically at bay before a shadowy escadrilla ; the just-indicated forms of tier on tier of spectators shut them in. A shadowy, dead and disembowelled horse lay, crushing its picador, just behind the bull.

George pursed his lips. " That's the Duke of Seville's '*Bull-fight*,'" he said. It undoubtedly was that famous picture. Gregory, with a gesture of his thumb, made it plain that

the other canvases were all from the same collection.

"You're going to have a Spanish Exhibition at the Gallery?" George asked.

Gregory chuckled: "Don't mention it—up above."

The room—it resembled a butler's pantry—was in the very basement of the house. There were thick iron bars before the windows, a large figured almanac facing them, a heavy safe built into the wall. The table was covered with baize to protect the frames of pictures placed upon it for inspection. It had for Gregory the home-feeling of his office at the Gallery.

He settled himself in a revolving chair and took a sheaf of letters from behind the portrait. George recognised the note that he himself had written about his own affairs.

Gregory made a curdling sound in his throat.

"You're absolutely at the end of your tether, George," he said.

George, leaning against the window-sill, tapped the walking-stick that he still held against the tiled floor. He said: "Ah!" He sat down facing his brother.

"As far as I've gone into the matter, you've nothing. Unless you've something in the bank."

"Oh, I've a little in the bank," George said.

Gregory said, "Um."

Looking sideways at the floor, George tried

to figure out what it meant to him. He was ruined. He was penniless. He had something in the bank—enough, perhaps, for two months' house-keeping. Perhaps for three. He wondered a little how he was taking it. How *was* he taking it? What *did* it mean? He couldn't tell. It meant nothing; not as much as if a road vanished uphill on the skyline. He hadn't the least idea what was beyond. He looked at his brother.

"I can't say I didn't expect it," he said. Half a dozen queer pictures of his future presented themselves to him.

Gregory said that the statement was only approximate.

"I suppose you've other obligations besides this precious undertaking?" He lifted, with an air of disfavour, the demand from the creditors of the Renaissance Press. "This is the principal, of course? You may, if it's to be managed, compound it for a couple of thousand. That's about the last of your capital."

George said: "Ah!"

"You aren't subsidising anything else?" Gregory asked.

George shook his head. He did not mean to speak. It had suddenly occurred to him that it might mean—that it must mean—his leaving his house. "Can't—can't something be arranged?" he interrupted his own thoughts. His voice had a shade of a tremble in it. It struck him that he was taking it very

badly. He laughed : " But of course nothing can be arranged."

It ran tumultuously through his head that it must mean that. Some time ago—a long time—he had reasoned it out calmly enough that when the crash came he would have to leave his house and his little town. Then he had concluded that he would not mind it much. Now he was face to face with it.

Gregory was putting him through an examination that worried him a good deal. Had he many debts? Oh! some—the usual ones. A fairly heavy bookseller's bill. He remembered several dozen of Pouilly, and some of Chamberlin. (They had had both wines for Thwaite's wedding. He had given Dora a complete little library, too. Prettily bound. The shelves had cost a great deal. *They* weren't paid for.) Something to his tailor?—Practically nothing: not twenty pounds. Something to his tobacconist.

" You don't smoke," Gregory said.

" Oh, I give cigars for Christmas presents—and tobacco for the villagers. Snuff, too."

" For the old women?" Gregory asked, cheerfully.

George nodded. It was rather appalling the way bills mounted up. There must be a couple of hundred. . . . More, perhaps. He remembered half-a-dozen small accounts he had promised to pay for a man called Dean, who wrote sonnets, and was starving.

"And your debtors?" Gregory asked.

George frowned. "Oh, my lending's always been a figure of speech," he said.

"You gave," Gregory said.

"You must know me by this time," George said.

Gregory beamed at him attentively.

VII.

THRASHED out fairly fully, the matter ended in a certain indefiniteness. Things might turn out rather better than Gregory had estimated ; they might—very much worse. Gregory had made a trip to town for the purpose of inspecting the books of the Renaissance Press.

"I don't know if you realise," he said, "what this precious agreement amounts to." It amounted to George's being responsible for all the losses. Hailes and, in a lesser degree, Spendle would have taken all the profits had there been any. "Mr. Hailes," Gregory said grimly, "likes speculating with other people's money. I can't quite say whether you'll be sold up or not. You may be just able to find the money."

George rose nervously from his chair.

"I say very probably you won't be sold up," Gregory said.

George looked through him, a great way away.

"But even if you aren't," Gregory advanced a point, "you can't go on living where you are."

George began to pace swiftly up and down.

"My personal expenses are nothing."

"But you've always someone in the house," Gregory pushed the matter. He had always disapproved of George's hospitality. George stopped angrily in front of him.

"My dear chap," he said sharply, "that's a pure superstition."

"Haven't you anyone now?" Gregory asked.

George answered, "No." Then he stopped confusedly.

He had suddenly remembered that at that moment Carew, Clara Brede's South American cousin, would almost certainly be reining his horse in before George's own steps. He would just have returned from his tour among the cathedrals. "At least——" he added.

Gregory said: "Ah!"

George swerved nervously in his stride. He felt intensely irritated.

"It's only some fool. An absolute *cretin*." What, in fact, was he doing with such a creature in his house. What did the man mean by being there at all? He had an image of the bearded, jaunty colossus, swinging with his horseman's stride down his—George's—own steps and along the clear, quiet streets to the Brede's cottage. To pay his court to Clara Brede!

He said quickly: "Well, there's nothing to be made of this discussion. I must get back."

He held out his hand to Gregory. He wanted most intensely to be home.

Gregory shook his head minutely.

"Your house would sell well," he said. George ignored the question.

"I have found you a purchaser. I've got the exact person. You could pay off all the mortgages and just live abroad."

George said: "I couldn't think of it."

The firmness of his own voice surprised him. He was disturbed so as to be hardly conscious of speaking. "I couldn't think of it," he repeated. "I must get home. I must get home at once."

Gregory, rising ungracefully in his chair, seemed to have grown quite small and a long way away. The room itself didn't matter at all.

Mr. Hailes was saying, exactly two stories above them:

"You really think he can be got to speak for me to your husband," and Mrs. Moffat was answering:

"Oh, you don't *know* George."

They both of them had an air of panic-stricken conspirators with their heads together. They were in Mrs. Moffat's work-room—all shagreen bolstered arm-chairs and dark panelling.

"After all," Hailes went on re-assuredly, "I don't see why he should bear me any ill-will. It's the fortunes of war. The Press *ought* to have succeeded. It isn't as if I had done anything dishonourable."

Mrs. Moffat, leaning her chin on her wrist, asked:

"What were you working at with Felicia?"

Mr. Hailes replied with excellent nonchalance :

"Oh, she's been writing some nonsense for the *Lady's Magazine*. She asked me to correct the proofs."

Mrs. Moffat shot an intensely distrustful glance at his unconcerned face. She wanted to discover what untruth lay hidden beneath what she knew to be the transparent veracity of Hailes' words.

"I should have thought she wouldn't have wanted to worry you," she said.

"Oh, I don't mind," Hailes answered in the same tone.

They began to answer letters, and to arrange when the local clergy might dine at the house.

"We shall have to put the garden party for the 6th," Hailes said, with his air of competency. "Is Colonel Williams an Honourable, or is it his wife?" He opened a scarlet reference book.

Mrs. Moffat's fingers drummed on the inlaid green leather of the writing table.

"What, after all, is at the bottom of your transaction with George?" she asked.

Hailes, with the same unconcern, marking with a pale finger his place in the book, explained: "Oh, he wanted to make money. I thought it would be a good thing. I introduced Spendle to him. Some of those presses have earned fabulous sums. I'm afraid this

hasn't, though. I don't see what he has against me."

Mrs. Moffat said: "Oh, it isn't George. It's how Gregory will take the matter."

Hailes looked at her interrogatively.

"Gregory will have all the papers in his hands by this time." She did not for a moment believe in her secretary's clean hands in the matter.

"Oh, *I* don't appear in any papers," Hailes answered. He had taken care of that.

"Gregory worships George," Mrs. Moffat said.

Hailes ejaculated negligently, "Oh!" After five minutes of reflection he asked: "Has he been saying anything more against me?"

"Oh, Gregory's never *said* anything at all," Mrs. Moffat answered. "Nothing, except that once. It's precisely his not saying anything
——"

Hailes interjected: "Then perhaps I'd better clear out."

"You mean altogether?" Mrs. Moffat shot at him.

She, like George, was face to face with it—with what she had dreaded. But she wasn't prepared to accept that sort of bankruptcy.

"I don't want to cause unpleasantness," Hailes yawned at her.

She couldn't, she wasn't going to, accept this. It was obvious to her that Hailes had a price; that he wanted, as it were, an advance

of wages. What *did* he want? What was it? She swished her skirts together with a certain violence of assertion.

"Unpleasantness," she said blackly. "What do you mean by that? Gregory knows better than to speak to me."

Hailes got up slowly. He clinked the keys in his trouser pockets, and sauntered towards the tall window.

"Oh, I didn't know," he said.

He quite literally didn't know what Mrs. Moffat wanted. He accepted his post of paid servant, and did his easy work easily until he could see a chance of bettering himself. He wanted to make money; he supposed Mrs. Moffat wanted him to make it for her. That was why she kept him. But it was an extraordinary family. He stood looking out of the window. Mrs. Moffat gave a long look of superacute hatred at his unconscious back.

What did *she* want of him? She hadn't even yet figured it out. What does a woman want of a man? Admiration? A tacit and continuous acknowledgment of wonder? Sympathy, perhaps, and, above all, no betrayal of a desire to slacken the binding chain, the tie, whatever its nature. That above all; and at the very least a pretence that one is the only woman that counts—the pretence, however shallow, however easy to pierce. And Hailes hadn't made the least shadow of a pretence of the sort. She absolutely refused to believe

that that was his real attitude. He had adopted it ; he wanted to screw something out of her—something more.

She perfectly accepted his mercenary nature. It was part of him ; it was perhaps part of his attraction. I suppose that what she really wanted was some acknowledgment of a personal attraction, an "influence" over him. If by playing him with a gilt bait, by luring him on, she could wring from him some acknowledgment that would be absolutely independent of the money factor. If ! That, in fact, would be the triumph.

She said at last : " And the Spanish scheme ? What would become of that ? "

Hailes gnawed at his moustache. " We don't seem to get more forward with it," he said. " It isn't worth while, with our resources. We ought to have been there and back."

" It will have to be for the next season," Mrs. Moffat said. " We can't go before September."

He surveyed her with some interest. " I thought you had dropped the idea," he said. He pondered a little. " With the money we have—I've reckoned it out—we couldn't make any kind of a show."

Mrs. Moffat hazarded another card. " I daresay I could find another five hundred"—and, at Hailes' minute shrug of the shoulders

—"or a thousand, perhaps." The prospect of a long, warm journey in Spain with Hailes had suddenly opened out before her as extremely desirable—a thing to thaw out all sorts of coolness.

Hailes drew the creases out of his waistcoat, ricking his neck back. He began to speak slowly: "The fact is we want much more capital." He was rather mystified; he couldn't see why Mrs. Moffat should suddenly blow hot after having for months blown extremely cold. He supposed she was suddenly in want of money for some reason unknown to him. "The idea's too good to spoil. It's my own, after all. I've studied the subject." He re-explained the details to Mrs. Moffat. "If now you'd go to Mrs. Henwick——" he broke off suddenly.

Mrs. Moffat started into stiffness. "I couldn't think of it," she said.

Hailes, still chasing small creases out of his dark suit, said that he couldn't see why. Mrs. Henwick was the soul of good nature.

"I couldn't think of it," Mrs. Moffat repeated.

Hailes said: "Oh, well," and turned again to the window. He said, uninterestedly: "There they both are, George Moffat and your husband, looking at the strawberry beds. Why, Mrs. Henwick's coming round the corner, too." It occurred to him that Mrs. Moffat simply didn't want to let Mrs. Henwick share in the good thing.

"You need only borrow the money. She needn't stand in," he returned to the charge. "I'm sure she'd lend it. If there's any delicacy about it I would speak to her myself."

"I've told you I couldn't think of it," Mrs. Moffat repeated with a touch of her old disdain. She had suffered a good deal on seeing Hailes and Mrs. Henwick, as it were, cheek by jowl on the window seat. She was not yet prepared even to think of Felicia as a possible rival. But she certainly was not going to throw opportunities in his way.

"We shall simply have to drop it," she said, icily.

Hailes continued his survey of the sunny garden with the three figures parading the paths. He answered, negligently: "Oh, very well. By jove, Mrs. Henwick is showing George Moffat those absurd proofs of hers. Oh, very well, but the idea's too good, almost, to be lost."

"You can do as you please about that," Mrs. Moffat said. She felt an intense disgust with herself for having stooped without conquering this oaf. Who was he? What was he? "You'd better go and order the tea—in the square drawing-room," she added.

Hailes, chuckling slightly to himself at this sign of his employer's displeasure—it was always a sign of displeasure to make her secretary perform some slightly menial office—was yet remotely perturbed at the idea of meet-

ing George. "It's an extraordinary household," he said to himself. "I wonder now what she *does* want—what she *is* getting at." He wondered, too, if it would be possible to meet Mrs. Henwick in the shrubbery after tea.

Left to herself, Mrs. Moffat exclaimed : "The beast ; oh, the beast !"

Mrs. Henwick really had shown her proofs to George, producing them bashfully under the beaming glances of Gregory. She had been reading and re-reading them, fretting delicately up and down the secluded paths of the walled garden. Then George had appeared in the wake of his brother. I am not sure that Mrs. Henwick's attack hadn't been the best thing in the world for George himself.

He had mastered his desire for flight. There had not seemed to be any reason for it ; he instinctively distrusted his emotions. He wasn't, after the inevitable had happened, going to yelp at his time of life. He mastered the desire and assented to Gregory's fervent pressure to stop the night.

"You haven't seen the house ; you haven't seen the gardens," Gregory uttered in a flustered, outraged voice.

George found himself suddenly let out of a little door into a blaze of sunlight and fruit trees. They worried him more than a little. Gregory began pointing out the strawberry beds.

