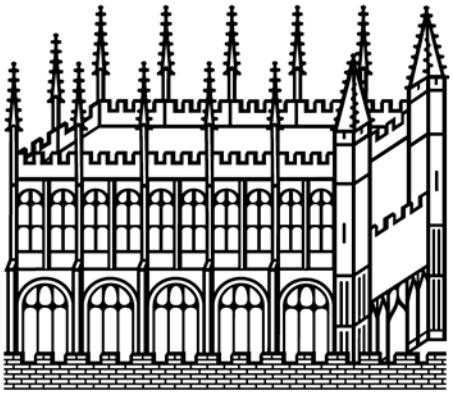

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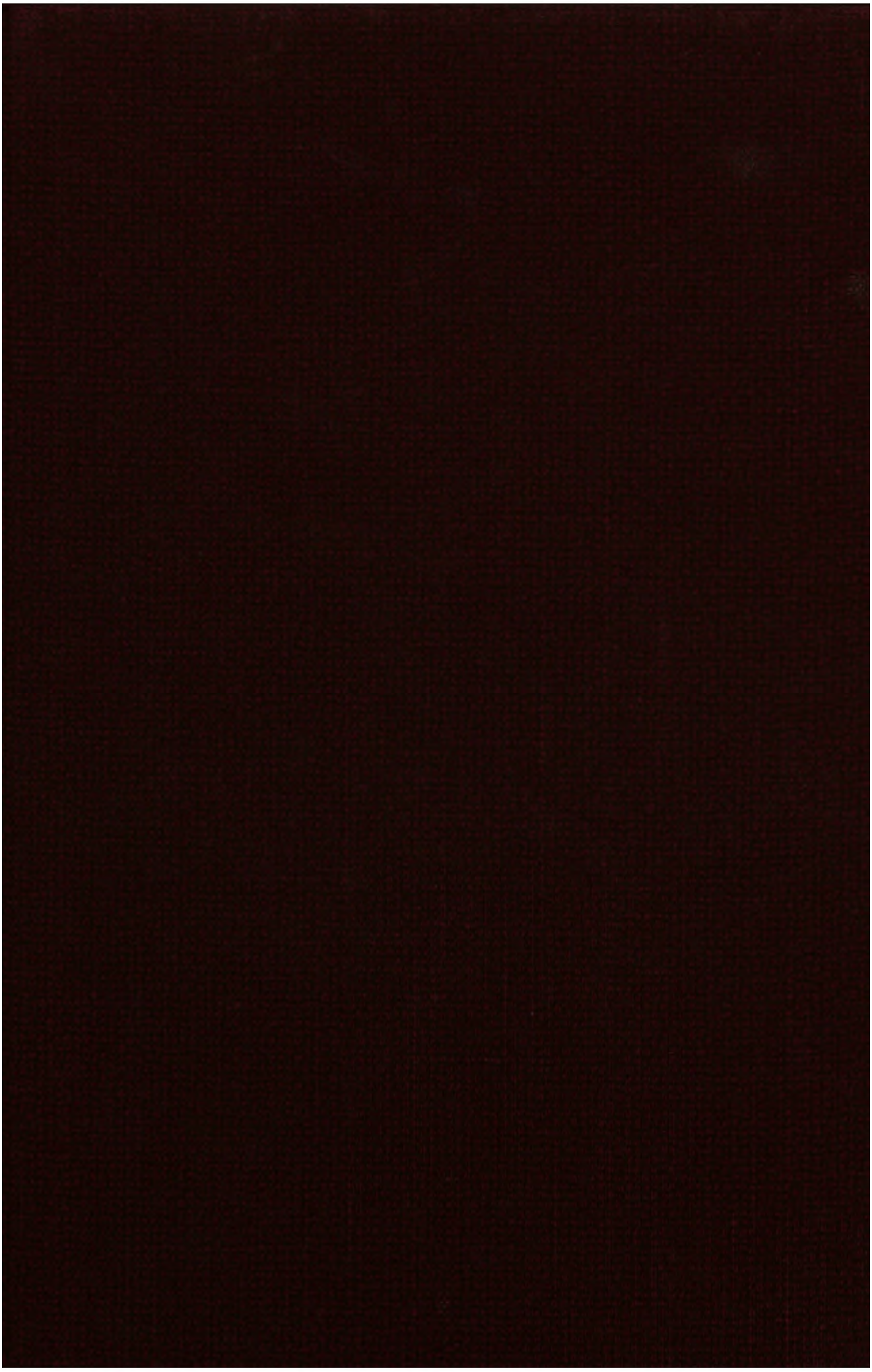

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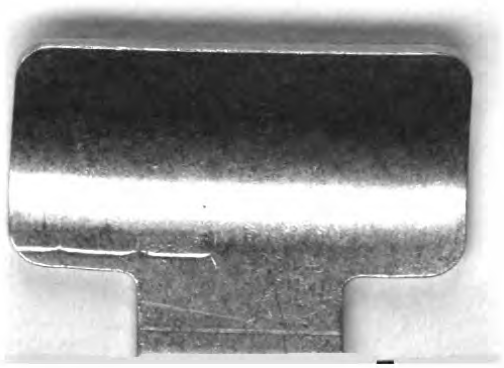

Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

GEORGE GISSING

SHORT STORIES *of*
TO-DAY & YESTERDAY

First Volumes

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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

GEORGE GISSING

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IT would seem impossible to write of George Gissing, however briefly, without mentioning Charles Dickens. Many circumstances are contributory to this. In the home of his boyhood hung a portrait of Charles Dickens, and Gissing could well remember the eagerness with which they all awaited the parts of "Our Mutual Friend," then appearing serially. Later, when, amid so much discouragement and so many difficulties, he himself essayed to write fiction, he revered Dickens as a master, and wrote a study of his work which remains unrivalled for sympathy and insight. The comparison, then, being inevitable, one cannot but remark that the likenesses are not more striking than the differences. If the early years of both writers were filled with acute suffering, the younger showed afterward a bitterness and stark pessimism that contrasts strongly with the unconquerable boyishness of the older writer. Dickens railed loudly against abuses because he was convinced that they might be remedied. Gissing's suffering was the more poignant because he had no faith in any remedy. Dickens's inexhaustible and irrepressible humour saved him from bitterness. Gissing was not without humour, as some have supposed, but it was of that wistful and less obvious kind that at length transformed his bitterness into a sweet sadness that was full of charm.

The short stories, with which we are here particularly

concerned, illustrate his careful craftsmanship and his descriptive power. He was not a master of clever dialogue, but no one could so well convey that vague feeling of ineffectiveness which oppresses some men and women. It is what in our modern jargon we term an "inferiority complex," but Gissing, in characters like Laurence Nangle and Dick Rutland, gave us the unmistakable fact. His pages lack the sparkle which a brilliant wit can give, but he could conjure up unforgettable pictures of drab side-streets and unspeakably mean lodging-houses. Because of this it is easy to dub Gissing a realist and to imagine that you have fully accounted for him. But this is to neglect the vital fact that there was in him a strong romantic strain which comes out unmistakably in his later books. If he could describe with fidelity the squalor and meanness amid which Fate had ordained that he should spend so many years, he could portray with equal truth and infinite sympathy idyllic scenes in Devonshire and Southern Italy.

George Gissing was born at Wakefield in 1857, *and was educated at Owens College, Manchester. He spent some dark years in a fierce struggle with poverty in London—an experience which coloured all that he wrote. During this period he did some teaching and worked at the British Museum Library. Success came with tantalizing slowness, and he was never to experience the thrill of a wide appeal. Besides a number of novels and short stories, he wrote "Charles Dickens: a Critical Study," "By the Ionian Sea," and "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft." The last is one of the most revealing bits of autobiography in our language. Gissing died at Saint-Jean-de-Luz in* 1903. F. H. P.

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THE PRIZE LODGER

THE ordinary West-End Londoner—who is a citizen of no city at all, but dwells amid a mere conglomerate of houses at a certain distance from Charing Cross—has known a fleeting surprise when, by rare chance, his eye fell upon the name of some such newspaper as the *Battersea Times*, the *Camberwell Mercury*, or the *Islington Gazette*. To him, these and the like districts are nothing more than compass points of the huge metropolis. He may be in practice acquainted with them; if historically inclined, he may think of them as old-time villages swallowed up by insatiable London; but he has never grasped the fact that in Battersea, Camberwell, Islington, there are people living who name these places as their home; who are born, subsist, and die there as though in a distinct town, and practically without consciousness of its obliteration in the map of a world capital.

The stable element of this population consists of more or less old-fashioned people. Round about them is the ceaseless coming and going of nomads who keep abreast with the time, who take their lodgings by the week, their houses by the month; who camp indifferently in regions old and new, learning their geography in train and tram-car. Abiding parishioners are wont to be either

very poor or established in a moderate prosperity; they lack enterprise, either for good or ill: if comfortably off, they owe it, as a rule, to some predecessor's exertion. And for the most part, though little enough endowed with the civic spirit, they abundantly pride themselves on their local permanence.

Representative of this class was Mr Archibald Jordan, a native of Islington, and, at the age of five-and-forty, still faithful to the streets which he had trodden as a child. His father started a small grocery business in Upper Street; Archibald succeeded to the shop, advanced soberly, and at length admitted a partner, by whose capital and energy the business was much increased. After his thirtieth year Mr Jordan ceased to stand behind the counter. Of no very active disposition, and but moderately set on gain, he found it pleasant to spend a few hours daily over the books and the correspondence, and for the rest of his time to enjoy a gossipy leisure, straying among the acquaintances of a lifetime, or making new in the decorous bar-parlours, billiard-rooms, and other such retreats which allured his bachelor liberty. His dress and bearing were unpretentious, but impressively respectable; he never allowed his garments (made by an Islington tailor, an old schoolfellow) to exhibit the least sign of wear, but fashion affected their style as little as possible. Of middle height, and tending to portliness, he walked at an unvarying pace, as a man who had never known undignified hurry; in his familiar

thoroughfares he glanced about him with a good-humoured air of proprietorship, or with a look of thoughtful criticism for any changes that might be going forward. No one had ever spoken flatteringly of his visage; he knew himself a very homely-featured man, and accepted the fact, as something that had neither favoured nor hindered him in life. But it was his conviction that no man's eye had a greater power of solemn and overwhelming rebuke, and this gift he took a pleasure in exercising, however trivial the occasion.

For five-and-twenty years he had lived in lodgings; always within the narrow range of Islington respectability, yet never for more than a twelvemonth under the same roof. This peculiar feature of Mr Jordan's life had made him a subject of continual interest to local landladies, among whom were several lifelong residents, on friendly terms of old time with the Jordan family. To them it seemed an astonishing thing that a man in such circumstances had not yet married; granting this eccentricity, they could not imagine what made him change his abode so often. Not a landlady in Islington but would welcome Mr Jordan in her rooms, and, having got him, do her utmost to prolong the connection. He had been known to quit a house on the paltriest excuse, removing to another in which he could not expect equally good treatment. There was no accounting for it: it must be taken as an ultimate mystery of life, and made the most of as a perennial topic of neighbourly conversation.

As to the desirability of having Mr Jordan for a lodger there could be no difference of opinion among rational womankind. Mrs Wiggins, indeed, had taken his sudden departure from her house so ill that she always spoke of him abusively; but who heeded Mrs Wiggins? Even in the sadness of hope deferred, those ladies who had entertained him once, and speculated on his possible return, declared Mr Jordan a "thorough gentleman." Lodgers, as a class, do not recommend themselves in Islington; Mr Jordan shone against the dusky background with almost dazzling splendour. To speak of lodgers as of cattle, he was a prize creature. A certain degree of comfort he firmly exacted; he might be a trifle fastidious about cooking; he stood upon his dignity; but no one could say that he grudged reward for service rendered. It was his practice to pay more than the landlady asked. "Twenty-five shillings a week, you say? I shall give you twenty-eight. *But*——" and with raised forefinger he went through the catalogue of his demands. Everything must be done precisely as he directed; even in the laying of his table he insisted upon certain minute peculiarities, and to forget one of them was to earn that gaze of awful reprimand which Mr Jordan found (or thought) more efficacious than any spoken word. Against this precision might be set his strange indulgence in the matter of bills; he merely regarded the total, was never known to dispute an item. Only twice in his long experience had he quitted a lodging because of ex-

orbitant charges, and on these occasions he sternly refused to discuss the matter. "Mrs Hawker, I am paying your account with the addition of one week's rent. Your rooms will be vacant at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning." And until the hour of departure no entreaty, no prostration, could induce him to utter a syllable.

It was on the 1st of June, 1889, his forty-fifth birthday, that Mr Jordan removed from quarters he had occupied for ten months, and became a lodger in the house of Mrs Elderfield.

Mrs Elderfield, a widow, aged three-and-thirty, with one little girl, was but a casual resident in Islington; she knew nothing of Mr Jordan, and made no inquiries about him. Strongly impressed, as every woman must needs be, by his air and tone of mild authority, she congratulated herself on the arrival of such an inmate; but no subservience appeared in her demeanour; she behaved with studious civility, nothing more. Her words were few and well chosen. Always neatly dressed, yet always busy, she moved about the house with quick, silent step, and cleanliness marked her path. The meals were well cooked, well served. Mr Jordan being her only lodger, she could devote to him an undivided attention. At the end of his first week the critical gentleman felt greater satisfaction than he had ever known.

The bill lay upon his table at breakfast-time. He perused the items, and, much against his habit, reflected upon them. Having breakfasted, he rang the bell.

"Mrs Elderfield——"

He paused, and looked gravely at the widow. She had a plain, honest, healthy face, with resolute lips, and an eye that brightened when she spoke; her well-knit figure, motionless in its respectful attitude, declared a thoroughly sound condition of the nerves.

"Mrs Elderfield, your bill is so very moderate that I think you must have forgotten something."

"Have you looked it over, sir?"

"I never trouble about the details. Please examine it."

"There is no need, sir. I never make a mistake."

"I said, Mrs Elderfield, please *examine* it."

She seemed to hesitate, but obeyed.

"The bill is quite correct, sir."

"Thank you."

He paid it at once and said no more.

The weeks went on. To Mr Jordan's surprise, his landlady's zeal and efficiency showed no diminution, a thing unprecedented in his long and varied experience. After the first day or two he had found nothing to correct; every smallest instruction was faithfully carried out. Moreover, he knew for the first time in his life the comfort of absolutely clean rooms. The best of his landladies hitherto had not risen above that conception of cleanliness which is relative to London soot and fog. His palate, too, was receiving an education. Probably he had never eaten of a joint rightly cooked, or tasted a potato boiled as it

should be; more often than not, the food set before him had undergone a process which left it masticable indeed, but void of savour and nourishment. Many little attentions of which he had never dreamed kept him in a wondering cheerfulness. And at length he said to himself: "Here I shall stay."

Not that his constant removals had been solely due to discomfort and a hope of better things. The secret—perhaps not entirely revealed even to himself—lay in Mr Jordan's sense of his own importance, and his uneasiness whenever he felt that, in the eyes of a landlady, he was becoming a mere everyday person—an ordinary lodger. No sooner did he detect a sign of this than he made up his mind to move. It gave him the keenest pleasure of which he was capable when, on abruptly announcing his immediate departure, he perceived the landlady's profound mortification. To make the blow heavier he had even resorted to artifice, seeming to express a most lively contentment during the very days when he had decided to leave and was asking himself where he should next abide. One of his delights was to return to a house which he had quitted years ago, to behold the excitement and bustle occasioned by his appearance, and play the good-natured autocrat over grovelling dependents. In every case, save the two already mentioned, he had parted with his landlady on terms of friendliness, never vouchsafing a reason for his going away, genially eluding every attempt to obtain an

explanation, and at the last abounding in graceful recognition of all that had been done for him. Mr Jordan shrank from dispute, hated every sort of contention; this characteristic gave a certain refinement to his otherwise commonplace existence. Vulgar vanity would have displayed itself in precisely the acts and words from which his self-esteem nervously shrank. And of late he had been thinking over the list of his landladies, with a half-formed desire to settle down, to make himself a permanent home. Doubtless as a result of this state of mind, he betook himself to a strange house, where, as from neutral ground, he might reflect upon the lodgings he knew, and judge between their merits. He could not foresee what awaited him under Mrs Elderfield's roof; the event impressed him as providential; he felt, with singular emotion, that choice was taken out of his hands. Lodgings could not be more than perfect, and such he had found.

It was not his habit to chat with landladies. At times he held forth to them on some topic of interest, suavely, instructively; if he gave in to their ordinary talk, it was with a half-absent smile of condescension. Mrs Elderfield seeming as little disposed to gossip as himself, a month elapsed before he knew anything of her history; but one evening the reserve on both sides was broken. His landlady modestly inquired whether she was giving satisfaction, and Mr Jordan replied with altogether unwonted fervour. In the dialogue that ensued, they exchanged personal confidences.

The widow had lost her husband four years ago; she came from the Midlands, but had long dwelt in London. Then fell from her lips a casual remark which made the hearer uneasy.

"I don't think I shall always stay here. The neighbourhood is too crowded. I should like to have a house somewhere further out."

Mr Jordan did not comment on this, but it kept a place in his daily thoughts, and became at length so much of an anxiety that he invited a renewal of the subject.

"You have no intention of moving just yet, Mrs Elderfield?"

"I was going to tell you, sir," replied the landlady, with her respectful calm, "that I have decided to make a change next spring. Some friends of mine have gone to live at Wood Green, and I shall look out for a house in the same neighbourhood."

Mr Jordan was, in private, gravely disturbed. He who had flitted from house to house for many years, distressing the souls of landladies, now lamented the prospect of a forced removal. It was open to him to accompany Mrs Elderfield, but he shrank from the thought of living in so remote a district. Wood Green! The very name appalled him, for he had never been able to endure the country. He betook himself one dreary autumn afternoon to that northern suburb, and what he saw did not at all reassure him. On his way back he began once more to review the list of old lodgings.

But from that day his conversations with Mrs Elderfield grew more frequent, more intimate. In the evening he occasionally made an excuse for knocking at her parlour door, and lingered for a talk which ended only at supper-time. He spoke of his own affairs, and grew more ready to do so as his hearer manifested a genuine interest, without impertinent curiosity. Little by little he imparted to Mrs Elderfield a complete knowledge of his commercial history, of his pecuniary standing—matters of which he had never before spoken to a mere acquaintance. A change was coming over him; the foundations of habit crumbled beneath his feet; he lost his look of complacence, his self-confident and superior tone. Bar-parlours and billiard-rooms saw him but rarely and flittingly. He seemed to have lost his pleasure in the streets of Islington, and spent all his spare time by the fireside, perpetually musing.

On a day in March one of his old landladies, Mrs Higdon, sped to the house of another, Mrs Evans, panting under a burden of strange news. Could it be believed! Mr Jordan was going to marry—to marry that woman in whose house he was living! Mrs Higdon had it on the very best authority—that of Mr Jordan's partner, who spoke of the affair without reserve. A new house had already been taken at Wood Green. Well! After all these years, after so many excellent opportunities, to marry a mere stranger and forsake Islington! In a moment Mr Jordan's character was gone; had he figured in the police-court under

some disgraceful charge, these landladies could hardly have felt more shocked and professed themselves more disgusted. The intelligence spread. Women went out of their way to have a sight of Mrs Elderfield's house; they hung about for a glimpse of that sinister person herself. She had robbed them, every one, of a possible share in Islington's prize lodger. Had it been one of themselves they could have borne the chagrin; but a woman whom not one of them knew, an alien! What base arts had she practised? Ah, it was better not to inquire too closely into the secrets of that lodging-house!

Though every effort was made to learn the time and place of the ceremony, Mr Jordan's landladies had the mortification to hear of his wedding only when it was over. Of course, this showed that he felt the disgracefulness of his behaviour; he was not utterly lost to shame. It could only be hoped that he would not know the bitterness of repentance.

Not till he found himself actually living in the house at Wood Green did Mr Jordan realize how little his own will had had to do with the recent course of events. Certainly, he had made love to the widow, and had asked her to marry him; but from that point onward he seemed to have put himself entirely in Mrs Elderfield's hands, granting every request, meeting halfway every suggestion she offered, becoming, in short, quite a different kind of man from his former self. He had not been sensible of a moment's reluctance;

he enjoyed the novel sense of yielding himself to affectionate guidance. His wits had gone woolgathering; they returned to him only after the short honeymoon at Brighton, when he stood upon his own hearth-rug, and looked round at the new furniture and ornaments which symbolized a new beginning of life.

The admirable landlady had shown herself energetic, clear-headed, and full of resource; it was she who chose the house, and transacted all the business in connection with it; Mr Jordan had merely run about in her company from place to place, smiling approval and signing cheques. No one could have gone to work more prudently, or obtained what she wanted at smaller outlay; for all that, Mr Jordan, having recovered something like his normal frame of mind, viewed the results with consternation. Left to himself, he would have taken a very small house, and furnished it much in the style of Islington lodgings; as it was, he occupied a ten-roomed 'villa,' with appointments which seemed to him luxurious, aristocratic. True, the expenditure was of no moment to a man in his position, and there was no fear that Mrs Jordan would involve him in dangerous extravagance; but he had always lived with such excessive economy that the sudden change to a life correspondent with his income could not but make him uncomfortable.

Mrs Jordan had, of course, seen to it that her personal appearance harmonized with the new surroundings. She dressed herself and her young

daughter with careful appropriateness. There was no display, no purchase of gewgaws—merely garments of good quality, such as became people in easy circumstances. She impressed upon her husband that this was nothing more than a return to the habits of her earlier life. Her first marriage had been a sad mistake; it had brought her down in the world. Now she felt restored to her natural position.

After a week of restlessness, Mr Jordan resumed his daily visits to the shop in Upper Street, where he sat as usual among the books and the correspondence, and tried to assure himself that all would henceforth be well with him. No more changing from house to house; a really comfortable home in which to spend the rest of his days; a kind and most capable wife to look after all his needs, to humour all his little habits. He could not have taken a wiser step.

For all that, he had lost something, though he did not yet understand what it was. The first perception of a change not for the better flashed upon him one evening in the second week, when he came home an hour later than his wont. Mrs Jordan, who always stood waiting for him at the window, had no smile as he entered.

"Why are you late?" she asked, in a clear, restrained voice.

"Oh—something or other kept me."

This would not do. Mrs Jordan quietly insisted on a full explanation of the delay, and it seemed to her unsatisfactory.

"I hope you won't be irregular in your habits, Archibald," said his wife, with gentle admonition. "What I always liked in you was your methodical way of living. I shall be very uncomfortable if I never know when to expect you."

"Yes, my dear, but—business, you see——"

"But you have explained that you *could* have been back at the usual time."

"Yes—that's true—but——"

"Well, well, you won't let it happen again. Oh, really, Archibald!" she suddenly exclaimed. "The idea of you coming into the room with muddy boots! Why, look! There's a patch of mud on the carpet——"

"It was my hurry to speak to you," murmured Mr Jordan, in confusion.

"Please go at once and take your boots off. And you left your slippers in the bedroom this morning. You must always bring them down, and put them in the dining-room cupboard; then they're ready for you when you come into the house."

Mr Jordan had but a moderate appetite for his dinner, and he did not talk so pleasantly as usual. This was but the beginning of troubles such as he had not for a moment foreseen. His wife, having since their engagement taken the upper hand, began to show her determination to keep it, and day by day her rule grew more galling to the ex-bachelor. He himself, in the old days, had plagued his landladies by insisting upon method and routine, by his faddish attention to domestic

minutiæ; he now learnt what it was to be subjected to the same kind of despotism, exercised with much more exasperating persistence. Whereas Mrs Elderfield had scrupulously obeyed every direction given by her lodger, Mrs Jordan was evidently resolved that her husband should live, move, and have his being in the strictest accordance with her own ideal. Not in any spirit of nagging, or ill-tempered unreasonableness; it was merely that she had her favourite way of doing every conceivable thing, and felt so sure it was the best of all possible ways that she could not endure any other. The first serious disagreement between them had reference to conduct at the breakfast-table. After a broken night, feeling headachy and worried, Mr Jordan taking up his newspaper, folded it conveniently, and set it against the bread so that he could read while eating. Without a word, his wife gently removed it, and laid it aside on a chair.

"What are you doing?" he asked gruffly.

"You mustn't read at meals, Archibald. It's bad manners, and bad for your digestion."

"I've read the news at breakfast all my life, and I shall do so still," exclaimed the husband, starting up and recovering his paper.

"Then you will have breakfast by yourself. Nelly, we must go into the other room till papa has finished."

Mr Jordan ate mechanically, and stared at the newspaper with just as little consciousness. Prompted by the underlying weakness of his

character to yield for the sake of peace, wrath made him dogged, and the more steadily he regarded his position, the more was he appalled by the outlook. Why, this meant downright slavery! He had married a woman so horribly like himself in several points that his only hope lay in overcoming her by sheer violence. A thoroughly good and well-meaning woman, an excellent housekeeper, the kind of wife to do him credit and improve his social position; but self-willed, pertinacious, and probably thinking herself his superior in every respect. He had nothing to fear but subjection—the one thing he had never anticipated, the one thing he could never endure.

He went off to business without seeing his wife again, and passed a lamentable day. At his ordinary hour of return, instead of setting off homeward he strayed about the by-streets of Islington and Pentonville. Not till this moment had he felt how dear they were to him, the familiar streets; their very odours fell sweet upon his nostrils. Never again could he go hither and thither, among the old friends, the old places, to his heart's content. What had possessed him to abandon this precious liberty! The thought of Wood Green revolted him; live there as long as he might, he would never be at home. He thought of his wife (now waiting for him) with fear, and then with a reaction of rage. Let her wait! He—Archibald Jordan—before whom women had bowed and trembled for five-and-twenty years—was *he* to come and go at a wife's bidding? And at length

the thought seemed so utterly preposterous that he sped northward as fast as possible, determined to right himself this very evening.

Mrs Jordan sat alone. He marched into the room with muddy boots, flung his hat and overcoat into a chair, and poked the fire violently. His wife's eye was fixed on him, and she first spoke—in the quiet voice that he dreaded.

"What do you mean by carrying on like this, Archibald?"

"I shall carry on as I like in my own house—hear that?"

"I do hear it, and I'm very sorry to. It gives me a very bad opinion of you. You will *not* do as you like in your own house. Rage as you please. You will *not* do as you like in your own house."

There was a contemptuous anger in her eye which the man could not face. He lost all control of himself, uttered coarse oaths, and stood quivering. Then the woman began to lecture him; she talked steadily, acrimoniously, for more than an hour, regardless of his interruptions. Nervously exhausted, he fled at length from the room. A couple of hours later they met again in the nuptial chamber, and again Mrs Jordan began to talk. Her point, as before, was that he had begun married life about as badly as possible. Why had he married her at all? What fault had she committed to incur such outrageous usage? But, thank goodness, she had a will of her own, and a proper self-respect; behave as he might, *she* would still persevere in the path of womanly duty. If he

thought to make her life unbearable he would find his mistake; she simply should not heed him; perhaps he would return to his senses before long —and in this vein Mrs Jordan continued until night was at odds with morning, only becoming silent when her partner had sunk into the oblivion of uttermost fatigue.

The next day Mr Jordan's demeanour showed him, for the moment at all events, defeated. He made no attempt to read at breakfast; he moved about very quietly. And in the afternoon he came home at the regulation hour.

Mrs Jordan had friends in the neighbourhood, but she saw little of them. She was not a woman of ordinary tastes. Everything proved that, to her mind, the possession of a nice house, with the prospects of a comfortable life, was an end in itself; she had no desire to exhibit her well-furnished rooms, or to gad about talking of her advantages. Every moment of her day was taken up in the superintendence of servants, the discharge of an infinitude of housewifely tasks. She had no assistance from her daughter; the girl went to school, and was encouraged to study with the utmost application. The husband's presence in the house seemed a mere accident—save in the still nocturnal season, when Mrs Jordan bestowed upon him her counsel and her admonitions.

After the lapse of a few days Mr Jordan again offered combat, and threw himself into it with a frenzy.

"Look here!" he shouted at length, "either

you or I are going to leave this house. I can't live with you—understand? I hate the sight of you!"

"Go on!" retorted the other, with mild bitterness. "Abuse me as much as you like, I can bear it. I shall continue to do my duty, and unless you have recourse to personal violence, here I remain. If you go too far, of course, the law must defend me!"

This was precisely what Mr Jordan knew and dreaded; the law was on his wife's side, and by applying at a police-court for protection she could overwhelm him with shame and ridicule, which would make life intolerable. Impossible to argue with this woman. Say what he might, the fault always seemed his. His wife was simply doing her duty—in a spirit of admirable thoroughness; he, in the eyes of a third person, would appear an unreasonable and violent curmudgeon. Had it not all sprung out of his obstinacy with regard to reading at breakfast? How explain to anyone what he suffered in his nerves, in his pride, in the outraged habitudes of a life-time?

That evening he did not return to Wood Green. Afraid of questions if he showed himself in the old resorts, he spent some hours in a billiard-room near King's Cross, and towards midnight took a bedroom under the same roof. On going to business next day, he awaited with tremors either a telegram or a visit from his wife; but the whole day passed, and he heard nothing. After dark he walked once more about the beloved

streets, pausing now and then to look up at the windows of this or that well-remembered house. Ah, if he durst but enter and engage a lodging! Impossible—for ever impossible!

He slept in the same place as on the night before. And again a day passed without any sort of inquiry from Wood Green. When evening came he went home.

Mrs Jordan behaved as though he had returned from business in the usual way. "Is it raining?" she asked, with a half-smile. And her husband replied, in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could command, "No, it isn't." There was no mention between them of his absence. That night Mrs Jordan talked for an hour or two of his bad habit of stepping on the paint when he went up and down stairs, then fell calmly asleep.

But Mr Jordan did not sleep for a long time. What! was he, after all, to be allowed his liberty *out* of doors, provided he relinquished it within? Was it really the case that his wife, satisfied with her house and furniture and income, did not care a jot whether he stayed away or came home? There, indeed, gleamed a hope. When Mr Jordan slept, he dreamed that he was back again in lodgings at Islington, tasting an extraordinary bliss. Day dissipated the vision, but still Mrs Jordan spoke not a word of his absence, and with trembling still he hoped.

From "Human Odds and Ends"

MISS RODNEY'S LEISURE

A YOUNG woman of about eight-and-twenty, in tailor-made costume, with unadorned hat of brown felt, and irreproachable umbrella; a young woman who walked faster than anyone in Wattleborough, yet never looked hurried; who crossed a muddy street seemingly without a thought for her skirts, yet somehow was never splashed; who held up her head like one thoroughly at home in the world, and frequently smiled at her own thoughts. Those who did not know her asked who she was; those who had already made her acquaintance talked a good deal of the new mistress at the High School, by name Miss Rodney. In less than a week after her arrival in the town, her opinions were cited and discussed by Wattleborough ladies. She brought with her the air of a University; she knew a great number of important people; she had a quiet decision of speech and manner which was found very impressive in Wattleborough drawing-rooms. The headmistress spoke of her in high terms, and the incumbent of St Luke's, who knew her family, reported that she had always been remarkably clever.

A stranger in the town, Miss Rodney was recommended to the lodgings of Mrs Ducker, a

churchwarden's widow; but there she remained only for a week or two, and it was understood that she left because the rooms "lacked character." Some persons understood this as an imputation on Mrs Ducker, and were astonished; others, who caught a glimpse of Miss Rodney's meaning, thought she must be "fanciful." Her final choice of an abode gave general surprise, for though the street was one of those which Wattleborough opinion classed as "respectable," the house itself, as Miss Rodney might have learnt from the incumbent of St Luke's, in whose parish it was situated, had objectionable features. Nothing grave could be alleged against Mrs Turpin, who regularly attended the Sunday evening service; but her husband, a carpenter, spent far too much time at The Swan with Two Necks; and then there was a lodger, young Mr Rawcliffe, concerning whom Wattleborough had for some time been too well informed. Of such comments upon her proceeding Miss Rodney made light; in the aspect of the room she found a certain 'quaintness' which decidedly pleased her. "And as for Mrs Grundy," she added "*je m'en fiche*," which certain ladies of culture declared to be a polite expression of contempt.

Miss Rodney never wasted time, and in matters of business had cultivated a notable brevity. Her interview with Mrs Turpin, when she engaged the rooms, occupied perhaps a quarter of an hour; in that space of time she had sufficiently surveyed the house, had learnt all that seemed necessary as

to its occupants, and had stated in the clearest possible way her present requirements.

" As a matter of course," was her closing remark, " the rooms will be thoroughly cleaned before I come in. At present they are filthy."

The landlady was too much astonished to reply; Miss Rodney's tones and bearing had so impressed her that she was at a loss for her usual loquacity, and could only stammer respectfully broken answers to whatever was asked. Assuredly no one had ever dared to tell her that her lodgings were " filthy "—any ordinary person who had ventured upon such an insult would have been overwhelmed with clamorous retort. But Miss Rodney, with a pleasant smile and nod, went her way, and Mrs Turpin stood at the open door gazing after her, bewildered 'twixt satisfaction and resentment.

She was an easy-going, wool-witted creature, not ill-disposed, but sometimes mendacious and very indolent. Her life had always been what it was now—one of slatternly comfort and daylong gossip, for she came of a small tradesman's family, and had married an artisan who was always in well-paid work. Her children were two daughters, who, at seventeen and fifteen, remained in the house with her doing little or nothing, though they were supposed to " wait upon the lodgers." For some months only two of the four rooms Mrs Turpin was able to let had been occupied, one by " young Mr Rawcliffe," always so called, though his age was nearly thirty, but, as was well

known, he belonged to the " real gentry," and Mrs Turpin held him in reverence on that account. No matter for his little weaknesses—of which evil tongues, said Mrs Turpin, of course made the most. He might be irregular in payment; he might come home " at all hours," and make unnecessary noise in going upstairs; he might at times grumble when his chop was ill-cooked; and, to tell the truth, he might occasionally be " a little too free " with the young ladies—that is to say, with Mabel and Lily Turpin; but all these things were forgiven him because he was " a real gentleman," and spent just as little time as he liked daily in a solicitor's office.

Miss Rodney arrived early on Saturday afternoon. Smiling and silent, she saw her luggage taken up to the bedroom; she paid the cabman; she beckoned her landlady into the parlour, which was on the ground-floor front.

" You haven't had time yet, Mrs Turpin, to clean the rooms? "

The landlady stammered a half-indignant surprise. Why, she and her daughters had given the room a thorough turn-out. It was done only yesterday, and *hours* had been devoted to it.

" I see," interrupted Miss Rodney, with quiet decision, " that our notions of cleanliness differ considerably. I'm going out now, and I shall not be back till six o'clock. You will please to *clean* the bedroom before then. The sitting-room shall be done on Monday."

And therewith Miss Rodney left the house.

On her return she found the bedroom relatively clean, and, knowing that too much must not be expected at once, she made no comment. That night, as she sat reading at eleven o'clock, a strange sound arose in the back part of the house; it was a man's voice, hilariously mirthful and breaking into rude song. After listening for a few minutes, Miss Rodney rang her bell, and the landlady appeared.

"Whose voice is that I hear?"

"Voice, miss?"

