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THE DICTATOR

BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY, M.P

AUTHOR OF 'DEAR LADY DISDAIN' 'DONNA QUIXOTE' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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THE DICTATOR

CHAPTER I

AN EXILE IN LONDON

THE May sunlight streamed in through the window, making curious patterns of the curtains upon the carpet. Outside, the tide of life was flowing fast ; the green leaves of the Park were already offering agreeable shade to early strollers ; the noise of cabs and omnibuses had set in steadily for the day. Outside, Knightsbridge was awake and active ; inside, sleep reigned with quiet. The room was one of the best bedrooms in Paulo's Hotel ; it was really tastefully furnished, soberly decorated, in the style of the fifteenth

French Louis. A very good copy of Watteau was over the mantel-piece, the only picture in the room. There had been a fire in the hearth overnight, for a grey ash lay there. Outside on the ample balcony stood a laurel in a big blue pot, an emblematic tribute on Paulo's part to honourable defeat which might yet turn to victory.

There were books about the room: a volume of Napoleon's maxims, a French novel, a little volume of Sophocles in its original Greek. A uniform-case and a sword-case stood in a corner. A map of South America lay partially unrolled upon a chair. The dainty gilt clock over the mantel-piece, a genuine heritage from the age of Louis Quinze, struck eight briskly. The Dictator stirred in his sleep.

Presently there was a tapping at the door to the left of the bed, a door communicating with the Dictator's private sitting-room. Still

the Dictator slept, undisturbed by the slight sound. The sound was not repeated, but the door was softly opened, and a young man put his head into the room and looked at the slumbering Dictator. The young man was dark, smooth-shaven, with a look of quiet alertness in his face. He seemed to be about thirty years of age. His dark eyes watched the sleeping figure affectionately for a few seconds. 'It seems a pity to wake him,' he muttered, and he was about to draw his head back and close the door, when the Dictator stirred again, and suddenly waking swung himself round in the bed and faced his visitor. The visitor smiled pleasantly. 'Buenos dias, Escelencia,' he said.

The Dictator propped himself up on his left arm and looked at him.

'Good morning, Hamilton,' he answered. 'What's the good of talking Spanish here? Better fall back upon simple Saxon until we

can see the sun rise again in Gloria. And as for the Excellency, don't you think we had better drop that too ?'

'Until we see the sun rise in Gloria,' said Hamilton. He had pushed the door open now, and entered the room, leaning carelessly against the door-post. 'Yes; that may not be so far off, please Heaven; and, in the meantime, I think we had better stick to the title and all forms, Excellency.'

The Dictator laughed again. 'Very well, as you please. The world is governed by form and title, and I suppose such dignities lend a decency even to exile in men's eyes. Is it late? I was tired, and slept like a dog.'

'Oh no; it's not late,' Hamilton answered. 'Only just struck eight. You wished to be called, or I shouldn't have disturbed you.'

'Yes, yes; one must get into no bad habits in London. All right; I'll get up now, and be with you in twenty minutes.'

‘Very well, Excellency.’ Hamilton bowed as he spoke in his most official manner, and withdrew. The Dictator looked after him, laughing softly to himself.

‘L’excellence malgré lui,’ he thought. ‘An excellency in spite of myself. Well, I dare say Hamilton is right; it may serve to fill my sails when I have any sails to fill. In the meantime let us get up and salute London. Thank goodness it isn’t raining, at all events.’

He did his dressing unaided. ‘The best master is his own man’ was an axiom with him. In the most splendid days of Gloria he had always valeted himself; and in Gloria, where assassination was always a possibility, it was certainly safer. His body-servant filled his bath and brought him his brushed clothes; for the rest he waited upon himself.

He did not take long in dressing. All his movements were quick, clean, and decisive; the movements of a man to whom moments

are precious, of a man who has learnt by long experience how to do everything as shortly and as well as possible. As soon as he was finished he stood for an instant before the long looking-glass and surveyed himself. A man of rather more than medium height, strongly built, of soldierly carriage, wearing his dark frock-coat like a uniform. His left hand seemed to miss its familiar sword-hilt. The face was bronzed by Southern suns ; the brown eyes were large, and bright, and keen ; the hair was a fair brown, faintly touched here and there with grey. His full moustache and beard were trimmed to a point, almost in the Elizabethan fashion. Any serious student of humanity would at once have been attracted by the face. Habitually it wore an expression of gentle gravity, and it could smile very sweetly, but it was the face of a strong man, nevertheless, of a stubborn man, of a man ambitious, a man with clear resolve, personal

or otherwise, and prompt to back his resolve with all he had in life, and with life itself.

He put into his buttonhole the green-and-yellow button which represented the order of the Sword and Myrtle, the great Order of La Gloria, which in Gloria was invested with all the splendour of the Golden Fleece ; the order which could only be worn by those who had actually ruled in the republic. That, according to satirists, did not greatly limit the number of persons who had the right to wear it. Then he formally saluted himself in the looking-glass. 'Excellency,' he said again, and laughed again. Then he opened his double windows and stepped out upon the balcony.

London was looking at its best just then, and his spirits stirred in grateful response to the sunlight. How dismal everything would have seemed, he was thinking, if the streets had been soaking under a leaden sky, if the trees

had been dripping dismally, if his glance directed to the street below had rested only upon distended umbrellas glistening like the backs of gigantic crabs! Now everything was bright, and London looked as it can look sometimes, positively beautiful. Paulo's Hotel stands, as everybody knows, in the pleasantest part of Knightsbridge, facing Kensington Gardens. The sky was brilliantly blue, the trees were deliciously green; Knightsbridge below him lay steeped in a pure gold of sunlight. The animation of the scene cheered him sensibly. May is seldom summery in England, but this might have been a royal day of June.

Opposite to him he could see the green-grey roofs of Kensington Palace. At his left he could see a public-house which bore the name and stood upon the site of the hostelry where the Pretender's friends gathered on the morning when they expected to see Queen Anne succeeded by the heir to the House of Stuart.

Looking from the one place to the other, he reflected upon the events of that morning when those gentlemen waited in vain for the expected tidings, when Bolingbroke, seated in the council chamber at yonder palace, was so harshly interrupted. It pleased the stranger for a moment to trace a resemblance between the fallen fortunes of the Stuart Prince and his own fallen fortunes, as dethroned Dictator of the South American Republic of Gloria. 'London is my St. Germain's,' he said to himself with a laugh, and he drummed the national hymn of Gloria upon the balcony-rail with his fingers.

His gaze, wandering over the green bravery of the Park, lost itself in the blue sky. He had forgotten London; his thoughts were with another place under a sky of stronger blue, in the White House of a white square in a white town. He seemed to hear the rattle of rifle shots, shrill trumpet calls, angry party

cries, the clatter of desperate charges across the open space, the angry despair of repulses, the piteous pageant of civil war. Knights-bridge knew nothing of all that. Danes may have fought there, the chivalry of the White Rose or the Red Rose ridden there, gallant Cavaliers have spurred along it to fight for their king. All that was past; no troops moved there now in hostility to brethren of their blood. But to that one Englishman standing there, moody in spite of the sunlight, the scene which his eyes saw was not the tranquil London street, but the Plaza Nacional of Gloria, red with blood, and 'cut up,' in the painter's sense, with corpses.

'Shall I ever get back? Shall I ever get back?' that was the burden to which his thoughts were dancing. His spirit began to rage within him to think that he was here, in London, helpless, almost alone, when he ought to be out there, sword in hand, dictating

terms to rebels repentant or impotent. He gave a groan at the contrast, and then he laughed a little bitterly and called himself a fool. 'Things might be worse,' he said. 'They might have shot me. Better for them if they had, and worse for Gloria. Yes, I am sure of it—worse for Gloria!'

His mind was back in London now, back in the leafy Park, back in Knightsbridge. He looked down into the street, and noted that a man was loitering on the opposite side. The man in the street saw that the Dictator noted him. He looked up at the Dictator, looked up above the Dictator, and, raising his hat, pointed as if towards the sky. The Dictator, following the direction of the gesture, turned slightly and looked upwards, and received a sudden thrill of pleasure, for just above him, high in the air, he could see the flutter of a mass of green and yellow, the colours of the national flag of Gloria. Mr. Paulo, mindful

of what was due even to exiled sovereignty, had flown the Gloria flag in honour of the illustrious guest beneath his roof. When that guest looked down again the man in the street had disappeared.

‘That is a good omen. I accept it,’ said the Dictator. ‘I wonder who my friend was?’ He turned to go back into his room, and in doing so noticed the laurel.

‘Another good omen,’ he said. ‘My fortunes feel more summer-like already. The old flag still flying over me, an unknown friend to cheer me, and a laurel to prophesy victory—what more could an exile wish? His breakfast, I think,’ and on this reflection he went back into his bedroom, and, opening the door through which Hamilton had talked to him, entered the sitting-room.

CHAPTER II

A GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER

THE room which the Dictator entered was an attractive room, bright with flowers, which Miss Paulo had been pleased to arrange herself—bright with the persevering sunshine. It was decorated, like his bedroom, with the restrained richness of the mid-eighteenth century. With discretion, Paulo had slightly adapted the accessories of the room to please by suggestion the susceptibilities of its occupant. A marble bust of Cæsar stood upon the dwarf bookcase. A copy of a famous portrait of Napoleon was on one of the walls; on another an engraving of Dr. Francia still more delicately associated great

leaders with South America. At a table in one corner of the room—a table honeycombed with drawers and pigeon-holes, and covered with papers, letters, documents of all kinds—Hamilton sat writing rapidly. Another table nearer the window, set apart for the Dictator's own use, had everything ready for business—had, moreover, in a graceful bowl of tinted glass, a large yellow carnation, his favourite flower, the flower which had come to be the badge of those of his inclining. This, again, was a touch of Miss Paulo's sympathetic handiwork.

The Dictator, whose mood had brightened, smiled again at this little proof of personal interest in his welfare. As he entered, Hamilton dropped his pen, sprang to his feet, and advanced respectfully to greet him. The Dictator pointed to the yellow carnation.

'The way of the exiled autocrat is made smooth for him here, at least,' he said.

Hamilton inclined his head gravely. 'Mr. Paulo knows what is due,' he answered, 'to John Ericson, to the victor of San Felipe and the Dictator of Gloria. He knows how to entertain one who is by right, if not in fact, a reigning sovereign.'

'He hangs out our banner on the outer wall,' said Ericson, with an assumed gravity as great as Hamilton's own. Then he burst into a laugh and said, 'My dear Hamilton, it's all very well to talk of the victor of San Felipe and the Dictator of Gloria. But the victor of San Felipe is the victim of the Plaza Nacional, and the Dictator of Gloria is at present but one inconsiderable item added to the exile world of London, one more of the many refugees who hide their heads here, and are unnoted and unknown.'

His voice had fallen a little as his sentences succeeded each other, and the mirth in his voice had a bitter ring in it when he ended.

His eye ranged from the bust to the picture, and from the picture to the engraving contemplatively.

Something in the contemplation appeared to cheer him, for his look was brighter, and his voice had the old joyous ring in it when he spoke again. It was after a few minutes' silence deferentially observed by Hamilton, who seemed to follow and to respect the course of his leader's thoughts.

'Well,' he said, 'how is the old world getting on? Does she roll with unabated energy in her familiar orbit, indifferent to the fall of states and the fate of rulers? Stands Gloria where she did?'

Hamilton laughed. 'The world has certainly not grown honest, but there are honest men in her. Here is a telegram from Gloria which came this morning. It was sent, of course, as usual, to our City friends, who sent it on here immediately.' He handed the

despatch to his chief, who seized it and read it eagerly. It seemed a commonplace message enough—the communication of one commercial gentleman in Gloria with another commercial gentleman in Farringdon Street. But to the eyes of Hamilton and of Ericson it meant a great deal. It was a secret communication from one of the most influential of the Dictator's adherents in Gloria. It was full of hope, strenuously encouraging. The Dictator's face lightened.

‘Anything else?’ he asked.

‘These letters,’ Hamilton answered, taking up a bundle from the desk at which he had been sitting. ‘Five are from money-lenders offering to finance your next attempt. There are thirty-three requests for autographs, twenty-two requests for interviews, one very pressing from “The Catapult,” another from “The Moon”—Society papers, I believe; ten invitations to dinner, six to luncheon; an

offer from a well-known lecturing agency to run you in the United States ; an application from a publisher for a series of articles entitled " How I Governed Gloria," on your own terms ; a letter from a certain Oisin Stewart Sarrasin, who calls himself Captain, and signs himself a soldier of fortune.'

'What does *he* want?' asked Ericson. 'His seems to be the most interesting thing in the lot.'

'He offers to lend you his well-worn sword for the re-establishment of your rule. He hints that he has an infallible plan of victory, that in a word he is your very man.'

The Dictator smiled a little grimly. 'I thought I could do my own fighting,' he said. 'But I suppose everybody will be wanting to help me now, every adventurer in Europe who thinks that I can no longer help myself. I don't think we need trouble Captain Stewart. Is that his name?'

‘Stewart Sarrasin.’

‘Sarrasin—all right. Is that all?’

‘Practically all,’ Hamilton answered. ‘A few other letters of no importance. Stay; no, I forgot. These cards were left this morning, a little after nine o’clock, by a young lady who rode up attended by her groom.’

‘A young lady,’ said Ericson, in some surprise, as he extended his hand for the cards.

‘Yes, and a very pretty young lady too,’ Hamilton answered, ‘for I happened to be in the hall at the time, and saw her.’

Ericson took the cards and looked at them. They were two in number; one was a man’s card, one a woman’s. The man’s card bore the legend ‘Sir Rupert Langley,’ the woman’s was merely inscribed ‘Helena Langley.’ The address was a house at Prince’s Gate.

The Dictator looked up surprised. ‘Sir Rupert Langley, the Foreign Secretary?’

‘I suppose it must be,’ Hamilton said, ‘there can’t be two men of the same name. I have a dim idea of reading something about his daughter in the papers some time ago, just before our revolution, but I can’t remember what it was.’

‘Very good of them to honour fallen greatness, in any case,’ Ericson said. ‘I seem to have more friends than I dreamed of. In the meantime let us have breakfast.’

Hamilton rang the bell, and a man brought in the coffee and rolls, which constituted the Dictator’s simple breakfast. While he was eating it he glanced over the letters that had come. ‘Better refuse all these invitations, Hamilton.’

Hamilton expostulated. He was Ericson’s intimate and adviser, as well as secretary.

‘Do you think that is the best thing to

do?' he suggested. 'Isn't it better to show yourself as much as possible, to make as many friends as you can? There's a good deal to be done in that way, and nothing much else to do for the present. Really I think it would be better to accept some of them. Several are from influential political men.'

'Do you think these influential political men would help me?' the Dictator asked, good-humouredly cynical. 'Did they help Kossuth? Did they help Garibaldi? What I want are war-ships, soldiers, a big loan, not the agreeable conversation of amiable politicians.'

'Nevertheless,' Hamilton began to protest.

His chief cut him short. 'Do as you please in the matter, my dear boy,' he said. 'It can't do any harm, anyhow. Accept all you think it best to accept; decline the

others. I leave myself confidently in your hands.'

'What are you going to do this morning?'

Hamilton inquired. 'There are one or two people we ought to think of seeing at once. We mustn't let the grass grow under our feet for one moment.'

'My dear boy,' said Ericson good-humouredly, 'the grass shall grow under my feet to-day, so far as all that is concerned. I haven't been in London for ten years, and I have something to do before I do anything else. To-morrow you may do as you please with me. But if you insist upon devoting this day to the cause——'

'Of course I do,' said Hamilton.

'Then I graciously permit you to work at it all day, while I go off and amuse myself in a way of my own. You might, if you can spare the time, make a call at the Foreign Office and say I should be glad to wait on

Sir Rupert Langley there, any day and hour that suit him—we must smooth down the dignity of these Foreign Secretaries, I suppose?’

‘Oh, of course,’ Hamilton said, peremptorily. Hamilton took most things gravely; the Dictator usually did not. Hamilton seemed a little put out because his chief should have even indirectly suggested the possibility of his not waiting on Sir Rupert Langley at the Foreign Office.

‘All right, boy; it shall be done. And look here, Hamilton; as we are going to do the right thing, why should you not leave cards for me and for yourself at Sir Rupert Langley’s house? You might see the daughter.’

‘Oh, she never heard of me,’ Hamilton said hastily.

‘The daughter of a Foreign Secretary?’

‘Anyhow, of course I’ll call if you wish it, Excellency.’

‘Good boy! And do you know I have taken a fancy that I should like to see this soldier of fortune, Captain——’

‘Sarrasin?’

‘Sarrasin—yes. Will you drop him a line and suggest an interview—pretty soon? You know all about my times and engagements.’

‘Certainly, your Excellency,’ Hamilton replied, with almost military formality and precision; and the Dictator departed.

CHAPTER III

AT THE GARDEN GATE

LONDONERS are so habituated to hear London abused as an ugly city that they are disposed too often to accept the accusation humbly. Yet the accusation is singularly unjust. If much of London is extremely unlovely, much might fairly be called beautiful. The new Chelsea that has arisen on the ashes of the old might well arouse the admiration even of the most exasperated foreigner. There are recently created regions in that great tract of the earth's surface known as South Kensington which in their quaintness of architectural form and braveness of red brick can defy the gloom of a civic March or November. Old

London is disappearing day by day, but bits of it remain, bits dear to those familiar with them, bits worth the enterprise of the adventurous, which call for frank admiration and frank praise even of people who hated London as fully as Heinrich Heine did. But of all parts of the great capital none perhaps deserve so fully the title to be called beautiful as some portions of Hampstead Heath.

Some such reflections floated lightly through the mind of a man who stood, on this May afternoon, on a high point of Hampstead Hill. He had climbed thither from a certain point just beyond the Regent's Park, to which he had driven from Knightsbridge. From that point out the way was a familiar way to him, and he enjoyed walking along it and noting old spots and the changes that time had wrought. Now, having reached the highest point of the ascent, he paused, standing on the grass of

the heath, and turning round, with his back to the country, looked down upon the town.

There is no better place from which to survey London. To impress a stranger with any sense of the charm of London as a whole, let him be taken to that vantage-ground and bidden to gaze. The great city seemed to lie below and around him as in a hollow, tinged and glorified by the luminous haze of the May day. The countless spires which pointed to heaven in all directions gave the vast agglomeration of buildings something of an Italian air; it reminded the beholder agreeably of Florence. To right and to left the gigantic city spread, its grey wreath of eternal smoke resting lightly upon its fretted head, the faint roar of its endless activity coming up distinctly there in the clear windless air. The beholder surveyed it and sighed slightly, as he traced meaningless

symbols on the turf with the point of his stick.

‘What did Cæsar say?’ he murmured. ‘Better be the first man in a village than the second man in Rome! Well, there never was any chance of my being the second man in Rome; but, at least, I have been the first man in my village, and that is something. I suppose I reckon as about the last man there now. Well, we shall see.’

He shrugged his shoulders, nodded a farewell to the city below him, and, turning round, proceeded to walk leisurely across the Heath. The grass was soft and springy, the earth seemed to answer with agreeable elasticity to his tread, the air was exquisitely clear, keen, and exhilarating. He began to move more briskly, feeling quite boyish again. The years seemed to roll away from him as rifts of sea fog roll away before a wind.

Even Gloria seemed as if it had never been—aye, and things before Gloria was, events when he was still really quite a young man.

He cut at the tufted grasses with his stick, swinging it in dexterous circles as if it had been his sword. He found himself humming a tune almost unconsciously, but when he paused to consider what the tune was he found it was the national march of Gloria. Then he stopped humming, and went on for a while silently and less joyously. But the gladness of the fine morning, of the clear air, of the familiar place, took possession of him again. His face once more unclouded and his spirits mounted.

‘The place hasn’t changed much,’ he said to himself, looking around him while he walked. Then he corrected himself, for it had changed a good deal. There were many more red brick houses dotting the landscape than there

had been when he last looked upon it some seven years earlier.

In all directions these red houses were springing up, quaintly gabled, much verandahed, pointed, fantastic, brilliant. They made the whole neighbourhood of the Heath look like the Merrie England of a comic opera. Yet they were pretty in their way ; many were designed by able architects, and pleased with a balanced sense of proportion and an impression of beauty and fitness. Many, of course, lacked this, were but cheap and clumsy imitations of a prevailing mode, but, taken all together, the effect was agreeable, the effect of the varied reds, russet, and scarlet and warm crimson against the fresh green of the grass and trees and the pale faint blue of the May sky.

To the observer they seemed to suit very well the place, the climate, the conditions of life. They were infinitely better than suburban

and rural cottages people used to build when he was a boy. His mind drifted away to the kind of houses he had been more familiar with of late years, houses half Spanish, half tropical, with their wide courtyards and gaily striped awnings and white walls glaring under a glaring sun.

‘Yes, all this is very restful,’ he thought—‘restful, peaceful, wholesome.’ He found himself repeating softly the lines of Browning, beginning, ‘Oh to be in England now that April’s here,’ and the transitions of thought carried him to that other poem beginning ‘It was roses, roses, all the way,’ with its satire on fallen ambition. Thinking of it, he first frowned and then laughed.

He walked a little way, cresting the rising ground, till he came to an open space with an unbroken view over the level country to Barnet. Here, the last of the houses that could claim to belong to the great London army

stood alone in its own considerable space of ground. It was a very old-fashioned house; it had been half farmhouse, half hall, in the latter days of the last century, and the dull red brick of its walls, and the dull red tiles of its roof showed warm and attractive through the green of the encircling trees. There was a small garden in front, planted with pine trees, through which a winding path led up to the low porch of the dwelling. Behind the house a very large garden extended, a great garden which he knew so well, with its lengths of undulating russet orchard wall, and its divisions into flower garden and fruit garden and vegetable garden, and the field beyond, where successive generations of ponies fed, and where he had loved to play in boyhood.