Gregory, in the words of Mrs. Moffat, worshipped George. In common with his wife—whom Gregory considered still one of the most brilliant persons in the world—George stood for all that was most able, fine and illustrious—for the undoubted hope of the family. Gregory would have wanted to conceal, to make up deficiencies out of his own pocket, to drop a mortgage here, an odd figure or two there. But under George's keen eyes this wasn't possible—and Gregory had had to face putting the matter as coldly and as clearly as he could. It agitated him a great deal—far beyond the point of realising that strawberry beds in July couldn't much interest a man who suddenly found himself penniless.

To him, too, Mrs. Henwick's gliding approach had come as a relief; it gave him time to think how he was going to say things to George—to make offers without giving offence. It was, after all, comedy—those three in the blazing garden, with their smiles concealing emotions intense enough. For Mrs. Henwick, more diffident and less a master of words than even Gregory himself, the plunge—the definite request to a person of George's calibre—had been almost incredible. She was as flustered as a wild bird in your hand.

A minute or so later they were seated on a white bench in the shadow of a tall pear-espalier.

Gregory, his clumsy and unpresentable thumbs sticking out from his jacket pockets, a white hat tilted forward above his spectacles, and a length of scorched, red neck dominating the back of his crumpled and baggy fawn-coloured coat, moved clumsily, at a little distance, still intent on the strawberry leaves that, here and there, were already changing colour.

IX.

GEORGE was in love with Clara Brede. He had to face that fact, too, very late, in a great bed, in a panelled room. It stood straight up against him and filled him with an embarrassed and intense dislike for the frailty of his own nature.

He, at his age, with his experience, with his maturity, with all the things that made anything like such a feeling disastrous, was simply in love with a young girl to whom he stood, as it were, in a position of trust. It was a calamity—a calamity that made everything else unimportant, that paled the other ruin, since it meant that he could not any more be sure of himself. It was more than a calamity ; it was a humiliation. But he was undoubtedly in love with her. He had to face the fact, and to face it he must give it a name. The words "in love" said nothing, or said too much ; covered a space too wide, and left undefined the exact nature of the thing. And, having, as it were, uttered and faced them, he dropped them once and for all.

What did he want ? What did he desire ? He, too, did not know. He only wanted to be back there. It was as if he could only get

a clear view of the situation with her beneath his eyes. In that case he might get at something—if there was anything to be got at. Where he lay, staring at the darkness, there seemed to be nothing but a physical unrest, with the vague phantoms of thoughts, dark and flitting before a dim radiance as vaguely suggesting her face. Vaguely suggesting! He could not even remember—could not call to mind—her features. It was as if something external told him that she was fair; that she had blue eyes—as if he had made a note of it and remembered the note, not the face. That, too, added to his perplexity.

He wanted to be back, to see just what she *was* like. He could remember exactly the emotions her face had caused him—tenderness, compassion, an intense desire to comfort, an overwhelming pity. Thinking of her, he felt all these. But he wanted to see her to be sure.

He would never deserve to be sure again—never sure of himself. He had behaved like a fool; he had been a fool. Why hadn't he got out of the way? The feelings, the emotions that he could remember, ought to have warned him at the time he felt them. If he had thought! If he had taken himself in hand; if only he hadn't fatally drifted. He remembered now very clearly sudden, intense twinges of impatience—when her father had talked of travelling. He understood why he hadn't

been able to stand that La Platan. Why hadn't he at the time taken his feelings in hand, analysed them, got to the bottom of them? He realised that it was because he had been too contented; too tranquilly happy. And it was the being with Clara Brede that had made him happy.

What concerned him most was whether he would be able to "keep his end up"; to conceal the fact; to stand the strain, not to make a fool of himself—not to "yelp." He hadn't much doubt of that. He was, after all, mature; he *had* himself in hand. He had managed to keep his end up during that rather long, rather dreary, day. He would have to go on doing it.

George had managed to keep going. It had occurred to him, quite early in the midst of his financial perturbation—"Why, I'm in love with Clara Brede." Probably because, in the dreariness of his other thoughts, that of Clara had been comforting, the idea had seemed to flash by him as an agreeable pleasantry. But it had recurred insistently. It showed him at last that it was Clara Brede that he was determined not to leave; not his house, his associations, his little town, his past life. Without the shock of his ruin, he felt he might have gone on quietly for years, knowing nothing, merely enjoying himself in her society. The thought of having to leave her came up suddenly through all his talks with

Mrs. Henwick, with Hailes, with his sister-in-law, and with his perturbed brother.

He had kept his end up, though. Mrs. Henwick's little effusion had touched him quite genuinely. His own emotional state, as if it reached out, touched the emotions, the loneliness, and recognised the self-abandonment that really underlay Mrs. Henwick's night writings. He had, at any rate, left very happy a Mrs. Henwick who was quite awake enough to discriminate between George's praise and Hailes'.

The meeting with Hailes took place without shock of any kind. If, when the door opened beyond the tea-table, anyone felt any tremor, it was certainly Hailes—and perhaps Mrs. Moffat. George's figure filled the doorway behind Mrs. Henwick. And Hailes very quickly took a grip of the position. George, he observed, greeted him quite naturally and without any reservation, as if he were really interested to hear how Hailes had "got on." He proceeded to take tea with Mrs. Moffat. Hailes considered him furtively and attentively. He supposed that, after all, George couldn't have made such a bad thing of it; he must be seeing his way to make it pay. Gregory was such a wonderful man of business with bric-a-brac of that sort. He perhaps had got out of it too soon. He approached George in a corner of the room and airily suggested :

"If the losses over that Renaissance Press

are very heavy, perhaps I ought to try to repay something." He said that he hadn't any property but his furniture, but he might sell that to recoup George ; it might bring twenty pounds. He affected a certain embarrassment. "Of course, I'm in some degree responsible."

George looked at him as if absently—as if Hailes hardly existed. "Oh—*that*. Don't think of it," he said.

He saw through Hailes very well ; he didn't want to think of him ; he was thinking that he had to consider Clara Brede.

Later at night, he and his brother lounged in a large dimly lit hall, where, all round the walls, men-at-arms' visors gaped out from between ladies in powdered wigs and colonels in scarlet. George explained to Gregory : "If you like, it was the confidence trick, and Hailes is a sharper. But I have always sympathised with these gentry." Gregory hissed between his yellow teeth, and George smiled a little wanly. "Oh, it irritates you. But if you're travelling on a foreign railway, and a porter or a guide tries to do you out of an extra franc or so, you'll see his whole face intent on it, his black eyes flashing and exploring yours like a dog's ; it's his whole life to him ; it's nothing to you ; and perhaps he's really the better man—the more purposeful, or has the more need——" He spoke rather wearily, without his usual buoyancy of words, and he left his sentence unfinished. His preoccupations had

out-tired him, even in his altruist's profession of faith.)

"You mean to say you'd let the man swindle you," Gregory barked.

George raised a hand deprecatingly.

"It's idiotic, perhaps, or it isn't." He roused himself suddenly on his lounge. "But in the matter of Hailes—I'm not going to worry about him. Let's let him alone."

Gregory compressed his lips. He didn't say anything.

"It's no use," George began—he paused as if forgetfully—"crying about spilt milk—that particular spilt milk." A long, heavy night silence descended upon the two of them. After a time George said desultorily :

"Don't get *your* knife into him. He isn't worth attention."

Gregory suddenly erected his head until it had the rigidity of a seal's peering out of the water. He didn't say anything. George laughed a little disconsolately. He recognised his brother's final sign of implacability.

"Oh, let him alone," he said. "I tempt these people. I'm too open to them ; it's not fair to be revenged on them." He got up like a very tired man. "It's no use talking——"

Gregory, leaning a little forward, let out his voice as if his throat were very dry. It was a sign of intense nervousness.

"You wouldn't, I suppose, go back—go, that is, to your wife ? Or let me——"

He had a more than nervous fear of his brother's displeasure—a shrinking from any kind of quarrel.

George faced round on him with sudden vigour: “*I*,” he said. Then he paused. Gregory having, as it were, entered on the road, commenced to shuffle along it:

“But your wife. She needs your advice.”

“My *advice*,” George said.

Gregory, hurried and anxious to make the most of any opening, said: “Your advice is always excellent, George.”

George said: “Oh, for heaven’s sake——” He made towards the distant stairs and came back.

“You want me, in fact, to live on her. How could I? With what sort of a face?”

Gregory said: “Gertrude would be very glad.”

“My dear chap,” George said, “my dear chap, I’ve ruined my own life.”

A sort of conviction in his tone made Gregory attempt a sort of stuttered, “Not so bad as that.”

“I’ve mangled and mismanaged everything that I ever touched. I’ve muddled and meddled.” He raised a hand in a large gesture. Then, in spite of the genuineness of his emotions, it struck him that he was overdoing it; that he was, so to speak, harrowing Gregory’s feelings. “I mean,” he finished quickly, “that the respect I have for Gertrude

should surely, in all conscience, make me leave her alone."

Gregory raised his hands and opened his mouth with the gesture of an old woman. It shocked him inexpressibly that the brother that he considered so gifted and so fine should even remotely touch such mortification. "There's all my money," he brought out. "All this." His clumsy thumb indicated the large hall, the house, and its treasures. "If you wanted them, they'd practically all be at your disposal. There's no one else but you and my wife."

The words hardly filtered through to the inner George, though he felt as if Gregory had withdrawn a curtain from something affecting.

"Of course, you'll have to go on working without money troubles," Gregory said. "You've got to keep up the family name and the tradition."

The speech as much astonished George as if, whilst he was hurrying past it, one of the men-at-arms had muttered from its shadowy and yawning visor.

He went to bed to face his feeling for Clara Brede, but Gregory's last speech added to his perplexities. It added to them because it seemed to increase his responsibilities. He wasn't, he discovered, alone. There were his brother, his father's friends and admirers; his own, too, perhaps—old people now whom he had not seen for years. They counted on him

to maintain the tradition of his family, that had done things worthily. He had, as it were, to sacrifice himself to them. They demanded it, all of them, down to his eloquent and brilliant father. To men like George the dead do not die, since their memories are living things in the heart. It was not with him a point of conduct ; it was not a thing that affected himself. He had to preserve his image worthily before the world, so that the dead whose name he bore should be unashamed, and so that such of the living as loved him should not be saddened.

To preserve his image unspoiled . . . He thought about the small piece of his future that he could see, and it was an easy matter to arrange in his mind. He would sell his house without any fuss, secretly, and at the last moment he would walk out and go away. In any case, he would have had to go away. He wasn't, of course, a man who could not keep himself from making love to a girl nurtured and placed as Clara Brede had been. And, much more, he could not spoil his own image for her father.

He wasn't, of course, going to make any fuss, even to himself ; he wasn't going to avoid the Bredes. He would stay his month or so at home, and then go. He gave very little thought to the material side of it. He would live in an Italian town, making enough to keep himself with his pen. That was perfectly easy.

Even in her eyes he would go down gallantly. He would not tell them that he was ruined. He did not wish to sadden her, as he knew it would sadden her. He would say nothing, or nothing more than that he was going abroad, and he would disappear, leaving the same gallant and helpful image in her mind. He knew that she respected him, and that would be how she would continue to think of him.

Then it struck him as curiously unphilosophical that he should desire to leave any image in her mind, and then, in the darkness, he smiled at himself for expecting to be superhumanly reasonable. Of course, he would want her to think well of him. And he wanted to be at home.

END OF PART III.

THE BENEFactor.

PART IV.

THE BANKRUPT JEWELLER.

THE BENEFACTOR.

PART IV.

THE BANKRUPT JEWELLER.

I.

SHE had been watching for his return from her window. She wanted to see if he looked worried ; it might tell her whether he really were ruined. He came walking with his fine stride ; beside him a porter was wheeling his portmanteau on a hand-truck. He was interested in something the man was saying. He nodded.

"I suppose Griffin is begging of him," Clara said bitterly to herself. George looked in at the window ; he saw her, and waved a hand gently. He smiled brilliantly. She had not seen him for two days, and it seemed to her that she had never seen anyone so noble, so good and so kind ; her heart was filled with an immense thankfulness, and she wanted to cry because he had come back.

"He can't be ruined," she said. "He *can't* be going away."

It came to her as a luminous conviction that, had there been any danger, he would have told them. He would owe that to them. She could no longer believe that he was not at

least friendly to her, and interested in her. And, even if he weren't, he would owe it to her father to tell him. They were his most intimate friends. And she knew George so well. He couldn't be so cruel as not to have told them.

During the next few days she observed him with the meticulous earnestness of a woman in love. He wasn't in the least melancholy ; he wasn't even preoccupied. Once or twice she observed him frown and wince. It was always when Carew was speaking. A rather rigid look would come into his eyes and spread, as if it were communicating itself, to the back of his head and to his spine. It suggested to her a wild thought that she dared not entertain. Carew came and went with the fine irresponsibility and the easy swing of a great bird round an accustomed crag. A younger son, he genially "didn't get on with" the elder brother who lived in his paternal house, or with the sister who was married in Yorkshire. She thought him too boisterous. He made himself quite frankly at home with the Bredes. Clara found him amusing because he reminded her of an immense Newfoundland dog. As children, they had climbed oaks together, and, hidden among the leaves, had dropped acorns upon the heads of passers by. He wanted her to accept a pony from him, and tried to make her take up riding again. He said she used to have a regular cowboy's seat when she was

a child, and the nerve of three men, by jove, only her hands were a little heavy on the reins. Women's always were. He might cure her of that, though. Clara laughed, and said that she had her father to see to. He asked if old Moffat wasn't enough for the governor? She didn't answer.

They were walking towards the sea a fortnight after George's return. Looking back upon that time afterwards, it seemed that they had all the time been doing nothing else in the tremendous blaze of the summer weather. Great rollers of white cloud piled up into the immense crystalline and shimmering vault of the sky. The level fields blazed vivid green; yellowing rushes filled the dykes. A dancing haze made tremulous the outlines of low, purple hills on the horizon. Mr. Brede, at George's side, laid down the law ponderously. The shining, dark red cattle watched their passage as they walked four abreast across the smooth turf.

This occasion seared itself into her mind; it was never forgotten; it never merged itself into the other seasonal "walks to the sea." The cattle raised their noses, snuffing the wind. Then, with a sudden accord, they went galloping, a serried wedge of red-brown, round and round, thundering on the green meadow, appearing and suddenly disappearing on the slopes of the dyke mounds. In all the fields around, among the shaggy pollard willows,

there were tails flashing up at the flanks of galloping beasts.

