JOHN MAIDMENT

BY

JULIAN STURGIS


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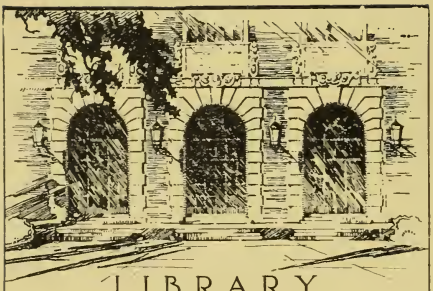

Thank Thorgio.
May 1904.

Walcott

JOHN MAIDMENT

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JULIAN STURGIS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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10

MY MOTHER

I.

CHAPTER I.

The debating-room of the Oxford Union was unusually full. The great debate of the year was in progress; it was a party question; and the youthful champions of the two political parties were there in full force. All the long benches were filled with young men, tall and short, fat and thin, sallow most of them as studious youth are apt to be, with hair rather rough and with ragged remnants of undergraduate gowns upon their backs.

Most of the audience were reading men, for the Union was not a fashionable resort; and the few who suggested idleness or

dulness looked more like the lovers of beer and skittles than of hunting and champagne. Here and there in the rows of young faces, which showed the feeling of the moment, was the less simple countenance of some don, whom the fame of this great debate had drawn to the place. A little ashamed of being there, a little contemptuous of his neighbours' seriousness, perhaps a little envious, the young dons prepared to listen to the contest of these tremendous politicians. And not only were the long benches on the floor of the House too full for comfort, but the light gallery, which ran all round the oval chamber, was packed with men, and even a few light gowns of ladies gave colour to the scene. Above the gallery itself was more colour, but sadly faint and faded, where from the upper wall the knights and damosels

of decaying frescoes, the brief effect of young enthusiasm, looked down upon these living boys, who dreamed, some of them, that they would move the world.

Suddenly the babbling and scuffling were hushed, as the door of the chamber swung, and the dignified President in correct dress-clothes moved up between the facing benches to his high seat at the end. This end of the room was a little raised above the rest of the floor; on each side of the presidential chair boldly-curved green seats were fitted to the curved walls; and these seats were now filled to their utmost capacity by the committee-men and chief speakers, who had followed the President into the room.

The debate had been adjourned from the last meeting, and, as everybody was eager to hear the brilliant young Radical who was to

address the House first, there was no long delay in calling him to his feet.

With a whispered word to the friend at his side, John Maidment stepped quickly forward to the table, and faced the crowded House.

More than half the attraction of the great debate was the expectation of a great speech from him, and he knew it. It was generally admitted, not only that he was the orator of his contemporaries, but even that during many generations of copious rhetoric there had been no speaking at Oxford like the speaking of Maidment of Balliol. And now Maidment was to make his last speech in the Union, and he meant it to be his best. There was a worthy audience; there were more opponents than supporters, and he liked that; there was expectation in the air. The room was full of light, though a green shadow

seemed to lie high up in the vaulted roof; the warmth of party strife was ready to break forth; the heat of young humanity was there already; the eager welcome died away, and in a profound silence Maidment began his speech.

The speech began, but it was not effective; something was wanting. It sounded fine and it seemed full of matter; but the listeners were not warmed so quickly as they had hoped to be. The orator's great intentions hampered him; he was too eager that this speech should be eminent, that it should surpass all his former efforts. He tried to lift it to a higher level; he felt himself comparatively ineffective, and, vexed by this recurrent feeling, he roused himself to eloquent passages, which seemed to end abruptly. It was just such an audience as he had wished,

and yet he could not move them, as he had fancied himself moving them when he lay in bed that morning. Indeed, his audience were too considerate; for foes, as well as friends, were so eager to hear him and to give him every chance of a final triumph, that he spoke at first in a silence which chilled him. Two streams of thought were his as he continued. Though his mind was busy with the making of sentences, it was busy too with questioning their effect. Would his next phrase warm them, and should he catch their warmth? As he spoke, he felt his hearers' disappointment, and his hottest words seemed to turn cold on the air. He was cold and cross, and every other moment he was ready to sit down, to curse himself for a fool, to admit that his great speech was a failure.

Indeed, John Maidment's last Oxford ora-

tion might have been little better than a failure had not help come from an unexpected quarter.

Among the little things which irritated the young speaker, as he laboured with his task, was the presence of a small number of undergraduates, who differed widely from the rest of the audience. They had a sporting look, and their clothes were both better and brighter; it was their first visit to the Union. John knew some of them, and it annoyed him to think that they had dined together, and had come to hear him as a novelty, as a few nights before they had waited on a music-hall singer. His eyes met theirs again and again, and each time a slight irritation followed. Their behaviour was harmless and they seemed attentive; but John fancied an air of superiority. As he stood looking down

the long chamber, they faced him from the gallery opposite; he could not ignore them; their presence was another cause of discomfort and annoyance. Yet from these young men came help. For some time they listened with becoming gravity; but, as they became accustomed to this new atmosphere of debate and began to gain some notion of the speaker's meaning, the more intelligent felt first a growing amazement, then a quick rush of indignation. They had known, when they came to hear him, that Maidment was a Radical—'an awful Radical,' they had called him; some of them had thought it strange that he did not prefer their society to that of men who seemed to them only half shaved and dingily dressed. But, for all their preparation, this radicalism of a man who had been at school with some of them seemed,

when it actually assailed their ears, unworthy and outrageous. It seemed impossible to stand still opposite to a fellow who talked like that, and not utter a protest.

On the other hand, John Maidment's utterances were cruder and more subversive than usual; for in his efforts to warm himself and his hearers he flung them out with uncomfortable emphasis and vehemence. From the dull level of his speech he broke abruptly into short phrases of denunciation, with which he hoped to excite himself; and these poor phrases assumed an unnatural distinctness. More and more the young orator felt the ineffectiveness of his speech, and his eye full of vexation rising to the group of smart young men read in their simple faces condemnation of his extravagance.

Who were they, that they should condemn

him, these idlers and careless Sybarites? These were the men with whom, if he had chosen the primrose path, he would have spent his time at Oxford. Whenever he had felt brief desire of their soft luxurious life, of cricket in summer and hunting in winter, of late rising and long lunching, contempt of his own weakness had turned in an instant to bitter scorn of their idleness and uselessness. And now they had come here for absolute vacancy in the hour which should have been the hour of his triumph to witness his failure; their prosperous air, the look as of men who had dined well, was a final aggravation. His eyes sought theirs as he launched his most acrid sentence, and across the long space he seemed to read in their boyish faces disapproval and derision.

As he looked, something more extrava-

gant than he had yet said came to him in an instant, and, as he gave it utterance, he was full of the wild wish to see how they would like that. They did not like it at all. The leader of their set cried out in mockery, and his friends followed with loud murmurs.

The habitual Conservatives of the place seemed only to have waited for a lead, and the voice of the young orator was drowned by a dull roll of dissenting voices. In an instant the colour leapt to John Maidment's cheek; he felt real hot anger well up from within him; his cold fits were gone. As the murmurs died away, indignant words came thronging to his lips; he was glad in the midst of his wrath; he was conscious that the something needful had come to him. His thoughts no longer

went wandering here and there; there was no divided stream; with fury and exultation he launched himself on the full current of his speech.

And now John Maidment was like a young prophet in the tents of the ungodly. His eyes shone; he saw in these genial young men who had dined at the Mitre the essence of all that was wrong with the whole nation, with the world; he burned to pulverise them. His denunciation of the idle and luxurious, who, lolling at ease on divine couches, moved with a nod resistance to all true reforms, was like a personal attack; it was lucky that these young Britons had gained from race and a hearty out-of-door life a rare fund of defensive stolidity. The dull speech blazed into brilliancy; fierce indignation made it almost poetical. Mur-

murs of warm applause answered the murmurs of objection; the real old party fires burnt once more in these young specimens of the eternal parties. The atmosphere was thrilled with the quick ebb and flow of opposing passions, and John's voice was like a trumpet in his own ears. It was a splendid burst of denunciation.

When the young Radical paused after the fury of his onslaught, the Liberal party broke into exclamations of delight. They were quickly moved to rapture, and this brilliant hero appealed to both ears and eyes. As he stood alert by the table, unable yet to speak for the tumult of applause, flushed and radiant and bold, he was as full of beauty as of the nervous energy of the time. With his head held high and his eyes shining he waited till the sounds passed; and then, with

a fine rhetorical instinct, he began to speak in a new mood. His face changed like the face of a consummate actor. He felt the sympathy of the friends around him and their generous admiration; he yielded himself to the charm; indignation had passed, and the fair hope of the future held him. His words seemed for his own delight to clothe his thoughts with beauty; he almost tasted them; he seemed to be listening to somebody else's speech, and enjoying it very much. He was content with himself. A few minutes before he had been saying to himself with bitterness that he was no better than other people; now a beguiling voice seemed to whisper to him that he was indeed set apart from the common crowd. He knew that after his great burst of denunciation he must not long delay the end.

Very gently he began to speak, and they all were very still to hear.

'But, why should we be angry?' he said. 'Is not the future ours? We may smile on our opponents, for to them is the strife without hope, to us the star of victory; to them the clouds of darkness, to us the splendour of the dawn. The day is at hand. We who are but starting on the high path of life, brothers in heart and hope, we shall live to see the glorious days when a free people in a free land, sole masters one and all of the dear soil on which we live, sole masters one and all of the destiny of our fair Fatherland—the glorious days when we, a nobler and a juster people in the eyes of God and man, shall put our veto on all aggressive war, on all unequal

burdens, on all unequal laws. Yes, we shall live to see it. Do we not see it now? Look to the East, for from thence cometh the morning; nay, look to the West, for from thence cometh the morning to the nations. Liberty is good, and we shall be free beyond the dreams of freedom. Equality shall cease to be a mockery, as when the rich alone are rich enough to seek justice. Only the good and the wise shall be held worthy of honour, only the wise and the good and the dignity of daily labour. And more than liberty, more than equality, brotherhood, a living brotherhood shall be ours. Aye, and a brotherhood like ours shall be for the nations too. Nation shall be as brother to nation, all together with mutual help and love working out the divine purpose in the world. The day dawns, my brothers, if you

will but see. Speaking here for the last time——'

Here the voice of the speaker seemed to break, and a deep murmur of sympathy rose from all sides; as it ceased he said:

'I will say no more. Let my last words in this place be, "Have faith, my brothers."'

Before the last words were spoken, some had risen from their seats; young blood was on fire, and the unstinted admiration of youth; it seemed an amazing thing that one of themselves should speak so eloquently, with a manner so faultless and a voice so beautiful.

When John sat down, there was such tumultuous applause, that the dignified young President grew anxious for the dignity of the House. It seemed as if the wilder and more revolutionary youth would toss the orator to their shoulders, as if he were no more than

the winner of a boys' race at school. There was nothing but applause; the Conservative majority made no counter-demonstration. Even the most sullen of these young opponents felt that there was nobility in the young Radical's errors; even the most cynical of the few dons present, though he smiled grimly over a boy's broadcast sowing of political wild oats, turned in the doorway for another glance at this brilliant creature, illumined by youth, by genius, and by faith. As John sank down in his seat, his friend Paul grasped his hand and wrung it hard, for he could not speak. John was supremely happy. Even the young men who had roused his wrath, the Sybarites in check shooting-coats, were pleasant in his eyes. He was intoxicated with his triumph; he was exquisitely conscious of his power; he was pleased with

himself. As he felt Paul's honest hand grasp his, he had a final exquisite sensation of delight in this loyal, unquestioning friendship. Pressing his friend's hand with his strong, nervous fingers, he felt sure of his power over men, sure that he was a leader of men, that with his gifts he might go anywhere. And he meant to go far. He was very ambitious.

CHAPTER II.

Paul Brent was slow of speech. Moved in all his heart—and it was a very big one—by the triumph of his friend, he could only express his feelings by grasping his hand. It is true that he opened his mouth, but, if any word came forth with difficulty, it was too short and too deep to reach even John's ear, and it did little indeed to swell the clamour of applause. And yet if all the enthusiasm which John Maidment's speech excited could have been weighed there and then, the joy of Paul Brent in his friend's triumph would have been found greater than that of all

the tumultuous youth together. His was a great unquestioning admiration, which had grown slowly with his growth from the day of his first meeting with his friend when they were both small boys—a belief, which had gained strength with every day, entwining itself with all his habits of slow careful thinking, and blending itself with the strong silent currents of his deepest feelings. He had been charmed by those qualities in his friend which were least like his own: the quickness of understanding, the readiness of speech. From the first John had seemed to him a shining person in body as in mind. John had seen great amazing truths at a glance, and Paul had stared and stared till he had acquired a clear view of them. John had swallowed great principles, which were to transform himself and through him the world, and Paul had

gulped them down with faith. There was no limit to the gratitude, of which he could not express a thousandth part. He believed that this friend, who had been brought to him in boyhood by a sort of happy chance, had freed his eyes from bandages of prejudice and error, and had shown him the world as it might be, and as even he might help to make it—a world of higher aims and purer lights, a world of brothers, a world approaching perfection in all its parts by virtue of a universal panacea which was called Democracy. He believed that John had taught him how to live.

John on his side had no idea of the strength of Paul's feeling for him. Indeed, he often laughed at him for his cold temperament, and for the faintness of the flush which came to his cheek in times of the greatest

excitement. Of course he knew that he had great influence with him, had had great influence from the first. He did not think much about it; it seemed only natural; it was obvious that he should lead and Paul should follow.

As Paul travelled down from Oxford a few days after John's great speech at the Union, he wished many times, as he had often wished before, that he had told his friend how grateful he was. His eyes rested rather vaguely on the familiar scene, where the easy sloping hills stand back from the valley garden of the Thames; and as he thought of his friend, and that their college days were ended as their school days had ended, there was a mist on the river, though its morning mist had vanished long ago. Later, when he had passed through London, and the pastures and

hop-gardens and wheat-fields were gliding past his window, the same wish came back to him again and again. He told himself, not for the first time, that there must be something wrong with him, since he could not plainly and frankly tell his friend how well he knew the vastness of the debt which he owed him. He set his teeth and nodded his head slightly, as he made up his mind that once for all he would tell what he felt to John when he joined him at Brentholme.

And now the train was drawing near to the familiar station, and Paul could get a distant view of his native village, straggling loosely up the hill to the open gates of his father's place.

This so-called borough was probably the most insignificant place in England which sent a representative to Parliament; and the

choice of the representative depended on the will of the present owner of Brentholme as absolutely as it had depended on the will of the most arbitrary of his ancestors. The place had descended for many generations from father to son, and the eldest son of each alternate generation had gone into Parliament as a matter of course. Every eldest son wished to go into the army, but it was only the Brent who had grown weary of sitting grim and silent in the House of Commons while talk ran jerkily on who allowed his eldest son to become a soldier. Paul's grandfather had been a member; his father had been in the army till he became a colonel; it was therefore fixed as the Pyramids that Paul should enter the House.

And now his time had come. He had finished his Oxford life with credit; and his

next duty was to go through the form of being elected by the friendly electors, who had known him in his perambulator, and who would have chosen him at first sight, perambulator and all, if Colonel Brent had suggested it. And now everything was ready. The worthy gentleman who had contentedly acted as seat-warmer was ready to go; and Paul was to occupy his place, and was not sorry that it must be so. Indeed, the education which daily intercourse with John Maidment had given him made him profoundly glad, first of all Brents, that even by dumb voting he could help bring in the golden time. He was profoundly glad, and profoundly grateful to John.

As he looked at the straggling, unpretending pleasant village, it struck him even more sharply than usual how unfair it was that

such a place should have the glory of a representative, and what a greater shame it was that, while it continued to enjoy this honour, its representative should not be John. How wrong it was that he, the tongue-tied, should walk into Parliament with his hands in his pockets, and that his friend, the brilliant and the eloquent, should have to chew his burning thoughts in silence! Glad as he was of the career before him, he would not have hesitated for a moment to give up his chance to John, if it had been in his power to give it up. But Paul knew, and John knew too, that Colonel Brent was not to be persuaded to change his plans.

The Colonel made few plans, but those he made without help, and he did not discuss them. Brought up very strictly by the last Parliamentary Brent, he allowed his children

a perhaps excessive freedom in everyday matters; but at certain epochs they found duties awaiting them, and for escape from these not all the arguments of all the advocates would avail. It had long been settled that Paul, as soon as he had done with Oxford, should go into Parliament.

It seemed to Paul that there was still a good deal of unfairness in the world. There was this ridiculous little rotten borough, and he, the wrong man, was bound to represent it; and, when he had become its representative, he must help to deprive it of representation. It never occurred to him for a moment that he need not join as heartily in the suppression of this little family iniquity as in that of all the other iniquities which they were to smash in the good time coming. He was a very simple soul. He wondered how his

father, staunch old Whig with inconsistent peculiarities, would like the changes. He thought that they would come very quickly. He thought himself weak for hoping that the glorious improvements would not include the cutting up of Brentholme into cabbage gardens in his father's day. If he were ever allowed to inherit the place, and if the new lights made it clear that cabbages were right, he would stick in the first spade, though it would scar his heart too. He had a deep love for Brentholme.

And now the train stopped at the station, and Paul stepped out quickly, for there on the platform was his sister, his only sister and fast friend. Nobody else got out at that quiet place, and when the train moved on again, Letty, unmindful of the porter, who was an old family friend, put her arms round Paul's

neck and would not let him go. She laughed and almost cried, and could hardly keep her feet from dancing. She had to stand a-tiptoe to embrace her long-legged brother, and he put on a fine blush as she kissed him before the admiring friend who was arranging his luggage on the truck. He unclasped her hands by force, and held her away that he might look at her.

She was a pleasant sight. There was the fair skin of the family, though it was not free from freckles, and there were the family blue eyes; but the little nose was the very opposite of the Brent aquiline, and nose and mouth and chin seemed to hint a slight wilfulness which was unlike the Brent severity. She seemed to be still a child though old enough to be a woman, to be all compact of wholesome country air and country thoughts and

simple ways of life. She laughed under Paul's eyes, and her dimples were very pretty. She insisted on holding his hand as they went up the drowsy street, wherein there were but two or three friendly folk to give them greeting, and through the big park gates, which all day long stood open to the village. It was a sign of a long-established friendship. The little Brents made themselves at home in their neighbours' houses, and were aware of the birth of every puppy in the place; and in turn they brought the school children from the dusty road into the spacious playground of the park.

Very near to its open gates stands the old square house, square and solid as the family itself, with its trim flower-beds about it (the Colonel had a very orderly taste in flowers); but beyond it the park stretches far away its

wide and generous spaces. It would give small encouragement to the reforming spade, for there is very little earth above the chalk. It cannot be called well timbered, for it is only in the deepest hollows that the elms and beeches have grown large, while on the upland slopes small clumps seem to cling for life, and on the highest places the stunted shrubs grow streaming with a driving wind. Its beauty is the beauty of wide spaces and open breezy life, of springy turf and lovely line. The slopes melt into hollows and the hollows swell into hills with the grace of following waves; and so the land spreads far and free till it slips under the furthest park paling and is far-reaching open down; and the downs stretch forward their long majestic curves till they are broken into high chalk walls by the buffets of the rolling sea.

CHAPTER III.