He rested his hand on the upper rim of the garden gate, and looked with curious affection at the inscription in faded gold letters that ran along it. The inscription read, 'Bla-

rulfsgarth,' and he remembered ever so far back asking what that inscription meant, and being told that it was Icelandic, and that it meant the Garth, or Farm, of the Blue Wolf. And he remembered, too, being told the tale from which the name came, a tale that was related of an ancestor of his, real or imaginary, who had lived and died centuries ago in a grey northern land. It was curious that, as he stood there, so many recollections of his childhood should come back to him. He was a man, and not a very young man, when he last laid his hand upon that gate, and yet it seemed to him now as if he had left it when he was quite a little child, and was returning now for the first time with the feelings of a man to the place where he had passed his infancy.

His hand slipped down to the latch, but he did not yet lift it. He still lingered while he turned for a moment and looked over the wide extent of level smiling country that stretched

out and away before him. The last time he had looked on that sweep of earth he was going off to seek adventure in a far land, in a new world. He had thought himself a broken man; he was sick of England; his thoughts in their desperation had turned to the country which was only a name to him, the country where he was born. Now the day came vividly back to him on which he had said good-bye to that place, and looked with a melancholy disdain upon the soft English fields. It was an earlier season of the year, a day towards the end of March, when the skies were still but faintly blue, and there was little green abroad. Ten years ago: how many things had passed in those ten years, what struggles and successes, what struggles again, all ending in that three days' fight and the last stand in the Plaza Nacional of Valdorado! He turned away from the scene and pressed his hand upon the latch.

As he touched the latch someone appeared in the porch. It was an old lady dressed in black. She had soft grey hair, and on that grey hair she wore an old-fashioned cap that was almost coquettish by very reason of its old fashion. She had a very sweet, kind face, all cockled with wrinkles like a sheet of crumpled tissue paper, but very beautiful in its age. It was a face that a modern French painter would have loved to paint—a face that a sculptor of the Renaissance would have delighted to reproduce in faithful, faultless bronze or marble.

At sight of the sweet old lady the Dictator's heart gave a great leap, and he pressed down the latch hurriedly and swung the gate wide open. The sound of the clicking latch and the swinging gate slightly grinding on the path aroused the old lady's attention. She saw the Dictator, and, with a little cry of joy, running with an almost girlish activity to meet

the bearded man who was coming rapidly along the pathway, in another moment she had caught him in her arms and was clasping him and kissing him enthusiastically. The Dictator returned her caresses warmly. He was smiling, but there were tears in his eyes. It was so odd being welcomed back like this in the old place after all that had passed.

‘I knew you would come to-day, my dear,’ the old lady said half sobbing, half laughing. ‘You said you would, and I knew you would. You would come to your old aunt first of all.’

‘Why, of course, of course I would, my dear,’ the Dictator answered, softly touching the grey hair on the forehead below the frilled cap.

‘But I didn’t expect you so early,’ the old lady went on. ‘I didn’t think you would get up so soon on your first morning.’

You must be so tired, my dear, so very tired.'

She was holding his left hand in her right now, and they were walking slowly side by side up by the little path through the fir trees to the house.

'Oh, I'm not so very tired as all that comes to,' he said with a laugh. 'A long voyage is a restful thing, and I had time to get over the fatigue of the——' he seemed to pause an instant for a word; then he went on, 'the trouble, while I was on board the "Almirante Cochrane." Do you know they were quite kind to me on board the "Almirante Cochrane"?''

The old lady's delicate face flushed angrily. 'The wretches, the wicked wretches!' she said quite fiercely, and the thin fingers closed tightly upon his and shook, agitating the lace ruffles at her wrists.

The Dictator laughed again. It seemed too strange to have all those wild adventures quietly discussed in a Hampstead garden with a silver-haired elderly lady in a cap.

‘Oh, come,’ he said, ‘they weren’t so bad ; they weren’t half bad, really. Why, you know, they might have shot me out of hand. I think if I had been in their place I should have shot out of hand, do you know, aunt?’

‘Oh, surely they would never have dared—you an Englishman?’

‘I am a citizen of Gloria, aunt.’

‘You who were so good to them.’

‘Well, as to my being good to them, there are two to tell that tale. The gentlemen of the Congress don’t put a high price upon my goodness, I fancy.’ He laughed a little bitterly. ‘I certainly meant to do them some good, and I even thought I had suc-

ceeded. My dear aunt, people don't always like being done good to. I remember that myself when I was a small boy. I used to fret and fume at the things which were done for my good ; that was because I was a child. The crowd is always a child.'

They had come to the porch by this time, and had stopped short at the threshold. The little porch was draped in flowers and foliage, and looked very pretty.

'You were always a good child,' said the old lady affectionately.

Ericson looked down at her rather wistfully.

'Do you think I was?' he asked, and there was a tender irony in his voice which made the playful question almost pathetic. 'If I had been a good child I should have been content and had no roving disposition, and have found my home and my world at Hampstead, instead of straying off into

another hemisphere, only to be sent back at last like a bad penny.'

'So you would,' said the old lady, very softly, more as if she were speaking to herself than to him. 'So you would if——'

She did not finish her sentence. But her nephew, who knew and understood, repeated the last word.

'If,' he said, and he, too, sighed.

The old lady caught the sound, and with a pretty little air of determination she called up a smile to her face.

'Shall we go into the house, or shall we sit awhile in the garden? It is almost too fine a day to be indoors.'

'Oh, let us sit out, please,' said Ericson. He had driven the sorrow from his voice, and its tones were almost joyous. 'Is the old garden-seat still there?'

'Why, of course it is. I sit there always in fine weather.'

They wandered round to the back by a path that skirted the house, a path all broidered with rose-bushes. At the back, the garden was very large, beginning with a spacious stretch of lawn that ran right up to the wide French windows. There were several noble old trees which stood sentinel over this part of the garden, and beneath one of these trees, a very ancient elm, was the sturdy garden-seat which the Dictator remembered so well.

‘How many pleasant fairy tales you have told me under this tree, aunt,’ said the Dictator, as soon as they had sat down. ‘I should like to lie on the grass again and listen to your voice, and dream of Njal, and Grettir, and Sigurd, as I used to do.’

‘It is your turn to tell me stories now,’ said the old lady. ‘Not fairy stories, but true ones.’

The Dictator laughed. ‘You know all that

there is to tell,' he said. 'What my letters didn't say you must have found from the newspapers.'

'But I want to know more than you wrote, more than the newspapers gave—everything.'

'In fact, you want a full, true, and particular account of the late remarkable revolution in Gloria, which ended in the deposition and exile of the alien tyrant. My dear aunt, it would take a couple of weeks at the least computation to do the theme justice.'

'I am sure that I shouldn't tire of listening,' said Miss Ericson, and there were tears in her bright old eyes and a tremor in her brave old voice as she said so.

The Dictator laughed, but he stooped and kissed the old lady again very affectionately.

'Why, you would be as bad as I used to be,' he said. 'I never was tired of your

sagas, and when one came to an end I wanted a new one at once, or at least the old one over again.'

He looked away from her and all around the garden as he spoke. The winds and rains and suns of all those years had altered it but little.

'We talk of the shortness of life,' he said; 'but sometimes life seems quite long. Think of the years and years since I was a little fellow, and sat here where I sit now, then, as now, by your side, and cried at the deeds of my forbears and sighed for the gods of the North. Do you remember?'

'Oh, yes; oh, yes. How could I forget? You, my dear, in your bustling life might forget; but I, day after day in this great old garden, may be forgiven for an old woman's fancy that time has stood still, and that you are still the little boy I love so well.'

She held out her hand to him, and he clasped it tenderly, full of an affectionate emotion that did not call for speech.

There were somewhat similar thoughts in both their minds. He was asking himself if, after all, it would not have been just as well to remain in that tranquil nook, so sheltered from the storms of life, so consecrated by tender affection. What had he done that was worth rising up to cross the street for, after all? He had dreamed a dream, and had been harshly awakened. What was the good of it all? A melancholy seemed to settle upon him in that place, so filled with the memories of his childhood. As for his companion, she was asking herself if it would not have been better for him to stay at home and live a quiet English life, and be her help and solace.

Both looked up from their reverie, met each other's melancholy glances, and smiled.

‘Why,’ said Miss Ericson, ‘what nonsense

this is! Here are we who have not met for ages, and we can find nothing better to do than to sit and brood! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves.'

'We ought,' said the Dictator, 'and for my poor part I am. So you want to hear my adventures?'

Miss Ericson nodded, but the narrative was interrupted. The wide French windows at the back of the house opened and a man entered the garden. His smooth voice was heard explaining to the maid that he would join Miss Ericson in the garden.

The new-comer made his way along the garden, with extended hand, and blinking amiably. The Dictator, turning at his approach, surveyed him with some surprise. He was a large, loosely made man, with a large white face, and his somewhat ungainly body was clothed in loose light material that was almost white in hue. His large and slightly

surprised eyes were of a kindly blue ; his hair was a vague yellow ; his large mouth was weak ; his pointed chin was undecided. He dimly suggested some association to the Dictator ; after a few seconds he found that the association was with the Knave of Hearts in an ordinary pack of playing-cards.

‘ This is a friend of mine, a neighbour who often pays me a visit,’ said the old lady hurriedly, as the white figure loomed along towards them. ‘ He is a most agreeable man, very companionable indeed, and learned, too—extremely learned.’

This was all that she had time to say before the white gentleman came too close to them to permit of further conversation concerning his merits or defects.

The new-comer raised his hat, a huge, white, loose, shapeless felt, in keeping with his ill-defined attire, and made an awkward bow which at once included the old lady and the

Dictator, on whom the blue eyes beamed for a moment in good-natured wonder.

‘Good morning, Miss Ericson,’ said the new-comer. He spoke to Miss Ericson; but it was evident that his thoughts were distracted. His vague blue eyes were fixed in benign bewilderment upon the Dictator’s face.

Miss Ericson rose; so did her nephew. Miss Ericson spoke.

‘Good morning, Mr. Sarrasin. Let me present you to my nephew, of whom you have heard so much. Nephew, this is Mr. Gilbert Sarrasin.’

The new-comer extended both hands; they were very large hands, and very soft and very white. He enfolded the Dictator’s extended right hand in one of his, and beamed upon him in unaffected joy.

‘Not your nephew, Miss Ericson—not the hero of the hour? Is it possible; is it pos-

sible? My dear sir, my very dear and honoured sir, I cannot tell you how rejoiced I am, how proud I am, to have the privilege of meeting you.'

The Dictator returned his friendly clasp with a warm pressure. He was somewhat amused by this unexpected enthusiasm.

'You are very good indeed, Mr. Sarrasin.' Then, repeating the name to himself, he added, 'Your name seems to be familiar to me.'

The white gentleman shook his head with something like playful repudiation.

'Not my name, I think ; no, not my name, I feel sure.' He accentuated the possessive pronoun strongly, and then proceeded to explain the accentuation, smiling more and more amiably as he did so. 'No, not my name ; my brother's—my brother's, I fancy.'

'Your brother's?' the Dictator said inquiringly. There was some association in

his mind with the name of Sarrasin, but he could not reduce it to precise knowledge.

‘Yes, my brother,’ said the white gentleman. ‘My brother, Oisín Stewart Sarrasin, whose name, I am proud to think, is familiar in many parts of the world.’

The recollection he was seeking came to the Dictator. It was the name that Hamilton had given to him that morning, the name of the man who had written to him, and who had signed himself ‘a soldier of fortune.’ He smiled back at the white gentleman.

‘Yes,’ he said truthfully, ‘I have heard your brother’s name. It is a striking name.’

The white gentleman was delighted. He rubbed his large white hands together, and almost seemed as if he might purr in the excess of his gratification. He glanced enthusiastically at Miss Ericson.

‘Ah!’ he went on. ‘My brother is a remarkable man. I may even say so in your

illustrious presence ; he is a remarkable man. There are degrees, of course,' and he bowed apologetically to the Dictator ; 'but he is remarkable.'

'I have not the least doubt of that,' said the Dictator politely.

The white gentleman seemed much pleased. At a sign from Miss Ericson he sat down upon a garden-chair, still slowly and contentedly rubbing his white hands together. Miss Ericson and her nephew resumed their seats.

'Captain Sarrasin is a great traveller,' Miss Ericson said explanatorily to the Dictator. The Dictator bowed his head. He did not quite know what to say, and so, for the moment, said nothing. The white gentleman took advantage of the pause.

'Yes,' he said, 'yes, my brother is a great traveller. A wonderful man, sir ; all parts of the wide world are as familiar as home to him. The deserts of the nomad Arabs, the

Prairies of the great West, the Steppes of the frozen North, the Pampas of South America ; why, he knows them all better than most people know Piccadilly.'

'South America?' questioned the Dictator ; 'your brother is acquainted with South America?'

'Intimately acquainted,' replied Mr. Sarrasin. 'I hope you will meet him. You and he might have much to talk about. He knew Gloria in the old days.'

The Dictator expressed courteously his desire to have the pleasure of meeting Captain Sarrasin. 'And you, are you a traveller as well?' he asked.

Mr. Sarrasin shook his head, and when he spoke there was a certain accent of plain-tiveness in his reply.

'No,' he said, 'not at all, not at all. My brother and I resemble each other very slightly. He has the wanderer's spirit ; I am

a confirmed stay-at-home. While he thinks nothing of starting off at any moment for the other ends of the earth, I have never been outside our island, have never been much away from London.'

'Isn't that curious?' asked Miss Ericson, who evidently took much pleasure in the conversation of the white gentleman. The Dictator assented. It was very curious.

'Yet I am fond of travel, too, in my way,' Mr. Sarrasin went on, delighted to have found an appreciative audience. 'I read about it largely. I read all the old books of travel, and all the new ones, too, for the matter of that. I have quite a little library of voyages, travels, and explorations in my little home. I should like you to see it some time if you should so far honour me.'

The Dictator declared that he should be delighted. Mr. Sarrasin, much encouraged, went on again.

‘There is nothing I like better than to sit by my fire of a winter’s evening, or in my garden of a summer afternoon, and read of the adventures of great travellers. It makes me feel as if I had travelled myself.’

‘And Mr. Sarrasin tells me what he has read, and makes me, too, feel travelled,’ said Miss Ericson.

‘Perhaps you get all the pleasure in that way with none of the fatigue,’ the Dictator suggested.

Mr. Sarrasin nodded. ‘Very likely we do. I think it was à Kempis who protested against the vanity of wandering. But I fear it was not à Kempis’s reasons that deterred me; but an invincible laziness and unconquerable desire to be doing nothing.’

‘Travelling is generally uncomfortable,’ the Dictator admitted. He was beginning to feel an interest in his curious, whimsical interlocutor.

‘Yes,’ Mr. Sarrasin went on dreamily. ‘But there are times when I regret the absence of experience. I have tramped in fancy through tropical forests with Stanley or Cameron, dwelt in the desert with Burton, battled in Nicaragua with Walker, but all only as it were in dreams.’

‘We are such stuff as dreams are made of,’ the Dictator observed sententiously.

‘And our little lives are rounded by a sleep,’ Miss Ericson said softly, completing the quotation.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Mr. Sarrasin; ‘but mine are dreams within a dream.’ He was beginning to grow quite communicative as he sat there with his big stick between his knees, and his amorphous felt hat pushed back from his broad white forehead.

‘Sometimes my travels seem very real to me. If I have been reading Ford or Kinglake, or Warburton or Lane, I have but to

lay the volume down and close my eyes, and all that I have been reading about seems to take shape and sound, and colour and life. I hear the tinkling of the mule-bells and the guttural cries of the muleteers, and I see the Spanish market-place, with its arcades and its ancient cathedral; or the delicate pillars of the Parthenon, yellow in the clear Athenian air; or Stamboul, where the East and West join hands; or Egypt and the desert, and the Nile and the pyramids; or the Holy Land and the walls of Jerusalem—ah! it is all very wonderful, and then I open my eyes and blink at my dying fire, and look at my slippered feet, and remember that I am a stout old gentleman who has never left his native land, and I yawn and take my candle and go to my bed.'

There was something so curiously pathetic and yet comic about the white gentleman's case, about his odd blend of bookish know-

ledge and personal inexperience, that the Dictator could scarcely forbear smiling. But he did forbear, and he spoke with all gravity.

‘I am not sure that you haven’t the better part after all,’ he said. ‘I find that the chief pleasure of travel lies in recollection. *You* seem to get the recollection without the trouble.’

‘Perhaps so,’ said Mr. Sarrasin; ‘perhaps so. But I think I would rather have had the trouble as well. Believe me, my dear sir, believe a dreamer, that action is better than dreams. Ah! how much better it is for you, sir, to sit here, a disappointed man for the moment it may be, but a man with a glowing past behind him, than, like me, to have nothing to look back upon! My adventures are but compounded out of the essences of many books. I have never really lived a day; you have lived every day of your life. Believe me, you are much to be envied.’

There was genuine conviction in the white gentleman's voice as he spoke these words, and the note of genuine conviction troubled the Dictator in his uncertainty whether to laugh or cry. He chose a medium course and smiled slightly.

‘I should think, Mr. Sarrasin, that you are the only one in London to-day who looks upon me as a man much to be envied. London, if it thinks of me at all, thinks of me only as a disastrous failure, as an unsuccessful exile—a man of no account, in a word.’

Mr. Sarrasin shook his head vehemently. ‘It is not so,’ he protested, ‘not so at all. Nobody really thinks like that, but if everybody else did, my brother Oisin Stewart Sarrasin certainly does not think like that, and his opinion is better worth having than that of most other men. You have no warmer admirer in the world than my brother, Mr. Ericson.’

The Dictator expressed much satisfaction at having earned the good opinion of Mr. Sarrasin's brother.

'You would like him, I am sure,' said Mr. Sarrasin. 'You would find him a kindred spirit.'

The Dictator graciously expressed his confidence that he should find a kindred spirit in Mr. Sarrasin's brother. Then Mr. Sarrasin, apparently much delighted with his interview, rose to his feet and declared that it was time for him to depart. He shook hands very warmly with Miss Ericson, but he held the Dictator's hands with a grasp that was devoted in its enthusiasm. Then, expressing repeatedly the hope that he might soon meet the Dictator again, and once more assuring him of the kinship between the Dictator and Captain Oisin Stewart Sarrasin, the white gentleman took himself off, a pale bulky figure looming heavily across the grassy

lawn and through the French window into the darkness of the sitting-room.

When he was quite out of sight the Dictator, who had followed his retreating figure with his eyes, turned to Miss Ericson with a look of inquiry. Miss Ericson smiled.

‘Who is Mr. Sarrasin?’ the Dictator asked. ‘He has come up since my time.’

‘Oh, yes; he first came to live here about six years ago. He is one of the best souls in the world; simple, good-hearted, an eternal child.’

‘What *is* he?’ the Dictator asked.

‘Well, he is nothing in particular now. He was in the City, his father was the head of a very wealthy firm of tea merchants, Sarrasin, Jermyn, & Co. When the father died a few years ago he left all his property to Mr. Gilbert, and then Mr. Gilbert went out of business and came here.’

‘He does not look as if he would make a very good business man,’ said the Dictator.

‘No; but he was very patient and devoted to it for his father’s sake. Now, since he has been free to do as he likes, he has devoted himself to folk-lore.’

‘To folk-lore?’

‘Yes, to the study of fairy tales, of comparative mythology. I am quite learned in it now since I have had Mr. Sarrasin for a neighbour, and know more about “Puss in Boots” and “Jack and the Beanstalk” than I ever did when I was a girl.’

‘Really,’ said the Dictator, with a kind of sigh. ‘Does he devote himself to fairy tales?’ It crossed his mind that a few moments before he had been thinking of himself as a small child in that garden, with a taste for fairy tales, and regretting that he had not stayed in that garden. Now, with the dust of battle and the ashes of defeat upon him, he came

back to find a man much older than himself, who seemed still to remain a child, and to be entranced with fairy tales. 'I wish I were like that,' the Dictator said to himself, and then the veil seemed to lift, and he saw again the Plaza Nacional of Gloria, and the Government Palace, where he had laboured at laws for a free people. 'No,' he thought, 'no; action, action.'

'What are you thinking of?' asked Miss Ericson softly. 'You seem to be quite lost in thought.'

'I was thinking of Mr. Sarrasin,' answered the Dictator. 'Forgive me for letting my thoughts drift. And the brother, what sort of man is this wonderful brother?'

'I have only seen the brother a very few times,' said Miss Ericson dubiously. 'I can hardly form an opinion. I do not think he is as nice as his brother, or, indeed, as nice as his brother believes him to be.'

‘What is his record?’

‘He didn’t get on with his father. He was sent against his will to China to work in the firm’s offices in Shanghai. But he hated the business, and broke away and entered the Chinese army, I believe, and his father was furious and cut him off. Since then he has been all over the world, and served all sorts of causes. I believe he is a kind of soldier of fortune.’

The Dictator smiled, remembering Captain Sarrasin’s own words.

‘And has he made his fortune?’

‘Oh, no; I believe not. But Gilbert behaved so well. When he came into the property he wanted to share it all with his disinherited brother, for whom he has the greatest affection.’

‘A good fellow, your Gilbert Sarrasin.’

‘The best. But the brother wouldn’t take it, and it was with difficulty that Gilbert in-

duced him to accept so much as would allow him a small certainty of income.'

'So. A good fellow, too, your Oisín Stewart Sarrasin, it would seem; at least in that particular.'