Carew stopped and laughed with a whole-hearted gaiety. "Ah, they smell the thunder"—it growled heavily below the horizon—"but you should see my stock. You should come and see them." He raised his arms, as if he were urging the cattle on in their gallop.

George caught Clara's gentle and frank smile. It gave him a moment's intense pleasure merely to see it. Then it struck him as an injury intensely and personally to be resented, that that smile was one he had regarded as reserved for him.

"My dear sir!" he said sharply to Mr. Brede, who was more than half way through a sketch of a letter inciting resident gentry to provide bathrooms for their tenantry. "What, in the end, is the good of all this? You can't keep the peasant in the village. You'd have to alter the moon to arrest a falling tide."

The actual purport of the outburst did not penetrate to the engrossed mind of Mr. Brede. Clara's eyes seemed to be always upon the ground; but she felt the sudden chill that George spread around him. It made her admire him the more. He *could* be cold; he could strike and wound. She wondered that one of them wasn't actually blighted, and it pleased her. It made him seem so much more of a man.

It slipped suddenly into her mind: "He

must be jealous !” and she found that she was laughing excitedly, and breathing very fast. It wasn’t possible. And yet—— “That doesn’t mean that he loves me,” flashed through her excited mind. Men are like that. They will be jealous whether they want a woman or not. She had seen the same thing in robins on the lawn.

But her cousin must be paying her attentions—that was what had made George so angry. She had never thought of it before. It became a pleasing certainty. She hadn’t any doubt of it. It was very soothing. Now she was *living*. All of a sudden she was going to be able to watch, as if through half closed eyes, these two men concerned with her, agitated about her, swayed by her. She smiled, and the bright fields grew more bright ; the sky itself seemed friendly. Her breathing grew more free. She felt as if she could fly if she wanted to, as if she could do anything that she tried without any effort. This was life at last. She could not bring herself to believe that George loved her ; it would be too like a fairy tale. On the other hand, he wasn’t despicable, like robins or like other men. He wouldn’t be jealous for mere love of conquest. So he must care for her. But she could not believe it.

She wanted very much to test him. She thought of showing Carew some small favours to see if George frowned again. But she could

not think of what to do. Supposing she put her hand on her cousin's arm, or said that she wished she could go to La Plata. But she might do too much, and then George would despise her.

It struck her rather comfortingly that she was now a "mere coquette." She had always despised such women. She had fallen very low. She understood them now. It was a woman's right. She understood vividly that the fight between man and woman is according to no code of honour. Besides, she imagined that George himself admired a spice of coquetry in a woman. He had bantered her about her continual "scruples." She became more reserved towards Carew. She couldn't bring herself to flirt with him ; it wasn't in her. He became more attentive, and she grew distressed. She was afraid of hurting George if he really did care for her. She could not bear to think of that. It was like a pain to think that he should suffer.

But there were going to be these long days full of light, and pleasant thoughts to take to bed with one. She almost forgot the burden that her father was. Her unceasing and jealous watch over him was hardly any more a strain. She could sit beside him and think of these other things. And when at night she listened outside his door to make sure from his breathing that he was asleep, she knew that in her bed when she returned to it she would find warm and pleasant half-dreams.

II.

GEORGE was sitting with her father one evening in Mr. Brede's tiny work-room. It was obscure and gloomy, encumbered with dark furniture, and lit by a solitary reading candle in a metal hood. In the shadow, Mr. Brede's funereal coats and hats on pegs looked like dim men who had hung themselves. It seemed to him by now more familiar and more homelike than his own fine study.

The intrigues of the ladies of the Society for Promoting Rural Pleasures had become more harassing than ever. Mr. Brede displayed their letters and telegrams, that had cost formidable amounts, docketed and bound by broad india-rubber bands.

"Look here, this is what I have to put up with." He knotted his brows above a letter; with a faint idea of courtesy he fumbled with his reading candle to give George a better light. "This kind of unbearable thing. Listen." He began to read with a sort of frenzied indignation.

George caught faintly through the thin walls of the tiny room the thrilling jar of Carew's voice, followed by a long pause, then a fainter suggestion of Clara Brede's clear, conscien-

tiously halting tones. They were in the drawing-room just across the narrow passage.

"Of course, that's the confounded Countess," Mr. Brede commented. He pushed foolscap sheets irritably to right and to left, and grasped a telegram on several pages.

George's nerves were on the stretch. In the next room there was a long silence. Mr. Brede went on reading slowly and ponderously the virulent sentences of an American lady of title who wanted to be on his committee. George was wondering whether Clara was succumbing to the large attractions and stock-whip mannerisms of Carew. He tried to fix his mind on the affairs of the Society. He knew them all by heart. Carew's voice uttered one inaudible, sharp word. Clara, after an interval, a soft, long speech. Then Carew laughed.

"Feel imperative to press view on you to-morrow for committee meeting," Mr. Brede read heavily from his telegram. Suddenly he flung it passionately on to the desk. George knew that he would say: "It's no good." He raised a huge hand to his great creased forehead.

"I shall be off to La Plata," he said.

George felt the weight of an immense and expected catastrophe. It was all over, then!

Mr. Brede maintained a heavy brooding silence. The candle flickered slightly in the gloom and cast a wavering light on to the brown ceiling. They weren't speaking in the other room.

At last Mr. Brede brought out his heavy knell: "It's all over. It's no use."

And George echoed him. It wasn't any use. He could not engage in a struggle that, win or lose, must be ignoble. He was not going to fight—with a La Platan—for the possession of a woman he could do nothing with.

"Yes," he said slowly, "perhaps it would be the best thing you could do."

Mr. Brede flashed an angry and overbearing: "What?" from the depths of his black-study. "Do what? Write to these infernal women? It's no use."

George answered deliberately enough: "I mean, go to La Plata with your nephew."

Mr. Brede said: "Oh," contemptuously. He had forgotten already. "That's pure nonsense."

George's ideas whirled. He felt an irresistible desire to know *something*; to have something settled.

"Hasn't your nephew asked you?" he blurted out.

"Oh, that fellow," Mr. Brede answered, contemptuously. "He wants to marry Clara. What nonsense."

George's heart gave a solitary and sickening leap. Carew had spoken then. And Clara? At that moment Clara might be in his arms.

He sprang to his feet. The reedy, ancient piano began desultorily the *tum-pa-tum* of a Spanish-American banjo melody. No. She

couldn't be, then. The burr of Carew's voice, humming the melody between his teeth, succeeded ; then the drawing-room door closed. The sounds sank to nothing.

Mr. Brede, speaking thickly and very fast, began a string of confidences that were horrible on account of his voice and his suddenly wild eyes : " I tell you I'm going mad. The very idea terrifies me. You don't know what it is. I don't want to worry you. You're very good to me. I've no claim." He continued a hopeless, listless fatalism of monologue. He was sunk low in his chair ; there were deep vibrating tones in his voice that roused in George a vague and helpless alarm. He felt wearily that Mr. Brede was worse than he had ever been. His voice sank to nothing. He sat looking blackly and gloomily, as if at shadows of terror that he saw very plainly a long way away. He ground his teeth ; it was the devil who tempted him, who mocked at him, and who was driving him mad.

George raised a fine and insincere laugh. He had a faint glimpse of that sinister survival of the black history of man. This man still believed with a savage and hidden belief that was all the more blighting in that he did so sedulously hide it, that was all the more hopeless in that no human words could conjure it away. George would not accept that view ; he wasn't going to. It wasn't in him to do so. He said that that sort of thing—the Society

and its distractions—was only a means, not an end. Mr. Brede wasn't to take it seriously, it was only a means for tiding him over dark moments. He must drop it now that it had become a strain.

Mr. Brede muttered silently : "If I went to La Plata, what would you do?"

George, as if suddenly brought down to the earth, was silent.

"Of course, you couldn't be expected to come too," Mr. Brede added convincingly. "Well, then?" He had an air of heavily convincing an opponent's futility. He meant that he couldn't do without George.

Face to face with an opening that would one day have to be entered, George began :

"Eventually, you know, you'll have to get on without me."

Mr. Brede paid him no kind of attention.

"Of course, I sha'n't go," he said. "I shall face things out here. I'm not going to run away." George was overcome by a thankfulness that he could not analyse.

"Yes, here," Mr. Brede said. "If I can't do that, what's the good of me."

He rose heavily, and, at his full height, with a mysterious vindictiveness brought out :

"You think I ought to get back to my work—to my real work as shepherd of my flock. I ought to preach. You *said* so."

He was going to fight Satan, high in the air, from the shining elevation of the pulpit. He

knew that it would kill him. Very well ! But it would prove to these fellows—George and the rest—that he wasn't shamming, that there always had been that horrible "something" the matter with him.

"There's no doubt about it," he continued. "Very well, I shall." He motioned a great hand towards the door. "Let's hear some of that fellow's strumming. I shall try to be a man. I've shirked it too long." He held the door open. "I'm going to try to live up to your standard, Moffat."

George, in his hurry of mind, wondered vaguely which of his many maxims Mr. Brede had got hold of now.

The light of the drawing room was rather dazzling. Carew, with his back to the door, was abstractedly thumbing the yellow keys of the ancient box of a piano. Clara, from the further window seat, rose up eagerly at their entry. She smiled frankly into George's eyes. Carew, without turning his large back, began to roll out a Spanish Bamboula to the distracted stringy tinkle of the piano's notes. He had a rather good natural voice and sang with sentiment.

George leaned back in his chair. In a mirror running from floor to ceiling he had an excellent view of Clara Brede on the window-seat behind his back. She sat a little forward, with her hands clasped back to back, the little fingers linked, lying on the lap of her blue

dress. Her fair hair was quite smooth ; her eyes rested on the floor. She did not seem to be listening to the music of Carew. That gave George a moment's pleasure.

The song changed to a languorous and rhythmically marked chorus. It was as if, in the mirror, Clara Brede were a portrait of herself, shut in the alcove of the window-curtains that draped the straight, square seat ; the whole was framed in the reflection by the gilt bunches of flowers and fruit that set the mirror itself. Carew resumed the body of his song, the piano the inane *tumpa-tumpa*. The brilliant lamp suddenly raised its flame in a draught of open-windowed July. A sense of the heavy night outside conveyed itself by the black small panes of the casement.

She had just refused Carew. It had saddened and had sobered her. He had said : " I thought that you liked me. Is there anyone else ? " His voice had shaken and grated ; it had upset her. She had wondered if she had used him badly ; she could not believe she had. She had been avoiding him ever since the other day. But perhaps she ought to tell him that there was someone else ! If only there hadn't been ! She might be going away out of all this, beyond the horizon. Now there was nothing and no one—a long round of days, a dull world. If only she *needn't* love George ! Carew began to thump on the piano. He had a passionate and entirely sensuous love for rhythmical melodies.

She recognised that he was drowning his sorrows in the sound. She liked him for it, and she pitied him. Then George was there, looking at her. Ah, if only he had never come into her life ! What was the good of it all ? She could never leave her father ; she had made this other man miserable. What senselessness ! Why did he ever come ? He was looking at her in the glass ; it paralysed her. It was as if some immense power were keeping her motionless. What right had he to this hold over her ? What right had any man to make a woman love him, and not to know, not to care, not to think ? He looked at her so that it was as if she should never be able to move again.

She seemed to droop, listening to other voices—to the whispers of other thoughts ; the pitiful, tender smile was on her abstracted face. George's eyes ran over it from chin to forehead, from forehead to chin. The intense folly of his preoccupation made him wish to rub his eyes. He wondered very intensely why he should care ; what made him. She was a woman—a girl with certain, clear-cut, delicately enough tinted, softly enough outlined features—and a certain sadness. But just a woman. What, in essence, was her charm ? Had she a charm ? What was it ? Nothing seemed to radiate from her ; nothing appeared to hold his eyes. She was rather sad. But——

Carew finished with his Bamboula ; he bent again over the keys. He muttered that he had heard a rattling good song in town ; he had learned it for the benefits of the fellows "over there." He struck the first notes of a music-hall ballad.

George wondered what he was doing here. With a touch of the immense pride of the artist, he looked round him. It seemed ludicrous that he—*he*—should be among these little people, listening to that grotesque noise. And moved by this girl with nothing—nothing but a droop—a sadness, a passivity. He could not believe it. These people ! These ! They were the very people, the very class that one regards as the most hopeless, the most *borné*, the most unappreciative—and the most inappreciable. The "local clergy" ! It was not possible that they could appeal to him. What had become of all the artists with the great hopes he had shared ; of all the circle of thinkers more exclusive than Castillians ; more contemptuous of outsiders than any military sect ? They would have laughed at the idea of being in a parson's house. Yet there wasn't one of them within miles of him. He was listening to a jingle-song ; he was swayed by the hopes of people whose only purpose on earth was a tomb-stone, decipherable for a year or two. Clara raised her eyes, and in the glass met his fixed and abstracted glance. She had as if a moment of embarrassment, then gently turned

her head and looked out into the night behind her. The curve of her neck filled him with sudden, intimate, and very great joy. The pressure of her good-night hand was a thing frank, ingenuous and tender. He knew he had been awaiting it. It was the climax of his whole nights, and of each of his days.

III.

IN the silent darkness of the little street he was bringing his mind down again to the fact. Heavy and hurried footsteps jarred on his ear.

"I say, Sir"—he felt on his arm Carew's deferential touch—"she won't have me. Clara's refused me."

George made no answer ; he found nothing to say. They reached his steps and entered together his great, dimly lit hall. Carew pushed open the door of the study. His face was smiling, and George felt it to be suddenly pleasant and handsome. On the flap of the bureau, George noticed a long envelope bearing the angular writing of Hailes. It struck him as an odd occurrence. What could Hailes want ? And Clara Brede had refused Carew.

Carew said : "Oh, don't be too cast down for my sake. She's worth a second try."

George felt suddenly weary. He had, he thought, had enough for one day. What did this fool want ?

Carew wanted to tell him that it was a bit of a blow. He was going to go away for a month or so. But before he went back to South America he would return. "I shall leave her plenty of time, of course, to get ready her

trousseau. A woman can't go to the back of beyond without a lot of things."

George actually laughed. He felt as if he stood upon a pillar a great way above Carew. Of course she wouldn't marry such an oaf.

He asked George for some whiskey. George's was better, he said, than he could get at the Inn. One needed something after such an experience. He knew where the spirit case was, and would fetch it himself.