"Who is shouting and singing?" asked Miss Rodney, in a disinterested tone.

"I'm sorry if it disturbs you, miss. You'll hear no more."

"Mrs Turpin, I asked who it was."

"My 'usband, miss. But——"

"Thank you. Good night, Mrs Turpin."

There was quiet for an hour or more. At something after midnight, when Miss Rodney had just finished writing half a dozen letters, there sounded a latchkey in the front door, and some one entered.

This person, whoever it was, seemed to stumble about the passage in the dark, and at length banged against the listener's door. Miss Rodney started up and flung the door open. By the light of her lamp she saw a moustachioed face, highly flushed, and grinning.

"Beg pardon," cried the man, in a voice which harmonized with his look and bearing. "Infernally dark here; haven't got a match. You're

Miss—pardon—forgotten the name—new lodger. Oblige me with a light? Thanks awfully."

Without a word Miss Rodney took a match-box from her chimneypiece, entered the passage, entered the second parlour—that occupied by Mr Rawcliffe—and lit a candle which stood on the table.

"You'll be so kind," she said, looking her fellow-lodger in the eyes, "as not to set the house on fire."

"Oh, no fear," he replied, with a high laugh. "Quite accustomed. Thanks awfully, Miss—pardon—forgotten the name."

But Miss Rodney was back in her sitting-room and had closed the door.

Her breakfast next morning was served by Mabel Turpin, the elder daughter, a stupidly good-natured girl, who would fain have entered into conversation. Miss Rodney replied to a question that she had slept well, and added that, when she rang her bell, she would like to see Mrs Turpin. Twenty minutes later the landlady entered.

"You wanted me, miss," she began, in what was meant for a voice of dignity and reserve. "I don't really wait on lodgers myself."

"We'll talk about that another time, Mrs Turpin. I wanted to say, first of all, that you have spoiled a piece of good bacon and two good eggs. I must trouble you to cook better than this."

"I'm very sorry, miss, that nothing seems to suit you——"

"Oh, we shall get right in time!" interrupted Miss Rodney cheerfully. "You will find that I have patience. Then I wanted to ask you whether your husband and your lodger come home tipsy *every* night, or only on Saturdays?"

The woman opened her eyes as wide as saucers, trying hard to look indignant.

"Tipsy, miss?"

"Well, perhaps I should have said 'drunk'; I beg your pardon."

"All I can say, miss, is that young Mr Rawcliffe has never behaved himself in *this* house excepting as the gentleman he is. You don't perhaps know that he belongs to a very high-connected family, miss, or I'm sure you wouldn't——"

"I see," interposed Miss Rodney. "That accounts for it. But your husband. Is *he* highly connected?"

"I'm sure, miss, nobody could ever say that my 'usband took too much—not to say *really* too much. You may have heard him a bit merry, miss, but where's the harm of a Saturday night?"

"Thank you. Then it is only on Saturday nights that Mr Turpin becomes merry. I'm glad to know that. I shall get used to these little things."

But Mrs Turpin did not feel sure that she would get used to her lodger. Sunday was spoilt for her by this beginning. When her husband woke from his prolonged slumbers, and shouted for breakfast (which on this day of rest he always

took in bed), the good woman went to him with downcast visage, and spoke querulously of Miss Rodney's behaviour.

"I *won't* wait upon her, so there! The girls may do it, and if she isn't satisfied let her give notice. I'm sure I shan't be sorry. She's given me more trouble in a day than poor Mrs Brown did all the months she was here. I *won't* be at her beck and call, so there!"

Before night came this declaration was repeated times innumerable, and as it happened that Miss Rodney made no demand for her landlady's attendance, the good woman enjoyed a sense of triumphant self-assertion. On Monday morning Mabel took in the breakfast, and reported that Miss Rodney had made no remark; but, a quarter of an hour later, the bell rang, and Mrs Turpin was summoned. Very red in the face, she obeyed. Having civilly greeted her, Miss Rodney inquired at what hour Mr Turpin took his breakfast, and was answered with an air of surprise that he always left the house on week-days at half-past seven.

"In that case," said Miss Rodney, "I will ask permission to come into your kitchen at a quarter to eight to-morrow morning, to show you how to fry bacon and boil eggs. You mustn't mind. You know that teaching is my profession."

Mrs Turpin, nevertheless, seemed to mind very much. Her generally good-tempered face wore a dogged sullenness, and she began to mutter something about such a thing never having been

heard of; but Miss Rodney paid no heed, renewed the appointment for the next morning, and waved a cheerful dismissal.

Talking with a friend that day, the High School mistress gave a humorous description of her lodgings, and when the friend remarked that they must be very uncomfortable, and that surely she would not stay there, Miss Rodney replied that she had the firmest intention of staying, and, what was more, of being comfortable.

"I'm going to take that household in hand," she added. "The woman is foolish, but can be managed, I think, with a little patience. I'm going to *tackle* the drunken husband as soon as I see my way. And as for the highly connected gentleman whose candle I had the honour of lighting, I shall turn him out."

"You have your work set!" exclaimed the friend, laughing.

"Oh, a little employment for my leisure! This kind of thing relieves the monotony of a teacher's life, and prevents one from growing old."

Very systematically she pursued her purpose of getting Mrs Turpin "in hand." The two points at which she first aimed were the keeping clean of her room and the decent preparation of her meals. Never losing her temper, never seeming to notice the landlady's sullen mood, always using a tone of legitimate authority, touched sometimes with humorous compassion, she exacted obedience to her directions, but was well aware that at any moment the burden of a new civilization

might prove too heavy for the Turpin family and cause revolt. A week went by; it was again Saturday, and Miss Rodney devoted a part of the morning (there being no school to-day) to culinary instruction. Mabel and Lily shared the lesson with their mother, but both young ladies wore an air of condescension, and grimaced at Miss Rodney behind her back. Mrs Turpin was obstinately mute. The pride of ignorance stiffened her backbone and curled her lip.

Miss Rodney's leisure generally had its task; though as a matter of principle she took daily exercise, her walking or cycling was always an opportunity for thinking something out, and this afternoon, as she sped on wheels some ten miles from Wattleborough, her mind was busy with the problem of Mrs Turpin's husband. From her clerical friend of St Luke's she had learnt that Turpin was at bottom a decent sort of man, rather intelligent, and that it was only during the last year or two that he had taken to passing his evenings at the public-house. Causes for this decline could be suggested. The carpenter had lost his only son, a lad of whom he was very fond; the boy's death quite broke him down at the time, and perhaps he had begun to drink as a way of forgetting his trouble. Perhaps, too, his foolish, slatternly wife bore part of the blame, for his home had always been comfortless, and such a companionship must, in the long-run, tell on a man. Reflecting upon this, Miss Rodney had an idea, and she took no time in putting it into practice.

When Mabel brought in her tea, she asked the girl whether her father was at home.

"I think he is, miss," was the distant reply—for Mabel had been bidden by her mother to "show a proper spirit" when Miss Rodney addressed her.

"You think so? Will you please make sure, and, if you are right, ask Mr Turpin to be so kind as to let me have a word with him."

Startled and puzzled, the girl left the room. Miss Rodney waited, but no one came. When ten minutes had elapsed she rang the bell. A few minutes more and there sounded a heavy foot in the passage; then a heavy knock at the door, and Mr Turpin presented himself. He was a short, sturdy man, with hair and beard of the hue known as ginger, and a face which told in his favour. Vicious he could assuredly not be, with those honest grey eyes; but one easily imagined him weak in character, and his attitude as he stood just within the room, half respectful, half assertive, betrayed an embarrassment altogether encouraging to Miss Rodney. In her pleasantest tone she begged him to be seated.

"Thank you, miss," he replied, in a deep voice, which sounded huskily, but had nothing of surliness; "I suppose you want to complain about something, and I'd rather get it over standing."

"I was not going to make any complaint, Mr Turpin."

"I'm glad to hear it, miss; for my wife wished me to say she'd done about all she could, and if

things weren't to your liking, she thought it would be best for all if you suited yourself in somebody else's lodgings."

It evidently cost the man no little effort to deliver his message; there was a nervous twitching about his person, and he could not look Miss Rodney straight in the face. She, observant of this, kept a very steady eye on him, and spoke with all possible calmness.

"I have not the least desire to change my lodgings, Mr Turpin. Things are going on quite well. There is an improvement in the cooking, in the cleaning, in everything; and, with a little patience, I am sure we shall all come to understand one another. What I wanted to speak to you about was a little practical matter in which you may be able to help me. I teach mathematics at the High School, and I have an idea that I might make certain points in geometry easier to my younger girls if I could demonstrate them in a mechanical way. Pray look here. You see the shapes I have sketched on this piece of paper; do you think you could make them for me in wood?"

The carpenter was moved to a show of reluctant interest. He took the paper, balanced himself now on one leg, now on the other, and said at length that he thought he saw what was wanted. Miss Rodney, coming to his side, explained in more detail; his interest grew more active.

"That's Euclid, miss?"

"To be sure. Do you remember your Euclid?"

"My own schooling never went as far as that,"

he replied, in a muttering voice; " but my Harry used to do Euclid at the Grammar School, and I got into a sort of way of doing it with him."

Miss Rodney kept a moment's silence; then quietly and kindly she asked one or two questions about the boy who had died. The father answered in an awkward, confused way, as if speaking only by constraint.

" Well, I'll see what I can do, miss," he added, abruptly, folding the paper to take away. " You'd like them soon? "

" Yes. I was going to ask you, Mr Turpin, whether you could do them this evening. Then I should have them for Monday morning."

Turpin hesitated, shuffled his feet, and seemed to reflect uneasily; but he said at length that he " would see about it," and, with a rough bow, got out of the room. That night no hilarious sounds came from the kitchen. On Sunday morning, when Miss Rodney went into her sitting-room, she found on the table the wooden geometrical forms, excellently made, just as she wished. Mabel, who came with breakfast, was bidden to thank her father, and to say that Miss Rodney would like to speak with him again, if his leisure allowed, after tea-time on Monday. At that hour the carpenter did not fail to present himself, distrustful still, but less embarrassed. Miss Rodney praised his work, and desired to pay for it. Oh! that wasn't worth talking about, said Turpin; but the lady insisted, and money changed hands. This piece of business transacted,

Miss Rodney produced a Euclid, and asked Turpin to show her how far he had gone in it with his boy Harry. The subject proved fruitful of conversation. It became evident that the carpenter had a mathematical bias, and could be readily interested in such things as geometrical problems. Why should he not take up the subject again?

"Nay, miss," replied Turpin, speaking at length quite naturally; "I shouldn't have the heart. If my Harry had lived——"

But Miss Rodney stuck to her point, and succeeded in making him promise that he would get out the old Euclid and have a look at it in his leisure time. As he withdrew, the man had a pleasant smile on his honest face.

On the next Saturday evening the house was again quiet.

Meanwhile, relations between Mrs Turpin and her lodger were becoming less strained. For the first time in her life the flabby, foolish woman had to do with a person of firm will and bright intelligence; not being vicious of temper, she necessarily felt herself submitting to domination, and darkly surmised that the rule might in some way be for her good. All the sluggard and the slattern in her, all the obstinacy of lifelong habits, hung back from the new things which Miss Rodney was forcing upon her acceptance, but she was no longer moved by active resentment. To be told that she cooked badly had long ceased to be an insult, and was becoming merely a worrying truism. That she lived in dirt there seemed no

way of denying, and though every muscle groaned, she began to look upon the physical exertion of dusting and scrubbing as part of her lot in life. Why she submitted, Mrs Turpin could not have told you. And, as was presently to be seen, there were regions of her mind still unconquered, instincts of resistance which yet had to come into play.

For, during all this time, Miss Rodney had had her eye on her fellow-lodger, Mr Rawcliffe, and the more she observed this gentleman, the more resolute she became to turn him out of the house; but it was plain to her that the undertaking would be no easy one. In the landlady's eyes Mr Rawcliffe, though not perhaps a faultless specimen of humanity, conferred an honour on her house by residing in it; the idea of giving him notice to quit was inconceivable to her. This came out very clearly in the first frank conversation which Miss Rodney held with her on the topic. It happened that Mr Rawcliffe had passed an evening at home, in the company of his friends. After supping together, the gentlemen indulged in merriment which, towards midnight, became uproarious. In the morning Mrs Turpin mumbled a shamefaced apology for this disturbance of Miss Rodney's repose.

"Why don't you take this opportunity and get rid of him?" asked the lodger in her matter-of-fact tone.

"Oh, miss!"

"Yes, it's your plain duty to do so. He gives

your house a bad character; he sets a bad example to your husband; he has a bad influence on your daughters."

"Oh, miss, I don't think——"

"Just so, Mrs Turpin; you *don't* think. If you had, you would long ago have noticed that his behaviour to those girls is not at all such as it should be. More than once I have chanced to hear bits of talk, when either Mabel or Lily was in his sitting-room, and didn't like the tone of it. In plain English, the man is a blackguard."

Mrs Turpin gasped.

"But, miss, you forget what family he belongs to."

"Don't be a simpleton, Mrs Turpin. The blackguard is found in every rank of life. Now, suppose you go to him as soon as he gets up, and quietly give him notice. You've no idea how much better you would feel after it."

But Mrs Turpin trembled at the suggestion. It was evident that no ordinary argument or persuasion would bring her to such a step. Miss Rodney put the matter aside for the moment.

She had found no difficulty in getting information about Mr Rawcliffe. It was true that he belonged to a family of some esteem in the Wattleborough neighbourhood, but his father had died in embarrassed circumstances, and his mother was now the wife of a prosperous merchant in another town. To his stepfather Rawcliffe owed an expensive education and two or three starts in life. He was in his second year of

articles to a Wattleborough solicitor, but there seemed little probability of his ever earning a living by the law, and reports of his excesses which reached the stepfather's ears had begun to make the young man's position decidedly precarious. The incumbent of St Luke's, whom Rawcliffe had more than once insulted, took much interest in Miss Rodney's design against this common enemy; he could not himself take active part in the campaign, but he never met the High School mistress without inquiring what progress she had made. The conquest of Turpin, who now for several weeks had kept sober, and spent his evenings in mathematical study, was a most encouraging circumstance; but Miss Rodney had no thought of using her influence over her landlady's husband to assail Rawcliffe's position. She would rely upon herself alone, in this as in all other undertakings.

Only by constant watchfulness and energy did she maintain her control over Mrs Turpin, who was ready at any moment to relapse into her old slatternly ways. It was not enough to hold the ground that had been gained; there must be progressive conquest; and to this end Miss Rodney one day broached the subject which had already been discussed between her and her clerical ally.

"Why do you keep both your girls at home, Mrs Turpin?" she asked.

"What should I do with them, miss? I don't hold with sending girls into shops, or else they've an aunt in Birmingham, who's manageress of——"

" That isn't my idea," interposed Miss Rodney quietly. " I have been asked if I knew of a girl who would go into a country-house not far from here as second housemaid, and it occurred to me that Lily——"

A sound of indignant protest escaped the landlady, which Miss Rodney, steadily regarding her, purposely misinterpreted.

" No, no, of course, she is not really capable of taking such a position. But the lady of whom I am speaking would not mind an untrained girl, who came from a decent house. Isn't it worth thinking of? "

Mrs Turpin was red with suppressed indignation, but as usual she could not look her lodger defiantly in the face.

" We're not so poor, miss," she exclaimed, " that we need send our daughters into service."

" Why, of course not, Mrs Turpin, and that's one of the reasons why Lily might suit this lady."

But here was another rock of resistance which promised to give Miss Rodney a good deal of trouble. The landlady's pride was outraged, and after the manner of the inarticulate she could think of no adequate reply save that which took the form of personal abuse. Restrained from this by more than one consideration, she stood voiceless, her bosom heaving.

" Well, you shall think it over," said Miss Rodney, " and we'll speak of it again in a day or two."

Mrs Turpin, without another word, took herself out of the room.

Save for that singular meeting on Miss Rodney's first night in the house, Mr Rawcliffe and the energetic lady had held no intercourse whatever. Their parlours being opposite each other on the ground floor, they necessarily came face to face now and then, but the High School mistress behaved as though she saw no one, and the solicitor's clerk, after one or two attempts at polite formality, adopted a like demeanour. The man's proximity caused his neighbour a ceaseless irritation; of all objectionable types of humanity, this loafing and boozing degenerate was, to Miss Rodney, perhaps the least endurable; his mere countenance excited her animosity, for feebleness and conceit, things abhorrent to her, were legible in every line of the trivial features; and a full moustache, evidently subjected to training, served only as emphasis of foppish imbecility. "I could beat him!" she exclaimed more than once within herself, overcome with contemptuous wrath, when she passed Mr Rawcliffe. And, indeed, had it been possible to settle the matter thus simply, no doubt Mr Rawcliffe's rooms would very soon have been vacant.

The crisis upon which Miss Rodney had resolved came about, quite unexpectedly, one Sunday evening. Mrs Turpin and her daughters had gone, as usual, to church, the carpenter had gone to smoke a pipe with a neighbour, and Mr Rawcliffe believed himself alone in the house. But Miss Rodney was not at church this evening; she had a headache, and after tea lay down in her bed-

room for a while. Soon impatient of repose, she got up and went to her parlour. The door, to her surprise, was partly open; entering—the tread of her slippered feet was noiseless—she beheld an astonishing spectacle. Before her writing-table, his back turned to her, stood Mr Rawcliffe, engaged in the deliberate perusal of a letter which he had found there. For a moment she observed him; then she spoke.

"What business have you here?"

Rawcliffe gave such a start that he almost jumped from the ground. His face, as he put down the letter and turned, was that of a gibbering idiot; his lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"What are you doing in my room?" demanded Miss Rodney, in her severest tones.

"I really beg your pardon—I really beg——"

"I suppose this is not the first visit with which you have honoured me?"

"The first—indeed—I assure you—the very first! A foolish curiosity; I really feel quite ashamed of myself; I throw myself upon your indulgence."

The man had become voluble; he approached Miss Rodney smiling in a sickly way, his head bobbing forward.

"It's something," she replied, "that you have still the grace to feel ashamed. Well, there's no need for us to discuss this matter; it can have, of course, only one result. To-morrow morning you will oblige me by giving notice to Mrs Turpin—a week's notice."

"Leave the house?" exclaimed Rawcliffe.

"On Saturday next—or as much sooner as you like."

"Oh! but really——"

"As you please," said Miss Rodney, looking him sternly in the face. "In that case I complain to the landlady of your behaviour, and insist on her getting rid of you. You ought to have been turned out long ago. You are a nuisance, and worse than a nuisance. Be so good as to leave the room."

Rawcliffe, his shoulders humped, moved towards the door; but before reaching it he stopped and said doggedly:

"I *can't* give notice."

"Why not?"

"I owe Mrs Turpin money."

"Naturally. But you will go, all the same."

A vicious light flashed into the man's eyes.

"If it comes to that, I shall *not* go!"

"Indeed?" said Miss Rodney calmly and coldly. "We will see about it. In the meantime, leave the room, sir!"

Rawcliffe nodded, grinned, and withdrew.

Late that evening there was a conversation between Miss Rodney and Mrs Turpin. The landlady, though declaring herself horrified at what had happened, did her best to plead for Mr Rawcliffe's forgiveness, and would not be brought to the point of promising to give him notice.

"Very well, Mrs Turpin," said Miss Rodney at length, "either he leaves the house or I do."

Resolved, as she was, *not* to quit her lodgings, this was a bold declaration. A meeker spirit would have trembled at the possibility that Mrs Turpin might be only too glad to free herself from a subjection which, again and again, had all but driven her to extremities. But Miss Rodney had the soul of a conqueror; she saw only her will, and the straight way to it.

" To tell you the truth, miss," said the landlady, sore perplexed, " he's rather backward with his rent——"

" Very foolish of you to have allowed him to get into your debt. The probability is that he would never pay his arrears; they will only increase, the longer he stays. But I have no more time to spare at present. Please understand that by Saturday next it must be settled which of your lodgers is to go."

Mrs Turpin had never been so worried. The more she thought of the possibility of Miss Rodney's leaving the house, the less did she like it. Notwithstanding Mr Rawcliffe's " family," it was growing clear to her that, as a stamp of respectability and a source of credit, the High School mistress was worth more than the solicitor's clerk. Then there was the astonishing change that had come over Turpin, owing, it seemed, to his talk with Miss Rodney; the man spent all his leisure time in " making shapes and figuring "—just as he used to do when poor Harry was at the Grammar School. If Miss Rodney disappeared, it seemed only too probable that Turpin would be

off again to The Swan with Two Necks. On the other hand, the thought of " giving notice " to Mr Rawcliffe caused her something like dismay; how could she have the face to turn a real gentleman out of her house? Yes, but was it not true that she had lost money by him—and stood to lose more? She had never dared to tell her husband of Mr Rawcliffe's frequent shortcomings in the matter of weekly payments. When the easy-going young man smiled and nodded, and said, " It'll be all right, you know, Mrs Turpin; you can trust *me*, I hope," she could do nothing but acquiesce. And Mr Rawcliffe was more and more disposed to take advantage of this weakness. If she could find courage to go through with the thing, perhaps she would be glad when it was over.

Three days went by. Rawcliffe led an unusually quiet and regular life. There came the day on which his weekly bill was presented. Mrs Turpin brought it in person at breakfast, and stood with it in her hand, an image of vacillation. Her lodger made one of his familiar jokes; she laughed feebly. No; the words would not come to her lips; she was physically incapable of giving him notice.

" By the bye, Mrs Turpin," said Rawcliffe in an offhand way, as he glanced at the bill, " how much exactly do I owe you? "

Pleasantly agitated, his landlady mentioned the sum.

" Ah! I must settle that. I tell you what,

Mrs Turpin. Let it stand over for another month, and we'll square things up at Christmas. Will that suit you?"

And, by way of encouragement, he paid his week's account on the spot, without a penny of deduction. Mrs Turpin left the room in greater embarrassment than ever.

Saturday came. At breakfast Miss Rodney sent for the landlady, who made a timid appearance just within the room.

"Good morning, Mrs Turpin. What news have you for me? You know what I mean?"

The landlady took a step forward, and began babbling excuses, explanations, entreaties. She was coldly and decisively interrupted.

"Thank you, Mrs Turpin, that will do. A week to-day I leave."

With a sound which was half a sob and half grunt Mrs Turpin bounced from the room. It was now inevitable that she should report the state of things to her husband, and that evening half an hour's circumlocution brought her to the point. Which of the two lodgers should go? The carpenter paused, pipe in mouth, before him a geometrical figure over which he had puzzled for a day or two, and about which, if he could find courage, he wished to consult the High School mistress. He reflected for five minutes, and uttered an unhesitating decision. Mr Rawcliffe must go. Naturally, his wife broke into indignant clamour, and the debate lasted for an hour or two; but Turpin could be firm when he liked,

and he had solid reasons for preferring to keep Miss Rodney in the house. At four o'clock Mrs Turpin crept softly to the sitting-room where her offended lodger was quietly reading.

"I wanted just to say, miss, that I'm willing to give Mr Rawcliffe notice next Wednesday."

"Thank you, Mrs Turpin," was the cold reply. "I have already taken other rooms."

The landlady gasped, and for a moment could say nothing. Then she besought Miss Rodney to change her mind. Mr Rawcliffe should leave, indeed he should, on Wednesday week. But Miss Rodney had only one reply; she had found other rooms that suited her, and she requested to be left in peace.

At eleven Mr Rawcliffe came home. He was unnaturally sober, for Saturday night, and found his way into the parlour without difficulty. There in a minute or two he was confronted by his landlady and her husband: they closed the door behind them, and stood in a resolute attitude.

"Mr Rawcliffe," began Turpin, "you must leave these lodgings, sir, on Wednesday next."

"Hullo! what's all this about?" cried the other. "What do you mean, Turpin?"

The carpenter made plain his meaning; he spoke of Miss Rodney's complaint, of the irregular payment (for his wife, in her stress, had avowed everything), and of other subjects of dissatisfaction; the lodger must go, there was an end of it. Rawcliffe, putting on all his dignity, demanded the legal week's notice; Turpin demanded the

sum in arrear. There was an exchange of high words, and the interview ended with mutual defiance. A moment after Turpin and his wife knocked at Miss Rodney's door, for she was still in her parlour. There followed a brief conversation, with the result that Miss Rodney graciously consented to remain, on the understanding that Mr Rawcliffe left the house not later than Wednesday.

Enraged at the treatment he was receiving, Rawcliffe loudly declared that he would not budge. Turpin warned him that if he had made no preparations for departure on Wednesday, he would be forcibly ejected, and the door closed against him.

" You haven't the right to do it," shouted the lodger. " I'll sue you for damages."

" And I," retorted the carpenter, " will sue you for the money you owe me! "

The end could not be doubtful. Rawcliffe, besides being a poor creature, knew very well that it was dangerous for him to get involved in a scandal; his stepfather, upon whom he depended, asked but a fair excuse for cutting him adrift, and more than one grave warning had come from his mother during the past few months. But he enjoyed a little blustering, and even at breakfast-time on Wednesday his attitude was that of contemptuous defiance. In vain had Mrs Turpin tried to coax him with maternal suavity; in vain had Mabel and Lily, when serving his meals, whispered abuse of Miss Rodney, and promised to find

some way of getting rid of her, so that Rawcliffe might return. In a voice loud enough to be heard by his enemy in the opposite parlour, he declared that no " cat of a school teacher should get the better of *him*." As a matter of fact, however, he arranged on Tuesday evening to take a couple of cheaper rooms just outside the town, and ordered a cab to come for him at eleven next morning.

" You know what the understanding is, Mr Rawcliffe," said Turpin, putting his head into the room as the lodger sat at breakfast. " I'm a man of my word."

" Don't come bawling here! " cried the other, with a face of scorn.

And at noon the house knew him no more.

Miss Rodney, on that same day, was able to offer her landlady a new lodger. She had not spoken of this before, being resolved to triumph by mere force of will.

" The next thing," she remarked to a friend, when telling the story, " is to pack off one of the girls into service. I shall manage it by Christmas," and she added with humorous complacency, " it does one good to be making a sort of order in one's own little corner of the world."

From " The House of Cobwebs"

THE FIREBRAND

At the age of eighteen Andrew Mowbray Catterick vanished from among his kith and kin. They soon learnt that he was gone to London, and as this movement had been foreseen for a long time, the North Country folk made no fuss about it; if London proved too much for him, he had only to come back. Mrs Catterick enjoyed a comfortable four hundred per annum, which at her death would be divided between Andrew and his sister. That the lad took his resolve and acted quietly upon it, without taxing anyone or calling for applause, seemed a point in his favour. If hitherto he had earned no high esteem, he had done nothing to be ashamed of. Rather an idle dog—said his impartial acquaintances—and a trifle given to self-praise; but no one denied his cleverness. At Mapplebeck, a grey and sooty little town ringed about with collieries, he was not likely to do much good; and his "gift of the gab," as people called it, would sooner or later involve him in difficulties. A young fellow in a public office should not meddle with politics, and can gain nothing by displays of oratory at pothouses frequented by pitmen. Let him shift for himself in a larger world. Five pounds or so was the fortune he carried with him; capable

men have gone forth and conquered with much less.

From eighteen to three-and-twenty Andrew doubtless had a hard time of it. He wrote very seldom, and disregarded invitations to visit the old home. Such reports as he made were of dubious complexion; that he lived was clear, but no one at Mapplebeck knew exactly how. Writing, however, on his twenty-third birthday, the young man announced that he had secured regular employment as a journalist in connection with two London papers; and presently he began to send specimens of his work. Mrs Catterick, the widow of a town-clerk and herself much respected in the Conservative society of Mapplebeck, thought it a sad pity that her son persevered in revolutionary opinion: she did not care to circulate the newspapers he posted to her. Miss Bertha, now engaged to a solicitor of a neighbouring town, felt proud that Andrew had made such progress, and declared her indifference to his views if only he achieved a good position. Before long the journalist sent down a series of articles which, he said, were attracting attention—descriptions of obscure industries in London and elsewhere. He spoke, too, of allowing himself a holiday, and of coming home.

A couple of months elapsed without more news. Then, on an evening of September, Andrew presented himself at his mother's door.

It was difficult to recognize him. Not only had time converted the lanky stripling into a tall, wiry

specimen of bearded manhood, but he looked so deplorably ill that Mrs Catterick's first exclamation was one of alarm. As if the journey had overtaxed him, he dropped upon the nearest chair, and wiped moisture from his clay-coloured face. Yes, he was seedy. He had been overdoing it. He must have a good long rest. Mother and sister straightway devoted themselves to nursing him. The old doctor, friend of his childhood, was called into council. Andrew talked to him with a quiet air of condescension, yet as if grateful for the kindness with which he was surrounded.

" Sleep? Oh, my dear doctor! I haven't slept for a year or so. Sleep is such an expensive luxury; a journalist making his way has to do without it. Meals? Oh, I really forget. I eat now and then, I believe. Why, yes; not long ago I dined at the National Liberal Club with the editor of the *Morning Star*; so on that occasion, at all events, I ate. But, do you know, I find a bit of anchovy toast and a glass of cognac about the best thing, on most days. I suppose I ruined my stomach with *vache enragée*."

" What in the world is that? " asked the good doctor.

" Merely a pedantry for starvation, my dear sir. For three or four years I had simply nothing to eat. We all go through it, you know. A friend of mine, a novelist, says he thinks nothing of the man who hasn't starved to begin with. At the same time I drank rather too much. What would you have? Nervous force must be kept up somehow."

The doctor began to entertain a suspicion that this habit of drinking was not yet outgrown; he privately doubted whether Andrew's state of collapse had anything to do with excessive toil. In a day or two, however, he felt sure that his misgivings were unjustifiable. Catterick's case allowed of but one diagnosis: the young man had lived preposterously, but not as a debauchee. He had worked himself like a machine, disregarding every admonition of rebellious nature.

"And do you imagine, Andrew, that this kind of thing will lead to anything except the grave?"

"I can't keep it up; that I have discovered. But so far it has paid. The editors know me. Nowadays, doctor, a man who aims at success in any profession must be content to take his chance between that and death. If I don't get out of the ruck, I may as well die."

Talk in this vein amused the old practitioner, who regarded his patient as a boy, and studied in him the latest forms of puerile conceit. But not every one could listen so urbanely. Robert Holdsworth, who came over to make the acquaintance of his future brother-in-law, had much ado to disguise contemptuous irritation; he resented the easy patronage of Andrew's behaviour, and half believed him a disreputable impostor. Talking privately with Bertha, he asked why her brother had allowed so many years to pass without visiting his relatives.

"Oh," replied the girl, with a laugh, "he made a confession about that only yesterday. His pride

wouldn't let him come till he had done something that people could talk about."

"Andrew's pride seems to be the great feature of his character," Holdsworth remarked drily. "And what *has* he done? A little anonymous journalism. I don't think that justifies his airs."

"He does put it on rather. But, you know, he has worked frightfully!"

"So have a good many people."

"Yes; but it's a great thing to write for London newspapers—don't you think? And he has made friends with such a lot of important men."

Andrew took care that his arrival at Mapplebeck should be made known by the local paper. A short biography appeared in its columns, and the writer expressed his deep regret that Mr Catterick had been ordered to abstain for the present from all literary work. He added:

> This is the penalty paid by too many of our rising journalists. The conditions of modern journalism are terribly trying, and a young man of Mr Catterick's distinguished ability is tempted to efforts beyond the endurance of human nature.

With old acquaintances, most of whom were very sober and practical folk, Andrew made ostentatious display of his advanced opinions. He gave the good people to understand that Mapplebeck was a very sleepy little place, a century or so behind the civilization which he himself represented. Occasionally he met with blunt answers, but they moved him only to a smile. People might say of him what they liked, if only

they recognized his enormous advance in the interval since he disappeared from Mapplebeck. Superior to ordinary conversation, he discoursed in lively monologues, generally standing. His inquiries about local affairs were made in an indulgent tone. He deigned to show interest in the histories of young men, his contemporaries, who still remained in the town.

"Ah! poor old Robertson! I must have a talk with him. And Tom Gerard has three children? Amazing! It passes my comprehension how a fellow of any brains—and Tom *had* brains—can handicap himself in that way. Men don't marry nowadays—not till they have *arrived.*"

But about this time the local mind began to be occupied with a question which ultimately proved of national concern. Throughout the mining districts there was talk of an impending coal strike. Catterick, whose recuperative powers had soon overcome the grave symptoms of his disorder, amused himself with walking about the neighbourhood and holding converse with pitmen; whence it naturally came to pass that he one day found himself haranguing a coaly group, to whom he expounded the principles of modern industrial liberty. He came home in an excited state of mind, and from the hearthrug repeated to his mother and sister the oration he had publicly delivered.

"I think it very wrong to go talking in that way," declared Mrs Catterick. "You may make a deal of trouble."

"Very likely," Andrew replied, with modest allusion to his powers as an agitator.

"You have no business to encourage these men to strike," exclaimed his sister. "And what will our friends say if they hear of it?"

The suggestion confirmed Andrew in a resolve. A strike there undoubtedly would be, sooner or later, and how could he more profitably occupy his leisure than in helping to bring it about? The public eye would at once be fixed on him; with care and skill he might achieve more than local distinction, and the journalistic matter thus supplied to him would be all in the way of business.

A mile or so beyond Mapplebeck was a colliers' hamlet known as Pit Row; it consisted literally of a row of cottages set on the black soil hard by a coal-pit—grimy little boxes, all built precisely alike, with a plot of sorry garden in front of each, and behind them the walled backyards, where shirts and petticoats flapped in sooty air. Andrew decided to open his campaign at Pit Row. Thither he went on a Sunday morning, and inquired for Sam Dollop, a collier whose acquaintance he had made in casual talk on the road. Sam was a local firebrand, and it flattered him to be associated with a gentleman from London who had exactly his views as to the rights of the miner. Easily enough they collected the inhabitants of Pit Row; speeches were made, and Andrew scored an important point when he uttered a sentence or two in the dialect of his hearers. Mapplebeck, he went on to assure them,

was his native place. He stood here as no interloper. From childhood's days he had regarded with compassion the hard lot of men who toiled underground; and now that fortune had favoured him, now that he had won by sheer hard work a somewhat prominent place in Metropolitan journalism, he felt it to be only his duty to come down and take part with his old friends in their struggle against the avarice of capitalists.

He had not long to wait for the public effect of these proceedings. Respectable Mapplebeck talked indignantly of his reckless and wicked meddling with troubles in which he had no concern. Mrs Catterick's friends came to condole with her, knowing how strongly she disapproved of her son's politics. Andrew himself was stopped in the street by an old gentleman, who asked him severely what his good father would have thought of such doings, and advised him, if he must needs be working mischief, to go and speechify elsewhere. The town's one newspaper, which called itself "independent," and tried to please every one, came out with an article vaguely deprecating the interference of outsiders in industrial disputes. Andrew replied in a long letter, printed the following week, wherein he justified himself on high grounds, economical and moral: it was the duty, he maintained, of all enlightened men to use these opportunities for a protest against the grinding tyranny of the present social system. He had deliberately taken off his coat, and was going to work with a full sense of the responsibilities he

incurred. He might mention that he had carefully inquired into the state of the mining population in this district, and the results of his inquiries would shortly be made public in one of the leading organs of advanced opinion.