'Yes; of course. The brothers don't meet very often, for Captain Sarrasin——'

'Where does he take his title from?'

'He was captain in some Turkish irregular cavalry.'

'Turkish irregular cavalry? That must be a delightful corps,' the Dictator said with a smile.

'At least he was captain in several services,' Miss Ericson went on; 'but I believe that is the one he prefers and still holds. As I was going to say, Captain Sarrasin is almost always abroad.'

'Well, I feel curious to meet him. They are a strange pair of brothers.'

'They are, but we ought to talk of nothing

but you to-day. Ah, my dear, it is so good to have you with me again.'

'Dear old aunt!'

'Let me see much of you now that you have come back. Would it be any use asking you to stop here?'

'Later, every use. Just at this moment I mustn't. Till I see how things are going to turn out I must live down there in London. But my heart is here with you in this green old garden, and where my heart is I hope to bring my battered old body very often. I will stop to luncheon with you if you will let me.'

'Let you? My dear, I wish you were always stopping here.' And the grey old lady put her arms round the neck of the Dictator and kissed him again.

CHAPTER IV

THE LANGLEYS

THAT same day there was a luncheon party at the new town house of the Langleys, Prince's Gate. The Langleys were two in number all told, father and daughter.

Sir Rupert Langley was a remarkable man, but his daughter, Helena Langley, was a much more remarkable woman. The few handfuls of people who considered themselves to constitute the world in London had at one time talked much about Sir Rupert, but now they talked a great deal more about his daughter. Sir Rupert was once grimly amused, at a great party in a great house, to

hear himself pointed out by a knowing youth as Helena Langley's father.

There was a time when people thought, and Sir Rupert thought with them, that Rupert Langley was to do great deeds in the world. He had entered political life at an early age, as all the Langleys had done since the days of Anne, and he made more than a figure there. He had travelled in Central Asia in days when travel there or anywhere else was not so easy as it is now, and he had published a book of his travels before he was three-and-twenty, a book which was highly praised, and eagerly read. He was saluted as a sort of coming authority upon Eastern affairs in a day when the importance of Eastern affairs was beginning to dawn dimly upon the insular mind, and he made several stirring speeches in the House of Commons which confirmed his reputation as a coming man. He was very dogmatic, very

determined in his opinions, very confident of his own superior knowledge, and possessed of a degree of knowledge which justified his confidence and annoyed his antagonists. He formed a little party of his own, a party of strenuous young Tories who recognised the fact that the world was out of joint, but who rejoiced in the conviction that they were born for the express purpose of setting it right. In Sir Rupert they found a leader after their own heart, and they rallied around him and jibed at their elders on the Treasury Bench in a way that was quite distressing to the sensitive organs of the party.

Sir Rupert and his adherents preached the new Toryism of that day—the new Toryism which was to work wonders, which was to obliterate Radicalism by doing in a practical Tory way, and conformably to the best traditions of the kingdom, all that Radicalism dreamed of. Toryism, he used to say in those

hot-blooded, hot-headed days of his youth, Toryism is the triumph of Truth, and the phrase became a catchword and a watchword, and frivolous people called his little party the T.T.s—the Triumphers of Truth. People versed in the political history of that day and hour will remember how the newspapers were full of the T.T.s, and what an amazing rejuvenescence of political force was supposed to be behind them.

Then came a general election which carried the Tory Party into power, and which proved the strength of Langley and his party. He was offered a place in the new Government, and accepted it—the Under-Secretaryship for India. Through one brilliant year he remained the most conspicuous member of the Administration, irritating his colleagues by daring speeches, by innovating schemes; alarming timid party-men by a Toryism which in certain aspects was scarcely to be distin-

guished from the reddest Radicalism. One brilliant year there was in which he blazed the comet of a season. Then, thwarted in some enterprise, faced by a refusal for some daring reform of Indian administration, he acted, as he had acted always, impetuously.

One morning the 'Times' contained a long, fierce, witty, bitter letter from Rupert Langley assailing the Government, its adherents, and, above all, its leaders in the Lords. That same afternoon members coming to the Chamber found Langley sitting, no longer on the Treasury Bench, but in the corner seat of the second row below the gangway. It was soon known all over the House, all over town, all over England, that Rupert Langley had resigned his office. The news created no little amazement, some consternation in certain quarters of the Tory camp, some amusement among the Opposition sections. One or two of the extreme Radical papers made overtures

to Langley to cross the floor of the House, and enter into alliance with men whose principles so largely resembled his own. These overtures even took the form of a definite appeal on the part of Mr. Wynter, M.P., then a rising Radical, who actually spent half an hour with Sir Rupert on the terrace, putting his case and the case of youthful Radicalism.

Sir Rupert only smiled at the suggestion, and put it gracefully aside. 'I am a Tory of the Tories,' he said; 'only my own people don't understand me yet. But they have got to find me out.' That was undoubtedly Sir Rupert's conviction, that he was strong enough to force the Government, to coerce his party, to compel recognition of his opinions and acceptance of his views. 'They cannot do without me,' he said to himself in his secret heart. He was met by disappointment. The party chiefs made no overtures to him to reconsider his decision, to withdraw his resigna-

tion. Another man was immediately put in his place, a man of mediocre ability, of commonplace mind, a man of routine, methodical, absolutely lacking in brilliancy or originality, a man who would do exactly what the Government wanted in the Government way. There was a more bitter blow still for Sir Rupert. There were in the Government certain members of his own little Adullamite party of the Opposition days, T.T.s who had been given office at his insistence, men whom he had discovered, brought forward, educated for political success.

It is certain that Sir Rupert confidently expected that these men, his comrades and followers, would endorse his resignation with their own, and that the Government would thus, by his action, find itself suddenly crippled, deprived of its young blood, its ablest Ministers. The confident expectation

was not realised. The T.T.s remained where they were. The Government took advantage of the slight readjustment of places caused by Sir Rupert's resignation to give two of the most prominent T.T.s more important offices, and to those offices the T.T.s stuck like limpets.

Sir Rupert was not a man to give way readily, or readily to acknowledge that he was defeated. He bided his time, in his place below the gangway, till there came an Indian debate. Then, in a House which had been roused to intense excitement by vague rumours of his intention, he moved a resolution which was practically a vote of censure upon the Government for its Indian policy. Always a fluent, ready, ornate speaker, Sir Rupert was never better than on that desperate night. His attack upon the Government was merciless; every word seemed to sting like a poisoned arrow; his exposure of the

imbecilities and ineptitudes of the existing system of administration was complete and cruel ; his scornful attack upon ' the Limpets ' sent the Opposition into paroxysms of delighted laughter, and roused a storm of angry protest from the crowded benches behind the Ministry. That night was the memorable event of the session. For long enough after those who witnessed it carried in their memories the picture of that pale, handsome young man, standing up in that corner seat below the gangway and assailing the Ministry of which he had been the most remarkable Minister with so much cold passion, so much fierce disdain. ' By Jove ! he's smashed them ! ' cried Wynter, M.P., excitedly, when Rupert Langley sat down after his speech of an hour and a quarter, which had been listened to by a crowded House amidst a storm of cheering and disapproval. Wynter was sitting on a lower

gangway seat, for every space of sitting room in the chamber was occupied that night, and he had made this remark to one of the Opposition leaders on the front bench, craning over to call it into his ear. The leader of the Opposition heard Wynter's remark, looked round at the excited Radical, and, smiling, shook his head. The excitement faded from Wynter's face. His chief was never wrong.

The usual exodus after a long speech did not take place when Rupert sat down. It was expected that the leader of the House would reply to Sir Rupert, but the expectation was not realised. To the surprise of almost everyone present the Government put up as their spokesman one of the men who had been most allied with Sir Rupert in the old T.T. party, Sidney Blenheim. Something like a frown passed over Sir Rupert's face as Blenheim rose; then he sat immovable, expressionless, while Blenheim made

his speech. It was a very clever speech, delicately ironical, sharply cutting, tinged all through with an intolerable condescension, with a gallingly gracious recognition of Langley's merits, an irritating regret for his errors. There was a certain languidness in Blenheim's deportment, a certain air of sweetness in his face, which made his satire the more severe, his attack the more telling. People were as much surprised as if what looked like a dandy's cane had proved to be a sword of tempered steel. Whatever else that night did, it made Blenheim's reputation.

Langley did not carry a hundred men with him into the lobby against the Government. The Opposition, as a body, supported the Administration; a certain proportion of Radicals, a much smaller number of men from his own side, followed him to his fall. He returned to his seat after the numbers had been read out, and sat there as com-

posedly as if nothing had happened, or as if the ringing cheers which greeted the Government triumph were so many tributes to his own success. But those who knew, or thought they knew, Rupert Langley well said that the hour in which he sat there must have been an hour of terrible suffering. After that great debate, the business of the rest of the evening fell rather flat, and was conducted in a House which rapidly thinned down to little short of emptiness. When it was at its emptiest, Rupert Langley rose, lifted his hat to the Speaker, and left the Chamber.

It would not be strictly accurate to say that he never returned to it that session; but practically the statement would be correct. He came back occasionally during the short remainder of the session, and sat in his new place below the gangway. Once or twice he put a question upon the paper; once or twice

he contributed a short speech to some debate. He still spoke to his friends, with cold confidence, of his inevitable return to influence, to power, to triumph; he did not say how this would be brought about—he left it to be assumed.

Then paragraphs began to appear in the papers announcing Sir Rupert Langley's intention of spending the recess in a prolonged tour in India. Before the recess came Sir Rupert had started upon this tour, which was extended far beyond a mere investigation of the Indian Empire. When the House met again, in the February of the following year, Sir Rupert was not among the returned members. Such few of his friends as were in communication with him knew, and told their knowledge to others, that Sir Rupert was engaged in a voyage round the world. Not a voyage round the world in the hurried sense in which people occasionally made then,

and frequently make now—a voyage round the world, scampering, like the hero of Jules Verne, across land and sea, fast as steam-engine can drag and steamship carry them. Sir Rupert intended to go round the world in the most leisurely fashion, stopping everywhere, seeing everything, setting no limit to the time he might spend in any place that pleased him, fixing beforehand no limit to chain him to any place that did not please him. He proposed, his friends said, to go carefully over his old ground in Central Asia, to make himself a complete master of the problems of Australasian colonisation, and especially to make a very profound and exhaustive study of the strange civilisations of China and Japan. He intended further to give a very considerable time to a leisurely investigation of the South American Republics. ‘Why,’ said Wynter, M.P., when one of Sir Rupert’s friends told him of these

plans, 'why, such a scheme will take several years.' 'Very likely,' the friend answered; and Wynter said, 'Oh, by Jove!' and whistled.

The scheme did take several years. At various intervals Sir Rupert wrote to his constituents long letters spangled with stirring allusions to the Empire, to England's meteor flag, to the inevitable triumph of the New Toryism, to the necessity a sincere British statesman was under of becoming a complete master of all the possible problems of a daily-increasing authority. He made some sharp thrusts at the weakness of the Government, but accused the Opposition of a lack of patriotism in trading upon that weakness; he almost chaffed the leader in the Lower House and the leader in the Lords; he made no allusion to Sidney Blenheim, then rapidly advancing along the road of success. He concluded each letter by

offering to resign his seat if his constituents wished it.

His constituents did not wish it—at least, not at first. The Conservative committee returned him a florid address assuring him of their confidence in his statesmanship, but expressing the hope that he might be able speedily to return to represent them at Westminster, and the further hope that he might be able to see his way to reconcile his difficulties with the existing Government. To this address Sir Rupert sent a reply duly acknowledging its expression of confidence, but taking no notice of its suggestions. Time went on, and Sir Rupert did not return. He was heard of now and again; now in the court of some rajah in the North-West Provinces, now in the khanate of some Central Asian despot; now in South America, from which continent he sent a long letter to the ‘Times,’ giving an interesting account of the

latest revolution in the Gloria Republic, of which he had happened to be an eye-witness; now in Java; now in Pekin; now at the Cape. He did not seem to pursue his idea of going round the world on any settled consecutive plan.

Of his large means there could be no doubt. He was probably one of the richest, as he was certainly one of the oldest, baronets in England, and he could afford to travel as if he were an accredited representative of the Queen—almost as if he were an American Midas of the fourth or fifth class. But as to his large leisure people began to say things. It began to be hinted in leading articles that it was scarcely fair that Sir Rupert's constituents should be disfranchised because it pleased a disappointed politician to drift idly about the world. These hints had their effect upon the disfranchised constituents, who began to grumble. The Conservative

Committee was goaded almost to the point of addressing a remonstrance to Sir Rupert, then in the interior of Japan, urging him to return or resign, when the need for any such action was taken out of their hands by a somewhat unexpected General Election. Sir Rupert telegraphed back to announce his intention of remaining abroad for the present, and of not, therefore, proposing to seek just then the suffrages of the electors. Sidney Blenheim succeeded in getting a close personal friend of his own, who was also his private secretary, accepted by the Conservative Committee, and he was returned at the head of the poll by a slightly decreased majority.

Sir Rupert remained away from England for several years longer. After he had gone round the world in the most thorough sense, he revisited many places where he had been before, and stayed there for longer periods.

It began to seem as if he did not really intend to return to England at all. His communications with his friends grew fewer and shorter, but wandering Parliamentarians in the recess occasionally came across him in the course of an extended holiday, and always found him affable, interested to animation in home politics, and always suggesting by his manner, though never in his speech, that he would some day return to his old place and his old fame. Of Sidney Blenheim he spoke with an equable, impartial composure.

At last one day he did come home. He had been in the United States during the closing years of the American Civil War, and in Washington, when peace was concluded, he had met at the English Ministry a young girl of great beauty, of a family that was old for America, that was wealthy, though not wealthy for America. He fell in love with her, wooed her, and was accepted. They

were married in Washington, and soon after the marriage they returned to England. They settled down for a while at the old home of the Langleys, the home whose site had been the home of the race ever since the Conquest. Part of an old Norman tower still held itself erect amidst the Tudor, Elizabethan, and Victorian additions to the ancient place. It was called Queen's Langley now, had been so called ever since the days when, in the beginning of the Civil War, Henrietta Maria had been besieged there during her visit to the then baronet by a small party of Roundheads, and had successfully kept them off. Queen's Langley had been held during the Commonwealth by a member of the family, who had declared for the Parliament, but had gone back to the head of the house when he returned with his king at the Restoration.

At Queen's Langley Sir Rupert and his wife abode for a while, and at Queen's

Langley a child was born to them, a girl child, who was christened after her mother, Helena. Then the taste for wandering which had become almost a passion with Sir Rupert took possession of Sir Rupert again. If he had expected to re-enter London in any kind of triumph he was disappointed. He had allowed himself to fall out of the race, and he found himself almost forgotten. Society, of course, received him almost rapturously, and his beautiful wife was the queen of a resplendent season. But politics seemed to have passed him by. The New Toryism of those youthful years was not very new Toryism now. Sidney Blenheim was a settled reactionary and a recognised celebrity. There was a New Toryism, with its new cave of strenuous, impetuous young men, and they, if they thought of Sir Rupert Langley at all, thought of him as old-fashioned, the hero or victim of a piece of ancient history.

Nevertheless, Sir Rupert had his thoughts of entering political life again, but in the meantime he was very happy. He had a steam yacht of his own, and when his little girl was three years old he and his wife went for a long cruise in the Mediterranean. And then his happiness was taken away from him. His wife suddenly sickened, died, unconscious, in his arms, and was buried at sea. Sir Rupert seemed like a broken man. From Alexandria he wrote to his sister, who was married to the Duke of Magdiel's third son, Lord Edmond Herrington, asking her to look after his child for him—the child was then with her aunt at Herrington Hall, in Argyllshire—in his absence. He sold his yacht, paid off his crew, and disappeared for two years.

During those two years he was believed to have wandered all over Egypt, and to have passed much of his time the hermit-like

tenant of a tomb on the lovely, lonely island of Phylæ, at the first cataract of the Nile. At the end of the two years he wrote to his sister that he was returning to Europe, to England, to his own home, and his own people. His little girl was then five years old.

He reappeared in England changed and aged, but a strong man still, with a more settled air of strength of purpose than he had worn in his wild youth. He found his little girl a pretty child, brilliantly healthy, brilliantly strong. The wind of the mountain, of the heather, of the woods, had quickened her with an enduring vitality very different from that of the delicate fair mother for whom his heart still grieved. Of course the little Helena did not remember her father, and was at first rather alarmed when Lady Edmond Herrington told her that a new papa was coming home for her from across the seas. But the feeling of fear passed away after the

first meeting between father and child. The fascination which in his younger days Rupert Langley had exercised upon so many men and women, which had made him so much of a leader in his youth, affected the child powerfully. In a week she was as devoted to him as if she had never been parted from him.

Helena's education was what some people would call a strange education. She was never sent to school; she was taught and taught much at home, first by a succession of clever governesses, then by carefully chosen masters of many languages and many arts. In almost all things her father was her chief instructor. He was a man of varied accomplishments; he was a good linguist, and his years of wandering had made his attainments in language really colloquial; he had a rich and various store of information gathered even more from personal experience than from

books. His great purpose in life appeared to be to make his daughter as accomplished as himself. People had said at first when he returned that he would marry again, but the assumption proved to be wrong. Sir Rupert had made up his mind that he would never marry again, and he kept to his determination. There was an intense sentimentality in his strong nature; the sentimentality which led him to take his early defeat and the defection of Sidney Blenheim so much to heart, had made him vow, on the day when the body of his fair young wife was lowered into the sea, changeless fidelity to her memory. Undoubtedly it was somewhat of a grief to him that there was no son to carry on his name; but he bore that grief in silence. He resolved, however, that his daughter should be in every way worthy of the old line which culminated in her; she should be a woman worthy to surrender the ancient name to

some exceptional mortal; she should be worthy to be the wife of some great statesman.

In those years in which Helena Langley was growing up from childhood to womanhood, Sir Rupert returned to public life. The constituency in which Queen's Langley was situated was a Tory constituency which had been represented for nearly half a century by the same old Tory squire. The Tory squire had a grandson who was as uncompromisingly Radical as the squire was Tory; naturally he could not succeed, and would not contest the seat. Sir Rupert came forward, was eagerly accepted, and successfully returned. His reappearance in the House of Commons after so considerable an interval made some small excitement in Westminster, roused some comment in the press. It was fifteen years since he had left St. Stephen's; he thought curiously of the past as he took

his place, not in that corner seat below the gangway, but on the second bench behind the Treasury Bench. His Toryism was now of a settled type; the Government, which had been a little apprehensive of his possible antagonism, found him a loyal and valuable supporter. He did not remain long behind the Treasury Bench. An important vacancy occurred in the Ministry; the post of Foreign Secretary was offered to and accepted by Sir Rupert. Years ago such a place would have seemed the highest goal of his ambition. Now he—accepted it. Once again he found himself a prominent man in the House of Commons, although under very different conditions from those of his old days.

In the meantime Helena grew in years and health, in beauty, in knowledge. Sir Rupert, as an infinite believer in the virtues of travel, took her with him every recess for extended expeditions to Europe, and, as she grew older,

to other continents than Europe. By the time that she was twenty, she knew much of the world from personal experience ; she knew more of politics and political life than many politicians. After she was seventeen years old she began to make frequent appearances in the Ladies' Gallery, and to take long walks on the Terrace with her father. Sir Rupert delighted in her companionship, she in his ; they were always happiest in each other's society. Sir Rupert had every reason to be proud of the graceful girl who united the beauty of her mother with the strength, the physical and mental strength, of her father.

It need surprise no one, it did not appear to surprise Sir Rupert, if such an education made Helena Langley what ill-natured people called a somewhat eccentric young woman. Brought up on a manly system of education, having a man for her closest companion,

learning much of the world at an early age, naturally tended to develop and sustain the strongly marked individuality of her character. Now, at three-and-twenty, she was one of the most remarkable girls in England, one of the best known girls in London. Her independence, both of thought and of action, her extended knowledge, her frankness of speech, her slightly satirical wit, her frequent and vehement enthusiasms for the most varied pursuits and pleasures, were much commented on, much admired by some, much disapproved of by others. She had many friends among women and more friends among men, and these were real friendships, not flirtations, nor love affairs of any kind. Whatever things Helena Langley did there was one thing she never did—she never flirted. Many men had been in love with her and had told their love, and had been laughed at or pitied according to the degree of their

deserts, but no one of them could honestly say that Helena had in any way encouraged his love-making, or tempted him with false hopes, unless indeed the masculine frankness of her friendship was an encouragement and a treacherous temptation. One and all, she unhesitatingly refused her adorers. 'My father is the most interesting man I know,' she once said to a discomfited and slightly despairing lover. 'Till I find some other man as interesting as he is, I shall never think of marriage. And really I am sure you will not take it in bad part if I say that I do not find you as interesting a man as my father.' The discomfited adorer did not take it amiss; he smiled ruefully, and took his departure; but, to his credit be it spoken, he remained Helena's friend.

CHAPTER V

‘ MY GREAT DEED WAS TOO GREAT ’

THE luncheon hour was an important epoch of the day in the Langley house in Prince's Gate. The Langley luncheons were an institution in London life ever since Sir Rupert bought the big Queen Anne house and made his daughter its mistress. As he said himself good-humouredly, he was a mere Roi Fainéant in the place ; his daughter was the Mayor of the Palace, the real ruling power.

Helena Langley ruled the great house with the most gracious autocracy. She had everything her own way and did everything in her own way. She was a little social Queen, with a Secretary of State for her Prime Minister,

and she enjoyed her sovereignty exceedingly. One of the great events of her reign was the institution of what came to be known as the Langley luncheons.