On the morning after his son's return from Oxford, Colonel Brent was pacing up and down his den. The Turkey carpet, which had lasted long, showed a marked line where the Colonel was wont to walk backward and forward for the assistance of the somewhat slow process of thought. In the pleasant morning light, which came freely in at the bow window, everything in the room looked old as the carpet. The red curtains, which were pulled tight back, were faded. There was a stiff high-backed leathern arm-chair, the seat of which was hollowed by long

occupation; and there was a roomy leathern sofa, with a mattress not much thicker than a board. Between these well-worn articles of furniture was a wide grate with high old-fashioned mantelpiece; on the mantelpiece were a few pipes, a tobacco jar, a superannuated powder-flask, and a dog-whistle; and above these hung a map of the county yellowed by age. There was nothing in the room, except a pipe or two and the later numbers of 'Baily's Magazine,' which the Colonel's father would not have recognised at a glance. The present owner looked thoroughly at home in his den. He had an air as old-fashioned as his furniture, and his back was stiffer than that of his chair. He looked tall and strong, but he did not carry his strength easily; he had a peculiar air of being hampered by his muscles. Of course

his eyes were clearly blue, and his hair thick and fair. His skin, but for its summer tan, might have been envied by the fairest Saxon girl; and an abundant golden beard covered his square chin and massive throat.

When the Colonel had taken but a few turns on his familiar track the door opened and Paul came in. He had been for an early ride about the park; he looked longer in the leg than usual in his breeches and gaiters, and his face had a rosier colour. As he had felt his favourite animal leap under him with a treble portion of the springiness of the short turf, and had met the fresh rush of the air as he galloped against it, he had said in his heart that he was a very lucky young man. His life lay plain before him, and it seemed very good.

The Colonel stopped in his walking, and

father and son, equal in height, looked straight at each other. After a minute the Colonel began—

'About this——' he said in his deep voice, and stopped.

Paul nodded gravely.

'This going into Parliament,' said the Colonel, as if he finished his sentence with an effort.

Paul nodded again.

'Johnson wants to come out.'

Paul nodded.

'Are you ready to go in?'

'Yes,' said Paul.

Then there was a pause. The Colonel could not speak without putting his chin up first. On this occasion he put his chin well up and opened his mouth, as if he were going to say something momentous, and then

he shut his mouth with no word spoken. His son waited patiently, being accustomed to the thought that speech was a difficulty. At last the father spoke a trifle lower than usual.

'You must not vote for any lowering of the franchise,' he said.

'What?'

'It's gone far enough. I can't have old Treddles voting.'

'You can't help it,' said Paul, who was beginning to understand the force of his father's words.

His father waited a minute, and then, with his chin very much up and a faint flush on his cheek-bones, he said—

'I can help your having a hand in it.'

After this there was a longer pause.

'You mean,' said Paul at last, and rather

huskily, 'that I am not to go into Parliament.'

'If you don't promise.'

'If it isn't right that the people should vote, the whole thing is—is bosh.'

On this the Colonel made no comment either by voice or gesture. He stood firmly planted before the empty grate, with the old county map above his head, an embodiment of all the decision of all the Brents.

'I believe in it,' said Paul with equal decision; 'and so I must do all I can to help it.'

The Colonel hereupon opened his mouth as if again he were about to say something of importance, and this time from the depth of his chest issued a single deep note, or grunt, which might have meant anything. It probably meant that he did not intend

to discuss the question, but waited to hear whether his son would give the promise or not.

'I can't promise,' said Paul shortly.

His father said nothing, but looked at him steadily.

'Then I am not to stand for——' Paul finished his sentence by a nod towards the family borough.

'No,' said the Colonel.

Paul stood a moment looking down at the point of his boot; then he turned to the door, and when he had opened it he said, with an obvious effort—

'I am sorry not to do what you ask.'

'Ah!' said his father, with the upward movement of the head.

This deep, brief answer meant that he was sorry for the fact, and that further

speech was useless; and Paul, being a Brent, understood it, and accepted it as conciliatory.

Colonel Brent, when his son had left him, stood in the same place, and in the same attitude. He was not half so much surprised as his son, for he had long arrived at the conclusion that Paul had views, probably young men's folly, unlike his own. Though not a sign of it appeared in his face, he was very sorry for his boy. He was proud of him too, for he had taken his disappointment like a man—like a Brent.

'How like the boy is to my father!' he said to himself, with a softening of the heart.

If the Colonel had been in the habit of thinking of himself, he might have said—

'How like he is to me!'

He was not only proud of his son, but

even a little envious. At the bottom of his heart he envied this chance of taking a knock-down blow so pluckily. There was a great deal of stoicism in the family, and many of its members had felt a highly rarified pleasure in enduring without a word the buffets of fortune. The Colonel did not sit down to examine his thoughts nor to nurse his feelings. He had decided some time before what the next step should be, if Paul refused to promise. Paul had refused; and the Colonel, after standing silent for a few minutes, put on his hat and walked at his usual pace to the post-office.

Paul took his disappointment well, but he showed more emotion than his father. To him it was a complete surprise, and he was a little staggered. An hour ago he had seen his life fairly arranged before him, and

his life's work ready to his hand. Now he did not know what he was to do. As this was a state of mind which was always unbearable to him, he began to consider at once what his first step should be. He could not rest till he had made some plan of action; and so to assist the process, and only waiting a minute to unbuckle his spurs, he strode away to tramp and think. He walked more quickly than usual, and at first his lips were very tightly pressed together; and so it may be fairly said that he showed more emotion than his father.

But, walk as fast and far as he would, Paul could not decide on his first step. He thought that he must get away from home for a while, but he was not sure that this was not mere weakness. He thought that it would be good for him as a Democrat to

visit America, but he was not sure that this was anything more than a wish for indulgence. However, the exercise had parted his lips and brought him to his normal pace, and he seemed calm as usual when he came back from his walk and found Letty on the terrace. When he saw his sister, it struck him that she would be hurt if she heard the news from anybody but him, and, as he hated to hurt Letty, he determined to tell her. He used the fewest words.

'Not going into Parliament?' she cried out.

'No,' he said.

'Won't the father give it you? What a shame!' she said, hotly—'oh, Paul, what a shame!'

'He's right—from his point of view.'

'But why? How can he be right? Why won't he let you go in?'

'He asked me not to vote for lowering the franchise.'

'And you wouldn't?' Her whole face changed. 'Oh, Paul! Such a little thing!'

'It's big,' he said after a minute; 'it's at the bottom of the whole thing.'

'Oh, but, Paul, to please the father! Can't you really promise him that?'

She put her two hands up to his shoulders, and her sweet upturned face was full of entreaty.

Her brother set his lips again, wishing that he could explain. After a pause of consideration he said—

'A man in Parliament, who believes in democracy and don't do all he can to give

the people votes, is'—he looked about for a word—'is a sneak.'

This effort did not seem to have the required effect, for Letty still looked at him with doubt and entreaty.

'I think you ought to be ready to give up something to the father,' she said.

'But this is everything. Ask John when he comes. He will show you. He can make it clear.'

As he spoke of John, he determined to write to him. This was the very first thing to do. He even thought, that being so much moved, he would be able to express himself more warmly to his friend, and so some little good might come out of this evil chance.

'I can't help it,' he said, and he squeezed his sister's little hands rather tightly. Then

he went and shut himself in his bed-room, that he might write his letter.

'Dear old man,' he wrote, and then he stopped.

This was an affectionate style of beginning a letter, which he had never used before. He blushed; he thought the words looked gushing; but there they were, written, and they should go:—

'Dear Old Man,—I am not to go into Parliament. The father won't have it. He wanted me to promise not to vote for extending the franchise. Of course I could not promise; and so I am out of it. I don't like it. I have told nobody but Letty; and she thinks me wrong. She does not understand. You will understand. I wish I could make you know that I know what I owe you

You have made me see things straight, and what one may do, and what one may not. When can you get away from Oxford ? We shall all be—glad when you come here.

'Yours ever,

'PAUL BRENT.'

He blushed again as he wrote, 'Yours ever ;' it looked like the ending of a romantic schoolgirl ; but he let it stand.

CHAPTER IV.

By the afternoon post of the next day Paul received a letter, and recognised with a secret thrill the writing of John Maidment. Holding it unopened in his hand, he considered it till he had grasped the fact that it must have been written before John had received his letter of the day before. He smiled at the thought that while he was reading John's letter about everyday matters John might be crying out with amazement over the news of his disappointment. Smiling, he opened the letter and began to read; but in a moment the smile had gone from his lips.

'My dear Paul,'—John wrote—'how shall I ever thank you? When I read your father's telegram offering me the seat, I knew in a moment what you had done. Paul, my dear friend, yours is a heart of gold. There is not one man in ten thousand who would forego such a chance for the sake of a friend. But you must pause and think. It seems absurd to write this to you, who are always pausing and thinking. I know you must have thought this thing through and through before you decided that I should go before you into Parliament. Anyway, I shan't be really happy till we are both there, and working together again, as we worked for the schools. If you don't repent your sacrifice even a little bit I can't refuse it. I am so sure that there is my proper work—the work which I can do best. There cannot be a doubt of that.

If I am good for anything, I am good for speaking. It would be unpardonable in me to refuse a chance of going into Parliament. My obvious sphere of duty is in Parliament. I am so glad that there can't be a shadow of doubt about that, for your father put a thing in his telegram which might have made me pause if I had not been so absolutely sure what I ought to do. He offered me the seat on condition that I would not vote for lowering the franchise. Of course I shall try to argue him out of that. Anyway, it is of course wholly different from promising to vote against it—that I could not have promised. But the mere absence of a single voter can make no difference; the odds are incalculably great. It would be simply preposterous for anybody to allow such a thing to keep him from a career in which he sees

clearly his only real path of usefulness. It would be madness. Oh, my dear Paul, how can I thank you? I have written all this as if it was settled; but you must not give up this thing to me, if you have the least doubt or regret. Write to me at once, and tell me. Be sure that, if you draw back, I shall never blame you. Only write and tell me all about it, or I shall come flying home at once. I can do nothing till I am sure.—Yours ever,

'JOHN MAIDMENT.'

Paul shut himself up with John's letter. He could not bear to speak of it to anybody. He read it through again deliberately; he examined it sentence by sentence; he could find no comfort in it. He was sure that his friend was wrong, and this was a great shock, for never before had he realised that in any

matter of any importance John Maidment could be wrong. It was a shock to the foundations of all his usual thoughts and feelings; but yet he was sure that his friend was wrong. Moreover, as he patiently examined the letter, he arrived gradually at the conclusion that his friend more than half suspected that he was wrong. He noted all the expressions of certainty—'I am so sure.' 'There cannot be a doubt.' 'I am so glad that there can't be a shadow of doubt.' 'It would be simply preposterous,' John had written, 'to be turned from a useful career by such a trifle; it would be madness.' Paul had no doubt: his friend was wrong, and his friend's conscience was uneasy. He wished with all his heart that he had been with him.

What a revolution in himself was implied by this wish he did not stop to ask. He felt

the discomfort of the shock, but he did not think about it. All his thoughts were for John, and as he thought about him he was filled with pity. The brilliant creature, who might have grown great, was beginning with a mistake; the young man full of noble aspirations was yielding to the first temptation; the politician, who had thrilled his hearers with visions of political purity, was to pay his principles for the very start in the race. It was pitiful. Paul wished with all his heart that he had been near to strengthen him in the hour of temptation. It was no use indulging in such wishes. What could he do now? He decided that he could do nothing yet. He must wait and see how his letter, which had crossed this ill-omened epistle on the road, would affect John Maidment. It was impossible that John could consent to be

less scrupulous than he, who had always looked to him for guidance. Poor John! Paul foresaw that it would be bitter for his friend to know that another had been firmer under temptation; but that was a small matter, if only it might save him from beginning life with a fatal mistake. He must wait and see how his friend would answer his letter, and he hoped with all his heart that the answer would include a refusal of the Colonel's offer.

Paul had not long to wait. The post of the next day brought John's second letter. It was not long:—

'DEAR PAUL,—Burn my letter of yesterday, and forget that I wrote it. I can't tell you how annoyed I am that I made such a mistake. Not that the mistake was strange.

I certainly never should have suspected that even for a moment you would have seen the thing in such a false light. It is to be blind to the relative importance of things; it is to be not conscientious, but fantastic. To give up a career of high utility rather than promise to stand aside from a single measure, which is certain to come without your help! You must have seen before this that that is hopelessly unpractical. Go to your father (you have probably gone already) and tell him you will have the seat. Don't think for a moment that I will grudge it you. It hurt me, I confess, that you hesitated to do what I was ready to do. Surely you don't think me unscrupulous. I can't believe it. You must know after all these years that my dangers are all on the other side. If I fail in life, as is only too likely, my failure will be

due to a morbid conscientiousness. Of this I am absolutely certain. More than enough of this. I only write to ask you to burn my last letter, and to tell your father at once that you will take the seat.—Yours very truly,

'JOHN MAIDMENT.'

To this letter Paul replied even more shortly.

'Dear John,' he wrote, 'I can't promise what my father asks, and there is no chance of his changing. I still hope that you won't promise either. It is no good my arguing about it, for you are a great deal cleverer than I am. Still, I feel strongly that you had better let it alone. I would give a great deal to be able to persuade you of this. It must be such a bad business to start wrong. I go

to America to-morrow week, and shan't be back till the election is over.

'Yours very truly,

'PAUL BRENT.'

Here the correspondence ended. Paul received no more letters from John, but on the day of his leaving home his father handed him without a word an old telegram and an open letter. The former had been sent by John as soon as he received the Colonel's telegram, and contained a grateful acceptance of the seat; the latter, which had been written at the same time, brought more expressions of gratitude, and asked twice why Paul had refused the chance. Further missives had come from John, and it was clear that he had not withdrawn his acceptance; and Paul, as he laid the telegram and letter on his father's writing-table,

laid down with them his last hope of his friend's repentance. He could not speak; his eyes were smarting; he felt the pain of loneliness. He had given to his friend unquestioning faith and the generous admiration of a boy. With deep delight he had made his friend his master. Reserved and a little narrow, he had been content with this one master, and had concentrated on him all the deep enthusiasm which he could not utter. Now he had been forced to believe that this friend was weaker than himself. It was a revolution, with all the pain thereof. He had no second guide to whom he might turn; he was forced to depend upon himself; he stood alone.

The Colonel, standing square before his empty grate, was moved by a deep sympathy for his boy, whose discomfort he in part

divined. All business details concerning the son's tour had been settled between them in the briefest manner. There was no more for the father to say except 'Good-bye.' Still he stared steadfastly at Paul, and at last he unlocked his lips. He opened his mouth to say that America would cure him of his democratic fancies, but he shut it again with no word spoken, for it did not seem as if the remark would ease his heart. He took Paul's hand and held it hard; Paul wrung his father's hand for answer; and so they parted.

When the young traveller parted from his sister, there was at least on one side a greater show of emotion. Letty was furious with John, and at first she wilfully refused to see anything except that, like a young cuckoo, he had shoved Paul out of a seat which was a family possession. When her brother had

explained with care and pains that he had refused it before it was offered to John, and that he could not have taken it even if his friend had refused it, she scolded him and John too. Their conduct seemed to confirm a theory which she was beginning to hold of the perversity of young men.

'If he is wrong,' said Paul, patting her on the shoulder, 'you ought to pity him. That's what women are good for.'

'Is that all?' she said.

She thought it must be an inadequate view of the value of women; but, though she mocked, she was pleased. She liked the idea of pitying John. She was a little tired of contemplating him on his pedestal. Her beloved Paul had inspired her long ago with an immense admiration for his friend—an admiration which was excited to much liveli-

ness by the free criticism of her school-boy brothers, who looked doubtfully at a man who preferred study to looking for a rabbit. She was as lively in defence as a ruffled hen, and never saw John's merits so clearly as in the holidays, when Jacky and Dicky and Teddy accused him of being a prig. These boys liked 'to get a rise' out of Letty, of whom, nevertheless, they highly approved. Yet sometimes, when the younger brothers were at school, their sister grew restless in the attitude of respectful admiration; and the idea of being able to pity John came with an irresistible fascination. It appealed to something protective in her, a dormant motherliness. She had been zealous in defending an idol on a pedestal, and now the idol was proved to be so small that she could protect him under her wing.

'Be kind to him,' said Paul rather hoarsely. He was sure that John would come home in no comfortable mood, and he was very sorry for him.

'Yes,' said Letty with sudden tears in her eyes, 'I'll try to be kind.'

CHAPTER V.

Paul had gone, but John still lingered in Oxford. He had stayed up after term time to write an essay, with which he hoped to gain a University prize; but after the arrival of Colonel Brent's offer he had not written a word of his essay, nor thought of it, except to assure himself eagerly that he need never finish it. As he was taking his final leave of Oxford, he wanted to pack his books or see them packed; and perhaps some impulse to sentimental leave-takings kept him rambling about the walks of Magdalen or the field paths of the surrounding hills. But still Letty pronounced it amazing, and the Colonel

thought it strange, that John delayed his coming.

The delay was certainly unusual, for John Maidment was wont to hurry to these good friends; and, though he was not related to them even in the remotest degree, he had never known any home but theirs. Indeed, it seemed to John impossible that he had ever had any other home. The pictures of his childhood which his memory had kept were as apparently commonplace as those of most people, but in no two of them was the background the same. Here and there in those first years, which are so long, a chance scene remained startlingly clear, like a brightly lighted station in a night journey by rail, while tracts of time between, with all their infant joys and sorrows, were mere darkness. There was a picture of a woman with a dark

face, and earrings eyes and teeth all gleaming, who chirped shrilly to a canary piping more shrilly in answer, while the sun poured under the yellow blind a broad flood of mottled yellow light. There was another picture of a redder face and a gay cap, which the infant John was tearing from its place, while he was half dragged and half carried down a passage covered with oilcloth; and, when in later life he recalled this scene, he could hear the key turn with a horrid shriek in the lock, and he was alone again in the dark, wild with grief and fury, beating on the door. There were two or three more such pictures, which John could summon from the past at will, and in every picture there was a different woman. From this fact he inferred that nurses did not stay long with him, as from the difference of the backgrounds he inferred that he had

spent a great part of his extreme youth in travel.

Of all the disconnected scenes of early childhood which his memory had kept for him, the one which the boy liked best was this.

He was standing on a garden seat, and about him was a soft arm covered with some light stuff, and he was looking down at the sea; and the sea was all blue, like blue paint, lightly speckled with gold, and ruffled and glancing; and close beside him was a tall tree, and somebody said it was like an umbrella, and he tried hard to see that it was like an umbrella; and other ladies had come about him, laughing and kissing him, and saying that he was pretty. A certain perfume always brought this picture before him in a moment. And while these soft creatures were petting him, a man came laughing too

and touched his cheek with a fair silky moustache, and murmured, 'Little son!'

And one of the ladies cried out, 'Do you call him little son because you've forgotten his name?'

And the man answered with more laughter, 'I forget everything.'

After many years John could recall the exact tone of voice in which the smiling, exquisite man had answered; and he liked to recall it and the whole scene therewith, for it was all that he could remember of his father. And John Maidment was very much interested in his father, and this impression of him as a most charming man was very pleasant to him. It explained everything satisfactorily. Besides, there was no other relative for him to think about. His mother had died before the date of his first mental picture; and it

early became clear to him that he had either no living relations or none who cared to cultivate his acquaintance.

In the early days of his life at Brentholme he asked a great many questions about his father, but, as Colonel Brent was the only person who could have answered them, he obtained very little information. So the boy became indignant, and asked no more questions on that subject. And very soon he became busy in building up a complete theory of his father out of the scanty materials which he had gathered, and his single vivid impression of a charming personality. He assured himself that Wilfred Maidment (even the name was suggestive of charm) had been the most brilliant and popular man of his day. He knew that the Colonel and he had been brother officers, and

he decided that the slow, silent Philip Brent had found in the friendship of his irresistible comrade the greatest delight of which he was capable. It was evident that Philip had owed all the brightness of his life to Wilfred, and the guardianship of his son was but a poor return. Indeed, John went so far as to assure himself that it was a great privilege for Colonel Brent to look after Wilfred's boy. As he did not like the idea of being under obligations to people, he found great comfort in this assurance. Without a doubt he was a treat, as Wilfred's boy; and he need not trouble his guardian, who blushed and frowned under interrogation, with questions about the source of his pocket-money and the cheques for schooling and tailors. Probably they came from America, where it was understood that Mr. Maidment was dabbling in

silver mines; but, if the Colonel paid the bills, he would be paid of course when his friend came home, and in the meantime it was a privilege for him to do what he could to repay the debt of happiness which he owed to the comrade of his youth.