His " facile pen," as the local paper would have called it, knocked off a couple of sensational reports, which presently appeared in a London evening journal. Copies were in demand at Mapplebeck, and the county press made its comments, sympathetic or denunciatory. Andrew congratulated himself on the circumstances which had brought him hither just at this time. Mapplebeck would come to regard him as a terrible fellow. He looked impatiently for the actual outbreak of the strike, when, with a little effort, he might play a part of more than local distinction.

Meanwhile Mr Robert Holdsworth viewed with keen annoyance the pranks of his future relative. This prudent young man by no means relished the thought of celebrating his marriage with Miss Catterick at a moment when Andrew was incurring the odium of all well-to-do people in the district. He came over to talk plainly of the matter; and Bertha, distressed by his grave representations, was driven to propose that their wedding should be put off till the next year.

" It's no use saying anything to Andrew; he is really very selfish. I think Mother ought to tell him that we can't have him here any longer."

" So do I," replied Holdsworth emphatically.

"His behaviour is simply monstrous. Your mother will feel the effects of it for long enough."

Andrew was away, carrying the fiery cross. When he returned, late at night, mother and sister united in a very strong appeal to him. Couldn't he see the inconvenience, to say the least, that he was causing them? If he was well enough to go about making speeches, had he not better return to London?

"I am obliged to stay here," answered the journalist, with forbearance. "Not only my interest, but my duty, forbids me to turn back from the work I have undertaken. But, of course, I need not remain in this house. I admit all you urge, and to-morrow I will look about for a lodging."

To this Mrs Catterick could not assent, and the discussion was prolonged to an unheard-of hour. Andrew, when he understood the difficult position in which his sister was placed, held firm to his self-denying ordinance; he would forego the comforts of home, and lodge somewhere in the neighbourhood. This step would declare to all and sundry that the ladies dissociated themselves from his obnoxious principles.

And on the morrow the change was made. Andrew felt a glow of conscious virtue; no one could say that he had not behaved with scrupulous honour. He wrote a touching letter to Holdsworth, explaining his sacrifice, and enlarging upon its meritorious features. The solicitor replied in a line or two of formal civility.

Catterick had aptitude for the work of an agitator. His harangues were not merely fluent and spirited, they testified to a sincerity of feeling with which the casual observer would not have credited Andrew. Himself acquainted with hardships, he did, in fact, sympathize with the employed as against the capitalist. His whole bent of mind engaged him to the democratic standpoint; his interests were all in combative modernism. Robert Holdsworth, deeming him a noisy charlatan, did justice neither to his abilities nor to the motives of his conduct; yet there was a weak point in Andrew which the lawyer accidentally discovered, and which he resolved to attack by an ingenious stratagem. Talking confidentially of her brother, Bertha had mentioned that in boyhood he was anything but remarkable for courage.

" If there's any rioting," she said, " I'm quite sure he'll get out of the way. It's a pity he can't have a good fright. He would soon find that business called him to London."

Holdsworth said little, but he reflected and schemed.

A few days after this Andrew received a letter addressed in a rude, sprawling hand, the writing of some one who barely knew how to hold a pen. The contents were with difficulty decipherable, but seemed to run thus:

> Mr Caterikk, us three chaps as made up our moind to-night to wright to yo we work at a pit and weeve gotten wives and childer and we downt

want to see them go hungery weer badly of as it is and we dont bileve a strike will mak it better so us chaps as mad up oor mind to give yo fare worning if the lads about here cum out on strike yol hear from us were not thretning yor life but well give you the best threshin yo iver had sens yo was born thers three sticks redy and ef we go to jale for it thell be more bread fort wives and childer so look out.

This same morning Andrew learnt that in a neighbouring county the strike had already begun. In a day or two great numbers of colliers would have left their work, and all but certainly those round about Mapplebeck would join in the movement. They were a particularly rough lot of men, and, as he well knew, eager to try their strength with the masters. He knew equally well that individuals among them, looking forward to short commons and fireless hearths, secretly cursed the agencies which threw them out of employment; and this letter from the nameless trio seemed to him an undoubtedly genuine threat. Its very moderation (he had only to fear bruises and indignity) was an alarming feature of the menace. For a long time he sat with the letter in his hand thinking anxiously.

The post-mark was Mapplebeck. Impossible to determine to what pit these three men belonged. His mind's eye surveyed whole crowds of grimy faces, and everywhere saw hostility in the white upturned orbs.

First came the natural impulse to make public his danger. It would be a proud moment. " Be-

hold this infamous production! Do you imagine that a base threat such as this can for a moment shake my purpose? See, I tear it into fragments, and scatter it to the winds!" Acquaintances in Mapplebeck would admire his scornful indifference, or, at all events, talk the more about him. "He receives threatening letters. Hired ruffians have vowed to beat him within an inch of his life." But was he actually indifferent? When all the pitmen of the locality were idle, would he care to walk about by-ways, or go home to his lodgings on a dark night? He hoped to make a figure during the strike, and to send journalistic correspondence to London; he must move freely hither and thither at all hours, affording his enemies abundant opportunity to waylay him. Well, was it not what a public man had to expect? Who that takes part in industrial warfare can feel secure from outrage? If the fellows thrashed him, they were not likely to escape, and here again would be a splendid advertisement.

Yes; but the thrashing itself. Three sturdy colliers, armed with three big sticks, and only inclined to stop short of murder. His bones would ache for some time, be sure of it. He had never undergone a thrashing, not even as a boy. He had never fought; for, as his sister truly affirmed, physical courage was not his strong point. As he thought and thought, the drops came out upon his forehead.

For the present he would keep this letter in his pocket, and speak of it to no one.

He went into the town, and kept an appointment with a fellow-worker in the bar-room of the principal hotel. "Grand news!" exclaimed his friend, a provincial journalist without employment. At Baker's Pits that morning a notice was posted which would be sure to bring matters to a head: before evening the men would all be out. They must go at once——

Andrew felt a chill run down his back.

"It's a confounded nuisance!" he began blusteringly. "I have a letter from my editor. He wants me to go at once to the Clegg Valley district. I've half a mind to wire back that I must see it out here."

But the friend thought this imprudent. His own ambitions clashed somewhat with Catterick's, and he would not be sorry to see the fiery orator depart for the Clegg Valley or elsewhere.

"It's a beastly nuisance!" repeated Andrew, wondering how soon after the declaration of a strike at Baker's Pits his bludgeon-armed foes would start on the war-path. Perhaps this very evening would see them lying in wait for him. "I think I shall stay."

He drank a glass of whisky, but it had no effect whatever upon his state of mind. Ah!—he said to himself—this was manifestly the result of nervous breakdown. He had not recovered from his illness; he had been over-exciting himself when what he needed was repose. Why, his limbs trembled under him! No, no; he was not such a poltroon as all that! In reasonable health he

could have faced the peril, which, after all, might be imaginary. Those fellows would not dare to attack him—why, it would be as much as their lives were worth! But a dark night—the lonely road near his lodgings—faces masked—they might, perhaps, do it with impunity. Cold sweat again started on his forehead.

And all the time his friend was counselling him not to neglect the editor's instructions.

" My people at home yonder," said Andrew with a smile, " would be glad enough if I took myself off. Perhaps I owe it to them to make the sacrifice. I must think it over quietly for a few minutes. You go over to Pit Row. If I don't come presently you shall hear from me! "

He sat in the hotel for nearly an hour, and only strangers entered. At length appeared a shopkeeper with whom he was slightly acquainted.

" Well, Mr Catterick, I suppose this is a great day for you? I hear that Baker's men have come out."

Andrew smiled, but could not at once reply.

" Sure of it? " fell from his lips, when he had moistened them.

" It's the talk in the town, at all events. And I dare say you know more about it than most people."

Andrew rose, nodded, and left the hotel.

He walked quickly to his mother's house, and cast many glances about him in the quiet suburban road which led thither. It began to rain, but he

did not put up his umbrella. Mrs Catterick and Bertha were sitting by the fireside, talking about the price of coals; his abrupt entrance—for he walked in without ringing the bell—made them start up in apprehension.

"What has happened? Why do you look so?"

"Nothing. I've done my work, that's all, and I'm off."

"Oh, thank goodness!" cried Bertha.

"You know that the colliers are on strike everywhere? Sorry for what it'll cost you in coals"—he laughed noisily—"but you mustn't mind that. I have to rush off to the Clegg Valley—seat of war—telegram from London. Done all that I can here. Bertha, will you do me a kindness?"

"Certainly."

"Take a cab to my lodgings, pack up all my things, leave them at the station cloak-room and keep the receipt till I send for it. It's all I shall do to catch my train. I thought of staying here to see the fun out, but I should rile an important man if I declined to go. And as you two rejoice, it's just as well. Explain to Holdsworth, will you? Sorry I couldn't say good-bye to him. But I *hope* to come down for your wedding, Bertha. Rather I didn't? Well, well, I quite understand; no harm done. You'll have broader views some day. Good-bye! Not one minute to lose."

And away he sped.

In a few days Holdsworth was at Mapplebeck.

He listened with a grave smile to the repetition of what Bertha had already told him in a letter.

"And he went off in a tremendous hurry?"

"Hardly time to say a dozen words. This morning he writes from London, and I have to send on his luggage."

"From London? I'm surprised he could do his work for the newspaper so soon!"

"He says it was too exciting for him—he was falling ill again."

Holdsworth could not feel absolutely sure that his stratagem had got rid of the firebrand. Andrew's explanations might be all true; yet he disappeared on the very day when that threatening letter must have reached him; and, what was more, on the day when the strike began at Baker's Pits. In any case an odd and amusing coincidence.

From "Human Odds and Ends"

A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES

In the summer of 1869, an artist, whose wanderings had led him far into rural England, rambled one sunny morning about the town of Glastonbury. Like all but a very few Englishmen, he cared little for the ancient history of his land: Avalon was a myth that did not speak to his imagination, and the name of Dunstan echoed but faintly for him out of old school books. His delight was in the rare quaint beauty of the noiseless streets, in the ruined abbey with its overgrowth, its great elms, its smooth sward where sheep were nibbling, and in the exquisite bits of homely landscape discoverable at every turn. He would have liked to remain here for several days, but in the evening he must needs journey on.

After a midday meal at the inn which was built for the use of pilgrims four hundred years ago, he turned his steps towards a spot it still behoved him to visit, though its associations awoke in him but a languid curiosity. This was Wirrall Hill, a little grassy ascent just outside the town—famous for ages throughout Christendom as the place of the Holy Thorn, the budding staff set by Joseph of Arimathæa when he landed from his voyage. A thorn is still preserved on the summit: having considered it with a smile, the artist threw himself

upon the grass, and gazed at what interested him much more, the scene spread before his eyes.

Opposite lay Glastonbury, its red-roofed houses (above them the fine old towers of St John and St Benedict) clustered about the foot of that high conical hill called the Tor, which with its ruined church beacons over so many miles of plain. Northward the view was bounded by the green Mendips, lovely in changing lights and shadows. In the west, far upon a flat horizon, glimmered the Severn Sea. White lines of road marked the landscape in every direction; the willow-bordered rhines—great trenches to save the fields from flood—wound among crops or cattled pasturage; and patches of rich brown showed where peat was stacked. A scene perfect in its kind, so ancient, peaceful, dream-inspiring.

He was awakened from reverie by the sound of voices. At a short distance stood two children, a little boy and a still smaller girl, doubtless brother and sister: they had just caught sight of the stranger, and were looking at him with frank, wide eyes, their talk suspended by his presence. Our friend (he was a bachelor of fifty) did not care much for very young people, but this small couple were more than usually interesting; he thought he had never seen such pretty children. They were dressed very simply, but with a taste which proved that they did not belong to working folk; their faces, too, had nothing in common with those of little rustics, but were delicately featured, remarkably intelligent, toned in softest

cream colour. The boy (perhaps seven years old) wore a tunic and knickerbockers, and carried a wand higher than himself; the girl, a year younger, who had golden curly locks, and a red sash about her waist, held in her arms the tiniest of terrier pups.

"How do you do?" cried the artist, in the friendliest voice he could command, nodding to them. "Here's a comfortable place; come and sit down."

They hesitated, but only for a moment. Then the boy advanced, and the girl followed more timidly. After a few rather awkward attempts the artist drew them into conversation. Their wits corresponded to their faces; when he spoke of the hill on which they were sitting, he found that the boy knew all about its history.

"Joseph of Arimathæa," said the youngster, with perfect pronunciation of the long word, "had eleven companions. Father is painting them."

"Painting them? What! your father is a painter?"

"Yes," the boy answered proudly. "Like Michael Angelo and Raphael."

"Now that's a curious thing. I am a painter too!"

They examined him keenly, the little girl allowing her puppy to escape, so that in a few moments she had to run away after it.

"Are you an historical painter?" inquired the boy with much earnestness.

"No. Landscape only."

"Oh!"

The tone was of disappointment.

"What is your father's name? Perhaps I have heard of him."

"Horace Miles Castledine," was the reply, again uttered proudly.

The artist averted his face and kept silence for a moment.

"Mine is Godfrey Banks," he said at length; "not such a nice name as your father's."

"No, not so nice. But it isn't a bad name. I like Godfrey. And are you famous?"

"Some people like my pictures."

"But are you really famous—like my father is going to be?"

"I am afraid not."

"But you are very old, you know," said the lad. "Father is only thirty—quite young for an artist. When he gets as old as you, he'll be famous all through the world—like Michael Angelo."

"I'm very glad to hear that. Where does your father live?"

"Just down there—not far. Shall I take you to see him and tell him you're a painter?"

"That would be very kind. Yes, I would like to go."

The artist had made up his mind that he must not leave Glastonbury without visiting this most notable of its inhabitants, a man who, in the year 1869, was engaged on an historical painting—subject, "The Landing of Joseph of Arimathæa

in Britain "—and who plainly had the habit of declaring before his offspring that in a few years his fame would circle the earth.

Addressing his companion as "Murie"—which probably meant Muriel—the youngster announced that they would return home forthwith, and with many signs of delight he led the way. Banks held his hand to the little girl, who accepted it very sweetly; with her other arm she enfolded the puppy. And thus they moved forward.

In less than a quarter of an hour the guide pointed to his father's dwelling. It was one of a row of simple cottages, old and prettily built; in the small garden were hollyhocks, sunflowers, tall lilies, and other familiar flowers blooming luxuriantly, and over the front of the house trailed a vine. A delightful abode in certain moods, no doubt; but where could be the studio?

The artist took from his pocket a visiting card.

"I will stay here," he said, "until you have given that to your father, and asked if I may be allowed to see him."

Two or three minutes elapsed, and when the boy reappeared, it was in the company of a singular looking man. This person (one would have judged him less than thirty) had a short, slim figure, and a large head with long, beautiful hair, almost as golden as that of his younger child. He wore a dressing-gown, which had once been magnificent, of blue satin richly worked; time had faded its glories, and it showed a patch here and

there. On his feet were slippers, erst of corresponding splendour; but they, too, had felt the touch of the destroyer, and seemed ready to fall to pieces. His neck was bare. The features of the man lacked distinction; one felt that they were grievously out of keeping with such original attire, that they suggested the most respectable of everyday garments. A small perky nose, lips and chin of irreproachable form and the kindliest expression, blue eyes which widened themselves in a perpetual endeavour to look inspired—that was all one cared to notice, save, perhaps, the rare delicacy of his complexion.

He came quickly forward, smiling with vast gratification.

" Mr Banks, you do me a great honour! Pray come in! My wife is unfortunately from home; she would have been overjoyed! "

His voice was quite frank and pleasant; the listener had prepared himself for some intolerable form of euphuism, and felt an agreeable surprise.

They entered, and went first of all into a tiny sitting-room, gracefully furnished. Castledine could not conceal his excitement; for here was one of the first artists of the day, a man really to be reverenced, coming—if only by chance—to inspect his work and utter words of encouragement! He kept up a dancing movement round three sides of the table whilst his visitor spoke ordinary civilities.

" My studio," he explained at length, " is upstairs. I have very little convenience, but for the

present it must do. The picture I am engaged upon I should like to have undertaken on a larger scale; but that couldn't be managed."

"My little friend here," replied the artist, "has told me what the subject is."

"Yes—yes!" said Castledine, breathlessly. "But of course he couldn't explain the principles on which I work. I must tell you, first of all, Mr Banks, that I have had no academic instruction. I trust you don't think that is fatal?"

"Fatal? Surely not."

"I was married—I am happy to say—very early; at two and twenty, in fact." He blushed a little. "At that time I lived in Lincolnshire; I was in business. But from boyhood I had studied drawing—quite seriously, I assure you; so much so, that I passed the South Kensington examinations." He pointed to a framed certificate on the wall. "I even went in for anatomy—seriously you know. In anatomy I feel pretty sound. At my marriage I was able to get a little more leisure; we went to Paris and to the Netherlands, and it was then I determined to become a painter. I didn't feel altogether justified—as a married man—in abandoning business, but I managed to give a good half of each day to serious work—really serious. Then we decided to go to London for a year or two, and I studied independently at the National Gallery. The figure was to be my forte; I had understood that from the first; I worked very seriously from the life—made quite a vast number of the most thorough studies. I haven't

wholly neglected landscape, but I should be ashamed to speak to you of what I have done in that direction. All the time, I still gave attention to—to my business; but at last it was clear to me that I must take a bold step—the step inevitable to every serious artist—and give myself entirely to painting. So, two years ago, we came to live here, and I began my studies for what I hope may be a—a work one needn't feel ashamed of."

"You chose the place because of its quietness?"

"I must explain to you." He still moved dancingly about the table, forgetting even to ask his visitor to be seated. "From boyhood I have felt very strongly that artists have never paid sufficient attention to the early history of England. It seemed to me that this was a great field for any man with true enthusiasm. My wife—who sympathizes with me in most things—encourages this idea. She has a great delight in the history of the English Church, and on one of our holidays we came down here to see Wells and Glastonbury. Then it was that I conceived the thought I am now trying to work out on canvas. I felt that I couldn't do better than work on the very spot—in this atmosphere of antiquity."

"I understand."

"But I must explain. It will occur to you—what about costumes and that kind of thing? Here my principle comes in. It seems to me that our modern painters attach far too much importance to these accessories. Now we know that the great

men cared very little about them—that is to say, about antiquarian details. They painted boldly, intent upon the subject—the human interest—the human figure. I am trying to follow them. Of course I avoid grotesque improprieties, but otherwise I allow my imagination free play. No one really knows how Joseph of Arimathæa and his companions were dressed; I have devised costumes which seem to me appropriate."

He spoke hurriedly, watching the listener's face as if he dreaded a sign of disapproval. But Godfrey Banks was all courteous attention.

"Of course I used models. There is one man who sits for me often—a very fine fellow. And I—but perhaps you will come upstairs?"

"Gladly."

Castledine intimated to his children that they were to remain below; then he led the way to the upper storey, and into a back room—lighted from the north indeed, but with obstruction of trees, and through a small window. Fastened upon the wall opposite this window was a canvas of about eight feet by five, covered with figures in various stages of advancement, some little more than outlined. Impossible for the painter to get more than two good paces away from his picture. A deal table and two chairs were the only furniture, but every free bit of wall was covered with small canvases and drawings on paper.

"Not much convenience, as I said," remarked Castledine, with nervous glances, his whole frame breathing tremulous eagerness. "But men have

done serious things, you know, under worse difficulties. I hope before long to get a skylight; that would be a vast improvement."

"Yes," murmured the other, absently.

He was regarding the great picture. One glance had sufficed to confirm his worst fears; the thing had neither execution nor promise. It was simply an example of pretentious amateurism: no drawing, no composition, no colour, not even a hint of the imaginative faculty. In grouping the figures about Joseph (who watched the instantaneous budding of his pilgrim's staff) Castledine seemed to have been influenced by a recollection of Raphael's "Feed my Sheep" cartoon; the drapery, at all events, was Raphaelesque. What remark could be made that would spare the painter's feelings, and yet not be stultifying to the critic?

"It ought really to be seen from farther off," panted Castledine, whose heart was already sinking as he read the countenance of his judge.

"Yes. And wouldn't it perhaps have been wiser to take a smaller canvas—under the circumstances? You have set yourself a task of extreme difficulty."

"The difficulty inspires me," said the other, but this time with feigned animation. He had fully expected an admiring utterance of some kind as soon as ever his companion's eyes fell on the picture; but the silence was not caused by awe, and could mean nothing but dissatisfaction.

As Banks's look strayed in embarrassment, it chanced to light upon the little table by the win-

dow. There lay a water-colour drawing, still fixed on the board but seemingly finished, the colour box open beside it. He moved a step nearer, for the drawing struck him as of interest. It was a bit of local landscape, a rendering of just such a delightful motive as had held his attention again and again, through the day. For quite two minutes he examined it gravely, Castledine, with an air of mortified abstraction, glancing from him to the canvas.

"And yet," exclaimed the artist suddenly, turning round, "you spoke slightingly of your endeavours in landscape!"

Castledine seemed not to understand the remark; his delicate cheek grew warm; his eyes fell for a moment, then turned absently to the drawing.

"You think——" he began, stammeringly.

"Can you show me anything else of this kind?" Banks inquired, with a smile.

It was no novelty in his experience that a man of marked aptitude for one line of work should hold with obstinate blindness to another, in which he could do nothing effectual; but here seemed to be a very curious instance of such perversity. Again he scrutinized the water-colour. And whilst he did so Castledine took from a portfolio that was leaning against the wall some half-dozen similar drawings. In silence he handed these to the artist, who regarded them one after another with unmistakable pleasure.

"You think they're worth something, Mr Banks?"

"They seem to me really very good," replied the critic, as one who weighs his words.

It was on his lips to add: "Did you really do these?" but Castledine's silence seemed to make the question as needless as it would have been uncivil.

"If I may venture to offer counsel," he continued, "I should say, go in for this kind of thing with all your energy."

"You—you don't care for my picture—I'm afraid——"

"I feel that it would be very unjust to speak unfavourably of it. In so small a studio it's simply impossible to face the demands of such work—hard enough under any conditions. But these water-colours—my dear sir, how can you have been so doubtful of their merit? Have you never shown them to anyone?"

"Never."

"Will you give me one of them in exchange for a thing of my own, which I would send you?"

"With great pleasure; choose which you like."

"It shall be this, then."

Castledine was so plainly chagrined by the slighting of his great work that the artist sought to console him with more effusive praise of the drawings than he would otherwise have felt justified in offering. Imperfections were obvious enough to his practised eye. The things would not stand beside a David Cox or a Copley Fielding, but there was a promise of uncommon excellence. No ordinary amateur could by any degree

of perseverance have obtained the happy effects which characterized this pencil. After all, Castledine's artistic fervour meant something. He had gone shockingly astray, but it was not too late to hope that he would cultivate his true faculty with fine results.

They conversed for half an hour, then Banks made known the necessity he was under of quitting Glastonbury early that evening, and with much friendliness prepared to take his leave. Downstairs he was met by the children; he tapped the girl's glossy head with the rolled drawing and said to her father:

"It was a happy chance that brought these little people to me up on the hill. No one had ever more appropriate guides to an artist's house."

Castledine beamed with sincere pleasure.

"They are healthy," he said, catching up the child in his arms, "that's a great thing."

So the visitor went his way, musing and wondering.

II

"What's that in his hand?" asked the boy, as he stood watching at the door. "Have you given him something, father?"

"Yes. A little drawing he wished to take. Come, we must get tea."

There was no servant in the cottage. A neighbour's daughter came to do occasional rough work, but all else was seen to by Mrs Castledine. That lady had gone this morning to Wells, on no

very agreeable errand; the circumstances of the family were straitened, and a pressing need for ready money obliged her to sell a gold watch which was lying by. Her husband seemed the natural person to do business of this kind, but his time was too valuable. Mrs Castledine had insisted on going herself, and she would not be back for another hour or two.

With his children Castledine was usually a model father, full of joke and song and grotesque playfulness: tender as a woman, yet not foolishly indulgent. But the visit of the distinguished artist had a grievous effect upon him; whilst boiling the kettle and laying the tea things he grew silent and gloomy. His nerves were disordered; he broke a cup, and fretted over the accident. Presently the little ones could not get from him a word or a smile. He drank some tea, bade the boy guard his sister, and went upstairs.

To reappear again in a few minutes. He could not remain in one place. The sight of his picture caused him acute misery, gradually changing to resentment, and when he came in sight of the water-colour by the window, he turned sharply away.

A well-dressed lad of sixteen knocked at the front-door.

"You weren't able to come for my drawing-lesson, Mr Castledine?" he said, when the long-haired man presented himself.

"Upon my word! I entirely forgot it!" was the despondent reply. "Some one just called at the time."

The excuse was invalid, for Castledine ought to have gone for the lesson half-an-hour before Banks's arrival. But he had in truth forgotten all about his engagement. With a promise to come on the morrow, he dismissed his pupil, and strayed about the house more dismally than ever.

At length Mrs Castledine returned.

She was not handsome, but had a face of far nobler stamp than her husband's—a warm, animated face, with kind eyes and the lips of motherhood, infinitely patient. In entering she looked both tired and excited. The first thought was for her children; she caught them both in her arms, kneeling down to them, and bathed her face in their curls. Then—

"Where's father? Upstairs?"

"Yes," replied the boy; "and he won't play with us because he's got a headache, and a landscape painter has been to see him—not a very famous painter—Godfrey Banks."

"What are you talking about, darling? Godfrey Banks has been here? Sit down quietly, and I'll go and see father."

She hurried up the crazy little staircase, and threw open the door of the studio.

"Horace! have you a headache, dear? What's this that the children tell me? Has Godfrey Banks really been to see you?"

"Yes."

"But what's the matter? Did he——?"

She checked herself, glancing uneasily at the great picture.

" Well, you see, I don't think he knows much about historical painting. I suspect he was put out by the originality of the thing, if the truth were told."

" Perhaps so," murmured his wife, in a tone which betrayed anxiety, but no sceptical disposition regarding the work discussed. She asked for particulars of the visit; and when this was talked over, Castledine inquired what success she had had at Wells. At once her face changed to a sly good-humour; she opened her little handbag, searched in it mysteriously for a moment, then laid upon the table a sovereign.

" You don't mean to say that's all? " cried her husband.

Smiling, she brought forth a second sovereign, a third, a fourth—and so on till she had displayed the sum of ten guineas. Finally, there appeared the gold watch which she held triumphantly aloft. Castledine was amazed, and demanded what it all meant.

" Listen, and you shall hear. You remember our reading in the paper the other day about Mr Merriman of Wells, and his fine collection of pictures? "

Castledine nodded, gazing at her in painful suspense.

" Thinking and thinking," she continued, " of all sorts of ways of getting money, I made up my mind to try something which was perhaps hopeless, yet it seemed to me worthy trying. I resolved to go to this Mr Merriman and show him two of my water-colours."

She broke off, alarmed by her husband's look.

"You think I did wrong, Horace?"

"No, no. Go on! What happened?"

"I went to his house, and he was very kind indeed—a most courtly gentleman. And I showed him the sketches—saying they were by a friend of mine. I didn't dare to say I had done them myself, lest he should think them worthless before he had really looked at them."

Her modesty was exquisite; she spoke with perfect good faith and simplicity.

"And what do you think? He liked them so much that he offered to give me five guineas for each, at once. And he said he would take more, if my friend had any to dispose of!"

"Then you told him they were yours?" asked Castledine in an uncertain voice.

"No, not even then. I had a pleasure, then, in keeping the secret. He was discretion itself; didn't ask a single troublesome question, not even my name. And I have been thinking all the way home how good it would be for you to know him! Don't you think so? If we told him the truth about the water-colours, and then got him to look at your picture, mightn't it be of great advantage to you?"

Castledine smiled in a sickly way, murmuring assent.

The children's voices calling impatiently put an end to the talk. Castledine said that he would have a walk before dark, to see if he could get rid of his headache; and having made himself

rather more like a man of this world, he went forth.

He was in sore perplexity and travail of spirit. What in the name of common sense had possessed him to tell that silent lie to Godfrey Banks? For the present, perchance, no harm would come of it; but sooner or later what he had done must almost certainly be discovered by his wife, if not by other people.

For, in their serious need, how was it possible to neglect a promising source of income? Here were two men, both excellent judges, who declared the water-colours of value. Yet he had never suspected it. The fact was, his wife's work had been growing better and better by gradual stages, the result of her great patience; this progress he ignored, taking it for granted that she was still at the same point in art as at the time of their marriage, when she drew and coloured not much better than the schoolgirl with a pretty taste in that kind of thing. She spoke too humbly of her attempts, and assented so cheerfully to all his views of what was worth doing in art. But for a strong vein of artistic faculty in her composition, she must long ago have been discouraged and have given up even amusing herself with sketching from nature. Castledine was quite incompetent to direct her, or to estimate what she did. Convinced that his own genius would display itself in grand subjects on big canvases, he had got into the habit of slighting all work of modest aim and dimensions. Now and then,

asked to look at some drawing which his wife had finished, he said: "Pretty—very pretty"; and she, who was the real artist, bowed her head to the dictum of the pretender, in whose future, by force of love, she firmly believed.

Evil promptings came into his mind. He felt a preposterous jealousy. Yes, that was why he had allowed Banks to think him the artist of the water-colours; he could not bear to become altogether insignificant, subordinate even to his wife. Had the great picture received a modicum of praise, he could have told the truth about the little drawings. But self-esteem held his tongue, and minute after minute went by—and the lie was irrevocable, or seemed so.

He wandered some distance into the country, and did not return home till an hour after sunset.

His wife was waiting anxiously. Long ago the children lay in bed. She was alone, and troubled because of the strange way in which her joyful news had been received. Being a woman of clear enough judgment in most things, she divined the astonishing truth that her husband was a little envious of the success that had come to her, whilst he laboured year after year without a gleam of encouragement. How was such feeling compatible with the love she always recognized in him? But men were singular beings, especially those blest or cursed with genius.

Castledine entered silently, fatigued and miserable. Wisely, his wife did not constrain him to talk. She set his accustomed supper of warm

bread and milk before him, and waited patiently. When he had eaten, he allowed his hand to be taken and caressed; and of a sudden remorseful tenderness subdued him.

"Hilda, I have behaved like a blackguard——"

"Nonsense, dear!"

"Oh, but wait! I'm going to tell you something disgraceful. I can't look you in the face, but I must tell you."

He began to unburden his conscience. With red cheeks, burning ears, and eyes like those of a dog conscious of wrongdoing, he half explained how he had been led into deceit. Yet did not tell the whole truth; could not, though aware that what he concealed was the better part of his excuse. He found it impossible to avow that Banks had not a word of commendation for the big picture. Partly to relieve his confusion, and in part because she was really anxious, before discussing the other matter, to know the judgment of such a man as Banks on the work with which all their hopes were connected, Hilda asked:

"But what did he say that so discouraged you?"

"Oh, he didn't discourage me," replied her husband, with nervous impatience. "He talked about the difficulties I must be finding—in such a little studio, you know. I could see that he didn't quite trust himself to speak decidedly about figure painting. He has never done anything but landscape, and so it was natural. He didn't discourage me in the least!"

"Did he like the attitude of Joseph?"

"Yes, he liked that. I saw he was impressed by that," stammered Castledine; "and the grouping in general, and the scheme of colour. Don't think for a moment, Hilda, that he discouraged me. But what a blackguard you must think me to go and——"

She kept silence.

"I shall write to Banks," he continued, "and make a clean breast of it. I can't help what he thinks. He shall know that I deceived him."

"But, Horace, you say you didn't actually tell him that the drawings were your work——?"

"No. I only allowed him to suppose it."

"Then why need you do anything at all?"

He glanced at her, and Hilda's eyes fell, a slight colour mantling in her cheeks.

In the first moment she had felt ashamed of what he had done, and very uneasy about the position in which it placed them. The shame still troubled her, but she deemed it so impossible for Horace to go through the humiliation of confessing a lie—the consequence of which might even be a lasting detriment to him—that in a flash her mind had contrived how to cloak the deception by continuing it. What woman has the courage to bid her husband face a mortifying ordeal in the cause of truth, especially when the result of such ordeal will be to glorify herself at his expense? Of a sudden her countenance changed; she laughed, and began to speak as if the matter were trifling.

"Now, what a good thing that I didn't tell Mr Merriman! Let the drawings go without a name. No, no; better still! They shall be signed 'H. Castledine'; that's my name, and yours as well!"

Hope began to brighten the listener's face, but for very decency he made a show of resistance.

"I can't allow it, Hilda! I've suffered too much already for cheating you of your praise. And think, we shall be only too glad to sell as many drawings as you can make. How is it possible to keep up such a deception for ever?"

"For ever?" she laughed with mirthful mockery. "As if we should be long in difficulties! Why, you will have finished your picture in a few months, and then we shall have no more trouble. You don't imagine that these little sketches are really important enough to be talked about? Let us sell as many as we can; they won't please for very long, and in a year or two no one will remember them."

"But it's a monstrous shame——"

"Nonsense! Now go on steadily with your work, and let me draw away whilst the summer lasts. We'll send some of the sketches to London, and see if dealers will buy them. And, you know, Mr Merriman has promised to take more of them. As if it mattered, Horace! Husband and wife are one, I hope!"

And so, in spite of her conscience, Hilda settled the question. On the morrow, Castledine forced himself to resume painting with a semblance of

confident zeal. The ten guineas would go a long way, and with their help he was soon able to believe that Godfrey Banks knew less than nothing about the higher walks of art.

He prided himself upon the slowness with which he worked. " All great works of art," he was wont to say, " take a long time." It often happened that he sat through a whole morning merely gazing at his canvas; Leonardo, he reminded Hilda, had the same habit. This mental labour exhausted him, and, for a day or two after, he found it necessary to read novels, or wander with his children about the fields. Of late he had been earning a little money as a teacher of drawing; but this employment was degrading; it always made him incapable of handling a brush for the next twenty-four hours.

About a week after the visit of the landscape painter, there arrived the drawing promised in exchange for that he took away. Of course it was a delightful bit of work. Castledine remarked, " Pretty—very pretty," and paid no more attention; but Hilda kept it before her for days, studying and profiting by its masterly characteristics.

The water-colours sent up to London were readily sold. With this resource before her, Hilda was relieved from any necessity of applying again to Mr Merriman. Conducting business by correspondence, Horace could sign himself simply " H. Castledine," and needed not to state that he was the artist. But one day towards the end of October a carriage stopped before the house, and

Hilda, at the window, was alarmed by seeing the connoisseur from Wells alight and approach. She rushed upstairs to her husband, spoke a few words of agitated surprise, and ran down again to answer the knock at the door.

Mr Merriman was past middle age, lean, tall, grave of aspect. On seeing Hilda, he for an instant looked puzzled; it was plain that he remembered her. But without reference to their former meeting, he explained, in very pleasant tones, that he wished to see Mr Castledine, of whom he had recently heard in a conversation with Mr Godfrey Banks the painter. Leaving him in the parlour, Hilda again hurried upstairs.

"You must come!" she whispered, trying her best to look as if she enjoyed the joke. "Mr Banks has sent him here. He knew me again. You must say that I took the water-colours to sell without your knowledge."

"But how can I——?"