These luncheons differed from ordinary luncheons in this, that those who were bidden to them were in the first instance almost always interesting people—people who had done something more than merely exist, people who had some other claim upon human recognition than the claim of ancient name or of immense wealth. In the second place, the people who were bidden to a Langley luncheon were of the most varied kind, people of the most different camps in social, in political life. At the Langley table statesmen who hated each other across the floor of the House sat side by side in perfect amity. The heir to the oldest dukedom in England met there the latest champion of the latest phase of democratic socialism ; the great tragedian from the

Acropolis met the low comedian from the Levity on terms of as much equality as if they had met at the Macklin or the Call-Boy clubs ; the President of the Royal Academy was amused by, and afforded much amusement to, the newest child of genius fresh from Paris, with the slang of the Chat Noir upon his lips and the scorn of *les vieux* in his heart. Whig and Tory, Catholic and Protestant, millionaire and bohemian, peer with a peerage old a Runnymede and the latest working-man M.P., all came together under the regal republicanism of Langley House. Someone said that a party at Langley House always suggested to him the Day of Judgment.

On the afternoon of the morning on which Sir Rupert's card was left at Paulo's Hotel, various guests assembled for luncheon in Miss Langley's Japanese drawing-room. The guests were not numerous—the luncheons at Langley House were never large parties.

Eight, including the host and hostess, was the number rarely exceeded ; eight, including the host and hostess, made up the number in this instance. Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn, the distinguished and thoroughly respectable actor and actress, just returned from their tour in the United States ; the Duke and Duchess of Deptford—the Duchess was a young and pretty American woman ; Mr. Soame Rivers, Sir Rupert's private secretary ; and Mr. Hiram Borringer, who had just returned from one expedition to the South Pole, and who was said to be organising another.

When the ringing of a chime of bells from a Buddhist's temple announced luncheon, and everyone had settled down in the great oak room, where certain of the ancestral Langleys, gentlemen and ladies of the last century, whom Reynolds and Gainsborough and Romney and Raeburn had painted, had been brought up from Queen's Langley at Helena's special

wish, the company seemed to be under the special survey. There was one vice-admiral of the Red who was leaning on a Doric pillar, with a spy-glass in his hand, apparently wholly indifferent to a terrific naval battle that was raging in the background; all his shadowy attention seemed to be devoted to the mortals who moved and laughed below him. There was something in the vice-admiral which resembled Sir Rupert, but none of the lovely ladies on the wall were as beautiful as Helena.

Mrs. Selwyn spoke with that clear, bell-like voice which always enraptured an audience. Every assemblage of human beings was to her an audience, and she addressed them accordingly. Now, she practically took the stage, leaning forward between the Duke of Deptford and Hiram Borringer, and addressing Helena Langley.

‘My dear Miss Langley,’ she said, ‘do you

know that something has surprised me to-day?’

‘What is it?’ Helena asked, turning away from Mr. Selwyn, to whom she had been talking.

‘Why, I felt sure,’ Mrs. Selwyn went on, ‘to meet someone here to-day. I am quite disappointed—quite.’

Everyone looked at Mrs. Selwyn with interest. She had the stage all to herself, and was enjoying the fact exceedingly. Helena gazed at her with a note of interrogation in each of her bright eyes, and another in each corner of her sensitive mouth.

‘I made perfectly sure that I should meet him here to-day. I said to Harry first thing this morning, when I saw the name in the paper, “Harry,” I said, “we shall be sure to meet him at Sir Rupert’s this afternoon. Now did I not, Harry?’

Mr. Selwyn, thus appealed to, admitted

that his wife had certainly made the remark she now quoted.

Mrs. Selwyn beamed gratitude and affection for his endorsement. Then she turned to Miss Langley again.

'Why isn't *he* here, my dear Miss Langley, why?' Then she added, 'You know you always have everybody before anybody else, don't you?'

Helena shook her head.

'I suppose it's very stupid of me,' she said, 'but, really, I'm afraid I don't know who your "he" is. Is your "he" a hero?'

Mrs. Selwyn laughed playfully. 'Oh, now your very words show that you do know whom I mean.'

'Indeed I don't.'

'Why, that wonderful man whom you admire so much, the illustrious exile, the hero of the hour, the new Napoleon.'

'I know whom you mean,' said Soame

Rivers. 'You mean the Dictator of Gloria?'

'Of course. Whom else?' said Mrs. Selwyn, clapping her hands enthusiastically. The Duke gave a sigh of relief, and Hiram Borringer, who had been rather silent, seemed to shake himself into activity at the mention of Gloria. Mr. Selwyn said nothing, but watched his wife with the wondering admiration which some twenty years of married life had done nothing to diminish.

The least trace of increased colour came into Helena's cheeks, but she returned Mrs. Selwyn's smiling glances composedly.

'The Dictator,' she said. 'Why did you expect to see him here to-day?'

'Why, because I saw his name in the "Morning Post" this very morning. It said he had arrived in London last night from Paris. I felt morally certain that I should meet him here to-day.'

'I am sorry you should be disappointed,' Helena said, laughing, 'but perhaps we shall be able to make amends for the disappointment another day. Papa called upon him this morning.'

Sir Rupert, sitting opposite his daughter, smiled at this. 'Did I really?' he asked. 'I was not aware of it.'

'Oh, yes, you did, papa; or, at least, I did for you.'

Sir Rupert's face wore a comic expression of despair. 'Helena, Helena, why?'

'Because he is one of the most interesting men existing.'

'And because he is down on his luck, too,' said the Duchess. 'I guess that always appeals to you.' The beautiful American girl had not shaken off all the expressions of her fatherland.

'But, I say,' said Selwyn, who seemed to think that the subject called for statesmanlike

comment, 'how will it do for a pillar of the Government to be extending the hand of fellowship——'

'To a defeated man,' interrupted Helena. 'Oh, that won't matter one bit. The affairs of Gloria are hardly likely to be a grave international question for us, and in the meantime it is only showing a courtesy to a man who is at once an Englishman and a stranger.'

A slightly ironical 'Hear, hear,' came from Soame Rivers, who did not love enthusiasm.

Sir Rupert followed suit good-humouredly.

'Where is he stopping?' asked Sir Rupert.

'At Paulo's Hotel, papa.'

'Paulo's Hotel,' said Mrs. Selwyn; 'that seems to be quite the place for exiled potentates to put up at. The ex-King of Capri stopped there during his recent visit, and the chiefs from Mashonaland.'

‘And Don Herrera de la Mancha, who claims the throne of Spain,’ said the Duke.

‘And the Rajah of Khandur,’ added Mrs. Selwyn, ‘and the Herzog of Hesse-Steinberg, and ever so many more illustrious personages. Why do they all go to Paulo’s?’

‘I can tell you,’ said Soame Rivers. ‘Because Paulo’s is one of the best hotels in London, and Paulo is a wonderful man. He knows how to make coffee in a way that wins a foreigner’s heart, and he understands the cooking of all sorts of eccentric foreign dishes; and, though he is as rich as a Chicago pig-dealer, he looks after everything himself, and isn’t in the least ashamed of having been a servant himself. I think he was a Portuguese originally.’

‘And our Dictator went there?’ Mrs. Selwyn questioned.

Soame Rivers answered her, ‘Oh, it is the right thing to do; it poses a distinguished

exile immediately. Quite the right thing. He was well advised.'

'If only he had been as well advised in other matters,' said Mr. Selwyn.

Then Hiram Borringer, who had hitherto kept silent, after his wont, spoke.

'I knew him,' he said, 'some years ago, when I was in Gloria.'

Everybody looked at once and with interest at the speaker. Hiram seemed slightly embarrassed at the attention he aroused; but he was not allowed to escape from explanation.

'Did you really?' said Sir Rupert. 'How very interesting! What sort of man did you find him?'

Helena said nothing, but she fixed her dark eyes eagerly on Hiram's face and listened, with slightly parted lips, all expectation.

'I found him a big man,' Hiram answered.

'I don't mean big in bulk, for he's not that; but big in nature, the man to make an empire and boss it.'

'A splendid type of man,' said Mrs. Selwyn, clasping her hands enthusiastically. 'A man to stand at Cæsar's side and give directions.'

'Quite so,' Hiram responded gravely; 'quite so, madam. I met him first just before he was elected President, and that's five years ago.'

'Rather a curious thing making an Englishman President, wasn't it?' Mr. Selwyn inquired. At Sir Rupert's Mr. Selwyn always displayed a profound interest in all political questions.

'Oh, he is a naturalised citizen of Gloria, of course,' said Soame Rivers, deftly insinuating his knowledge before Hiram could reply.

'But I thought,' said the Duke, 'that in

those South American Republics, as in the United States, a man has to be born in the country to attain to its highest office.'

'That is so,' said Hiram. 'Though I fancy his friends in Gloria wouldn't have stuck at a trifle like that just then. But as a matter of fact he was actually born in Gloria.'

'Was he really?' said Sir Rupert. 'How curious!' To which Mr. Selwyn added, 'And how convenient;' while Mrs. Selwyn inquired how it happened.

'Why, you see,' said Hiram, 'his father was English Consul at Valdorado long ago, and he married a Spanish woman there, and the woman died, and the father seems to have taken it to heart, for he came home, bringing his baby boy with him. I believe the father died soon after he got home.'

Sir Rupert's face had grown slightly graver. Soame Rivers guessed that he was

thinking of his own old loss. Helena felt a new thrill of interest in the man whose personality already so much attracted her. Like her, he had hardly known a mother.

‘Then was that considered enough?’ the Duke asked. ‘Was the fact of his having been born there, although the son of an English father, enough, with subsequent naturalisation, to qualify him for the office of President?’

‘It was a peculiar case,’ said Hiram. ‘The point had not been raised before. But, as he happened to have the army at his back, it was concluded then that it would be most convenient for all parties to yield the point. But a good deal has been made of it since by his enemies.’

‘I should imagine so,’ said Sir Rupert. ‘But it really is a very curious position, and I should not like to say myself off-hand how it ought to be decided.’

‘The big battalions decided it in his case,’ said Mrs. Selwyn.

‘Are they big battalions in Gloria?’ inquired the Duke.

‘Relatively, yes,’ Hiram answered. ‘It wasn’t very much of an army at that time, even for Gloria; but it went solid for him. Now, of course, it’s different.’

‘How is it different?’ This question came from Mr. Selwyn, who put it with an air of profound curiosity.

Hiram explained. ‘Why, you see, he introduced the conscription system. He told me he was going to do so, on the plan of some Prussian statesman.’

‘Stein,’ suggested Soame Rivers.

‘Very likely. Every man to take service for a certain time. Well, that made pretty well all Gloria soldiers; it also made him a heap of enemies, and showed them how to make themselves unpleasant. I thought it

wasn't a good plan for him or them at the time.'

'Did you tell him so?' asked Sir Rupert.

'Well, I did drop him a hint or two of my ideas, but he wasn't the sort of man to take ideas from anybody. Not that I mean at all that my ideas were of any importance, but he wasn't that sort of man.'

'What sort of man was he, Mr. Borringer?' said Helena impetuously. 'What was he like, mentally, physically, every way? That's what we want to know.'

Hiram knitted his eyebrows, as he always did when he was slightly puzzled. He did not greatly enjoy haranguing the whole company in this way, and he partly regretted having confessed to any knowledge of the Dictator. But he was very fond of Helena, and he saw that she was sincerely interested in the subject, so he went on :

‘Well, I seem to be spinning quite a yarn, and I’m not much of a hand at painting a portrait, but I’ll do my best.’

‘Shall we make it a game of twenty questions?’ Mrs. Selwyn suggested. ‘We all ask you leading questions, and you answer them categorically.’

Everyone laughed, and Soame Rivers suggested that they should begin by ascertaining his age, height, and fighting weight.

‘Well,’ said Hiram, ‘I guess I can get out my facts without cross-examination.’ He had lived a great deal in America, and his speech was full of American colloquialisms. For which reason the beautiful Duchess liked him much.

‘He’s not very tall, but you couldn’t call him short; rather more than middling high; perhaps looks a bit taller than he is, he carries himself so straight. He would have made a good soldier.’

‘He did make a good soldier,’ the Duke suggested.

‘That’s true,’ said Hiram thoughtfully. ‘I was thinking of a man to whom soldiering was his trade, his only trade.’

‘But you haven’t half satisfied our curiosity,’ said Mrs. Selwyn. ‘You have only told us that he is a little over the medium height, and that he bears him stiffly up. What of his eyes, what of his hair—his beard? Does he discharge in either your straw-colour beard, your orange tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French crown-coloured beard, your perfect yellow?’

Hiram looked a little bewildered. ‘I beg your pardon, ma’am,’ he said. The Duke came to the rescue.

‘Mrs. Selwyn’s Shakespearean quotation expresses all our sentiments, Mr. Borringer. Give us a faithful picture of the hero of the hour.’

‘As for his hair and beard,’ Hiram resumed, ‘why, they are pretty much like most people’s hair and beard—a fairish brown—and his eyes match them. He has very much the sort of favour you might expect from the son of a very fair-haired man and a dark woman. His father was as fair as a Scandinavian, he told me once. He was descended from some old Danish Viking, he said.’

‘That helps to explain his belligerent Berserker disposition,’ said Sir Rupert.

‘A fine type,’ said the Duke pensively, and Mr. Selwyn caught him up with ‘The finest type in the world. The sort of men who have made our empire what it is;’ and he added somewhat confusedly, for his wife’s eyes were fixed upon him, and he felt afraid that he was overdoing his part, ‘Hawkins, Frobisher, Drake, Rodney, you know.’

‘But,’ said Helena, who had been very silent, for her, during the interrogation of

Hiram, 'I do not feel as if I quite know all I want to know yet.'

'The noble thirst for knowledge does you credit, Miss Langley,' said Soame Rivers pertly.

Miss Langley laughed at him.

'Yes, I want to know all about him. He interests me. He has done something; he casts a shadow, as somebody has said somewhere. I like men who do something, who cast shadows instead of sitting in other people's shadows.'

Soame Rivers smiled a little sourly, and there was a suggestion of acerbity in his voice as he said in a low tone, as if more to himself than as a contribution to the general conversation, 'He has cast a decided shadow over Gloria.' He did not quite like Helena's interest in the dethroned Dictator.

'He made Gloria worth talking about!' Helena retorted. 'Tell me, Mr. Borringer, how did he happen to get to Gloria at all?'

How did it come in his way to be President and Dictator and all that?’

‘Rebellion lay in his way and he found it,’ Mrs. Selwyn suggested, whereupon Soame Rivers tapped her playfully upon the wrist, carrying on the quotation with the words of Prince Hal, ‘Peace, chewit, peace.’ Mr. Soame Rivers was a very free-and-easy young gentleman, occasionally, and as he was a son of Lord Riverstown, much might be forgiven to him.

Hiram, always slightly bewildered by the quotations of Mrs. Selwyn and the badinage of Soame Rivers, decided to ignore them both, and to address himself entirely to Miss Langley.

‘Sorry to say I can’t help you much, Miss Langley. When I was in Gloria five years ago I found him there, as I said, running for President. He had been a nationalised citizen there for some time, I reckon, but how he got so much to the front I don’t know.’

'Doesn't a strong man always get to the front?' the Duchess asked.

'Yes,' said Hiram, 'I guess that's so. Well, I happened to get to know him, and we became a bit friendly, and we had many a pleasant chat together. He was as frank as frank, told me all his plans. "I mean to make this little old place move," he said to me.'

'Well, he has made it move,' said Helena. She was immensely interested, and her eyes dilated with excitement.

'A little too fast, perhaps,' said Hiram meditatively. 'I don't know. Anyhow, he had things all his own way for a goodish spell.'

'What did he do when he had things his own way?' Helena asked impatiently.

'Well, he tried to introduce reforms——'

'Yes, I knew he would do that,' the girl said, with the proud air of a sort of ownership.

‘ You seem to have known all about him,’ Mrs. Selwyn said, smiling loftily, sweetly, as at the romantic enthusiasm of youth.

‘ Well, so I do somehow,’ Helena answered almost sharply ; certainly with impatience. She was not thinking of Mrs. Selwyn.

‘ Now, Mr. Borringer, go on—about his reforms.’

‘ He seemed to have gotten a kind of notion about making things English or American. He abolished flogging of criminals and all sorts of old-fashioned ways ; and he tried to reduce taxation ; and he put down a sort of remnant of slavery that was still hanging round ; and he wanted to give free land to all the emancipated folks ; and he wanted to have an equal suffrage to all men, and to do away with corruption in the public offices and the civil service ; and to compel the judges not to take bribes ; and all sorts of things. I am afraid he wanted to do a good deal too much

reform for what you folks would call the governing classes out there. I thought so at the time. He was right, you know,' Hiram said meditatively, 'but, then, I am mightily afraid he was right in a wrong sort of way.'

'He was right, anyhow,' Helena said, triumphantly.

'S'pose he was,' said Hiram; 'but things have to go slow, don't you see?'

'Well, what happened?'

'I don't rightly know how it all came about exactly; but I guess all the privileged classes, as you call them here, got their backs up, and all the officials went dead against him——'

'My great deed was too great,' Helena said.

'What is that, Helena?' her father asked.

'It's from a poem by Mrs. Browning, about

another dictator; but more true of my Dictator than of hers,' Helena answered.

'Well,' Hiram went on, 'the opposition soon began to grumble——'

'Some people are always grumbling,' said Soame Rivers. 'What should we do without them? Where should we get our independent opposition?'

'Where, indeed,' said Sir Rupert, with a sigh of humorous pathos.

'Well,' said Helena, 'what did the opposition do?'

'Made themselves nasty,' answered Hiram. 'Stirred up discontent against the foreigner, as they called him. He found his congress hard to handle. There were votes of censure and talks of impeachment, and I don't know what else. He went right ahead, his own way, without paying them the least attention. Then they took to refusing to vote his necessary supplies for the army and navy. He

managed to get the money in spite of them ; but whether he lost his temper, or not, I can't say, but he took it into his head to declare that the constitution was endangered by the machinations of unscrupulous enemies, and to declare himself Dictator.'

'That was brave,' said Helena, enthusiastically.

'Rather rash, wasn't it?' sneered Soame Rivers.

'It may have been rash, and it may not,' Hiram answered meditatively. 'I believe he was within the strict letter of the constitution, which does empower a President to take such a step under certain conditions. But the opposition meant fighting. So they rebelled against the Dictator, and that's how the bother began. How it ended you all know.'

'Where were the people all this time?' Helena asked eagerly.

‘I guess the people didn’t understand much about it then,’ Hiram answered.

‘My great deed was too great,’ Helena murmured once again.

‘The usual thing,’ said Soame Rivers. ‘Victory to begin with, and the confidence born of victory; then defeat and disaster.’

‘The story of those three days’ fighting in Valdorado is one of the most rattling things in recent times,’ said the Duke.

‘Was it not?’ said Helena. ‘I read every word of it every day, and I did want him to win so much.’

‘Nobody could be more sorry that you were disappointed than he, I should imagine,’ said Mrs. Selwyn.

‘What puzzles me,’ said Mr. Selwyn, ‘is why when they had got him in their power they didn’t shoot him.’

‘Ah, you see he was an Englishman by

family,' Sir Rupert explained; 'and though, of course, he had changed his nationality, I think the Congressionalists were a little afraid of arousing any kind of feeling in England.'

'As a matter of fact, of course,' said Soame Rivers, 'we shouldn't have dreamed of making any row if they had shot him or hanged him, for the matter of that.'

'You can never tell,' said the Duke. 'Somebody might have raised the *Civis Romanus* cry——'

'Yes, but he wasn't any longer *civis Romanus*,' Soame Rivers objected.

'Do you think that would matter much if a cry was wanted against the Government?' the Duke asked, with a smile.

'Not much, I'm afraid,' said Sir Rupert. 'But whatever their reasons, I think the victors did the wisest thing possible in putting their man on board their big ironclad, the

“Almirante Cochrane,” and setting him ashore at Cherbourg.’

‘With a polite intimation, I presume, that if he again returned to the territory of Gloria he would be shot without form of trial,’ added Soame Rivers.

‘But he will return,’ Helena said. ‘He will, I am sure of it, and perhaps they may not find it so easy to shoot him then as they think now. A man like that is not so easily got rid of.’

Helena spoke with great animation, and her earnestness made Sir Rupert smile.

‘If that is so,’ said Soame Rivers, ‘they would have done better if they had shot him out of hand.’

Helena looked slightly annoyed as she replied quickly, ‘He is a strong man. I wish there were more men like him in the world.’

‘Well,’ said Sir Rupert, ‘I suppose we shall all see him soon and judge for ourselves.’

Helena seems to have made up her mind already. Shall we go upstairs?'

'My great deed was too great' held possession that day of the mind and heart of Helena Langley.

CHAPTER VI

‘ HERE IS MY THRONE—BID KINGS COME
BOW TO IT ’

LONDON, eager for a lion, lionised Ericson. That royal sport of lion-hunting, practised in old times by kings in Babylon and Nineveh, as those strange monuments in the British Museum bear witness, is the favourite sport of fashionable London to-day. And just at that moment London lacked its regal quarry. The latest traveller from Darkest Africa, the latest fugitive pretender to authority in France, had slipped out of the popular note and the favours of the Press. Ericson came in good time. There was a gap, and he filled it.

He found himself, to his amazement and his amusement, the hero of the hour. Invitations of all kinds showered upon him; the gates of great houses yawned wide to welcome him; had he been gifted like Kehama with the power of multiplying his personality, he could scarcely have been able to accept every invitation that was thrust upon him. But he did accept a great many; indeed, it might be said that he had to accept a great many. Had he had his own way, he might, perhaps, have buried himself in Hampstead, and enjoyed the company of his aunt and the mild society of Mr. Gilbert Sarrasin. But the impetuous, indomitable Hamilton would hear of no inaction. He insisted, copying a famous phrase of Lord Beaconsfield's, that the key of Gloria was in London. 'We must make friends,' he said; 'we must keep ourselves in evidence; we must never for a moment allow our claim to be forgotten, or

our interests to be ignored. If we are ever to get back to Gloria we must make the most of our inevitable exile.'