Thus John made for himself a delightful story of an unequal friendship in which the gratitude was all on one side, and a delightful picture of his absent parent, with the contemplation of which he often pleased himself. Once or twice in the early years the Colonel had unlocked his lips and informed John that his father was coming home; but each time he had had to repeat the unlocking process to say that he was not coming. Then even the rumours of home-coming ceased. The Colonel occasionally received letters from Newport or Denver, or intermediate places,

but he did not show them to John. He carried them off to his own den, and pored over them, making slow calculations with many figures, and answering them at last with difficulty, and yet with brevity.

When young Maidment was at school and rapidly finding out that he was more clever than his neighbours, he thought less and less about his absent parent. There was the Colonel, an excellent every-day father, more free of money than of jaw; and for the rest the easy acquisition of all sorts of knowledge, with an average amount of summer cricket and football in winter, filled almost all his thoughts. To surpass his fellows with apparent ease, to know a lot of things and to be admired for the knowledge, to win well-bound books, became more pleasant than toffee, though the boy always had a sweet

tooth. And so, as time went on and he 'socked' in places more and more exclusive, he ceased to wonder why he heard so little of his father, and why he did not see him. The father whom he had constructed for himself remained more or less in the dark, and was only dragged out with effusion on very rare occasions. When for instance John felt that his talents received a cold acknowledgment, or when he had dashed himself like a flowing wave against some solid purpose of the Colonel, then he would assure himself with fury that all would be well if his real father were with him. Trembling with a great excitement, he would fly to his ideal parent, who somewhere in the silver mountains was making a fortune in a manner the most picturesque. A fur-clad hero of Ballantyne, a modern Raleigh, chief ornament of court and

camp, an exiled prince in search of adventures, there always was Wilfred Maidment, exquisite, with a fair moustache, not a day older, to carry comfort to his wounded boy.

At last came a telegram from Oxford announcing John's coming, and a few hours later came John himself. It was evening when he stepped into the cool bare hall, where the same old fox's mask smiled above the whip-rack, and where the stuffed heron leaned only a little more awry on the old marble-topped table.

At the bang of the front door Jacky and Dicky and Teddy dashed into the hall. They had but just come home for the summer holidays, and they greeted the new-comer with a warmth which was caused in part by the intoxication of the first days of free roving. Those of the dogs who had the run

of the house trooped in at their heels, and the whole party filled the house with a delightful clamour of welcome.

But John looked beyond these boys and dogs with anxious eyes. It seemed ominous to him that Letty had not come with the rest. She had meant to run out of the room with the others; she too had jumped up at the sound of the door; but some new shyness suddenly stopped her, and she stood listening, breathing quickly. John's heart sank; he was offended; he felt her criticism in the air. As he shook hands with the young Brents and patted a dog or two in passing, he was hotly but silently defending his own action, and running through once more the many arguments which proved the folly of Paul. He was looking so anxiously for the girl, that at first he did not notice the Colonel standing

in the entrance of his den; but the Colonel looked at him and was not satisfied. Even in the dim light his strong eyes saw that John was pale and that his mouth was anxious and irritable, and the sight made him sad. John was not far wrong in his theory of the feeling which the Colonel had had for Wilfred Maidment. The companionship of his graceful friend had doubled the light of Philip Brent's life when they were boys in the Guards; and when the same friend who had always brought his troubles to Philip finally brought his son, who was the chief trouble of the moment, the Colonel received the child without a murmur.

Both friends had married and both had lost their wives, and the one who had been left with five children took the one child of the other without a murmur, though with a

sure conviction that he would have to be alone responsible for his bringing up. He had been alone responsible; and as he had watched the boy growing in grace and in ability, there had grown up in him an affection as strong and deep as that which he had felt for his father. It had in truth become a privilege to look after Wilfred's boy. He had been glad to see the boy grow in the clean air of Brentholme and the fine simplicity of its daily life from a sallow nervous child to a young man quick and abounding in energy. As he saw the boy's industry and zeal for knowledge, he had slowly acquired an immense belief in him. Slowly, too, he had formed the theory that here was his lost friend without his old weaknesses and with all his old charm. He had said in his heart that here was a Wilfred without errors.

As he never said these things aloud, John Maidment, though he guessed the friendship which had existed between his real father and the father who paid his bills, never guessed how great a measure of the old devotion had descended to himself. The Colonel loved him as a child of his own, and yet with a peculiar tenderness for the child of his friend. Now, as he stared anxiously at him in the shadows, he told himself that he had never seen him look so ill since he had taken him, a puny child of seven, from his father's arms.

CHAPTER VI.

When Letty had so far conquered her unusual shyness that she could look at John, she too could see that he was not well. He was pale and silent, and on small provocation irritable; and when he talked at all he talked feverishly and laughed too often. She could see that he was ill at ease; she felt more and more sorry for him, as she would have felt for a naughty boy who had had quite enough punishment. Now in his presence, as before in imagination, she found a pleasure in this pity; but, when she looked at the young man with a new kindness, he was thrilled with

annoyance, as if each nerve were conscious of her venturing to criticise him. He did not want to be pitied. He must have her loyal friendship and admiration. He could not do without it. He made up his mind to broach this matter of Parliament as soon as he could find the girl alone. Better the immediate discussion of this uncomfortable topic than the gnawing consciousness that it was in the thoughts of both and would fill every moment of silence with intolerable uneasiness.

Full of this purpose of instant speech, he went to bed and had a restless night. He had not slept well of late, and, as this was unprecedented in his life, he was vexed. At Brentholme his bedroom was next to Paul's, and this nearness sent his thoughts wandering across the Atlantic with the string of excellent arguments of which he was heartily sick.

Had not this wretched question of the borough caused him pain enough in his lonely days and restless nights at Oxford? He had told himself a thousand times that he had done right; he was furious at being obliged to tell himself so often. And now when he was at home, where it was natural that he should find rest and comfort after his struggles, the whole air was full of the criticism of this girl, this mere child, who ought to know that he was right without any explanation. He declared to himself that it would be too absurd to explain his conduct to Letty; but yet he knew that he had no chance of the repose which he needed until he had talked to her about the whole matter. He would talk to her and have done with it; but an uneasy doubt cropped up once more whether even then he would have done with it.

On the next morning, when Letty, busy with her garden scissors, saw John coming, she saw too, more clearly than by candle-light, how ill he looked. His face was white and haggard, though he held it high and put on a severe expression. She was not at all impressed by his grand air. She had meant to be very kind to him, being very sure that he had suffered much; but she felt rebellious again, as he came and stood over her and she snipped off the wrong bud. He began to talk at once and to talk of Paul. When he had begun, it seemed easier than he had hoped. His words were always a great help to him. He spoke of Paul very kindly and regretfully, with the manner of a wise and good doctor discussing a self-willed patient. He seemed to take it for granted that his was the only possible view, and that his listener must agree

with him. Now this exasperated Letty, and her intentions of sympathy vanished with amazing quickness. She would not hear Paul spoken of as if he had something the matter with him.

'How could he promise'—she broke out suddenly—'not to do what he thought he ought to do?'

'It's absurd,' began John, and could get no further. He stood digging his heel into the grass. He had expected that Letty would ask some such question, but, when he heard it, he liked it none the better.

'I don't suppose I can make you understand,' he began again, and again stopped; and the girl went on with her business and said nothing. 'It's absurd of Paul to suppose that his support is necessary to this measure of reform; it's certain to be; the cart wheel will

go round with or without the fly; it seems to me a sort of vanity to suppose that one is so important.'

'Paul isn't vain,' she said, standing straight and looking at him; 'you know he isn't; he hasn't a bit of vanity.'

John smiled in a superior manner.

'Don't suppose that I blame Paul,' he said.

'But you do—you do blame him when you say he's vain; he isn't a bit vain.'

'I think you may trust me not to abuse my friends. You may trust me so far at least. I meant no more than that it looked like attaching too much importance to himself. He was not even asked to oppose this measure, this one measure; he was merely asked to stand on one side and see it pass. Upon my word it's ridiculous; I can't understand it in a man like Paul.'

He felt as if he must make her speak; but she was bending her head again, that he might not see her eyes, which a thought of the absent Paul, whom she had blamed before he went, had filled with tears. Her heart was full of loyalty to her brother.

'At least,' said John, after a pause, in a calmer and a more provoking tone, 'it shows that Paul is not yet fit for political life.'

'Perhaps he isn't,' she cried, in a moment; 'perhaps he is a great deal too good.'

'It's good enough for me, I suppose,' he cried out angrily, 'but not for Paul.'

She did not answer.

'Really,' he went on after a moment, 'I think I may be trusted not to do a mean action! It's too ridiculous! Nobody ever accused me of doing anything mean. I don't pretend to be perfect, but you know as well

as I do that everybody has always laughed at me for being over-scrupulous and over-conscientious, and—and——'

He stopped short, struck suddenly by the thought that there was something ridiculous in his words; he looked angrily at the girl to see if she was smiling. She was not smiling; she was resisting an impulse to slap him.

'Of course,' he continued, 'I believe as much as Paul in universal suffrage and all that; but one must give up something in life; one cannot expect everything to be just as one wants it. Was I to allow a single preference of my own to keep me from a career in which I know that I have a chance of being useful to the world? I should have blamed myself all my life long if I had refused the chance and wrapped myself in my virtue and my talent in a napkin. Why don't you write to Paul? Why

don't you persuade him to come back? He knows, anyway, that I would not stand in his way for one moment.'

She listened to him with pouting lips and arched eyebrows, and, when he had finished his speech, she looked up at him, and—

'I think Paul was right,' she said loyally.

'Then you think me wrong?' he cried out sharply.

'Oh, John,' she said, 'I don't want to say any more; I don't want to blame you—only you must not blame Paul.'

'Of course I am nothing in comparison with Paul.'

He was sick of his own arguments, and angry with her because she would not argue. He was very restless, and, after standing silent beside her for another long minute, he shrugged his shoulders and marched off to

the house. She looked after him with a face full of doubt; she was longing to throw the garden-scissors at him as he stalked away in dignity, and longing to call him back and to say that she was sorry for having hurt him.

John Maidment passed a disagreeable day, in which the clamour of boys and dogs seemed at times an intentional insult; and the disagreeable day was followed by an almost sleepless night. He began to think that he must be ill, and visions of possible maladies trooped by his pillow. Most persuasive arguments which he might have used in his talk with Letty came to him in the silent watches, and he dismissed them more and more angrily. Again and again he declared to himself with fervour that his conduct needed no defence, that it was extremely praiseworthy. Did he not know—

was he the only man who did not know—that it was waste of time to argue with girls? Girls are notoriously irrational. Was he the best judge of his own conduct, or was Miss Brent? Such a question needed no answer. He assured himself that he ought to be angry with Letty.

But let him reason as he would, no fine chain of arguments would draw him down to sleep, nor away from the haunting certainty that he should know no perfect rest till he and she were friends. They had always been friends. He could not be quiet under her disapproval. It vexed him almost beyond endurance that she, unreasonable girl though she was, should not approve of all his words and actions. His nerves and his arguments would not let him lie quiet in bed. Hot and

restless he dashed out of his bedroom in the morning. He needed the luxury of the fresh clear air. He needed the presence of Letty, and to make her his friend once more.

CHAPTER VII.

Though John was early, he was by no means the first of the household to taste the sweet air of the morning. The boys had planned a visit to the brook in the valley, where, even in summer heat, there was one hole in which after a walk of a mile and a half they could get almost as good a bath as in their own rooms. These boys liked the days to be long; they followed the same pursuits; they were capital friends. If they quarrelled, they made it up without explanations; if each fought for his right, the winner was as likely as not to give up the prize to the loser; if they had borne some buffets from each other,

they were as one against the rest of the world, bound by an alliance unwritten, even unspoken. They took each other on a sensible work-a-day level. They did not go into solitary places to ponder on their mutual offences; they did not conclude that the world was hollow because brother was not always loving brother, nor would make any show of loving him when he refused to do his fair share of bowling. They had tumbled up together very happily in the wholesome country air, and in that simplicity of life which seemed good to their stalwart father.

Now, as these lads returned from their morning bath they skirted the village by a field-path, and, when they came to the field beyond the churchyard, there they espied their sister running races with the old rector's watch-dog. This excellent mongrel, who was

of so amiable a temper that he would not bark at the most notorious robber of hen-roosts in the county, appealed very strongly to Letty's pity on account of the monotony of his life, which was not relieved, as is that of more commonplace watch-dogs, by fits of furious clamour and attempts to strangle himself with his collar. So, when Letty had gone through the farmyard and said 'Good-morning' to the other girl, who came clattering out of the dairy with her broad face rosy and shining, and when she had gone down the village street and had received a good report of the blacksmith's baby, she remembered the parson's ineffectual guardian and loosed him and took him for a run in his master's meadow.

Letty was light-hearted this morning, for she had made up her mind to be kinder to

John. To be angry with those she loved was always painful to Letty; and her conscience had been pricking her, and that was painful too. Paul had told her to be very kind to John, and now Paul was countless miles away, and she had seized the first opportunity of doing what he had asked her not to do: she had been unkind to John. As to this irritating political matter, she was quite ready to believe that they were both wrong. She had an idea, that men were always getting hot and wrong-headed about politics; and she had another idea, that young men who were given to talking of women as irrational were themselves extremely fantastic. Very likely Paul had been absurd: he was the dearest of young men, but still a young man. But nobody must say to her that Paul was absurd; nobody must even think it in her presence.

If John would refrain from hinting or even looking blame of her brother, she would be kind to John. She could not bear not to be. Of course John was wrong—more wrong than Paul; of course he ought to have refused to profit by his friend's loss—to step into his friend's shoes, however wilful it was of the other to step out of them. John was wrong; but, if only he would not blame Paul, she would forgive him for Paul's sake and his own. After all, there was a hidden sweetness in the thought that John could be wrong: it was delightful to forgive him. She had begun to be a little bored by his perfection. She would be kind to him: she asked herself why he should care, but she felt that he would care. It was strange that her kindness should matter to a man, strange and sweet. She had begun several romances in

her day; she had written them hastily in old copy-books, when she was tired of playing with her brothers, or riding over the downs, or going to see her village friends; she had left them all unfinished.

As she ran with the dog in the old rector's meadow, a sudden thought of one of these tales, locked safely away in her old oak box, came to her and made her stop in a moment. What if the tale, which had seemed so far away from real life, should not be impossible after all? What if it should be her story, here and now, in this real home of hers, which had seemed a million miles from the utmost bounds of the romantic world? She stood still indignant; she was ashamed that such a thought had come to her for a moment; she stamped her foot and bade it go; she vowed she

would burn her old copy-books and tamper no more with these phantoms, which could start up like this and make her feel silly.

'Silly' was a severe word in Letty's vocabulary. She pressed her hands to her cheeks as if she would push in the blushes; and then she saw that her worthy comrade crouched before her observant and challenging, with his stubbly chin rubbed on the grass, and with a laugh she set off running again, and only stopped when her brothers hailed her from beyond the straggling hedge. These creatures would be young men too, and she felt inclined to scold them. Her quick eyes saw at a glance that Teddy, for a walk through the dewy grass, had put on his evening pumps, and she rated him, and the boy laughed. It was so like these young brothers of hers; they always dashed into

the wrong clothes, very often each into the other's. If Jacky caught a fish, he caught it with Dicky's rod and Teddy's line, and then they argued the question to whom the fish belonged.

On this occasion, as they came out of the field-path on to the road and saw John standing hatless by the old park gates, it was borne in on Dicky that he had picked up somebody's hat in the dim light of the hall, and so without waiting for discussion he dashed through the gates as if a gadfly had stung him, and his brothers rushed after him with a cry.

Thus Letty was left to walk towards John alone. She would have been angry with him for staring had she not seen, as he stood bare-headed in the clear morning light, that he was pale and anxious-eyed. Indeed, John's

face showed marked effects of the painful struggle which had been again and again renewed since the wretched day when he had received Paul's letter at Oxford. He had suffered much in spite of all his hot arguments with himself. He had suffered, and the girl regarding him in the tell-tale light was full of pity. If he were weak and needed help, she would try to help him. A great tenderness brought tears to her eyes. She would have liked to defend him against somebody, as she used to defend him from the curt criticisms of her younger brothers. He looked so ill that she was frightened.

John saw Letty coming with the morning sunlight slanting about her, and fresh from classical atmosphere he thought of Hebe. A poet might have pleased himself with the fancy that the dew lingered on the wayside

grass and the freshness of dawn in the air till the maiden had passed by. John was not a poet; he had not even made verses except in dead languages; but the charm of the young girl touched him in his most poetic corner. His mood was very different from that of yesterday; it was different, and he knew that it would serve him better. Yesterday he had told himself that he could do without this wilful creature's sympathy, but now he knew that he could not do without it, and he knew too that his softened mood would win it. He had an exquisite sense of her brightness and morning charm; he was sure that nobody would appreciate her loveliness as he did; he felt that she was made for him. He said nothing, but held out his hand.

'I am sorry,' she said, and could say no more.

'It made me very unhappy,' said John softly. His voice was always musical, and now it seemed full of feeling. 'I can't do without your help,' he cried more eagerly. 'I want you to help me; there is nobody so much to me.'

She felt herself blushing and trembling, half happy, half vexed with the world; and suddenly back came the thought of the unfinished romance in the box. How was she to know what these new intrusive feelings meant? She did not like them, yet would not have them away. How should she know if this were love, though she had written fluently about it in blank books? She wished he would say something, and not stand staring at her. If he did not let her hand go, she felt that she should pull it away, and perhaps box his ears, or perhaps begin to cry

like a fool. And then she did pull her hand away, and then she thought she had been unkind again, and so she seized his hand again, and pressed it for a moment. It was a promise of help, of friendship, perhaps of more. With all her generosity, she felt that she had pledged herself, and she would not draw back; only she would not think yet what her unspoken promise meant.

John was quick to feel, and he felt that he had better keep silence. There was no hurry; he felt sure of her. When her hand pressed his, he accepted all which it could be made to mean; he felt sure of her. He had never doubted Letty; he knew that she was true; it was a keen delight to foresee that some day it would be this girl's chief duty to be true to him.

And now began a very healing time for

John Maidment. There was peace between him and Letty. It is true that now and then came a wild impulse to prove to her that Paul had been wrong—absurdly wrong; but he bit his lips and walked away till the fit was over, and in time this impulse came less often and less strong.

Then letters came from Paul, letters a little less brief than his speech, and in them were messages for John as for the rest; and so Paul's name came to be mentioned naturally between John and Letty, and so a barrier fell.