George picked up the letter from Hailes. It covered an article that Hailes begged George to get inserted in the *Salon*. It was one of a series that Hailes was writing about Spanish art. Spanish art hadn't had justice done to it; Hailes was anxious that it should. He had discovered an unknown Portuguese painter called El Gran Vasco—a miracle. He had the assistance of the Duke of Medina's master of the horse.

Hailes, in fact, was beginning to boom his exhibition of Spanish bric-a-brac. He had bought four of El Gran Vasco's pictures for six pounds each.

Carew's face fell disappointedly as he caught sight of the papers in George's hand. He wanted, he said, desperately, a little talk with George; a little advice. He sat down on the sofa edge, holding a glass. He was prepared to wait until George had finished his letter.

Hailes, for his part, was sure George would do him this small favour "in the interests of a

great art," and George seemed to see him writing the letter. It was a clever move. Hailes was intent on demonstrating to the hilt that George felt no resentment against him.

George smiled a little. A sentence at the end of the letter aroused, underneath his amusement, a touch of interest. "I have been trying to do you a good turn. I think it will succeed, and feel sure that you will be pleased and touched." George was more than *avaised*. It struck him that Hailes wanted to bribe him to pitchfork the Spanish article into the *Salon*.

Carew, clearing his throat, was plainly trying to draw his attention, and to extract from George an invitation to stop where he was. George waved his hand non-committally. He glanced through Hailes' article. It alarmed him. It read like the official advertisement of a German Spa. One might almost have considered that Hailes thought Spanish art, Spanish lace, Spanish upholstery, and El Gran Vasco, the painter he had discovered, universal panaceas. They were bound to be the thing very shortly for anyone who wished to be in the swim. It alarmed George to think that this was Hailes—the real and unaided Hailes, if you excepted the help of the master of the horse, whose Spanish, egregiously translated, dominated in hyperbole the style of the article. This was Hailes.

And George, himself, with his easy good

nature, had set his seal on Hailes' talent ! He had fathered him before the world. He dropped the papers and gazed abstractedly at Carew. Carew immediately began a lover's praise of Clara Brede.

And, afterwards, George had to listen to the thoughts of his own mind. All the barriers of altruism were levelled before a passion not to be held off. He wanted Clara Brede. He wanted her love ; he wanted her to be enthralled ; cut off—smiles, glances, tears, and thoughts—from all the rest of the world. Rationally or irrationally, for better or very much for worse, she had for him a charm that was, that could be, in no other person in the world. Rationally or irrationally ! In the end, rationally enough ; for, in the infinite combinations, the infinite possibilities of this world of women, it was impossible that there could be another Clara Brede, another woman with just those lines of the face, with just that turn of mind, of childlike candour, of flower-like openness ; a combination that appealed so intimately, that came always so inevitably true to him.

He saw the words " Not to be " scrawled across the prospect. But it is at once the solace and the curse of mankind that one must for ever picture the just impossible as the supremely desirable—that one must always imagine the place where such things might be,

the place beyond the horizon, at the back of beyond.

He was married ; he could not take her. He was ruined ; it pained him even to think of bringing Clara Brede even near a sort of indigence. He repeated to himself the words : " One doesn't take a woman to the back of beyond without the prospect of good meals "—they were Carew's words. He repeated to himself : " One doesn't take a woman to the back of beyond in any case," which were his own. But he lay contemplating the landscape of that land where there is no more evil, somewhere in sheltered hollows or beneath an immense sky, or beside a vast and silent sea.

One does not do it. But if a catclysm could overwhelm the things that one doesn't, that, being true to oneself, one can't do ? He wondered how she would make the sacrifice. How would *she* face it ? Calmly, without a doubt : without any doubt quite reasonably. It might not be much of a sacrifice. It came suddenly into his head : " And she ? Does she care for me ? "

He ran through in his mind all that he had to go upon : a few blushes, a few smiles, a great deference to his opinion. He numbered many hundreds of the smallest incidents. He remembered her : " If the man isn't worth writing about it makes it all the worse that you have written so tremendously well about him "—the earnestness with which she had said it. That might mean either a great feeling for him or a

great censure for all his doings—for his essential *dilettantism*. Only two mornings before when he had passed the window he had seen her clipping the stems of flowers to put in a vase. He entered the passage, and he saw the swift flash of her skirt as she ran up the stairs, evidently away from him. That might mean that she saw too much of him, or that she had been wearing an apron, and wanted to appear before him only at her best. The room, at any rate, had been full and fragrant of clove pinks; the day before he had said they were his favourite flower. But clove pinks filled all the beds in July.

She read always any book that he mentioned with favour; but he was supposed to be an authority of literature, a kind of professor. All these small incidents became torturing enigmas of the first importance; each one, he felt desperately, if he could get at what lay behind, would solve definitely and for good all that was to be known.

And, as the lustrous night ran on, things solved themselves. She cared; she would come. She would face the sacrifice; it would be no sacrifice. They would be beyond the horizon, in a land where there is no evil to be feared. It came to that in the delicate stillness of the dawn.

In the morning he saw himself again—growing old, penniless, failing and falling; with ties that cannot be broken; unloved—and face to face with what one does not do.

IV.

THREE days later Thwaite was back in Wickham. George had anticipated a great deal of pleasure ; things would run smoothly now until the very end. It was to be the very end. He had already sold his house ; he would disappear without any fuss, without any leave-takings, as if he were just going abroad for a time. He was going to walk quietly out of the front door. "Things"—his affairs had turned out even worse than he had expected or Gregory had hoped. He was stripped almost bare. He had sold his house ; it fetched just enough to pay his own creditors and those of the Renaissance Press. There were a few hundreds over. He hadn't made any fuss about it. Gregory found a purchaser for the house as it stood. The purchaser was naturally an American ; but he was neither hideously rich nor singularly outrageous ; he came quite quietly to look over the property. He was small and dark ; a comfortable man who wanted to "retire." He found his native State unpleasing for the purpose. He appreciated George's taste in furniture, but insisted on knocking off a little of the purchase price because the drains were not in first-class re-

pair. That was the final comment on the chief labour of George's life. A London valuer had already paid a discreet visit of appraisal.

The American, at their pleasant parting—George expressed hopes for his future in the town—declared himself proud to be the successor of the author of *Wilderspin*. It came out then that Mr. Beale was undoubtedly booming George's work. As the little, friendly, dark man put it: "Over there at home they have *Wilderspin* with their breakfast cakes and syrup. It hits you in the eye all over the page the moment you open the Herald."

George laughed. It was a little drop of bitter the more to be the "Author of *Wilderspin*," the work he would least want to be remembered by. The American's lawyers were set to work at that meticulous inspection of old deeds that is called "completing the purchase." At the thought of their attitudes, George remembered Gregory's rapt face and back bowed above the same parchments. Years ago he had completed his purchase of the ramshackle and rat-ridden old barrack. It was now the mellow house he was leaving for good. At any rate, he didn't make any fuss about it. Nobody, so far, even thought of smelling a rat. At the bottom of that, too, there was Clara Brede; it was she who was not to know of the breakdown of the fine fabric until it was all over. It was undoubt-

edly for her that he was carrying on until the very end. He was afraid of himself, afraid of the strain that, more and more, her companionship had put upon him. On one of the inevitable drives in the warm dusk to fetch her father back from his parish she had happened to say, after a long interval of silence :

"You are very good to us. I don't know why." She had lately, as if she were exhausted, given up her attempts to keep George at his work.

The wheels had turned slowly in the soft, sunken lanes ; the driver had been somnolent on the box, they were climbing a hill at sunset. She had spoken slowly and seriously, as if after much reflection on a matter that claimed her attention and puzzled her. He had been very good to them ; she didn't know why.

She had not afterwards broken the long, unbearable silence ; her shoulder had been touching his as they sat. It was as if he were entirely pervaded by her being ; by the irradiation of her life.

Afterwards, in the light of the upper roads, George had thanked the Gods that had given him power to remain silent, just to sit still. But the strain had been too great. That evening he had written to Gregory : "Sell the house if anyone's fool enough to buy." And, coming back from the post, he had turned in at the Bredes' gate.

He gave a little dinner to celebrate the return of Thwaite and Dora. It was to be the last of his gatherings under that roof. It had been one of Mr. Brede's bad days. Dora was nervous and constrained. She cast apprehensive glances at her husband's handsome, overcast face. A cold chill of dislike passed from Thwaite to Clara.

There was no fusing of lights, no effect at all. The great drooping roses on the white table were each solitary; the magnificent beams overhead seemed fantastic and out of place. It was the last time they would have a chance of impending over *his* revelry. He roused himself to talk gallantly to Dora; his voice, sounding alone, seemed to him futile and irritating. Dora said she had enjoyed herself very much. "Oh, very much." She found nothing else to say.

Afterwards Dora and Clara went out into the garden; Thwaite's eyes followed them suspiciously and gloomily. Their voices sounded for a little near the open window, intimately low and comprehending each other with that comprehension between women that is given to neither husband nor lover. Mr. Brede gazed in moody silence at his dessert plate.

Thwaite began to talk irritably of his sub-editor on the *Salon*. During Thwaite's absence he had inserted a great many columns of his personal friends' rhapsodical effusions.

"You can't trust anyone," Thwaite said.

George, with his warm affection for his disciple, shifted his seat closer.

"It will all come right," he said, "now you're back."

Thwaite, with an added gloom, muttered :

"And that means that I shall have to be away from here for ever so long."

George laughed : "Oh, you can trust *us* to look after Dora."

Thwaite glanced nervously and suspiciously towards the open window. The voices of Clara and Dora had died away on the lower paths.

Mr. Brede interpolated suddenly : "Mind—that wine-glass at your elbow, Moffat." He relapsed into gloom.

George mentioned that he had all but finished his book.

Thwaite said : "Oh."

He broke out : "I shall take two rooms in town. To take Dora to."

George had been hesitating whether or not to tell Thwaite of his approaching departure. He decided that Thwaite had already worries enough. He told him, instead, of the article on Spanish Art that Hailes had asked to have inserted in the *Salon*.

Thwaite ejaculated : "Oh, *that* ass. You surely don't want me to insert *him*."

George waved his hand non-committally. He rather wanted to help Hailes because he was such an amusing scoundrel,

"I shall send it back to-morrow," Thwaite said.

Afterwards, in the garden, Thwaite liberated his soul to George. He mistrusted Clara's influence on his wife. The two men, walking up and down on the path in front of the house, talked in low tones. A thick quickset hedge separated them from the dark lawn; they had glimpsing suggestions of it through high, clipped arches. Clara and her sister seemed to have been swallowed up in the remote black depths of the paths among the trees. George was in a great trouble of mind.

"But, surely——" he began. He couldn't find anything to say. A family quarrel, so black, so odious and so unhappy, gave him a more complete disgust with life itself. He made a great effort, trusting to his age, his prestige, his delicacy, and his great services to Thwaite.

"My dear fellow," he said, "my dear fellow, Dora is very fond of her sister."

Thwaite in the darkness made a small obdurate sound.

George added: "It's—don't you see?—it's a great responsibility to take. To sew dissension between two sisters, to break up a family so united."

Thwaite maintained his silence; they stepped regularly up and down the path beneath the brilliantly lit windows. George took Thwaite's arm affectionately. Thwaite, with his

delicacy, his sympathy, his human imagination, could not in the end fail to come to a better frame of mind. "You're tired, you're worried," he said. "But you can't really mean——."

Thwaite said grimly: "What have I got to do with Dora's family? They're nothing to me. What have I in common with such people?" It was the "artistic exclusiveness." He regarded them as mere outsiders. Why should he trouble about them. He did not want to know them.

That view became appallingly clear to George. He said gently: "But Dora?"

Thwaite did not answer. Suddenly he said:

"I don't approve of Clara. I've been hearing a great deal about her. I don't like her ideas. It's not an influence I like Dora to be under."

His tone was peremptory and decisive. Dora, in fact, had told him Clara's secret. She had been so convinced that he, too, would see the romantic side of it. Hadn't she married him because he was romantic? They had been at the time leaning over the balcony of a mediocre hotel facing one of the Paris stations, where everything was as grey, as dull and as noisy as in Euston Square. It had slipped out. He had said, "Ah." He hadn't spoken to her about it. Now he was speaking.

It flashed suddenly upon George that "Clara's views" might mean that she was prepared to face being taken to the back of

beyond. She might have spoken to Dora in that way of the relations of man and woman.

"I don't think," he said quickly, "that you have any right to speak of Clara."

Thwaite said: "*I don't speak without the book.*"

"To me, I mean," George said, hotly. "I'm a stranger; I'm an outsider. You've heard what you have heard in confidence from your wife."

He had come to a pause at one end of the path, and was speaking quickly. He gripped hard on Thwaite's arm. It occurred to him that he was frightfully angry with Thwaite—with Thwaite, of all men in the world; and that in the darkness Thwaite seemed to be sneering at him. He finished hotly:

"I don't consider you've the right, and I certainly will not listen to you."

He did not want to listen; it seemed to him that next moment Thwaite might reveal to him that Clara was in love with him. He didn't—he didn't want to hear.

"Clara has never spoken against you to Dora," he said. He was sure of that.

"She has no call to," Thwaite said. "I haven't swindled *her*."

There was a great and increasing bitterness in his tone.

George pressed his arm more tightly. It was as if he wanted to hold his disciple,

"For heaven's sake," he said, agitatedly, "for heaven's sake don't let such a miserable cause give rise to all this unhappiness."

Thwaite raised his voice : "I shall stick out for Dora's rights. I shall force her to do it herself. I'm master in my own house."

George remembered how light-heartedly and confidently he had forced Thwaite on the Bredes—against the father's will, and against Clara's.

He said, miserably : "But not in such a quarrel ; for a little money ! Clara has such a noble spirit."

Thwaite pulled his arm from George's grasp, and with amazing violence flashed upon him : "Does that infernal woman think I wouldn't *pay* you ?" There was an exclamation like a sob from the other side of the hedge ; a quick sound of footsteps. Dora came with a certain rigidity and stillness through one of the cut arches. Both men were silent as her feet sounded on the gravel. She touched her husband's arm.

"We had better go now," she said. There was not much of the inestimable gift of youth in her voice. She and her sister had been coming over the turf behind the hedge. The night had been very still ; Thwaite had been shouting. They hadn't missed a word. They both went away from George, and he felt as if tragedy went with them.