The Dictator smiled at the enthusiasm of his young henchman. Hamilton was tremendously enthusiastic. A young Englishman of high family, of education, of some means, he had attached himself to Ericson years before at a time when Hamilton, fresh from the University, was taking that complement to a University career—a trip round the world, at a time when Ericson was just beginning that course of reform which had ended for the present in London and Paulo's Hotel. Hamilton's enthusiasm often proved to be practical. Like Ericson, he was full of great ideas for the advancement of mankind; he had swallowed all Socialisms, and had almost believed, before he fell in with Ericson, that he had elaborated the secret of social government. But his wide knowledge was of

service; and his devotion to the Dictator showed itself of sterling stuff on that day in the Plaza Nacional when he saved his life from the insurgents. If the Dictator sometimes smiled at Hamilton's enthusiasm, he often allowed himself to yield to it. Just for the moment he was a little sick of the whole business; the inevitable bitterness that tinges a man's heart who has striven to be of service, and who has been misunderstood, had laid hold of him; there were times when he felt that he would let the whole thing go and make no further effort. Then it was that Hamilton's enthusiasm proved so useful, that Hamilton's restless energy in keeping in touch with the friends of the fallen man roused him and stimulated him.

He had made many friends now in London. Both the great political parties were civil to him, especially, perhaps, the Conservatives. Being in power, they could

not make an overt declaration of their interest in him, but just then the Tory Party was experiencing one of those emotional waves which at times sweep over its consciousness, when it feels called upon to exalt the banner of progress ; to play the old Roman part of lifting up the humble and casting down the proud ; of showing a paternal interest in all manner of schemes for the redress of wrong and suffering everywhere. Somehow or other it had got it into its head that Ericson was a man after its own heart ; that he was a kind of new Gordon ; that his gallant determination to make the people of Gloria happy in spite of themselves was a proof of the application of Tory methods. Sir Rupert encouraged this idea. As a rule, his party were a little afraid of his advanced ideas ; but on this occasion they were willing to accept them, and they manifested the friendliest interest in the Dictator's defeated

schemes. Indeed, so friendly were they that many of the Radicals began to take alarm, and think that something must be wrong with a man who met with so cordial a reception from the ruling party.

Ericson himself met these overtures contentedly enough. If it was for the good of Gloria that he should return some day to carry out his dreams, then anything that helped him to return was for the good of Gloria too, and undoubtedly the friendliness of the Ministerialists was a very important factor in the problem he was engaged upon. He did not know at first how much Tory feeling was influenced by Sir Rupert; he did not know until later how much Sir Rupert was influenced by his daughter.

Helena had aroused in her father something of her own enthusiasm for the exiled Dictator. Sir Rupert had looked into the whole business more carefully, had recognised

that it certainly would be very much better for the interests of British subjects under the green and yellow banner that Gloria should be ruled by an Englishman like Ericson than by the wild and reckless Junta, who at present upheld uncertain authority by martial law. England had recognised the Junta, of course ; it was the *de facto* Government, and there was nothing else to be done. But it was not managing its affairs well ; the credit of the country was shaken ; its trade was gravely impaired ; the very considerable English colony was loud in its protests against the defects of the new *régime*. Under these conditions Sir Rupert saw no reason for not extending the hand of friendship to the Dictator.

He did extend the hand of friendship. He met the Dictator at a dinner-party given in his honour by Mr. Wynter, M.P. : Mr. Wynter, who had always made it a point to

know everybody, and who was as friendly with Sir Rupert as with the chieftains of his own party. Sir Rupert had expressed to Wynter a wish to meet Ericson; so when the dinner came off he found himself placed at the right-hand side of Ericson, who was at his host's right-hand side. The two men got on well from the first. Sir Rupert was attracted by the fresh unselfishness of Ericson, by something still youthful, still simple, in a man who had done and endured so much, and he made himself agreeable, as he only knew how, to his neighbour. Ericson, for his part, was frankly pleased with Sir Rupert. He was a little surprised, perhaps, at first to find that Sir Rupert's opinions coincided so largely with his own; that their views of government agreed on so many important particulars. He did not at first discover that it was Ericson's unconstitutional act in enforcing his reforms, rather than the actual

reforms themselves, that aroused Sir Rupert's admiration. Sir Rupert was a good talker, a master of the manipulation of words, knowing exactly how much to say in order to convey to the mind of his listener a very decided impression without actually committing himself to any pledged opinion. Ericson was a shrewd man, but in such delicate dialectic he was not a match for a man like Sir Rupert.

Sir Rupert asked the Dictator to dinner, and the Dictator went to the great house in Queen's Gate and was presented to Helena, and was placed next to her at dinner, and thought her very pretty and original and attractive, and enjoyed himself very much. He found himself, to his half-unconscious surprise, still young enough and human enough to be pleased with the attention people were paying him—above all, that he was still young enough and human enough to

be pleased with the very obvious homage of a charming young woman. For Helena's homage was very obvious indeed. Accustomed always to do what she pleased, and say what she pleased, Helena, at three-and-twenty, had a frankness of manner, a straightforwardness of speech, which her friends called original and her detractors called audacious. She would argue, unabashed, with the great leader of the party on some high point of foreign policy; she would talk to the great chieftain of Opposition as if he were her elder brother. People who did not understand her said that she was forward, that she had no reserve; even people who understood her, or thought they did, were sometimes a little startled by her careless directness. Soame Rivers once, when he was irritated by her, which occasionally happened, though he generally kept his irritation to himself, said that she had a 'slap on the

back' way of treating her friends. The remark was not kind, but it happened to be fairly accurate, as unkind remarks sometimes are.

But from the first Helena did not treat the Dictator with the same brusque spirit of *camaraderie* which she showed to most of her friends. Her admiration for the public man, if it had been very enthusiastic, was very sincere. She had, from the first time that Ericson's name began to appear in the daily papers, felt a keen interest in the adventurous Englishman who was trying to introduce free institutions and advanced civilisation into one of the worm-eaten republics of the New World. As time went on, and Ericson's doings became more and more conspicuous, the girl's admiration for the lonely pioneer waxed higher and higher, till at last she conjured up for herself an image of heroic chivalry as romantic in its way as anything

that could be evolved from the dreams of a sentimental schoolgirl. To reform the world —was not that always England's mission, if not especially the mission of her own party? —and here was an Englishman fighting for reform in that feverish place, and endeavouring to make his people happy and prosperous and civilised, by methods which certainly seemed to have more in common with the benevolent despotism of the Tory Party than with the theories of the Opposition. Bit by bit it came to pass that Helena Langley grew to look upon Ericson over there in that queer, ebullient corner of new Spain, as her ideal hero; and so it happened that when at last she met her hero in the flesh for the first time her frank audacity seemed to desert her.

Not that she showed in the slightest degree embarrassment when Sir Rupert first presented to her the grave man with the

earnest eyes, whose pointed beard and brown hair were both slightly touched with grey. Only those who knew Helena well could possibly have told that she was not absolutely at her ease in the presence of the Dictator. Ericson himself thought her the most self-possessed young lady he had ever met, and to him, familiar as he was with the exquisite effrontery belonging to the New Castilian dames of Gloria, self-possession in young women was a recognised fact. Even Sir Rupert himself scarcely noticed anything that he would have called shyness in his daughter's demeanour as she stood talking to the Dictator, with her large fine eyes fixed in composed gaze upon his face. But Soame Rivers noticed a difference in her bearing; he was not her father, and he was accustomed to watch every tone of her speech and every movement of her eyes, and he saw that she was not entirely herself in the company of

the 'new man,' as he called Ericson; and seeing it he felt a pang, or at least a prick, at the heart, and sneered at himself immediately in consequence. But he edged up to Helena just before the pairing took place for dinner, and said softly to her, so that no one else could hear, 'You are shy to-night. Why?'—and moved away smiling at the angry flash of her eyes and the compression of her mouth.

Possibly the words of Rivers may have affected her more than she was willing to admit; but she certainly was not as self-composed as usual during that first dinner. Her wit flashed vivaciously; the Dictator thought her brilliant, and even rather bewildering. If anyone had said to him that Helena Langley was not absolutely at her ease with him, he would have stared in amazement. For himself, he was not at all dismayed by the brilliant, beautiful girl who

sat next to him. The long habit of intercourse with all kinds of people, under all kinds of conditions, had given him the experience which enabled him to be at his ease under any circumstances, even the most unfamiliar, and certainly talking to Helena Langley was an experience that had no precedent in the Dictator's life. But he talked to her readily, with great pleasure; he felt a little surprise at her obvious willingness to talk to him and accept his judgment upon many things; but he set this down as one of the few agreeable conditions attendant upon being lionised, and accepted it gratefully. 'I am the newest thing,' he thought to himself, 'and so this child is interested in me and consequently civil to me. Probably she will have forgotten all about me the next time we meet; in the meanwhile she is very charming.' The Dictator had even been about to suggest to himself that he might possibly forget all about

her ; but somehow this did not seem very likely, and he dismissed it.

He did not see very much of Helena that night after the dinner. Many people came in, and Helena was surrounded by a little court of adorers, men of all ages and occupations, statesmen, soldiers, men of letters, all eagerly talking a kind of talk which was almost unintelligible to the Dictator. In that bright Babel of voices, in that conversation which was full of allusions to things of which he knew nothing, and for which, if he had known, he would have cared less, the Dictator felt his sense of exile suddenly come strongly upon him like a great chill wave. It was not that he could feel neglected. A great statesman was talking to him, talking at much length confidentially, paying him the compliment of repeatedly inviting his opinion, and of deferring to his judgment. There was not a man or woman in the room who was not

anxious to be introduced to Ericson, who was not delighted when the introduction was accorded, and when he or she had taken his hand and exchanged a few words with him. But somehow it was Helena's voice that seemed to thrill in the Dictator's ears; it was Helena's face that his eyes wandered to through all that brilliant crowd, and it was with something like a sense of serious regret that he found himself at last taking her hand and wishing her good-night. Her bright eyes grew brighter as she expressed the hope that they should meet soon again. The Dictator bowed and withdrew. He felt in his heart that he shared the hope very strongly.

The hope was certainly realised. So notable a lion as the Dictator was asked everywhere, and everywhere that he went he met the Langleys. In the high political and social life in which the Dictator, to his

entertainment, found himself, the hostilities of warring parties had little or no effect. In that rarefied air it was hard to draw the breath of party passion, and the Dictator came across the Langleys as often in the houses of the Opposition as in Ministerial mansions. So it came to pass that something almost approaching to an intimacy sprang up between John Ericson on the one part and Sir Rupert and Helena Langley on the other. Sir Rupert felt a real interest in the adventurous man with the eccentric ideas; perhaps his presence recalled something of Sir Rupert's own hot youth when he had had eccentric ideas and was looked upon with alarm by the steady-going. Helena made no concealment of her interest in the exile. She was always so frank in her friendships, so off-hand and boyish in her air of comradeship with many people, that her attitude towards the Dictator did not strike

any one, except Soame Rivers, as being in the least marked—for her. Indeed, most of her admirers would have held that she was more reserved with the Dictator than with others of her friends. Soame Rivers saw that there was a difference in her bearing towards the Dictator and towards the courtiers of her little court, and he smiled cynically and pretended to be amused.

Ericson's acquaintance with the Langleys ripened into that rapid intimacy which is sometimes possible in London. At the end of a week he had met them many times and had been twice to their house. Helena had always insisted that a friendship which was worth anything should declare itself at once, should blossom quickly into being, and not grow by slow stages. She offered the Dictator her friendship very frankly and very graciously, and Ericson accepted very frankly the gracious gift. For it delighted him, tired

as he was of all the strife and struggle of the last few years, to find rest and sympathy in the friendship of so charming a girl; the cordial sympathy she showed him came like a balm to the humiliation of his overthrow. He liked Helena, he liked her father; though he had known them but for a handful of days, it always delighted him to meet them; he always felt in their society that he was in the society of friends.

One evening, when Ericson had been little more than a month in London, he found himself at an evening party given by Lady Seagraves. Lady Seagraves was a wonderful woman—'the fine flower of our modern civilisation,' Soame Rivers called her. Everybody came to her house; she delighted in contrasts; life was to her one prolonged antithesis. Soame Rivers said of her parties that they resembled certain early Italian pictures, which gave you the mythological

gods in one place, a battle in another, a scene of pastoral peace in a third. It was an astonishing amalgam.

Ericson arrived at Lady Seagraves' house rather late; the rooms were very full—he found it difficult to get up the great staircase. There had been some great Ministerial function, and the dresses of many of the men in the crowd were as bright as the women's. Court suits, ribands, and orders lent additional colour to a richly coloured scene. But even in a crowd where everybody bore some claim to distinction the arrival of the Dictator aroused general attention. Ericson was not yet sufficiently hardened to the experience to be altogether indifferent to the fact that everyone was looking at him; that people were whispering his name to each other as he slowly made his way from stair to stair; that pretty women paused in their upward or downward progress to look at him, and

invariably with a look of admiration for his grave, handsome face.

When he got to the top of the stairs Ericson found his hostess, and shook hands with her. Lady Seagraves was an effusive woman, who was always delighted to see any of her friends; but she felt a special delight at seeing the Dictator, and she greeted him with a special effusiveness. Her party was choking with celebrities of all kinds, social, political, artistic, legal, clerical, dramatic; but it would not have been entirely triumphant if it had not included the Dictator. Lady Seagraves was very glad to see him indeed, and said so in her warm, enthusiastic way.

'I'm so glad to see you,' Lady Seagraves murmured. 'It was so nice of you to come. I was beginning to be desperately afraid that you had forgotten all about me and my poor little party.'

It was one of Lady Seagraves' graceful little affectations to pretend that all her parties were small parties, almost partaking of the nature of impromptu festivities. Ericson glanced around over the great room crammed to overflowing with a crowd of men and women who could hardly move, men and women most of whose faces were famous or beautiful, men and women all of whom, as Soame Rivers said, had their names in the play-bill; there was a smile on his face as he turned his eyes from the brilliant mass to Lady Seagraves' face.

‘How could I forget a promise which it gives me so much pleasure to fulfil?’ he asked. Lady Seagraves gave a little cry of delight.

‘Now that's perfectly sweet of you! How did you ever learn to say such pretty things in that dreadful place? Oh, but of course; I forgot Spaniards pay compliments to per-

fection, and you have learnt the art from them, you frozen Northerner.'

Ericson laughed. 'I am afraid I should never rival a Spaniard in compliment,' he said. He never knew quite what to talk to Lady Seagraves about, but, indeed, there was no need for him to trouble himself, as Lady Seagraves could at all times talk enough for two more.

So he just listened while Lady Seagraves rattled on, sending his glance hither and thither in that glittering assembly, seeking almost unconsciously for one face. He saw it almost immediately; it was the face of Helena Langley, and her eyes were fixed on him. She was standing in the throng at some little distance from him, talking to Soame Rivers, but she nodded and smiled to the Dictator.

At that moment the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of Deptford set Ericson free from

the ripple of Lady Seagraves' conversation. She turned to greet the new arrivals, and the Dictator began to edge his way through the press to where Helena was standing. Though she was only a little distance off, his progress was but slow progress. The rooms were tightly packed, and almost every person he met knew him and spoke to him, or shook hands with him, but he made his way steadily forward.

‘Here comes the illustrious exile!’ said Soame Rivers, in a low tone. ‘I suppose nobody will have a chance of saying a word to you for the rest of the evening?’

Miss Langley glanced at him with a little frown. ‘I am afraid I can scarcely hope that Mr. Ericson will consent to be monopolised by me for the whole of the evening,’ she said; ‘but I wish he would, for he is certainly the most interesting person here.’

Soame Rivers shrugged his shoulders

slightly. 'You always know someone who is the most interesting man in the world—for the time being,' he said.

Miss Langley frowned again, but she did not reply, for by this time Ericson had reached her, and was holding out his hand. She took it with a bright smile of welcome. Soame Rivers slipped away in the crowd, after nodding to Ericson.

'I am so glad that you have come,' Helena said. 'I was beginning to fear that you were not coming.'

'It is very kind of you,' the Dictator began, but Miss Langley interrupted him.

'No, no; it isn't kind of me at all; it is just natural selfishness. I want to talk to you about several things; and if you hadn't come I should have been disappointed in my purpose, and I hate being disappointed.'

The Dictator still persisted that any mark of interest from Miss Langley was kindness.

‘What do you want to talk to me about particularly?’ he asked.

‘Oh, many things! But we can’t talk in this awful crush. It’s like trying to stand up against big billows on a stormy day. Come with me. There is a quieter place at the back, where we shall have a chance of peace.’

She turned and led the way slowly through the crowd, the Dictator following her obediently. Once again the progress was a slow one, for every man had a word for Miss Langley, and he himself was eagerly caught at as they drifted along. But at last they got through the greater crush of the centre rooms and found themselves in a kind of lull in a further saloon where a piano was, and where there were fewer people. Out of this room there was a still smaller one with several palms in it, and out of the palms arising a great bronze reproduction of the

Hermes of Praxiteles. Lady Seagraves playfully called this little room her Pagan parlour. Here people who knew the house well found their way when they wanted quiet conversation. There was nobody in it when Miss Langley and the Dictator arrived. Helena sat down on a sofa with a sigh of relief, and Ericson sat down beside her.

‘What a delightful change from all that awful noise and glare!’ said Helena. ‘I am very fond of this little corner, and I think Lady Seagraves regards it as especially sacred to me.’

‘I am grateful for being permitted to cross the hallowed threshold,’ said the Dictator. ‘Is this the tutelary divinity?’ And he glanced up at the bronze image.

‘Yes,’ said Miss Langley; ‘that is a copy of the Hermes of Praxiteles which was discovered at Olympia some years ago. It is the right thing to worship.’

‘One so seldom worships the right thing—at least, at the right time,’ he said.

‘I worship the right thing, I know,’ she rejoined, ‘but I don’t quite know about the right time.’

‘Your instincts would be sure to guide you right,’ he answered, not indeed quite knowing what he was talking about.

‘Why?’ she asked, point blank.

‘Well, I suppose I meant to say that you have nobler instincts than most other people.’

‘Come, you are not trying to pay me a compliment? I don’t want compliments; I hate and detest them. Leave them to stupid and uninteresting men.’

‘And to stupid and uninteresting women?’

‘Another try at a compliment!’

‘No; I felt that.’

‘Well, anyhow, I did not entice you in

here to hear anything about myself; I know all about myself.'

'Indeed,' he said straightforwardly, 'I do not care to pay compliments, and I should never think of wearying you with them. I believe I hardly quite knew what I was talking about just now.'

'Very well; it does not matter. I want to hear about you. I want to know all about you. I want you to trust in me and treat me as your friend.'

'But what do you want me to tell you?'

'About yourself and your projects and everything. Will you?'

The Dictator was a little bewildered by the girl's earnestness, her energy, and the perfect simplicity of her evident belief that she was saying nothing unreasonable. She saw reluctance and hesitation in his eyes.

'You are very young,' he began.

'Too young to be trusted?'

‘No, I did not say *that*.’

‘But your look said it.’

‘My look then mistranslated my feeling.’

‘What did you feel?’

‘Surprise, and interest, and gratitude.’

She tossed her head impatiently.

‘Do you think I can’t understand?’ she asked, in her impetuous way—her imperial way with most others, but only an impetuous way with him. For most others with whom she was familiar she was able to control and be familiar with, but she could only be impetuous with the Dictator. Indeed, it was the high tide of her emotion which carried her away so far as to fling her in mere impetuosity against him.

The Dictator was silent for a moment, and then he said: ‘You don’t seem much more than a child to me.’

‘Oh! Why? Do you not know?—I am twenty-three!’

'I am twenty-three,' the Dictator murmured, looking at her with a kindly and half-melancholy interest. 'You are twenty-three! Well, there it is—do you not see, Miss Langley?'

'There what is?'

'There is all the difference. To be twenty-three seems to you to make you quite a grown-up person.'

'What else should it make me? I have been of age for two years. What am I but a grown-up person?'

'Not in my sense,' he said placidly. 'You see, I have gone through so much, and lived so many lives, that I begin to feel quite like an old man already. Why, I might have had a daughter as old as you.'

'Oh, stuff!' the audacious young woman interposed.

'Stuff? How do you know?'

'As if I hadn't read lives of you in all the

papers and magazines and I don't know what. I can tell you your birthday if you wish, and the year of your birth. You are quite young—in my eyes.'

'You are kind to me,' he said, gravely, 'and I am quite sure that I look at my very best in your eyes.'

'You do indeed,' she said fervently, gratefully.

'Still that does not prevent me from being twenty years older than you.'

'All right; but would you refuse to talk frankly and sensibly about yourself?—sensibly, I mean, as one talks to a friend and not as one talks to a child. Would you refuse to talk in that way to a young man merely because you were twenty years older than he?'

'I am not much of a talker,' he said, 'and I very much doubt if I should talk to a young

man at all about my projects, unless, of course, to my friend Hamilton.'

Helena turned half away disappointed. It was of no use, then—she was not his friend. He did not care to reveal himself to her; and yet she thought she could do so much to help him. She felt that tears were beginning to gather in her eyes, and she would not for all the world that he should see them.