At last she spoke to him of his public life with curiosity and with no sign of blame, and at the word he poured forth much which he had been longing to say to her. He spoke with growing fire of his hopes of being useful to his fellows, of his high ideal of a life

devoted to the public good; and the girl, as she listened, felt that it would be hard indeed that anyone so brilliant and noble-hearted should be kept from the service of his country. She almost forgot that she had blamed him; and nothing of the blame remained but that consciousness of his fallibility, which made him the more human, the more lovable. All things seemed to work together for the comfort of this young man who had suffered. He had a fine taste for luxury, and the very simplicity of Brentholme life gave this midsummer luxury its finest flavour. It was the noon of the year, full summer, and the birds were still, and the trees in the deep valleys massive and dark with leaves. All day the old grey house stood open to delicious air, and now and then the air was stirred and quickened by light breezes from the open

downs and open sea beyond. There were shady places in the park; there was the best turf in the world; there was a charming girl, a little more silent than usual, a little more ready to listen. And John talked about himself, with only an occasional doubt whether he were not talking of himself too much. It was delightful to feel this young girl's sympathy; it was delightful to look forward to an exciting eventful life. He looked to the future with a growing confidence. Whatever it might bring, he would be there, and he could trust himself. The presence of the girl charmed him; the vision of his future charmed him; the dream of the two combined soothed him with the most exquisite charm. This charm he did not mean to destroy by definite speech. The first approaches of young people are rich in delicate

shades of feeling, when even doubts and fears are a form of pleasure ; and John found the soft ebb and flow of tender emotions and hesitations very much to his taste. The lisping of the little waves in the uncertain moonlight is lost when the clear sun rises on a day of explanations and arrangements. John knew that there was a lifetime before him for plain speaking. His keen eyes grew dreamy and his lips smiled of themselves, as he lingered by Letty, and wooed her with every look and every tone of his expressive voice.

II.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a milky morning in London, and the day was St. Valentine's Day. The west wind was blowing softly, and the soft blue sky was flecked with little fleecy clouds. These brief delusive glimpses of the spring come to us year after year in February; it seems for a day that winter has gone, and life begins again.

To John Maidment treading the London pavement it seemed that life was beginning indeed. Parliament had just met, and he was a member; social houses were beginning to open their doors, and he was invited to

enter; all about him was the stir of novel and interesting life. He walked fast along the Embankment, glad of the freshness of the morning and of the swelling tide with the brown barges drifting; it pleased him to walk towards Westminster, and to glance up at the clock-tower with a keen sense of property. If an unquiet thought crossed him, he said to himself with decision that Paul would have felt so much less pleasure in all this than he did; he was sure that Paul was enjoying his American tour as he never could enjoy political life; he almost fancied himself envying his friend the sight of that interesting, puzzling, and gigantic country. His thoughts flew to Brentholme as he came striding into St. James's Park, and fancying Letty there bareheaded in the soft light he was glad of all the quiet and simplicity for her. That peaceful

simple home seemed the right place for the pretty warm-hearted girl, who was doubtless thinking of him. It was well for her to be there, thinking of him, waiting for him. His fancies made him glow. When he was wearied by his labours, how sweet it would be to go for rest to that wholesome corner of the world, and to find welcome in those clear innocent eyes! Brentholme and its quiet folk were there, and he could take them up again whenever he chose, and find them just the same. Meanwhile he had a thousand things to do, and he felt strong enough to do them all.

There was drill on the Horse Guards' Parade, and, as John came near, the men in their tight white jackets began to march off the ground. Their slanted bayonets were blue in the slanting light; the drums and fifes

began their cheerful comical music; the young man's heart leapt responsive; he walked all round the Park for the sake of their company. The waters of the big pond were pale blue, almost as blue as the slanted bayonets, in the milky light. But that the sooty trees were bare, it might have been the first morning of summer.

John marched exultant. As the full soft wind met him with a caress, his heart leapt up in answer; his confidence was almost ecstasy. It was a glorious thing that he had taken his first step in public life; he had but to keep marching, and he was bound to arrive. It was good for him and good for the world too, for he was on the right side; and how great a thing it was that he, with all this power and vigour, which he felt in every quivering nerve and every flying thought,

was on the right side! Surely it was no bad world, in which a man so eager to do good and so able found a fair way open for his feet at the very beginning of his life. Paul himself ought to be delighted that the chance had passed from him to his friend. It would be a narrow selfishness in Paul to feel a moment's regret that a Parliamentary career lay open to one who had so much greater power of doing good. John said to himself that his friend was incapable of narrow selfishness. His imagination showed him in the future some triumphant night, and he felt the pressure of Paul's hand eloquent of fervent admiration. For John, full of exciting visions, the regulation pace was not fast enough. He had soon walked away from the marching soldiers, and his pace grew quicker with his thoughts. He lifted his face to the

clear morning light, in which above the old red palace of St. James, as in a bath of air, the bright-plumed pigeons were circling. It may be that each detail of the fair hour added something to the young man's exaltation, but it is certain that he did not dwell on a single detail. He felt the quickening power of the day; and his quick mind flew, now to his many advantages, now to the questions of the day which seemed so easy to answer; exultant it passed to and fro between the review of its own bright weapons and the scenes where they would be used. To John's flying thoughts, as to his hurrying feet, there was a slight obstruction by the garden wall of Marlborough House; for there were leaning or standing the usual loungers, men and boys, with pot-hats and pipes, awaiting the daily band.

And now the band came marching in all their bravery, stalwart and gilded, and playing the music of 'Carmen.' The music, richer than the drums and fifes which he had left, raised John up again, and brought a rush of words to his lips. He was making fine bits of a speech as he stepped along, imagining sentences of an Opposition speaker and darting in reply the most brilliant and annoying epigrams. He did not have a moment's difficulty in speaking for the other man, or for himself. Indeed, he was carried away so far by this delightful pastime, that in Pall Mall a lady called him twice before he was aware of her presence.

Lady Gertrude Bookham was not in the habit of calling in vain. She pushed her horse to the edge of the pavement, and stopped him short within arm's length of the

inattentive youth. As John looked up with a start the young lady laughed, but there was a little complaint in her tone as she said—

'I can't imagine why you should want to cut me.'

'Nor can I,' said he, like one awakened from sleep, and they both laughed and looked at each other. She was very pleasant to look at, sumptuous in shape and colour as a Venetian lady of Titian, straight and active as an English girl accustomed to air and exercise. She sat her handsome horse superbly, and as she looked down upon John the moment's annoyance gave way to frank approval.

'My father wants you to come to us at Boucherett for Easter,' she said.

John hesitated; he had meant to spend Easter at Brentholme; Boucherett was one of

the finest houses in England, and Lord Whimley and Boucherett an influential person in the political world, though he belonged to the opposite party.

'You are not engaged?' asked the young lady quickly.

'No,' said John.

'Very well, then,' she said with a short laugh, 'I suppose you will honour us?'

There was a trace of impatience in her tone, at which the tall young man who was riding with her laughed.

John looked at him with sudden enmity.

'*Of course*,' said Lady Gertrude plaintively, 'if you have anything pleasanter to do——'

'But I haven't,' said John quickly. 'I shall be delighted to come; I was thinking of other things; you took my breath away.'

And now she beamed again, for there was

something complimentary in his words and looks. As she turned her horse away she became aware of her attendant cavalier, and called to John again.

'Mr. Maidment! Mr. Maidment, don't you know my cousin Algy? You had better know him; you'll meet at Boucherett.'

When two young Englishmen of the well-fed class are made known to each other, there is generally a trace of defiance in their mutual recognition. Between these two the trace was more than usually definite: they both nodded stiffly. They recognised each other at a glance; they were of about the same age; they had been at the same school; they had been at the same time at different colleges at Oxford; neither had sought the society of the other; both had been leaders in the world of boys, and both had felt from the first a

mutual dislike. John now felt as if there was a look of contempt in the light-coloured eyes of his old acquaintance; he flushed slightly, and his nod was the more curt of the two.

Algy Garner looked both fierce and lazy, both heavy and refined. His head was like a marble head, which the sculptor had finished in the upper parts, but only roughly indicated in the lower. The mouth, which John remembered in the tell-tale days of boyhood large and somewhat shapeless, with lips too often pressed tight together by anger, was now hidden by a big moustache; but the heaviness of the chin was still apparent. The forehead, on the contrary, though it looked narrow in comparison with the jaw, was finely formed, and the aquiline nose conveyed to the most careless observer an impression of

aristocracy. Mr. Garner was tall, long-limbed, strongly and rather heavily built. He was understood to be a handsome man; he looked as if he came of a race accustomed to be promptly obeyed; with discipline, which he detested, he would have made a fine cavalry officer; he had no occupation; he had had a small fortune. At school and college he had been a leader, when he chose to be, a leader in mischief of the more dangerous sort; but though he had been followed, he had not been popular. He had been quick to show his contempt of any hanging back, and not the least careful to hide his opinion that the fellow who hesitated for a moment was afraid—an imputation peculiarly bitter to boys. Altogether he was an uncomfortable creature, admired rather than liked, indifferent with flashes of white fierceness, taking

all the luxuries of life without gratitude, riding hard and killing his thousands of game with small show of enjoyment. Most women admired him none the less because his manner to them varied from indifference to something like rudeness; but of all the women of his acquaintance only one thought that she could manage him, and that one was his cousin, Lady Gertrude Bookham.

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN found London a big place. Even in those small parts of London, the political world and the world of exclusive society, there were a great many other young men. But the feeling of the crowd rather exhilarated than depressed John Maidment: he rejoiced that there were many competitors; he felt no depressing sense of his insignificance. The race was about to begin, and he was in capital training—not 'fat and scant of breath,' as a youth overfull of unpractical philosophy. He had studied metaphysics at Oxford, but had taken good care, as he told himself, not to go

too far. He had stopped, as he thought, at the right place. It was right to know what philosophers were talking about, even perhaps to show them in some unoccupied moment that one knew what they were talking about; he did not mean to be set down as a Philistine politician; he must know a little of all things which interested his intelligent contemporaries, literature, art, philosophy. But for the moment these matters were of small value; all the time which he could spare from the absorbing study of politics, which had but just become the business of his life, was demanded by little social duties, which in their novelty were not without a certain charm also. There were always notes to answer, cards to leave, dinners to eat, parties at which it was well to make a bow. He was one in a crowd of young men, but he was one

of the more favoured ; he was not only entertained as a new member of the party by the wives of political magnates, but he was made welcome also at the smaller parties of the most agreeable women. He was called 'very good-looking' and 'out of the common,' and his air of abundant energy kept in due drawing-room bounds by good taste had a peculiar success in a society open-eyed and open-mouthed for novelty.

In some few people of this select world he aroused memories almost exciting of his brilliant and fascinating father ; they asked each other what on earth had become of Wilfred Maidment, when had he vanished and whither, was he alive or dead ; they debated whether the son were not handsomer than the father ; they tried to remember if they had ever heard of Wilfred having a son. They soon

gave up these vain questions, content with the fact of the boy, a fact agreeable both to eye and ear; they saw his good looks; they heard that he was wonderfully clever; they thought it better not to speak to him of their old friend Wilfred, since nobody could answer the question whether he were alive or dead.

If John received some flattering attention in society, he aroused a more intelligent curiosity in the shrewdest of the political elders whom he met in the House of Commons. It is true that an Oxford reputation does little for a youth beyond imposing on him the duty of proving that he is no prig; but John's gift of words had been held at the university so remarkable, that rumours of his power had reached the ears even of party leaders. They smiled in a superior manner when their sons

and nephews spoke of Maidment's oratory, but they thought that, prig or not, the young member was probably worth getting hold of. Moreover, when John entered the House he was a marked man; he looked so young and so clever, that he seemed to have stepped in from the iniquitous old days of pocket boroughs. His was one of the last of these channels for introducing young men of talent to the business of the country. Boroughs are won now by other qualities than conspicuous ability; and among the bald pates of dozing legislators the keen boyish head of the new member was refreshing as wild flowers among the rocks. He could not help being a marked man; he had no wish to help it.

But after all it was neither his youth nor his ability, his gifts nor his graces, which had most to do with attracting the attention of the

very shrewdest of the politicians of the day: it was the hour of his appearance in the political world. It was an hour of doubt and change.

The old lines of division, which had seemed distinct as the limit of life, were everywhere smudged and confused. The two great parties, without which it had appeared to English politicians that politics were impossible, were so much alike at the edges that prominent persons slipped from one to the other with no apparent change of doctrine. A Tory statesman took office in a Liberal Government, and almost at the same moment a couple of Liberal landowners supported a Conservative candidate for their county. Old words had lost their meaning, and none more completely than the verb 'to rat.' The Conservative was eager to outbid

the Whig with promises of useful reforms; the Liberal was more prompt than the Tory to sneer at universal laws of political economy and fundamental principles of free government. Each party boasted of their common sense; each accused the other of a latent tendency to Communism. The Liberal party, on account of the still extant confidence in their Liberalism, found it easier to interfere efficiently with personal liberty; the Conservative, strong in their anti-revolutionary reputation, were bolder to borrow from the Socialists plans of State interference with the homes of the poor and the purses of the rich. Liberty and order rang in the perorations of Liberal orators; order and liberty answered from the perorations of the Tories; and good simple souls thought that the good old fight was being fought with the zeal and faith of former days,

and that the dust which was thrown in their eyes concealed the shock of a real battle. Meanwhile, below this empty clamour, the flinging of dust and the half-humorous bandying of personalities, there was audible sometimes a murmur which seemed more serious. Now and then a political manager, a pulse-feeler, a wire-puller, would pause in his playful arrangements, and wonder what was coming next, dimly conscious in one inspired moment that a new force was at work in this world which it was his mission to manage, that some day uncomfortable people might ask for something, which was neither non-interference with their liberty of living in pig-styes nor permission to drink in poisonous water to the glory of the British Constitution.

In days of doubt and change the eyes of

less foolish men turn naturally to the young. What have they learned? What will they teach? How will the best of them face the difficulties of their time? These are interesting questions, and it happened that some people were asking them at the moment when John Maidment dawned upon London and the Palace of Westminster with his Oxford reputation, his brilliant appearance, his air of nervous energy, and the fine confidence in himself which he carried not ungracefully. What wonder, then, that shrewd and hesitating elders turned with some curiosity to this youth, who was said to represent the opinions of many of his ablest contemporaries, and to have much influence with them? They eyed him as augurs may have eyed a promising chicken, who bore within him the signs of the times to come; they came about him with

courtesy, and with something of the scientific interest of medical students.

Among others the Earl of Whimley and Boucherett had been told that he ought to wish to have a look at the new young man who was expected by some people to do something. Lord Whimley as a boy had kept white mice and rabbits, and he still indulged in the privacy of his family a liking for drawing-room games and acting in charades; but, besides these innocent tastes, his position and his cousin, Mr. Randall, who was a rising man, obliged him to display a warm interest in politics. He was the head of one of the great political families of the country; he had a family mansion in London, where the wives and daughters of the party assembled at regular intervals; his place in the country was famous not only for many historical

associations, but also for its splendour and for its hospitality to all sorts of interesting people. So when Mr. Randall had impressed on Lord Whimley that he ought to feel an interest in John Maidment, Lord Whimley with his grave air of party responsibility remarked to his wife that there was a young Radical 'Maybird,' whom she had better ask to something. Lady Whimley, with the broad smile which was always caused by any exhibition of solemnity in her husband, asked her daughter Gertrude if she had met such a young man; and Lady Gertrude, after plaintively expressing her wonder that her parents never could get a name right, said that they had all met Mr. Maidment at dinner, added with more emphasis that he was most interesting, and finished by deciding that he should be asked to Boucherett for Easter.

When the day of his visit arrived, John set off for Boucherett with lively pleasure. He had blamed himself long ago for having hesitated even for a moment whether he should accept this flattering invitation; he had told himself with decision that his friends at Brentholme would have blamed him justly if for the sake of spending Easter with them he had lost such a chance of studying the prominent people of the day in their hours of less reserve. The fact that Boucherett was one of the greatest Tory houses made the invitation more complimentary, and would make the visit more interesting. John was thrilled with the idea that the big-wigs of the other party might think it worth while to try to pump him, even to try to convert him; he hoped with all his heart that they would try; he meant to impress them. He left

London for Boucherett with keen curiosity and a purpose of enjoyment. The train in which he travelled was full of guests who were going to the same house: the small dimly-lighted station seemed no more than the ante-room to the magnificent place whither he was bound; he was amused by the masses of luggage, the bustle of maids and men with furs and dressing-cases, the number and variety of vehicles which had been sent to meet them; he liked the feeling of splendour and of spaciousness. The gates were vast through which the carriages were driven; and in the growing darkness the park seemed vaster than it was: there was a lofty portico, and a loftier hall, and the guests were led through a series of half-ligthed rooms to the long gallery where in a circle of light by the farther fire-place tea was

waiting for them. Even the solemnity of a party which has been but just collected could not depress John. The men were looking at each other with a suspicious air, on the defensive, each waiting for the other to show that he desired a better acquaintance, dropping brief remarks defiantly. The women were sipping tea, and some were probably thinking that tea and travel might make their noses red at dinner. The great room and the little light, the low voices and frequent times of silence, were all part of a certain dreariness which made an emotional lady think tenderly of her home, and made her husband consider with dismay that he was bound to spend a week in that majestic place at a time of year when there was nothing to hunt or shoot.

This same long gallery was lighter when

people assembled before dinner, and the gleam of shoulders and the glitter of diamonds made the scene more gay; but still there was stiffness, almost sadness. A party of Englishmen and of Englishwomen who have been but just collected, knowing that they are expected to amuse each other for a week, cannot but feel a certain oppression, which only dinner can remove.

At last some great doors were softly opened; Lord Whimley with a muttered joke, which he had borrowed from an American paper, offered his arm to the Duchess, and his guests went two by two through a smaller room into the great dining-hall. Their feet fell on thick noiseless carpets; one could scarcely hear the faint rustle of a gown through the murmur of voices. The high vaulted room was full of soft splendid light,

and of the soft warm scent of flowers and delicate food. Flowers were in profusion from end to end of the long table, and golden dishes of fruit from the famous Boucherett houses. As the long procession of diners found their places, the row of powdered footmen broke into noiseless activity, and from a further room came the sound of music. Encouraged by the music, which was not too loud, and charmed by the luxurious atmosphere, people looked more boldly at each other, and after soup began to talk more freely. John was delighted; the atmosphere was new to him; he felt great pleasure in the sumptuousness of life. He had taken in no lady, and he had time to look about him. He liked to look down the long table and to see, beyond gold plate and brilliant flowers, white necks bending and jewels gleaming,

and in the pauses of the music to hear light laughter and the tinkling of knives and forks. As he smiled with pleasure seeming to breathe his native air, a sudden vision came to him of the faded chintzes and low ceilings of Brentholme; life there seemed thin and chilly; he was impatient of its Spartan simplicity. The vision passed in a moment, and John was aware of nothing but of delicate odours and sounds, and of gracious people seen through the impalpable vapour of good living. A few of these people he knew by sight, and to a very few he had spoken; but of most of them he knew nothing at all. Only he had a comfortable certainty that most were important people in some way, and that he would make himself pleasant to those whom it was worth while to please. For the present he scarcely cared to

ask who they were; it was enough that they were part of this luxury, which was new to him and very delightful; he was content to accept them vaguely as a rich background of duchesses.

But if John was content to enjoy his dinner and say little, his neighbours were by no means of the same mind. He sat between old Sir Ludovick Rafferty and Lady Charmian, and both were inclined, as usual, to talk. Sir Ludovick, though according to the common notion of success he had been singularly unsuccessful in life, was very clever, almost as clever as he looked. His eyes, which were very near to his long fleshy nose, twinkled as brightly as a boy's. He spoke much less from the throat than most Englishmen, and the marked movement of his lips, which he moistened often with the tip of his tongue,

contributed to his air of an old comedian He had the face of a Parisian actor of farce and the head of a great philosopher. His imagination was only weaker than his logical faculty, and he had a great collection of stories, of which many were indecent but all were comical. If some of these tales were rather hard on his friends, it was not due to malice but only to the subjection of friendship, as of everything else, to his intense delight in his own humour. Sir Ludovick Rafferty had hardly turned one twinkling eye on John Maidment before he was sure that he was next to an intelligent listener. As he very soon found out that his young neighbour was a new-comer in the social world, he favoured him at intervals during dinner with brief notes on the people present.