It certainly stayed with him as he walked

instinctively back into the house. It was as if out there he could see Clara—a dim figure through the denseness of the hedge and through the darkness of the night—and it was as if every one of Thwaite's words had been horrible and undeserved blows upon her silent figure. She must have been there ; she must have heard and must have felt the bitterness of having to ensue the pitiless hatred that pursued her into the hearts of her own sister and her own friend.

He went back into the house. He wanted not to have to face her ; not to have any explanation ; any scene with a personal element. He was more than saddened. A dead misery must have descended upon Dora's head by this time. He seemed to see the two of them arriving at their little house, that with so much joy, so short a time ago, had received its toy-like finishing touches.

It was Dora's first admission to the intimate personality of her husband. He began to rave at her, too. He was going to take her away from her sister ; he was going to knock these ideas out of her head. He was going to speak to her father. An abominable intrigue was going on between her sister and George Moffat. That was what George Moffat had been up to all along. It was a scandal. They had conspired to rob him of Dora's money. To Dora it was like death.

It was something like it to George, too. He

stood for a long time pondering over it. His drawing-room, lit up with many candles, lay rich and glowing round his solitary meditation. The portentous "Troth bideth frendshepe," scrawled across the flamboyant bookcase, greeted him fantastically with its inscrutable, incomprehensible message. Truth had certainly outbided most of his friendships—and this too. In Thwaite's tone there had been a bitterness of outrage, of insult against himself. He could not understand why. But in this case, as in so many others, the worry and fret of circumstance had been too much for old friendship. And he had passed his word for Thwaite; he had blindly pitchforked him into the Brede family; he was responsible. It was a miserable business. He sighed rather heavily and went back to Mr. Brede.

The great clergyman raised his head from an abstracted scrutiny of the shiny table-cloth; he smiled almost gaily as George entered the room.

"I've taken a resolution," he said. His smile gave George a momentary and warm feeling of satisfaction. Young Scraithe, the Vicar here, had asked him to give a sermon to the Volunteers on Sunday. He was going to do it. There was a sort of heavy firmness in his speech.

He went on to explain, rather animatedly, pushing the wine-glasses aside to allow room for the gestures of his arms, that during

dinner he had been immersed in doubts. He hadn't dared to face the idea of officiating again.

"But what you said to me on Monday came into my mind. I'll do it."

What George had said on Monday was one of George's innumerable platitudes—that a man who can't do his work may just as well die. Of all the time and the innumerable words that he had expended in the service of Mr. Brede, this copybook phrase, dropped by chance to fill in a chain of ideas, had proved his salvation !

It seemed to amount to salvation.

"Yes, by Jove," he said, "if I can't do my work, I may as well die. I'm going to do it. I've been malingering and shirking too long."

He straightened his gigantic back, and looked with a certain tenderness at George.

"You're a good fellow, Moffat," he said. "I don't know why you do it."

A certain look in his eyes—a certain similarity of his tone reminded George overwhelmingly of Clara. He wondered why he *had* done it now that it was at an end. Because with Mr. Brede's sermon on Sunday evening it would be at an end. He arranged with himself to walk over to the Junction after he had heard that Mr. Brede was safely through. He would catch the last train and the night-boat.

It was at an end. He felt a warm glow of

satisfaction. He had carried through a difficult, but surely not a thankless task. He felt, too, a warm liking for the great, uncouth and passionate man who sat opposite him. Perhaps it was only because he was Clara's father; perhaps because of the likeness, the curious family similarity that is like a familiar voice speaking unmistakably, but through a veil. There was in them both the same passionate steadfastness in what they had in hand, a certain imperviousness to outside influence, and at the same time a persuasibility—a docility when they thought the persuader was to be trusted in.

"I shall be able to touch some of them up." Mr. Brede was referring to his sermon. "Make them see things. An awakener, an eye opener is needed somewhere in days like these." He was speaking buoyantly and confidently.

For George a certain glow came into the room; it was as if, after all, on this last evening there was again a touch of success, a last glimmer of the sun.

Behind his back Clara Brede came in. He did not look round. "Tracts *against* the Time," Mr. Brede chuckled, "that's what's needed."

George knew that Clara Brede, with her habitual patient movement, was sitting down to listen to their discussion. Suddenly Mr. Brede reached across to pat her hand clumsily.

The gesture carried George's eyes with it to Clara herself. She was looking at him.

"You're a good girl, Clara," Mr. Brede said. "Very patient with me."

She turned her eyes upon her father ; they were a little starred, as if she had been crying. Her face was rather pale. George felt his familiar but more deep emotion of intolerable pitifulness. He was at the bottom of this grief of hers ; he had brought it into her life.

"I think," she said, slowly, "if Mr. Moffat can be so patient with us all, it's no great merit in me to do my duty." Mr. Brede again, and as if confirmatorily, patted her hand. "*He* set me the example."

George read in her eyes a gratitude for having left her alone in the garden. She had suffered a great deal to hear Thwaite abusing her to George. But she didn't care, because George had defended her. She had heard him say she had a noble spirit.

V.

It was as if from cellar to roof of his great house not an association remained appreciable or poignant. The centre of his life had changed from it to the Bredes' cottage; the whole of his past had grown dim and entirely negligible. It hadn't mattered more than the merest passing of time; it hadn't been a life, it was the merest dallying with trifles and with triflers. It seemed impossible that he could have spent years of his time in amassing the immense dead-weight of the house and its contents. He had given the best of his life to it. Now it had crushed him with its beams, its mullioned windows, its groined stones; it, and what it represented—the frame of mind, the profuse and unreflecting giving; the parasites it had attracted to him.

He went leisurely from room to room collecting his more personal relics; a few books, some small sketches of his father's, a portrait or two, some drawers full of old letters from his wife. He was neither very dazed nor very regretful. He acknowledged that for this reaping he had sown. He was not going to yelp.

In this disturbing of old and dusty corners, this burning of old papers, a rather onerous

solitude descended upon him. He recognised with some gratitude his own loneliness, his want of dependents, of responsibilities. There was no one to care very much, except perhaps Clara and perhaps her father. Not even Thwaite.

Thwaite had driven him away a little earlier than he had expected, a day or two—perhaps a week. He had meant to have had again a few of the good old talks. Now that wasn't any more possible. He would have to write to Thwaite—to make one final attempt to get him back to reason. He had been fond of the man. Even yet he was not going to believe that he would not find *some* way to touch him.

Thwaite had gone to London and had taken Dora with him. They had left a message that they would not be back for a week. In a week George would be in a small town in the North of Italy.

It was a place that he had visited two or three times. There was a small and rather presentable *pension* where they cooked bearably enough ; the ruins of a Roman circus ; some shady walks by the side of the Adige. That was to be the end of him. After the final settlings up there would remain enough to keep him for a year or two ; after that the gods must provide, or kind death, or his pen.

He stuck to his image of "walking out"—there was no reason why he should not. He was going to send his small baggage by rail in

the morning of the Sunday, and he was going to walk away by himself, after taking a swift leave of the Bredes at their supper. Mr. Brede would just have delivered his sermon. George felt still a warm satisfaction at the thought. There at least was one thing he had not bungled.

He had figured it all out, down to the minute details. He would have handsome cheques in his waistcoat pockets for his servants who were to be engaged by his successor. On the Saturday night after his supper—it would be the last he would take there—he discovered that he had no labels for his luggage.

On his way to the Bredes, he turned in at the infinitesimal grocer's shop, whose lamps made a brilliant spray in the dusky street. The shop was full of the hard-featured villagers huddled together before the swift passage across the counter of the Saturday-night packages. A sudden hush fell on it, and all the faces turned to George. A ferret-eyed woman with a battered straw hat and an unsightly basket on her arm threw back her head and laughed shrilly. Small nudges of elbows passed among them all. George was used to the black and bitter envy of all villagers for all the "Quality," but he was astonished at the more than usually candid want of concealment. An old man with singularly heavy boots and a thin fringe of hair beneath his chin touched his hat, groped up his small

parcel of tobacco, and hobbled with grotesque haste out of the shop. He was followed by all the others. A solitary yell of laughter went up from outside, and the faces of the village boys appeared glued against the windows.

The grocer, a diminutive and stout, beady-eyed man, whisked away a copy of the local paper that sprawled its coarse type across the counter. He produced with an apologetic air a small bill—"for embrocation for your house-keeper, forgotten when we sent in the account to-day." George paid it and made his purchase.

"We've had dealings a great many years," the grocer said, with a friendly and inane smile. "I trust I've given satisfaction." He wished George good-night with *empressement*.

At the top of the descending street George caught, whirled against the sky, the swift and sinister flash of the great light on the French coast. He paused and looked at it; that, too, he was seeing for the last time from that place. He was going a long way beyond that horizon.

He made his way to the Bredes' cottage. The familiar and hoarse giggling voice went up from the hardly distinguishable, lounging group of young men at the church-yard corner.

"There's old, 'That's-what-you-want.'"

Another commented more shrilly: "What's 'e want now." There was a roar of laughter.

It added a little to his sadness. That was the best that could be done for him, in his own town, after so many years. Clara was alone ; her father was preparing his sermon. She smiled when George entered.

VI.

IT really seemed to amount to no more than the mere leaving a woman, and walking away from a house. He looked forward to the time when it would be all over, to a quiet and grey expanse of unnoteworthy days. It was as if he were getting off very cheaply—too cheaply. It was, in fact, all over already ; he passed a good night. He had finished all his preparations ; he had before him only a few hours of nothing to do—of sunshine, of intense leisure, and then hurried farewells. It was a quite still Sunday morning ; there wasn't a quiver of wind in the cottage climbing roses. He walked towards the Bredes'. Not a soul was in the wide, swept streets ; the sheep in the churchyard meditated among the tomb stones ; on the ridge of the church roof a long row of starlings was aligned and motionless, as if they, too, in the heavens observed the decencies of the Sabbath. He was going to spend his last day with the Bredes.

Clara Brede was standing in the gate-way. She had one hand across her forehead ; she was quite obviously waiting for him. She held, drooping limply, the country paper ; her face was hard and drawn ; there were on it little lines

that George did not recognise. She said suddenly :

“What is this?”

And George had to face, as if thrust accusingly up at him, a paragraph copied from a London journal. It began :

“The world of letters will be deeply concerned to learn of the great financial losses sustained by Mr. George Moffat,” and it gave accurately enough a detailed account of George’s position. In his swift and gasping glance George caught that his “magnificent house in which so many men of letters and the arts had spent unforgettable hours had already been disposed of, and that we understand he is leaving immediately for the South of France.” He even saw the words, “Renaissance Press.” He breathed a heavy sigh of exasperation.

“Is it true?” Clara asked.

He did not look at her face ; he kept his eyes on the paper. He learned dazedly that his many friends were organising a testimonial to him ; that Prince Nicholas of Moldavia had headed the list with a munificent donation in return for George’s services to Moldavia. Even the balalaïka was there.

Clara said in a constrained tone : “It’s rather cruel of you not to have told us, isn’t it?”

He read that the secretary and organiser was Mr. C. T. Hailes. This grotesque and horrible affair was Hailes’ “good turn.” He

had given the paragraph to the papers ; that was why it was so accurate.

"It's rather cruel of you, isn't it," she repeated, "not to have told us?"

Her voice had a cold ring of accusation. It came suddenly and dismally into his mind that it was rather cruel.

"A servant showed it to me last night," she said.

She had learned the news from a servant. Her dry and dim eyes showed him that she had had a bad night. Standing in the gateway she had made no move to let him pass ; she was stopping the way, and he realised, with a sudden pang, that he was not to spend his last morning with her. Her pallid face seemed to blaze accusingly at him like a white flower in the shadow of a moonlight night.

She hated him. She had hated him all through an interminable night. A servant had brought her the paper with a little giggle just after George had left. He had been talking to her calmly and very pleasantly. He had been concealing this wicked thing even then. And she had thought he had cared for her ; she had thought he was interested in her. She was a laughing-stock to herself. She, Clara Brede ! He had been raising a public subscription ; he hadn't even come to them. He was too distinguished ! He had been kind to them, as he might be to the lower animals. She understood what the artist's pride is. She

and her father were Philistines ; they were outsiders—people you didn't talk to about your private affairs. And she had thought he was interested in her. And she loved him. Ah, heavens ! by what right could men make women love them, and then treat them like dust ? By what right ; by what force ? How did they dare to smile ; to be amiable ; to behave as if they were attentive and interested, when they meant nothing ?

She said bitterly : " My father must not know till after his sermon." She had to keep all shocks off him. How was she to keep *this*. " He is preparing it for to-night."

George said : " No, no," and then, " I'm sorry. I thought—I had thought—" It struck him like a calamity that he had never thought of her feelings. He had wanted to keep his image in her eyes as prospering, as buoyant, as untouched. He had left her to learn the truth from a servant. The thought of her father, sitting absorbed and intent, as if caged up in his tiny room, contented and relieved of gloom, became suddenly poignant to him, like the figure of a man unconscious and threatened by an assassin's knife.

He said quickly : " No, no ! don't let him know "; and then : " I'm going away to-night."

It was as if something swift and deadly passed from her eyes to his, as if she had struck him. Her lips moved, twitching convulsively. He dropped his eyes like a culprit.

He heard her say : " Yes, I must keep it from him." Her voice was low and as if abstracted. " He was very—we were both—very—very—fond—— "

It was as if he only remembered it afterwards. He had been horribly upset ; he had been casting about for some consoling word that would be convincing. She had already turned away ; he had caught at her hand. He had said : " I didn't tell you because I loved you." She had snatched her hand passionately and hatefully from his fingers and had gone. From the bedroom window, that, among rose-leaves, stood open above his head, he heard the sound of sudden, suddenly hushed sobbing.

There was a footstep on the gravel behind him. A boy put a telegram into his hand. He did not look at it. It seemed odd that a telegram should be delivered on a Sunday, till he recollected that it wasn't quite ten o'clock. A carriage rattled past behind his back. He couldn't understand what he had done.

He heard confused sounds from the carriage behind him. It stopped. He recognised a familiar voice. Why must people bother him now ? He turned swiftly and saw his brother. Gregory was advancing, blinking in the bright sunlight. His hand was held nervously out, his beaming smile was shaded right down to the eyes by an old, broad-brimmed, grey hat.

He said : " I wasn't certain when you were

going. But I don't want to be in the way." He looked at the Bredes' cottage.

"Oh, we'll go home," George answered.