"Of course you can, for it's the truth. Say you had thought very little of them—were absorbed in your great picture, and that we were dreadfully short of money just then. Do, do be careful!"

Mr Merriman stayed for more than an hour. Less conscious than Banks, he did not allow himself to be struck dumb by the sight of "Joseph of Arimathæa," but found something to say which, though it meant little enough, was balm to Castledine's feelings. Naturally, however, he kept conversation as much as possible to the subject of water-colours. Horace had little difficulty

in following his wife's instructions; when he told the story of Hilda's visit to Wells, the connoisseur showed himself relieved from an embarrassment.

"I had made up my mind," he said, "that the lady was herself the artist, though it was difficult to account for her not being willing to admit it. When Banks happened to bring out the drawing you gave him, I recognized the workmanship at once, but something of the mystery still remained. I'm not sure," he added, laughing, "that I didn't begin to think of larceny."

Horace joined in the laugh with great heartiness, and thereupon Mrs Castledine was summoned up to the studio. Mr Merriman repeated his laudation of the water-colours, and appeared so taken up with them that only at the moment of leaving was he obliged to invent a few more phrases for "Joseph" and the "Holy Thorn." To these words Hilda listened eagerly, and they sufficed to inspirit her. When the visitor was gone, she talked exultantly about the painting, and, with her husband's help, avoided a syllable of reference to the imposture which had again been successfully practised.

III

In one sense Hilda Castledine did not underestimate her work; for the last year she had been conscious of great improvements, and at times it disappointed her that Horace seemed not to recognize this advance. She had explained his indifference by humbly admitting to herself that after all

she remained an amateur—the kind of person especially distasteful to artists of strong individuality. But this excuse was no longer valid; her work had a market value, and that owing to no sensational qualities, to no passing fancy of the public, but in virtue of simple merits which make their claim felt wherever men are capable of recognizing true art. When it was necessary to speak of the matter with her husband, she still used a slighting tone; but her eyes were opened, and she saw, among other things, that Horace had either been insincere with her or was lacking in judgment. This consciousness became a fixed trouble, and blended with the self-reproach due to the falsehood she had undertaken to support.

That perfect harmony which had reigned in the little household was gravely disturbed. Castledine could no longer work; when he shut himself into the studio it was only because he grew ashamed of open idling. He knew that Mr Merriman's encouragement meant nothing; Banks's silent criticism sank deeper and deeper into his mind. A process of disillusion was hastened by the moral imbroglio into which he had slipped. In spite of conceit, he was anything but a man of lax principles; prior to that hapless day of Banks's visit he had never been guilty of grave untruth. But, as generally happens, harassment of material cares had weakened his character and prepared him for yielding to temptation. Already he had begun to regard his picture with secret uneasiness, to weary of the great task; left to himself he would

probably have abandoned "Joseph of Arimathæa" and, in face of financial trials, either have seriously taken up the profession of drawing master, or have returned to his old business. Now he could neither renounce his labour nor pursue it. A sense of shame constantly haunted him—shame at being supported by his wife, shame at taking the credit due to her, shame at his own futility. Even the hours spent with his children were spoilt; he no longer had that pure joy in their affection which used to be the best element of his life.

It was significant that Hilda had ceased to sit with him in the studio. When working at home, she retired to her bedroom—not venturing to use the parlour lest her occupation should be observed. Even from the children she began to conceal, as far as possible, her artistic pursuits; they might speak to strangers, and, worse still, they might in future years conceive suspicions affecting their father's honesty. Every day she said to herself that the life of falsehood to which she was committed must not last long.

That she was living thus resulted from her own lack of firmness; it was she who had withheld Horace from an avowal of his fault. She admitted it, lamented it, and understood the disastrous results for which she was responsible. At the same time she blamed Horace—even though her heart loathed and utterly rejected the idea of doing so.

Her faith in him had suffered a blow from which it would not recover. This, too, she did

her best to deny; but no effort enabled her to talk with him of his work as formerly. She saw that on his side there existed a corresponding unwillingness; this relieved her from a painful endeavour, but otherwise only intensified the moral disease she had contracted.

One natural result of her artistic success was the development of an ambition which hitherto had taken only the lowliest forms. Formerly she cared for no approval but her husband's, and when even this was denied she could recompense herself with the happiness of home. Now it cost her a continual struggle to repress the impulses which signified that she was something more than wife and mother. Her gifts had ripened; a long, patient apprenticeship was over, and but for unfriendly circumstances she would have hastened to enlarge her experience amid nobler scenes. The simple lowland landscape no longer satisfied her. Of this, however, she must not speak, must not even think. Had she not doomed her art to eventual sterility? Impossible to continue for a lifetime secretly producing work which admirers and purchasers would attribute to Horace. Even if her nature were equal to the strain, it was obvious that discovery and disgrace must sooner or later befall the perpetrators of so singular a fraud.

In seeking to defend Horace from the results of puerile falsehood, she had sacrificed a future rich in the happiest possibilities for herself, her husband, and her children.

Mr Merriman invited them to spend a day with him at Wells, that they might see his pictures. The children would accompany them. All arrangements were made, and a fine morning summoned them to set forth early; but at the last moment Hilda declared that she did not feel well enough to go.

For several days she had been troubled with a cold caught in damp fields; it seemed better, but a sleepless night had dispirited her, and she could not endure the thought of practising deceit in return for their friend's kindness.

"My head is too bad," she professed, when Horace went to speak with her in private.

"That's a pretence," was his impatient answer. "Why couldn't you say before that you had rather not go?"

"You will be far more at ease without me, Horace."

He turned away, with difficulty refraining from an outburst of anger. It was very rarely indeed that they spoke to each other in any voice but that of affection; at present, both felt irritable, and desired to be apart. Horace moved towards the door, but perverse feeling got the upper hand with him.

"If this is how you are going to behave," he exclaimed suddenly, "why did you prevent me from having done with lies when I wished to?"

They could not face each other. Hilda trembled from head to foot, and her tongue retorted in spite of her will:

"Why did you make it necessary for me to save you from shame?"

He hastened out of the room and out of the house. Hearing the front door close, Hilda all but sprang forward to recall him. The children, running in with anxious questions, helped her to resist the impulse.

"Mother isn't well enough to go, my darlings," she said, taking them in her arms. "Father must go alone, and you shall stay to keep me company."

She shed a few tears, but presently commanded herself, and turned to the common duties of the house. Evidently Horace had gone. There was a fear in her mind lest he should resolve on some act of expiation—such as confessing his fault to Mr Merriman: but it seemed unlikely; he had not enough force of character. The depreciatory thought afflicted her; she spent a day of struggle with her emotions, and determined that this first scene of discord should also be the last. Rather than the peace of their home should be marred, she would support every trial. On his return, Horace should find her with the old face of tender welcome. It was she who had done the worse wrong; she must atone for it by self-denial, by cheerful devotion, and hope that some escape from the consequences of their weakness might soon be discoverable.

Castledine was back again at four in the afternoon. He came in anxious and shamefaced, not ill-tempered. The reception that awaited him, though not unlooked for, brought tears to his eyes.

" A letter has come for you," said Hilda, when they had exchanged words of forgiveness.

" Who's this from, I wonder? "

It proved to be an offer of the post of drawing-master at a boarding-school in the neighbourhood. This was no surprise, for the father of Horace's pupil had already suggested the possibility of his filling a position left vacant at the summer holidays. The demand upon his time would be only two hours a week, and the payment of corresponding slightness.

" I shall take it," he announced with an air of resignation. " Curious that this should come today; I have a promise of two other private pupils. On the way home I met Mr Brownson, and he recommended me to call on a friend of his who had two little girls to be taught drawing. I shall take that too."

And with a sigh he stared at the ceiling.

The Mr Brownson in question was their only acquaintance at Glastonbury. They had known him for a month or two. People of education who choose (or are compelled) to live in a peasant's cottage, will never have any difficulty in avoiding intercourse with the better class folk of their neighbourhood; an anomalous position is a safeguard against the attentions of country society. But for this isolation, Hilda could hardly have entertained the thought of passing off her own drawings as her husband's. It looked now as if their connexions were likely to extend; and herefrom might result new anxieties.

"I have something else to tell you," said Castledine, presently, in a tone that suggested grave deliberation. "For the present—just for the present only—I think I shall put the 'Joseph' aside."

Hilda listened breathlessly; she could find nothing to say, and after a short silence her husband proceeded:

"The fact of the matter is, I have attempted something—not beyond my strength, but impossible in my situation. There's no finishing a picture of that size in such a studio. Merriman thinks I have done wonders—all things considered. But miracles are not in my power. I must wait till we have a larger house."

"I am sure that is wise," Hilda murmured, consolingly.

"If you really think so, that settles it. For the present, 'Joseph' must stand aside. I shall get a small canvas, and begin at the 'King Alfred.' Won't that be better? I mentioned the thing to Merriman, and he seemed to be much interested. But I tell you what, Hilda: it's not only a larger studio that I need; I'm afraid I'm rusting in this out-of-the-world place."

"Yes—I, too, have had that fear," she assented with much readiness. "I am sure it would be better for you to be in a town—if we could only manage it!"

"We must plan it somehow. Yes, I am decidedly rusting; that's the explanation of the dull, tired feeling I have had for a long time. The fact

of the matter is, if I can't live by my painting, I must be content to give up a part of each day to lessons. It's a wretched necessity, but then it's better than having to give up art altogether,—isn't it? If I had to do that, it would be all over with me, you know."

He looked at her very gravely, a pathetic wrinkle on his brow.

Hilda made up her mind that the project of leaving Glastonbury should be carried out, and before very long. But for what had befallen, the lanes and fields and water-courses in their autumnal colouring would have afforded her calm delight, and have supplied infinite material for her pencil. But that was all over; she feared the thoughts that were suggested by every favourite nook or view. The renunciation on which she had resolved, if possible at all, would only be so amid strange surroundings—all the better if remote from natural beauty. In a town she might perhaps forget the misery of frustrated impulses.

Horace procured the small canvas, and transferred to it the outlines of a drawing which he had prepared and laid aside more than a year ago. But he got no further than this. Distaste for the subject speedily assailed him; he mooned about his little room or slipped away in truancy, or else declared that the skies were too gloomy for painting, and amused himself with his children. Hilda had entirely ceased her water-colour work, and no remark on the subject ever passed between them. Meanwhile, she was corresponding with

a married sister who lived in the north, trying to discover if Horace could hope for employment as a teacher in that town. The undertaking seemed feasible. She succeeded, moreover, in borrowing a sum of money to meet the expenses of removal and settlement. Thereupon it was decided that they should quit Glastonbury at Christmas.

Castledine brightened wonderfully at the prospect of change. He began to talk as in the old days, of great achievements that lay before him. Again he assured his little boy and girl that some day their father's name would be rumoured to the ends of the earth—" Like those of Michael Angelo and Raphael." He resumed the satin dressing-gown, of late discarded, and began to make what he called anatomical studies, in charcoal, on huge sheets of paper. The packing of his " Joseph of Arimathæa " occupied him for many days; so precious a canvas must not be exposed to risk in the removal.

And as for his wife, she seemed to have recovered the sweet and placid patience which was always her characteristic. No one divined what lay beneath her tender smile, with its touch of sadness—least of all Horace himself. No one knew of the long sleepless nights when she wept silently over a glorious hope that had come only to vanish. She had her moments of rebellion, but subdued herself by remembering that her own weakness was to blame for these sorrows. An artist no longer, however her artistic soul might

revolt, the duties of wife and mother must suffice for all her energies, and supply all her happiness.

Then she packed away her colours and sketch-books—it was once for all. She never drew again and never again looked at the accumulated work which was her preparation for a futile success.

IV

In the bar parlour of one of those comfortable little inns (not hotels, and still less gin-shops) which are yet discoverable if you seek far enough from London, destroyer of all simple ease, three men were sitting. It was New Year's Eve. At this hour, past ten o'clock, the streets of the market town had fallen into stillness; the house itself was very quiet, only an occasional laugh, or a voice raised in seasonable greeting, came from the bar. For more than five minutes the three men had kept silence. Two sat by the fire, with long clay pipes in hand, and glasses reachable on the mantelpiece; they were middle-aged, and by their dress seemed to be well-doing tradesmen. The third leaned back in a corner, his arms crossed, his head bent; he too wore broadcloth, but it had seen more than fair service. His plain and not very intelligent face declared an uneasy mind, and thin straggling hair of unusual length heightened the woe-begone effect of his general appearance.

One of his companions turned to look at him, and said in a friendly voice:

"Rather quiet to-night, Mr Castledine?"

He nodded and sighed, but made no other answer.

"Let's hope that 1890 will treat us better than 1889 has done," continued the other, cheeringly. "Won't do, you know, to begin the New Year in low spirits. Never meet trouble half-way."

Castledine let his arms fall, looked into his empty glass, and said in a husky voice:

"I've had a shock to-day."

"Sorry to hear that. How was it?"

The third man had turned his head in curiosity. For a moment Castledine glanced from one to the other, seeming to hesitate; then he changed his position, stroked his stubbly chin, coughed, and began to speak with an air of impressiveness.

"I went to call upon Sir William Barnard."

A pause invited the hearers to look surprised or respectful.

"I have no personal acquaintance with him, but I had my reasons for thinking that he might be disposed to recommend me a pupil or two. It isn't my habit, you know, to trouble people with this kind of application, but just at present I have to stir myself. Things are dull in my profession."

"Like in every other," remarked the man hitherto silent.

"I fear so. Well, Sir William was at home, and he received me without a minute's delay. I explained to him who I was and what I wanted. He looked at me with a good deal of interest and said, 'Mr Castledine, your name is familiar to me. Are you a landscape-painter?' I answered that

in days gone by I had done a little work of that kind, and he looked still more interested. 'I see from your card,' he said, 'that your first initial is H. Now I have two little water-colours, bits of Somerset landscape, which I prize very highly, and they are both signed H. Castledine. Are they your work, I wonder?' 'Yes, Sir William,' I answered, 'I have no doubt they are.' At that he was really delighted, and asked me at once to come into Lady Barnard's boudoir and look at the drawings. And there they hung—my work of just twenty years ago!"

His voice sank mournfully. He shook his head, sighed, and watched the faces of the listeners, who knew not what to say.

"I'm a victim of circumstances," he continued in a moment, "if ever man was. It puzzles you, no doubt, that I should once have done great things, and yet at my age, only fifty, be nothing but an obscure drawing master. You don't understand the artist's nature. You can't imagine how completely an artist is at the mercy of circumstances."

Assuredly the worthy men had but slight understanding of these things. They exchanged a glance, muttered "Ah!" and still listened.

"I told my story to Sir William, and he was deeply moved—deeply moved. He said he would exert himself to be of use to me."

"Well, that means a good deal, I should think," said one of the hearers. "It ought to have cheered you up."

"Perhaps so; but you don't know what it meant to be reminded of power and reputation that are gone for ever. When I did those two little water-colours, anyone would have said that I had a brighter future than most artists then living. Landscape wasn't really my strong point. I was an Historical painter. I lived at Glastonbury, in Somerset; an out-of-the-way place, if you like; but even there I was sought out by great artists. The late Godfrey Banks—you have heard of him, I hope?—one of the greatest men in the English school, called upon me one day, just to see a picture I was engaged upon. He was astonished at finding me in a little cottage, with nothing but a tiny back bedroom for a studio. 'How's this, Mr Castledine?' he said; 'how can you work under such conditions as these?' 'You may well ask, Mr Banks,' I replied. 'Circumstances, circumstances. Can't afford anything better at present.' He was shocked and angry. You must understand that an artist's reputation doesn't always mean money. My little water-colours sold for just enough to keep me and my family alive; but my great work had to be done very slowly —very slowly. Banks was delighted with what I showed him—a great picture, filling all one side of the room; but it almost brought tears to his eyes to think I should be labouring against such terrible odds."

"Didn't he help you?" was asked.

"Help me, my dear sir? How could he? An artist cannot go round with a hat soliciting alms.

He could only hope that my great picture might soon be finished, and sold for a satisfactory price. But it was never to be finished!"

"Why not?"

"It's very difficult to explain an artist's obstacles. But, from the first, circumstances were against me. I married at two-and-twenty—a rash, indeed a fatal, step. I encumbered myself with a wife and family (though the best wife and the sweetest children that man ever had) at an age when I ought, above everything, to have been independent—free to travel, to study. Already I had overtaxed my health in working at art when circumstances compelled me to earn a living in other ways. And whilst at Glastonbury my strength and spirits were so completely shattered that—well, well, I don't like to speak of it. Would you believe that my poor wife had to go and sell her watch to provide us with food? That," he added, quickly, "was before I had found out that my water-colours would sell. I thought so little of them. And now two of them are hanging in Lady Barnard's boudoir, together with a Millet and a Turner and other masterpieces! Yes, a victim of circumstances, if ever man was!"

His companions kept a sympathetic silence.

"We left Glastonbury; but ill-luck followed us. I had to toil as a drawing master, and before long my artistic faculty deserted me—crushed out by hard circumstances. Four years later my wife died—of a fever she caught in dirty lodgings at the seaside. The noblest wife that ever man had!"

A tear ran down his cheek. " I was left with the two children—a boy and a girl. My son would have been a great painter. At twelve years old he had done astonishing things. But he died at fourteen, after a dreadful illness—poor, dear little lad! And my poor, dear little girl married a blackguard—a blackguard, who took her off to the colonies, and makes her life so miserable that I dread to have a letter from her, though she does her best to put a good face on things, poor child! All of us, victims of circumstances."

He stood up, turned aside to blow his nose and wipe his cheeks, and began to move towards the door. Before going forth, he faced his companions again, and said hoarsely:

" Gentlemen, I wish you a Happy New Year! "

From "A Victim of Circumstances"

AN INSPIRATION

ABOUT six o'clock, just as Harvey Munden came to the end of his day's work, and grew aware that he was hungry, some one knocked at the outer door—a timid knock, signalling a person of no importance. He went to open, and saw a man whose face he remembered.

"What is it this time?" he asked good-humouredly.

"Well, sir, I should like, if you will allow me, to draw your attention to an ingenious little contrivance—an absolute cure for smoky chimneys."

The speaker seemed to be about forty; he was dressed with painful neatness, every article of his clothing, from hat to boots, exhibiting some trace of repair. He stood with his meagre form respectfully bent, on his drawn features a respectful smile, and prepared to open a small hand-bag—so strikingly new that it put its bearer to shame. Harvey Munden observed him, listened to his exposition, and said at length:

"When do you knock off work?"

"Well, sir, this is probably my last call to-day."

"Come in for a minute, then. I should like to have a talk with you."

Respectfully acquiescent, the man stepped forward into the comfortable sitting-room, which he

surveyed with timid interest. His host gave him a chair by the fireside, and induced him to talk of his efforts to make a living. Brightened by the cheeriness of the surroundings, and solaced by an unwonted sympathy, the hapless struggler gave a very simple and very lamentable account of himself. For years he had lived on the petty commission of petty sales, sometimes earning two or three shillings a day, but more often reckoning the total in pence.

"I'm one of those men, sir, that weren't made to get on in the world. As a lad, I couldn't stick to anything—couldn't seem to put my heart into any sort of work, and that was the ruin of me—for I had chances to begin with. I've never done anything to be ashamed of—unless it's idleness."

"You are not married?"

His eyes fell, and his smile faded; he shook his head. The other watched him for a moment.

"Will you tell me your name? Mine is Munden."

"Nangle, sir—Laurence Nangle."

"Well, Mr Nangle, will you come and dine with me?"

Abashed and doubtful, the man drew his legs further beneath the chair and twisted his hat. There needed some pressure before he could bring himself to accept the invitation; improbable as it seemed, he was genuinely shy; his stammered phrases and a slight flush on his cheeks gave proof of it.

They descended together to the street, and

Munden called a hansom; ten minutes' drive brought them to the restaurant, where the host made choice of a retired corner, and quietly gave his directions. Nangle's embarrassment being still very observable, Munden tried to put him at ease by talking as to any ordinary acquaintance, of the day's news, of the commonest topics. It was not possible to explain himself to his guest, to avow the thought which had prompted this eccentric behaviour; Nangle could not but regard him with a certain uneasiness and suspicion; but by dint of persistence in cheerful gossip he gradually fixed the smile upon the face of his shabby companion, and prepared him to do justice to the repast.

Failure in that respect would not have been due to lack of appetite. When soup was set before him Nangle's lips betrayed their watery eagerness; his eyes rolled in the joy of anticipation. Obviously restraining himself, and anxious not to discredit his host by any show of ill-breeding, he ate with slow decorum—though his handling of the spoon obeyed nature rather than the higher law. Having paused for a moment to answer some remark of Munden's, he was dismayed by the whisking away of his plate.

"But—I—I hadn't finished——"

The waiter could not be called back, and Munden, by treating the incident jocosely, made it contribute to his guest's equanimity. When wine was poured out for him Nangle showed a joyous suffusion over all his changing countenance; he

drew a deep breath, quivered at the lips, and straightened himself.

"Mr Munden"—this when he had drunk a glass—"it is years since I tasted wine. And ah! how it does one good! What medicine is like it?"

"None that I know of," jested Harvey, "though I've had wine uncommonly like medicine."

Nangle laughed for the first time—a most strange laugh, suggesting that he had lost the habit, and could not hit a natural note. Feeling the first attempt to be a failure, he tried again, and his louder voice frightened him into silence.

"What is your opinion?" asked Munden, smiling at this bit of character. "Is it possible for a shy man to overcome the failing, with plenty of practice?"

"Do you ask that because of anything you have noticed in me?"

"Well, yes. It rather surprises me, after all your experience, that you are still unhardened. How do you manage to call at people's houses and face all sorts of——"

"Ah! you may well ask! Mr Munden, it's a daily death to me; I assure you it is. I often stand at a door shaking and trembling, and can scarcely speak when it opens. I'm the last man to succeed in this kind of thing; I do it because I can't do anything else. But it's awful, Mr Munden, awful; and I get no better. I know men who never feel it; they'd laugh in my face if I spoke of such a

thing. But all my life I've suffered from want of self-confidence. If it hadn't been for that——"

He broke off to help himself from a dish offered at his shoulder. The waiter's proximity startled him, and for a few moments he ate in silence—ate with manifest hunger, which he did not try to disguise; for the influences of the fortunate hour had warmed his heart and were giving him courage. Munden set a fair example, himself no despicable trencherman. After an *entrée* of peculiar savour, Nangle found it impossible to restrain his feelings.

"I never in all my life ate anything so good," he murmured across the table.

Munden observed the growth of a new man, born of succulent food and generous wine. The characteristics of the individual thus called into being promised amusement; it was clear that they would be amiable and not unrefined. Semi-starvation and a hated employment had not corrupted the original qualities of Laurence Nangle; rather, these qualities had been frozen over, and so preserved. They were now rapidly thawing, and the process, painful to him at first, grew so enjoyable that delight beamed from his eyes.

At dessert he talked without self-consciousness, and was led into reminiscence. Munden had chanced to mention that he was a Yorkshireman.

"And so am I!" exclaimed Nangle; "so am I. But I came away when I was a little lad, and I've never been there since. Do you know Colchester? That's where I grew up and was educated. I hadn't a bad education; most men would

have made more use of it. But something happened when I was a young man—it seemed to floor me, and I've never quite got over it."

"A love affair, I dare say?"

Nangle looked away and slowly nodded several times. Then he drank with deliberation, and smacked his lips. A glow was deepening on his hollow cheeks.

"Yes, you are right. I could tell you a strange thing that happened to me only a few days ago. But, first of all, I should like to know—*why* did you ask me to dine with you?"

"Oh, an inspiration."

"You thought I looked hungry. Yes, so I was; and the dinner has done me good. I feel better than I have done for years—for years. I could tell you a strange thing——"

He paused, a shade of troublous agitation passing over the gleam of his countenance. After waiting for a moment Munden asked whether he smoked.

"When I can afford it, which isn't very often."

They rose and went to the smoking-room. Nangle's step had the lightness, the spring of recovered youth. He selected a cigar with fastidious appreciation: buoyantly he declared for cognac with the coffee. And presently the stream of his talk flowed on.

"Yes, I had a very good education at a private school—a commercial school. You don't know Colchester? I went into the office of a wool-stapler—Cliffe was his name; our best friend, and

always very kind to me. I didn't get on very well —never was such a fellow for making mistakes and forgetting addresses, and so on. I was an idle young dog, but I meant well—I assure you I meant well. And Mr Cliffe seemed to like me, and asked me to his house the same as before. I wish he hadn't; I should have done better if he'd been a little hard with me. He had a daughter— Ah, well; you begin to see. When I was one-and-twenty, she was nineteen, and we fell in love with each other. We used to meet in a quiet place just outside the town—you don't know Colchester, or I could tell you the spot. I happened to be down there a year or two ago, and I went and sat in the old place for a whole day. Ah, well!— Lucy Cliffe; I've only to say the name, and I go back—back—— It makes me young again."

His eyes grew fixed; the hand in which he held his cigar fell. A deep sigh, and he continued:

"I believe her father would have helped us, one way or another; but Mrs Cliffe spoilt all. When it came out, there was a fearful to-do. Lucy was what you may call rich; at all events, she'd be left comfortably off some day. As for me— what prospects had I? Mr Cliffe talked kindly to me, but he had to send me away. He got me a place in London. Lucy wrote me a letter before I went, and said she must obey her parents. We were like each other in that: soft, both of us; hadn't much will of our own. And so we never saw each other again—not till a few days ago."

"She married some one else, no doubt?"

"Yes, she did. And I knew all about it, worse luck; I'd rather have lost sight of her altogether. She married the brother of a friend of mine; well, not a friend, but an acquaintance, who was in London when I came, twenty years ago. She married three years after our parting, and I've heard of her from James Dunning (that's her brother-in-law's name) off and on ever since. I used to have a good opinion of Dunning, but I know better now. He's a rough, selfish brute!"

The last words were uttered with startling vehemence. Nangle clenched his fist, and sat stiffly, quivering with excitement. Munden subdued a smile.

"A long time back, nearly four years, this fellow Dunning told me that his brother had just died. Lucy was left with her daughter, the only child she'd had; and they lived at Ipswich. Since then, I've met Dunning only once or twice, and when I asked him about Lucy, he just said she was going on as usual, or supposed she was. He told a lie, and I half guess the reason of it. The other day—do you know Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town? You've heard of it. Well, I was going along Prince of Wales Road, in the usual business way, and I knocked at the door of a largish, respectable-looking house. The minute I'd knocked the door opened; it was a lady just coming out—dressed in black. She looked at me, and I looked at her. I had a queer feeling, and there seemed to be something of the same on her side. I was just going to say something, when

she asked me who it was I wished to see. I had only to hear her voice, and I knew I wasn't mistaken. But I didn't dare to speak; I stood staring at her, and she stood just as still. At last I somehow got out a word—'I think you are Mrs Dunning?'—'And you,' she said, all of a tremble, 'you are Laurence Nangle.' Then she turned round to the door, and asked me to come in. And we sat down in a dining-room, and began to talk. You can't imagine how I felt. It was like talking in a dream; I didn't know what I said. Lucy hadn't altered very much—nothing like as much as I should have expected in twenty years. She seemed so young I could hardly believe it. Of course she's only about thirty-eight, and has lived all her life in comfort. But it's wonderful she should have known *me*, after all I've gone through. I must seem more like sixty than forty——"

"Not at present," remarked the listener. And truly, for the warm, animated face before him was that of a comparatively young man.

"Well, I felt bitterly ashamed of myself, dressed as I was, and peddling from house to house. She kept staring at me, as if she couldn't get over her astonishment. Had she never heard of me? I asked. Yes, she had, every now and then. James Dunning had told her I was a commercial traveller, or something of that kind. Then I asked if she was living here, in Kentish Town. Yes, she was; with James Dunning and his wife. 'And your daughter as well?' I asked. Then she began

to cry, and told me her daughter had been dead for nearly two years, and she was quite alone, but for the Dunnings, who were very kind to her. She had come to live with them after her daughter's death. And she told me her husband had left her very well off, but what was the use of it when all her family was gone?—And just then we were disturbed by some one coming into the room; a flashy sort of young woman, I guessed her to be Dunning's wife, and I was right. Lucy —I can't help calling her Lucy—stood up, and looked nervous; and of course I stood up too. 'I didn't know anyone was here,' said her sister-in-law, looking very hard at me. 'It's some one I used to know,' said Lucy. 'Oh, then I won't intrude.'—Lucy couldn't say any more. She was ashamed of me, after all. But I felt a good deal more ashamed of myself, and I choked something about being in a hurry, and got out of the room. Neither of them tried to stop me. When I'd let myself out at the front door, I walked off like a madman, running into people because I didn't see them, and talking to myself, and going on straight ahead, till I came to my senses somewhere out Hampstead way."

"I hope that isn't the end of the story," said Munden, as he cut the tip of a second cigar.

"I only wish it was," returned his guest, frowning and straightening himself as before. "Now, you know something about me, Mr Munden—I mean, you can form some notion of the man I am from what I have told you. And

do you think that I could do such a mean thing as go to that lady—her I call Lucy, for old-time sake—in the hope of getting money from her? Do you believe it of me? "

"Assuredly not."

"I thank you for your saying so. It came about like this. I did a foolish thing. Two days after that meeting I had to be in Kentish Town again, and late in the evening I passed near Prince of Wales Road. Well, I was tempted. I couldn't resist the wish to go by that house where she lives. And when I got near it, in the dark, I stood still; some one was playing a piano inside, and I thought it might be Lucy. I stood for a minute or two—and all at once a man came up from behind me and stared in my face. James Dunning it was. 'Halloa!' he said. 'Then it *is* you, Nangle. I just thought it might be. And what are you doing here?' I couldn't understand his way of speaking, and I hadn't any words ready. 'Now, look here, Nangle,' he went on, drawing me away by the arm; 'you've found out that my sister-in-law is living with us. I didn't want you to know, because I couldn't trust you, and after what happened the day before yesterday I see I was right. Of course they told me. Now I want you to understand that my sister-in-law can't be troubled in this way. I suppose you're spying here on the chance that she may come out; I'm glad I happened to find you at it. If you're in low water I don't mind lending you half-a-crown, but you'll keep out of Prince of Wales Road, or

I shall know how to deal with you.' There, that's what he said to me. I wasn't man enough to strike him as I ought to have done; I've always been poor-spirited. I just told him in a few hot words what I thought of his behaviour, and went off, feeling devilish miserable, I can assure you."

Munden reflected. There was silence for a little.

"Do you suppose," asked the host at length, "that Mrs Dunning—the widowed lady—regarded you with any such suspicion?"

"Not for one moment," cried Nangle.

"No, and isn't it possible that you misunderstood her when you thought she was ashamed of you? From what you have told me of her character——"

"Yes," interrupted the other eagerly, "no doubt I was wrong in that. She felt like I did—a sort of shame, a sort of awkwardness; but if I had stayed she'd have got over it. I'm sure she would. I was a fool to bolt like that. It gave James Dunning's wife a chance of thinking of me as her husband does. It's all my fault."

"And another thing. You take it for granted that James Dunning accused you of wanting to beg or borrow from his sister-in-law. Doesn't it occur to you that he might be afraid of something else—something more serious from his point of view?"

"I don't quite understand."

"Why, suppose that when the widowed lady talked to him about you she showed a good deal more interest in you than James Dunning ap-

proved? Suppose she even asked for your address, or something of that kind?"

Nangle fixed a gaze on the speaker. His eyes widened to express an agitating thought.

"You think—that—is possible?"

"Well, not impossible."

"And that fellow—is afraid—Lucy might——"

"Precisely. In all likelihood that would be very disagreeable to Mr and Mrs James Dunning. She is a widow in easy circumstances, without children, without near relatives——"

"You are right!" murmured Nangle slowly. "I see it now. That's why he has been afraid of me. And he must have had some reason. Perhaps she has spoken of me. It seems impossible—after all these years——"

He sank back, and stared into vacancy with glowing eyes.

"In your position," said Munden, "I should take an early opportunity of revisiting Prince of Wales Road."

"How *can* I? Think of my poverty! How can you advise such a thing?"

"It behoves you," continued the other, with much gravity, "to clear your character in the eyes of that lady. In justice to yourself——"

"Again you are right! I will go to-morrow."

"It seems to me that this is a case for striking while the iron is hot. It's now only eight o'clock, and give me leave to say that you will never be so able to justify yourself as this evening. A hansom will take you to Kentish Town in half an hour."

Nangle started up—the picture of radiant resolve.

"I have just half-a-crown in my pocket, and that's how I'll use it! Thank you! You have made me see things in a new light. I feel another man! And if I find that what you hinted at is really the case, shall I hesitate out of false shame? Which is better for Lucy: to live with those people, always feeling sad and lonesome, or to find a real home with the man she loved when she was a girl—the man who has loved her all his life?"

"Bravo! This is the right—the heroic vein."

In five minutes they had quitted the restaurant. They found a hansom, and, as he leapt into it, Nangle shouted gallantly to the driver: "Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town!" Impossible to recognize the voice which but two hours since had murmured respectfully at Harvey Munden's door. "Come and see me to-morrow," Munden called to him, and a hand waved from the starting cab.

Munden was entertained, and something more. Partly out of kindness, in part from curiosity, he had given a good dinner to a poor devil oppressed with ills; he desired to warm the man's chilly blood and to improve its quality; he wished to study the effects of such stirring influence in this particular case. And it seemed probable that he had achieved a good deal more than the end in view. It might come to pass that a good-humoured jest would change incalculably the course of two lives.

It happened that on the morrow he was obliged to go out of town. On returning late at night he found in his letter-box a hand-delivered note, with the signature, " Laurence Nangle." Only a couple of lines to say that Nangle had called twice, and that he would come again in a day or two. " Yours gratefully," he wrote himself, which possibly signified the news Munden hoped for.

Nearly a week went by, and again at six o'clock Munden was summoned to the door by a knock he recognized. There stood Mr Nangle—*quantum mutatus!* In his hand no commercial bag, but a most respectable umbrella; on his head an irreproachable silk hat; the rest of his equipment in harmony therewith. The disappearance of an uncomely beard had struck a decade from his apparent age; he held himself with a certain modest dignity, and did not shrink from the scrutiny of astonished eyes.

" Come in! Delighted to see you."

He entered, and for a moment seated himself, but his feelings would not allow him to keep a restful position. Starting up again, he exclaimed:

" Mr Munden, what can a man say when he's in debt for all that makes life worth living? "

" It depends whether the creditor is man or woman."

" In my case, it's both. But if it hadn't been for *you*——"

His voice failed him.