John was delighted to listen, gaining

instruction with amusement. He reserved to himself the right of disapproving of his informant; he had a suspicion that he was not a good old man; but for the moment he abandoned himself to the enjoyment of Sir Ludovick's gossip as to the other novel luxuries. Already there was somebody about whom he particularly wished for information; again and again, as he glanced about him, he had met the quiet gaze of two round brown eyes, which regarded him with a fixed contemplative look, and rather melancholy. Though the lady's eyes were large and pathetic, she seemed to the energetic youth neither young nor pretty; even at that distance and in that becoming light she looked tired, freckled, dark, and faded, a little puffy under the large eyes; she had drawn round her shoulders a light shawl, as if even in that soft atmosphere

she felt chilly. But John read interest in her level musing gaze—interest in him; and it was this which attracted his eyes again and again to the dull pathetic orbs of the chilly lady. It was not long before Sir Ludovick in one of the intervals of his dinner, which he enjoyed thoroughly, discovered the direction of the young man's glances.

'Do you know her?' he asked suddenly; 'do you know Mrs. Lulham?'

He licked his lips and nodded to where the lady sat, a little lower down on the other side of the table.

'No,' said John, and looked expectant.

'I could tell you a story,' began the old gentleman, with his philosophic head on one side like a magpie's.

'Don't listen to him,' said the lively and good-natured Lady Charmian. 'Lud is a

very wicked old man, and tells stories about everybody.'

Sir Ludovick pointed a sharpened finger-nail at her.

'I can tell you one about her,' he said.

'Good gracious!' cried the lady. 'Stop your ears, Mr. Maidment;' but she laughed aloud as she spoke. 'Susan Lulham is perfectly charming,' she said—'dreadfully clever, but quite charming. We'll make her sing this evening.'

'She has a voice like a consumptive mouse,' whispered Sir Ludovick hoarsely. Lady Charmian ignored this uncomplimentary comparison.

'There's something about her singing,' she said with enthusiasm, 'that you don't get in the singing of the very best professionals.'

'Yes—wrong notes,' said Sir Ludovick, and he chuckled.

'Oh, you wicked, wicked old man!' cried Lady Charmian, beaming with amusement. 'You must never believe Lud,' she said to John; 'and you must admire Susan Lulham. She is awfully interesting; she is a spiritualist and all sorts of things; she has the oddest experiences.'

'Is she a medium?' asked John.

'She is not the happy medium,' said Sir Ludovick, and licked his lips; and John laughed, for indeed the lady's eyes were turned upon him with a most melancholy interest. But though Mr. Maidment could not help laughing at this very comical old man, he reminded himself, even while he laughed, that it was in this way that frivolous people spoke of their superiors; that Sir Ludovick and the

laughing Lady Charmian with her white teeth were almost incredibly frivolous. He looked at Mrs. Lulham with an interest which began to respond to her own; he thought it likely that she was really accomplished; he felt almost sure that she had a fine taste.

CHAPTER X.

When with a great moving of chairs and rustling of fine raiment, some courteous hesitations and deprecating bendings of fair necks, the troop of ladies had sailed out of the great dining-room, Sir Ludovick drew his chair closer to John's, and, with his twinkling old face close to his attentive ear, favoured him with a few notes on the family who were entertaining them so royally.

'Willy Whimley is a dear fellow,' he said; 'I have known him since he was the height of this decanter—drink this claret before the boys begin to smoke; it is good—he is a dear

fellow, but a very light weight. Look at him trying to look substantial; he knows that Randall has his eye on him and expects him to look solid; he only looks apologetic. Whimley is always silently apologising for being an earl, and for being able to buy us all up. He could buy me cheap. Do you know his wife well? No? She's charming; she's the laziest woman in England; she laughs and grows fat, and it is her husband she laughs at. Their boy is sensible, sensible as a cabbage; he is going round the world—everybody goes round the world nowadays—to improve his mind; he is getting up the dead meat question; he will write about it, when he gets back, in the new Review. Lady Gertrude is worth ten of him; she is a fine creature.'

He seemed to draw the lady in the air with his long-fingered old hand.

'She is very handsome,' said John.

'But she is too moral,' said Ludovick regretfully. 'I feel as if she were always picturing my death-bed repentance.'

He chuckled, much delighted with this fancy.

'Ah!' he said in a moment; 'that villain Algy has lit a cigarette; I can drink no more. You young men are selfish; you don't drink, and you won't let others drink: you have the blood of fish without their imbibing power. Do you know Algy Garner? He is very modern, very rude; he plays without grace and races without enjoyment. How he glares at his cigarette! Something has disagreed with him. He is very hard hit, and he hopes to marry his cousin.'

'Lady Gertrude?' asked John, with an interest which surprised himself.

'She will have a fine dot,' said Sir Ludovick with three nods. 'The young man is in a tight place; he bets heavily; he gets the very best information; no wonder he's ruined.'

'And will she marry him?' asked John, feeling a quick rush of his old indignation against his schoolfellow.

Sir Ludovick raised his shoulders, and looked more than ever like an inspired Punch.

'All my life,' he said, 'I have been studying women, and I have arrived at one conclusion, which I will give you for your guidance. Never be sure that a woman will say the unreasonable thing; never be sure that she will do the practical thing; she is capable of anything to disappoint you.'

'Thank you very much,' said John, with a

smile, which he forced. For some reason he had lost his taste for this old man's pleasantries; that disapproval of him which he had kept in reserve seemed to be coming up with a rush.

'There are many aspirants,' said Sir Ludovick in a confidential whisper; 'there is another over there—the man with the fat eyes and sleek beard, next to the Duke—when there is a duke, Smithers Plumley is always next to him. Smithers has the best cook in London, and the worst heart; he is very rich, and is said to be very good-natured; he has the worst male tongue in London. I am talking of you, Smithers, and giving you a funny character.'

Mr. Plumley's eyes vanished as he laughed and nodded; he was afraid of old Sir Ludovick.

'Then there is Randall,' said Sir Ludovick, turning again to John. 'Many think that he will be the lucky man; he pretends to consult Lady Gertrude on political affairs; she is enormously flattered. Randall is very deep. He began his political career by printing a brilliant satire and making a humorous speech about bishops; he made people laugh; it was almost fatal to him. But he saw his error. For years he has been uttering dull excellent speeches, looking wise and quoting statistics; he is the most rising Conservative of his age; he has a solid reputation for statesmanship and success. He dare not risk his reputation for success; he will never ask our fair friend till he is sure she will take him.'

'Our fair friend' had not been happy in the drawing-room while the old friend of the family

had been sketching her suitors over his claret. She was annoyed by the Duchess, who indeed had a gift of irritation. This great lady had a face which betrayed no emotion, and this was naturally exasperating to an impulsive girl, who showed every feeling as it passed. She was often called 'the handsome Duchess,' and she certainly had an imposing appearance, of which much was due to a high nose, painted eyebrows, thin lips, and the very latest Parisian wig. If she condemned her neighbours, she seemed to pronounce sentence on them from a sense of duty—to have detected with her fine nose an odour dangerous to the society of which she was the only genuine guardian. She was an admirable figure-head to a high-class vessel. With this remarkable woman Lady Gertrude was angry. She had heard her say something disagreeable

about her cousin Algy. As she herself had but just been quarrelling with him, she of course defended him with the more warmth; her warmth had raised a smile on other female faces, and now there was no repose for her until she had made her cousin suffer too.

As soon as Algy came in with the other men, he looked at her and saw that she was uneasy. She moved this way and that on her sofa; she was flushed, and fanned herself with unnecessary vigour; she would not summon him with a look, but she meant him to come to her. He came slowly, and stood looking down at her.

'What is it?' he asked presently.

'She's an odious, vulgar woman,' said Lady Gertrude with a glance at the most refined of duchesses.

Algy Garner turned his light eyes on the Duchess, as if he thought of wringing her long neck.

'I wish women would keep their tongues quiet,' he said.

'I don't know why you say "women,"' she said in an aggrieved tone; and, as he showed no sign of explaining his speech, 'Of course,' she continued, 'if you mean to class me with the most scandalous and malicious woman in England—Oh, you can't go beyond that!—you are very kind, I'm sure.'

'I never said a word about classing you with anybody,' he said; and he began to bite his under lip.

'I am sure I don't want to abuse the Duchess;' and as she went on she grew more and more plaintive and more and more emphatic. 'Why should *I* want to abuse her?

What harm can she do *me*? I shouldn't have thought that you would *like* to be called a blackleg——'

'What?'

The question came like a growl.

'Oh, of course she didn't say so in so many words; she said you were ruined again, and that you couldn't pay your debts, and that you had no business to be going about as if you had a pocket full of money, and—ah!'

She seemed to be stopped by sheer disgust, as she twisted her fine shoulders impatiently and began to fan herself more vehemently than ever.

'What business is it of hers?' said Algy; and he looked at the Duchess again as if he were on the very point of twisting her finely-dressed head off. Then he seated himself by the side of his cousin, who sat the straighter on

the sofa, and said, 'It's true, you know; I told you. I am in a bad place—I told you; I told you that I must have 500*l.*, and I asked you to get it from my uncle.'

'And you want me to ask my father for it,' she said, plaintive still, but more kind.

'I shan't get it if you don't,' he said with a short laugh.

The tribute to her power led her yet further back on the way to amiability. He was looking fixedly at her, and she passed from the thought of her power with her father to the thought of her power with this untamed young man; she was proud of managing him; she found herself smiling before she intended. Smiling and still flushed with her late emotions she looked splendidly beautiful. He said to himself again that he did not care a bit (even to himself he used a

stronger monosyllable) for racing or gambling, that they might all go to blazes if his beautiful cousin would take him—and take him she should. As for the horses, grooms, carts, theatre stalls, dressing cases, and the thousand and one luxuries which grew on him like barnacles, he was ready to curse these encumbrances on young activity. Disgust of these clogging nothings had sent him into the desert before now or to sleep in a torn blanket among the rocks of the Rocky Mountains; and perhaps the truest pleasure which he had yet enjoyed was the sense of his strength after roughing it with the roughest. Since hunting had stopped, Algy Garner was more than ever sure that there was only one thing in life worth getting, and that was his cousin Gertrude. He was so lost in regarding her that he had almost forgotten his urgent need

of the money, when she said, 'Of course I will get it for you.'

She spoke with a pout, in which vanished the last element of her grievance; and, being now in a comfortable mood, she began to sink into a familiar strain of confidential lecturing of this reckless young man, while he sat staring and pulling his moustache. She was expressing once again her wonder why he was so absurdly extravagant, and what pleasure he could possibly find in grieving his best friends, when he suddenly got up and left her. He thought he saw that, while she talked to him, she was looking at John Maidment; this made him angry, and he was more angry when John instantly crossed the room and took the place which he had left. John was still enchanted with the atmosphere of luxury, the length of the brilliantly lighted

gallery, the deep recesses of the windows full of more grateful shadow. The matter-of-course magnificence was new to him, and it seemed to him that the centre of it all, the jewel in the casket of gold, was the daughter of the house. Lady Gertrude on her side had openly proclaimed her warm interest in this new young man. All her interests were warm; her heart was warm; if her temper was sometimes hot, she was generous with her admiration. Not only were her geese swans, but her swans were the very largest and whitest birds that ever curved their necks with pride. John began to talk with brightness and candour of his first experience of political people and his first impressions of society; and she listened and began to beam, and to refresh herself with the conviction that she had made a friend who was (to use

a favourite expression of her own) 'not just like everybody else.' She was sorry when their talk was interrupted; but she was a most conscientious hostess, and in presence of her mother's unruffled laziness she felt the full responsibility for everybody present.

'Hush!' she said; 'Mrs. Lulham is going to sing. We must go nearer to the piano; it's wonderful, but not very strong.'

It was not very strong. Those who were fond of music drew nearer and nearer to the piano, as the lady began to sing. She murmured over the keys very pathetically; in spite of Sir Ludovick's harsh judgment she was almost exactly correct; she sang with a world of meaning. It was supremely melancholy, and it was immensely admired. John standing close to the end of the piano could not avoid the singer's eyes, sorrowful, inscrutable. They

made him nervous, and yet he liked the dumb pathetic interest with which they gazed on him. Lady Charmian, who had professed so much admiration for Mrs. Lulham's singing, had glided away to the furthest end of the long gallery, that she might listen to Sir Ludovick, who crisply stated that the best part of the performance was that it was inaudible at two yards from the instrument. But though there were many who preferred conversation, there were many too who pressed the sweet singer to sing again and again.

So when the woful German song was done, she sang a little Tuscan verse scented with death and love, and then a Spanish serenade in which passion seemed all pain, and at last an English merry-making air, which was most melancholy of all. Lady Charmian

came back in time to press the singer's hands, and to say with real conviction that there was no such singing in the world.

'Dear Del!' said Mrs. Lulham for answer very sadly and sweetly, and with her large dull eyes still fixed on John Maidment. She was very unconventional, and did not wait for ceremonious introductions. As her admirers fell away from the piano she came to John. 'I feel as if I had known you in a former state,' she said gravely in a low voice.

The young man was startled, but he did not lose his charm of manner. He looked very wide-awake in contrast with the lady's weak dreaminess; and yet he found himself presently without any purpose of his own seated by Mrs. Lulham in a secluded window-seat.

'I have not seen you before in this world,'

she said, still gazing at him with a quiet interest.

'Not in this world,' answered John, nodding to the people who filled the gallery; 'I am a new-comer—a raw Oxonian.' He smiled, but she did not.

'And I am a rare comer,' she said. 'I live in Naples; I am always ill in Naples; I have no lungs; I live by will. *They* tell me to live. Who do I mean by they? Ah!—You are different. They tell me that you are different. I should like to live to see your future. You are very interesting. Let me read your hand.'

No sooner had Mrs. Lulham risen from the music-stool than Lady Charmian seated herself briskly at the piano, and dashed impulsively into a waltz tune. She was always eager to please somebody, and on the

look-out for 'a bit of fun.' 'A bit of fun' were the words most often on her smiling lips.

At the sound of dance music the daughter of the house, flushed and radiant, turned to a group of the younger men, and appealed to them not without a tone of authority. The more energetic responded, and pushed some of the furniture out of the way, and in a minute a few active couples were whirling down the long gallery. Delia Charmian laughed aloud and quickened the pace, as Lady Gertrude swept into the dance a light but resolute diplomatist. Lady Gertrude was in the highest spirits, but in another moment she felt a pang of annoyance. As she swept by one of the windows, she saw in the shaded seat Mrs. Lulham and John Maidment; and she saw too that the lady

was holding her companion's hand with her tiny yellow fingers and was gazing gravely on the palm.

'A little withered monkey!' said Lady Gertrude to herself, as she stood panting at the end of the long gallery, and she began to beat the floor with her foot impatiently.

When Delia Charmian started 'a bit of fun' it seemed as if it would never end. Having set the dancing going at Boucherett, she very soon gave up her place at the piano to her daughter, who looked no younger than she by candlelight and danced less lightly, and the party became so gay that it was long before the men were left alone. John would have gladly gone to bed, but as all the younger men prepared to smoke, he did not like to be exceptional on this first evening. So he too repaired to that sumptuous Oriental

apartment which Lord Whimley had furnished after the successful journey in the Levant, of which he had printed an account in one elegant octavo volume for private circulation only.

Very sumptuous was this Eastern chamber, and rich with warm shaded lights. Against the walls were deep low divans, and above the divans trophies of Damascus blades and Arab guns, curious brasses and tasselled pipes. The floor was tiled like the walls of the mosque of Omar, and thick rich rugs lay on it, and in the middle was a shallow tank where a fountain could be made to play. There were small round tables, each a fine specimen of inlaid work, and the open-work shutters were as the windows of an Egyptian harem. It was very complete. John liked it, though he cared little for smoking. He

sat in a corner with a cigarette in his mouth, and listened with indifference to the scraps of talk which fell from the lips around him in their moments of leisure.

Smithers Plumley was the chief speaker. He sat on the soft divan as if he had been made for it; he had crossed his fat legs like a Turk; he was sleek as the favourite cat of the Shah of Persia, and seemed to overflow with loving-kindness. Nevertheless, his words were not agreeable to Mr. Garner, on whom he was smiling most sweetly.

'He says that of course you ride hard, but with no judgment.'

'That's your opinion, is it?' said Algy Garner, chucking the end of his cigar into the fire rather viciously.

'My opinion! My dear chap, you know I only know a horse from a cow because he

hasn't got horns. I believe that a horse never has horns. Why do you laugh? Does he ever have horns? I shall be still more afraid of him if I find he can gore me.'

Plumley was clearly in the vein. His comfort was much increased by the absence of old Sir Ludovick, before whose wit the wit of this little fat gentleman kept timidly at home. As his audience laughed at his views of the horse, he smiled on the comfortable world till his eyes were scarcely visible.

'Does he think that he can ride?' asked Garner with low-voiced scorn.

'I rather think he does,' said the other, beaming round on the circle with large friendliness; 'I thought that it was generally agreed that Regy was a fine horseman.' One man nodded, another grunted assent, but Algy said nothing. 'Don't suppose, dear

chap, that Regy was crabbing you,' said Smithers generously; 'he only said that you were a trifle hard on your horses, and that some mare of which you think a great deal——'

'Molly? What of her?'

'Not much of her,' said Mr. Plumley beaming; 'he said that you had knocked her to pieces.'

'He lied,' said Mr. Garner curtly.

'Oh, I only tell you what he said: he said it was a pity to ruin such a good beast.'

The little gentleman spoke with invincible good humour.

'She never was more fit in her life,' said Algy.

'Regy is generally considered a good judge,' said Smithers Plumley softly, rolling for himself another cigarette.

'You may tell your friend Regy,' said Algy Garner, 'that I will ride Molly against any brute in his stable over any course he likes.'

'Oh, my dear chap!' cried the other, looking round as if he would appeal to everybody to prevent such madness.

'I only make one condition,' continued Garner—'that he will ride his own horse.'

Smithers regarded him with a smile, which looked kind but was undeniably provoking. 'Don't do it,' he said, shaking his sleek head; and then, as Algy said nothing, he added in a minute, 'Not that it would do any harm to make your offer! You don't catch Regy making a match for love.'

Algy bit his cigar hard and kept his mouth shut; and it is possible that no more would have been said had not a simple youth uplifted from a corner a voice which had

hardly ceased cracking. This boy was strikingly suggestive of heavy losses on the turf. His smoking-clothes were redolent of superfluous money; his long thin legs looked meaningless until the spectator thought of horses; his pink innocent face was a standing invitation to the crafty. This youth, whom Nature had formed in a playful mood to drop gold on racecourses, spoke from his corner with a fine knowing air and said—

'Algy don't do much either unless the money's on.'

'You amaze me,' said Smithers Plumley, beaming on the boy. 'I thought that Algy was reformed—or broke—or something. He has promised to be a good boy, and never, never, never to bet any more.' Here he looked again at Mr. Garner and wagged his head playfully at him.

'I'll back myself for five hundred,' said Algy, who looked dangerously white.

'Oh, you bad boy! Stop him, somebody!'

'You need not be afraid for your friend,' said Algy venomously: 'I happen to have the money, or shall have it to-morrow; I'll put it in your hands, if you like.' With a look of undisguised distaste at Mr. Plumley's hands, which were dimpled like a baby's, he chucked the end of his cigar into the fireplace and went out.

CHAPTER XI.