He seemed to be turning, with a finger on his lips, from beside some death-bed. The low, yellow cottages, embroidered with joyous creepers, looked, in the vivid light, as if they smiled ironically and had become strange and hostile.

Gregory said: "You didn't let me know what you were going to do."

It came into George's head that his brother must have been afraid that he was going to commit suicide.

Gregory seemed plunged in intense meditations. He paused at George's gate and absently inspected the latch. His face was intent and abstracted; there were deep lines about the mouth. His shoulders stooped more than ever. He said: "You had an article sent you by that man Hailes."

George drew a deep breath. That horrible man was at the bottom of this misery. And he had told Clara Brede that he loved her. It filled him with a sudden horror. He said: "Yes, I gave the article to Thwaite. I think Thwaite sent it back."

Gregory came to a stop and drove his stick into the turf at the side of George's drive. He pondered for a long time over the little hole.

George felt horribly sick and ill. It came back more and more insistently that

he had told Clara that he loved her. It had slipped out. He had hardly realised it at the time. He had hardly heard himself speak, because he had been so moved. Now the words seemed to shout at him. Perhaps, though, she hadn't heard. She had been so angry. Or she might regard his words as—only a figure of speech—a way of excusing himself by saying he was fond of her. Certainly he hadn't meant to make her a declaration.

They were standing still, just before his house. The many windows were dimmed and cloudy. It was as if they reproached him like eyes. The garden walls at the wings looked sordid in the deep shadow of the trees. And he had lived in that house all these years, to find that he could not hold his tongue at a pinch.

Gregory said: "You know Hailes got Thwaite dismissed from the *Salon*?"

George said, "Oh!" He didn't care. His eyes roved away among his trees, as if for a place in which to hide from the light.

Gregory seemed to be chuckling. He turned his glasses on George in a blank and inutely observant gaze: "My wife—Ella—dismissed him."

George said: "Dismissed Thwaite." It suddenly occurred to him what that would mean for Dora. He said:

"You surely didn't allow it?"

Gregory in his turn looked away among the

trees. "Do you know if Thwaite drinks?" he asked.

George walked agitatedly up to him. He asked what it meant. He wanted to get to the bottom of it quickly, without any delay. He had too much else to think of.

Gregory looked at him searchingly again. "Thwaite thought—he insisted to me that *you* got him dismissed."

George hadn't even the power to utter "I." His hands opened. The telegram that he was holding dropped on to the ground. His brother stooped to restore the orange envelope to him.

"You haven't read that," he said, with the mechanical air of the man of business. "Is it important?"

"I don't know," George said. "I've too many worries to want to see a new one."

"Thwaite made an extraordinary scene in my office," Gregory muttered. "He said that his wife's sister——"

George said: "Good God!"

"I couldn't stop him," Gregory said. "I didn't feel certain that I ought to. He would have been telling my porters."

George clenched his fists with a fury that was quite new to him. "What—what—what did the scoundrel say?" He quivered.

Gregory dropped into the dry manner of a solicitor. "From what I could ascertain—the man wasn't particularly coherent—his griev-

ance was against Miss Brede. About her mother's legacy to Mrs. Thwaite. I remember you mentioned some of the particulars to me——"

In the midst of his immense anger George remembered too. "He had passed his word to Gregory that Thwaite would be the last person in the world to make trouble about that very thing.

"She intended," Gregory went on, "to devote the money to paying off a debt that Thwaite had incurred—to you."

George said: "Dora did?"

Gregory added: "No, Miss Brede."

A certain horror came slowly into George's eyes.

"Clara meant the money for me," he said. It flashed across him that Thwaite, in the garden, had said: "Does she think I don't mean to pay you——" "For me," he said.

Gregory laid his hand timidly on George's arm. He gave up the effort to speak like a lawyer.

"I listened to the man because he spoke of having commenced an action against Miss Brede. I thought you ought to know what he had to allege. I didn't want to interfere." He was stuttering with emotion.

It occurred to George, slowly and inevitably, that there was in the world an immense and lamentable affair of which he was the centre.

Gregory cast his eyes appealingly over the grey face of the house and up to the tops of the trees. He dropped into his dry mode of speech once more.

"Thwaite's theory was that you had influenced my wife to dismiss him at the instigation of Miss Brede—out of revenge for his having commenced the action against her."

George said with an accent of sick horror :
"She hadn't even told me."

It was nothing short of horror. He was realising very vividly that another man, incensed and not master of his tongue, was going about the world levelling a vile accusation against Clara Brede. It was going on . . .

"He said that you had been carrying on an intrigue with Miss Brede under pretence of helping her father. And that his wife had told him that her sister had been in love with you for a long time."

It was as if for a moment the sunlight had become a blight ; Gregory's voice sounded distant and unimportant. He was explaining that he had not been able to stop Thwaite. George seemed to see Thwaite bursting into the board-room, his eyes blazing, his hands trembling as he remembered they had trembled when Mr. Brede had opposed his marriage. George had thought at the time that he was almost mad. Poor Dora ! But all that was unimportant. Clara had loved him—for a long time. She must have loved

him on the night when he had imagined himself playing the part of the eminent old man. A Scotch tune that Dora had hummed that night sounded suddenly in his mind :

“I’ve heard them lilting at our ewe-milking,
Lasses a-lilting before the break o’ day . . .”

That was why she had run out and taken his part with the Moldavians. He seemed to hear her “I’m so sorry ; so sorry,” when she had heard of his brusqueness to them. Her adorable and quaint humility, all the pleasantness of those immensely distant days came, like a tiny lull, back to him.

And with sudden emotion he remembered her : “Don’t you know you’re a great poet ?” She had wanted to spur him on, to make a man of him.

Gregory was saying rigidly, and with a hard glint in his eyes : “Of course, I shall dismiss Thwaite now. I’ll take care he doesn’t get another appointment, too.”

George found himself answering, with fierce emphasis : “Yes, yes ; let him feel it, Gregory.”

He was quivering with rage. The man had vilely defamed her. His breath hissed through his nostrils.

He couldn’t abandon her now ! He made a motion as if to go swiftly to her. Then he remembered her father, and that he himself was ruined.

Gregory was patiently digging his stick into the turf.

"You're very tired, Gregory," he said.
"You look ill."

VII.

MRS. Moffat had, two-days before, taken the great leap. Hailes, naturally, had pushed her to it. According to him, if anything were to be done with the Spanish plan it would have to be done quickly. The Duke of Medina's Master of the Horse had written to him that someone was already in the market. The Duke of Seville's *Portrait of a Manola*, his celebrated *Toreador preparing the coup de grace*, and half-a-dozen other Goya's were already in England, bought, apparently, by some English Milor.

"Of course," Hailes said, in his reasonable manner, "those are too high game for us. But it's a bad sign. Someone *may* be in the market."

He had paid increasing attentions to Mrs. Henwick, quite openly. He told her that she needed for her stories a strong local colour. Why not the starlight of old Madrid?

His openness increased the pangs of Mrs. Moffat; she became more insolent to him. He didn't seem to notice it. It had flashed upon her that he regarded her as comparatively powerless—as, in short, not a very good speculation. Then Hailes received back his article from Thwaite.

"I really don't see why you should put up with the fellow's insolence," he said.

The speech was a challenge and ultimatum.

She would have to lose him, or show her power by dismissing Thwaite.

They debated the matter in her panelled work-room with the green morocco furniture. Hailes said :

"He's insolent ; he's an abject fool. He can't make the paper pay. Now I——" He pressed down his collar, and erected his long neck. "I suppose your husband wants him?" he added.

Mrs. Moffat saw once and for all that Hailes' price was either the editorship of the *Salon* or the money to finance his Spanish Exhibition. Her fingers twitched with doubt.

Hailes said : "George Moffat owes me a good turn. Subscriptions are literally pouring in." He had started that testimonial to George, and he really considered he had put George under an obligation. He had taken a great deal of trouble ; he had carried the paragraph round to all the papers. "I've routed up everyone who ever owed him a penny. He would be bound to make it all right with your husband."

Mrs. Moffat hadn't any illusions on that point. It was for her only a matter how far she herself could overawe Gregory. She remembered that he had never refused her anything in or out of reason, except the dismissal

of Thwaite. But George was concerned in that.

When he had bought the paper she had regarded it as a present to her. She could have had it had she wanted it. She had played at editing it for some months. Then she had grown tired, and Thwaite had been appointed at the request of George.

She was quite unsure of the position ; she was quite unsure of Gregory. She hadn't the least idea of what was underneath his amiability. He had never really opposed anything she asked.

Hailes said : " If you *cared* for me to take Thwaite's place, I could do that and your work too. I could make a good thing of the *Salon*."

He saw himself quite clearly as Editor. The thing was a journalistic plum. It would " place " him for good and all. Thwaite had undoubtedly given the paper weight. It counted, if it didn't sell. It was something that one could rise from ; it would, in the end, be worth several Spanish projects. Mrs. Moffat had been used to overbearing Gregory. With a quiver of alarm she consented to overbear him once more. She had to if she were to keep Hailes' allegiance ; she *must* show that she could make it worth his while. She wrote the letter of dismissal to Thwaite. It had driven Thwaite mad. He had been convinced that George had got him dismissed, and he had gone nearly raving to " show up " George and Clara to Gregory.

Afterwards—on the afternoon before Gregory had gone down to George—an imperative telegram had come from Gregory to his wife. He himself had just faced Thwaite. She had to face Gregory.

Her heart had beaten violently all the way up in the train. She flounced haughtily into the Board-Room. Gregory, to her astonished alarm, greeted her with a sudden and as if unveiled tenderness that she didn't in the least know what to do with. She thought he must be leading up to something abominable.

He explained, nervously and haltingly, fumbling with his button-holes. She had put him in a difficult and false position. "I've had, my dear, to tell Mr. Thwaite that *I* hadn't dismissed him. I had passed my word to George not to." He muttered, "Very awkward," and looked intently at a blotter. His mouth opened.

Mrs. Moffat couldn't get over her alarm; what was the man going to say now?

He dropped his head again.

"It's most unfortunate," he said, "most unfortunate."

He considered blankly for a minute or two. It gave Mrs. Moffat more than time to collect herself. She sank into one of the cane chairs and dropped her reticule brilliantly on to the table.

"I told Mr. Thwaite"—Gregory looked up at her at last—"that it was a mistake—that, in

fact, a clerk had misaddressed two letters ; that yours hadn't been meant for him at all. " Naturally "—he brought out with an immense effort—" the last thing I should wish would be to cross you or to give anyone the idea that we were at variance."

Mrs. Moffat looked at him ironically.

" I don't anticipate," he added cheerfully, " that he or anyone else will think that."

He stretched out his fumbling hand and patted her wrist. It flashed into Mrs. Moffat's mind :

" Why, the man's fond of me ! "

His familiar and irritating gesture had suddenly given her this bizarre clue to his character.

He was fond of his wife. He had begun by thinking her more brilliantly and flashingly beautiful, more desirable and more admirable than he by any means deserved. He had simply gone on thinking it. She had a right to be proud and overbearing ; it was part of what made him proud of her. He had never cavilled at her companions—her " own people." They even suited his particular business very well. A brilliant, expensive, and not too scrupulous world with a large subsidiary fringe whose qualifications were the great wealth that made them desirable. To Mr. Frewer Hoey he had offered no objections ; he had rather liked him. There wasn't any harm in

him, and Mrs. Moffat had undoubtedly needed both an assistant and someone to talk to. But he could not bear Hailes. He disliked him instinctively and with a blind rightness. He was perfectly convinced that Hailes, at least, wasn't a fit companion for his wife. He was of the lower type. And after Hailes' treatment of George he had been the more determined to be rid of him. With his same blind man's insight he more than suspected his wife's attachment to Hailes.

Mrs. Moffat did not lose any time over the wonderfulness of her discovery. She rearranged her skirts and said, with her high contemptuous voice :

"If I'm not to have the *Salon* to occupy me I shall want to do something. You can't expect me to stifle at Woodlands." She was going to make the most of her advantage. "I shall travel."

Gregory, with a sort of instinctive humility, made a motion towards his cheque book. It was an habitual gesture.

"I shan't be able to go with you," he said.

"I'm going to Spain," she announced. She was going to force Gregory to finance Hailes' Spanish Exhibition.

Gregory raised his head sharply. He did not say anything.

"For some months," she added.

His neck suddenly rose rigidly above his

low collar. His lips moved as if he had caught at a phrase and missed it.

"I warn you," he pronounced huskily, "that if you go to Spain with Hailes I shall divorce you."

Mrs. Moffat laughed contemptuously.

"You're perfectly absurd," she said. "I went to dozens of places with Hoey."

Gregory said: "I warn you."

His neck remained rigidly erect; he had an odd air of menacing like a wild beast listening to a distant footfall. His lips folded and creased one on another; his eyes gleamed. Mrs. Moffat quite literally did not know her husband.

He gave her a couple of days to reflect upon the matter. With her verdict hanging over him he sat talking to George in the brilliant study. He was afraid, too, for his brother. He had understood that something lamentable was in progress; he feared, as George had discerned, that George might do "something irrevocable." He did not mention the matter of his wife and Hailes. And George never gathered that one more of his protégés had caused unhappiness in yet another family. He had enough to think of with Thwaite and the Bredes. Eventually he had to plead for Thwaite, himself.

Gregory said, implacably: "I won't shelter a man speaking like that of you."

"Oh, I've unhappiness enough to answer

for," George said. He dropped his head dejectedly. Gregory's face took an expression of immense concern. He could not bear to see George despond.

"Don't you see"—George spoke lucidly and musically—"it's such a muddle. The only string that you can in any way pull out of the tangle ends at me. I've caused an immense amount of misery. Oh, with the best intentions."

Gregory was moving his hands in a dumb show of remonstrance. "I am at the bottom of it all, however you look at it. I foisted Thwaite on to poor Dora; I forced him insanely on the family. Quite without any will of mine, I'm responsible for Clara's attitude to him. Perhaps she gauged him better than I did, and he would not have paid me. I know, as a rule, she is unerringly right, by instinct. But say she's in the wrong—I'm none the less miserably at the bottom of that. I foisted that miserable Hailes on Ella—and Hailes got her to dismiss him."