'I thought we were friends,' she said, giving out the words very much as a child might give them out—and, indeed, her heart was much more as that of a little child than she herself knew or than he knew then; for she had not the least idea that she was in love or likely to be in love with the Dictator. Her free, energetic, wild-falcon spirit had never as yet troubled itself with thoughts of such kind. She had made a hero for herself out of the Dictator—she almost adored him; but it was

with the most genuine hero-worship— or fetish worship, if that be the better and harsher way of putting it—and she had never thought of being in love with him. Her highest ambition up to this hour was to be his friend and to be admitted to his confidence, and—oh, happy recognition!—to be consulted by him. When she said ‘I thought we were friends,’ she jumped up and went towards the window to hide the emotion which she knew was only too likely to make itself felt.

The Dictator got up and followed her. ‘We are friends,’ he said.

She looked brightly round at him, but perhaps he saw in her eyes that she had been feeling a keen disappointment.

‘You think my professed friendship mere girlish inquisitiveness—you know you do,’ she said, for she was still angry.

‘Indeed I do not,’ he said earnestly. ‘I have had no friendship since I came back an

outcast to England—no friendship like that given to me by you——'

She turned round delightedly towards him.

'And by your father.'

And again, she could not tell why, she turned partly away.

'But the truth is,' he went on to say, 'I have no clearly defined plans as yet.'

'You don't mean to give in?' she asked eagerly.

He smiled at her impetuosity. She blushed slightly as she saw his smile.

'Oh, I know,' she exclaimed, 'you think me an impertinent schoolgirl, and you only laugh at me.'

'I do nothing of the kind. It is only too much of a pleasure to me to talk to you on terms of friendship. Look here, I wish we could do as people used to do in the old melodramas, and swear an eternal friendship.'

‘I swear an eternal friendship to you,’ she exclaimed, ‘whether you like it or not,’ and, obeying the wild impulse of the hour, she held out both her hands.

He took them both in his, held them for just one instant, and then let them go.

‘I accept the friendship,’ he said, with a quiet smile, ‘and I reciprocate it with all my heart.’

Helena was already growing a little alarmed at her own impulsiveness and effusiveness. But there was something in the Dictator’s quiet, grave, and protecting way which always seemed to reassure her. ‘He will be sure to understand me,’ was the vague thought in her mind.

Assuredly the Dictator now thought he did understand her. He felt satisfied that her enthusiasm was the enthusiasm of a generous girl’s friendship, and that she thought about him in no other way. He had learned to like

her companionship, and to think much of her fresh, courageous intellect, and even of her practical good sense. He had no doubt that he should find her advice on many things worth having. His battlefield just now and for some time to come must be in London—in the London of finance and diplomacy.

‘Come and sit down again,’ the Dictator said; ‘I will tell you all I know—and I don’t know much. I do not mean to give up, Miss Langley. I am not a man who gives up—I am not built that way.’

‘Of course I knew,’ Helena exclaimed triumphantly; ‘I knew you would never give up. You couldn’t.’

‘I couldn’t—and I do not believe I ought to give up. I am sure I know better how to provide for the future of Gloria than—than—well, than Gloria knows herself—just now. I believe Gloria will want me back.’

‘Of course she will want you back when

she comes to her senses,' Helena said with sparkling eyes.

'I don't blame her for having a little lost her senses under the conditions—it was all too new, and I was too hasty. I was too much inspired by the ungoverned energy of the new broom. I should do better now if I had the chance.'

'You will have the chance—you must have it!'

'Do you promise it to me?' he asked with a kindly smile.

'I do—I can—I know it will come to you!'

'Well, I can wait,' he said quietly. 'When Gloria calls me to go back to her I will go.'

'But what do you mean by Gloria? Do you want a *plébiscite* of the whole population in your favour?'

'Oh no! I only mean this, that if the

large majority of the people whom I strove to serve are of opinion they can do without me—well, then, I shall do without them. But if they call me I shall go to them, although I went to my death and knew it beforehand.'

'One may do worse things,' the girl said proudly, 'than go knowingly to one's death.'

'You are so young,' he said. 'Death seems nothing to you. The young and the generous are brave like that.'

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'let my youth alone!'

She would have liked to say, 'Oh, confound my youth!' but she did not give way to any such unseemly impulse. She felt very happy again, her high spirits all rallying round her.

'Let your youth alone!' the Dictator said, with a half-melancholy smile. 'So long as

time lets it alone—and even time will do that for some years yet.’

Then he stopped and felt a little as if he had been preaching a sermon to the girl.

‘Come,’ she broke in upon his moralisings, ‘if I am so dreadfully young, at least I’ll have the benefit of my immaturity. If I am to be treated as a child, I must have a child’s freedom from conventionality.’ She dragged forward a heavy armchair lined with the soft, mellowed, dull red leather which one sees made into cushions and sofa-pillows in the shops of Nuremberg’s more artistic upholsterers, and then at its side on the carpet she planted a footstool of the same material and colour. ‘There,’ she said, ‘you sit in that chair.’

‘And you, what are you going to do?’

‘Sit first, and I will show you.’

He obeyed her and sat in the great chair.

‘Well, now?’ he asked.

'I shall sit here at your feet.' She flung herself down and sat on the footstool.

'Here is my throne,' she said composedly; 'bid kings come bow to it.'

'Kings come bowing to a banished Republican?'

'You are my King,' she answered, 'and so I sit at your feet and am proud and happy. Now talk to me and tell me some more.'

But the talk was not destined to go any farther that night. Rivers and one or two others came lounging in. Helena did not stir from her lowly position. The Dictator remained as he was just long enough to show that he did not regard himself as having been disturbed. Helena flung a saucy little glance of defiance at the principal intruder.

'I know you were sent for me,' she said. 'Papa wants me?'

'Yes,' the intruder replied; 'if I had not

been sent I should never have ventured to follow you into this room.'

'Of course not—this is my special sanctuary. Lady Seagraves has dedicated it to me, and now I dedicate it to Mr. Ericson. I have just been telling him that, for all he is a Republican, he is *my* King.'

The Dictator had risen by this time.

'You are sent for?' he said.

'Yes—I am sorry.'

'So am I—but we must not keep Sir Rupert waiting.'

'I shall see you again—when?' she asked eagerly.

'Whenever you wish,' he answered. Then they shook hands, and Soame Rivers took her away.

Several ladies remarked that night that really Helena Langley was going quite beyond all bounds, and was overdoing her unconventionality quite too shockingly. She was

actually throwing herself right at Mr. Ericson's head. Of course Mr. Ericson would not think of marrying a chit like that. He was quite old enough to be her father.

One or two stout dowagers shook their heads sagaciously, and remarked that Sir Rupert had a great deal of money, and that a large fortune got with a wife might come in very handy for the projects of a dethroned Dictator. 'And men are all so vain, my dear,' remarked one to another. 'Mr. Ericson doesn't look vain,' the other said meditatively. 'They are all alike, my dear,' rejoined the one. And so the matter was settled—or left unsettled.

Meanwhile the Dictator went home, and began to look over maps and charts of Gloria. He buried himself in some plans of street improvement, including a new and splendid opera house, of which he had actually laid the foundation before the crash came.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCE AND CLAUDIO

WHY did the Dictator bury himself in his maps and his plans and his improvements in the street architecture of a city which in all probability he was never to see more?

For one reason. Because his mind was on something else to-night, and he did not feel as if he were acting with full fidelity to the cause of Gloria if he allowed any subject to come even for an hour too directly between him and that. Little as he permitted himself to put on the airs of a patriot and philanthropist—much as he would have hated to exhibit himself or be regarded as a professional patriot, yet the devotion to that cause which he had himself created—the cause of a regene-

rated Gloria—was deep down in his very heart. Gloria and her future were his day-dream—his idol, his hobby, or his craze, if you like; he had long been possessed by the thought of a redeemed and regenerated Gloria. To-night his mind had been thrown for a moment off the track—and it was therefore that he pulled out his maps and was endeavouring to get on to the track again.

But he could not help thinking of Helena Langley. The girl embarrassed him—bewildered him. Her upturned eyes came between him and his maps. Her frank homage was just like that of a child. Yet she was not a child, but a remarkably clever and brilliant young woman, and he did not know whether he ought to accept her homage. He was, for all his strange career, somewhat conservative in his notions about women. He thought that there ought to be a sweet reserve about them always. He rather liked the pedestal theory

about woman. The approaches and the devotion, he thought, ought to come from the man always. In the case of Helena Langley, it never occurred to him to think that her devotion was anything different from the devotion of Hamilton; but then a young man who is one's secretary is quite free to show his devotion, while a young woman who is not one's secretary is not free to show her devotion. Ericson kept asking himself whether Sir Rupert would not feel vexed when he heard of the way in which his dear spoiled child had been going on—as he probably would from herself—for she evidently had not the faintest notion of concealment. On the other hand, what could Ericson do? Give Helena Langley an exposition of his theories concerning proper behaviour in unmarried womanhood? Why, how absurd and priggish and offensive such a course of action would be! The girl would either break into

laughter at him or feel herself offended by his attempt to lecture her. And who or what had given him any right to lecture her? What, after all, had she done? Sat on a footstool beside the chair of a public man whose cause she sympathised with, and who was quite old enough—or nearly so, at all events—to be her father. Up to this time Ericson was rather inclined to press the ‘old enough to be her father,’ and to leave out the ‘nearly so.’ Then, again, he reminded himself that social ways and manners had very much changed in London during his absence, and that girls were allowed, and even encouraged, to do all manner of things now which would have been thought tomboyish, or even improper, in his younger days. Why, he had glanced at scores of leading articles and essays written to prove that the London girl of the close of the century was free to do things which would have brought the deepest and

most comprehensive blush to the cheeks of the meek and modest maidens of a former generation.

Yes—but for all this change of manners it was certain that he had himself heard comments made on the impulsive unconventionality of Miss Langley. The comments were sometimes generous, sympathetic, and perhaps a little pitying—and of course they were sometimes ill-natured and spiteful. But, whatever their tone, they were all tuned to the one key—that Miss Langley was impulsively unconventional.

The Dictator was inclined to resent the intrusion of a woman into his thoughts. For years he had been in the habit of regarding women as trees walking. He had had a love disappointment early in life. His true love had proved a false true love, and he had taken it very seriously—taken it quite to heart. He was not enough of a modern London man to recognise the fact that something of the

kind happens to a good many people, and that there are still a great many girls left to choose from. He ought to have made nothing of it, and consoled himself easily, but he did not. So he had lost his ideal of womanhood, and went through the world like one deprived of a sense. The man is, on the whole, happiest whose true love dies early, and leaves him with an ideal of womanhood which never can change. He is, if he be at all a true man, thenceforth as one who walks under the guidance of an angel. But Ericson's mind was put out by the failure of his ideal. Happily he was a strong man by nature, with deep impassioned longings and profound convictions; and going on through life in his lonely, overcrowded way, he soon became absorbed in the entrancing egotism of devotion to a great cause. He began to see all things in life first as they bore on the regeneration of Gloria—now as they bore on his restoration to

Gloria. So he had been forgetting all about women, except as ornaments of society, and occasionally as useful mechanisms in politics.

The memory of his false true love had long faded. He did not now particularly regret that she had been false. He did not regret it even for her own sake—for he knew that she has got on very well in life—had married a rich man—held a good position in society, and apparently had all her desires gratified. It was probable—it was almost certain—that he should meet her in London this season—and he felt no interest or curiosity about the meeting—did not even trouble himself by wondering whether she had been following his career with eyes in which old memories gleamed. But after her he had done no love-making and felt inclined for no romance. His ideal, as has been said, was gone—and he did not care for women without an ideal to pursue.

Every night, however late, when the Dictator had got back to his rooms Hamilton came to see him, and they read over letters and talked over the doings of the next day. Hamilton came this night in the usual course of things and Ericson was delighted to see him. He was sick of trying to study the street improvements of the metropolis of Gloria, and he was vexed at the intrusion of Helena Langley into his mind—for he did not suspect in the least that she had yet made any intrusion into his heart.

‘Well, Hamilton, I hope you have been enjoying yourself?’

‘Yes, Excellency—fairly enough. Do you know I had a long talk with Sir Rupert Langley about you?’

‘Aye, aye. What does Sir Rupert say about me?’

‘Well,’ he says, Hamilton began distress-

edly, 'that you had better give up all notions of Gloria and go in for English politics.'

The Dictator laughed; and at the same time felt a little touched. He could not help remembering the declaration of his life's policy he had just been making to Sir Rupert Langley's daughter.

'What on earth do I know about English politics?'

'Oh, well; of course you could get it all up easily enough, so far as that goes.'

'But doesn't Sir Rupert see that, so far as I understand things at all, I should be in the party opposed to him?'

'Yes, he says that; but he doesn't seem to mind. He thinks you would find a field in English politics; and he says the life of the House of Commons is the life to which the ambition of every true Englishman ought to turn—and, you know—all that sort of thing.'

‘And does he think that I have forgotten Gloria?’

‘No; but he has a theory about all South American States. He thinks they are all rotten, and that sort of thing. He insists that you are thrown away on Gloria.’

‘Fancy a man being thrown away upon a country,’ the Dictator said, with a smile. ‘I have often heard and read of a country being thrown away upon a man, but never yet of a man being thrown away upon a country. I should not have wondered at such an opinion from an ordinary Englishman, who has no idea of a place the size of Gloria, where we could stow away England, France, and Germany in a little unnoticed corner. But Sir Rupert—who has been there! Give us out the cigars, Hamilton—and ring for some drinks.’

Hamilton brought out the cigars, and rang the bell.

‘Well—anyhow—I have told you,’ he said hesitatingly.

‘So you have, boy, with your usual indomitable honesty. For I know what you think about all this.’

‘Of course you do.’

‘You don’t want to give up Gloria?’

‘Give up Gloria? Never—while grass grows and water runs!’

‘Well, then, we need not say any more about that. Tell me, though, where was all this? At Lady Seagraves?’

‘No; it was at Sir Rupert’s own house.’

‘Oh, yes, I forgot; you were dining there?’

‘Yes; I was dining there.’

‘This was after dinner?’

‘Yes; there were very few men there, and he talked all this to me in a confidential sort of way. Tell me, Excellency; what do you think of his daughter?’

The Dictator almost started. If the question had come out of his own inner consciousness it could not have illustrated more clearly the problem which was perplexing his heart.

‘Why, Hamilton, I have not seen very much of her, and I don’t profess to be much of a judge of young ladies. Why on earth do you want my opinion? What is your own opinion of her?’

‘I think she is very beautiful.’

‘So do I.’

‘And awfully clever.’

‘Right again—so do I.’

‘And singularly attractive, don’t you think?’

‘Yes; very attractive indeed. But you know, my boy, that the attractions of young women have now little more than a purely historical interest for me. Still, I am quite prepared to go as far with you as to admit

that Miss Langley is a most attractive young woman.'

'She thinks ever so much of *you*,' Hamilton said dogmatically.

'She has great sympathy with our cause,' the Dictator said.

'She would do anything *you* asked her to do.'

'My boy, I don't want to ask her to do anything.'

'Excellency, I want you to advise her to do something—for *me*.'

'For you, Hamilton? Is that the way?' The Dictator asked the question with a tone of infinite sympathy, and he stood up as if he were about to give some important order. Hamilton, on the other hand, collapsed into a chair.

'That is the way, Excellency.'

'You are in love with this child?'

‘I am madly in love with this child, if you call her so.’

Ericson made some strides up and down the room, with his hands behind him. Then he suddenly stopped.

‘Is this quite a serious business?’ he asked, in a low, soft voice.

‘Terribly serious for me, Excellency, if things don’t turn out right. I have been hit very hard.’

The Dictator smiled.

‘We get over such things,’ he said.

‘But I don’t want to get over this; I don’t mean to get over it.’

‘Well,’ Ericson said good-humouredly, and with quite recovered composure, ‘it may not be necessary for you to get over it. Does the young lady want you to get over it?’

‘I haven’t ventured to ask her yet.’

‘What do you mean to ask her?’

‘ Well, of course—if she will—have me.’

‘ Yes, naturally. But I mean when——’

‘ When do I mean to ask her?’

‘ No; when do you propose to marry her?’

‘ Well, of course, when we have settled ourselves again in Gloria, and all is right there. You don’t fancy I would do anything before we have made that all right?’

‘ But all that is a little vague,’ the Dictator said; ‘ the time is somewhat indefinite. One does not quite know what the young lady might say.’

‘ She is just as enthusiastic about Gloria as I am, or as you are.’

‘ Yes, but her father. Have you said anything to him about this?’

‘ Not a word. I waited until I could talk of it to you, and get your promise to help me.’

‘ Of course I’ll help you, if I can. But tell

me, how can I? What do you want me to do? Shall I speak to Sir Rupert?’

‘If you would speak to him after, I should be awfully glad. But I don’t so much mind about him just yet; I want you to speak to her!’

‘To Miss Langley? To ask her to marry you?’

‘That’s about what it comes to,’ Hamilton said courageously.

‘But, my dear love-sick youth, would you not much rather woo and win the girl for yourself?’

‘What I am afraid of,’ Hamilton said gravely, ‘is that she would pretend not to take me seriously. She would laugh and turn me into ridicule, and try to make fun of the whole thing. But if you tell her that it is positively serious and a business of life and death with me, then she will believe you, and she *must* take it seriously and give you a

serious answer, or at least promise to give me a serious answer.'

'This is the oddest way of love-making, Hamilton.'

'I don't know,' Hamilton said; 'we have Shakespeare's authority for it, haven't we? Didn't Don Pedro arrange for Claudio and Hero?'

'Well, a very good precedent,' Ericson said with a smile. 'Tell me about this to-morrow. Think over it and sleep over it in the meantime, and if you still think that you are willing to make your proposals through the medium of an envoy, then trust me, Hamilton, your envoy will do all he can to win for you your heart's desire.'

'I don't know how to thank you,' Hamilton exclaimed fervently.

'Don't try. I hate thanks. If they are sincere they tell their tale without words. I know you—everything about you is sincere.'

Hamilton's eyes glistened with joy and gratitude. He would have liked to seize his chief's hand and press it to his lips; but he forbore. The Dictator was not an effusive man, and effusiveness did not flourish in his presence. Hamilton confined his gratitude to looks and thoughts and to the dropping of the subject for the present.

'I have been pottering over these maps and plans,' the Dictator said.

'I am so glad,' Hamilton exclaimed, 'to find that your heart is still wholly absorbed in the improvement of Gloria.'

The Dictator remained for a few moments silent and apparently buried in thought. He was not thinking perhaps altogether of the projected improvements in the capital of Gloria. Hamilton had often seen him in those sudden and silent, but not sullen moods, and was always careful not to disturb him by asking any question or making any remark.

The Dictator had been sitting in a chair and pulling the ends of his moustache. At once he got up and went to where Hamilton was seated.

‘Look here, Hamilton,’ he said, in a tone of positive sternness, ‘I want to be clear about all this. I want to help you—of course I want to help you—if you can really be helped. But, first of all, I must be certain—as far as human certainty can go—that you really know what you do want. The great curse of life is that men—and I suppose women too—I can’t say—do not really know or trouble to know what they do positively want with all their strength and with all their soul. The man who positively knows what he does want and sticks to it has got it already. Tell me, do you really want to marry this young woman?’

‘I do—with all my soul and with all my strength!’

‘But have you thought about it—have you turned it over in your mind—have you come down from your high horse and looked at yourself, as the old joke puts it?’

‘It’s no joke for me,’ Hamilton said dolefully.

‘No, no, boy; I didn’t mean that it was. But I mean, have you really looked at yourself and her? Have you thought whether she could make you happy?—have you thought whether you could make her happy? What do you know about her? What do you know about the kind of life which she lives? How do you know whether she could do without that kind of life—whether she could live any other kind of life? She is a London Society girl, she rides in the Row at a certain hour, she goes out to dinner-parties and to balls, she dances until all hours in the morning, she goes abroad to the regular place at the regular time, she spends a certain part of the winter

visiting at the regulation country houses. Are you prepared to live that sort of life—or are you prepared to bear the responsibility of taking her out of it? Are you prepared to take the butterfly to live in the camp?’

‘She isn’t a butterfly——’

‘No, no; never mind my bad metaphor. But she has been brought up in a kind of life which is second nature to her. Are you prepared to live that life with her? Are you sure—are you quite, quite sure—that she would be willing, after the first romantic outburst, to put up with a totally different life for the sake of you?’

‘Excellency,’ Hamilton said, smiling somewhat sadly, ‘you certainly do your best to take the conceit out of a young man.’

‘My boy, I don’t think you have any self-conceit, but you may have a good deal of self-forgetfulness. Now I want you to call a halt and remember yourself. In this business

of yours—supposing it comes to what you would consider at the moment a success——’

‘At the moment?’ Hamilton pleaded, in pained remonstrance.

‘At the moment—yes. Supposing the thing ends successfully for you, one plan of life or other must necessarily be sacrificed—yours or hers. Which is it going to be? Don’t make too much of her present enthusiasm. Which is it going to be?’

‘I don’t believe there will be any sacrifice needed,’ Hamilton said, in an impassioned tone. ‘I told you she loves Gloria as well as you or I could do.’

The Dictator shook his head and smiled pityingly.

‘But if there is to be any sacrifice of any life,’ Hamilton said, driven on perhaps by his chief’s pitying smile, ‘it shan’t be hers. No, if she will have me after we have got back to Gloria, I’ll live with her in London

every season and ride with her in the Row every morning and afternoon, and take her, by Jove! to all the dinners and balls she cares about, and she shall have her heart's desire, whatever it be.'

The Dictator's face was crossed by some shadows. Pity was there and sympathy was there—and a certain melancholy pleasure, and, it may be, a certain disappointment. He pulled himself together very quickly, and was cool, genial, and composed, according to his usual way.