The first day of the Boucherett party was pronounced by Lady Gertrude to be little better than a failure. She had planned an expedition to the ruin, which all visitors were bound to see; and since she was never content with making a plan but must settle all the details too, and since no people either can or will do exactly what they are meant to do, it was no uncommon declaration of Lady Gertrude that nothing ever went right. The truth is that the plans of this magnificent young lady suffered from over-elaboration, and that many people were sick of her expe-

ditions or entertainments before they began. So on this occasion some of the guests had begged not to be taken; others had asked to go in the wrong carriage; and Sir Ludovick had been most annoying of all, for he had talked of nothing but the picnic, and 'picnic' was a word which always displeased her. She could not bear to think of herself as getting up picnics. Nor had her parents contented her. She liked them to leave all arrangements to her, but to seem not to leave them; and it was aggravating that her mother would sit in her favourite chair smiling and showing in every curve how much better it was to repose than to go flying about the country in a string of vehicles. As for the Earl of Whimley and Boucherett, that influential person had waited in the obscurity of his farther mushroom-house until the coast was

clear and he might slip back in safety to his turning-lathe—and so he had played his part not at all to the satisfaction of his daughter, who suspected his hiding-place and could not smile at the mental picture. So Lady Gertrude's day had begun with vexation, and she had fretted and sighed, and had found her only consolation in condemning herself to the most disagreeable place in the carriage which she most disliked. She had seated herself by the side of the Duchess in the barouche, and had bidden Smithers Plumley, who had a taste for duchesses, to amuse them from the opposite seat.

Smithers Plumley had much tact, and quick sympathy with feminine moods. As the carriage rolled solemnly along the country road, he devoted himself to the amusement of the Duchess; while Lady Gertrude, under the sooth-

ing influence of silence and smooth motion, recovered a fair amount of placidity. Smithers was just scandalous and malicious enough to amuse the Duchess without offending the young lady, while his appearance of gaiety and good-living seemed to vouch for his essential good-nature. It was almost impossible to think that this well-fed jolly gentleman ever intended to hurt anybody. The Duchess was so well amused that she almost forgot to make the one or two ill-natured speeches which she had thought of in bed as likely to wound the daughter of the house; and the party had almost reached their destination before she brought the little speeches out, and then rather jerkily. They referred to Algy Garner, and were addressed to Mr. Plumley; and, though the Duchess could extract nothing but deprecating looks from that cautious

gentleman, she had the satisfaction of feeling Lady Gertrude leap in her place and turn sharply away.

Then, when they had arrived at their ruins and had left their carriage, Mr. Plumley seized his opportunity and showed with the utmost delicacy how little he sympathised with the Duchess's tone about Algy Garner. He was so sorry for Algy, who was such a nice fellow; he seemed to take for granted her cousinly interest in the reckless young man; he regretted deeply his perversity in getting into scrapes; and, softly following this train of thought, he let slip something of Algy's bet in the smoking-room on the night just past. Lady Gertrude with sudden passion demanded details, and when she heard the amount she was hurt and angry indeed. The very sum

which she was to get for him he was pledged to throw away before he held it. He was incurable; he was one of her failures. Life was full of failures, and this miserable picnic was another of them. Even the excellent luncheon and the contentment of her guests, the trees all powdered with fresh green of the spring, the calm of the distant river, the delicate grass below and the feathery white clouds high up in the blue—even all these good things failed to soothe the troubled spirit of Lady Gertrude Bookham. Trifles irritated her. She was annoyed by the Duchess's method of sliding food between her tiny scarcely-parted lips; she was annoyed by the hearty laughter of Lady Charmian, who laughed till she cried at nothing. She was even annoyed by the attentions of Mr. Randall, in whose talk she generally

felt sure of being interested. Now she tacitly accused him of heaviness, and her plenteous generosity and hospitality were offended by his rigid abstinence. Mr. Randall had a tendency to fat, against which he seemed to be ever contending. He walked with excessive vigour and determination, and there was a perceptible strain on the buttons of all his coats. At this luncheon in the open air, which was not to be a picnic, he offended the lady whom he was anxious to please by a cold-blooded refusal of the choicest viands. She was vexed with him and showed it; and she said to herself, not for the first time, that he looked too like a vigorous and trustworthy railway guard. Though there is no type more likely to gain the confidence of the intelligent public, Lady Gertrude held that

it was inconsistent with the higher statesmanship. She, like almost all his friends, had forgotten those early flashes of indiscretion which the ambitious politician had been teaching the nation to forget. Everything went wrong; nobody behaved as he or she ought. Luncheon was half over when Mrs. Lulham came strolling from the neighbouring grove with John Maidment by her side.

'The luncheon is nearly finished,' said Lady Gertrude in her aggrieved tone.

'I never eat,' said Mrs. Lulham quietly.

John looked at Lady Gertrude, but she ignored his looks. He had come from the wood with his heart full of pleasure; he had been conversing with one whom he found the cleverest of women; he was flushed with the most delicate flatteries.

Perhaps Lady Gertrude saw in him some trace of a vanquishing air. When he spoke to her with a happy friendliness, she answered shortly, and, as she turned to Mr. Randall with a string of unimportant questions, she moved just so far that John Maidment could find no place by her side. John felt himself snubbed, and was very angry. As he stood irresolute, he caught the twinkling eye of Smithers Plumley and was more angry. Lady Gertrude's manner was like a shower-bath to his sensitive nerves: he hated it, and he hated her for the moment. This was that aristocratic insolence of which he had heard; these were the manners of the barbarian class. On the way home his thoughts ran the same way. He told himself that he had enjoyed a most useful experience; but he did not enjoy it much. He told himself that

he was following a most useful train of thought. It is only centuries of insolence, he thought, which could produce this perfect flower. This girl treated him like an inferior being; he would like to show her which was the better, he or she. He would show her some day. Changes were coming, and coming quickly; and these people were too dull to see them. This excessive and enervating luxury was founded on the possession of land by the few; that at least was doomed, and with it would vanish this hereditary insolence of a landed class. What was this girl that she should think herself better than he? How absurd that she should think herself his equal! She would know better some day. Even he, whom she fancied she could snub with impunity, would be compelled to lend a hand to the destruction of that old state of

things which alone made possible the existence of such an arrogant maiden.

It was not long before John Maidment had recovered his amiability. He passed from indignation to pity. If Lady Gertrude knew as much as he knew, she would be more careful how she treated him. They were all stupid, these people who fancied that the world was made for them. The world was made for him who knew how to make the world. John came down to dinner, feeling that the fate of thirty or forty guests collected in the stately house of Boucherett was in his hands. If they did not make him their friend, it would be the worse for them. He went in to dinner, unruffled and with self-respect restored ; and the ceremony of dinner, with its easy splendour and its distant music, soothed him more and more, until again he took a genial, if

somewhat contemptuous, view of the worthy folk around him. Let them have their hour, he thought, and I—I too will enjoy it.

Later in the same evening, when Mrs. Lulham had uttered her faint expressive notes and some were playing cards and some were talking, John wandered into a room which opened out of the gallery, and saw before him the entrance to an inner shrine wherefrom a richer light was pouring. Across the entrance a heavy curtain was half drawn, and with the light and fragrance of hot-house flowers the sound of a voice came also. Lady Gertrude was speaking, and speaking in her most plaintive tone; but suddenly the even flow of her complaint was checked, and checked most rudely.

'And this is why,' said the voice of Mr. Garner, full of compressed fierceness—'this

is why you've kept me hanging about you like an infernal—— Ah! I'm sick of it; I'm sick of getting nothing but sermons.'

There was a pause before the word 'sermons,' in which John imagined a strong epithet swallowed with difficulty. He had not time to move before Garner came out, and passing him without a word or sign went through a side door, which he left shaking behind him. John turned to go back to the gallery, but stopped. He felt a strong impulse to look at the girl. He remembered that she had snubbed him; he would like to see if she would snub him again; he was not afraid of her; he should see at a glance if he were intruding, and could retire in a moment. In a moment he had passed the curtain and was in the room.

The Duchess was fond of saying that Lady

Gertrude did not know how to dress herself, and that she wore clothes which were not suitable for a girl. It is certain that this girl loved sumptuous raiment and to adorn herself with jewels. In the soft light of the little room, she herself was rich and lustrous as a jewel in a shrine. There was a flush on her cheek, and her dark eyes were soft and pleading. There was a sparkle of gems at her round white throat, and of tears on her long lashes. As she looked up from the low couch and saw John in the doorway, the flush deepened and she drew her hand indignant across her eyes. The young man moved as if he meant to go.

'Don't go,' she said quickly.

He came in, and sank down on the seat by her side. He seemed to taste the fragrance of a splendid tropical flower. He

had drunk more wine, and richer, than he had known in his ascetic boyhood; he had yielded himself to the enjoyment of languishing music; he was in a mood for most delicate delight. After a silence of a few minutes, she spoke again with lips which were still tremulous.

'You mustn't think,' she said—'I don't want you to think for a moment— It's nothing, nothing at all. I am very much annoyed; that's all. He's my cousin, and one of my oldest friends. You won't think that, because I am such a fool as to cry—will you?'

It was perhaps a little incoherent, but John understood her and knew that he could answer better by looks than by speech. As she turned impulsively to him with her final question, her beautiful arm touched him,

and thrilled him with a new feeling. All her pride seemed to have gone. Her great eyes, yet dim with tears, seemed to ask his sympathy. His voice sounded to himself low and eloquent as he assured her that he understood her meaning.

'I can't think how a man can be so silly,' she said; and he waited to hear more. 'Just fancy!' she said with increasing emphasis. 'Can you imagine such a thing? He borrowed some money to pay bills, which ought to have been paid long ago, and went directly—directly—and put it all on some horse.'

Her voice rose gradually from a low tone of regret to high complaint. John felt a quick increase of interest.

'Who told you about his backing the horse?' he asked.

'Mr. Plumley told me. He was very sorry about it. He is so funny that one does not expect him to feel things; but even he was sorry about that.'

'It was five hundred pounds?'

'Yes.'

'It was Plumley who made him do it,' cried John with sudden anger. For the moment he was possessed wholly by a quick rush of virtuous indignation; there was no room in him for anything but measureless disgust at the mean conduct of this unctuous Plumley; his voice quivered with emotion as he told her of the talk in the smoking-room. As he spoke, he saw how good it was to open the girl's eyes to the character of this wealthy admirer, who with dishonesty had been opening her eyes to the weakness of another. It was not right that this splendid being

should marry either of these men; she was as much too good for a sly millionaire as for an ill-tempered spendthrift. He would save her from both these rivals; it was his clear duty; it was absorbing; it was politic. Lady Gertrude's eyes were fixed upon his face, which glowed with righteous indignation. She admired him and his right anger; she interrupted him with exclamations of horror; when he had finished she thanked him warmly.

'I always knew of course that he was horrid,' she said, 'and sly, and scandalous; but I did not think that any man could be so mean. It's like a woman.'

'Don't say that,' said John softly; 'I have such a high ideal of woman.'

'I sometimes think that one is a fool to have any ideals. This is too shocking.

That there should be two men staying here, in this house, two gentlemen and friends of ours, and that one should be so pitifully weak and the other so wicked!' Her voice was full of sharp complaint, but it sank again to its deep pathetic tone. 'How can one have any ideals?' she asked.

'We must not give up high aims because others are unworthy,' said John softly, and he found a pleasure in the use of the word 'We'

There was a pause, and then she said with a smile beginning to come, 'How strange that I should discuss these things with you!'

'It's very pleasant for me; I feel as if you treated me as a friend.'

'That's what I like,' she said with intense conviction; 'I like to make friends.'

'If you will tell me anything at any time, and if I can ever do anything for you——' He stopped, and looked at her with devotion. Her dark eyes fell before his, and she did not speak for a minute. 'Can't we shake hands on our friendship?' he said with an awkward laugh; and he raised her soft warm hand in his.

CHAPTER XII.

When John Maidment and Lady Gertrude had shaken hands on their friendship, they began to moralise. Lady Gertrude was very fond of moralising. They discussed the high aims of life; they found many points of sympathy. Indeed, though Lady Gertrude would have been offended by any doubt of her complete Toryism, which was a matter of course in a member of her family, her warm heart was often aglow with some scheme as revolutionary as philanthropic. She was not rigidly, prosaically consistent. She was almost as full

as John of the desire to help her fellow-creatures, and she had made many more practical endeavours to help them. It must be confessed that she was charitable uncomfortably, fretting and sighing, but generous withal. When an old man in the village broke his leg, she took it as a personal grievance. She expected a great deal from her poor friends, though she was given to declare with vehemence that she expected nothing from so bad a world. When people disappointed her, she was fretful over their shortcomings. If they told her rudely that she herself was not perfect, she was in a hurry to confess it. She confessed with emphasis and passion, and always felt the better for her confession. She thought of herself as distinguished by high ideals and *of course* falling short. Thus she soothed

her conscience; and she soothed it, too, by being fretful over her neighbours' offences, by deploring the wickedness of an idle world, which she had no wish to abjure. She felt a warm interest in John; as she sat in that quiet corner and listened to his facile speech, she declared to herself again that she had never met so interesting a young man. Her generous admiration led him easily from the discussion of general propositions about life to the more absorbing subject, himself. But, though he felt the temptation to be most eloquent on himself and on his hopes of the future, he restrained the topic within due bounds, and so pleased her the more. He did not talk too much about himself; he spoke more and with finer feeling about those who had come nearest to him in life.

It seemed to the girl, as she listened, that he had lived in a romantic air. This delighted her, and made her look at him with quickly growing interest; for she had said to herself a thousand times that in modern life there was no romance. She had seen her friends make excellent marriages with men for whom they did not care a jot, and she had sniffed scornfully at their easy acquiescence and the cheap sentimentalisms of the mothers who had arranged the affairs. She had fretted over the commercial maxims of young men, the routine of laborious amusement, the inadequacy of prosaic life. Now, as she listened to this brilliant and eloquent youth, she thought that he had been born and bred in a world where everybody was exceptional. She enjoyed a vision of his wild and graceful father, who had exchanged a brilliant society, where

none shone with such lustre, for the pure exciting air, the free life, and the silver dreams of Colorado. Any day he might strike his pickaxe on the sterile ground, and be richer than the Caliph of Bagdad or Crœsus king of Lydia. Born in a family where wealth was a matter of course, Lady Gertrude thought that she despised money; but silver asleep in the mountain till the prospecting prince should come made her eyes brighter and her red lips open in wonder. And there were other figures, too, who made a most heroic appearance in John's tale. This huge and simple guardian, of whom the young man spoke with an engaging mixture of patronage and tenderness, seemed to the girl like a gigantic Norseman, with eyes like wintry blue and beard like the yellow corn. She could imagine the grand simple faith of such an one

in this brilliant youth, whom it was his privilege to start in life. And as John spoke of the friend who had been his comrade at school and in holidays, the girl began to think of Jonathan and David, of the greatness and beauty of friendship. She was under a charm. Why, she asked herself, should not a woman be a man's friend, and the best of all possible friends? John said nothing of Letty, who had been his good friend too.

John talked charmingly, and found the richest pleasure in talking to this lovely lady in this sumptuous place. The place and the hour, the easy winning of a friend so rare, the delightful confidence, the glow of a new life affected him like wine. His words came warm to his lips, and only stammered when his eyes met hers. The girl was delighted. Had she not suddenly

remembered the cold glances of the Duchess, she might have sat in a corner with this picturesque talker so long that her cool judgment would have disapproved.

John, before he slept that night, allowed himself to play with the pretty notion that perhaps after all a state of society, which was to be on its trial, would find its best excuse in that it made possible a splendid flower of girlhood.

John slept well, and woke to wonder if any particular thing had made him so happy. He pulled up his blind and opened his window wide, that lying in bed he might look across the spacious courtyard and see beyond the great florid iron gates the wide park stretch away like a green county under the spring-tide blue. His heart grew great, and he laughed with a sense of expansion. Then

he thought with a sigh that people would feel a keen regret when such princely places were no longer possible. His mind was very active. After all, why should they not be possible? If the profits which the world affords are unfairly divided, perhaps it was not the landlords who got too much, but rather the manufacturers and merchants. And these merchants and manufacturers did not enrich their fellows by making such things of beauty as Boucherett, but only overloaded the groaning earth with new monuments of ugliness and ostentation. Perhaps the first action of the reformer should be to defy the musty precepts of the political economist and to ensure fair wages for the workman. Perhaps the landlords might be taught to help the workmen against the capitalists and so gain for themselves a new period of

dignified and noble life. Schemes came to the quick-thinking youth as he lay in bed, schemes of decent dwellings for the poor of the towns, of healthy amusement, of open spaces and pure water. Let the landed folk admit the virtue of trades' unions, and let the trades' unions accept the friendship of the landlords, and the vulgar capitalist would have to be content with less profit. The friendship of a new and wise nobility with a free and enlightened people was a captivating idea. John broke short his chain of idle fancies with a laugh. He found that he was thinking the thoughts of a new sort of Tory; he remembered that he was a daring Radical. Well, after all, no man should bind himself at the outset of life in the complete buckram of a party creed. It was a morning which suggested an open mind. John was

delighted with his quick thoughts, his clear quick visions. It could not be said of him, he felt, that he could take but one point of view. Who could better venture to let his lively mind play round a subject, for who was surer than he of a solid foundation of sound public morality?

There came a tap at the door, and John's pleasant musing was presently changed to annoyance. The servant to whose care he had been assigned stood by his bed-side with a telegram. John tore it open, and in a moment his face was full of vexation. He would send no answer, and, as soon as the man had gone, he jumped out of bed and spread the offending telegram flat on the little writing-table. It was from Colonel Brent, and was very short. 'Come home, if you can,' the Colonel had written, and no more.

John was made angry by this characteristic brevity. He declared that it left him no choice. Of course he could go to Brentholme. It was absurd of Colonel Brent to give him no reason; it was treating him, a member of Parliament, a man to whom the guests of Boucherett showed much consideration, as if he were a child incapable of rational choice. While he washed and dressed himself, he was inclined for each alternate minute to write for further information and meanwhile to wait where he was. However, he was sure that the right thing was to go at once, and that he would do the right thing. He always did the right thing.

When he announced after breakfast that he had been summoned by telegram, he looked straight at the eyes of Lady Gertrude, and he felt a thrill of pleasure as he read in

them an annoyance equal to his own. It would have been more flattering to him if she had tried to hide her feeling; but her voice touched its highest point of fretfulness as she declared that something always happened to spoil her party. She was plaintive; she thought herself for the thousandth time the sport of a capricious destiny. She sighed as she poured out a cup of tea for a late comer; she snubbed her father, who was curious about one of the day's details, which she had settled twelve hours ago, and she told him not to fuss.

'The brougham will take you to the station,' she said to John, as if broughams and stations had been created alike for her peculiar annoyance. She sighed as she told him the time of his train, as if it were started

at the one minute of all the day which was most inconvenient for her.

The last thing which John saw as he was carried away was Lady Gertrude's face, still eloquent of the certainty that the world was arranged for her particular disappointment.

CHAPTER XIII

To John Maidment's eyes the chalk slopes of Brentholme looked bare, the hall chilly, and the morning-room, into which he strode, threadbare and faded. The Colonel's man, who had grown old in the service of the family, went slowly in search of his master, and it was not long before the Colonel appeared. Indeed, he had a strange tale to tell, and, since it seemed to his own discredit, he would lose no time in the telling. He told it boldly and barely. He said that he had lost a great deal of money, or at least so much that it was a heavy loss for him.