" I was right, was I? "

" Yes, you were right. I'll tell you about it. I

got out of the cab at the end of Prince of Wales Road, and walked to the house. I knocked at the door. A servant came, and I told her I wished to see Mrs Dunning—the widow lady. I'd hardly spoken when James Dunning came out of a room; he had heard my voice. 'What's the meaning of this?' he said in his brutal way, pushing up against me. 'Didn't you understand me?' 'Yes, I did, and better than you think. I have come to see a lady who happens to live in your house——' And just then I saw Lucy herself at the back of the hall. I brushed past Dunning, and went right up to her. 'Mrs Dunning, I wish to speak to you. Will you let me? Or do you want me to be turned out of the house like a beggar?' 'No, no!' She was white as a sheet, and held out her hand to me, as if she wanted protection. 'It's all a mistake. You must stay—I want you to stay!' James's wife had come forward, and she was staring at me savagely. 'Where can we talk in private?' I asked; and I didn't let go Lucy's hand. Then, all of a sudden, Dunning turned about; you never saw such a change in a man. 'Why, Lucy, what's the matter? I thought you didn't wish to see Mr Nangle. You've altogether misled us.' I looked at Lucy, and she was going red—and then I saw tears in her eyes. 'Go into the drawing-room, Nangle,' said Dunning. 'It's all a mis-understanding. We must talk it over afterwards.' So I went into the room, and Lucy came after me, and I shut the door——"

He stopped with a choke of emotion.

"Excellent, i' faith," said Munden, beaming.

"Do you suppose," continued the other, gravely, "that I could ever have done that if it hadn't been for your dinner? Never! Never! I should have crept on through my miserable life, and died at last in the workhouse; when all the time there was a woman whose own happiness depended on a bit of courage in me. She'd never have dared to show a will of her own; James Dunning and his wife were too strong for her. Cowards, both of us—but I was the worst. And you put a man's heart into me. Your dinner—your wine—your talk! If I hadn't gone that night, I should never have gone at all—never!

"I knew that."

"But what I can't understand is—*why* did you ask me to dine with you? Why? It's like what they call the finger of Providence."

"Yes. As I told you—it was an inspiration."

From "Human Odds and Ends"

THE JUSTICE AND THE VAGABOND

MR RUTLAND did not feel well this morning. As he dressed, a sense of faintness troubled him, the result, perhaps, of very hot weather in these days of spring. After breakfast he reclined languidly in the study, trying to read. There was no absolute necessity for his going forth; but at eleven he drove into the town to sit with his brother magistrates, preferring the tedium of the court to lonely idleness at home.

His age was about five-and-forty, and to a casual eye he seemed in good health; but certain lines upon his countenance denoted a habit of melancholy musing, and his voice suggested the same. The townspeople, regarding his wealth and social influence, his apparent domestic peace and life of leisure, judged him an enviable man. Mr Rutland saw himself in a very different light, and to-day he suffered especially from the despondence which had weighed upon him for many years.

Born to easy circumstances, he had married at three-and-twenty; six children had been born to him, all daughters, but only three of them survived, the youngest a girl of fifteen. His wife was a woman of narrow mind and strong will; she

ruled him in every detail of his life—unobtrusively, suavely, without suspecting for a moment that the yoke galled him, or anticipating the possibility of conflict between his purpose and hers. Mrs Rutland belonged to a county family, and valued above all things her local prestige: when she went to London it was only to associate with those of her county friends whom fashion had directed townwards; if she took a holiday abroad it was merely for the sake of its retrospective advantages on her return home. She regarded everything from a rigidly provincial point of view. Her daughters were admirably brought up—that is to say, with a conscientiousness which never lost sight of their destiny as county ladies. The father had as little voice in their education as in the daily management of his household. Of him Mrs Rutland expected only that he should exert himself to support the dignity of his name in county circles. To please her, he had twice contested a Parliamentary election, but on both occasions was defeated. Twice he had been mayor of the town in which he owned much property, and near to which he lived. Mrs Rutland viewed this as rather a condescension, but it kept the good man occupied. For the same reason she liked him to discharge his functions as justice of the peace. At her bidding he took part in various local activities: opened flower-shows, presided at important lectures, encouraged movements for the (moderate) benefit of working folk, and so on—all which duties Mr Rutland thoroughly disliked.

But still more did he dislike the shadow of domestic discord, and he knew very well that his independence could only be asserted at the cost of his tranquillity.

All his acquaintances spoke well of him. One or two old friends regretted the lack of energy which frustrated his natural abilities, and wondered that a man so well read, so interesting in private talk, should be content to lead such a humdrum existence. But as to the amiability and generosity of his character opinions never differed. As a magistrate, he enjoyed a reputation for leniency, and the town scamps whom he could not but commit to jail counted on Mr Rutland's compassion when they came out again.

This morning, when he entered the court, a case of assault was being heard. Evidently a paltry matter. The prisoner, a stranger in the town, had obtained work at house-painting, and while thus occupied, an hour or two ago, had got into a quarrel with a loafing fellow, who accused him of some trade irregularity. Losing patience under insult, he knocked the man down, and was forthwith given into the charge of a constable who stood by. Mr Rutland observed the prisoner, and at once felt a peculiar interest in him; face and bearing spoke strongly on the man's behalf; he looked superior to his position, and, though uncomfortable in the present circumstances, was neither shamefaced nor impudent. Aged forty or more, he had a clear brown skin, a bright intelligent eye, and a strong upright figure.

"What's his name?" inquired Mr Rutland, in an undertone, of his neighbour on the bench.

"Henry Goodeve."

"Goodeve—Goodeve——"

Mr Rutland reflected with a puzzled countenance, and again scrutinized the prisoner. At that moment Goodeve's voice was heard in answer to a question. Mr Rutland listened intently, and his features betrayed some strange thought.

A trivial fine was imposed, whereupon the prisoner declared that he had neither money nor money's worth—unless it were the clothing he stood in. He had arrived in the town only yesterday, all but penniless, and this morning had found work. The statement was made with a half-amused air. Moreover, the man's speech made proof that he was no ordinary artisan; his tongue, though not particularly refined, smacked of gentle breeding.

"I shall pay for him," said Mr Rutland privately. "And I must have a word with him out of court."

The prisoner's case was allowed to stand over for half an hour. Led, at Mr Rutland's direction, into a private room, Goodeve saw, to his surprise, that one of the magistrates wished to speak with him.

"May I ask," began the kindly looking gentleman, "whether you were at school at Brockhurst?"

"I was," answered Goodeve with a smile, gazing steadily into the questioner's face. "I left in '62."

"The year before I did. Have you no recollection of me?"

"I'm afraid I haven't. And yet——"

"My name is Rutland—Dick Rutland."

The other slapped his thigh, and broke into words of delighted recognition. Thirty years ago these men were chums inseparable at a boarding-school of good repute. They came from different counties, and did not know each other's kinsfolk; Harry Goodeve was the son of a struggling shopkeeper, and had little to hope for save from his own efforts; while Dick Rutland saw the path of life smooth and pleasant before him. At fifteen Goodeve was put into an office, where he idled and played pranks; at sixteen he went to sea, and from that day to this he had been a cheery vagabond on the face of the earth.

"You must come to my house," said Mr Rutland after a few minutes' talk. "It happens that I am quite alone for a few days; my wife and daughters are in London. Half an hour's walk from here; anyone will show you the way. I shall be at home at half-past one."

"What about my fine?"

"Pooh! We'll soon settle that."

When his Worship reached home he found the vagabond stretched at full length on a shady part of the lawn; a gardener, in doubt as to his assertions, had kept an eye upon the man.

"Is there a pond or stream anywhere about here," Goodeve asked, "where a fellow could have a plunge?"

"Well, no. But if you don't despise an ordinary bath——"

"Not at all, when I can do no better."

They sat down together to luncheon; a strange contrast as to their clothing, but in other respects no unsuitable companions. Goodeve betrayed not the least embarrassment amid these luxurious surroundings: he ate and drank with hearty appetite, and talked merrily of old days. His host, seeming to throw off a burden of care, astonished the domestic in attendance no less by his boyish gaiety than by his intimacy with so strange a guest. As yet, nothing was said of intervening years: they lived again in their schooltime, discussed the masters, roared over ancient jokes, revived the great days of cricket and football. Goodeve began to ask what had become of this, that, and the other fellow; they were now alone, and could speak more freely.

"Gubbins disappeared," said Mr Rutland. "His father was mixed up in a disagreeable affair, and I'm afraid the poor chap——"

"Ah!" cried the other, "I met him in New Zealand ten or twelve years ago. He was at the bar—serving liquor."

"Heavens!"

"And Potts—Toady Potts, not Sammy. I came across him in Sumatra. He was clerking for a Dutch pepper-grower; had intermittent fever, and must be dead long ago."

"How have you travelled so much?" asked Mr Rutland. "As a sailor?"

"Generally working my passage, but not always. On land I've been a bit of everything. I'm a good carpenter—you remember, I had the knack at school—and I reckon myself no bad hand at plumbing. I've done a little tailoring now and then. I've gained glory as a scene-painter, and made shift to live by taking photographs. It's only in England that I've sometimes found it hard to get a meal. Oh yes! I often come back to the Old Country, though I have no relatives left. I get home-sick, and make plans for settling down, but I suppose I never shall. I landed at Southampton five weeks ago from Bahia—an old friend of mine is in the tobacco business there, and I went just to see him, from Jamaica. Well, I landed with a dollar or two, found the weather pleasant, and just tramped, with nothing particular in prospect. At home here I generally fall back on house-painting, though it isn't always easy to get work. I don't take kindly to the rougher sorts of work. Last time, five years ago, I had to do a bit of navvying, down in Kent. It didn't suit me, and I soon shipped again."

"What a life!" murmured the listener, staring before him.

"Oh, not so bad——"

"You misunderstand me. I mean, what a glorious life! I envy you, Goodeve; with heart and soul I envy you!"

"You do? Well, I can't quite understand that either. A man who has a house like this; free to come and go as the humour takes him——"

"Free!" cried the host. "Don't judge by appearances. You ought to know the world better. There's no man living who is more a slave than I am."

His voice quivered into silence, and he seemed to reprove himself for indiscretion.

"Come out into the garden, old fellow. Light another cigar, and put some in your pocket."

This afternoon there was a garden-party at a house in the neighbourhood, and Mr Rutland had promised to attend it. By failing to do so he would excite surprise, and cause no little disappointment to the people who counted his presence an honour. But time stole on; he felt ever more reluctant to leave his entertaining companion for the wearisome society of his neighbours; at length he said to himself deliberately that go he would not. Let Mrs Rutland express her astonishment when she heard of the neglect. "But, my dear Richard, surely it was rather——" He shut his ears against the voice, and listened only to Goodeve.

"...The next day we sighted the Horn. I forgot all my hardships. Do you remember how we used to talk of it at school—going round the Horn? I thought of you then; I did indeed."

At seven o'clock, when the sun was setting and the air had grown cool, Mr Rutland rose and stretched himself.

"There's the first dinner-bell. Hours have gone like minutes."

"All the same, I'm pretty hungry," laughed Goodeve.

"Why, so am I; the first time I've had an appetite for years. It's the sea air. What a life! What a life! Of course, you'll stay here overnight. Your coming was a godsend. I feel young again. I begin to see things——"

He broke off, and walked with his head down, musing.

After dinner—a meal of scandalous informality—they went into the library, and Goodeve began to run his eye along the shelves.

"Why, you seem to have nothing here but books of travel. I can't make you out, Rutland. If you've always thought as much of travelling as you did at school, why the deuce have you led such a stay-at-home life? Wife and family! But you've always been a rich man. What was to prevent you going trips about the world as other men do?"

What, indeed? In the days of love-making Rutland delighted himself with the thought that he and his beloved would journey far and wide, beholding all the glories and the wonders of earth. Their honeymoon was to include a visit to Egypt; but Mrs Rutland soon discovered that she had little taste for foreign countries, and on the hither side of the Alps they turned homeward. The births of his children, which came in rapid succession, loaded year by year the fetters of domestic bondage; until the poor rich man stifled in silence his last hope. At the suggestion of dis-

tant travel Mrs Rutland would have smiled indulgently—that terrible smile which her husband knew so well, a smile as of implacable fate. "Richard is so fanciful," he once overheard her say to a lady, and the word had a dread weight of meaning.

They opened a great atlas, and Mr Rutland followed his friend's voyaging from land to land. Their heads together, and talking with the completest familiarity, they were as boys again. Thus had they sat many a time on the school benches, the map before them, and schemed expeditions of discovery. In those days Dick Rutland was the more sanguine, the more energetic, conscious of possessing the wherewithal to travel: Harry Goodeve merely dreamed and desired. Now, with thirty years of subsequent life behind them, Mr Rutland, the prosperous man, the local magnate, felt his heart burn within him as he heard Goodeve tell of joys and perils which put a circle round the globe.

"Ah, you have lived!" he exclaimed at length, starting up and moving excitedly about the room. "It is you who have been the rich man; I, a miserable pauper! The Arabs have a proverb, 'Travel is conquest.' You have conquered the world, whilst I have been crouched in my petty corner, playing at life. I go down yonder, and sit in a big chair, and look as wise as an owl, and send poor devils to prison: this is the utmost I have attained to. You have been living among men, working, suffering, enjoying like a man, and every day learning something new. Good

God! it maddens me to look back on these thirty years, and contrast my vegetable existence with such a life as yours. Can you imagine the sort of people I have to do with? Men and women who wear a certain kind of costume in the morning, and a different kind at night, and who know nothing more important than the change from one to the other. We attend meetings about local option, and you—you are fighting a hurricane in mid ocean, or landing in some new port, with a new world before you."

"Hang it, man!" shouted the other with a great laugh, "it's not too late. You're no older than I am."

Mr Rutland stared at him with fascinated eyes.

"Yes—yes," he said slowly and under his breath. "I might see something of the world yet."

He moved again to the atlas, and turned to the map of South America.

"That's one of the things I most wish to see—the river Amazon."

"Little more than a fortnight's voyage," replied Goodeve mirthfully.

"A fortnight! Yes. A fortnight."

Mr Rutland spoke as one in a dream. His finger trembled as it marked the course of the great river.

"Go to Bahia," said Goodeve, "and see my friend the tobacco-merchant. A fine fellow. He can tell you more in an hour than I could in a week. I wish I could go with you."

Again Mr Rutland stood and stared at his guest.

"Why not? You mean the expense of going as a passenger? What's that to me? Say you will go, and——"

He paused, his hand in the air, and seemed to be fronting a vast enterprise. However ludicrous the obstacles in another's sight, to Mr Rutland they meant nothing less than the crushing habits of a lifetime.

"I'll go fast enough," said Goodeve, seeming to sniff the Atlantic.

"We might do more than just go to Brazil and back," pursued his host, whose face had grown very red. "If I once left England, I shouldn't be content to see only one country. I should like to travel for a year or more—perhaps for two or three years."

His voice quivered and his eyes flashed. Goodeve watched him with a smile of sympathy.

"Will you travel with me, Harry, as far and as long as I like?"

"Of course I will! When can you be ready to start?"

Mr Rutland fell into a reverie. He was silent for more than five minutes, then drew a deep breath, and said gravely:

"To-day is Wednesday. I will be ready to leave home on Saturday morning."

"We must look up the steam-boats."

"Yes; but whether there is a ship or not, I shall leave home on Saturday morning, and join you where you like. Stay with me one more day.

I shall be busy, but I want to have you near. On Friday you shall go, and on Saturday we meet again at Liverpool, or Southampton, or wherever you appoint."

They sat talking till late in the night, and, among other things, it was arranged that Goodeve should next day change his rude clothing for a garb more suitable to Mr Rutland's guest. He was in no way troubled by a sense of obligation. Thirty years of adventurous life had taught him to regard things with simplicity and directness: if a wealthy man chose to relieve his friend of all worldly cares, why should the friend make any difficulty? Goodeve was a bluff, plain-spoken, honest fellow, quite incapable of scheming for his own advantage. The fine points of his character appealed to Mr Rutland as strongly as in the days gone by. Rough living, labour, and the companionship of his inferiors had not debased him; what he lacked in refinement of manner was abundantly compensated by his sincerity, good-nature, and freshness of mind. Mr Rutland's circumstances appeared to him in a humorous light; he suspected that the poor fellow lived under female tyranny, and to Goodeve such a state of things was inexplicable. He enjoyed the thought of releasing his old comrade from this sorry fix, and the joke was all the better if, as he suspected, Rutland meant to escape from bondage during his wife's absence.

That, indeed, was his Worship's project. Knowing the uselessness of an attempt to sleep, Mr Rutland sat up all night, busy with multi-

farious concerns: arranging papers, writing letters, reviewing his personal, domestic, and public affairs. The suddenness with which he had taken his resolve, the firmness with which he held to it, seemed to him a manifestation of destiny; for, like all contemplative and irresolute men, he had a vein of philosophic superstition. He knew that his purpose must be put into effect at once; Goodeve's arrival in the absence of Mrs Rutland was a coincidence which, the more he thought of it, made him the more eager to depart.

His wife and daughters were to return on Saturday evening. He would leave a mere note, saying that he had just left home with a friend, and might be away for a day or two. Later, but before she had had time to grow uneasy, Mrs Rutland should receive the full explanation.

There was no serious obstacle whatever in the way of his proposed flight. He could easily commit to his solicitors the care of all such matters as Mrs Rutland would be unable to deal with. His departure need not make the smallest change in the life of his family. The mother and daughters would pursue their course as methodically, as respectably, as ever. In pecuniary affairs Mrs Rutland had always held an independent position; she was better fitted to manage everything of the kind than her husband. It would cost him no severe pang to be long away from his children, for they belonged to their mother rather than to him; the one who had loved him best was dead. Yes; by Saturday morning he might so have

ordered everything in his control as to feel entirely free. A boyish rapture in the thought of what was before him made him regardless of the wonder, the censure, the gossip he was leaving behind.

About the hour of sunrise he was overcome with exhaustion—not a feeling of wholesome weariness, not a desire for sleep; but an oppressive faintness, like that which troubled him yesterday morning. He explained it, naturally enough, as the result of unwonted excitement. A drop of brandy seemed to do him good, and he lay down; but no sleep came to him.

Through the day he pursued his business, though languidly; the weather was again very warm, and it seemed to overpower him.

"I shall soon pick up on the sea," he remarked to Goodeve at luncheon, after confessing that he hadn't been "quite the thing" lately. "It's just what I need. I have lived sluggishly—foregone all custom of exercise, as Hamlet says. If I went on like this, I should smoulder out at fifty or so."

"As likely as not," assented the other genially.

Again they passed a long evening together, with the big atlas open; and again Mr Rutland worked himself into a fever of anticipation. When he went to bed his eyes looked very large and prominent, and his cheeks were burning. For an hour or two he tossed in misery of sleeplessness, then fell into fearful dreams of storm and wreck, which harassed him until day.

On the Friday morning, Goodeve departed.

He had learnt that a steamer would leave Southampton on Monday for Rio de Janeiro, which place they agreed to make the starting-point of their travels. The new clothing irked him a little, but, on the whole, he was rather pleased with his appearance; he went off in high spirits, well provided with money to make necessary purchases at Southampton. He had already telegraphed for berths to the shipping agents, and had received a satisfactory reply.

It rained a little to-day, and Mr Rutland enjoyed the coolness. He thought with some apprehension of the climate for which he was setting forth, but reassured himself with the certainty that a fortnight on shipboard would quite reestablish him in health and vigour. There was nothing really the matter with him; of course not. His mind had affected his body; that was all. Then, if Brazil proved uncomfortable, he and his friend would simply travel north or south. The world lay open before him, like the atlas over which he had so often pored. He set no limit to the extent of his wanderings, and had quite resolved that nothing save ill-news from home should bring him back before the end of a year or two.

When he *did* return he would no longer be the same man. His wife would know by then that her reign was over.

He had now transacted all his business, and the hours dragged. There was a letter from Mrs Rutland speaking of her return to-morrow, and requiring his attention to a score of vexatious

trivialities; he laughed, and threw it aside. In the afternoon, feeling incapable of the least exertion, he lay on the couch in his study; his heart was beating rapidly, and he tried to calm the mental agitation which disturbed it, but every hour seemed to intensify his excitement. He dreaded the long evening and night, and wished himself already at Southampton.

At dinner he ate only a little soup. There was no disguising from himself that he felt seriously unwell, and the dread of being unable to start in the morning kept him miserably agitated. From table he went again into the study, and sat down in an armchair with a newspaper. As his body lay back he drew a deep sigh.

Shortly after ten o'clock the butler wished to speak with Mr Rutland; he knocked at the study door, and entered. But on drawing near he saw that his master had fallen asleep.

An hour later he again entered the room. Mr Rutland had not moved, and the servant, regarding him more closely, became aware of something strange in his appearance. He bent to listen. Mr Rutland was not breathing.

And next day, at Southampton, Henry Goodeve sought vainly among the passengers who arrived by a certain train. "Hanged if I wasn't afraid of it!" he muttered in vexation. "His wife has come back and caught him."

From "Human Odds and Ends"

ONE WAY OF HAPPINESS

HERE and there in the more populous London suburbs you will find small houses built with a view to the accommodation of two families beneath the same roof. Considering the class of people for whom this advantage was contrived, the originator of the idea showed a singular faith in human nature. It does, however, occasionally happen that two distinct households prove themselves capable of living in such proximity for a certain time without overt breach of the peace—nay, with a measure of satisfaction on both sides. This was the case with the Rippingilles and the Budges. Rippingille, salesman at a large boot warehouse, and Budge, a coal-merchant's clerk, were young men of sober disposition, not incapable of modest mirth, content with their lot in life, and rarely looking more than a month or two ahead. Their wives did not lack corresponding virtues. Granted the female privilege of believing (and telling each other) that they might have married much more brilliantly if they had waited longer, and the necessary relaxation of abusing their husbands when a dinner was ill-cooked or babes gave trouble, Mrs Budge and Mrs Rippingille discharged their domestic duties as well as could be reasonably expected. They

talked in a high key, laughed in a scream, and bade defiance to care with a very praiseworthy resolution. The Rippingilles had three young children, the Budges had two. It was not always possible for the two families to take their annual holiday at the same time; this year circumstances were favourable, and the parents planned a joint expedition to the seaside. Long and warmly did they discuss the attractions of half a dozen popular resorts; the final vote was for Brighton. They would leave home on Saturday afternoon; spend Sunday, Monday (the August Bank Holiday) and Tuesday by the seashore, and on Wednesday return. Thursday morning must see the bread-winners back at their respective places of business.

Mrs Budge and Mrs Rippingille had a clear fortnight in which to make their preparations and to talk inexhaustibly about the glories of Brighton. Both had been to Brighton before, but neither of late years. They lived in a crescendo of joyous excitement; from room to room they interchanged high-pitched remarks, jests, ejaculations.

"Louie! this time next week—eh!"

"Jist be at London Bridge, shan't we? Oh my! Say, Annie——"

One was in a top bedroom, the other in the wash-house, and at this moment the shrieks of two infants made them inaudible to each other; but they continued to vociferate with shrill merriment.

"Now look 'ere," observed Rippingille, gravely, one night when the children were all in bed, and the elders had assembled, as was their

habit, for a common supper. " About the apartments." It would never have occurred to Rippingille to say " rooms " or " lodgings." His stress on " apartments " held the listeners silent whilst he reflected. " We mean 'aving comfort, understand, and we've got to pay for it. But we're not going to be 'ad."

No, no; certainly not. All were determined not to be imposed upon. The ladies vied in screeching their reasonable demands. Two double-bedded rooms and a comfortable parlour; the cost not to exceed thirty shillings.

" And mind you," Budge succeeded at length in remarking, with impressive severity, " no hextras. Not a single bloomin' hextra! I know what that means, if they begin the game. Why, Tom Leggatt and me, we was once together down at Ramsgate——"

He was not allowed to finish the reminiscence; a chorus of awful experiences clamoured him down. In a quarter of an hour's time, when the others had paused breathless, Budge repeated, as though it were a novel remark:

" Mind you, not a single bloomin' hextra! "

Thereupon renewal of shrieks, and for another fifteen minutes all was vociferous confusion.

The purchase of a new jacket by Mrs Budge, whereas Mrs Rippingille could not afford that luxury, caused a slight heartburning between the two; but they outlived it. All the children had some new garment, showy, inexpensive, purchased without any regard to durability or the

wearer's comfort. Rippingille bought a straw hat, a yellow waistcoat, and a pair of sand shoes; his friend purchased a guinea suit of tweeds, and a blue necktie, relying upon an old cricket cap for the completion of his seaside costume. On the Friday night all, children included, donned their holiday attire, and ran about the house inviting each other's compliments.

Not without much discussion was it decided how they and their luggage should be transported to London Bridge station; time had to be considered, as well as money, and there seemed to be no avoiding the expense of a cab. Solemnly the precise fare was calculated. Convinced against their will that the outlay would be smaller by sixpence or so than if any other course were adopted, the ladies none the less resented this tax upon the holiday fund; notwithstanding high spirits, they looked sourly at the cabman. Rippingille, with the two eldest children—for the cab could not be made to hold all—went by omnibus.

Brighton was reached about five o'clock. Mrs Budge's baby, probably objecting to a bottle of half-churned milk, screamed vigorously most of the way, and by Mrs Rippingille was secretly voted a nuisance; but in all other respects the journey proved enjoyable. For the third-class carriage had its complement of passengers, all going to Brighton for a holiday, all noisily talkative and joyously perspiring. Much solid food and a liberal supply of liquid refreshment were consumed *en route*. Thus fortified, the happy band

could postpone thoughts of a meal until they had discovered the suitable lodging, on which quest they set forth at once from the station. The sun shone gloriously; the street pavements were hot and dry; if necessary, two or three hours could be devoted to inspection of apartments.

At house after house they tried, not, of course, with a view of the sea or anywhere near it; the highways and byways along which they trudged might well have been part of some London suburb, save, perhaps, for an unusual freshness in the air. The wonted noises, the familiar accents, everywhere protected these Londoners against the unpleasant feeling of strangeness. Numbers of people strayed hither and thither on the same errand as themselves; every snatch of talk that fell upon their ears was concerned with rent of "apartments." And, indeed, their undertaking promised to be not a little wearisome; rents were mostly, from their point of view, exorbitant, or, if reasonable, covered but mean accommodation. At first, the whole party invaded each house. Presently, Mrs Budge, overtired with the burden of her infant, had to lag behind a little; and with her two little girls, who had begun to cry, Mrs Rippingille grew cross, but could still enjoy a scornful laugh in the face of extortionate landladies. The men supported each other in boisterous good humour.

"All right, Annie," shouted Budge to his pallid wife. "We've got the night before us, and miles of apartments to choose from."

"Cheer up, old girl," Rippingille called out to his own spouse. "We won't be bested. Like a shrimp tea before we go on again?"

But the children (the eldest only six years old) could hardly drag their little limbs along; wails arose, and the mothers, nervously unstrung, had to threaten a slap, or even a "hiding."

"I say, Tom," remarked Budge to his male companion quietly, "we shall have to take the first where there's room enough. I'm about done up."

Rippingille nodded, and with an air of cheery resolve they made for the next house which showed a card in the window.

Here, by good luck, three rooms were vacant, but one only was double-bedded. The landlady, however, professed her willingness to put in a sofa each night, and provide it with bedclothes.

"Well," said Budge to his wife, "I could sleep on the sofa and you and the children in the bed."

"Of course you could," exclaimed Mrs Rippingille, eager to get housed, and fairly content with the chamber which was designed for her and her family. "I've often slep' on a sofa myself, and slep' sound, too."

At this there was a general roar of laughter, with no special meaning. The terms were now inquired, and on this point followed a vigorous contest. For the rooms, until evening on Wednesday, the landlady asked thirty shillings—and extras.

"Now see here, Mrs What's-yer-name," cried Rippingille, in what he meant for a perfectly civil

tone, " we don't pay no hextras. It's got to be hinclusive—understand? Kitchen fire, candles, boots, and every blessed thing. We'll pay you thirty bob and not grumble, if you give us no cause. But no extras—see? "

All talked, or rather shouted, at once; there was a deafening uproar. The wives, tired out as they were, thoroughly enjoyed this combat of tongues, and the landlady, after a brave struggle against overwhelming odds, yielded with a good grace. She had never taken so little before; but as she could see that the babies, bless 'em, were crying to go to bed—well, she wouldn't hold out. But half the sum must be paid in advance; that she made a rule.

Budge went back to the railway station to fetch a tin box, in which both families had packed their indispensable belongings. Rippingille set forth to purchase the groceries and other articles of food. The ladies, until their luggage arrived, closely examined each of the rooms, and tried to keep the children quiet. Relieved from weary prolongation of their walk, and gratified by a conquest of the landlady, they were in the mood for finding everything admirable. Impossible, they agreed, to have done better. The place was clean; the beds looked comfortable; they were not more than twenty minutes' walk from the beach.

" I don't know what you think, Annie, but I call this first-rate. Did you see the picture of the Queen and all her fam'ly in my bedroom? "

" And look at those lovely hartificial flowers!

Why, you feel you want to be smelling at 'em. I don't know what you think, but I'm a-goin' to enjoy myself! "

The first disappointment was the unpunctuality of supper, which, ordered for nine o'clock, was served at a quarter to ten. The children being in bed, their parents at length sat down to the meal with keen appetite, and soon recovered good humour. Budge had brought in with him a bottle of Irish whisky, Rippingille a bottle of rum; these stood unopened upon the sideboard, an exhilarating promise for half an hour before bedtime. It gave the ladies some concern to discover that the cupboard in which they would keep their grocery had no lock; at table they discussed this matter from every point of view, and came to the decision that a very careful watch must be kept upon the various parcels. Mrs Budge hit upon an ingenious device; when sugar, coffee, tea, and the rest had been opened, she should mark, with a pencil, the exact position of each packet upon the shelf, so as to ensure immediate detection of any tampering with the goods. Mrs Rippingille suggested that all edibles should be kept under lock and key in the bedroom; but, besides the inconvenience of this method, there was a certain delight attaching to the anticipation of sternly convincing their landlady, in case of fraud.

At half-past ten they sallied forth to taste the sea air. In a street hard by, in front of a busy public-house, they were arrested by a crowd gathered around negro melodists, and here they

feasted their souls with music until the hat began to circulate, which sped them onwards. Arrived at the sea front, they found abundant life of the kind most pleasing to them: a thronged highway, resounding with virile shout and feminine squeal, with refrains of the music-hall, and every such noise as inspirits the children of a great capital. In spite of the fatigue which made their limbs ache, the happy wives and mothers leapt about like girls, screamed mirthfully at each other, thumped their husbands' backs, and declared a thousand times that this was the height of human bliss. On their return the spirit bottles were exultantly opened, and each one drank a stiff, sweet, steaming tumbler. Ordinarily very temperate people in the matter of strong beverage, they felt it incumbent upon them to indulge a little at the seaside. Rippingille pretended to be overcome and staggered about the floor with low comedy monologue. This brought the evening to a splendidly hilarious close, and they paired off for rest with laughter which made the house ring.

They awoke to Sunday. Not only this, but the weather had suffered an unfortunate change; the sky was gloomy and threatened rain. Breakfast, ordered for nine, could not be obtained until nearly an hour later. The children were troublesome and very noisy; the ladies had a bad headache, and began to complain loudly of various discomforts. To complete the cheerlessness of the morning, rain actually began to fall just as breakfast was finished.

"I tell you what it is," exclaimed Rippingille, voicing the general sentiment, "we're going to be better waited on than this, and the landlady's got to understand that." He spoke while the servant was in the room. "I don't call that fish properly fried—what do you say?"

Budge was the person appealed to, and he assented vigorously, adding that, if dinner wasn't brought up at the right time, he would know the reason why.

"We've got eighteen people in the 'ouse to cook for," remarked the servant impartially and casually.

All answered together that this had nothing to do with them, that they hadn't come here to waste time, and that they weren't the sort to pay money for what they didn't get. It was added that the bedrooms swarmed with fleas, and that the bed-clothes were insufficient, with many another pointed complaint. But the servant merely smiled, and went her way.

With the aid of umbrellas, the whole party reached the parade, and found seats in a shelter. Budge and Rippingille, to ward off low spirits, engaged in horseplay, and were so far successful that at dinner-time all went back through the rain with resolute display of mirth. But the day was unpropitious. Mrs Budge, on scrutinizing the cupboard, protested that the bag of loaf sugar had been interfered with; there followed an unpleasant scene with the servant; the landlady herself could not be assailed, for she declined to come upstairs. Rain, squabbling, chastisement of

children, and occasional words between the two ladies brought Sunday to its close. Happily, there remained the half-hour devoted to steaming tumblers, and this paid for all. Budge sang a song about waiting till the clouds roll by, and hearty voices joined him in the chorus. No one could honestly say that the day seemed lost.

On Monday morning the landlady began reprisals. Meeting Mrs Rippingille on the stairs, she complained of the noise that the five children made. A lady below (the word was meaningly emphasized) had been unable to sleep since seven o'clock this morning, owing to the tumult. "Tell the lydy," answered Mrs Rippingille tartly, "she'd better git up earlier; it's good for her 'ealth." And this retort kept the holiday makers in exuberant spirits till dinner-time. For the first time they got down on to the beach; they rolled about, and pelted each other; spades and buckets were bought for the elder children. They talked about bathing, but, on the whole, it seemed better to save their money for more certain delights. "Paddling" could be enjoyed free of expense; and remarkable figures did the two young women present as they ran hither and thither on the edge of the tide—their petticoats pinned up outside their dresses. Budge and Rippingille, reclining pipe in mouth, watched with a genial grin.

Dinner, obtained only after repeated and furious ringing at the bell, came up infamously cooked; the huge slab of steak was tough as leather, and swam in water of a yellowish hue. Mrs Rip-

pingille, who had visited the butcher's this morning, declared that a good half pound had been feloniously cut off below stairs. Messages of savage insult were sent to the landlady, but satisfaction ended here. It was some relief, however; and, after all, the cooking could not be very much worse than that to which our friends were accustomed at home.

In the afternoon, Mrs Budge, whose baby had an attack of some complaint incidental to its time of life, offered to take care of all the children, whilst the other three elders went in search of enjoyment. This took the form of a ten mile drive in a public brake, where they sat squeezed and perspiring amid some thirty people. The sun blazed; chalky dust hung in a perpetual cloud about the vehicle; it was hardly possible to get a handkerchief out of one's pocket; but gaiety defied everything. On the way home, Mrs Rippingille, red as a peony with heat and laughter and many quenchings of thirst, consulted the comfort of her neighbours by sitting on Mr Budge's knee; ceaseless joking as to Mrs Budge's state of mind if she knew what was going on kept all three in a roar. The absent lady, meanwhile, having administered remedies to her infant, was walking about the main streets of Brighton, enjoying the sight of the Bank Holiday crowd; the baby she carried in her arms, and the other children followed her. They wanted to play on the beach, but Mrs Budge said it was too far, and for her own part she preferred the pavement.

Over the steaming tumblers that night a vow was registered that, on the morrow, they would have better attendance and better cookery, or know the reason why. As soon as the children awoke, they were encouraged to make the utmost possible noise; to stamp and jump and throw over the furniture, and yell at the top of their voices. This had the desired effect; it brought up the landlady at breakfast. Before she could speak, the angry woman was overwhelmed with vilification. Presently Rippingille voiced the general demand.

"We haven't come here to be bested, and just you bear that in mind! If this kind of thing goes on we won't pay—not a bloomin' penny—understand? You've got to cook our meals proper and to time—see? What do you tike us for? Why, the beds ain't even shook up. And do you call these boots cleaned? It's himposition, that's what it is."

The combat was too unequal; in spite of her great command of "language," the landlady retreated. The lodgers, flushed with victory, sallied forth under a cloudy sky, and betook themselves to the pier, where they attended a popular concert. Dinner, for the first time, was ready almost at the appointed hour, and somewhat better prepared than hitherto; pæans rose round the table.