'All right, my boy,' he said, 'this is genuine love at all events, however it may turn out. You have answered my question fairly and fully. I see now that you do know what you want. That is one great point, anyhow. I will do my very best to get for you what you want. If it only rested with me, Hamilton!' There was a positive note of tenderness in his voice as he spoke

these words; and yet there was a kind of forlorn feeling in his heart as if the friend of his heart was leaving him. He felt a little as the brother Vult in Richter's exquisite and forgotten novel might have felt when he was sounding on his flute that final morning, and going out on his cold way never to see his brother again. The brother Walt heard the soft, sweet notes, and smiled tranquilly, believing that his brother was merely going on a kindly errand to help him, Walt, to happiness. But the flute-player felt that, come what might, they were, in fact, to be parted for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

‘ I WONDER WHY ? ’

THE Dictator had had a good deal to do with marrying and giving in marriage in the Republic of Gloria. One of the social and moral reforms he had endeavoured to bring about was that which should secure to young people the right of being consulted as to their own inclinations before they were formally and finally consigned to wedlock. The ordinary practice in Gloria was very much like that which prevails in certain Indian tribes—the family on either side arranged for the young man and the maiden, made it a matter of market bargain, settled it by compromise of price or otherwise, and then brought the pair together and married them.

Ericson set his face against such a system, and tried to get a chance for the young people. He carried his influence so far that the parents on both sides among the official classes in the capital consulted him generally before taking any step, and then he frankly undertook the mediator's part, and found out whether the young woman liked the young man or not—whether she liked someone better or not. He had a sweet and kindly way with him which usually made both the youths and the maidens confidential—and he learned many a quiet heart-secret ; and where he found that a suggested marriage would really not do, he told the parents as much, and they generally yielded to his influence and his authority. He had made happy many a pair of young lovers who, without his beneficent intervention, would have been doomed to 'spoil two houses,' as the old saying puts it.

Therefore, he did not feel much put out at the mere idea of intervening in another man's love affairs, or even the idea of carrying a proposal of marriage from another man.

Yet the Dictator was in somewhat thoughtful mood as he drove to Sir Rupert Langley's. He had taken much interest in Helena Langley. She had an influence over him which he told himself was only the influence of a clever child—told himself of this again and again. Yet there was a curious feeling of unfitness or dissatisfaction with the part he was going to play. Of course, he would do his very best for Hamilton. There was no man in the world for whom he cared half so much as he did for Hamilton. No—that is not putting it strongly enough—there was now no man in the world for whom he really cared but Hamilton. The Dictator's affections were curiously narrowed. He had almost no

friends whom he really loved but Hamilton—and acquaintances were to him just all the same, one as good as another, and no better. He was a philanthropist by temperament, or nature, or nerve, or something; but while he would have risked his life for almost any man, and for any woman or child, he did not care in the least for social intercourse with men, women, and children in general. He could not talk to a child—children were a trouble to him, because he did not know what to say to them. Perhaps this was one reason why he was attracted by Helena Langley; she seemed so like the ideal child to whom one can talk. Then came up the thought in his mind—must he lose Hamilton if Miss Langley should consent to take him as her husband? Of course, Hamilton had declared that he would never marry until the Dictator and he had won back Gloria; but how long would that resolve last if Helena were to answer, Yes

—and Now? The Dictator felt lonely as his cab stopped at Sir Rupert Langley's door.

‘Is Miss Langley at home?’

Yes, Miss Langley was at home. Of course, the Dictator knew that she would be, and yet in his heart he could almost have wished to hear that she was out. There is a mood of mind in which one likes any postponement. But the duty of friendship had to be done—and the Dictator was sorry for everybody.

The Dictator was met in the hall by the footman, and also by To-to. To-to was Helena's black poodle. The black poodle took to all Helena's friends very readily. Whom she liked, he liked. He had his ways, like his mistress—and he at once allowed Ericson to understand not only that Helena was at home, but that Helena was sitting just then in her own room, where she habitually received her friends. The footman told

the Dictator that Miss Langley was at home —To-to told him what the footman could not have ventured to do, that she was waiting for him in her own drawing-room, and ready to receive him.

Now, how did To-to contrive to tell him that?

Very easily, in truth. To-to had a keen, healthy curiosity. He was always anxious to know what was going on. The moment he heard the bell ring at the great door, he wanted to know who was coming in, and he ran down the stairs and stood in the hall to find out. When the door was opened, and the visitor appeared, To-to instantly made up his mind. If it was an unfamiliar figure, To-to considered it an introduction in which he had no manner of interest, and, without waiting one second, he scampered back to rejoin his mistress, and try to explain to her that there was some very uninteresting man or

woman coming to call on her. But if it was somebody he knew, and whom he knew that his mistress knew, then there were two courses open to him. If Helena was not in her sitting-room, To-to welcomed the visitor in the most friendly and hospitable way, and then fell into the background, and took no further notice, but ranged the premises carelessly and on his own account. If, however, his mistress were in her drawing-room, then To-to invariably preceded the visitor up the stairs, going in front even of the footman, and ushered the new-comer into my lady's chamber. The process of reasoning on To-to's part must have been somewhat after this fashion. 'My business is to announce my lady's friends, the people whom I, with my exquisite intelligence, know to be people whom she wants to see. If I know that she is in her drawing-room ready to see them, then, of course, it is my duty and my pleasure

to go before and announce them. But if I know, having just been there, that she is not yet there, then I have no function to perform. It is the business of some other creature—her maid very likely—to receive the news from the footman that someone is waiting to see her. That is a complex process with which I have nothing to do.' The favoured visitor, therefore—the visitor, that is to say, whom To-to favoured, believing him or her to be favoured by To-to's mistress—had to pass through what may be called two portals, or ordeals. First, he had to ask of the servant whether Miss Langley was at home. Being informed that she was at home, then it depended on To-to to let the visitor know whether Miss Langley was actually in her drawing-room waiting to receive him, or whether he was to be shown into the drawing-room and told that Miss Langley would be duly informed of his presence, and asked

if he would be good enough to take a chair and wait for a moment. Never was To-to known to make the slightest mistake about the actual condition of things. Never had he run up in advance of the Dictator when his mistress was not seated in her drawing-room ready to receive her visitor. Never had he remained lingering in the hall and the passages when Miss Langley was in her room, and prepared for the reception. Evidently, To-to regarded himself as Helena's special functionary. The other attendants and followers—footmen, maids, and such like—might be allowed the privilege of saying whether Miss Langley was or was not at home to receive visitors; but the special and quite peculiar function of To-to was to make it clear whether Miss Langley was or was not at that very moment waiting in her own particular drawing-room to welcome them.

So the Dictator, who had not much time

to spare, being pressed with various affairs to attend to, was much pleased to find that To-to not merely welcomed him when the door was opened—a welcome which the Dictator would have expected from To-to's undisguised regard and even patronage—but that To-to briskly ran up the stairs in advance of the footman, and ran before him in through the drawing-room door when the footman had opened it. The Dictator loved the dog because of the creature's friendship for him and love for its mistress. The Dictator did not know how much he loved the dog because the dog was devoted to Helena Langley. On the stairs, as he went up, a sudden pang passed through the Dictator's heart. It might, perhaps, have brought him even clearer warning than it did. 'If I succeed in my mission'—it might have told him—'what is to become of *me*?' But, although the shot of pain did pass through him, he did not give it time to explain itself.

Helena was seated on a sofa. The moment she heard his name announced she jumped up and ran to meet him.

‘I ought to have gone beyond the threshold,’ she said, blushing, ‘to meet my king.’

‘So kind of you,’ he said, rather stiffly, ‘to stay in for me. You have so many engagements.’

‘As if I would not give up any engagement to please you! And the very first time you expressed any wish to see me!’

‘Well, I have come to talk to you about something very serious.’

She looked up amazed, her bright eyes broadening with wonder.

‘Something that concerns the happiness of yourself, perhaps—of another person certainly.’

She drooped her eyes now, and her colour deepened and her breath came quickly.

The Dictator went to the point at once.

‘I am bad at prefaces,’ he said. ‘I come to speak to you on behalf of my dear young friend and comrade, Ernest Hamilton.’

‘Oh!’ She drew herself up and looked almost defiantly at him.

‘Yes; he asked me to come and see you.’

‘What have I to do with Mr. Hamilton?’

‘That you must teach me,’ said Ericson, smiling rather sadly, and quoting from ‘Hamlet.’

‘I can teach you that very quickly—Nothing.’

‘But you have not heard what I was going to say.’

‘No. Well, you were quoting from Shakespeare—let me quote too. “Had I three ears I’d hear thee.”’ She drew herself back into her sofa. They were seated on the sofa side by side. He was leaning forward—she had drawn back. She was waiting in a sort of dogged silence.

‘Hamilton is one of the noblest creatures I ever knew. He is my very dearest friend.’

A shade came over her face, and she shrugged her shoulders.

‘I mean amongst men. I was not thinking of you.’

‘No,’ she answered, ‘I am quite sure you were not thinking of me.’

She perversely pretended to misunderstand his meaning. He hardly noticed her words. ‘Please go on,’ she said, ‘and tell me about Mr. Hamilton.’

‘He is in love with you,’ the Dictator said in a soft low voice, and as if he envied the man about whom that tale could be told.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed impatiently, turning on the sofa as if in pain, ‘I am sick of all this love-making! Why can’t a young man like one without making an idiot of himself and falling in love with one? Why can’t we let each other be happy all in our own way? It

is all so horribly mechanical! You meet a man two or three times, and you dance with him, and you talk with him, and perhaps you like him—perhaps you like him ever so much—and then in a moment he spoils the whole thing by throwing his ridiculous offer of marriage right in your face! Why on earth should I marry Mr. Hamilton?’

‘Don’t take it too lightly, dear young lady—I know Hamilton to the very depth of his nature. This is a serious thing with him—he is not like the commonplace young masher of London Society; when he feels, he feels deeply—I know what has been his personal devotion to myself.’

‘Then why does he not keep to that devotion? Why does he desert his post? What does he want of me? What do I want of him? I liked him chiefly because he was devoted to you—and now he turns right round and wants to be devoted to me! Tell

him from me that he was much better employed with his former devotion—tell him my advice was that he should stick to it.’

‘You must give a more serious answer,’ the Dictator said gravely.

‘Why didn’t he come himself?’ she asked somewhat inconsequently, and going off on another tack at once. ‘I can’t understand how a man of any spirit can make love by deputy.’

‘Kings do sometimes,’ the Dictator said.

Helena blushed again. Some thought was passing through her mind which was not in his. She had called him her king.

‘Mr. Hamilton is not a king,’ she said almost angrily. She was on the point of blurting out, ‘Mr. Hamilton is not *my* king,’ but she recovered herself in good time. ‘Even if he were,’ she went on, ‘I should rather be proposed to in person as Katherine was by Henry the Fifth.’

'You take this all too lightly,' Ericson pleaded. 'Remember that this young man's heart and his future life are wrapped up in your answer, and in *you*.'

'Tell him to come himself and get his answer,' she said with a scornful toss of her head. Something had risen up in her heart which made her unkind.

'Miss Langley,' Ericson said gravely, 'I think it would have been much better if Hamilton had come himself and made his proposal, and argued it out with you for himself. I told him so, but he would not be advised. He is too modest and fearful, although, I tell you, I have seen more than once what pluck he has in danger. Yes, I have seen how cool, how elate he can be with the bullets and the bayonets of the enemy all at work about him. But he is timid with *you*—because he loves you.'

“ He either fears his fate too much——” ’ she began.

‘ You can’t settle this thing by a quotation. I see that you are in a mood for quotations, and that shows that you are not very serious. I shall tell you why he asked me, and prevailed upon me, to come to you and speak for him. There is no reason why I should not tell you.’

‘ Tell me,’ she said.

‘ I am old enough to have no hesitation in telling a girl of your age anything.’

‘ Again!’ Helena said. ‘ I do wish you would let my age alone! I thought we had come to an honourable understanding to leave my age out of the question.’

‘ I fear it can’t well be left out of this question. You see, what I was going to tell you was that Hamilton asked me to break this to you because he believes that I have great influence with you.’

'Of course, you know you have.'

'Yes—but there was more.'

'What more?' She turned her head away.

'He is under the impression that you would do anything I asked you to do.'

'So I would, and so I will!' she exclaimed impetuously. 'If you ask me to marry Mr. Hamilton I will marry him! Yes—I *will*. If you, knowing what you do know, can wish your friend to marry me, and me to become his wife, I will accept his condescending offer! You know I do not love him—you know I never felt one moment's feeling of that kind for him—you know that I like him as I like twenty other young men—and not a bit more. You know this—at all events, you know it now when I tell you—and will you ask me to marry Mr. Hamilton now?'

'But is this all true? Is this really how you feel to him?'

‘Zwischen uns sei Wahrheit,’ Helena said scornfully. ‘Why should I deceive you? If I loved Mr. Hamilton I could marry him, couldn’t I?—seeing that he has sent you to ask me? I do not love him—I never could love him in that way. Now what do you ask me to do?’

‘I am sorry for my poor young friend and comrade,’ the Dictator answered sadly. ‘I thought, perhaps, he might have had some reason to believe——’

‘Did he tell you anything of the kind?’

‘Oh, no, no; he is the last man in the world to say such a thing, or even to think it. One reason why he wished me to open the matter to you was that he feared, if he spoke to you about it himself, you would only laugh at him and refuse to give him a serious answer. He thought you would give me a serious answer.’

‘What a very extraordinary and eccentric young man!’

‘Indeed, he is nothing of the kind—although, of course, like myself, he has lived a good deal outside the currents of English feeling.’

‘I should have thought,’ she said gravely, ‘that that was rather a question of the currents of common human feeling. Do the young women in Gloria like to be made love to by delegation?’

‘Would it have made any difference if he had come himself?’

‘No difference in the world—now or at any other time. But remember, I am a very loyal subject, and I admit the right of my King to hand me over in marriage. If you tell me to marry Mr. Hamilton, I will.’

‘You are only jesting, Miss Langley, and this is not a jest.’

‘I don’t feel much in the mood for

jesting,' she answered. 'It would rather seem as if I had been made the subject of a jest——'

'Oh, you must not say that,' he interposed in an almost angry tone. 'You can't, and don't, think that either of him or of me.'

'No, I don't; I could not think it of *you*—and no, I could not think it of him either. But you must admit that he has acted rather oddly.'

'And I too, I suppose?'

'Oh, you—well, of course, you were naturally thinking of the interest, or, at least, the momentary wishes, of your friend.'

'Of my two friends—you are my friend. Did we not swear an eternal friendship the other night?'

'Now you *are* jesting.'

'I am not; I am profoundly serious. I thought perhaps this might be for the happiness of both.'

‘Did you ever see anything in me which seemed to make such an idea likely?’

‘You see, I have known you but for so short a time.’

‘People who are worth knowing at all are known at once or never known,’ she said promptly and very dogmatically.

‘Young ladies do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves.’

‘I am afraid I do sometimes—too much,’ she said.

‘I thought it at least possible.’

‘Now you *know*. Well, are you going to ask me to marry your friend Mr. Hamilton?’

‘No, indeed, Miss Langley. That would be a cruel injustice and wrong to him and to you. He must marry someone who loves him; you must marry someone whom you love. I am sorry for my poor friend—this will hurt him. But he cannot blame you,

and I cannot blame you. He has some comfort—he has Gloria to fight for some day.’

‘Put it nicely—*very* nicely to him,’ Helena said, softening now that all was over. ‘Tell him—won’t you?—that I am ever so fond of him; and tell him that this must not make the least difference in our friendship. No one shall ever know from me.’

‘I will put it all as well as I can,’ said the Dictator; ‘but I am afraid it must make a difference to him. It made a difference to me—when I was a young man of about his age.’

‘You were disappointed?’ Helena asked, in rather tremulous tone.

‘More than that; I think I was deceived. I was ever so much worse off than Hamilton, for there was bitterness in my story, and there can be none in his. But I have survived—as you see.’

‘Is—she—still living?’

‘Oh, yes; she married for money and rank, and has got both, and I believe she is perfectly happy.’

‘And have you recovered—quite?’

‘Quite; I fancy it must have been an unreal sort of thing altogether. My wound is quite healed—does not give me even a passing moment of pain, as very old wounds sometimes do. But I am not going to lapse into the sentimental. It was only the thought of Hamilton that brought all this up.’

‘You are not sentimental?’ Helena asked.

‘I have not had time to be. Anyhow, no woman ever cared about me—in that way, I mean—no, not one.’

‘Ah, you never can tell,’ Helena said gently. He seemed to her somehow to have led a very lonely life; it came into her thoughts just then; she could not tell why. She was relieved when he rose to go, for she

felt her sympathy for him beginning to be a little too strong, and she was afraid of betraying it. The interview had been a curious and a trying one for her. The Dictator left the room wondering how he could ever have been drawn into talking to a girl about the story of his lost love. 'That girl has a strange influence over me,' he thought. 'I wonder why?'

CHAPTER IX

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

SOAME RIVERS was in some ways, and not a few, a model private secretary for a busy statesman. He was a gentleman by birth, bringing-up, appearance, and manners; he was very quick, adroit, and clever; he had a wonderful memory, a remarkable faculty for keeping documents and ideas in order; he could speak French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and conduct a correspondence in these languages. He knew the political and other gossip of most or all of the European capitals, and of Washington and Cairo just as well. He could be interviewed on behalf of his chief, and could be trusted not to

utter one single word of which his chief could not approve. He would see any undesirable visitor, and in five minutes talk him over into the belief that it was a perfect grief to the Minister to have to forego the pleasure of seeing him in person. He was to be trusted with any secret which concerned his position, and no power on earth could surprise him into any look or gesture from which anybody could conjecture that he knew more than he professed to know. He was a younger son of very good family, and although his allowance was not large, it enabled him, as a bachelor, to live an easy and gentlemanly life. He belonged to some good clubs, and he always dined out in the season. He had nice little chambers in the St. James's Street region, and, of course, he spent the greater part of every day in Sir Rupert's house, or in the lobby of the House of Commons. It was understood that he was

to be provided with a seat in Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity, not, indeed, so much for the good of the State as for the convenience of his chief, who, naturally, found it unsatisfactory to have to go out into the lobby in order to get hold of his private secretary. Rivers was devoted to his chief in his own sort of way. That way was not like the devotion of Hamilton to the Dictator; for it is very likely that, in his own secret soul, Rivers occasionally made fun of Sir Rupert, with his Quixotic ideas and his sentimentalisms, and his views of life. Rivers had no views on the subject of life or of anything else. But Hamilton himself could not be more careful of his chief's interests than was Rivers. Rivers had no beliefs and no prejudices. He was not an immoral man, but he had no prejudice in favour of morality; he was not cruel, but he had no objection to other people being as cruel as they liked, as

cruel as the law would allow them to be, provided that their cruelty was not exercised on himself, or anyone he particularly cared about. He never in his life professed or felt one single impulse of what is called philanthropy. It was to him a matter of perfect indifference whether ten thousand people in some remote place did or did not perish by war, or fever, or cyclone, or inundation. Nor did he care in the least, except for occasional political purposes, about the condition of the poor in our rural villages or in the East End of London. He regarded the poor as he regarded the flies—that is, with entire indifference so long as they did not come near enough to annoy him. He did not care how they lived, or whether they lived at all. For a long time he could not bring himself to believe that Helena Langley really felt any strong interest in the poor. He could not believe that her professed zeal for their wel-

fare was anything other than the graceful affectation of a pretty and clever girl.

But we all have our weaknesses, even the strongest of us, and Soame Rivers found, when he began to be much in companionship with Helena Langley, where the weak point was to be hit in his panoply of pride. To him love and affection and all that sort of thing were mere sentimental nonsense, encumbering a rising man, and as likely as not, if indulged in, to spoil his whole career. He had always made up his mind to the fact that, if he ever did marry, he must marry a woman with money. He would not marry at all unless he could have a house and entertain as other people in Society were in the habit of doing. As a bachelor he was all right. He could keep nice chambers; he could ride in the Row; he could have a valet; he could wear good clothes—and he was a man whom Nature had meant, and tailor recognised, for one to show

off good clothes. But if he should ever marry it was clear to him that he must have a house like other people, and that he must give dinner parties. He did not reason this out in his mind—he never reasoned anything out in his mind—it was all clear and self-evident to him. Therefore, after a while, the question began to arise—why should he not marry Helena Langley? He knew perfectly well that if she wished to be married to him Sir Rupert would not offer the slightest objection. Any man whom his daughter really loved Sir Rupert would certainly accept as a son-in-law. Rivers even fancied, not, perhaps, altogether without reason, that Sir Rupert personally would regard it as a convenient arrangement if his daughter were to fall in love with his secretary and get married to him. But above and beyond all this, Rivers, as a practical philosopher, had broken down, and he found himself in love with Helena

Langley. For herself, Helena never suspected it. She had grown to be very fond of Soame Rivers. He seemed to fill for her exactly the part that a good-tempered brother might have done. Indeed, not any brother, however good-natured, would have been as attentive to a sister as Rivers was to her. He had a quiet, unobtrusive way of putting his personal attentions as part of his official duty which absolutely relieved Helena's mind of any idea of lover-like consideration. At many a dinner party or evening party her father had to leave her prematurely, and go down to the House of Commons. It became to her a matter of course that in such a case Rivers was always sure to be there to put her into her carriage and see that she got safely home. There was nothing in it. He was her father's secretary—a gentleman, to be sure; a man of social position, as good as the best; but still, her father's secretary looking after

her because of his devotion to her father. She began to like him every day more and more for his devotion to her father. She did not at first like his cynical ways—his trick of making out that every great deed was really but a small one, that every seemingly generous and self-sacrificing action was actually inspired by the very principle of selfishness ; that love of the poor, sympathy with the oppressed, were only with the better classes another mode of amusing a weary social life. But she soon made out a generous theory to satisfy herself on that point. Soame Rivers, she felt sure, put on that panoply of cynicism only to guard himself against the weakness of yielding to a futile sensibility. He was very poor, she thought. She had lordly views about money, and she thought a man without a country-house of his own must needs be wretchedly poor, and she knew that Soame Rivers passed all his holiday seasons in the country-houses

of other people. Therefore, she made out that Soame Rivers was very poor; and, of course, if he was very poor, he could not lend much practical aid to those who, in the East End or otherwise, were still poorer than he. So she assumed that he put on the mask of cynicism to hide the flushings of sensibility. She told him as much; she said she knew that his affected indifference to the interests of humanity was only a disguise put on to conceal his real feelings. At first he used to laugh at her odd, pretty conceits. After a while he came to encourage her in the idea, even while formally assuring her that there was nothing in it, and that he did not care a straw whether the poor were miserable or happy.