'I made a foolish investment,' he said, 'in something American; and as I shall have to give back a great part of my rents of this year, I must spend less for a time.' He became very gruff, and seemed to draw up his words from his very boots, as he said that he should try to let the place for a few years. The statement seemed to stick in his throat. 'The boys must leave school for a year or more,' he added, 'and try a tutor.' He smiled grimly, thinking perhaps that Jacky, Teddy, and Dicky were well made for the trial of tutors; but there was no answering gleam of a smile in John Maidment's eyes. John was waiting with ill-disguised impatience till the statement of plans should touch his own career. 'Paul,' continued the Colonel, 'will decide for himself. Perhaps he will stay in America for a while. He has found

a friend who wants him to join him in cattle-breeding. He has, as you know, a little money, which came to him from his aunt Susan. He knows that I have been losing money; he will soon know how much.'

'Then you told Paul.' John's sense of injury fastened on this fact. 'I wish you had told me,' he added almost in the same breath.

'I hoped not to tell you at all,' said the Colonel after a minute, while only the flush on his fair skin showed the pain which he felt. 'Things might have taken a better turn. Can you do with a hundred a year less—for this year at least?'

What internal convulsions had preceded this curt cold question, nobody in the world would have guessed. John had no conception of the sufferings of this great healthy

man, who expressed himself with so much difficulty. He was aggrieved, and did not care to hide it.

'Of course I must do with it,' he said. His thoughts came and went fast. He had been kept in the dark most foolishly; the Colonel should have asked his advice long ago; the Colonel had been extraordinarily foolish. He thought that Mr. Randall would have considered his advice worth the trouble of asking, and with that thought his quick mind was back at Boucherett. He had a vision of a life where no trumpery hampering considerations of expenditure need be. If he were not to some extent bound—— Was he bound? He was obliged to come back to the present moment, for there was his guardian standing solid and silent before him with his chin pushed upward and outward.

'Of course,' said John again, 'I must do with less money; I have no claim; it is for you to decide. I only wish that you had told me, that you had given me the chance of being of some help, however small. I wish I had known.'

Colonel Brent opened his mouth as if he would speak, but he shut it again and slowly went out of the room. He went to look for his daughter. Letty was sitting on a gate; she looked unusually meditative; she had been regarding the familiar fields and trees through tears which came unbidden with the thought of leaving Brentholme even for a single year. She felt an unreasonable dislike of the people who would take the place: there might even be a girl who would dare to have her favourite views and favourite corners; the idea was insupportable; she was

sure that the girl was horrid. Nevertheless she looked up at her father with a smile. She was very sorry for him; she was sure that somewhere under his great silence and his stoical face there was deep sorrow.

'John is in my study,' he said looking over her head.

It was not much which he said, but the girl was in the habit of finding a great deal in her father's curt sentences. She read in this one that John was out of spirits and that she was to go to him, and she read in it too with a throb of the heart that it was recognised that she was the person whose duty and right it was to comfort this young man of genius. She descended from her gate with a new gravity in her face, and she stood a-tiptoe to kiss her mighty father before she went slowly towards the house.

Letty had not reached the house before she met John walking quickly and speaking even more quickly to himself. She could see his lips moving before he saw her, and the sight roused a little opposition in her, which made her hesitate. John Maidment was a wonderful creature, so clever and so handsome ; she had always admired him so much ; it ought to be such a privilege to help and console him. He looked the hero of romance, but for some unlucky reason on that morning she could not feel romantic. And yet it was determined : she was the being who was to be dedicated to the consolation of this youth—had she not dedicated herself? She tried to feel the full dignity of her mission—how great a thing it was that he should care for her. If only some one of her young brothers had been near to criticise John, she would

have found in his defence the necessary warmth; she would have met him then with a glow of loyalty. As it was, she was half inclined to run away.

John Maidment, who was not thinking about the girl's thoughts, had hardly pressed her hands in his before he began those criticisms of the Colonel with which he was overflowing. He told the girl too often that the lessening of his allowance was nothing, that it was not that which hurt him. Letty grew colder and colder, and as silent as her father.

'I'm not greedy,' said John; 'I think I may say that. Of course it is extremely hard to live in London and do the various duties, which a member of Parliament is bound to do, on so little; but that is nothing; I make no complaint of that.'

'Of course not,' she said with difficulty.

'Although it will be very inconvenient—there is no good in attempting to say that it won't be very inconvenient.'

'It's harder for my father!' she said more clearly.

'Of course it is harder for him, but why didn't he consult me? Why did he keep me in the dark? It is that which I can't get over. He must have been speculating so foolishly—even now he tells me no particulars—it's treating me like a child. Of course it's hard for him, but what has he done with it?'

'You ought not to ask,' she said sharply, and with a little nod of her head.

'Don't be absurd!' he said angrily.

'Thank you.' She stood a moment looking at him, and then with her little head

in air she walked into the house, and having passed beyond his sight ran upstairs, almost stumbling in her haste, that she might lock herself into her room before the tears came flowing. It was thus that she executed her mission of consolation.

For the remaining hours of that lagging day there was little ease for the small party gathered at Brentholme. They avoided each other, and, if there was no quarrelling, there was very little talk; and so at last bed-time came and silence was no longer awkward.

The next morning Letty woke full of happiness and wondered why. Beyond the dimity curtains with their faded well-washed rosebuds, she felt the freshness of the dewy morning and heard the tumultuous babble of the thronging birds. But these delightful

trifles of the day were only charms of the old place which she was to leave; they should have made her sad. And a doubt would come and come again whether she had been kind and patient enough. She felt that she ought to be sad; she sighed conscientiously, but her spirits would not be denied. Out in the air she grew happier and happier; she was bound to nothing; she was free. She was filled with the ecstasy of freedom; it seemed wrong; it was not what she had meant to feel; and so at last a great sob surprised her, and she began to cry.

A little later John Maidment was flying to London and thinking, whether he would or no, of money. He had never fully realised the importance of money. He perceived that he ought to think about it. He wondered if Lady Gertrude would have much. Suddenly

he was shocked—where were his thoughts going to? He had a vision of Letty—what would she think of his mind being busy with money? His conscience had sprung up uneasy; he attacked it with fury, with a passionate declaration that he had been treated infamously. If he were thinking of money, is it not absolutely necessary for the independence of the modern politician? He only wanted money that he might work, as nature meant him to work, effectively for the public good: he was sure that he was right to want it; he need not fear that he would ever yield to any temptation to gain it by unworthy means. How quick his conscience was to take alarm! He had been ready to blame himself for thoughts which a moment's consideration showed to be most sensible. But he was glad that his conscience was so sensi-

tive. He could go forward without fear, for his conscience would not let him stray an inch from the path of duty. What a safeguard was that!

III

CHAPTER XIV.

The first year of John Maidment's Parliamentary life was uneventful. There was a great deal of talk and very little law-making; and though the young orator cared little for the Bills which had to be abandoned, he was much disappointed by the quality of the talk. It seemed to him that the most loquacious members, if they spoke less pompously than his old friends at the Union, spoke less fluently also. They had the air of hesitating, as if the matter of their remarks was so important that a wrong word would be fatal, and yet with all their hesitations and repeti-

tions it was not generally a very valuable thought which finally struggled to the light. John sometimes thought with a thrill that when he unlocked his lips he would treat this audience to something better; but then always followed the chilling doubt whether those who liked this spasmodic method would have the good taste to admire his richer eloquence. Sometimes, as he sat dreary on a dull night in the House (and there were a great many dull nights in that year), he told himself that it was not worth while to shine among such a lot of stammerers; and, as he looked round on the half-empty benches, the slouching bodies and the faces distorted at short intervals by wide ostentatious yawns, he compared the scene with his old visions of the great arena and felt the full bitterness of the contrast. How-

ever, though his view of the House was by no means respectful, John was wise enough to keep his opinion to himself. Moreover, he cleverly made use of his disillusion to strengthen his purpose of not making a speech that year. He had meant to keep silence for a while, and he was glad that the temptation to let his words flow was weaker than he expected. So he began to acquire among the few political people who seemed to notice him a reputation for constant attendance and attention, and for a respectful attitude to the Senate of his country.

Mr. Maidment was dissatisfied. After the first excitement of London life he suffered from a natural reaction; he began to think himself neglected. The chiefs of his party seemed scarcely aware of his existence. Mr. Stanley Belchamber was the only one of

the leading men who showed any wish for his better acquaintance, and this one loudly explained his desire not by any expectation of the young member's political qualities (at their first meeting he pretended to forget to which party John belonged), but by his lively recollection of the escapades of Mr. Maidment the Elder. He declared that he and Wilfred Maidment had been boys together, that they had heard the chimes at midnight, had been sworn brothers in many a wild adventure.

To hear him you would suppose that this worthy man, whose University first class had been followed by years of the patient study of Blue-books and 'Statesmen's Year-books,' and by the conscientious staring at details furnished by the permanent staffs of various departments, had been Prince Hal and Don Juan, and that the study where he had worked

with unflagging industry had been ornamented with the knockers of half the fat citizens of London. As he rose in the world, he had been more and more offended by his reputation for blamelessness. If he must submit to the reputation of excellence as a public servant, he could at least struggle against that of private virtue. He took to swearing with premeditation; he went in search of improper stories, and, above all, he delighted in references to his younger days and to that dashing swashbuckler in whom he half believed as his former self.

So John found himself used as a peg on which were hung wild anecdotes of his father and his father's friend who had been barely an acquaintance, and, though he would have forgiven the slight to his own claims for the sake of the praises of his parent, whom it was part

of his creed to admire extravagantly, he did not like the stories which gave to the gay doings of the brilliant Wilfred a coarser and more common air than he chose to accept. He decided that the coarseness was due to the coarser medium through which the tales reached him, but it gave him a mild dislike of the only prominent member of his party who paid him any attention.

John's discontent with his party made it easier for him to contemplate with equanimity the fact that he was not to support them in carrying the Reform Bill. This great measure was still a matter of some future session; and meanwhile John lost no fitting opportunity of privately saying that it would not have his support. He wished to break his fall, to prevent the shock of an unpleasant surprise. There were a few young men in the House

who were Liberals because their ancestors had believed in freedom of speech and trial by jury, and these began to look on the attractive Maidment as an acquisition. They, too, were discontented with their leaders, and their new friend found pleasure in their free criticism of the men with whom they voted.

There were other influences too which more directly drew John from his party. While his own chiefs paid him scant attention, he was complimented by finding himself an object of interest to one of the ablest of their opponents. Mr. Randall cultivated him, asked him to breakfast in the Albany, even asked his advice. He at least had an adequate conception of the importance of the ideas, right or wrong, of the young men; and he listened to John with apparent respect and very real interest. And there was a more

flattering, a more dangerous influence than that of Mr. Randall. Among the social attentions which the young man received, none were so pleasant or so frequent as those which came from Boucherett House. There he met pleasant men and charming women, who seemed to accept his radicalism as a piquant peculiarity; he enjoyed the atmosphere of the nicest house in London and the knowledge that he was a lucky fellow to enjoy it so often. Lady Gertrude had accepted him as full of generous enthusiasm, as vastly interesting; she had almost inflated him to heroic size. For the disappointments of his first session there was no compensation equal to that which he found in the society of the Whimley intimates, and especially in that of the handsome daughter of the house.

John Maidment recognised the fact that

his enthusiasm for his great party grew colder day by day, but he scarcely thought either of the indifference of its leaders or of the attentions of its enemies as causes of his growing coldness. These he saw at moments with a passing glance; but to him there was one cause, which alone was enough to explain his disenchantment and to make his aversion a virtue—the want of faith. That Tories should have no faith had seemed to the young man at Oxford a matter of course; he had supposed that cynicism was the natural attribute of the Conservative who was not merely stupid. Plunged into the atmosphere of London he found the Liberals, whose acquaintance he made, more cynical in private talk than any of their opponents. He had imagined a great party full of faith in liberty, full of zeal for the raising and enlightening of their less fortu-

nate countrymen; and he heard from the lips, which had filled halls and skating rinks with resounding praises of freedom and protestations of philanthropy, nothing more stimulating than stale cheap sneers at anyone who believed in benefiting anybody but himself, or on rare occasions a shrewd hint how to play the game of politics. John told himself again and again that these men were cynical as a despot at a time of decadence, and would play concerted pieces on their Cabinet fiddles though the empire were in flames and the strong man starving in the street. John was vastly and constantly indignant with this cynical tone; he felt its enervating power, its chilling and deadly effect.

It fully explained to him his growing aversion to the leaders of his party. He was never tired of denouncing to himself this fatal influence, and at last there came a time when

his virtuous indignation could no longer be locked in his own breast, but after an evening of unusual provocation broke forth in indignant speech.

It was near the end of the season when John was surprised by an invitation to dine with Mr. Otho Sunderland. Mr. Sunderland's dinners were famous, and, though he had always taken a prominent place in the political world, his best attention was given to the selection of food and guests. The latter were always few and the former exquisite. Mr. Sunderland was still a comely man, whose skin retained a remarkable gloss and rosiness; and if there was something pig-like in the lines of the face and the twinkle of the little eyes, it suggested an animal of a refined breed and one whose marvellous digestive powers had been used with some regard to moderation.

Moreover, if at the first sight of this hospitable gentleman the observer could not but think of his digestion, at the next he was bound to recognise his intelligence. Above the twinkling eyes, which were themselves very keen and vivacious, the head was strong and solid. If Mr. Sunderland was like a pig, it was a pig with the intelligence strongly and sanely developed. He was very rich; he was a bachelor, and seemed happy in the state; he had great political influence; he had refused office. He appeared to enjoy all aspects of life, and one of the things which amused him most was the game of politics. At his little dinners he liked to entertain no one better than a Cabinet minister, unless it were a pretty and a witty woman. He had seen John in the House, admired his handsome vivacious appearance, and asked him to dinner. John

accepted with pleasure, for he had heard of Mr. Sunderland's influence, and he was captivated by the compliment of an invitation to one of those banquets which were notoriously select; and his pleasure was increased when he found that in the small party to which he had been bidden there were three Cabinet ministers and at least two of the prettiest women in London.

John prepared to be happy, but to prepare to be happy is to challenge disappointment. You build the palace of happiness stone by stone, and dulness sits heavy in every chamber: you go into the back-yard, and with a glint of sunshine over the wall happiness has kissed you and is gone. John found himself out of it. The ladies, who were undeniably pretty, and with eyes and teeth and laughter which were almost wit, were so busy

with fascinating the more ponderous politicians that they scarcely seemed to notice that the new youth was good-looking, and the attentions of the magnates of his party were so casual as to be less complimentary than obvious contempt. A limp finger from Lord Allport and a galvanized grin on the tired face of Mr. Belchamber were all the signs that they recognised in Mr. Maidment a pledged supporter. John's contempt increased as the delicate feast went on. He asked himself why this elderly Sybarite had asked him? His lip curled at the pleasantries with which, to their own immense satisfaction, the politicians entertained the beauties. The insincerity of these public moralists filled him with disgust, the coarseness and clumsiness of their compliments. If the admirable artist who had made the entrées

of the evening had had no finer taste in flavours, they might have been dining at a farmers' ordinary. And their equivocal compliments to the ladies were no worse than the jests which they rolled at each other. They told stories against each other and all were of one pattern. Each had a tale of some delinquency of the other. If you had believed them, you would have supposed that her Majesty's Ministers cared for nothing but gambling in railway carriages, following pretty women, and sneering at politics. Otho Sunderland beamed irresponsible; he led the talk; he gave it its greatest richness. Somebody spoke of the Radicals.

'Radicals!' he cried; 'we are all Radicals. Hillingdon is Radical till you touch the land, Allport till you touch his monotonous pheasants; Simpson's a Socialist to the point of

Sèvres china, and Belchamber to that of ladies' gowns. The ladies must have pretty gowns for Belchamber.' Mr. Stanley Belchamber, in whose weary face the lines had been vanishing in that unctuous atmosphere, made ready to think of a *mot*, but the irresistible host passed on above him. 'I shall dish you all,' he said; 'I shall lead the party yet; I haven't a taste I can't give up with a smile—not even the gowns.' He gave a large smile to left and right and added, 'No degree of Communism can prevent one woman from being prettier than another.'

'Order, order!' cried Lord Allport for no particular reason and laughed immoderately.

'Otho doesn't stop at the gowns,' said Stanley Belchamber, who had at last put together something which seemed witty. Perhaps it was witty, for they all laughed, and

pretty Lady Skipmore whispered something to Mr. Hillingdon, and called him a cad when he threatened to repeat it.

'Don't reform away our pretty clothes,' said lovely Mrs. Mullinger gravely; 'we should be nothing without them.'

Mrs. Mullinger had large soft eyes, and made the most simple remarks. Nobody knew if she meant to be funny, and, when her audience roared with laughter, she looked at them like a surprised dove.

As the wine began to take effect and the public servants expanded more and more, the talk came faster and the jokes aroused more generous laughter. Hillingdon declared that Lord Allport had sold the future of the House of Lords to a beautiful Radical lady; and Allport asserted that Hillingdon had failed to meet the local Three Hundred, whose

mouthpiece he was, because he was so intent on robbing a bagman at écarté that he had passed the station unawares. 'There he was in a first-class carriage with the blinds down pocketing the gent's last shilling, and there were his masters outside waiting for his defence of his monstrous and unpatriotic treatment of the great French Egg Question; they'll never forgive him; the seat's lost.'

'Hillingdon,' said Mr. Belchamber, 'would make any place too hot to hold him.'

'Ah!' cried Otho Sunderland; 'he may find that useful some day.'

There was a pause before the laughter came; there was a sort of shiver in Lady Skipmore's silvery laughter. Lady Skipmore had been born and brought up in one of the quieter towns of New England, and

her first success in English society had been as the daintiest of Puritans; but she was a clever little woman, and finding that in the set which struck her as the best a certain freedom of speech prevailed, she had drilled herself through a time of blushes to listen to amazing talk and to answer in the same key. 'When you are in Rome,' she said to herself, 'you must talk as the Romans talk,' and it was not long before she bettered her example. It was all talk with Lady Skipmore, and the letters which she wrote to her relations in America were filled half with the names but not the talk of the prominent people among whom she moved, and half with the latest anecdotes of her babies.

John Maidment was vastly disgusted. The night was hot and dry, and when he

left Mr. Sunderland's house he found small refreshment. On the stairs he had heard a burst of laughter, and felt certain that they were laughing at him. He would make some of them laugh on the wrong side of their mouths yet. He half resolved to start the crusade on the morrow—to set forth on a speaking tour, to stump the country, to lay bare to the deluded provincials the intimate opinions of these men, whose moral perorations had thrilled them in the daily papers. He remembered the time when he too had been thrilled, and he was furious with these men who had deceived him. 'What do they think of me,' he said aloud, 'that they speak like that before me? Do they think me a fool —so weak that I can't hurt them?' He was deeply wounded. It seemed to him

that he had never before seen in all its naked deformity the shameless cynicism of the political orators whose mouths were full in full political meetings of equity, philanthropy, morality.

CHAPTER XV.

The next morning John Maidment was engaged to breakfast with a genial young Whig of his acquaintance, and he was still so full of the impressions of the last night that he spoke eloquently and with feeling of the contrast between public professions and private beliefs; and, being met with some light objections and comments, he grew rapidly warmer and expressed himself with an earnestness and even with a passion which is rare at an English breakfast table. He made an excellent impression. His words were very effective, and some of the listeners were busy

wondering if he might not be a power in the House. They wagged their heads at each other when he had gone, and said that he was a very earnest chap and had lots of go; and before he went his young host, wise as genial, had engaged him to come and speak to his constituents for him on some occasion before the next meeting of Parliament.