He spoke with a certain *entrain*; with even a certain zest. Clara Brede loved him. He sat alone with that precious and tender fact; other sorrows and the miseries of others seemed to grow small in that light. It was as if they too were tenderly pathetic, and as if he had had restored to him some of his power to do good, some of his buoyancy, some of his heart. He leaned his head back on the cushions of the chair, he was so soon to sit in it no more.

Gregory said in a shocked and agitated voice: "No, no, you aren't responsible for Hailes."

George interrupted: "She rather carried him off? True! He deserted me, if you like. But I ought not to lay people open to the risk of meeting such creatures in my house. But let Thwaite off, there's a good fellow. That is, if he's useful to you."

"Oh, he's useful," Gregory said. He added: "Why don't you open your telegram?" It worried his business mind to think that his brother might mislay something needing an answer.

George slowly tore the envelope open.

"Yes, let Thwaite alone," he said, with the pink enclosure between finger and thumb, "this is only something about my boat to-night—let him alone. After all there was a possibly logical scheme in his abominable suspicions. I don't pardon him anything. But let poor little Dora have a chance—for my sake. I'm responsible."

He leaned his impressive head back again on his chair; his searching eyes gazed through the sumptuous backs of his rows of books, into an infinite distance. "Worry about money," he said to himself. In the end it all came to that. It had brought out an undesirable strain in him, too. If he had been able to go on living, there would have been no shock or parting. That had shaken the even surface of

things into strange shapes ; it had forced him to see that he loved her, and to know that she loved him. He had never needed money ; he had never valued it. But now . . . One couldn't take a girl, reared as Clara had been reared, nurtured as she had been, into dishonour, without a decent chance of maintaining her. He hadn't any illusions on the point. He was too old. They couldn't think of a month of bliss and then suicide. It wasn't in Clara Brede's nature ; it wasn't in his.

Gregory was saying : " I'll do as you like about Thwaite. But if he owes you money, you must be paid. I shall give him a receipt when Miss Brede pays you."

His brother's intense and nervous battling for his interests struck George as oddly and pleasantly ludicrous. It was pleasing to have a champion so grim and so ardent. It reminded him of Clara. It was the sort of thing that in her had seemed so pleasantly, so amusingly—and so fatally—attractive. She, too, had fought for him silently and ardently !

" You're a good fellow, Gregory," he said.

His brother smiled brilliantly, and began to stammer a disclaimer. George unfolded his telegram ; it must be about the boat—some alteration in the time, or something about the weather. It occurred to him that if Clara had taken him in hand she would have forced him to become famous. She would have forced him. He would never have a chance now.

On his knee the telegram displayed large copy-book text :

“ 150,000 copies sold day of issue. Cheque mailed. Friendly congratulations.—Beale.”

The staccato phrases suddenly brought the Philadelphian before his eyes, with Clara Brede talking to them both. The words, he knew, meant something eminently fateful to him. It meant new adjustments, new worries. He tossed the limp sheet to his brother.

“Look at what this good creature says about *Wilderspin*,” he commented. “You see what they can do when they ‘boom.’”

VIII.

AND after that George had to face the creeping fingers of the clock. He had only a few hours ; the fragments of a day. The little black minute marks of the dial became infinite tortures ; it was as if they had become small thorns clinging to and impending the skirts of the hours. He wanted it over. The aspect of his room changed from minute to minute. The sunlight crept across the brilliant carpet, and shone reflected on the sumptuous binding of his aligned books. It seemed at times to grow all dim and far away, an unimportant mist hiding the reality of George's memories. They were the only real things left to him now. The voice of Gregory was discussing what seemed to be merely academic and unprofitable things.

"You'll be rich, you'll be successful," he commented on Beale's telegram. It was like a subtle and jarring irony. George made a lazy motion of his whole body—"I suppose I shall muddle — meander" — he was seeking the exact word to express his profitless and futile life. He could not find one ; it did not seem worth the labour of finding exact words any more—"as I've always done," he

added. "What do I want with such a success of the dogs now?"

"It means several thousand pounds," Gregory argued. "You'll have a big market for anything you do. A tremendous position." He brightened into one of his pleasant smiles.

"It won't touch me," George said, lazily. "I shall always be essentially the rotten apple I have been. If I 'succeed' on the strength of this absurd book, I shall only be a humbug as well."

Gregory raised his hands with the shocked air of a priest listening to blasphemy. It was an article of faith with him that George was brilliant in his work as in his life.

George looked at the clock; the minute hand was dropping to a half-hour. There was so much to be decided.

"I suppose I couldn't buy this place back again," he asked. Then he saw that that would be no solution.

It would mean not a prolonging of the old, slow, charming life. It would be only the commencement of endless false positions. He couldn't stroll any more with Clara Brede. Something must now occur. He wasn't the man, she wasn't the woman, to carry on an intrigue, to deal in sordid concealments. It wasn't matter for even a passing thought. At the same time, he could not leave the matter to chance. How much did he owe to Clara's feelings? Was he pledged to take her and

afterwards to shield her ? But he owed it to her father, to keep sacred in his eyes his own image as disinterested.

Gregory said : "That, of course, would lie with your purchaser. But if I were you, I would stick to the bargain." He was talking about the re-purchase of the house.

"Oh, I don't want to stop here," George added, negligently. "Besides, I haven't the money."

It had been slowly dawning upon him ever since he had opened Beale's telegram; it flashed disastrously in upon him now ! He had enough money to support Clara Brede !

One of his holds had been swept away.

But her father remained. Nothing could clear him out of the way. He couldn't carry off the daughter. The point was : ought he to see her again ?

Gregory was musing pleasantly. He muttered : "It means at least six thousand pounds already, doesn't it ?"

George did not hear him any more. The point was : ought he to risk a farewell ? And he knew that he ought not. He dared not risk it. He could not stand the strain. Neither of them could. She would stand in the arched porch ; she would walk beside him to the gate ; there would be just a shimmer of moonlight and they would be parting for good. He couldn't risk it ! He would say something disastrous. It would come out in spite of him-

self. And then—— He was never to see her again !

A sudden footstep on the road outside made him start violently. He understood that all the time he was expecting her to come, to say something to him, to bring some message from her father, to pass the window once again in her blue cloak. His gardener was coming back from morning service.

George went to the window. He wanted to see her and her father passing down the churchyard homewards. Her father was the only obstacle now. He was a hale man. He would not die ; George would not want him to die. There was not any other way. He couldn't even think of saddening Mr. Brede ; of shaking his belief in human nature. It must do that if he, George, abducted his daughter. It would seem like a small, usual intrigue—the petty horror Thwaite had thought him capable of.

In the churchyard the old and bent form of the sexton hobbled goutily over the pebbles of the path. He was swinging the church key round his thumb. The church was empty. She had gone. He could not risk seeing her that evening. He would never see her again.

He turned upon Gregory. "We had better lunch," he said.

At dusk the solemn and insistent jangle of the church bell took the place of the clock face, which became a pale blur. He had only the

length of the church service now. He could not remember how long it lasted. The church windows became suddenly glowing and tall. He would not be able to see her going in. His hall lamp was lit, too ; a thin beading of light fell through the crack of the door. His servants hurried down the steps—the old housekeeper after them. It irritated him. He would, if he were going to say good-bye to the Bredes, have to lose precious time in taking leave of the servants. He couldn't treat them like dogs ; they had been good servants to him.

Suddenly it flashed upon him, he couldn't be guilty of the incredible cruelty of leaving her without a word. He was in the middle of it all again. The voice of Gregory became intolerable. He was talking about his next exhibition, a Spanish one. It was as if they were in a house where someone lay dying, talking to pass the time.

Minutes assumed their preposterous air of being each a separate eternity. The service must long be over. He moved restlessly. The clock ting'd the half-hour. No. Mr. Brede must be in the middle of his sermon. At the hour George would be setting off for the station at last. He would *have* to say good-bye to the Bredes ; he would have to be commonly polite. He might even think of something to say to Clara ; something that, in a flash of joy, she might understand and treasure until she forgot. He had only an

hour now, all told, in which to catch his train. And he had to see his servants, too. An immense quiver, running all through him, told him that nothing was settled. In spite of everything his mind whispered to himself—in spite of his reasoning, of his ideas of right and fitness, he had not mastered his heart. It began to beat solemnly and insistently. If only there were no Mr. Brede——

He would not go. He would have to stop and explain to Clara Brede. They must part openly from each other, they must face it together. She was so brave—and he, he would'nt make a fuss. But no—— What was he to do?

Heavy footsteps sounded outside. It must be her father. What was going to happen? Mr. Brede must have heard that he was going; he would make a frightful scene. George hadn't thought of the frightful scene he would make. Gregory cleared his throat.

The outer door was opened. He was coming in. There was a clanking footstep in the hall; a fumbling knock on their door. What was going to happen? The crack widened; George caught a glimpse of scarlet cloth and of shining metal buttons. He got up quickly to face a military uniform. The callow head of the grocer's son was staring at him above a too tight collar. He remembered that Mr. Brede's sermon was to have been to the Volunteers. The boy said:

"Please will you come to Mr. Brede?"

Mr. Brede must have heard that he was going. The boy's eyes stared at him as if the stiff collar choked him. He grew calm himself. Yes, he was coming. The Volunteer disappeared.

George took his cap, and went slowly along the dark street. It occurred to him that Mr. Brede had been asked to preach a course of sermons to Volunteers. He wanted to consult him before consenting. In that case they would meet in the vestry. George might tell him there; there could not, in the nature of the place, be any scene. They would part. As he walked with his head bent down, pondering, across the turf of the graveyard, he pictured the vestry with its deal wainscotting, the surplices hung up, and glaring oil lamp, the strong shadows. He rehearsed a swift parting speech. It was very dark, and he stumbled over a grave. He thought mournfully enough that whatever else had happened, he had cured Mr. Brede. At least, in that he hadn't bungled. He had forced him to deliver the sermon.

The light, shooting from the open door, lit up a circular crowd of scarlet coats and of black dresses. He caught sight of the clumsy round of the big drum. A voice said: "Here's Moffat. Get out of the way." Faces, bent forward, peered straining into the bright doorway. He went in.

Above the high, brown pews, beneath the soaring vault of a column rendered patchy and pallid by the glare of a lamp, the pulpit was rent from panel to panel. Low and stifled voices came from the invisible aisle on the right. One of the sides of the pulpit hung towards the ground ; a fixed reading candle drooped, twisted and contorted, above the preacher's cushion. It passed slowly through George's mind, paralysingly : "There's been an accident." He stood still for a moment, thinking nothing. The great vault of the church soared into gloom above him ; on the altar table the brass candle-sticks and vases of artificial flowers gleamed gaily above the white altar-cloth and the diagonal, bright patterns of the frontal.

He walked swiftly round the pews. A knot of men stood stupidly, panting round a tall, canopied, mediæval tomb. They moved apart, and he saw Clara Brede bending over her father. He was sitting, crouched and with his hands to his face, at the feet of a cross-legged effigy. A fragment of his surplice hung jagged on his black, left shoulder. As George approached, Clara, still leaning over her father, raised her head. Her face was distorted ; her eyes had in them great tears, like those he remembered to have seen in some heavily painted picture. He had thought them impossible. They looked at him, intensely, dumbly, with an agony of appeal.

“This is what we have done,” she said.
“Oh, George !”

Mr. Brede had gone mad in the middle of his sermon.

IX.

"THEN, now there is no one between us."

The thought came suddenly into George's mind. It was two nights later, and he stood with his foot on the step of a carriage, looking at his watch in the light of the lamps. Behind him a long building wavered out of sight, old, high walled, with a light shining here and there in a window. A yew tree stretched dim and shadowy tiers of feathery needles over him. He stood reflecting over his watch; it was ten o'clock. He was eight miles from home; then he remembered that he hadn't any home. For a moment he thought of driving straight to the junction, then he snapped his watch to. As he got into the black recess before him his eyes ran along the face of the old house. It was long, rambling, comfortable in its outlines of an old manor. The lights of his carriage turned in the drive, there wavered palely in the light details of the brickwork, some rose leaves and a grating before a window.

He sank back into his corner. Twenty minutes before there had been before him the presence of Clara Brede's father. Now he was in the house George was leaving, like a man buried and no more. He was even

more than dead, since the dead seem to us to have spirits, and it was impossible to imagine his imprisoned soul watching the things of this earth. His spirit was more clouded than the soul of any dead man ; his weary ghost could not walk between his daughter and her lover.

The dreadful two days that had gone before stood, packed with detail, clear in George's mind. Everything in them was defined and unforgettable. But two things stood out—his love for her, and hers for him. It was plain and manifest : only the spoken words were needed now to make it alive and actual. They had spoken enough in the long hours whilst her father lay silent and breathing heavily in the shadow of his immense bed. That great and shadowy figure had presided at their remorse, at her tears, at her passionate self-reproach—and at his mournful repentance. It had filled the house with a numb quiet ; they spoke, but it seemed as if they were whispering.

George and his brother had taken everything into their hands. If it were a brain specialist who had broken to her that her father would never speak consciously again, it was Gregory who had fetched him, and it was George who had acted, as best he could, the part of consoler. There was no sharing the responsibility, and there wasn't any avoiding it. She crept, after the specialist had spoken to her, up to her father's room, as if she would be able to convey to him, in silence, her misery and her

repentance. George was there, looking silently at the great figure, that lay like a deeper blot in the shadows of the funereal bed curtains.

"That man says that we did it," she said.

Her father was always to be silent now. His head was always to hang on his breast ; it would shake a little at times, as if he were puzzled or as if he were shaking away tears. And he would never hear a word again.

"Do you remember," she asked, suddenly, "that night he said I had been very good and patient with him?" The big figure moved a little as if with her voice, a great hand clasped and unclasped itself. "That man says it was the preaching. Oh, poor dear, he thought it was fighting with devils up there . . . "

She shuddered violently.

George said : "Yes, it was that." He paused. "You couldn't reproach me more bitterly than I——"

She put her hand on his arm imperiously to stop him.

"No, I did it," her voice came. "I did it. I knew more than you."

"You couldn't have stopped my meddling," George said, bitterly.

Her eyes dilated, and she spoke breathlessly : "I ought to have sent you away. I had been warned. I had seen him before." She began to speak in a brooding monotone : "Yes, I had been warned. I ought to have known if anyone did, how bad——"

George said, harshly : " Don't say that. Don't think that. I forbid it."

She had used the very words, the very tone, that her father had used so often, and George was stung with a terrible dread : the family likeness, the terrible overscrupulousness was there again. He paused, overcome with his sharp fear ; he had never been so moved.