Chance favoured him. There were some poor people whom Helena and her father were shipping off to New Zealand. Sir Rupert, without Helena's knowledge, asked

his secretary to look after them the night of their going aboard, as he could not be there himself. Helena, without consulting her father, drove down to the docks to look after her poor friends, and there she found Rivers installed in the business of protector. He did the work well—as he did every work that came to his hand. The emigrants thought him the nicest gentleman they had ever known. Helena said to him, ‘Come now! I have found you out at last.’ And he only said, ‘Oh, nonsense! this is nothing.’ But he did not more directly contradict her theory, and he did not say her father had sent him—for he knew Sir Rupert would never say that of himself.

Rivers found himself every day watching over Helena with a deepening interest and anxiety. Her talk, her companionship, were growing to be indispensable to him. He did not pay her compliments—indeed, some-

times they rather sparred at one another in a pleasant schoolboy and schoolgirl sort of way. But she liked his society, and felt herself thoroughly companionable and comrade-like with him, and she never thought of concealing her liking. The result was that Soame Rivers began to think it quite on the cards that, if nothing should interpose, he might marry Helena Langley—and that, too, before very long. Then he should have in every way his heart's desire.

If nothing should interpose? Yes, but there was where the danger came in! If nothing should interpose? But was it likely that nothing and nobody would interpose? The girl was well known to be a rich heiress; she was the only child of a most distinguished statesman; she would be very likely to have Dukes and Marquises competing for her hand, and where might Soame Rivers be then? The young man sometimes thought that, if

through her unconventional and somewhat romantic nature he could entangle her in a love affair, he might be able to induce her to get secretly married to him—before any of the possible Dukes and Marquises had time to put in a claim. But, of course, there would be always the danger of his turning Sir Rupert hopelessly against him by any trick of that kind, and he saw no use in having the daughter on his side if he could not also have the father. Besides, he had a sore conviction that the girl would not do anything to displease her father. So he gave up the idea of the romantic elopement, or the secret marriage, and he reminded himself that, after all, Helena Langley, with all her unconventional ways, was not exactly another Lydia Languish.

Then the Dictator and Hamilton came on the scene, and Rivers had many an unhappy hour of it. At first he was more alarmed

about Hamilton than about the Dictator. He could easily understand an impulsive girl's hero-worship for the Dictator, and he did not think much about it. The Dictator, he assured himself, must seem quite an elderly sort of person to a girl of Helena's age; but Hamilton was young and handsome, of good family, and undoubtedly rich. Hamilton and Helena fraternised very freely and openly in their adoration for Ericson, and Rivers thought moodily that that partnership of admiration for a third person might very well end in a partnership of still closer admiration for each other. So, although from the very first he disliked the Dictator, yet he soon began to detest Hamilton a great deal more.

His dislike of Ericson was not exclusively and altogether because of Helena's hero-worship. According to his way of thinking, all foreign adventure had something more or less vulgar in it, but that was especially

objectionable in the case of an Englishman. What business had an Englishman—one who claims apparently to be an English gentleman—what business had he with a lot of South American Republicans? What did he want among such people? Why should he care about them? Why should he want to govern them? And if he did want to govern them, why did he not stay there and govern? The thing was in any case mere bravado, and melodramatic enterprise.

It was the morning after the day when the Dictator had proposed to Helena for poor Hamilton. Soame Rivers met Helena on the staircase.

‘Of course,’ he said, with an emphasis, ‘*you* will be at luncheon to-day?’

‘Why, of course?’ she asked, carelessly.

‘Well—your hero is coming—didn’t you know?’

‘I didn’t know; and who is my hero?’

‘ Oh, come now !—the Dictator, of course.’

‘ *Is he coming?* ’ she asked, with a sudden gleam of genuine emotion flashing over her face.

‘ Yes ; your father particularly wants him to meet Sir Lionel Rainey.’

‘ Oh, I didn’t know. Well, yes—I shall be there, I suppose, if I feel well enough.’

‘ Are you not well?’ Rivers asked, with a tone of somewhat artificial tenderness in his voice.

‘ Oh, yes, I am all right ; but I might not feel quite up to the level of Sir Lionel Rainey. Only men, of course?’

‘ Only men.’

‘ Well, I shall think it over.’

‘ But you can’t want to miss your Dictator?’

‘ My Dictator will probably not miss me,’ the girl said in scornful tones which brought no comfort to the heart of Soame Rivers.

‘ You would be very sorry if he did not

miss you,' Soame Rivers said blunderingly. Your cynical man of the world has his feelings and his angers.

'Very sorry!' Helena defiantly declared.

The Dictator came punctually at two—he was always punctual. To-to was friendly, but did not conduct him. He was shown at once into the dining-room, where luncheon was laid out. The room looked lonely to the Dictator. Helena was not there.

'My daughter is not coming down to luncheon,' Sir Rupert said.

'I am so sorry,' the Dictator said. 'Nothing serious, I hope?'

'Oh, no! a cold, or something like that—she didn't tell me. She will be quite well, I hope, to-morrow. You see how To-to keeps her place?'

Ericson then saw that To-to was seated resolutely on the chair which Helena usually occupied at luncheon.

‘But what is the use if she is not coming?’ the Dictator suggested—not to disparage the intelligence of To-to, but only to find out, if he could, the motive of that undoubtedly sagacious animal’s taking such a definite attitude.

‘Well, To-to does not like the idea of anyone taking Helena’s place except himself. Now, you will see; when we all settle down, and no one presumes to try for that chair, To-to will quietly drop out of it and allow the remainder of the performance to go undisturbed. He doesn’t want to set up any claim to sit on the chair himself; all he wants is to assert and to protect the right of Helena to have that chair at any moment when she may choose to join us at luncheon.’

The rest of the party soon came in from various rooms and consultations. Soame Rivers was the first.

‘Miss Langley not coming?’ he said, with a glance at To-to.

‘No,’ Sir Rupert answered. ‘She is a little out of sorts to-day—nothing much—but she won’t come down just yet.’

‘So To-to keeps her seat reserved, I see.’

The Dictator felt in his heart as if he and To-to were born to be friends.

The other guests were Lord Courtreeve and Sir Lionel Rainey, the famous Englishman who had settled himself down at the Court of the King of Siam, and taken in hand the railway and general engineering and military and financial arrangements of that monarch; and, having been somewhat hurt in an expedition against the Black Flags, was now at home, partly for rest and recovery, and partly in order to have an opportunity of enlightening his Majesty of Siam, who had a very inquiring mind, on the immediate condition of politics and housebuilding in England.

Sir Lionel said that, above all things, the King of Siam would be interested in learning something about Ericson and the condition of Gloria, for the King of Siam read everything he could get hold of about politics everywhere. Therefore, Sir Rupert had undertaken to invite the Dictator to this luncheon, and the Dictator had willingly undertaken to come. Soame Rivers had been showing Sir Lionel over the house, and explaining all its arrangements to him—for the King of Siam had thoughts of building a palace after the fashion of some first-class and up-to-date house in London. Sir Lionel was a stout man, rather above the middle height, but looking rather below it, because of his stoutness. He had a sharply turned-up dark moustache, and purpling cheeks and eyes that seemed too tightly fitted into the face for their own personal comfort.

Lord Courtreeve was a pale young man,

with a very refined and delicate face. He was a member of the London County Council, and was a chairman of a County Council in his own part of the country. He was a strong advocate of Local Option, and wore at his courageous buttonhole the blue ribbon which proclaimed his devotion to the cause of temperance. He was an honoured and a sincere member of the League of Social Purity. He was much interested in the increase of open spaces and recreation grounds for the London poor. He was an unaffectedly good young man, and if people sometimes smiled quietly at him, they respected him all the same. Soame Rivers had said of him that Providence had invented him to be the chief living argument in favour of the principle of hereditary legislation.

Sir Lionel Rainey and Lord Courtreeve did not get on at all. Sir Lionel had too many odd and high-flavoured anecdotes about

life in Siam to be a congenial neighbour for the champion of social purity. He had a way, too, of referring everything to the lower instincts of man, and roughly declining to reckon in the least idea of any of man's, or woman's, higher qualities. Therefore, the Dictator did not take to him any more than Lord Courtreeve did; and Sir Rupert began to think that his luncheon party was not well mixed. Soame Rivers saw it too, and was determined to get the company out of Siam.

‘Do you find London society much changed since you were here last, Sir Lionel?’ he asked.

‘Didn't come to London to study society,’ Sir Lionel answered, somewhat gruffly, for he thought there was much more to be said about Siam. ‘I mean in that sort of way. I want to get some notions to take back to the King of Siam.’

‘But might it not interest his Majesty to know of any change, if there were any, in

London society during that time?' Rivers blandly asked.

'No sir. His Majesty never was in England, and he could not be expected to take any interest in the small and superficial changes made in the tone or the talk of society during a few years. You might as well expect him to be interested in the fact that whereas when I was here last the ladies wore eel-skin dresses, now they wear full skirts, and some of them, I am told, wear a divided skirt.'

'But I thought such changes of fashion might interest the King,' Rivers remarked with an elaborate meekness.

'The King, sir, does not care about divided skirts,' Sir Lionel answered, with scorn and resentment in his voice.

'I must confess,' the Dictator said, glad to be free of Siam, 'that I have been much interested in observing the changes that have

been made in the life of England—I mean in the life of London—since I was living here.’

‘We have all got so Republican,’ Sir Rupert said sadly.

‘And we all profess to be Socialists,’ Soame Rivers added.

‘There is much more done for the poor than ever there was before,’ Lord Courtreeve pleaded.

‘Because so many of the poor have got votes,’ Rivers observed.

‘Yes,’ Sir Lionel struck in with a laugh, ‘and you fellows all want to get into the House of Commons or the County Council, or some such place. By Jove! in my time a gentleman would not want to become a County Councillor.’

‘I am not troubling myself about English politics,’ the Dictator said. ‘I do not care to vex myself about them. I should probably only end by forming opinions quite different

from some of my friends here, and, as I have no mission for English political life, what would be the good of that? But I am much interested in English social life, and even in what is called Society. Now, what I want to know is how far does society in London represent social London, and still more, social England?’

‘Not the least in the world,’ Sir Rupert promptly replied.

‘I am not quite so sure of that,’ Soame Rivers interposed. ‘I fancy most of the fellows try to take their tone from us.’

‘I hope not,’ the Dictator said.

‘So do I,’ added Sir Rupert emphatically; ‘and I am quite certain they do not. What on earth do you know about it, Rivers?’ he asked almost sharply.

‘Why shouldn’t I know all about it, if I took the trouble to find out?’ Rivers answered languidly.

‘Yes, yes. Of course you could,’ Sir Rupert said benignly, correcting his awkward touch of anger as a painter corrects some sudden mistake in drawing. ‘I didn’t mean in the least to disparage your faculty of acquiring correct information on any subject. Nobody appreciates more than I do what you are capable of in that way—nobody has had so much practical experience of it. But what I mean is this—that I don’t think you know a great deal of English social life outside the West End of London.’

‘Is there anything of social life worth knowing to be known outside the West End of London?’ Soame Rivers asked.

‘Well, you see, the mere fact that you put the question shows that you can’t do much to enlighten Mr. Ericson on the one point about which he asks for some enlightenment. He has been out of England for a great many years, and he finds some fault

with our ways—or, at least, he asks for some explanation about them.’

‘Yes, quite so. I am afraid I have forgotten the point on which Mr. Ericson desired to get information.’ And Rivers smiled a bland smile without looking at Ericson. ‘May I trouble you, Lord Courtreeve, for the cigarettes?’

‘It was not merely a point, but a whole cresset of points—a cluster of points,’ Ericson said, ‘on every one of which I wished to have a tip of light. Is English social life to be judged of by the conversation and the canons of opinion which we find received in London society?’

‘Certainly not,’ Sir Rupert explained.

‘Heaven forbid!’ Lord Courtreeve added fervently.

‘I don’t quite understand,’ said Soame Rivers.

‘Well,’ the Dictator explained, ‘what I

mean is this. I find little or nothing prevailing in London society but cheap cynicism—the very cheapest cynicism—cynicism at a farthing a yard or thereabouts. We all admire healthy cynicism—cynicism with a great reforming and purifying purpose—the cynicism that is like a corrosive acid to an evil system; but this West End London sham cynicism—what does that mean?’

‘I don’t quite know what you mean,’ Soame Rivers said.

‘I mean this, wherever you go in London society—at all events, wherever I go—I notice a peculiarity that I think did not exist, at all events to such an extent, in my younger days. Everything is taken with easy ridicule. A divorce case is a joke. Marriage is a joke. Love is a joke. Patriotism is a joke. Everybody is assumed, as a matter of course, to have a selfish motive in everything. Is this

the real feeling of London society, or is it only a fashion, a sham, a grimace?’

‘I think it is a very natural feeling,’ Soame Rivers replied, with the greatest promptitude.

‘And represents the true feeling of what are called the better classes of London?’

‘Why, certainly.’

‘I think the thing is detestable, anyhow,’ Lord Courtreeve interposed, ‘and I am quite sure it does not represent the tone of English society.’

‘So am I,’ Sir Rupert added.

‘But you must admit that it is the tone which does prevail,’ the Dictator said pressingly, for he wanted very much to study this question down to its roots.

‘I am afraid it is the prevailing social tone of London—I mean the West End,’ Sir Rupert admitted reluctantly. ‘But you know what a fashion there is in these things, as well as in

others. The fashion in a woman's gown or a man's hat does not always represent the shape of a woman's body or the size of a man's head.'

'It sometimes represents the shape of the man's mind, and the size of the woman's heart,' said Rivers.

'Well, anyhow,' Sir Rupert persevered, 'we all know that a great deal of this sort of talk is talked for want of anything else to say, and because it amuses most people, and because anybody can talk cheap cynicism; I believe that London society is healthy at the core.'

'But come now—let us understand?' Ericson asked; 'how can the society be healthy at the core for which you yourself make the apology by saying that it parrots the jargon of a false and loathsome creed because it has nothing better to say, or because it hopes to be thought witty by

parroting it? Come, Sir Rupert, you won't maintain that?'

'I will maintain,' Sir Rupert said, 'that London society is not as bad as it seems.'

'Oh, well, I have no doubt you are right in that,' the Dictator hastily replied. 'But what I think so melancholy to see is that degeneracy of social life in England—I mean in London—which apes a cynicism it doesn't feel.'

'But I think it does feel it,' Rivers struck in; 'and very naturally and justly.'

'Then you think London society is really demoralised?' The Dictator spoke, turning on him rather suddenly.

'I think London society is just what it has always been,' Rivers promptly answered.

'Corrupt and cynical?'

'Well, no. I should rather say corrupt and candid.'

'If that is London society, that certainly

is not English social life,' Lord Courtreeve declared emphatically, patting the table with his hand. 'It isn't even London social life. Come down to the East End, sir——'

'Oh, indeed, by Jove! I shall do nothing of the kind!' Rivers replied, as with a shudder. 'I think, of all the humbugs of London society, slumming is about the worst.'

'I was not speaking of that,' Lord Courtreeve said, with a slight flush on his mild face. 'Perhaps I do not think very differently from you about some of it—some of it—although, Heaven be praised, not about all; but what I mean and was going to say when I was interrupted'—and he looked with a certain modified air of reproach at Rivers—'what I was going to say when I was interrupted,' he repeated, as if to make sure that he was not going to be interrupted this time—'was, that if you would go down to the East End with me, I could show you in one day plenty

of proofs that the heart of the English people is as sound and true as ever it was——'

'Very likely,' Rivers interposed saucily. 'I never said it wasn't.'

Lord Courtreeve gaped with astonishment.

'I don't quite grasp your meaning,' he stammered.

'I never said,' Soame Rivers replied deliberately, 'that the heart of the English people was not just as sound and true now as it ever was—I dare say it is just about the same—*même jeu*, don't you know?' and he took a languid puff at his cigarette.

'Am I to be glad or sorry of your answer?' Lord Courtreeve asked, with a stare.

'How can I tell? It depends on what you want me to say.'

'Well, if you mean to praise the great

heart of the English people now, and at other times——’

‘Oh dear, no; I mean nothing of the kind.’

‘I say, Rivers, this is all bosh, you know,’ Sir Rupert struck in.

‘I think we are all shams and frauds in our set—in our class,’ Rivers said, composedly; ‘and we are well brought up and educated and all that, don’t you know? I really can’t see why some cads who clean windows, or drive omnibuses, or sell vegetables in a donkey-cart, or carry bricks up a ladder, should be any better than we. Not a bit of it—if we are bad, they are worse, you may put your money on that.’

‘Well, I think I have had my answer,’ the Dictator said, with a smile.

‘And what is your interpretation of the Oracle’s answer?’ Rivers asked.

‘I should have to interpret the Oracle itself before I could be clear as to the meaning of its answer,’ Ericson said composedly.

Soame Rivers knew pretty well by the words and by the tone that if he did not like the Dictator, neither did the Dictator very much like him.

‘You must not mind Rivers and his cynicism,’ Sir Rupert said, intervening somewhat hurriedly; ‘he doesn’t mean half he says.’

‘Or say half he means,’ Rivers added.

‘But, as I was telling you, about the police organisation of Siam,’ Sir Lionel broke out anew. And this time the others went back without resistance to a few moments more of Siam.

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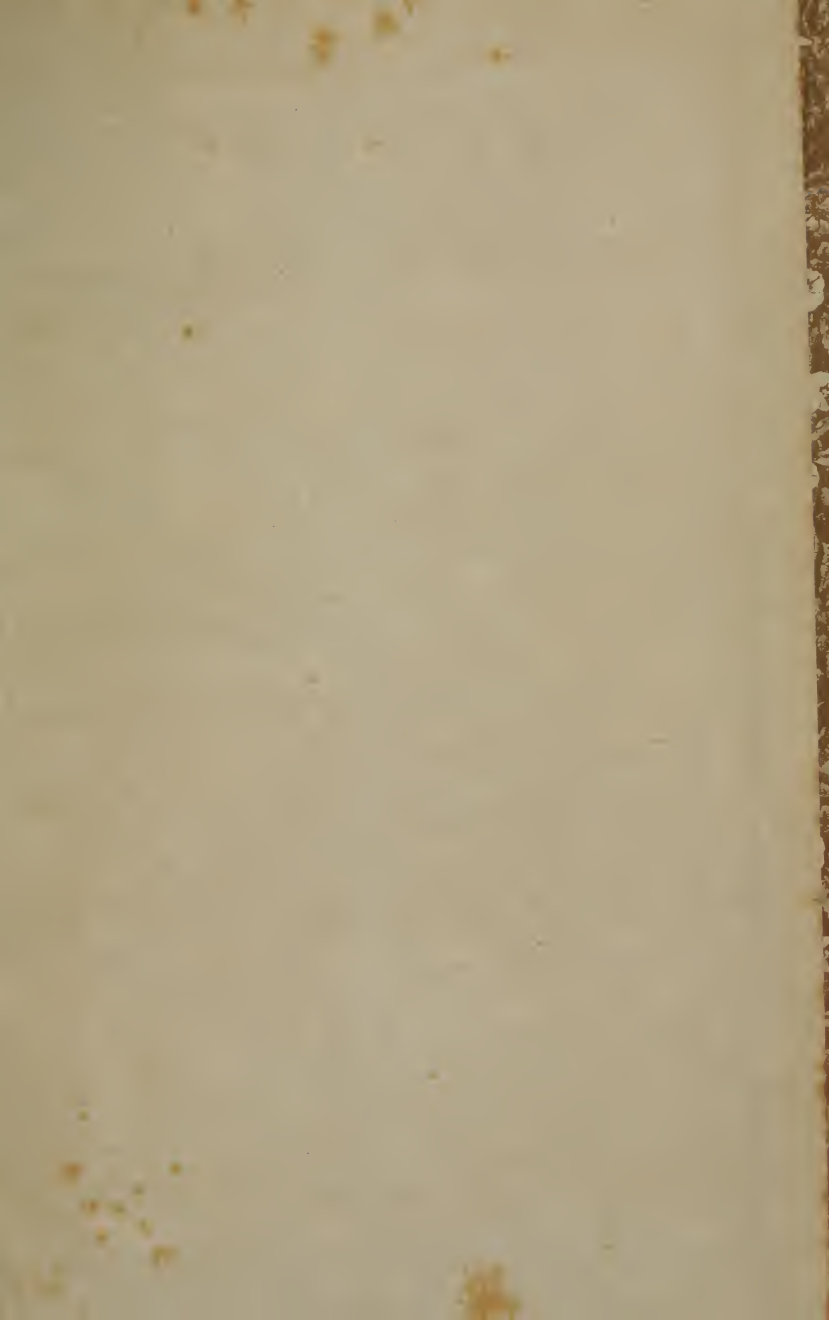
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