Some months passed before John's Whig friend claimed the fulfilment of his promise, and he responded to the summons like one awaking from a lethargy to a glorious day. He had not enjoyed these months of repose. He had stayed for the most part in his dull London lodgings, studying and doubting the usefulness of his studies; thinking of Brentholme which had already found a tenant, and telling himself that he had no place to go to; taking a doubtful pleasure in

economising. He pictured the Brent family established in the Marine Parade of the quiet watering-place which was too near to their beloved home; he did not want to go to them; he was angry because they did not press him to come. He was angry too at the folly of the family. It was absurd that they should have got themselves into such a position with their pride and reticence. Why had the Colonel not confided in him from the first? He asked himself the question again and again, though he was sick of it. He pictured Paul riding about after cows in Montana, and did not like the picture. Reminded of a promise which he had forgotten, and being called to speak at short notice in a small country town where he was unknown, his spirit leapt within him; he felt the first stirring of spring; he perceived that another time of

political activity had come; his speech was ready to flow. And his speech did flow indeed, and to such purpose, that the rumour of it spread beyond the petty place where it was delivered; it was noticed by more than one of the London papers, and finally one passage of it was quoted in a leader of the 'Times.'

The chiefs of John Maidment's party had concocted a little measure for Ireland, and, after producing it with tender patronising speeches, had been obliged to postpone it to the coming session. Upon this one of the entertaining experiments which are made upon the sister island John, sore with things in general, and especially with his leaders, allowed himself a free rush of indignant criticism. He did not suppose that he would be heard beyond the whitewashed walls of the Institute, and he thought that he might relieve

his overcharged heart and hear no more of it. He did not mean to say much; but the excitement of speech after long silence, the applause of his audience mingled with expostulatory grumblings of the most orthodox, and the unfeigned delight of his host, carried the young orator forward on a full stream. He touched briefly on former and larger measures for Ireland, and, after pointing out that the expected effect had not in each case followed, he held up the little piece of legislation which was to be now tried in its turn, and shook it and turned it inside out and flung it down with a fine scorn. 'Let nobody suppose,' he said, 'that I look with disrespect on the author of this measure. He has produced a masterpiece. With patient industry and a more than Machiavellian subtlety he has put together a piece of legislation so ingeniously

framed that the good, which it can in the happiest circumstances effect, will be the least possible, and the disturbance which it cannot but produce must be incalculable and irremediable. I congratulate her Majesty's Government. We are all warm supporters of her Majesty's Government.'

Here he was interrupted by the warm applause of those who had been a little puzzled but now recognised a familiar signal for acclamations.

'We are all warm supporters of her Majesty's Government, and it is our privilege to recognise with the profoundest sentiments to what an amazing pitch of ingenuity her Majesty's Government can attain.'

Here there was another burst of applause, but some of the more wary were again puzzled and abstained and looked cunning.

'This little measure,' said John in his sweetest tones, 'so long expected, so fondly cherished, nursed so carefully in the recess, displayed so delicately in the session—this little measure has every fault which so small a creature can exhibit. Sent as yet another messenger of conciliation, it will conciliate no class and exasperate all; instead of the olive-branch it bears the fiery cross; it will embitter every cause of discontent in the country and will mitigate none. You have all heard of the physician who threw his patients into fits because he understood fits. It might almost be held by a cynical critic of measures such as these that the Government liked to throw Ireland into convulsions because they understood coercion bills.'

It was this last illustration which was repeated by many people and which found

its way into the leading newspaper. John thought little of it; it had occurred to him while he spoke, and had taken shape before he had criticised it; for some reason it had in it the element of popularity. It was fated to turn up again at an important moment and to have a startling effect on its author's career.

There was dull speech-making in the House of Commons. The little Irish measure had reappeared, but shone with a fainter light. There was a general belief that it was doomed; it was rumoured that it was a cause of dissension in the Cabinet, who, as one cunning gentleman asserted, were only unanimous in the intention of ascribing its loss to the obstruction of the Opposition. Its success would have been a doubtful good; its failure might be of value to its party. It is no wonder that debate on a matter so small and with so little

vitality grew more and more languid. Even the heat of the Irish members required constant stirring, and the more humorous of them almost laughed in the midst of their denunciations. It was a night of boredom. Scattered on half-empty benches, legislators sprawled and yawned. Most of them had reached a time of life when monotonous oratory leads softly but surely to sleep. Viewed from ths Strangers' Gallery the House invited a study of various degrees and sorts of baldness, for, save where here and there one peacefully slumbered in the shadow of his tilted hat, the members were uncovered. There was shiny baldness and fluffy baldness, bumpy pates with wisps of hair laid dexterously across, but scarcely one head thickly and honestly covered. They were the heads of elderly sensible persons, who had done the

more serious work of their lives, some at ample desks in the City, some in the turnips or on the heather. Now, as their waists expanded, they seemed like men who were taking their ease, as Englishmen sometimes will, in the least easy manner possible.

But if to the great majority of members politics were obviously a matter of at least secondary importance, there was a fair show on both sides of the House of more earnest politicians. There were men who were young, as youth is reckoned nowadays, some on the sunny side of forty, others between forty and fifty.

Among these latter one might see the keen gray face of a lawyer, who had worked day after day from dawn to bedtime that he might be rich enough to enter Parliament, and who, having won his seat, was worrying

himself with the fear that he had forced his mind into a shape too exclusively legal. With nervous face, disordered hair, dusty and gritty as his legal bookshelves, he sat twisting his long legs and spurring his jaded attention. There too was the grave rough face of a workmen's candidate, who wasted too much of his energy in the set purpose of showing that he held himself at least as good as his fine-haired neighbours; and next to him was the light fluffy hair and pale-eyed, self-satisfied, intelligent face of the political theorist—a theorist who had learned the general principles of legislation from books, as a child his catechism, and who spent his life in preaching them like a Dissenting minister and in measuring with his little accurate rules the rough-and-tumble law-making of his party. There too were the small body of the might-

have-beens, cold, supercilious, critical of the efforts of their comrades, statesmen themselves had it been worth their while. There too, next to the well-fed, well-groomed Otho Sunderland, who watched the game with a mild eupeptic interest, was the big head with staring eyes of the politician altogether serious. Destitute of humour, loving debate however dull, rushing in private life into discussion and explanation of old debates long gone by, retailing on no encouragement old House-of-Commons jests and anecdotes, proud of the least significant of public offices, and looking up with respect to his colleagues in the Cabinet, the politician, who played the game as if he had one of his claw-like fingers in the management of the Universe, presented to the observant eye a strange resemblance to an unfinished eagle. And there

were a few men really young, shining like the lilies of the field in a great company of potatoes, who proclaimed in every line of head and face, as in their clothes and boots, that they owed their seats to family influence. They were a strange gathering, and over all of them—the successful, those who might have been successful, those who struggled for success, drowsy elders and gilded youths alike, intellectualised pigs and unfinished eagles—hung on that night a double portion of dreariness. Dreariness was the very atmosphere of the scene. One might have thought that the speakers were condemned to fill so many columns of the morning paper. An orator stopped in the midst of his oration to yawn. A thought had been beaten thin in a newspaper article, and now the article was beaten thin in a speech. It seemed as if

viands had been warmed up again and were served to people who had already supped too well. It had all been heard before; they would have to hear it all again. The hearers sat like men who were undergoing a cure, condemned to sit and let words trickle over them, so many an hour, in a sort of bath of vapours. They were undergoing the word-cure.

John too was overwhelmed by the general dreariness. He sat hearing arguments, foreseeing the argument which was to come next, repeating like a machine the answer which had been given so often. He sat like a lonely pleasure-seeker at a dull play, the dialogue of which he knows by heart.

But on a sudden he was aroused from his lethargy. A speaker of the Opposition, who had been going on the familiar round, tired

perhaps of ending his speech with his usual sentence of solemn warning, dropped an allusion to fits and coercion bills, and sat down. Two or three people, who were less near to sleep than their neighbours, looked at John and smiled. The Cabinet minister who rose to take his turn at the evening's solemn mockery turned as he rose and looked at John. The young member felt a sudden thrill of nervous excitement, but it grew faint as the great man began to repeat the familiar answers to the familiar criticisms of the last speaker. It was not until his task was done that he seemed to remember the young supporter who sat behind him; and then, with an air of patronage and playfulness, he said a few words about the indiscretion of extreme youth.

There was a laugh, and John leapt in his

seat. To be rebuked and patronised by one of these very men with whose flippancy he was so righteously angry! To be ridiculed by a master of such clumsy forensic pleasantry! John did not stop to think what he was doing; he was on his feet before the minister had lowered himself to his place; he met the recognition of the Speaker's glance; he was making his first speech in Parliament. He heard his voice full and firm in the place; he felt words and sentences arrange themselves before him; the arguments were only too familiar, but his annoyance gave them life; he was glad of his annoyance, for he spoke with fire, and knew that he was speaking well. The House began to fill rapidly; members poured in to listen, and those who had been dozing on the benches sat up and forgot the immense tedium. John felt the

growing interest, the delight of kindling admiration, the old stimulant of opposition. The criticisms of the small Irish measure sprang with new life to his lips, and, when he had made an end of these, he dared to pass to a wider view of the needs and distresses of Ireland, to a fine scorn of meddling injurious legislation, to a finer hope of honest and helpful reforms. He did not speak too long; he trusted to his instinct; he broke off when the sympathy of his audience was warmest.

'As for the allusion to my youth,' he said with an effective change of manner, 'if indeed it could have been intended for so insignificant an individual as myself, I will not repeat yet again—trite answer to a trite accusation—that youth is a fault soon remedied. I will not affect to regret that I am young. I will only say that, when I am come to man's

estate, I hope that I shall know better than to mistake a worn-out historical taunt for an effective rebuke.'

When John sat down, the House was full of animation, and he heard the delighted acclamations of the Opposition.

CHAPTER XVI.

The young man who wakes to find himself famous may be surprised to find how little way the trumpet of fame can carry. The servant girl who trots upstairs with his tea and toast is aware of no change in his importance. The man who lives in the rooms below does not know his name; the man who lives in the attics above scorns him as a well-dressed idler. A friend and playmate of his childhood wonders vaguely, as he walks into the City, if the Maidment who seems to have made rather a good speech is any relation of the fellow whom he used to know at school; and he tries to remember if

that was the way in which his friend spelt his name.

Still John was famous. His name was in all the papers, and his speech was fairly reported in some of them. At least two men stopped him in Pall Mall to congratulate him, and the sociable young Whig, for whom he had spoken at Easter, passed his arm through his and walked him up the pavement of St. James's Street with the air of an *impresario* who had brought out a successful prima donna. In Piccadilly too a very smart lady in a very smart carriage clapped her little gloved hands in a most knowing manner, and the next moment a Cabinet minister's wife, who, as is the way with women, was a far more earnest partisan than her semi-cynical lord, glared at him like a political Medusa. John was not turned to stone: he felt that he had really

made an impression; he was aglow with life; it was summer in all the air; it was hard to believe that any place could be more delightful than the shady side of Piccadilly. Nor did John Maidment's reputation pass with the day. His attitude to his party was the text of leading articles and the cause of letters more or less indignant printed in the daily papers; while at the week's end a whole article of a wise and good weekly Review was dedicated to the young member, who found himself admired and chided with the tender regret of the least narrow of maiden aunts. He had been naughty, but he was a very clever boy: it was by no means certain that he too had not some touch of genius.

These were brave days for the young man. He marked a daily growing flood of cards of invitation, and the more flattering

tribute of little notes. Nods in the street were more marked; people who knew him were glad to say so, and were apt to think that they had always known that he would make his mark. To make his mark—is it not a fine phrase? To insist upon recognition, to cry aloud that this is I who have done something. The uneducated person who cannot sign his name makes his mark also, but that is another matter. It was the season, the time of the flood of frivolity, when everyone in the world, the world who dress and dine and ride on glossy horses in the Park, was on the look-out for a novelty. 'Tell us of some new thing,' they seem to cry to each other; 'boredom is only half a length behind, and we must catch at something interesting or be caught. Oh! my dear, is that the young

man who made the wonderful speech or something? How clever he looks, and what eyes! My dear, you *must* introduce him to me.' Charming women declared emphatically that they must know John Maidment. Little plots were made that they might meet him at luncheon. His manner was pronounced perfect. He was vivacious; his eyes were full of fire; it was often said of him that he was such a relief after all those young men who could not amuse themselves and took no pains to amuse anybody else.

It seemed to John as if all the world was kind to him except the magnates of his party. Cards came to him from their wives, but no personal attentions. They still preserved the attitude of superior beings and showed no sign of thinking him dangerous. The Cabinet of the day was composed of men

unusually clever; they had dexterously defended many weak positions; they had reached the point of thinking that nobody outside their charmed circle was of much importance. As for this boy who had attacked them from the rear, when any one of them thought of him at all, he took care to be patronising and contemptuous. John was angry; he felt the insolence of their attitude; he was sure that this ignoring of his powers was mere affectation—part of the awful insincerity which had shocked him so deeply already. He waited for his opportunity and attacked them again. As the session went on he made more speeches, spirited, effective, not too many. If his own side preserved more or less the air of indifference, the Opposition grew more and more enthusiastic, and his words flowed apace under the combined

stimulants of applause and indignation. Nothing could be more effective than his attitude of the enthusiast who had lost or was fast losing his cherished illusions. He looked the part; he felt the loss. He seemed to embody the ardent faith of youth. His voice trembled as, speaking for the young Liberals of his college days, he described their ardour for reforms, their trust in their leaders, their vision of the fairer day to be, and then, carried away by his feelings, contrasted the hopes of these young enthusiasts with the catch-vote compromises of judicious and sceptical politicians. It was John's best peroration, and he recognised with delight that he owed its vigour to his righteous indignation. He nursed this indignation; he kept his eyes fixed on the insincerities of the party leaders; he tapped them, and listened to the hollow sounds.

While they turned a bold front to the world, was it not notorious that no one of them agreed with his fellows? If they were big with contempt of all who were outside of the charmed circle, were not all their best energies wasted in wrangling within it? What chance was there of an effectual policy from a collection of men who disagreed on the very aims to which their efforts should be directed?

More and more directly with each succeeding day did John Maidment's criticism of his chiefs lead him to a comparison of parties. More and more ready was he to declare that for useful reforms Liberals were not a whit more zealous than Conservatives. In his moments of leisure and solitude he reviewed the questions which were sure to arise, and considered what were the coming Liberal measures which he would be called upon to

support. There was the extension of the franchise, but that he must put aside, for by the peculiar accidents of his case he was prevented from voting for any extension of the franchise. As for the land, he expected nothing from the present Government but a too probable meddling, which would produce nothing but general insecurity. Of that which is too often with unconscious humour termed 'the abolition of primogeniture,' moderate men of all parties expressed at times a mild approval, which was extended also to the abolition of tenants for life, and a cheapening and simplification of the methods of land transfer. For any more sweeping changes in land tenure were these ministers, of whom the majority were large landowners, likely to be in earnest—these ministers, who, as John had found to his sorrow, were earnest

about nothing? All sorts of useful reforms were kept waiting because they were not of a kind to excite the sluggish imaginations of the mass of voters. The fairest river in the world ran foul and putrid through the richest city. Crowded on rotting floors and swarming on crumbling staircases, boys and girls grew up together with no chance of decency, on playground but the gutter, no protection for their youth.

As for these and other like matters, there was apathy enough in all quarters, but there was at least as much chance of their being dealt with by a Conservative as by a Liberal Government. Indeed, the first prominent politician, who had coquetted with a scheme for the improvement of the houses in which herd the London poor, was a Tory leader, who had incontinently drawn down upon

himself the rebuke and ridicule of Liberal political economists. John Maidment said to himself again and again that the Opposition were at least more honest, and that from them there was more chance of obtaining useful, if unshowy, reforms. They were more honest; they made less pretence; they did not taint the air with their sham philanthropy, their windy protestations; they did not even go quite so far in pouring flattery, which they knew to be undeserved, upon their beguiled and injured countrymen. The comparison of parties, which always ended to the disadvantage of the party to which he belonged, exercised more and more the active mind of Mr. John Maidment.

One afternoon in the height of the season John sat brooding in his lodgings. The afternoon sun poured in, and gave an irri-

tating importance to the cheap striped table-cloth, and a dazzling brilliancy to the glass pendants of the chimney ornaments. The blind was pulled up awry; a faint smell of cooking came up from below; the landlady's baby was fretful, and an inferior organ was jerking out 'La donna è mobile' at the street corner. John was out of spirits. The world seemed dry and dusty as the July afternoon. He was sick of his recurring arguments on political parties, and as sick of that social success which he had tasted so eagerly. After all, his success had been as nothing in comparison with that of the newest American girl, who had exchanged her triumphs as belle of Kansas City for the amazement and delight of the Courts of Europe. Even the enchanting Spaniard, who sang in the most proper drawing-rooms those songs

of Spain which were suspected of being so awfully wicked, had been a greater celebrity. John pushed aside a pile of cards, with which the table was littered, and was half inclined to abjure society. His notes for an essay on the Water Supply of London seemed even less to the purpose; it almost seemed as if a drought was the proper thing for this inferior Babylon. There was another pile of papers, which pleased him less than any. He had been extravagant in nothing, and yet he had spent too much money. He looked round the room and recognised his virtuous economy in living in a place so unlovely. He could think of nothing but hansoms, which could have rolled away with his pitiful allowance. What a shame it was that he, who had so many important matters on his mind, should be obliged to consider the price

of a necessary cab or a pair of decent boots! Nobody, he knew well, was less greedy of money than he; but enough to save him from these sordid calculations—was he not justified in demanding of Fortune so little as that? It was so iniquitous that a fine instrument should be blunted by base uses. If only he had been as little scrupulous as other men, he might by this time be in a position where he could put all thoughts of money on one side. He gave a great sigh, unlocked an old box which stood on the sloping floor at his side and shoved the papers in, and, as he pushed them down, he caught a glimpse of a piece of writing, which made him pause. Forgotten in the old despatch-box was a scrap of paper on which Letty had written some verses. He remembered the exact place in the old garden at Brentholme where he had caught

her spouting the lines, and had made her repeat them, and he had condemned them as formless doggerel, and she had been highly indignant and had declared that they were like all summer to her, and that he knew nothing about it; and afterwards in a mocking mood she had written them out for him and bade him learn them by heart.

John thought that he was a great admirer of poetry, but he had got out of the way of reading it. Perhaps he had always liked it best when it was nearest to rhetoric. Certainly these lines of Coleridge, written in the half-formed girlish hand, struck him still as childish stuff:—

But green leaves and blossoms and sunny warm weather,
And singing and loving, all come back together;
And the lark is so brimful of gladness and love,
The green fields below him, the blue sky above,
That he sings and he sings and for ever sings he—
I love my love and my love loves me.

A doubt flitted across the young man's mind if there were not something in this song after all, a certain freshness which changed the air of his stuffy London lodging. But it was the well-known writing which appealed to him more surely. As he held the crumpled paper, his conscience leapt up like a Jack-in-the-box and began asking questions. Had he been too quick to leave the girl, who in his mental picture showed so fair? Had he not been wrong in writing so little to the Brents? Was she pining for him by the green breaking waves of the shore? How fresh and cool was the thought of the sea in that stuffy room above the narrow street! It would be sweet to breathe the salt air, if only for an hour, and sweet to see again the girl who perhaps was thinking at that very moment of him. He could see her eyes as

they looked up and saw him coming. He would go, if only for a single day; he would rush in upon the Brent family in exile by the sea—yes, certainly, unless some duty, political or other, prevented him, he would go down by an early train on the very next morning. If it were not for the big ball he would go down that night; but he must go to the ball. It was one of the things to which everybody went who had a chance of going; and besides, he had told Lady Gertrude that he should be there. He had not seen Lady Gertrude for two whole days; and she had been so kind to him—the whole Boucherett family had been so kind—that he felt himself bound to stay for that one evening. To-morrow he would go; and he felt so virtuous after this good intention, that the heat and the dust and the

problems and the bills seemed light as air; and, as the evening brought a grateful coolness, he went out to dine at his club with a quick step and a good appetite.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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