"They always try it on," cried Budge. "You've got to show 'em you won't stand it." And he chanted a verse of the last song they had heard upon the pier.

Afterwards, all went for a sail in a yacht, and all were lamentably ill. Rain came on; it soaked

the holiday garments, and led to all manner of unpleasantness among the three score people packed on board. After a low-spirited tea, the two men, foreseeing an evening of domestic discord, silently vanished, and did not reappear until eleven o'clock. They had been to the theatre. As it happened, their wives had found an excellent opportunity for assailing the landlady, and were again victorious; so things passed off better than might have been expected, and over the usual tumblers all unkindness was forgotten.

Wednesday dawned; the end of their holiday. Though breakfast was very late and very bad, no one seemed in the mood to make an uproar. Mrs Rippingille busied herself with a scheme for packing and carrying away every smallest remnant of every purchased eatable; this must be done before she left the house for the morning's amusement, or servant and landlady would pillage without fear. Having swept the cupboard, she went briskly forth to purchase dinner. The meal was to consist of fried eggs and bacon, with a rice pudding to follow.

"And just you mind what I say"—thus she addressed the servant on her return with the provisions—"if this dinner isn't properly cooked, you'll remember it. And tell your missis that."

The menial grinned broadly, but made no answer.

Swift is the flight of happy hours and days. Every one remarked, at intervals through the morning, that they seemed only just to have come

to Brighton; yet to-night must see them home again. The children, whose enjoyment had been considerably less keen than that of their elders, wore gloomy faces at the thought of return; but the suggestion of donkey riding once more exhilarated the whole company. Great and small mounted for a gallop, and their yells rang along the beach. Other delights followed. As dinner-time approached their hunger grew fierce; the thought of delay was frenzy. A stampede upstairs announced their arrival, and rendered needless the loud ring of the sitting-room bell.

Nor had they to wait. The red-nosed servant appeared in a few minutes, panting with the heavy tray. Her lips rigidly set, she put down the dish of eggs and bacon. In the same moment Mrs Rippingille, who had stepped forward to judge the cookery, uttered an indignant shriek. Her companions rushed to the table, and in union vociferated, not without cause, for the dish made a gruesome display; in place of succulent rashers lay blackened fragments scarce to be recognized as bacon, and the fried eggs were mere bits of greasy leather. Frightened at the results of her mischief, the servant fled; before she reached the kitchen the bell had begun to ring, and it rang incessantly, with ear-piercing clangour, until the landlady, who had just returned from a brief expedition on a matter of business, angrily confronted her lodgers.

"Look at that, woman!" they roared. "What do you call that?"

The landlady could not pretend that complaint was unjustified. She happened to be particularly anxious to get rid of these people, as their rooms were already let to more desirable tenants, who desired to enter into possession as early as possible.

"I don't want to have no more words with you," she began, as soon as she could make herself audible. "There's been a accident, and I tell you what I'll do. If you'll leave after dinner, instead of after tea, I'll take the price of that dinner off what you owe me. How much did the stuff cost?"

The lodgers exchanged glances and reflected. It was possible to make a meal of a sort upon what lay before them, and the offered compensation would be clear gain. Not one had sufficient acuteness to see that, if they could claim damages at all, no condition need attach to the demand. After ten minutes' vehement debate they agreed upon terms, and promised to quit the house in an hour's time. Then, sharp set as wolves, they fell upon the base provender. Luckily, the rice pudding made a tolerable appearance; it vanished almost as soon as it reached the table.

They lingered about the shore and the streets till nearly sunset; the eating-house tea was universally declared the best meal they had had at Brighton. Every heart beat with a proud joy in the thought of two shillings deducted from their landlady's bill, compensation for a dinner, which, after all, they had thoroughly enjoyed. Nothing could have happened more luckily; the money

saved, and the victory over a letter of lodgings, crowned their holiday. They talked of the affair at home and among their friends for many a month, and to the end of their lives it will be a sunny reminiscence.

From "A Victim of Circumstances"

AN OLD MAID'S TRIUMPH

To this day's event Miss Hurst had looked anxiously forward for no less than thirty years. It was just thirty years since time and fate had made her dependent for a living upon her own exertions, without the least hope of aid from love or duty. Till then—that is, up to her twenty-eighth year—she had supported herself, but with frequent hospitality of kinsfolk to make the efforts lighter. Now, at eight-and-fifty, she had received from her pupils' parents, with all possible kindness of wording, the anticipated notice that after next quarter her services would be no more in request. So it had come at last, and fervently she thanked Heaven for the courage which enabled her to face it with so much composure. That there was no possibility of another engagement she took for granted; perhaps it was only out of delicate consideration that these good friends had kept her so long. She did not feel very old; was not conscious of mental decay; but probably others had observed some sign of it. At such an age as this who could expect to be retained as governess to young people? Doubtless it would be an injustice to her pupils. Moreover, she was ready for the change; again, Heaven be thanked!

"What will the poor old thing do?" asked Mrs Fletcher of her husband. "Impossible, I fear, that she can have saved anything."

"Don't see how the deuce she can have done," Mr Fletcher replied. "There are—institutions, I believe. I wish we could do something; but you know the state of things. Of course, a rather larger cheque—say double the quarter's salary; but I'm afraid that's all I can pretend to do."

However, Miss Hurst *had* found it possible to save, though what the fact signified was known only to herself. To-night she made up her account with life, and it stood thus. At eight-and-twenty she had owned a sum of nearly thirty pounds, which ever since had remained intact. For the thirty years that followed her average earnings had been twenty-nine pounds per annum, and out of this she had put aside what amounted to fifteen pounds a year—sometimes more, sometimes less. Very seldom, indeed, had she suffered from ill-health; only once had she spent six months unemployed. Accumulation of petty interest—the Bank and Government security were all she had ever dared to confide in—by this time made a sensible increment. With tremulous calculation she grasped the joyous certainty that a life of independence was assured to her. It must be by purchase of an annuity. She had never consulted any one on her financial affairs: common sense, and a strictly reticent habit, had guided her safely thus far. For the last and all-important pecuniary transaction she felt thoroughly prepared, so long

had she reflected upon it, and with such sedulous exactitude.

Beauty was never hers, nor much natural grace: nowadays she looked a very homely, but a very nice old lady, with something of austerity in her countenance which imposed respect. She spoke with a gentle firmness, smiling only when there was occasion for it. In education she knew herself much behind the teachers of to-day; her mental powers were not more than ordinary; but Nature had given her that spirit of refinement which is not otherwise to be acquired. Generally able to win the regard of well-conditioned children, she had always been looked upon as an excellent disciplinarian, which accounted in large measure for her professional success.

Her success! Never had she received the wages of a middling cook; yet the importance of her trust through life was such as cannot be exaggerated, and the duties laid upon her had been discharged with a competence, a conscientiousness, which no money could repay. Her success! At the age of fifty-eight she tremblingly calculated her hope of being able to live out the rest of her life with *not less* than twenty shillings a week.

And the life history which explained this great achievement. Miss Hurst could not have written it; she possessed neither the faculty nor the self-esteem needful for such a work; but assuredly it deserved to be written. Reflect upon the simple assertion that, from her twenty-eighth to her fifty-

eighth year this woman had never unavoidably spent one shilling-piece. She, with the instincts and desires of the educated class, had never allowed herself one single indulgence which cost more than a copper or so. Ah! the story of those holiday times which she was obliged to spend at her own cost, of the brief seasons when she was out of employment! Being a woman, she, of course, found it easier to practise this excessive parsimony than any man would have done; yet she was not, like so many women, naturally penurious. She longed for the delight of travel, she often hungered for books which a very slight outlay would have procured her, she reproached herself for limiting her charity to a mite at church collections. Mean lodgings were horrible to her, yet again and again she had occupied all but the meanest. And all this out of sheer dread of some day finding herself destitute, helpless, at the mercy of a world which never spares its brutality to those who perforce require its compassion. What a life! Yet it had not embittered her; her gentle courage, sustained by old-fashioned piety, had never failed. And now she saw herself justified of her faith in Providence.

Having regard to her sound constitution, she might live another twenty years. Her capital, merely put out to interest, would not afford sustenance. But the purchase of an annuity might assure at once her bodily comfort and her self-respect. Carefully had she studied the tables, the comparative advantages offered by many com-

panies. The fact that a hundred pounds will yield a woman less than a man had often troubled her; she understood the reason, but could not quite reconcile herself to the result. As a man, she would have saved vastly more; as a woman, the longer-lived, she must be content to receive less for her smaller opportunities.

Throughout this last quarter her behaviour differed in no outward respect from that of years past; she worked with the same admirable honesty of purpose, and kept the same countenance of sober cheerfulness. In her heart she was ever so little troubled. At the end of her engagement there would be due to her a payment of seven pounds ten, and the total of her possessions would then fall *slightly* short of a sum needed to purchase the annuity on which she had fixed her hopes. She desired a clear fifty-two pounds per annum, twenty shillings a week: surely no excessive demand. Yet it seemed as if she must content herself with a smaller income. It might, however, prove possible to earn the extra sum—a mere trifle. Yes, it might be possible; she would hope.

On the last day, when her pupils were preparing to leave home for the seaside, Mrs Fletcher called her apart, and spoke with confidential sweetness.

" Miss Hurst, need I say how very sorry we are to part with you? I do so wish that circumstances allowed of my asking you to come back again after the holidays. But—really there is no

harm in my telling you that we are obliged to—to make certain changes in our establishment."

The governess listened with grave sympathy.

"Have you heard of any other engagement?" pursued the lady, with doubtful voice and eyes drooping.

"Not yet, Mrs Fletcher," was the cheerful reply; "I should like to find one, if it were only for a short time."

"I will do my utmost in the way of making inquiries. And—let me give you the cheque, Miss Hurst. My husband begs you will accept from us, as a mark of our great—our very great—esteem, something more than the sum strictly due. I am sure we shall never be out of our debt to you."

In her own room Miss Hurst eagerly inspected the little slip of paper—it was a cheque for twice her quarter's salary. There was a great leap of her heart, a rush of tears to her eyes. She held the security of independent life. The long fight was over, and she had triumphed.

From "Human Odds and Ends"

THE POET'S PORTMANTEAU

THE poet had been nourishing his soul down in Devon. A petty windfall, a minim legacy, which plucked him from scholastic bondage in a London suburb, was now all but consumed. He turned his face once more to the mart of men, strong in the sanguine courage of two-and-twenty. His luggage (the sum total of his personal property, except twenty pounds sterling) consisted of a trunk and a portmanteau. The latter he kept beside him in the railway carriage—a small and very shabby portmanteau, but it guarded the result of ten months' work, the manuscript volume (entitled *The Hermit of the Tor; and Other Poems*) whereon rested all his hopes. A few articles of clothing and of daily necessity were packed in the same receptacle. On reaching London he would deposit his trunk at the station, and carry the small portmanteau whilst he searched for a temporary lodging.

Green vales and bosky slopes of Devon; the rolling uplands of Wiltshire; the streams and heaths and wooded hills of Surrey. It was late autumn, and the day drew to its close. Through mists of evening a red orb hung huge above the horizon; it crimsoned and grew lurid, athwart the first driftings of London smoke; it disappeared

amid towers and chimneys and squalor multiform. The poet grasped his portmanteau, and leapt out on to the platform of Waterloo Station.

One cheap room was all he wanted, and as he could not carry his burden very far he turned southward, guided by memory of the grey, small streets off Kennington Road. Twenty minutes' walk brought him into a by-way where every other window offered its card of invitation to wanderers such as he. At this hour of gloom there was little to choose between one house and another. A few paces ahead of him sounded the knock of a telegraph messenger. Where telegrams were delivered there must be, he thought, some measure of civilization; so he lingered till the boy had gone away, then directed his steps to that door.

His rat-tat was answered by a young woman, whose personal appearance surprised him. Her features were handsome and intelligent, though scarcely amiable; her clothing indicated poverty, but was not such as would be worn by a girl of the working class; her language and manner completed the proof that she was no native of this region. "Yes," she said, speaking distantly and nervously, "a single room was to let, a room up at the top." The poet, as became a poet, observed with emotional interest this unexpected figure. Only a wretched little oil-lamp hung in the passage, and he could not see the girl's face very distinctly; perhaps the first impression of sullenness was a mistake; it might be only the shrinking

self-respect of one whom circumstances had forced into a false position. He noticed that in her hand she held a telegram.

"Would you let me see the room?"

"Please wait a moment."

She went upstairs, and soon reappeared with a lighted candle. Leaving his portmanteau, he followed her through the usual stuffy atmosphere to a chamber of the usual dreariness. His attendant placed her candle within the room, then drew back and waited outside on the landing.

"I think this would do. What is the rent?"

There was hesitation. The poet stepped forward, and endeavoured to discern a face amid the shadows.

"Eight shillings—I think," he was at length answered.

Ah, then she was not the landlady. Perhaps the daughter of people who had come to grief. He began to speak of details; she answered shortly, but to his satisfaction.

"I shall be glad to take the room for a week or two. I'll go and bring up my portmanteau."

"It is usual"—he still could not see the speaker—"to pay a week's rent in advance."

"Oh, to be sure."

Determined to see her face in full light he took up the candle, and stepped with it on to the landing. As if aware of his motive, the girl stood in a retiring attitude; but she met his gaze, and they looked, for an instant, steadily at each other. She was handsome, but her lips had a hard, defiant

expression, and in her eyes he read either the suffering of a womanly nature or the recklessness of one indifferent to all good. Her speech favoured the pleasanter interpretation; yet, after all, the countenance disturbed rather than attracted him.

An old box stood by the head of the stairs; on this he placed the candle, and then drew from his pocket the sum he had to pay. The girl thanked him coldly. He ran downstairs, fetched his portmanteau, and put it in a corner of the dark room. Then they again faced each other.

"By-the-bye," he said, wishing he could draw her into conversation, "what's the address? I have come here by mere chance."

She gave the information as briefly as possible.

"Thank you. Now I must go out and get something to eat."

The girl would not speak. There was nothing for it but to turn and descend the stairs. She followed, and half-way down her voice stopped him.

"When shall you be back to-night?"

"Not later than eleven, I think."

And so they parted, the poet taking a last look at her as he opened the front door.

She had strongly affected his imagination. As he walked towards Westminster, new rhymes and rhythms sang within him to the roaring music of the street. The Devon hermitage was a far, faint memory. London had welcomed him with so sudden a glimpse of her infinite romance that he half repented his long seclusion.

At about the hour he had mentioned he returned to seek a night's rest. Would the same face appear when the door opened? He waited anxiously, and suffered a sad disappointment, for his knock was answered by just the kind of person that might have been expected—the typical landlady of cheap lodgings, a puffy, slatternly woman chewing a mouthful of the supper from which she had risen.

"Good evening," said the poet, as cheerfully as he could. "I am your new lodger."

The woman stared, as if failing to understand him.

"I took a room at the top, early this evening."

"You've made a mistake. It's the wrong 'ouse."

"But isn't this——?" he named the address which the girl had given him.

"Yes, that's 'ere."

"I thought so. I remember the house perfectly. You were out, I suppose. I saw a—a young woman. I paid a week's rent in advance."

This circumstantial story increased the listener's astonishment. She glared with protuberant eyes, breathed quickly, and gave a snort.

"Well, that's a queer thing. Wait a minute."

She went upstairs, and could be heard to tap at a door; but there followed no sound of voices. Then she came down again, and asked for a description of the young woman who had acted as her representative. The poet answered rather vaguely.

"We have somebody of that sort lodgin' 'ere, but she's out. You say you paid eight shillin's?"

"Yes. And left my portmanteau; you'll find it upstairs."

Again the landlady disappeared. When she returned her face exhibited a contemptuous satisfaction.

"There's no portmanty nowheres in *this* 'ouse. I told you you'd made a mistake. Try next door!"

The poet was staggered. Mistaken he could not be; the little oil-lamp, a dirty engraving on the wall of the passage, remained so clearly in his mind. A shapeless fear took hold upon him.

"Pray let me go up with you to the top room. I *know* this was the house. Let me see the room."

The woman was impatient and suspicious. At this moment there sounded from the back of the passage a male voice, asking, "What's up?" A man came forward; the difficulty was explained. For a second time the baffled poet essayed a description of the girl he remembered so well.

"He means Miss Rowe," said the husband. "She ain't in? Then you just take a light, and 'ave a good look in her room."

They went up together to the first floor, and the poet, unable to keep still, followed them at a distance. He was seriously alarmed. If his portmanteau were to be lost—heavens! His poems—his only copy! Some of the shorter ones he could rewrite from memory, but the backbone of his volume, *The Hermit of the Tor*, could not be reproduced. And *how* could the portmanteau have

vanished? That girl—— Surely, surely, impossible! Much rather suspect these vulgar people, or some one else of whom he knew nothing.

Man and wife were searching within the room. He heard feminine exclamations and a masculine oath. Unable to control himself he pushed open the door.

"She's took her 'ook," said the man, looking at him with a grin. "See—'ere's her tin box—empty! nothing as belongs to her in the room."

"And owin' a week's rent!" cried his wife. "I might 'a' known better than to trust her. There wasn't no good in her face. She's sloped with your eight bob and your portmanty, I'll take my hoath!"

The poet seized the candle, and strode up the higher flight of stairs. Yes, there was the old box on the landing; yes, this was the room he had paid for. *Pheu! pheu!*

"Sal!" roared the man's voice, "'ev a look and see if she's laid 'ands on anything of ours!"

The woman yelled at the suggestion, and began a fierce rummage, high and low.

"I can't miss nothin'," she kept shouting. And at length, "Go and fetch a p'liceman. D' y'ear, Matt? Go and fetch a p'liceman. This 'ere young gent 'll be chargin' us with robbin' him."

"Where's your receipt for the eight bob?" asked her husband, turning angrily upon the poet.

"I took no receipt."

"That doesn't sound very likely."

"Likely or not, it's true," cried the other,

exasperated by this insult added to his misfortune. "Fetch a policeman, or else I shall. We'll have this investigated."

"I'll jolly soon do that," was the man's retort. "Think you're dealing with thieves, do you? Begin that kind o' talk, and I'll—— 'Ere, Sal, keep a heye on him whilst I go for the copper."

What ensued calls for no detailed narrative. Suffice it that by midnight all had been done that could be done in the way of charges, defences, and official interrogation. Later, the poet sat talking with his rough acquaintances in their own parlour. After all, the people had lost nothing but a week's rent, and they were at length brought to some show of sympathy with the stranger so shamefully treated under their roof. He, for his part, decided still to occupy the bedroom, which would be let to him, magnanimously, for seven-and-sixpence: whilst the police were trying to track his plunderer he might as well remain on the spot. At one o'clock he went gloomily to bed, and in his troubled sleep dreamt that he was chasing that mysterious girl up hill and down dale amid the Devon moorland; she, always far in advance, held his fated manuscript above her head, and laughed maliciously.

II

On the eighth anniversary of that memorable day the poet could look back upon his loss with an amused indifference. He was a poet still, but

no longer uttered himself in verse. The success of an essay in romantic fiction had shown him how to live by his pen, and a second book made his name familiar " at all the libraries." For a man of simple tastes he was in clover. He dwelt among the Surrey hills, and on his occasional visits to London did not seek a lodging in the neighbourhood of Kennington Road.

As for *The Hermit of the Tor*, though often enough he wondered as to its fate, on the whole he was glad it had never been published. To be sure, no publisher would have risked money on it. In his vague recollection, the thing seemed horribly crude; he remembered a line or two that made him shut his eyes and mutter inarticulately. The lyrics might be passable; a couple of them, preserved in his mind, had got printed in a magazine some five years ago. One of his ambitions at present was to write a poetical drama, but he merely mused over the selected theme.

He was thus occupied one winter afternoon as he strolled from the outlying cottage, which he had made his home, to the nearest village. A footstep on the hard road caused him to look up, and he saw the postman drawing near. This encounter saved the humble official a half-mile walk; he delivered a letter into the poet's hands.

A letter redirected by his publishers; probably the tribute of an admiring reader, such as he had not seldom received of late. With a smile he opened it, and the contents proved to be of more interest than he had anticipated.

SIR,

I have in my possession a manuscript which bears your name, as that of its author, and dates from some years back. It consists of poetical compositions, the longest of them entitled *The Hermit of the Tor*. I cannot at present explain to you how these papers came into my hands, but I should like to return them to their true owner, and for this purpose I should be glad if you would allow me to meet you, at your own place and time. But for a residence abroad, I should probably have addressed you on the subject long before this, as I find that your name is well known to English readers. Please direct your reply to Penwell's Library, Westbourne Grove, W., and believe me,

Faithfully yours,

EUSTACE GREY

At the head of the letter there was no address. "Eustace Grey" sounded uncommonly like a pseudonym. Altogether a very surprising sequel to the adventure of eight years ago. Was the writer man or woman? Impossible to decide from the penmanship, which was bold, careless, indicative of character and of education. As a man, at all events, the mysterious person must be answered, and curiosity permitted no delay. Where should the meeting take place? He had no inclination to breathe the air of London just now, and a journey of twenty miles might fairly be exacted from a correspondent who chose to write in the strain of melodrama. Let "Eustace Grey" come hither.

With all brevity the poet invited him to take a

certain train from Waterloo, which would enable him to reach the cottage at about four in the afternoon, on a specified day.

The appointed hour was just upon nightfall. With blind drawn, lamp lit, and a log blazing in the old fireplace, the poet awaited his visitor, who might or might not come, for no second communication had been received from him. If he came, he would doubtless take a conveyance from the railway station, a mile and a half away; a rumble of wheels would announce him. At a quarter past four no such signal was yet audible, but five minutes later it struck upon the listener's ear. He stood up, and waited in nervous expectancy.

The vehicle stopped by the door; a knock sounded. A tap at the door of the sitting-room, and there appeared, led by the servant, a tall lady. She was warmly and expensively clad; wraps and furs disguised the outline of her figure, and allowed but an imperfect view of her features. In a moment, however, she threw some of the superfluities aside, and stood gazing at the poet, who saw now that she was a woman of not more than thirty, with a strong, handsome face, and a form that pleased his eye. She offered a hand.

"If I had known——" he began, breaking the silence with voice apologetic. But she interrupted him.

"You wouldn't have brought me all this way. Never mind. It's better. I shall be glad to have

made a pilgrimage to the home of the celebrated author."

Her language and utterance certainly did not lack refinement, but she spoke with more familiarity than the poet was prepared for. He judged her a type of the woman that lives in so-called smart society. His pulses had a slight flutter; in observing and admiring her he all but forgot the strange history in which she was concerned.

"The cab will wait for me," she continued, "so I mustn't be long."

"I'm sorry for that," replied the poet, so far imitating her as to talk like an old acquaintance. "You shall have a cup of tea at once." He rang a hand-bell. "You've had a cold journey."

Whilst he spoke he saw her lay upon the table a rolled packet, which was doubtless his manuscript. Then she seated herself in an easy chair by the fireside, glanced round the room, smiled at her own thoughts, and met his look with a steady gaze.

"Are you Eustace Grey?" he inquired, taking a seat over against her.

"I chose the name at random. My own doesn't matter. I am only an—an intermediary, as you would say in a book."

He searched her countenance closely, persistently, without regard to good manners. It was no common face. Had he ever seen it before? It did not charm him, but decidedly it affected his imagination. This could not be an ordinary

woman of fashion. He knew little of the wealthy world, but his experience of life assured him that "Eustace Grey" was not now for the first time engaged in transactions which had a savour of romance.

"Those are my verses?" He pointed towards the table.

"Exactly as they left your hands," she answered calmly.

"Or my portmanteau, rather."

"Yes, your portmanteau." She accepted the correction with a smile.

Surely he had *not* seen her face before? Surely he had never heard her voice? At this moment the servant entered with a tea-tray. The poet stood up and waited upon his visitor. As soon as the door had closed, she said:

"You are not married?"

"No—unhappily."

"Please don't add the word in compliment to me. I'm delighted to know that you keep your independence. Don't marry for a long time. And you live here always?"

"Most of the year."

"Ah, you are not like ordinary men."

"Nor you—I was thinking—like ordinary women."

"Well, no; I suppose not." She looked at him with a peculiar frankness, with a softer expression than her face had yet shown, and, whilst speaking, she drew off her left-hand glove. A peculiarity in the movement excited her companion's attention;

he saw that she wore two rings, one of them of plain gold.

"I like your books," was her next remark.

"I'm glad of it."

"Have you good health? You look rather pale—for one who lives in the country."

"Oh, I am very well."

"To be sure you have brains, and use them. It's pleasant to know that there *are* such men." She sipped her tea. "But time is going, and the driver and horse will freeze."

"I have no stable," said the poet, "but the man can sit by the kitchen fire and have some ale. Anything to make your visit longer."

"Complimentary; but I am here on business." She had grown more distant. "Of course, you want to know how those papers came into my hands. I'll tell you, and make a short story of it. I had them a year or two ago from a friend of mine—a girl, who died. She had stolen them."

The listener gave a start, and looked at the face before him more intently than ever. He detected no shrinking, but a certain suggestion of defiance.

"She was a girl who did what is supposed to be the privilege of men—sowed wild oats. She came to an end of her money, and found herself in a poor lodging—somewhere in the south of London——"

"Off Kennington Road," murmured the poet.

"Very likely. I forget. She had got rid of all the clothing she could spare. She was a week

behind with her rent. Another day or two, and she would starve. No way of earning money, it seemed. Poor thing, she thought herself something of an artist, and went about offering drawings to the papers and the publishers; but I'm afraid the work was poor to begin with, and got poorer as *she* did. The desperate state of things made her fierce and ready for anything.

" However, she had a girl friend who wrote to her now and then, addressing to the name she had assumed. This friend lived far away in the north, and earned her own living. One afternoon, just when things were at the blackest, there arrived a telegram: ' If you come at once, I can promise you employment. Start immediately.' All very well, but how was she to raise fifteen shillings or so for her journey? Now it happened that at this moment she was the only person in the house. The landlady, she knew, would be away for two or three hours; the husband wouldn't be home till eight (it was now five),—and another lodger had just gone out. I mention this—you know why. Whilst she was still standing with the telegram in her hand, some one knocked. She opened the door. A young man, carrying a portmanteau —a very nice-looking young man, who spoke softly and pleasantly—had come for a lodging; he wanted one room. She let him in, and took him upstairs."

" She did," murmured the poet, his eyes straying about the room.

" And you remember what followed? "

"Remarkably well. I can see—well, I'm not quite sure; but I *think* I can see her face."

"Can you? Well, until you had left the house her intention was perfectly honest. She thought that, in return for her service in letting the room the landlady might perhaps lend her money for the journey north, and trust for repayment. But as soon as you had gone the devil began whispering. Your money lay in her hand. Your portmanteau contained things that would sell or pawn. The chance of a loan from the landlady was dreadfully slight. You see? A man of imagination ought to understand."

"I do—perfectly."

"She tried her keys on the portmanteau. No use. But it was old and shaky. She prised open the lock. What she found disappointed her; it wouldn't fetch many shillings. But she had taken the fatal step. No staying in the house now. She put on her hat and jacket, stuffed into her pockets the few things still left to her, caught up the portmanteau—and away!"

The poet could not help a laugh, and his companion joined in it. But she was agitated, and her mirth had not a genuine ring.

"And how much were my poor old rags worth?"

"Five shillings."

"By Jove! You don't say so!"

"She pawned them in a street somewhere north of the Strand. But this gave her only thirteen shillings. Then she sold the portmanteau;

that brought eighteen-pence. Fourteen shillings and sixpence. Next she sold or pawned her jacket; it brought three shillings."

"Poor girl! With such a journey before her on a cold night! But the poems?"

"She looked at them, and was on the point of throwing them away, but she didn't. She read some of them in the train that night. And oh—oh—oh! how ashamed of herself she was then and for many a long day! So much ashamed that she couldn't even feel afraid."

"And she got the employment promised?"

"Yes. And sowed no more wild oats. It was a poor living, but she struggled on—until by chance she met a very rich man, who took a fancy to her. She didn't care for him. In her life she had only seen one man who really attracted her, but—well, she made up her mind to marry the rich man; and then—she died. I knew her story already, and at her death she left your poems in my care, to be restored if possible. There they are."

With a careless gesture she rose.

"You are not going yet," exclaimed the poet.

"I am; this moment. I have a train to catch."

"Hang the train! There's one at about nine o'clock. I shall send away your cab."

She looked at him very coldly.

"I am going at once, and you will be good enough to stay where you are."

"You won't even tell me your name?"

"Not even that. Good-bye, poet!"

She gave him her hand. Holding it, he gazed at her with bright eyes.

"I do remember your friend's face. And how I wish she could have spoken to me that night!"

"The ideal is never met in life," she answered softly. "Put it into your books—which I shall always read."

The door closed, and he heard the cab rumble away.

From "Human Odds and Ends"

A CHARMING FAMILY

"I MUST be firm," said Miss Shepperson to herself, as she poured out her morning tea with tremulous hand. "I must really be very firm with them."

Firmness was not the most legible characteristic of Miss Shepperson's physiognomy. A plain woman of something more than thirty, she had gentle eyes, a twitching forehead, and lips ever ready for a sympathetic smile. Her attire, a little shabby, a little disorderly, well became the occupant of furnished lodgings, at twelve and sixpence a week, in the unpretentious suburb of Acton. She was the daughter of a Hammersmith draper, at whose death, a few years ago, she had become possessed of a small house and an income of forty pounds a year; her two elder sisters were comfortably married to London tradesmen, but she did not see very much of them, for their ways were not hers, and Miss Shepperson had always been one of those singular persons who shrink into solitude the moment they feel ill at ease. The house which was her property had, until of late, given her no trouble at all; it stood in a quiet part of Hammersmith, and had long been occupied by good tenants, who paid their rent (fifty pounds) with exemplary punctuality; repairs, of course,

would now and then be called for, and to that end Miss Shepperson carefully put aside a few pounds every year. Unhappily, the old tenants were at length obliged to change their abode. The house stood empty for two months; it was then taken on a three years' lease by a family named Rymer—really nice people, said Miss Shepperson to herself after her first interview with them. Mr Rymer was "in the City"; Mrs Rymer, who had two little girls, lived only for domestic peace—she had been in better circumstances, but did not repine, and forgot all worldly ambition in the happy discharge of her wifely and maternal duties. "A charming family!" was Miss Shepperson's mental comment when, at their invitation, she had called one Sunday afternoon soon after they were settled in the house; and, on the way home to her lodgings, she sighed once or twice, thinking of Mrs Rymer's blissful smile and the two pretty children.

The first quarter's rent was duly paid, but the second quarter-day brought no cheque; and, after the lapse of a fortnight, Miss Shepperson wrote to make known her ingenuous fear that Mr Rymer's letter might have miscarried. At once there came the politest and friendliest reply. Mr Rymer (wrote his wife) was out of town, and had been so overwhelmed with business that the matter of the rent must have altogether escaped his mind; he would be back in a day or two, and the cheque should be sent at the earliest possible moment; a thousand apologies for this unpardon-

able neglect. Still the cheque did not come; another quarter-day arrived, and again no rent was paid. It was now a month after Christmas, and Miss Shepperson, for the first time in her life, found her accounts in serious disorder. This morning she had a letter from Mrs Rymer, the latest of a dozen or so, all in the same strain—

"I really feel quite ashamed to take up the pen," wrote the graceful lady, in her delicate hand. "What *must* you think of us! I assure you that never, never before did I find myself in such a situation. Indeed, I should not have the courage to write at all, but that the end of our troubles is already in view. It is *absolutely certain* that, in a month's time, Mr Rymer will be able to send you a cheque in complete discharge of his debt. Meanwhile, I *beg* you to believe, dear Miss Shepperson, how very, *very* grateful I am to you for your most kind forbearance." Another page of almost affectionate protests closed with the touching subscription, "ever yours, sincerely and gratefully, Adelaide Rymer."

But Miss Shepperson had fallen into that state of nervous agitation which impels to a decisive step. She foresaw the horrors of pecuniary embarrassment. Her faith in the Rymers' promises was exhausted. This very morning she would go to see Mrs Rymer, lay before her the plain facts of the case, and with all firmness—with unmistakable resolve—make known to her that, if the arrears were not paid within a month, notice to quit would be given, and the recovery of the debt

be sought by legal process. Fear had made Miss Shepperson indignant; it was wrong and cowardly for people such as the Rymers to behave in this way to a poor woman who had only just enough to live upon. She felt sure that they *could* pay if they liked; but because she had shown herself soft and patient, they took advantage of her. She would be firm, very firm.

So, about ten o'clock, Miss Shepperson put on her best things, and set out for Hammersmith. It was a foggy, drizzly, enervating day. When Miss Shepperson found herself drawing near to the house, her courage sank, her heart throbbed painfully, and for a moment she all but stopped and turned, thinking that it would be much better to put her ultimatum into writing. Yet there was the house in view, and to turn back would be deplorable weakness. By word of mouth she could so much better depict the gravity of her situation. She forced herself onwards. Trembling in every nerve, she rang the bell, and in a scarce audible gasp she asked for Mrs Rymer. A brief delay, and the servant admitted her.

Mrs Rymer was in the drawing-room, giving her elder child a piano-lesson, while the younger, sitting in a baby-chair at the table, turned over a picture-book. The room was comfortably and prettily furnished; the children were very becomingly dressed; their mother, a tall woman, of fair complexion and thin, refined face, with wandering eyes and a forehead rather deeply lined, stepped forward as if in delight at the unexpected

visit, and took Miss Shepperson's ill-gloved hand in both her own, gazing with tender interest into her eyes.

" How kind of you to have taken this trouble! You guessed that I really wished to see you. I should have come to you, but just at present I find it so difficult to get away from home. I am housekeeper, nursemaid, and governess all in one! Some women would find it rather a strain, but the dear tots are so good—so good! Cissy, you remember Miss Shepperson? Of course you do. They look a little pale, I'm afraid; don't you think so? After the life they were accustomed to—but we won't talk about *that*. Tots, school-time is over for this morning. You can't go out, my poor dears; look at the horrid, horrid weather. Go and sit by the nursery fire, and sing ' Rain, rain, go away! ' "

Miss Shepperson followed the children with her look as they silently left the room. She knew not how to enter upon what she had to say. To talk of the law and use threats in this atmosphere of serene domesticity seemed impossibly harsh. But the necessity of broaching that disagreeable subject was spared her.

" My husband and I were talking about you last night," began Mrs Rymer, as soon as the door had closed, in a tone of the friendliest confidence. " I had an idea; it seems to me so good. I wonder whether it will to you? You told me, did you not, that you live in lodgings, and quite alone? "

" Yes," replied Miss Shepperson, struggling

to command her nerves and betraying uneasy wonder.

" Is it by choice? " asked the soft-voiced lady, with sympathetic bending of the head. " Have you no relations in London? I can't help thinking you must feel very lonely."