" I forbid it," he repeated, and he felt as if he could make her obey him. " We can't divide the responsibility. I'll take it, if you like." She tried to speak. " Or," he went on gently, " I'll let it rest with him, with his nature, with those who have taught men to dread, with his God . . . "

But, as if he couldn't keep back a truth, he said : " No, it was because I cared for him too much. One kills, it seems to me, those one likes too well."

She said : " Oh, no. Oh, *no*."

He took her hand in both his own. He wanted to soothe her by the sound of his voice : " One persuades them to do things that one thinks will make them more happy, or more honourable or more serviceable to their fellows. And then, oh my dearest child, the strain breaks them."

She shook her head with a dumb vehemence.

" Don't. Don't," she whispered. " Don't force me to talk, here, now." Her voice broke in her throat. " Look at him !"

Her hand, gripped in his, moved convul-

sively, like something craving of itself for pity.

"I ought never to have seen him," George said. "I've spoilt too many lives."

She dragged her hand from his, and pressed her fingers into her ears :

"Oh, don't ; oh, don't," she moaned. "It's like deserting us. He was so fond of you. He never smiled at anyone but you. Wouldn't you have let him have that little pleasure?" She spoke between the heavings of her breast, her dilated eyes closed and opened, gazing at him, and because she was tottering on her feet, she caught at the curtains of the bed. "And me ! And me ! What's to become of me, if you make me think these things about you ? I'm so alone. And he—don't say that he made you do wrong. Oh, you mustn't desert us. You mustn't desert us. You must not, you daren't wrong us, me and him. What else is it, if you say that he made you do wrong."

She fell suddenly on her knees beside the bed, and as if in a passionate appeal to the man that lay there, she felt blindly for his hand. The flame of the candle that had stirred with her motion became a still and solid cone of fire. To George they seemed so terribly alone, all the three of them : alone together with their problems, their responsibilities, their remorseless destinies, and their dead and more remorseless pasts.

"God knows," he said, "I wouldn't wrong you or him."

"You dare not," she answered ; "you dare not."

To George, outside the gate, holding the fly door handle, the specialist had said : "Get that girl away. Hasn't she relations or any friends ? Well, get her away. How splendidly your creepers do here."

He shut the door on himself with professional skill, and drove away beside Gregory's blinking face.

That was George's last sight of his brother. Gregory was summoned to town ; George was to cross the Channel next morning. He would have to start early, practically at dawn, if he wished to avoid seeing the new owner of his house. Gregory on his way up was to arrange for Mr. Brede's reception at an asylum a few miles further up the line.

But Clara had no relations, and no friends ! It was one more fatality ; all her people were out of England, and Thwaite, struck down by the shock of his dismissal, was in a brain fever. That also, George thought bitterly, was his handiwork. He had dragged that wretched man into that family. And Dora was tied to his bedside. That sister, too, Clara had lost, as utterly as she had lost her father. And all her friends had dropped away from her, whilst she had been tied first to her mother, then to her father. She was entirely alone : there was no one but himself to think for her,

And then it was all over. George drove to the asylum very late, a black presence sitting alone with him in the intense darkness of a hearse-like carriage. The only sights were the swift flitting past of the hedgerow briars, revealed for an instant in the glow of the lamps.

A presence. . . . The man for whom he had cared so much seemed to him now at minutes only a deeper blot in the gloom, a more intense silence, a void more empty than if there had been no one. Then again, the reflection from a white wall showed dimly, for an instant, features, the outline of a beard, a glimpse of a man. It wasn't possible that he was shut out from them for ever ; it wasn't thinkable that a time had come when no words ever again could hearten him, make him speak or smile. It was to George as if there must be some secret words, some open sesame, that would touch the springs of his brain. And as the wheels of the carriage crept along, it was as if that word must be at the tip of his tongue. He wanted that drive never to end, so that he should have time to think.

In the narrow street of a market town something blocked their way, and the light from behind a chemist's carboy shone brilliantly in upon them. The great head turned upon George, the hopeless eyes seemed to unveil. "It's me, Moffat," George said, instinctively.

There was no answer ; the carriage rolled on again out into the darkness. It was for a time

a consolation to George, the feeling that they were doing something together, as if they were on an expedition alone. They had driven that road so often on the way to his parish. George wanted the drive never to end; at corners of rough and narrow lanes it seemed to hang, to pause for a long time. When they went on again it was to George like a disillusionment, because they were nearing the end.

Gradually there settled down upon him, there grew more and more overpowering, the feeling that this was a treachery. He seemed to be there in order to soothe that poor thing until he handed it over to a palpable gaol. He was decoying this man behind gates that would close for ever. It would be better to turn him loose into the darkness, enraged and violent, to let him dash himself to death against the black walls and the black trees, to let him die frenzied and gigantic, but at least free and like a man.

No luminous thought came to him, no philosophy that consoled him; no reasoning could make this thing anything other than lamentable. There was no possibility of leaning back and saying: "Perhaps, after all, it was for the best." That might have been possible had death come, for rest would have come with it. But this was a continuing misery, a long blackness—and a treachery.

And then all that was over; there was a lighted hall so bright that he could not see at first. A man with an expressionless face

motioned him to lead the great black form into a room where no unfamiliar voice could start dreadful fancies in its brain. George felt the pressure on his arm, the weight, the action of a great affection, of a tender solicitude—it was his final guiding and a final treachery.

George left him sitting with his immense hands hanging inert. His heavy eyes gazed unseeingly in front of him, his head was shaking a little. It was not even possible to press his hand in farewell. George tried to remember the last time he had said good-bye, but he could not call it to mind.

A doctor with a comforting professional manner assured him that every care would be taken of his friend. Their system was humane, their living rooms bright and healthy, their employees were men who had been thoroughly tested. He insisted upon showing George over the establishment. Then at last George was outside, looking mechanically at his watch, without a thought, without anything to think of, as if for an instant his brain were marking time.

But as the blackness of the empty carriage enveloped him, there came that immense fact : there was no one now between himself and Clara Brede. For a moment he quailed before the immensity of his satisfaction, as men fear joys that are too great to bear. But the lights shone upon the garden plants, upon the high stone pillars of the old gates, and upon the

pallid briars of the hedgerows. He was going to her, and after they met now they would never be parted again. He sighed. Under all the remorse and all the thoughts that fact stood, clear, firm, and tranquil, brought about irresistibly by Fate, that goes to its aim across the graves of men and the wrecks of their hopes, by that ironical and inscrutable destiny that had made all his benefits turn into curses, and that now converted a treachery into a sacred duty and into an intense joy for himself. ✓

Clara was lying back in her long chair in their brightly-lit room. After a few questions and answers as to her father, a silence fell upon them. Then he asked her what plans she had for her future. The question seemed like making believe, because he was going to take her future into his own hands.

She said that she had not thought yet, and he answered, "Ah, no."

She had been thinking about it all that day ; it had flashed into her mind between all the misery over her father. She had had paroxysms of doubt ; now she was very calm because she was certain he would take her away with him. Over her father's body he had pledged himself not to desert her ; and he loved her. He had said it before all this wretchedness had come.

She lay still. She was wearing her old blue dress, and the lamp on its pedestal blazed brilliantly down on her bright hair and her pure features. He was sitting on the window

seat with his eyes upon the ground, and it was she who looked at him as one still evening he had held her motionless. An echo of those old agonies, of those old beneficent and torturing doubts, floated into her calm. He loved her.

"He had not told her of his ruin because he loved her so much:" the words remained vivid in her memory through all these days of misery. It seemed years, a different world, since they had stood together. He had caught at her hand, and she seemed still to feel the pain of snatching it away, and still to feel the solace, the intense appeasement of the tears she had shed afterwards because he had said he loved her. He had not spoken for fear of shocking her, or because of her father. But her father was gone now, and she thought it would be easy. If he did not speak in the next day, she would tell him there was no room for misunderstandings now. She would give him two days.

He said suddenly :

"I shall be in France to-morrow."

The new owner would be already in his house in the morning.

She trembled a little ; they would have to speak to-night, then.

It occurred to him swiftly that he might say : "You must come with me," but he did not, because it would have been too brusque. He wanted to find some finer way, something delicate.

He began talking slowly about life, about

his own expectations, about how he was going to live in Italy. He was looking for an opening. He talked about happiness. He wanted her to be happy—to look at things in their entirety ; not to expect too much of life, but assuredly not to expect too little. Once he said :

“ I want you to be happy, because I am very fond of you.”

Her heart began to beat rapidly. It was coming now. No, no ; it was too soon. He must not speak yet, she was not ready ; it would spoil everything.

But he said : “ About what we talked of last night. It is no good thinking over what is past. It would be wrong. We have ourselves to think of ; that, too, is a duty. You remember there was a Roman who killed himself not so much for fear of his future as because he dreaded the recollection of his past.”

The image of poor Brede came to him : strong, vigorous in his tirades, crying out for sympathy, and indefatigable. That was how he would live in their hearts for as long as they lived. He was still alive ; he was still there. George could hardly remember him as he was actually then.

Clara said : “ No ; you told me never to think of that. I will not.”

The simplicity of her utterance seemed to give the measure of his influence over her, of his love, and of her respect.

In the reaction from the thought of her father he wanted to say : " I love you ; come with me." But at that moment the words seemed shocking, as if they must wound her ears. The memory of her father would not leave him, and he repeated :

" Yes, I want you to be happy."

But she must not expect that even " below the horizon " she would find pure rest.

She kept her eyes fixed on him ; there was a great light in them, and her lips were parted. She was suddenly more than beautiful, and to him it was like a bliss of unconsciousness merely to sit looking at her. She said :

" Oh, I shall not expect too much, even there," and he could not remember what they had been talking of, because he was so absorbed in looking at her.

He looked at the clock ; it was very late. That did not matter now ; nothing mattered any more. She lay back without stirring, and they were all alone. There was not in the whole village, in the whole black countryside, another watcher, another sigh, or another smile. They might wait like that until they started in the morning.

Suddenly he said : " I should like to take you to Rimini. There is a portico there that's very lovely." He got up abruptly, and she shrank a little and closed her eyes. " What I mean is, that it's in looking at such things that we can forget ourselves, Some things are so

beautiful that one can look at them for a long time, absorbed, unconscious. And, don't you see, it's then that one is happy. When you forget to think about your health, you are well; and, just in the same way, the moment you think, Now I am happy, you lose the finer spirit, you begin to question."

She said: "Yes, yes," eagerly, and she thought: "Now he has spoken. How tenderly he has done it."

"Over there," he was saying, "there are so many things. There's something for you, and something for me when we differ, and at every turn there's something for both of us together. It's that. It's that forgetfulness, it's that getting outside ourselves into communion with a spirit that absorbs us—it's that that is getting below the horizon."

"Yes," she said, "except at the supreme moments."

He paced swiftly up and down, coming so close to her that her heart shrank painfully, and then receding. He said, hurriedly: "It's only action that is a difficulty."

He stepped towards her recumbent figure. It was as if already he held her in his arms; as if she had said, "Ah!" as if her head had fallen back. Suddenly it slipped into his mind, like an odd thought that he regarded contemptuously, "This is seduction."

She wondered for one swift moment what it felt like to be dishonoured. Was it like a pain?

She had looked coldly at other women. He was coming : she shut her eyes.

Swift thoughts ran into her proud mind. What was ignominy? What did she care for contempt? She was going with him, and she felt proud and calm—— Social codes, framed by men for the purposes of men, were nothing to her. She felt in herself no dishonour, but the glory of sacrificing herself to him—— But he was coming, and she shivered. Outside the darkness of her closed lids something paralysing, something terrible and blissful was coming towards her.

A profound thankfulness, like the spirit of a prayer, shed itself over her, and her arms lay as if powerless along the chair.

Suddenly she heard him say: "But it's too——"

The black and tremendous figure of her father had risen before George's eyes once more. [The man was dead, the man was more than dead ; but his memory remained. This thing would never vex his troubled spirit. But his memory was in their hands, and George seemed to hear men's voices say, "Oh, Brede. He's in a lunatic asylum, and his daughter ran away with a married man." That contempt would fall on the memory of this man that they had both loved, and both impelled to his ruin. It would be a final and despicable stab at the fair fame of his friend's house ; it would be a final and despicable treachery.]

He said : " No, I must go. It would be a calamity for us all."

The spirit of self-sacrifice that was his seemed to envelope her too, now that she was his. She, too, must sacrifice herself to that tremendous ghost. The weariness that had so often come over him in face of Mr. Brede's long troubles fell upon him once more, and seemed to make the invisible presence of her father the more actual and the more paralyzing.

She gave a sudden and pitiful laugh of incredulity, a sharp, dry sound that expressed an utter disbelief. She could not believe that her attraction would not hold him.

He brought out : " I couldn't make love to his daughter after ruining him."

The horror of that long drive in the dark became appalling in his memory. He had been calm then, like a person stupefied. Now he saw it as something black and evil, a retribution for the ignoble course of events that had swept every obstacle away. It had given him her love, it had forced upon him the money that should make possible their life together, it had swept aside her father. But that memory and that past had risen up, a thing more dreadful than any disaster in the future.

She had been lying still, silent, as if she were very calm, but suddenly she was

standing up before him, very pale, tall and rigid.

"You think it would be a calamity?" she asked slowly.

He did not speak.

"You told me—you told me—you forbade me to think about him."

She had thought, lying there, that with a word she could change him again. She had happiness in her hands; nothing could take it from her. But now she could not find any words. A cold anger, a cruel pride was rising uncontrollable in her.

"You told me it did not matter. You told me to forget him. I was ready, God help you." A violent passion against the universe overwhelmed her. If he were right, the right was a bitter wrong to her, and it was fated that all the world might think for others, and never one man for her. And she had tasted happiness.

She could not trust herself to speak to this man who had thrown her away.

She stood before him, pale and tall, a monastic figure in her coarse blue dress. Her fair and waving hair was brilliant in the light of the lamp; her features were rigid and pitiful, because the smile of the happiness she had tasted had not yet vanished from them. Her eyes were very wide open, as if she were walking in her sleep, and mechanically she brushed a strand of hair from her forehead.

"Self-sacrifice," she said, slowly, "Doesn't that ever end?"

Her hands dropped passionately apart. He was looking at the ground. Her dress rustled inaudibly, and when he glanced up again, she was no longer there.

THE END.