It was not difficult to lead Miss Shepperson to talk of her circumstances—a natural introduction to the announcement which she was still resolved to make with all firmness. She narrated in outline the history of her family, made known exactly how she stood in pecuniary matters, and ended by saying:

" You see, Mrs Rymer, that I have to live as carefully as I can. This house is really all I have to depend upon, and—and——"

Again she was spared the unpleasant utterance. With an irresistible smile, and laying her soft hand on the visitor's ill-fitting glove, Mrs Rymer began to reveal the happy thought which had occurred to her. In the house there was a spare room; why should not Miss Shepperson come and live here—live, that is to say, as a member of the family? Nothing simpler than to arrange the details of such a plan, which, of course, must be " strictly businesslike," though carried out in a spirit of mutual goodwill. A certain sum of money was due to her for rent; suppose this were repaid in the form of board and lodging, which might be reckoned at—should one say, fifteen shillings a week? At midsummer next an account would be drawn up, " in a thoroughly businesslike way,"

and whatever then remained due to Miss Shepperson would be paid at once; after which, if the arrangement proved agreeable to both sides, it might be continued, cost of board and lodging being deducted from the rent, and the remainder paid " with regularity " every quarter. Miss Shepperson would thus have a home—a real home—with all family comforts, and Mrs Rymer, who was too much occupied with house and children to see much society, would have the advantage of a sympathetic friend under her own roof. The good lady's voice trembled with joyous eagerness as she unfolded the project, and her eyes grew large as she waited for the response.

Miss Shepperson felt such astonishment that she could only reply with incoherencies. An idea so novel and so strange threw her thoughts into disorder. She was alarmed by the invitation to live with people who were socially her superiors. On the other hand the proposal made appeal to her natural inclination for domestic life; it offered the possibility of occupation, of usefulness. Moreover, from the pecuniary point of view, it would be so very advantageous.

" But," she stammered at length, when Mrs Rymer had repeated the suggestion in words even more gracious and alluring, " but fifteen shillings is so very little for board and lodging."

" Oh, don't let *that* trouble you, dear Miss Shepperson," cried the other gaily. " In a family, so little difference is made by an extra person. I assure you it is a perfectly businesslike arrange-

ment; otherwise my husband, who is prudence itself, would never have sanctioned it. As you know, we are suffering a temporary embarrassment. I wrote to you yesterday before my husband's return from business. When he came home, I learnt, to my dismay, that it might be rather *more* than a month before he was able to send you a cheque. I said: 'Oh, I must write again to Miss Shepperson. I can't bear to think of misleading her.' Then, as we talked, that idea came to me. As I think you will believe, Miss Shepperson, I am not a scheming or a selfish woman; never, never have I wronged anyone in my life. This proposal, I cannot help feeling, is as much for your benefit as for ours. Doesn't it really seem so to you? Suppose you come up with me and look at the room. It is not in perfect order, but you will see whether it pleases you."

Curiosity allying itself with the allurement which had begun to work upon her feelings, Miss Shepperson timidly rose and followed her smiling guide upstairs. The little spare room on the second floor was furnished simply enough, but made such a contrast with the bed-chamber in the Acton lodging-house that the visitor could scarcely repress an exclamation. Mrs Rymer was voluble with promises of added comforts. She interested herself in Miss Shepperson's health, and learnt with the utmost satisfaction that it seldom gave trouble. She inquired as to Miss Shepperson's likings in the matter of diet, and strongly approved her preference for a plain, nutritive regimen.

From the spare room the visitor was taken into all the others, and before they went downstairs again Mrs Rymer had begun to talk as though the matter were decided.

"You will stay and have lunch with me," she said. "Oh yes, indeed you will; I can't dream of your going out into this weather till after lunch. Suppose we have the tots into the drawing-room again? I want them to make friends with you at once. I *know* you love children.—Oh, I have known that for a long time!"

Miss Shepperson stayed to lunch. She stayed to tea. When at length she took her leave, about six o'clock, the arrangement was complete in every detail. On this day week she would transfer herself to the Rymers' house, and enter upon her new life.

She arrived on Saturday afternoon, and was received by the assembled family like a very dear friend or relative. Mr Rymer, a well-dressed man, polite, good-natured, with a frequent falsetto laugh, talked over the teacups in the pleasantest way imaginable, not only putting Miss Shepperson at ease, but making her feel as if her position as a member of the household were the most natural thing in the world. His mere pronunciation of her name gave it a dignity, an importance quite new to Miss Shepperson's ears. He had a way of shaping his remarks so as to make it appear that the homely, timid woman was, if anything, rather the superior in rank and education, and that their simple ways might now and then cause her amusement. Even the children

seemed to do their best to make the newcomer feel at home. Cissy, whose age was nine, assiduously handed toast and cake with a most engaging smile, and little Minnie, not quite six, deposited her kitten in Miss Shepperson's lap, saying prettily, " You may stroke it whenever you like."

Miss Shepperson, to be sure, had personal qualities which could not but appeal to people of discernment. Her plain features expressed a simplicity and gentleness which more than compensated for the lack of conventional grace in her manners; she spoke softly and with obvious frankness, nor was there much fault to find with her phrasing and accent; dressed a little more elegantly, she would in no way have jarred with the tone of average middle-class society. If she had not much education, she was altogether free from pretence, and the possession of property (which always works very decidedly for good or for evil) saved her from that excess of defence which would have accentuated her social shortcomings. Undistinguished as she might seem at the first glance, Miss Shepperson could not altogether be slighted by anyone who had been in her presence for a few minutes. And when, in the course of the evening, she found courage to converse more freely, giving her views, for instance, on the great servant question, and on other matters of domestic interest, it became clear to Mr and Mrs Rymer that their landlady, though a softhearted and simple-minded woman, was by no means to be regarded as a person of no account.

The servant question was to the front just now, as Mrs Rymer explained in detail. She, "of course," kept two domestics, but was temporarily making shift with only one, it being so difficult to replace the cook, who had left a week ago. Did Miss Shepperson know of a cook, a sensible, trustworthy woman? For the present Mrs Rymer —she confessed it with a pleasant little laugh— had to give an eye to the dinner herself.

"I only hope you won't make yourself ill, dear," said Mr Rymer, bending towards his wife with a look of well-bred solicitude. "Miss Shepperson, I beg you to insist that she lies down a little every afternoon. She has great nervous energy, but isn't really very strong. You can't think what a relief it will be to me all day to know that some one is with her."

On Sunday morning all went to church together; for, to Mrs Rymer's great satisfaction, Miss Shepperson was a member of the orthodox community, and particular about observances. Meals were reduced to the simplest terms; a restful quiet prevailed in the little house; in the afternoon, while Mrs Rymer reposed, Miss Shepperson read to the children. She it was who—the servant being out—prepared tea. After tea, Mr and Mrs Rymer, with many apologies, left the home together for a couple of hours, being absolutely obliged to pay a call at some distance, and Miss Shepperson again took care of the children till the domestic returned.

After breakfast the next day—it was a very

plain meal, merely a rasher and dry toast—the lady of the house chatted with her friend more confidentially than ever. Their servant, she said, a good girl but not very robust, naturally could not do all the work of the house, and, by way of helping, Mrs Rymer was accustomed to " see to " her own bedroom.

" It's really no hardship," she said, in her graceful, sweet-tempered way, " when once you're used to it; in fact, I think the exercise is good for my health. But, of course, I couldn't think of asking *you* to do the same. No doubt you will like to have a breath of air, as the sky seems clearing."

What could Miss Shepperson do but protest that to put her own room in order was such a trifling matter that they need not speak of it another moment. Mrs Rymer was confused, vexed, and wished she had not said a word; but the other made a joke of these scruples.

" When do the children go out? " asked Miss Shepperson. " Do you take them yourself."

" Oh, always! almost always! I shall go out with them for an hour at eleven. And yet "—she checked herself, with a look of worry—" oh, dear me! I must absolutely go shopping, and I do so dislike to take the tots in that direction. Never mind; the walk must be put off till the afternoon. It *may* rain: but——"

Miss Shepperson straightway offered her services; she would either shop or go out with the children, whichever Mrs Rymer preferred. The lady thought she had better do the shopping—so

her friend's morning was pleasantly arranged. In a day or two things got into a happy routine. Miss Shepperson practically became nursemaid, with the privilege of keeping her own bedroom in order and of helping in a good many little ways throughout the domestic day. A fortnight elapsed, and Mrs Rymer was still unable to " suit herself " with a cook, though she had visited, or professed to visit, many registry-offices and corresponded with many friends. A week after that the subject of the cook had somehow fallen into forgetfulness; and, indeed, a less charitably disposed observer than Miss Shepperson might have doubted whether Mrs Rymer had ever seriously meant to engage one at all. The food served on the family table was of the plainest, and not always superabundant in quantity; but the table itself was tastefully ordered, and, indeed, no sort of carelessness appeared in any detail of the household life. Mrs Rymer was always busy, and without fuss, without irritation. She had a large correspondence; but it was not often that people called. No guest was ever invited to lunch or dinner. All this while the master of the house kept regular hours, leaving home at nine and returning at seven; if he went out after dinner, which happened rarely, he was always back by eleven o'clock. No more respectable man than Mr Rymer; none more even-tempered, more easily pleased, more consistently polite and amiable. That he and his wife were very fond of each other appeared in all their talk and behaviour; both

worshipped the children, and, in spite of that, trained them with a considerable measure of good sense. In the evenings Mr Rymer sometimes read aloud, or he would talk instructively of the affairs of the day. The more Miss Shepperson saw of her friends the more she liked them. Never had she been the subject of so much kind attention, and in no company had she ever felt so happily at ease.

Time went on, and it was near midsummer. Of late Mrs Rymer had not been very well, and once or twice Miss Shepperson fancied that her eyes showed traces of tears; it was but natural that the guest, often preoccupied with the thought of the promised settlement, should feel a little uneasy. On June 23 Mrs Rymer chose a suitable moment, and with her most confidential air, invited Miss Shepperson to an intimate chat.

"I want to explain to you," she said, rather cheerfully than otherwise, "the exact state of our affairs. I'm sure it will interest you. We have become such good friends—as I knew we should. I shall be much easier in mind when you know exactly how we stand."

Thereupon she spoke of a certain kinsman of her husband, an old and infirm man, whose decease was expected, if not from day to day, at all events from week to week. The event would have great importance for them, as Mr Rymer was entitled to the reversion of several thousands of pounds, held in use by his lingering relative.

"Now let me ask you a question," pursued the

lady in friendship's undertone. " My husband is *quite* prepared to settle with you to-morrow. He wishes to do so, for he feels that your patience has been most exemplary. But, as we spoke of it last night, an idea came to me. I can't help thinking it was a happy idea, but I wish to know how it strikes you. On receiving the sum due to you, you will no doubt place it in a bank, or in some way invest it. Suppose, now, you leave the money in Mr Rymer's hands, receiving his acknowledgment, and allowing him to pay it, with four per cent. interest, when he enters into possession of his capital? Mind, I only suggest this; not for a moment would I put pressure upon you. If you have need of the money, it shall be paid *at once*. But it struck me that, knowing us so well now, you might even be glad of such an investment as this. The event to which we are looking forward may happen very soon; but it *may* be delayed. How would you like to leave this money, and the sums to which you will become entitled under our arrangements, from quarter to quarter, to increase at compound interest? Let us make a little calculation——"

Miss Shepperson listened nervously. She was on the point of saying that, on the whole, she preferred immediate payment; but while she struggled with her moral weakness Mrs Rymer, anxiously reading her face, struck another note.

" I mustn't disguise from you that the money, though such a small sum, would be useful to my husband. Poor fellow! he has been fighting

against adversity for the last year or two, and I'm sure no man ever struggled more bravely. You would never think, would you, that he is often kept awake all night by his anxieties? As I tell him, he need not really be anxious at all, for his troubles will so soon come to an end. But there is no more honourable man living, and he worries at the thought of owing money—you can't imagine how he worries! Then, to tell you a great secret——"

A change came upon the speaker's face; her voice softened to a whisper as she communicated a piece of delicate domestic news.

"My poor husband," she added, "cannot bear to think that, when it happens, we may be in really straitened circumstances, and I may suffer for lack of comforts. To tell you the whole truth, dear Miss Shepperson, I have no doubt that, if you like my idea, he would at once put aside that money to be ready for an emergency. So, you see, it is self-interest in me, after all." Her smile was very sweet. "But don't judge me too severely. What I propose is, as you see, really a very good investment—is it not?"

Miss Shepperson found it impossible to speak as she wished, and before the conversation came to an end she saw the matter entirely from her friend's point of view. She had, in truth, no immediate need of money, and the more she thought of it, the more content she was to do a kindness to the Rymers, while at the same time benefiting herself. That very evening Mr Rymer

prepared a legal document, promising to pay on demand the sum which became due to Miss Shepperson to-morrow, with compound interest at the rate of four per cent. While signing this, he gravely expressed his conviction that before Michaelmas the time for payment would have arrived.

" But if it were next week," he added, with a polite movement towards his creditor, " I should be not a bit the less grateful to our most kind friend."

" Oh, but it's purely a matter of business," said Miss Shepperson, who was always abashed by such expressions.

" To be sure," murmured Mrs Rymer. " Let us look at it in that light. But it shan't prevent us from calling Miss Shepperson our dearest friend."

The homely woman blushed and felt happy.

Towards the end of autumn, when the domestic crisis was very near, the servant declared herself ill, and at twenty-four hours' notice quitted the house. As a matter of fact, she had received no wages for several months; the kindness with which she was otherwise treated had kept her at her post thus long, but she feared the increase of work impending, and preferred to go off unpaid. Now for the first time did Mrs Rymer's nerves give way. Miss Shepperson found her sobbing by the fireside, the two children lamenting at such an unwonted spectacle. Where was a new servant to be found? In a day or two the monthly nurse would be here, and must, of course, be waited upon. And what was to become of the children?

Miss Shepperson, moved by the calamitous situation, entreated her friend to leave everything to her. She would find a servant somehow, and meanwhile would keep the house going with her own hands. Mrs Rymer sobbed that she was ashamed to allow such a thing; but the other, braced by a crisis, displayed wonderful activity and resource. For two days Miss Shepperson did all the domestic labour; then a maid, of the species known as " general," presented herself, and none too soon, for that same night there was born to the Rymers a third daughter. But troubles were by no means over. While Mrs Rymer was ill—very ill indeed—the new handmaid exhibited a character so eccentric that, after nearly setting fire to the house while in a state of intoxication, she had to be got rid of as speedily as possible. Miss Shepperson resolved that, for the present, there should be no repetition of such disagreeable things. She quietly told Mr Rymer that she felt quite able to grapple with the situation herself.

" Impossible! " cried the master of the house, who, after many sleepless nights and distracted days, had a haggard, unshorn face, scarcely to be recognized. " I cannot permit it! I will go myself——"

Then, suddenly turning again to Miss Shepperson he grasped her hand, called her his dear friend and benefactress, and with breaking voice whispered to her:

" I will help you. I can do the hard work. It's only for a day or two."

Late that evening he and Miss Shepperson were in the kitchen together: the one was washing crockery, the other, who had been filling coal-scuttles, stood with dirty hands and melancholy visage, his eyes fixed on the floor. Their looks met; Mr Rymer took a step forward, smiling with confidential sadness.

"I feel that I ought to speak frankly," he said, in a voice as polite and well-tuned as ever. "I should like to make known to you the exact state of my affairs."

"Oh, but Mrs Rymer has told me everything," replied Miss Shepperson, as she dried a tea-cup.

"No; not quite everything, I'm afraid." He had a shovel in his hand, and eyed it curiously. "She has not told you that I am considerably in debt to various people, and that, not long ago, I was obliged to raise money on our furniture."

Miss Shepperson laid down the tea-cup and gazed anxiously at him, whereupon he began a detailed story of his misfortunes in business. Mr Rymer was a commission-agent—that is to say, he was everything and nothing. Struggle with pecuniary embarrassment was his normal condition, but only during the last twelve-month had he fallen under persistent ill-luck and come to all but the very end of his resources. It would still be possible for him, he explained, to raise money on the reversion for which he was waiting, but of such a step he could not dream.

"It would be dishonesty, Miss Shepperson,

and, however unfortunate, I have never yet lost my honour. People have trusted me, knowing that I am an honest man. I belong to a good family—as, no doubt, Mrs Rymer has told you. A brother of mine holds a respected position in Birmingham, and, if the worst comes to the worst, he will find me employment. But, as you can well understand, I shrink from that extremity. For one thing, I am in debt to my brother, and I am resolved to pay what I owe him before asking for any more assistance. I do not lose courage. You know the proverb: 'Lose heart, lose all.' I am blest with an admirable wife, who stands by me and supports me under every trial. If my wife were to die, Miss Shepperson——" He faltered; his eyes glistened in the gas-light. "But no, I won't encourage gloomy fears. She is a little better to-day, they tell me. We shall come out of our troubles, and laugh over them by our cheerful fireside—you with us—you, our dearest and staunchest friend."

"Yes, we must hope," said Miss Shepperson, reassured once more as to her own interests; for a moment her heart had sunk very low indeed. "We are all doing our best."

"You above all," said Mr Rymer, pressing her hand with his coal-blackened fingers. "I felt obliged to speak frankly, because you must have thought it strange that I allowed things to get so disorderly—our domestic arrangements, I mean. The fact is, Miss Shepperson, I simply don't know how I am going to meet the expenses of this ill-

ness, and I dread the thought of engaging servants. I cannot—I will not—raise money on my expectations! When the money comes to me, I must be able to pay all my debts, and have enough left to recommence life with. Don't you approve this resolution, Miss Shepperson?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do," replied the listener heartily.

"And yet, of course," he pursued, his eyes wandering, "we *must* have a servant——"

Miss Shepperson reflected, she too with an uneasy look on her face. There was a long silence, broken by a deep sigh from Mr Rymer, a sigh which was almost a sob. The other went on drying her plates and dishes, and said at length that perhaps they might manage with quite a young girl, who would come for small wages; she herself was willing to help as much as she could——

"Oh, you shame me, you shame me!" broke in Mr Rymer, laying a hand on his forehead, and leaving a black mark there. "There is no end to your kindness; but I feel it is a disgrace to us—to me—that you, a lady of property, should be working here like a servant. It is monstrous—monstrous!"

At the flattering description of herself Miss Shepperson smiled; her soft eyes beamed with the light of contentment.

"Don't you give a thought to that, Mr Rymer," she exclaimed. "Why, it's a pleasure to me, and it gives me something to do—it's good for my health. Don't you worry. Think about your busi-

ness, and leave me to look after the house. It'll be all right."

A week later Mrs Rymer was in the way of recovery, and her husband went to the City as usual. A servant had been engaged—a girl of sixteen, who knew as much of housework as London girls of sixteen generally do; at all events, she could carry coals and wash steps. But the mistress of the house, it was evident, would for a long time be unable to do anything whatever; the real maid-of-all-work was Miss Shepperson, who rose every morning at six o'clock, and toiled in one way or another till weary bedtime. If she left the house, it was to do needful shopping or to take the children for a walk. Her reward was the admiration and gratitude of the family; even little Minnie had been taught to say, at frequent intervals; "I love Miss Shepperson because she is good!" The invalid behaved to her as to a sister, and kissed her cheek morning and evening. Miss Shepperson's name being Dora, the baby was to be so called, and, as a matter of course, the godmother drew a sovereign from her small savings to buy little Miss Dora a christening present. It would not have been easy to find a house in London in which there reigned so delightful a spirit of harmony and kindliness.

"I was so glad," said Mrs Rymer one day to her friend, the day on which she first rose from bed, "that my husband took you into his confidence about our affairs. Now you know everything, and it is much better. You know that we

are very unlucky, but that no one can breathe a word against our honour. This was the thought that held me up through my illness. In a very short time all our debts will be paid—every farthing, and it will be delightful to remember how we struggled, and what we endured, to keep an honest name. Though," she added tenderly, " how we should have done without *you*, I really cannot imagine. We might have sunk—gone down! "

For months Mrs Rymer led the life of a feeble convalescent. She ought to have had change of air, but that was out of the question, for Mr Rymer's business was as unremunerative as ever, and with difficulty he provided the household with food. One gleam of light kept up the courage of the family : the aged relative was known to be so infirm that he could only leave the house in a bath-chair; every day there might be news even yet more promising. Meanwhile, the girl of sixteen exercised her incompetence in the meaner departments of domestic life, and Miss Shepperson did all the work that required care or common sense, the duties of nursemaid alone taking a great deal of her time. On the whole, this employment seemed to suit her; she had a look of improved health, enjoyed more equable spirits, and in her manner showed more self-confidence. Once a month she succeeded in getting a few hours' holiday, and paid a visit to one or the other of her sisters; but to neither of them did she tell the truth regarding her position in the house at

Hammersmith. Now and then, when every one else under the roof was asleep, she took from a locked drawer in her bedroom a little account-book, and busied herself with figures. This she found an enjoyable moment; it was very pleasant indeed to make the computation of what the Rymers owed to her, a daily-growing debt of which the payment could not now be long delayed. She did not feel quite sure with regard to the interest, but the principal of the debt was very easily reckoned, and it would make a nice little sum to put by. Certainly Miss Shepperson was not unhappy.

Mrs Rymer was just able to resume her normal habits, to write many letters, teach her children, pay visits in distant parts of London—the care of the baby being still chiefly left to Miss Shepperson—when, on a pleasant day of spring, a little before lunch-time, Mr Rymer rushed into the house, calling in an agitated voice his wife's name. Miss Shepperson was the only person at home, for Mrs Rymer had gone out with the children, the servant accompanying her to wheel baby's perambulator; she ran up from the kitchen, aproned, with sleeves rolled to the elbow, and met the excited man as he descended from a vain search in the bedrooms.

"Has it happened?" she cried—for it seemed to her that there could be only one explanation of Mr Rymer's behaviour.

"Yes! He died this morning—this morning!"

They clasped hands; then, as an afterthought,

their eyes fell, and they stood limply embarrassed.

"It seems shocking to take the news in this way," murmured Mr Rymer; "but the relief; oh, the relief! And then, I scarcely knew him; we haven't seen each other for years. I can't help it! I feel as if I had thrown off a load of tons! Where is Adelaide? Which way have they gone?"

He rushed out again, to meet his wife. For several minutes Miss Shepperson stood motionless, in a happy daze, until she suddenly remembered that chops were at the kitchen fire, and sped downstairs.

Throughout that day, and, indeed, for several days to come, Mrs Rymer behaved very properly indeed; her pleasant, refined face wore a becoming gravity, and when she spoke of the deceased she called him *poor* Mr So-and-so. She did not attend the funeral, for baby happened to be ailing, but Mr Rymer, of course, went. He, in spite of conscientious effort to imitate his wife's decorum, frequently betrayed the joy which was in his mind; Miss Shepperson heard him singing as he got up in the morning, and noticed that he ate with unusual appetite. The house brightened. Before the end of a week smiles and cheerful remarks ruled in the family; sorrows were forgotten, and everybody looked forward to the great day of settlement.

It did not come quickly. In two months' time Mr Rymer still waited upon the pleasure of the executors. But he was not inactive. His brother

at Birmingham had suggested "an opening" in that city (thus did Mrs Rymer phrase it), and the commission-agent had decided to leave London as soon as his affairs were in order. Towards the end of the third month the family was suffering from hope deferred. Mr Rymer had once more a troubled face, and his wife no longer talked to Miss Shepperson in a happy strain of her projects for the future. At length notice arrived that the executors were prepared to settle with Mr Rymer; yet, in announcing the fact, he manifested only a sober contentment, while Mrs Rymer was heard to sigh. Miss Shepperson noted these things, and wondered a little, but Mrs Rymer's smiling assurance that now at last all was well revived her cheerful expectations.

With a certain solemnity she was summoned, a day or two later, to a morning colloquy in the drawing-room. Mr Rymer sat in an easy-chair, holding a bundle of papers; Mrs Rymer sat on the sofa, the dozing baby on her lap; over against them their friend took her seat. With a little cough and a rustle of his papers, the polite man began to speak:

"Miss Shepperson, the day has come when I am able to discharge my debt to you. You will not misunderstand that expression—I speak of my debt in money. What I owe to you—what we all owe to you—in another and a higher sense, can never be repaid. That moral debt must still go on, and be acknowledged by the unfailing gratitude of a lifetime."

"Of a lifetime," repeated Mrs Rymer, sweetly murmuring, and casting towards her friend an eloquent glance.

"Here, however," resumed her husband, "is the pecuniary account. Will you do me the kindness, Miss Shepperson, to glance it over and see if you find it correct?"

Miss Shepperson took the paper, which was covered with a very neat array of figures. It was the same calculation which she herself had so often made, but with interest on the money due to her correctly computed. The weekly sum of fifteen shillings for board and lodging had been deducted, throughout the whole time, from the rent due to her as landlady. Mr Rymer stood her debtor for not quite thirty pounds.

"It's *quite* correct," said Miss Shepperson, handing back the paper with a pleased smile.

Mr Rymer turned to his wife.

"And what do *you* say, dear? Do *you* think it correct?"

Mrs Rymer shook her head.

"No," she answered gently, "indeed I do not."

Miss Shepperson was startled. She looked from one to the other, and saw on their faces only the kindliest expression.

"I really thought it came to about that," fell from her lips. "I couldn't quite reckon the interest——"

"Miss Shepperson," said Mr Rymer impressively, "do you really think that we should allow you to pay us for your board and lodging—you,

our valued friend—you, who have toiled for us, who have saved us from endless trouble and embarrassment? That indeed would be a little too shameless. This account is a mere joke—as I hope you really thought it. I insist on giving you a cheque for the total amount of the rent due to you from the day when you first entered this house."

"Oh, Mr Rymer!" panted the good woman, turning pale with astonishment.

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Mrs Rymer. "Do you think it would be *possible* for us to behave in any other way? Surely you know us too well, dear Miss Shepperson!"

"How kind you are!" faltered their friend, unable to decide in herself whether she should accept this generosity or not—sorely tempted by the money, yet longing to show no less generous a spirit on her own side. "I really don't know——"

Mr Rymer imposed silence with a wave of the hand, and began talking in a slow, grave way.

"Miss Shepperson, to-day I may account myself a happy man. Listen to a very singular story. You know that I was indebted to others besides you. I have communicated with all those persons; I have drawn up a schedule of everything I owe; and—extraordinary coincidence!—the sum-total of my debts is exactly that of the reversion upon which I have entered, *minus* three pounds fourteen shillings."

"Strange!" murmured Mrs Rymer, as if delightedly.

"I did not know, Miss Shepperson, that I owed so much. I had forgotten items. And suppose, after all, the total had *exceeded* my resources! That indeed would have been a blow. As it is, I am a happy man; my wife is happy. We pay our debts to the last farthing, and we begin the world again—with three pounds to the good. Our furniture must go; I cannot redeem it; no matter. I owe nothing; our honour is saved!"

Miss Shepperson was aghast.

"But, Mrs Rymer," she began, "this is dreadful! What are you going to do?"

"Everything is arranged, dear friend," Mrs Rymer replied. "My husband has a little post in Birmingham which will bring him in just enough to support us in the most modest lodgings. We cannot hope to have a house of our own, for we are determined never again to borrow—and, indeed, I do not know who would lend to us. We are poor people, and must live as poor people do. Miss Shepperson, I ask one favour of you. Will you permit us to leave your house without the customary notice? We should feel very grateful. To-day I pay Susan, and part with her; to-morrow we must travel to Birmingham. The furniture will be removed by the people who take possession of it——"

Miss Shepperson was listening with a bewildered look. She saw Mr Rymer stand up.

"I will now," he cried, "pay you the rent from the day——"

"Oh, Mr Rymer!" cried the agitated woman.

"How *can* I take it? How can I leave you penniless? I should feel it a downright robbery, that I should!"

"Miss Shepperson," exclaimed Mrs Rymer in soft reproach, "don't you understand how much better it is to pay all we owe, even though it does leave us penniless? Why, even darling baby" —she kissed it—"would say so if she could speak, poor little mite. Of course you will accept the money; I insist upon it. You won't forget us. We will send you our address, and you shall hear of your little godchild——"

Her voice broke; she sobbed, and rebuked herself for weakness, and sobbed again. Meanwhile Mr Rymer stood holding out banknotes and gold. The distracted Miss Shepperson made a wild gesture.

"How *can* I take it? How *can* I? I should be ashamed the longest day I lived!"

"I must insist," said Mr Rymer firmly; and his wife, calm again, echoed the words. In that moment Miss Shepperson clutched at the notes and gold, and, with a quick step forward, took hold of the baby's hand, making the little fingers close upon the money.

"There! I give it to little Dora—there!"

Mr Rymer turned away to hide his emotion. Mrs Rymer laid baby down on the sofa, and clasped Miss Shepperson in her arms. A few days later the house at Hammersmith was vacant. The Rymers wrote from Birmingham that they had found sufficient, though humble, lodgings, and

were looking for a tiny house, which they would furnish very, very simply with the money given to baby by their ever dear friend. It may be added that they had told the truth regarding their position—save as to one detail: Mr Rymer thought it needless to acquaint Miss Shepperson with the fact that his brother, a creditor for three hundred pounds, had generously forgiven the debt.

Miss Shepperson, lodging in a little bedroom, with an approving conscience to keep her company, hoped that her house would soon be let again.

From "The House of Cobwebs"

OUR MR JUPP

You knew the man at once by his likeness to a thousand others. His clothes were always in good condition; the gloss of his linen declared a daily renewal; he was scrupulously shaven, and blew his nose with a silk handkerchief. Yet the impression he made was sordid. The very flower in his buttonhole took a taint of vulgarity, and became suggestive of cheap promenade concerts, or of the public dancing-saloon. He had a fresh colour, proof of time spent chiefly out of doors; his features were blunt, trivial, not to be remembered; in his yellowish eyes lurked a speculative cunning, a cold self-conceit which tuned with the frequent simper upon his loose lips.

At his present age of nine-and-twenty Mr Jupp represented a South London firm of wholesale haberdashers, a house struggling hard against early difficulties—he was their town traveller, and they thought a good deal of him. He had the use of a pony-trap and attendant boy; to observe him as he drove about the highways and by-ways was to enter into the spirit of commercial democracy. Proud of his personal appearance and of his turn-out, proud of his skill in cutting the corners, he rattled from shop to shop with zealous absorption in the business of the day, with an eye for nothing

but what concerned his immediate interests. Out of business hours Jupp became a gentleman of untroubled leisure, visited the theatre or music-hall several times in the week, looked in at the Criterion bar about eleven, was home at Kennington not later than half-past twelve.

He lived with his mother and sister, in a very small house, in a squalid little street. His address mattered nothing to him, for he would never have dreamt of asking anyone to come and see him at home. For board and lodging he paid Mrs Jupp ten-and-sixpence a week, out of which sum he expected her to provide him with succulent breakfasts, with savoury suppers when he chose to return early, with a substantial dinner on Sundays, and with bitter ale to his heart's content. The mother grumbled privately, but stinted nothing. Miss Jupp, on the other hand, made frequent protest, and quarrelled with her brother every Sunday. She, a girl of twenty-two, worked very hard at the making of baby linen; of necessity nearly all her earnings went to the support of the house, and every year her temper grew more acrid.

One other person there was who had a decided opinion as to John Jupp's domestic behaviour. Martha Pimm knew the family through having lodged in the same house with them some years ago; she kept up an acquaintance with Ada Jupp, and learnt from her all about the brother's gross selfishness. "I wish *I* was his sister, that's all!" she often remarked, and her eyes twinkled with scorn. The truth was that, in days gone by, Jupp

had allowed Miss Pimm to suspect that he regarded her with a certain interest; she gave him neither encouragement nor the reverse, and presently, as his position improved, John began to spend his leisure elsewhere; nowadays they very seldom saw each other.

His income fluctuated, but for the last three years he had averaged an annual three hundred pounds, and of this he spent every penny upon himself. Whatever the difficulties and hardships at home, it never occurred to him to supplement his weekly ten-and-sixpence. In all sincerity he believed that he had barely sufficient for his wants. He groaned over the laundry bill, and thought it a hard thing that his mother would not discharge this out of what he gave her. If the cooking were not to his taste he piped querulously, and threatened to take rooms in a lodging-house, where his modest wants could be decently attended to. He wrangled with his sister about half-pence charged by her for the mending of his socks. With the cares of the house he would have nothing whatever to do; on one occasion he gently refused a loan to make up the rent, and Mrs Jupp had to visit the pawnbroker.

He did not care to encounter Martha Pimm, for she always looked and spoke in a way that made him feel uneasy. After such meeting he continued to think of her in spite of himself. She was rather a comely girl, and very sprightly; had a good-natured ' cheekiness ' of tone that sat well on her; altogether, the kind of young woman that

a fellow might get to think too much of. Jupp had not the slightest intention of marrying until he could find a wife with money: he wanted capital to start a business for himself. But he was by no means insensible to female charm, and he thought it just as well to keep out of Martha's way.

But one evening, when he had come home early to have a cheap supper, he found Miss Pimm in the dingy little sitting-room. She was high-coloured and in a state of joyous animation.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed at the door. "That you?"

"Used to be," Martha replied, perkily.

"What's up? Come in for a fortune?"

Martha gave a ringing laugh, which was moderately joined in by Mrs Jupp and her daughter.

"There's many a true word said in joke," she observed, with a little toss of the head.

It came out that Miss Pimm had actually inherited possessions. Her stepfather, a rag merchant in Bermondsey, a snuffy, grimy, miserly old fellow, had died at Guy's Hospital after a long illness. Martha had been to visit him now and then, though she hardly counted him a relative; she pitied the poor old curmudgeon, and made him a promise that he should not be buried by the parish. To her, by formal testament, the dying man bequeathed all he had, which, on inquiry in a certain indicated quarter, proved to be a matter of two or three thousand pounds, shrewdly invested.

John Jupp listened with wide eyes.

" And what are you going to do with it? " he asked.

" Spend it all on myself, of course—like other people that has lots o' money."

Jupp laughed—the allusion was not dark to him; but it left his withers unwrung. Long ago he had learnt to despise such rebukes.

But that night he lay awake for an unusual time. Two thousand pounds was a sum of money; he could see his way to making use of it. And it was wonderful how Martha Pimm had improved since he last met her. Had the money brought that fine colour to her cheeks? She was rather off-hand with him, but that meant pique at his neglect. If he chose to alter his tone, to approach the girl flatteringly—why, a man of his advantages, personal and other, was not likely to condescend in vain.

He took the resolve; he began to seek Martha's society.

She lived with a widowed aunt of hers, who kept a small tobacco-shop in a street off Kennington Road. The girl performed a multiplicity of services: waiting upon a female lodger, helping in the general domestic work (her aunt had four young children), and frequently attending to customers. This life was not altogether to her taste, and she could have earned more money by resuming her former occupation of dressmaking; but it would have been difficult for Mrs Pimm to find anyone else able and willing to give such thorough assistance; Martha's goodness of heart

found compensation for the things she relinquished.

When the children were abed Mrs Pimm and her niece took turns at sitting behind the counter, evening by evening. And presently Mr Jupp began to patronize the little place for his cigars, tobacco, and other trifles: he would pass along the street about nine o'clock and peep in just to see whether Martha was there. If so, he took a chair, and talked genially, sometimes for an hour or more.

"Don't you want a commission?" Martha asked one evening, when he at length bought a box of vestas and prepared to depart.

"Commission?"

"You're a sort of advertisement for the shop, you know. It brings custom when people see a swell like you sitting here."

Jupp laughed; he was flattered.

"I must think about it. Suppose we have a walk together one of these evenings, and talk it over?"

There was a sly smile on Martha's lips. She behaved as though the young man's advances were not at all disagreeable. It seemed to John that she had no suspicion of the motive which truly actuated him. All the same, he would be prudent; there must be no direct love-making yet awhile. Enough that he ingratiated himself by frequent exhibition of his spotless hats, his diverse neckties, the flower in his buttonhole. He studied a manner of suave politeness—and Jupp believed

that, like Samuel Johnson, he was well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity.

Martha consented to take a walk with him. Not to shame his gentility, she donned her best attire, and in the summer evening they sauntered as far as Westminster. In the fulness of his heart John proposed that they should enter a confectioner's. Martha gaily assented, and merrily made choice of the most expensive delicacies; she ate with such a hearty appetite that her companion, who had calculated on an expenditure of sixpence, found that he had two or three shillings to pay. It made him tremble with wrath; but he commanded his countenance, and thought on the ragman's legacy.

Before they parted he asked if he might take her to the theatre next Saturday. There was a good piece at the Adelphi.

"I should like it awfully!" exclaimed the girl. "But you must take your sister as well."

"Oh, nonsense! It'll spoil all the fun."

Martha insisted. She would not go unless Ada Jupp were of the company.

"I shall come and see her to-morrow, and tell her you're going to take us," she said with child-like exultation. "You're very nice, you know; much nicer than I thought."

Jupp grinned in torment. Never mind; if this was the way to win her, all right. A rapid computation, and he had decided that he would risk the bait.

He reached home the next evening about eight

o'clock, and had not been in the house many minutes—just time enough to exhibit unusual surliness—when Martha came.

"What do you think, Ada!" she cried, on entering the kitchen, where Mrs Jupp and her daughter were ironing linen, "your brother's going to take us up to the Adelphi on Saturday, you and me—to the upper circle!"

The listeners stood amazed. John, in the background, grinned horribly. He had intended seats in the pit.

"How can *I* go?" said Ada, pettishly. "I haven't a decent thing to put on."

"Then you'll have to get 'em. Your brother will pay for 'em, I'm sure."

"Hollo! Who said so?" cried a choking voice.

But it was overwhelmed by Martha's laughing protest. What! he wouldn't buy a hat and jacket for his own sister—a man rolling in money as he was! Of course that was only his fun. And in five minutes the whole thing was arranged. Martha suggested the shop where Ada's new trappings should be purchased. She herself would go with the girl, and assist her choice.

"I can't stay any longer, now. I only just looked in for a minute. I suppose you ain't walking my way, Mr Jupp?"

John was led off, gnashing his teeth, and secretly vowing a future vengeance, but supported by the reflection that already Martha could not keep away from him.

"You don't mean to go on working for your

aunt, do you?" he asked, as they walked away, venturing for the first time upon delicate ground.

"It wouldn't be kind to leave her all at once, you know."

"And where are you going when you *do* leave here?"

Martha seemed embarrassed.

"I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Time enough when I get my money. I'm going to see the lawyer again next week."

He made inquiries, in a jesting tone, and the girl informed him of all he desired to know. The money was absolutely for her own use; she had learnt the nature of the investments, and what they produced. John expressed an anxious hope that her lawyer was an honest man; he offered his services as a man of business. But Martha had an air of complete confidence; she smiled her sweetest, and John felt an unwonted flutter in his breast.

That evening at the theatre was the beginning of a round of delights. When Jupp proposed another entertainment, Martha insisted that he should take his mother this time; she knew it was so long since poor Mrs Jupp had been anywhere at all. But the widow was even worse provided in the matter of costume than her daughter, and Martha, having purposely led the conversation to this point, one evening at the Jupps', took upon herself to promise that John, like the excellent son he was, would buy his mother a whole new outfit. And she gained her point. By this time, John, whether conqueror or not, was un-

doubtedly himself subdued; he could not let an evening pass without seeing Martha. He offered her presents, but, to his surprise and relief, Martha would have none of them; he might pay for entertainments and for little feasts as much as he liked, but of gifts from hand to hand she would not hear. Never had Mrs Jupp and Ada known such a season of gaiety. Wherever Martha went with her cavalier, one or other of them, and sometimes both, went also. Theatres, music-halls, Kensington Exhibitions, shows at Westminster, the Crystal Palace, Rosherville Gardens—all were visited in turn, and invariably with a maximum of expense to Mr Jupp. He groaned after each expedition like a man with colic; in the privacy of his home he had fits of frenzied wrath; but still the expenditure ceased not, for Martha ruled him with her laughing eye and her 'cheeky' words, and he always reminded himself that the ragman's legacy would make abundant reparation. Miss Pimm spent a great deal of time at the Jupps' house, and never went away without suggesting—that is to say, commanding—some outlay or trouble for the comfort of Mrs Jupp and Ada. Their rooms were in a disgraceful state; John had to call in the services of paper-hanger and upholsterer. The roof leaked; John had to badger the landlord until it was seen to. All sorts of things were wanted for the kitchen; John had to buy them. Finally, one evening of autumn, as he and Martha walked idly in Kennington Road, the girl said to him:

"I tell you what it is: you don't pay half enough for your board and lodging, you know."

He checked his steps.

"What! after all I've done for them! Why, I've spent pounds, pounds!"

"Well; it's no more than you ought to have done. Fancy, only ten-and-sixpence a week. Make it a pound."

"A pound! Do you suppose I'm made of money?"

The discussion brought him to a point already several times approached. When was Martha going to marry him? Come, now, he had waited a long time. She knew that he was nothing but a downright slave to her. If he could only say all he felt——

"When did it begin?" asked Martha, slyly.

"Begin? Why, years ago. I've been fond of you ever since I first saw you——"

The girl laughed noisily. She would not allow him to be sentimental, would not discuss the question of marriage. As on each previous occasion, she put him off with the vaguest references to a future time. And John had to go home thus unsatisfied. He had a bad taste in his mouth; he felt bilious. What if Martha had only played with him? And the money he had spent in pursuit of her, of the legacy! That night he raged at his mother and his sister. They were in a plot to rob him. He would sell all the new furniture he had bought them, and go off to lodgings in another house. Mrs Jupp, seriously concerned, talked of

Martha, and tried to assure him that the girl was ready to be his wife, only he must let her take her own time. Ada answered wrath with wrath, and said it served him right, whatever happened; he was a sneak and a skinflint; he had only made up to Martha when she came in for money, and did he suppose a girl couldn't see that?

There was a terrific uproar in the house. After the women, worn out with disputation, had gone to bed, John sat up for an hour drinking bitter ale, accompaniment to bitter thoughts.

The next day he had an unpleasant interview with the partners of his firm. " Our Mr Jupp " no longer stood in such high favour with these gentlemen as a year ago, partly because of a falling-off in their business, partly as a result of John's personal demeanour lately. It had always been John's weakness to pose as indispensable; as long as they thought him so, his employers gladly bore with this trait, but when it appeared to them that he was no longer so skilful as of old in the hunt for orders, they grew disposed to resent his loftiness as mere impudence. The business, they remarked, stood in need of a decided impulse, and Mr Jupp, it seemed to them, had begun to exhibit laxity. One of them suspected underhand dealing; somebody had been whispering that Jupp had in view an enterprise of his own, and that he might already be estranging the connections of the house in his own interests. Briefly, there was what is called a ' rumpus,' and when it ended in Jupp's announcing that their engage-

ment might terminate whenever his employers chose, that confirmed them in their suspicion. John had notice to take himself elsewhere at an early date.

Very well. It was now his business to arrive at an understanding with Martha Pimm. This very night he would have it out with her, and he doubted not of success.

The little shop put up its shutters at ten. Just as the boy employed for this purpose had finished his work, Jupp pushed open the door. Martha was behind the counter, putting things in order for the night. She looked up and smiled, but not at all in her wonted way; rather as she might have greeted any strange customer.

"What can I do for you, Mr Jupp?"

"Hollo! What's the matter?"

"Matter? Nothing that I know of."

She was friendly, but distant. After a few minutes' idle talk, she again asked him what he had come for.

"Aunt has gone to bed, and I want to get the place locked up."

Speaking, she turned off one jet of gas, and lowered another, so that they stood in a dim light. Jupp leaned to her across the counter, and began to plead. It was singular love-making; the man's voice, and even his words, strongly suggested the insistence of a commercial traveller who is representing the merits of some new 'line.' Martha interrupted him.

"Are you going to give your mother a pound

a week? " she asked, in a tone of good-humoured interest.

" I will! I promise you, Martha. Only let's settle the time of our marriage, there's a dear girl."

" Oh, there's plenty of time to think of that."

He interrupted her with a thump on the counter, and began to speak in a thick, angry voice. He wouldn't be played with; she had as good as promised to marry him long ago; did she think he was to be fooled in this way? From Martha came a sharp reply; she had never hinted in a word or look that she meant to marry him; who was *he* to talk to her like this? Let him go and behave decently to his mother and sister, and show that he wasn't such a selfish cur as he used to be, and then it would be time enough to ask a girl to marry him. As he listened, Jupp's face became livid.

" Look 'ere! " he exclaimed, again thumping the counter. " You've gone too far to draw back. You've got to marry me! "

" Who? Me? " cried Martha. " Marry *you*? A man as comes making up to me just when he hears I've money left, and before that thought too much of himself to look at me! Not me indeed! "

Thwarted passion and baffled interest made such a whirl in the man's brain that he lost all control of himself. When Martha had ceased speaking, he stood for a moment staring her in the face with round, idiotic eyes; then he raised his right hand and dealt her a ringing box on the ear. Martha tottered aside, and gave a cry, but of

astonishment rather than of pain or fright. It brought Jupp to his senses; terrified at what he had done, he turned on his heels and bolted into the street. The door stood wide open behind him.

On the morrow he carried out his oft-repeated threat, and took lodgings in another part of London. From that day Mrs Jupp and Ada saw nothing of him for many months, and of course received no more of his bounty. After waiting in vain for a visit from Martha Pimm, Ada went to see the girl. Martha was quite herself, but professed that she knew nothing whatever of Mr Jupp. She came no more to her friend's house, and before very long her aunt removed from the little shop to one much larger in Brixton Road, where Martha took the tobacconist business seriously in hand, and to all appearances it throve.

When something like a year had passed Martha Pimm and Ada Jupp met by chance on a Bank Holiday at the Crystal Palace. Martha was accompanied by two of her little cousins, and had a look of frank enjoyment; Ada was walking about alone, looked rather cheerless, and wore the dress which her brother had so reluctantly purchased for her more than twelve months ago. They approached each other, and talked. Martha was just going to get seats for the afternoon concert; she made the lonely girl join her. Subsequently she took her and the children to have tea, not a 'ninepenny,' but a really festive meal at the exclusive tables. And here, bending forward, she asked with a smile what had become of John.

" He's been married about three months," Ada replied.

" Who to? " the other inquired, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

" A publican's widow. She had money—of course. And he's gone into the public line with her. The 'ouse is at 'Ammersmith."

Martha relieved her feelings in a laugh of the most undeniable mirthfulness.

" Is he 'appy? "

" I don't know. We never see nothing of him."

But in due time Martha had an answer to her inquiry; she came upon it in a newspaper, of date some half a year subsequent to that Bank Holiday. Here she read of one John Jupp, publican, who had answered a summons to the police-court, where he was charged with certain irregularities in the conduct of this business, chiefly the permission of gambling on the premises. The case was amusing; it gave scope to the reporter's humour. Mr Jupp appeared before the magistrates with a very black black-eye, interrogated as to which, he made known that it was bestowed upon him by his wife, with whom he lived in anything but ideal felicity. Mrs Jupp, he asserted, was no better than a " she-demon "; to her he attributed all the ill report which had gathered about his house. Whereupon from another part of the court there sounded a fierce shout, or rather yell; it came from the lady in question; she shrieked menaces at her husband, and quietness could only be restored by her forcible removal.

In the end, Mr John Jupp found himself mulcted in a heavy fine, and retired disconsolate.

Having read this bit of drama, Martha Pimm laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

Two months later, on a dreary November morning, she received at her shop in Brixton a letter of which the signature greatly surprised her. John Jupp wrote to ask if she would grant him an interview. He wished particularly to see her and as soon as possible, and he remained hers very faithfully. The address he appended was other than that of the house at Hammersmith. Martha at once wrote a reply, inviting him to come that very evening.

And he came about eight o'clock. Martha received him in a sitting-room above the shop. Seedily habited, and with a face which made suggestion of fresh assaults from his vigorous spouse, John moved humbly forward.

"Miss Pimm," he began, stopping at a few paces from her, "I am leaving London, and I wish before I go to ask your pardon for—for something I did a long time ago."

"Oh, you do, Mr Jupp, do you?" Martha replied, checking herself from laughter.

"Yes. In earnest I do. I ought to have come long ago, but I was ashamed, and that's the truth. I'm leaving London—I've got a little place in the Midlands, in fact, though I don't care to mention where it is, not even to you. And I want to hear as you've forgiven me."

"And what good'll it do you, Mr Jupp?"

Standing, he entered upon a narrative of his matrimonial experiences. It lasted a quarter of an hour, and the listener enjoyed herself as at a play; but she did not laugh. When he was silent she said that he hadn't behaved to her exactly like a gentleman, but that she too had something with which to reproach herself; she pardoned him freely, and wished him better luck.

But John still kept his position.

"Anything else you want to say, Mr Jupp?"

"Only this, Miss Pimm. At my age of one-and-thirty I am a broken and a penniless man. I'm going away to 'ide my 'ead. You've been doing well, and I'm glad to see it. What I want to ask is—could you find it in your 'art to offer me a little help?"

Martha looked at him for full a minute, during which he kept his eyes down. Then she felt in her pocket and produced a purse.

"How much did you think of asking?" she inquired gravely, but with a curious hint of mirth about her twitching mouth.

"Oh!" his note was joyful. "I leave that to you, Miss Pimm. I never thought I should come to this——"

"Would ten pounds be any use?"

"T—ten?" He had not hoped for so much, and consequently felt aggrieved that it was not more. "Oh, thank you! I think ten pounds would give me a nice little start. You see, Miss Pimm, I haven't a penny of my own. The house is my wife's—all the money is hers. I've had to

save myself from her with just what I stand up in——"

"All right. Wait a minute while I go downstairs."

Martha had been examining the contents of her purse; she now hurriedly put back the coins, and in doing so allowed half a sovereign to fall to the floor. It fell noiselessly upon the carpet, but not unobserved by Mr Jupp's eye. His head was perked forward; he seemed about to draw attention to the accident; but as Martha walked away in seeming unconsciousness of what had happened, he stood still and spoke not a word.

She was absent five minutes, then reappeared with a ten-pound note in her hand. Advancing to her former place she looked on the ground, but not in a way to excite Jupp's attention. He, meanwhile, stood just where she had left him.

"Well, here's ten pounds," she said, eyeing him strangely, severely.

"I thank you with all my 'art, dear Miss Pimm!"

"With that," she continued, her voice hardening, "*and the ten shillings you've just stolen*, you ought to make a nice start, don't you think?"

He staggered and turned deadly pale.

"Stolen—ten shillings—what d'you mean?"

Martha pointed to the floor.

"I saw it drop, and I thought I'd try you. I wanted to see what sort of a man you really were—understand? I shall give you the ten pounds all the same. I wouldn't have given a penny, only

I've felt that I made rather a fool of you once—you remember? I never felt sorry for you, and now I see I was right. Just take yourself off, Mr Jupp, before I pay you back something you once gave me, though I hadn't asked for it!"

And he turned and slunk away, in his fingers the squeezed banknote, in his pocket the half-sovereign.

From "Human Odds and Ends"

COMRADES IN ARMS

LUNCHEON hour was past, and the tide of guests had begun to ebb. From his cushioned corner, his familiar seat in the restaurant, Wilfrid Langley kept an observant eye upon chatting groups and silent solitaries who still lingered at the tables near him. In this quiet half-hour, whilst smoking a cigarette and enjoying his modest claret, he caught the flitting suggestion of many a story, sketch, gossipy paper. A woman's laugh, a man's surly visage, couples oddly assorted, scraps of dialogue heard amid the confused noises—everywhere the elements of drama, to be fused and minted in his brain. Success had multiplied his powers a hundredfold; success and the comforts that came with it—savoury meats, wine, companionship. No one was dependent upon him; no one restrained his liberty; he lived where he chose, and how he chose. And for all that—his age fell short of thirty—something seemed to him amiss in the bounty of the gods.

A figure was moving in his direction; he looked up from a moment's reverie, to see a woman seat herself at the opposite side of his table. A laugh of pleased recognition; a clasp of hands.

"Thought I might find you here," said Miss

Childerstone. She turned to the waiter. " Roast mutton—potatoes—bread. And—soda-water."

" Soda ! " Langley exclaimed in surprise. " That's where you women make a mistake. You need a stimulant."

" Thanks, old man ; I am better acquainted with my needs than you are. Here's something for you."

She threw an evening paper at him saying, " Page seven." Langley opened it, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure. A notice of his new book ; three-quarters of a column ; high laudation, as he saw immediately.

" Yours ? " he asked.

" Take it without questions, and be thankful you're not slated."

" It *is* yours. Don't I know the fine Roman hand. Irony in the first sentence." He read in silence for a few minutes, then gave his companion a look of warm gratitude. " You're a good sort."

Miss Childerstone was drinking deep of her soda-water. Neither plain nor pretty, she had noticeable features, a keen good-humoured eye, an air of self-possession and alertness. She dressed well, with a view to the fitness of things. Her years were in the fourth decade.

She began to eat, but, it seemed, with little appetite.

" I've had a headache since yesterday. I should like to go to bed and lie there for a week. But there's my stuff for Tomlinson. Don't feel like it, I tell you."

"I see now that you look out of sorts. Yes, you look bad. I tell you what—couldn't I scrawl something that would do for Tomlinson?"

She looked at him, and smiled.

"I dare say you could. Any rubbish you want to shoot somewhere. The truth is, I don't think I'm equal to it.—No, I can't eat. Thump! thump! on the back of the head."

They discussed the literary business in question, and Langley undertook to supply the article due from his friend to a weekly paper. It must be posted to-night. Miss Childerstone, abandoning the scarcely touched food, rested her head upon her hands for a few moments.

"I've done something I'm proud of," she said at length, "and I may as well have the satisfaction of telling you. My sister has just gone off to Natal, to be married there. I provided her outfit, paid her passage, and gave her fifty pounds. All off my own bat, old boy! Not bad, is it?"

"Your sister? Why, you never told me she was going to be married."

"No. It wasn't quite certain—all along. Two years ago she engaged herself to a man who was going out yonder—a man of no means, and not quite up to her mark, I thought. (I must eat something; I'll try the potatoes.) A very decent sort of fellow—handsome, honest. Well, she's been in doubt, off and on. (Are these potatoes bad? Or is it my taste that's out of order?) She stuck to her teaching, poor girl, and had a pretty dull time of it. In the end, I made up my mind

that she'd better go and get married. There couldn't be any doubt about the man's making her a good husband; I read his letters, and liked them. Good, plodding, soft-hearted sort of creature; not at all a bad husband for Cissy. Better than the beastly teaching, anyway. So she's gone."

"That's a disappointment to me," said Langley. "I hoped to meet her some day. And you promised I should."

"Yes—but I altered my mind."

"What do you mean? You didn't wish me to meet her?"

"The probability was you'd have unsettled her. She never knew a man of your sort. She might have fallen in love with you."

Miss Childerstone spoke in a matter-of-fact voice; her smile could not have been less ambiguous. Langley, gazing at her with surprise, exclaimed at length:

"Well? And why not?"

"Why not? Oh, my dear boy, I would do a good deal for you, but I couldn't indulge your vanity in that direction. I'm fond of my little sister."

"Of course you are. And why shouldn't *I* have been? Describe her to me."

"Fair — pretty — five-and-twenty. An old-fashioned girl, with all sorts of beliefs that would exasperate you. The gentlest creature! Vastly too patient, too good. Will make an ideal housewife and mother."

Langley smote the table with his fist.

"But you're describing the very girl I want to find, and can't! How absurdly you have behaved! And she's gone to the end of the earth to marry a man she doesn't care about—this is too ridiculous! Why, I want to marry, and the difficulty is to find such a girl as this. I shall never forgive you."

His companion looked searchingly at him, with mocking lips.

"Bosh!" she replied.

"It isn't! I'm desperately serious."

"In any case, I wouldn't have let her marry you. You've been too frank with me. I know you too well. Of course, I like you, because you're likeable—as a comrade-in-arms. We've fought the battle together, and done each other a good turn now and then. But you're very young, you know. You have money in your pocket for the first time, and—by-the-bye, I heard about that supper at Romano's. How much did it cost you?"

"Oh, ten or fifteen pounds—I've forgotten."

He said it with a touch of bravado, his smile betraying pleasure that the exploit had become known.

"Precisely. And your Dulcinea of the footlights—Totty, Lotty—what's her name?—was there. My dear boy, you mustn't marry for another ten years. It would spoil you. You're only just beginning to look round the world. Go ahead; enjoy yourself; see things; but don't think of marrying."

"I think of it perpetually."

The other moved an impatient hand.

"I can't talk. My head is terrible. I must go home."

"You've been working yourself to death to provide for your sister. And very likely made her miserable, after all."

"Mind your own business. Where's the waiter? Call him, will you? I'm turning blind and deaf, and I don't know what."

"I shall take you home," said Langley, rising.

"You can put me into a cab, if you like."

She looked very ill, and Langley kept glancing at her with uneasiness as they went together from the restaurant. His resolve to see her safely home was not opposed. In the hansom they exchanged few words, but Langley repeated his promise to do the bit of literary work for her editor. "To-morrow morning," he added, "I shall come and ask how you are. Send for a doctor if you're no better by night."

His own rooms were in the same district, that of Regent's Park, and after leaving Miss Childerstone he went off to perform the task he had undertaken—no difficult matter. Though it was holiday time with him just now, he spent the whole evening in solitude, more discontented than usual. The post brought him news that the first edition of his book was sold out. Satisfactory, but it gave him no particular delight. He had grown used to think of himself as one of the young men whom the public run after, and his

rooted contempt for the public made him suspicious of his own merits. Was he not becoming vulgarized, even personally? That supper the other night, in honour of the third-rate actress, when every one got more or less drunk—pah! These dreary lodgings, which no expenditure could make homelike. A home—that was what he wanted. Confound Miss Childerstone! That sister of hers, now steaming away to Natal——

At twelve o'clock next day he called on his friend, and was asked to wait in her sitting-room. He had been here only once or twice; to-day the room seemed more uncomfortable than on former occasions, and Langley wondered how a woman could live amid such surroundings. But was Miss Childerstone to be judged as a woman? For seven or eight years she had battled in the world of journalism, and with a kind of success which seemed to argue manlike qualities. Since he had known her, these last three years, she seemed to have been growing less feminine. At first he had thought of her with the special interest which arises from difference of sex; now he rarely, if ever, did so. He liked her, admired her, and could imagine her, in more natural circumstances, a charming woman. If, as was probable, her sister resembled her in all the good points——

She came in, and her appearance startled him. She wore a dressing-gown; her hair was tossed into some sort of order; illness unmistakably blanched her face. Without offering to shake hands, she tumbled on to the nearest chair.

"Why on earth did you get up?" Langley exclaimed. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"No; but I think you shall go and fetch some one," she answered, hoarsely and faintly. "Did you send the stuff to Tomlinson?"

"Oh yes, and forged your signature. Go back to bed; I'll——"

"Wait a minute. I want to ask you—I haven't any money——"

The change from her wonted vigour of speech and bearing was very painful to the young man. Money? Why, his purse was hers. In his pocket he had only a few sovereigns, but he would go to the bank straightway.

"Three or four pounds will do," she replied. "I don't know anyone else I care to ask. Borrowing isn't in my line, you know. I could sell or pawn some things—but I haven't the strength to get about."

Langley stepped towards her and put some coins into her hand.

"What is it?" he asked, gravely. "A fever of some kind?"

"I'm not feverish—at least I don't think so. Fearful head. Look chalky, don't I?"

"You do. Go back to bed at once, and leave things to me."

"You're a good fellow, Wilfrid."

"Pooh!"

"I feel so wretchedly weak—and I *hate* to feel weak—I——"

She suddenly turned her head away; and Lang-

ley was horrified to hear her sob. He moved for a moment about the room, as if in search of something; but it only served to hide his embarrassment. Then Miss Childerstone stood up, and went quickly away.

In half an hour's time the necessary assistance had been procured. Nervous collapse, said the man of medicine; overwork, and so on. Langley, finding that no one in the house could act as bedside attendant, obtained the services of a nurse. He did not see his friend again, but had a message from her that she was " all right "; he might call the next day, if he liked.

He paid the call as early as ten o'clock, and had a talk with the nurse, who could give but an indifferent report.

" If I write a few lines for her, can she read them? " he asked.

Yes, she could read a letter. So Langley sat down at the table, and tried to find something to say. To his surprise, he wrote with the utmost difficulty; words would not come. " Dear Miss Childerstone,—I feel sure that a little rest and nursing will soon——" Oh, that was insufferably childish. He bit his pen, and stared at the books before him: novels and plays, heaped newspapers, a volume or two of an encyclopædia, annuals, and dictionaries. She had no instinct of order; she lived from day to day, from hand to mouth. Her education must be very defective. On the moral side, no doubt, she was sound enough, but a woman should have domestic virtues.

What was he doing? Abusing his friend just when she lay helpless, and this defeat of her splendid strength the result of toil on a sister's behalf! He tore the sheet of paper and began anew. "Dear Bertha"—why not? she now and then called him "Wilfrid"—"don't trouble your head about anything. I have nothing to do, and to look after you will give me pleasure. Is there anyone you would like to communicate with? Consider me absolutely at your service—time, money, anything. I will call morning and evening. Cheer up, dear old chum! You must go away as soon as possible; I'll get lodgings for you."

And so on, over another page, in the hearty comrade tone which they always used to each other. The nurse, summoned by a light tap, handed this note to her patient, and in a few minutes she brought back a scrap of paper, on which was feebly scrawled in pencil, "Good old boy. All right."

It was the last he saw of Bertha Childerstone's handwriting for more than a month. Daily he called twice. What the nurse, doctor, and landlady thought of his relations with the invalid he would not trouble to conjecture. He met all current expenses, which amounted to not very much. And the result of it was that the sick woman became an almost exclusive subject of his thoughts; his longing to speak again with her grew intense.

One day in July, as he stepped as usual into the parlour, thinking to wait there for the nurse, his

eye fell upon a figure sitting in the sunlight. A pale, thin face, which he scarcely recognized, greeted him with a smile, and a meagre hand was held out to him.

"Up? Oh, that's brave!"

He hurried forward and clasped her hand tightly. They gazed at each other. Langley felt a thrill in his blood, a dimness about his eyes, and before he knew what he was doing he had given and received a kiss.

"No harm," said Miss Childerstone, laughing with a look of confusion. "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*"

But the young man could not recover himself. He was kneeling by the chair in which she reclined, and still kept her hand, whilst he quivered as if with fever.

"I'm so glad—I wanted so to see you—Bertha——"

"Hush! Don't be sentimental, old man. It's all right."

He pressed her hand to his lips. She abandoned it for a moment, then firmly drew it back.

"Tell me all the news."

"I know of nothing, except that I——"

He had lost his head. Bertha seemed to him now not only a woman, but beautiful and sweet and an object of passionate desire. He touched her hair, and stammered incoherencies.

"Wilfrid"—she spoke in the old blunt way—"don't make a fool of yourself. Go a yard or two away, there's a good boy. If not, I hobble back

into the other room. Remember that I can't stand excitement."

Eyes averted, he moved away from her.

"I had a letter from Cissy this morning——"

"I don't want to hear of it," he interrupted pettishly. "She was the cause of your illness."

Miss Childerstone pursued in the same tone.

"——Posted at Cape Town. Very cheerful. She was enjoying the voyage, and looking forward to its end in a reasonable and happy way. We did the right thing. There's a letter, too, from the expectant lover; a good letter; you may see it if you like."

Common sense came at length to Wilfrid's support. He sat down, crossed his legs, and talked, but without looking at his companion.

"I owe you a lot of money," said Bertha.

"Rubbish! When can you go away? And what place would you prefer?"

"I shall go next week to the seaside. Anywhere near. Some place where there are lots of people. I was dead, and am alive again; I want to feel the world buzzing round."

"Very well. Choose a place, and I'll go after rooms for you."

"No, no. I can do all that by letter. By-the-bye, I've been hearing from Tomlinson. He's a better sort of fellow than I supposed. What do you think? He sent me a cheque for five-and-twenty pounds—on account, he says."

Langley kept his head down, and muttered something.

"I suppose somebody or other has been pitching him a doleful story about me. It took a long time before people missed me; now they're beginning to write and call."

"Yes—you have a great many friends——"

"Heaps of them! Now, goosey, don't hang your head. The fact of the matter is, we oughtn't to have met just yet. There's an artificial atmosphere about an invalid. You're not to come again till I send for you—you hear that?"

"As you please," answered Langley, shamefaced, but no longer petulant. And he stayed only a few minutes after this. At parting, their eyes did not meet.

That night he wrote a letter, the inevitable letter, page upon page, strictly according to precedent. When two days had brought no answer, he wrote again, and this time elicited a short scrawl.

> Goosey, goosey gander! I don't like the style of these compositions; it isn't up to your later mark. Go and see Totty—Lotty—what's her name? I mean it; you want the tonic of such society. And pray, what work are you doing? Come to-morrow at three and tell me.

He would have liked to refuse the invitation, but had fallen into so limp a state that there was no choice save to go and be tortured. Miss Childerstone looked better.

"I pick up very quickly," she said. "In the early days, before I knew you, I had a worse floorer than this, and astonished every one by

the way I came round. Well, what are you doing?"

"Nothing much," the young man replied carelessly.

She pondered a little, then laughed.

"Now isn't it an odd thing, how far we were from knowing each other? I misunderstood you; I did indeed; as it goes without saying that you quite misunderstood me. I didn't think you could have written those letters."

"I'm not ashamed of them."

A certain quiet manliness in the words had its effect upon Miss Childerstone. She smiled, and regarded him kindly.

"Nor need you be, my dear boy. For my part, I'm considerably proud of them; I shall store them up and read them in years to come when they have a value as autographs. But I suppose you had purposely misled me, with your random talk. If I had known—yes, if I had known—I don't think I should have let Cissy go to Natal."

"Stop that nonsense," said Langley, "and answer me a plain question. Is it hopeless?—or can't you make up your mind yet?"

"I *have* made up my mind—since receiving your letters."

"Before, you were in doubt?"

"Just a wee bit. Partly, I suppose, because of my weakness. I like you so much, and I have such hopes of your future—it was tempting. But—No!"

Langley looked at her with eyes of thwarted passion.

"What do you mean? Just because I have really and honestly fallen in love with you——"

"Just so," she interrupted, "and shown yourself as I didn't know you. I like you as much as ever—more, perhaps. I more than half wish I could bring Cissy back again. You would have suited each other very well. And yet, it would have been an unkindness to *you*, however kind to *her*. It meant, for you, a sinking into the comfortable commonplace. You are too young for marriage. I had rather see you in any kind of entanglement. That longing for domesticity gave me a shudder. It's admirable, but it's the part of you that must be outgrown. Oh, you are so much more respectable than I thought."

She broke off, laughing.

"And you mean to say," exclaimed Wilfrid, "that if I could have given proof of blackguardism you might have been inclined to marry me?"

Miss Childerstone laughed uncontrollably.

"Oh, how young you are! No, I shouldn't have married you in any case. I might have promised to think about it. I might have promised to do it; but when the time came—*via*! Dear boy, I don't want to marry. Look at this room, dirty and disorderly. This is all the home I care for. Conceivably, I might marry a man with a big income, just for the sake of a large life. But it's only just conceivable. In poverty—and anything

you or I can count upon would be poverty—I prefer the freedom of loneliness."

"You imagine I should lay any restraint upon you?"

Again she broke into laughter.

"I have a pretty good theoretical knowledge of what marriage means. Unfortunately, one can't experiment."

Langley turned from her, and stared gloomily.

"Look here," said his companion. "In a few days I think I shall be strong enough to go away, and I shall not tell you where I'm going. Let us say good bye, and see each other again when we're both recovered. In the meantime, live and work. Give fifteen-pound suppers, if you like. Anything to keep your thoughts off domesticity. Cultivate blackguardism"—her voice rang mirthfully. "Then we shall get back to the old footing."

"Never!"

"Well, that's as you please. I should like it, though."

He left her, and determined neither to write nor to call again. In a day or two the former resolve was broken; he wrote at greater length than ever. When the silence that followed became unendurable, he went to the house, but only to learn that Miss Childerstone had left that morning.

For the mere sake of talking about her, he spent the evening with people who had known his friend for a long time. They, it appeared, were ignorant of her movements.

"Gone as war correspondent, I shouldn't

wonder," said a young man; and the laughter of the company appreciated his joke.

"Oh, she really is too mannish," remarked a young matron. "I suppose you study her as a curiosity, Mr Langley?"

"We're great chums," Wilfrid answered with a laugh.

"Well, at all events we needn't bid *you* beware," jested the lady.

On reaching home, late, he found in his sitting-room an object which greatly puzzled him; it was a large and handsome travelling-bag, new from some shop. By what mistake had it got here? He examined it, and found a ticket bearing his name and address. Then, turning to the table, he saw a letter, the address in a well-known hand.

> DEAR OLD MAN,
>
> I shall not offer to pay back the money you have spent upon me, but I'm sending a present, one of the useful order.
>
> Yours in *camaraderie*,
>
> B. C.

After a day or two of brooding he saw the use of Bertha's gift, and for a month the travelling-bag did him good service.

He and she had long been back in town, and were again tugging hard at the collar, before they met. It was a miserable day of November, and amid sleet, fog, slush, they came face to face on the pavement of the roaring Strand. Their umbrellas had collided, and as they shook hands the

hurrying pedestrians bumped them this way and that.

"All right again?" asked Bertha merrily.

"Quite," was the stalwart reply. "Come somewhere and talk."

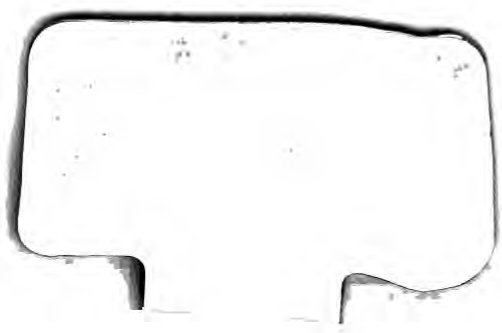
"Can't. Appointment in ten minutes."

"Move on, please!" shouted a policeman. "Mustn't stop the way."

"Lunch at the old place to-morrow?" said Wilfrid hurriedly.

"Yes. Two o'clock."

Each plodded on, and Langley had no cardiac tremor as he thought of Miss Childerstone. For all that—for all that—he could not forget that he had kissed her lips.

From "Human Odds and Ends"

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